

Carthago Delenda Est

Leo Tolstoy

1899

La Vita Internationale and *L'Humanité nouvelle* have sent me the following letter:—

”Sir,—With the object of furthering the development of humanitarian ideas and civilization, *La Vita internationale* (of Milan), with the support of *L'Humanité nouvelle* (of Paris and Brussels), has deemed it necessary to concern itself with the difficult problem which has of late arisen in all its gravity and importance, owing to the delicate question about which France and the whole world has become so ardently impassioned,—we mean the problem of war and militarism. With this aim in view, we beg all those in Europe that take part in politics, science, art, and the labor movement, and even those that occupy the foremost positions in the army, to contribute to this most civilizing task by replying to the following questions:—

”1. Is war among civilized nations still required by history, law, and progress?

”2. What are the intellectual, moral, physical, economical, and political effects of militarism?

”3. What, in the interests of the world's future civilization, are the solutions which should be given to the grave problems of war and militarism?

”4. What means would most rapidly lead to these solutions?”

I cannot conceal the feelings of disgust, indignation, and even despair which were aroused in me by this letter. Enlightened, sensible, good Christian people, who inculcate the principle of love and brotherhood, who regard murder as an awful crime, who, with very few exceptions, are unable to kill an animal,—all these people suddenly, provided that these crimes are called war, not only acknowledge the destruction, plunder, and killing of people to be right and legal, but themselves contribute toward these robberies and murders, prepare themselves for them, take part in them, are proud of them.

Moreover, always and everywhere one and the same phenomenon repeats itself, *viz.*, that the great majority of people—all working-people—those same people who carry out the robberies and murders, and on whom the burden falls—neither devise, nor prepare, nor desire these things, but take part in them against their will, merely because they are placed in such a position and are so instigated that it appears to them, to each individual, that they would suffer more were they to refuse. Whereas those who devise and prepare for these plunders and murders, and who compel the working-people to carry them out, are but an insignificant minority, who live in luxury and idleness, upon the labor of the workers.

This deceit has already been going on for a long time, but lately the insolence of the impostors has reached its extremest development, and a great share of what labor produces is being taken

away from the workers, and used for making preparations for plundering and killing. In all the constitutional countries of Europe the workers themselves—all, without exception—are called upon to take part in these robberies and murders; international relations are purposely always more and more complicated, and this leads on to war; peaceful countries are being plundered without the least cause; every year, in some place or other, people murder and rob; and all live in constant dread of general mutual robbery and murder.

It seems evident that, if these things are done, it can only be because the great mass of people are deceived by the minority to whom this deceit is advantageous, and therefore that the first task of those who are anxious to free people from the evils caused by this mutual murdering and plundering should be to expose the deception under which the masses are laboring; to point out to them how the deceit is perpetrated, by what means it is being upheld, and how to get rid of it.

The enlightened people of Europe, however, do nothing of the kind, but, under the pretext of furthering the establishment of peace, they assemble now in one, now in another city of Europe, and, seated at tables, with most serious faces, they discuss the question how best to persuade those brigands who live by their plunder to give up robbing, and become peaceful citizens; and then they put the profound questions: first, whether war is still desirable from the standpoint of history, law, and progress (as if such fictions, invented by us, could demand from us deviation from the fundamental moral law of our life); secondly, as to what are the consequences of war (as if there could be any doubt that the consequences of war are always general distress and corruption); and finally, as to how to solve the problem of war (as if it were a difficult problem how to free deluded people from a delusion which we clearly see).

This is terrible! We see, for instance, how healthy, calm, and frequently happy people year after year arrive at some gambling-den like Monte Carlo, and, benefiting no one but the keepers of those dens, leave there their health, peace, honor, and often their lives. We pity these people; we see clearly that the deceit to which they are subjected consists in those temptations whereby gamblers are allured, in the inequality of the chances, and in the infatuation of gamblers who, though fully aware that in general they are sure to be losers, nevertheless hope for once at least to be more fortunate than the rest. All this is perfectly clear.

And then, in order to free people from these miseries, we—instead of pointing out to them the temptations to which they are subjected, the fact that they are sure to lose, and the immorality of gambling, which is based on the expectation of other people's misfortunes—assemble with grave faces at meetings, and discuss how to arrange that the keepers of gambling-houses should of their own accord shut up their establishments; we write books about it, and we put questions to ourselves as to whether history, law, and progress require the existence of gambling-houses, and as to what are the economical, intellectual, moral, and other consequences of roulette.

If a man is given to drink, and I tell him that he himself can leave off drinking and that he must do so, there is a hope that he will listen to me; but if I tell him that his drunkenness is a complicated and difficult problem which we learned men are trying to solve at our meetings, then in all probability he will, while awaiting the solution of this problem, continue to drink.

Thus also with these false and refined external, scientific means of abolishing war, such as international tribunals, arbitration, and similar absurdities with which we occupy ourselves, while all the time carefully omitting to mention the most simple, essential, and self-evident method of causing war to cease—a method plain for all to see.

In order that people who do not want war should not fight, it is not necessary to have either international law, arbitration, international tribunals, or solutions of problems; but it is merely

necessary that those who are subjected to the deceit should awake and free themselves from the spell or enchantment under which they find themselves. The way to do away with war is for those who do not want war, who regard participation in it as a sin, to refrain from fighting. This method has been preached from the earliest times by Christian writers such as Tertullian and Origen, as well as by the Paulicians, and by their successors, the Mennonites, Quakers, and Herrnhuters. The sin, harmfulness, and senselessness of military service have been written about and exposed in every way by Dymond, Garrison, and, twenty years ago, by Ballou, as well as by myself. The method I have mentioned has been adopted in the past, and of late has been frequently resorted to by isolated individuals in Austria, Prussia, Holland, Switzerland, and Russia, as well as by whole societies like the Quakers, Mennonites, and Nazarenes, and recently by the Dukhobors, of whom a whole population of fifteen thousand are now for the third year resisting the powerful Russian government, and, notwithstanding all the sufferings to which they have been subjected, do not submit to its demands that they should take part in the crimes of military service.

But the enlightened friends of peace not only refrain from recommending this method, but cannot bear the mention of it; when it is brought before them they pretend not to have noticed it, or, if they cannot help noticing it, they gravely shrug their shoulders and express their pity for those uneducated and unreasonable men who adopt such an ineffectual, silly method, when such a good one exists,—namely, to sprinkle salt on the bird one wishes to catch, *i.e.* to persuade the governments, who only exist by violence and deceit, to forsake both the one and the other.

They tell us that the misunderstandings which arise between governments will be settled by tribunals or arbitration. But the governments do not at all desire the settlement of misunderstandings. On the contrary, if there be none they invent some, it being only by such misunderstanding with the governments that they are afforded a pretext for keeping up the army upon which their power is based. Thus the enlightened friends of peace strive to divert the attention of the working, suffering masses from the only method that can deliver them from the slavery in which they are held (from their youth upward), first by patriotism, next by oaths administered by the mercenary priests of a perverted Christianity, and lastly, by the fear of punishment.

In our days of close and peaceful relations between peoples of different nationalities and countries, the deceit called patriotism (which always claims the preeminence of one state or nationality over the rest, and which is therefore always involving people in useless and pernicious wars) is too evident for reasonable people of our age not to free themselves from it; and the religious deceit of the obligation of the oath (which is distinctly forbidden by that very gospel which the governments profess) is, thank God, ever less and less believed in. So that what really prevents the great majority from refusing to take part in military service is merely fear of the punishments which are inflicted by the governments for such refusals. This fear, however, is only a result of the government deceit, and has no other basis than hypnotism.

The governments may and should fear those who refuse to serve, and, indeed, they are afraid of them because every refusal undermines the prestige of the deceit by which the governments have the people in their power. But those who refuse have no ground whatever to fear a government that demands crimes from them. In refusing military service every man risks much less than he would were he to enter it.

The refusal of military service and the punishment—imprisonment, exile—is only an advantageous insurance of oneself against the dangers of the military service. In entering the service every man risks having to take part in war (for which he is being prepared), and during war he may be like a man sentenced to death, placed in a position in which under the most difficult and

painful circumstances he will almost certainly be killed or crippled, as I have seen in Sevastopol, where a regiment marched to a fort where two regiments had already been destroyed, and stood there until it too was entirely exterminated. Another, more profitable, chance is that the man who enters the army will not be killed, but will only fall ill and die in the unhealthy conditions of military service. A third chance is that, having been insulted by his superior, he will be unable to contain himself, will answer sharply, will break the discipline, and will be subjected to punishment much worse than that to which he would have been liable had he refused military service.

The best chance, however, is that instead of the imprisonment or exile to which a person refusing military service is liable, he will pass three or five years of his life amid vicious surroundings, practicing the art of killing, being all the while in the same captivity as in prison, and in humiliating submission to depraved people. This in the first place.

Secondly, in refusing military service, every man, however strange it may seem, can yet always hope to escape punishment—upon his refusal being that last exposure of the governments' deceit which will render any further punishment for such a deed, the punishment of one who refuses to participate in their oppression, impossible. So that submission to the demands of military service is evidently only submission to the hypnotization of the masses—the utterly futile rush of Panurge's sheep into the water, to their evident destruction.

Moreover, besides the consideration of advantage, there is yet another reason which should impel every man to refuse military service who is not hypnotized and is conscious of the importance of his actions. No one can help desiring that his life should not be an aimless and useless existence, but that it should be of service to God and man; yet frequently a man spends his life without finding an opportunity for such service. The summons to accept the military service presents precisely such an opportunity to every man of our time.

Every man, in refusing to take part in military service or to pay taxes to a government which uses them for military purposes, is, by this refusal, rendering a great service to God and man, for he is thereby making use of the most efficacious means of furthering the progressive movement of mankind toward that better social order which it is striving after and must eventually attain. But not only is it advantageous to refuse the participation in the military service, and not only should the majority of the men of our time so refuse; it is, moreover, *impossible* not to refuse, if only they are not hypnotized. To every man there are some actions which are morally impossible—as impossible as are certain physical actions. And the promise of slavish obedience to strangers, and to immoral people who have the murder of men as their acknowledged object, is, to the majority of men, if only they be free from hypnotism, just such a morally impossible action. And therefore it is not only advantageous to and obligatory on every man to refuse to participate in the military service, but it is also impossible for him not to do so if only he be free from the stupefaction of hypnotism.

"But what will happen when all people refuse military service, and there is no check nor hold over the wicked, and the wicked triumph, and there is no protection against savage people—against the yellow race—who will come and conquer us?"

I will say nothing about the fact that, as it is, the wicked have long been triumphing, that they are still triumphing, and that while fighting one another they have long dominated the Christians, so that there is no need to fear what has already been accomplished; nor will I say anything with regard to the dread of the savage yellow race, whom we persistently provoke and instruct in war,—that being a mere excuse, and one-hundredth part of the army now kept up in

Europe being sufficient for the imaginary protection against them,—I will say nothing about all this, because the consideration of the general result to the world of such or such actions cannot serve as a guide for our conduct and activity.

To man is given another guide, and that an unfailling one,—the guide of his conscience, following which he indubitably knows that he is doing what he should do. Therefore, all considerations of the danger that threatens every individual who refuses military service, as well as what menaces the world in consequence of such refusals—all these are but a particle of that enormous and monstrous deceit in which Christian mankind is enmeshed, and which is being carefully maintained by the governments who exist by the power of this deceit.

If man act in accordance with what is dictated to him by his reason, his conscience, and his God, only the very best can result for himself as well as for the world.

People complain of the evil conditions of life in our Christian world. But is it possible for it to be otherwise, when all of us acknowledge not only that fundamental divine law proclaimed some thousands of years ago, "Thou shalt not kill," but also the law of love and brotherhood of all men, and yet, notwithstanding this, every man in the European world practically disavows this fundamental divine law acknowledged by him, and at the command of president, emperor, or minister, of Nicholas or William, arrays himself in a ridiculous costume, takes an instrument of murder and says, "Here I am, ready to injure, ruin, or kill any one I am ordered to"?

What must a society be like which is composed of such men? Such a society must be dreadful, and indeed it is so!

Awake, brethren! Listen neither to those villains who, from your childhood, infect you with the diabolic spirit of patriotism, opposed to righteousness and truth, and only necessary in order to deprive you of your property, your freedom, and your human dignity; nor to those ancient impostors who preach war in the name of a cruel and vindictive God invented by them, and in the name of a perverted and false Christianity; nor, even less, to those modern Sadducees who, in the name of science and civilization, aiming only at the continuation of the present state of things, assemble at meetings, write books, and make speeches, promising to organize a good and peaceful life for people without their making any effort! Do not believe them. Believe only the consciousness which tells you that you are neither beasts nor slaves, but free men, responsible for your actions, and therefore unable to be murderers either of your own accord or at the will of those who live by these murders.

And it is only necessary for you to awake in order to realize all the horror and insanity of that which you have been and are doing, and, having realized this, to cease that evil which you yourselves abhor, and which is ruining you. If only you were to refrain from the evil which you yourselves detest, those ruling impostors, who first corrupt and then oppress you, would disappear like owls before the daylight, and then those new, human, brotherly conditions of life would be established for which Christendom—wary of suffering, exhausted by deceit, and lost in insolvable contradictions—is longing. Only let every man without any intricate or sophisticated arguments accomplish that which to-day his conscience unfaillingly bids him do, and he will recognize the truth of the Gospel words:—

"If any man will do his will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself."¹

¹ John vii. 17.

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