

THE LIFE STORY OF COUNT LEO TOLSTOY

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1878. He was a philosopher and moralist from his youth. He never was content with his position in life and that restless, dissatisfied spirit always was predominant in his actions and writings. He was a philosophical nihilist. He was ready to break away from his environment and to join the masses, but his marriage and subsequent family kept him attached to his aristocratic class.

A great conflict was going on in his mind. He could not sympathize with the movement against the government, but at the same time he hated the government. He hated himself for the shallow and dual life he led, and life lost all interest for him. So great was his despondency that he was thinking of self-destruction. But Tolstoy was too strong a man to commit suicide, so he started out to seek a solution of his predicament; to find some goal, some harbor in which to land his distracted mind, his wearied soul, to start life anew under some new banner, which would give him contentment, happiness and usefulness; and this he finally found in the love

for the masses, the peasants and working people, and the more he studied the masses, the more he loved them, and with that love came satisfaction, content and easiness at heart and mind, and indifference and disgust with his own class of people.

His motto became "Live as the millions live, toil as the millions toil," and with this motto Schopenhauer's teachings of pessimism and self annihilation vanished like the misty fog before the golden rays of the morning sun.

The impression he got in the slums of Moscow in 1861, strengthened him in his belief that the only thing to do was to go among the people and abandon his position as a rich landlord. Now there was nothing new even in that idea. He again, as in many other cases, was ten years behind the times. "Among the people" party was at that time in its zenith, and many a brave son of Russia, many of the flower of Russian youth, have sacrificed their liberties, their rich homes and their lives, for the people.

Upon his return to Yasanaja Poljana he gave up his mansion to his family and lived in a small room by himself, doffed his aristocratic frock of a count, and donned the garb of

a peasant, and started to work like one of the millions, following the plow, and to live the simple life of a peasant.

By accepting the simple life of a monk, Tolstoy also accepted his creed, the Greek orthodox church, but here he rebelled. The hypocrisy and sham of the priesthood, the distortion of the teachings of Christ and the dogmatic frills was more than his honest heart and profound mind could endure. Consequently, he started to interpret Christianity in its true sense, irrespective of the teachings of the different churches, and to revise the gospel in order to find the real meaning of the great teachings and precepts, showing the difference between the words of Christ and the interpretation given by the churches.

His ideas are given in the following books and pamphlets: "Dogmatic Theology," "Confession," "What is My Fate?" "What is Then to be Done?" "The Kingdom of God is Within You," "Christianity Not as a Mystic Teaching, but as a New Understanding of Life," "The Life and the Teachings of Christ," "My Reply to the Synod's Edict of Excommunication," "What is Religion?" "On Life," etc., etc.

In all these works he gives a rational interpretation of Christianity and its teachings, stripping from it all mysticism and agnosticism, and laying bare the purely spiritual teaching that ought to guide men to a higher life, a life of equality and brotherly relations with all men.

Tolstoy hates all that is mystical and dogmatic in Christianity, and never fails to grasp the opportunity to criticize or to scorn bitterly with all the might of his genius, the church and priesthood. His philippic against the church and priesthood led to his excommunication from the Russian church, which, however, did not change his views, but, on the contrary, spurred him on to arraign them still more fiercely.

Tolstoy sees in the belief of the immortality of the soul, a different interpretation and deeper meaning, namely, arranging our life so as to make it serviceable to mankind and to the universe.

Tolstoy's ideas of God, like those of Spinoza, is of a pantheistic character, describing him as life, love, or as an ideal within the individual conscience of man, shaping him in an abstract form of a desire to benefit life and creation. His idea of God is rather a rational one, as, after a man arrives at the age of self-consciousness, he desires individual welfare first, and then universal welfare, and, as universal welfare can be obtained only by concord and perfect union among men, hence Tolstoy's definition of God is in harmony with life and existence. Tolstoy may be called a true disciple of Christ, following the teachings laid down by Jesus in His "Sermon on the Mount."

As first Tolstoy preached the doctrine of non-resistance to evil, but finding that this doctrine was not in conformity with his conception of God, he changed it to "Don't resist evil by violence," and finally he preached the doctrine of passionate resistance against the different forms of evil and evil doers, but objecting to physical force in resisting evil.

The other doctrines of Tolstoy's teachings—sort of ten commandments—are as follows:

"Don't be angry."

"Remain true to one woman with whom you are united in life."

"Avoid temptations and all that excite passion."

"Do not take an oath, because an oath binds you especially to the government which takes advantage of

your position when bound by an oath."

"Love your enemies."

"Never prosecute anyone before a judge or a tribunal."

"Live the simple life in food, dress and in dwelling."

"Do your own manual labor."

Tolstoy in studying the fundamental principles of other religions, as well as Christianity, sifts from the latter all that cannot be adopted

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