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Devoted to the Philosophy of Science

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MOSES BY MICHAEL ANGELO.
In the Church of San Pietro in Vincoli, Rome.

Frontispiece to The Open Court.
TOLSTOY'S "FIVE DOCTRINES OF JESUS."

BY DAVID CLARALLAN.

In one of the Jungle Books, we read of an Oriental whose political knowledge of his own India was matched by his knowledge of European statecraft, whose influence was paramount at home and weighty abroad; a man of vast wealth, culture and learning, honored, rich in friends, yet who, at the height of power and mental vigor, forsook all that which the world holds dear to become a mendicant hermit on an isolated mountain top. A kindred spirit is Tolstoy. He has tasted life's pleasures and honors to the full; he possesses wealth and genius; world-wide fame is his portion. After weighing them all he has found them wanting. In a life of absolute contrast to what it once was, in a life simple and pious he has found content.

Would Kipling's Eastern potentate have sought isolation and obscurity and poverty had they been his daily portion in youth and early manhood? Would Tolstoy have found solace and content in a peasant life had that life been his from infancy? We may well doubt it. We ought no more to let his teachings form our entire life's guidance than we ought to isolate ourselves on a mountain top. Only such truths as are mixed with his errors, only such help as he holds out to us in our own misguided efforts to find peace, should we cherish reverently, after reverently disentangling them from bias and exaggeration.

In "My Religion" as in every one of Tolstoy's subjective works, these errors and truths are blended. But the blacker the shadow, the more radiant the sunlight which it seeks to obscure. The fallacies in the great book are so palpably fallacies, the truths are so unmistakably truths, that while the reader mentally rejects the former with a smile, he is forced to examine the value of the latter. Like the prophets of old—notably like the first Isaiah and like Jeremiah—
Tolstoy is impracticable, one-sided, intolerant of the good of civilization because of its concomitant evil. The sins of the powerful and rich, the sufferings of the weak and poor—these constitute for him as they did for those older reformers, all life's problems. Glory, wealth, ambition are confounded with the evils that all too often accompany them;—poverty, toil, ignorance are confounded with the virtues to which they are often linked. Tolstoy sees social disease in its ugliness as few have seen it. With his whole heart and soul, with every faculty strained, he seeks to convince suffering humanity of the remedy that lies in the grasp of all as it lay long unheeded in his own. Is his remedy indeed potent? Has he indeed found the panacea universal in those five doctrines of Jesus whose fulfilment, as he reiterates, will establish God's Kingdom upon earth?

The world at large, even that sympathetic world which hails in the Russian Teacher, the greatest ethical force of our day, believes not. Like his exaggeration in "What is Art?", like his absurd condemnation of all method and discipline in the "Yasnaya Polyana School," so Tolstoy's strong, earnest almost prayerful precepts in "My Religion" are at best one-sided, are often untenable, at times not only illogical but even childish. And yet it is in this very one-sidedness that the great force of the man lies. He perceives the swing of truth's pendulum only in one direction toward Ethics; but perceives it in that direction so clearly, seeks so earnestly and devotedly to make others see it also, that he forces those who in their turn see but the other half of truth,—the intellectual and the materialistic,—to rouse themselves to full and complete being; he makes them see the value of doing and loving no less than of knowing and enjoying. Perhaps more than any other living man, Tolstoy is helping to shatter the shams of civilization. He may seek to shatter civilization itself as a thing of evil and valueless; but civilization is made up of more than shams. It is made up of some living forces which Tolstoy in his onesideness cannot see. These forces (science, art, education) his battering rams have no power to graze, let alone to demolish. Truth's pendulum has swung from right to left, from love to knowledge, from spirit to matter, in spite of the greatest of the prophets of old—it will so swing in spite of the greatest of the prophets of to-day.

An examination of Tolstoy's own doctrines in "My Religion" should precede an examination of what he considers the salient teachings of Jesus. The first of these purely Tolstoyan doctrines may be condensed into the words: "Thou shalt not be a member of polite society." Instead of laying stress on a child's use of knife and fork,
on cleanliness, good manners, on the dozens of little niceties that accompany a so-called proper bringing-up, stress should be laid on the child's neglected spiritual training, on its insight into the rights of others, its insight into its own insignificance. Tolstoy would have inculcated in the child a sense of kinship with its fellows. He would have the hours which are now spent in giving children a respect and craving for social superiority, devoted to that genuine Christian teaching which bids us see in the meanest a brother. "Serve thy God with half the zeal thou servest thy king" might well express the plea Tolstoy justly makes. Another strikingly true statement is the urging upon us to live not for the present for ourselves, but for posterity. As we owe all we have of accumulated knowledge, beauty, of personal vigor and ability to the ancestors passed away, so we, in turn, should struggle to set aside present desires and benefits, should strive to contribute something to the well-being of generations to come.

Tolstoy's attitude toward the Church—toward dogmatic religion—though just in the main, is in one respect too harsh. He is right when he concedes to it no present influence upon science, which it once nurtured; upon art, which it once exclusively fostered; upon statecraft, which it once directed as it willed; upon social reforms, which in its noblest days it engendered. He is right when he sees it divested of its pristine glory. But when he asserts that it "has nothing left but temples and shrines and canonicals and vestments and words," he is indeed too sweeping. The Church, weak as it is, is not lifeless: More even than settlement workers, as much surely as secular charitable organizations, do churches of every creed further the work of hospitals, orphan homes, and other institutions which bring relief to the old, the infirm, the sick and the destitute. The Church does not alleviate mankind's intellectual ills, it does not battle with ignorance and vice as perhaps it should; but it does mitigate ills as great, the physical ills which still are more pressingly urgent than the intellectual. And furthermore to many a weary soul, those very dogmas which Tolstoy despises, the sacraments, the superstitions even, constitute life's only blessings. That the Church has exalted dogma above deed has diminished but has not annihilated its activity. It is still the "believer," not the "enlightened," of to-day who is the chief alleviator of human misery.

One of Tolstoy's extremely rare forceful utterances is his denial of atheism—his definition of religion: "The principles by which men live is their religion." Another brief and compelling utterance is his denunciation of spiritual authority—the sanctioning as divine
our merely human teachings. Once it was, he scathingly observes, the Hebraic Code which regulated man's every petty act by a decree introduced with the binding words: "And the Lord said unto Moses." Jesus, seeing the abuse of such precepts, noting the petrifaction of even the spiritual teachings of the Old Testament by these ordinances, denied the validity of all forms and ceremonies and sacrifices. And now, says Tolstoy, Christ's own followers, in the spirit of the Pharisees of old, have set up a new set of so-called divine ordinances, have replaced the Pentateuch's: "And the Lord said unto Moses" by the Gospel's: "Thus saith the Holy Spirit"; and that with as little of divine sanction. The prophetic denunciations of Isaiah against the priests of Jerusalem more than 2500 years ago, are being reiterated to-day by Tolstoy. Away with forms and ceremonies; away with the letter of the law; obey its spirit.

This law whose spirit we should follow, this guide of his own later life's actions, Tolstoy finds in five commandments culled from the Sermon on the Mount. He would make these five doctrines the guides of the lives of others. He would, to apply his own definition of religion, make them the principles by which men live.

The first of these doctrines he condenses into the simple statement: Be not angry. The words in the Sermon on the Mount supply all the commentary needful (Matthew v. 21-26): "It hath been said unto you, Thou shalt not kill; whoever shall kill shall be in danger of judgment. But I say unto you that whosoever is angry with his brother....whosoever says to his brother 'Raca' [worthless fellow] shall be in danger of the Sanhedrin; whosoever says 'Fool' shall be in danger of 'Gehenna.'"

There is no doubt that anger and its allied vices—revenge, contempt—are at the root of much that prevents the coming of God's Kingdom, of Peace on Earth. The doctrine "Be not angry" is one which not only should but which could be, a daily impulse to individual betterment. Its practicability need not be questioned. We do not teach our children arithmetic that each one may become a Euclid; or music with the hope that each one be a Mozart. If from childhood up, as much attention were given this doctrine as is given to music or arithmetic, if we were to adhere with gentle insistence on our children's despising no one—their inferiors in either knowledge, ability, or position,—perfection of goodwill may not be attained (what perfection ever is?)—but an approximation to it might be. We seldom suffer our anger to rise against those whom we consider our superiors,—we would never suffer it to rise (no matter what the provocation) against a king, a genius, a master of men.
And just as we would quietly endure such a one's command, such a one's error even, so it is certain that the most abject among us would not arouse our anger or violence if we had no contempt for him, if we had instead only the pity and forbearance Tolstoy would have deeply inculcated into our natures. The fact that in the Gospels themselves, Jesus is often pictured as giving way to anger, is made to call his antagonists "hypocrites," "a generation of vipers," "deceivers,"—the fact that this gentlest of prophetic teachers is made to curse the unfruitful figtree, to drive the money changers from the temple—all this need not be adduced (as it sometimes is) as an argument against the practicability of the doctrine. The abuse put upon the lips of Jesus is probably an addition to his original words. But even were it not, it would not impair the validity of a command that all should at least strive to obey.

The second command is "Not to commit adultery." The main, irrefutable interpretation that a man guard the sanctity of the marriage relation even though that relation has not been sanctioned by law, is the essential point. The addition made by Jesus to the original seventh Mosaic command: "He that looks at a beautiful woman with evil desire has already committed adultery," is a statement that may well be questioned by even the severest moralist. Ethics can concern itself only with the result of evil thinking, not with the thought itself. Purity of deed despite temptation is the highest purity. Jesus himself said: "There is more rejoicing over one sinner who repenteth than over nine and ninety just men who need no repentance." Analogously, there is greater virtue in subduing an evil desire than in having none to subdue. Let a man but obey the spirit of this second doctrine of Jesus, to be faithful throughout to the woman who is his wife before God, and there will be no need to examine the moral struggles and conquests over temptation which made his faithfulness in deed possible.

The third command: Not to take an oath, is one that appeals not to great moral forces but merely to a sense of fitness, to wisdom and to prudence. "Let your yea be yea—your nay, be nay." "Ein Mann, ein Wort." If a man breaks his simple word he is as likely to break an oath. The precept is just and wise. But is it so important as to be placed with essential principles that should govern our lives? The question it would seem is not whether you swear upon Bible, upon sword, by a life you hold dear, or merely say yes or no. The question after all is: Do you keep your oath; do you keep your word. The old Mosaic precept "Thou shalt not lie" cov-
ers the point at issue, though surely greater beauty and strength are added by the words of Jesus “Let your yea be yea—your nay, nay.”

The fourth of Tolstoy’s five doctrines of Jesus is the famous: Resist not evil. “It hath been said unto you, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, but I say unto you; Resist not evil, but who shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asks thee and from him that would borrow of thee, turn not thou away.” Tolstoy has replaced for the currently accepted meaning of this characteristic teaching of Jesus a very ingenious and to many an attractive and plausible interpretation. The Russian master’s condemnation of our entire social system, his absolute conviction that law-courts, tribunals of justice, and police officials are incapable of checking or correcting crime—in a word, his intolerance of all authority, has made him discover in this beautifully clear command to bear and forbear and renounce, an ordinance against human justice. He allies “resist not evil” with the kindred precept “Judge not that ye be not judged—Condemn not that ye be not condemned.” “Resist not evil” he would have us understand as “Do not arrest an evil-doer; be not a judge in a court of justice; do not condemn any one to punishment.” And yet, after pages of argument and illustration to sustain his novel standpoint, Tolstoy invalidates it himself. In his own rendition of the Scriptures, after eliminating all he holds contrary to the original teachings of Jesus, Tolstoy retains the forceful words, addressed evidently to those in authority: “Do not judge falsely.” Not the forbidding of human courts of justice, but the forbidding of injustice itself seems to be the point Jesus emphasized in this connection. We must accept, as Tolstoy does in his own life, the old, more ideal if more unpractical meaning of the command ordaining the non-resistence to personal animosity or greed. Obedience to this accepted version would of itself abolish judges and police-officials. True, we may not realize this ideal to the full either. Indeed it is very questionable whether we ought to try. The impossibility of doing more than merely approximating obedience to the command, Tolstoy himself inadvertently demonstrates by adducing an exception to it. His law is “Resist not evil by violence.” His exception is: “Resist evil even by violence if it is done to a child.” This is the breach that allows of the enemy’s entering the ideally guarded citadel. Why resist only evil done a child? Is there not other weakness than a child’s which should be aided? Does not all weak-
ness, whether an aged man’s, a woman’s, an oppressed caste’s, a wrongfully invaded nation’s, cry out to the brave and strong for succor? Better the mandate of our aggressive President: “Resist evil. Resist it with all the force that is yours—intellectual, moral, material—Fight it, if need be, with sword and gun.” It is not the non-resistance to evil, it is the resistance to good, it is the indifference to good, that prevents the Kingdom of God from being established on earth. “Resist not evil.” It is a beautiful precept, true for the weak, the crushed by life’s hardships, the hopeless of success, the conquered in life’s battle. For them it is full of truth, peace—bestowing. But it is not a command for the active, for the soldiers of humanity, for those who strive for righteousness with might and main, with brain and brawn, with word and deed. Be sure you are right and then struggle to attain it. Abraham Lincoln was the soul of gentleness, but he was the soul, too, of justice. He would have borne, perhaps unresistingly, all evil done himself personally. Evil against truth and right as he saw them, he would never have failed to withstand. The fourth command of Jesus in the spirit he himself fulfilled it, is not, “Resist not evil absolutely,” but is “Resist not the evil done to thee personally.” So a brave but humane soldier would strike down the foe to his country’s liberty, though he would bear manfully even the unjust degradation or punishment imposed upon him by his superior officer.

“IT has been said unto you: Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you: Love your enemies, bless them that curse you; do good to them that despitefully use you and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your father in Heaven; for he makes the sun to shine on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and the unjust. For if you love them that love you, what reward have you? Do not even the publicans the same? And if you salute your brethren only, what do you more than others? Do not even the heathen so? Be therefore perfect even as your Father in Heaven is perfect.” To this fifth command Tolstoy also gives a very ingenious interpretation induced not by the words themselves, but by his own perpetual propaganda against warfare. The word “neighbor” in this passage Tolstoy would render “fellow-Jew”; the word “enemy” he would render “non-Jew,” “enemy to one’s country.” “Do not make war. Look upon all men as your compatriots”; that is the great Peace-preacher’s proclamation, his interesting if unwarranted exposition of words clear as crystal surely in their beautiful idealism if ever ideal has been clearly expressed. War is an evil; injustice to a nation can be righted by other means.
Jesus would have thundered or gently pronounced against it had not the very thought of so hideous a thing as slaughter been foreign to his mind. Do but read the words without bias, and you will find no hint at other than mere personal animosity. "Love your enemy. Bless them that curse you, do good to those who despitefully use you....For if you love [only] them that love you, what reward have you?"—The word "love." an exaggeration, an idealizing rather of the words "do good" is expounded by Jesus himself. Feeling is lifted into the realm of action. "Bless them, do good to them that hate you." You may not be able to love, but you can do good; you need not hate. "Love thy neighbor as thyself." Not the emotion in its surging motherhood, in its conjugal or filial self-surrender, is enjoined by this comand, but the act of love is uncompromisingly commanded. Do for thy fellow man as for thyself; that is the clear unmistakable meaning in Leviticus."Do even for thine enemy as for a friend," that is the tender meaning as clear and as unmistakable in the Sermon on the Mount. It is therein that Jesus outstripped in human sympathy the noblest article in the Mosaic Code, it is therein that he definitely and absolutely rendered universal that epitome of the Law—the Golden Rule,—enunciated a generation before by the gentle Hillel: "Do unto others what you would have others do unto you."

Fellow-feeling for the sinner, compassion for the outcast. That one positive doctrine of Jesus which contains in essence all the rest is his glory: "Love thine enemy"—"I am come to save the lost sheep of the house of Israel"—"Forgive not seven times only but seventy times seven"—"Let him that is without sin cast the first stone."—Words such as these, so tender, so full of deepest human sympathy, are genuinely typical of what was better than all his doctrines, more inspiring than any of his words; typical of what was the life of Jesus: joyous in the simple joys of the people: commending labor: surely like Paul of Tarsus, an artisan himself; independent of creed or tradition; but above all imbued with regenerating love for the blackest of sinners; "I am come to seek the lost sheep of the house of Israel." In that one sentence, I find all the originality, all the love made deed which raises Jesus above even those glorious prophets of old whose spirit he kindled anew.

Hillel taught the doctrine of love as Jesus did. But it remained a doctrine—"Do unto others as thou wouldst have others do to thee," was an answer given in a school of learning. "Love thy neighbor as thyself" was proclaimed in scholarly discussion as the epitome of the Mosaic Law, and a law—a dead letter it remained, as it remains
to-day to most. "I have obeyed the decalogue, I have loved my neighbor as myself," asserts the zealous rich young man when Jesus urges obedience to these commands as the one road to salvation. But the youth's possession of great wealth when there was poverty to be alleviated, was refutation ample that he had not obeyed the law. Love of his fellow man was only a doctrine, not a principle. It is the deed, not the word that proves the love. It is the life of Jesus, not his doctrines, that made him the force he was—his love of his fellows had become deed. And similarly it is the life of Tolstoy, not his exposition of the five doctrines of Jesus, that has made him "the greatest ethical force of the century." His love of humanity has become deed.

From the teachings of those human beings whose weak lips have been touched with divine flame, error is bound to drop away in the course of centuries. The evil done by great men has died after them—the good done "revives, goes to work in the world," is deathless. The denunciations ascribed to Jesus are discarded by his spiritual followers. Even if he really spoke them, they will be long forgotten when his love of the poor outcast will still stimulate generation after generation to a higher duty.

Into five mainly negative doctrines does Tolstoy condense his Christianity; into two does the earlier nineteenth century prophet—Thomas Carlyle—similarly condense his. "Take it," here is the Britain's doctrine of non-resistance: "Take it, thou too ravenous individual. Take that pitiful additional fraction of a share which I reckoned mine, but which thou so wantest. Take it with a blessing. Would Heaven I had enough for thee." This expresses the half of Carlyle's Christianity. Listen though, how the other as needful half rumbles thunderously from his lips, and then mark the contrast of the two men: the one, a life-satiated noble descending from social eminence to preach poverty, passivity;—the other, a life-palpitating peasant, struggling upward from social obscurity, to preach energy, achievement: "Produce! Produce! were it but the pitifullest infinitesimal fraction of a product, produce it in God's name. 'Tis the utmost thou hast in thee; out with it then. Up! Up! whatsoever thy hand findeth to do—do it with thy might. Work while it is called to-day, for the night cometh wherein no man can work."

Without such a doctrine,—a doctrine of activity—express it as you will, no code of ethics is complete. Tolstoy even more than Carlyle, demonstrates by deed, its validity. Tolstoy, more than did Carlyle, practices what he should, however, also preach:

"Love—Pardon—Work."