

# To God or Mammon

Leo Tolstoy

1896

"No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."—Luke xvi. 13.

"He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathers not for me scatters abroad."—Matthew xii. 30.

Enormous tracts of the very best lands by which millions of now poverty-stricken families might be supported are devoted to tobacco, vineyards, barley, hemp, and especially rye and potatoes, employed in the production of intoxicating beverages: wine, beer, and mainly brandy.

Millions of laborers who might be making things useful for men are occupied in the production of these things. In England it is estimated that one-tenth of all the laboring men are occupied in the manufacture of brandy and beer.<sup>1</sup>

What are the consequences of the manufacture and consumption of tobacco, wine, vodka, beer?

There is a terrible story about a monk who laid a wager with the devil that he would not admit him into his cell; if he let him in, he agreed to do whatever the devil should order him to do. The story tells how the devil took the form of a wounded raven with its bloody wing trailing, and hopped about pitifully at the door of the monk's cell. The monk had compassion on the raven and took him into his cell; and then the devil, having obtained entrance, gave the monk a choice among three crimes: murder, fornication, or drunkenness. The monk chose drunkenness, thinking that if he got intoxicated he would harm only himself. But when the liquor had overcome him, he lost control of his reason, he went to the village and there, yielding to temptation of a woman, he committed adultery with her, and then murder by defending himself from the husband, who returned and attacked him.

Thus are pictured the consequences of drunkenness in the old story, and nowise different in real life are the consequences of the use of intoxicating beverages. It is an unusual burglar or

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<sup>1</sup> According to the statistics published by the Imperial Bureau, the consumption of beer in Germany during the year 1897-1898 was 1,383,700,000 gallons, while it was 1,237,000,000 gallons in the United States, 1,192,000,000 gallons in Great Britain, 463,500,000 gallons in Austria-Hungary, 279,000,000 gallons in Belgium, 180,000,000 in France, and a little over 90,000,000 gallons in Russia. The consumption of beer per head of the population is estimated at 36 gallons in Belgium, 32 in Great Britain, 25 in Germany, 21 in Denmark, 12 in Switzerland, 10 in the United States, 9 in Austria-Hungary, 9 in Holland, 5 in France, 3 in Norway, 2 in Sweden, and 1 in Russia.—Ed.

murderer who perpetrates his crime while sober. According to the reports of courts it is seen that nine-tenths of misdemeanors are accomplished when people are tipsy. The most convincing proof that the large number of misdemeanors are traceable to liquor is afforded by the fact that in certain states of America, where wine and the manufacture and sale of intoxicating liquors are prohibited, crimes have almost ceased. There are no robberies, or thefts, or murders, and the jails are empty.

Such is one consequence of the use of intoxicating drinks.

Another consequence is the harmful influence produced by intoxicating beverages on the health of the people. Besides the fact that from the use of intoxicating drinks arise various painful illnesses peculiar to drunkards, many of whom die of them, it is to be noted that men who drink recuperate from ordinary diseases with greater difficulty than others, so that in life insurance, the insurance companies always prefer the risks on those that do not make use of intoxicating drinks.

This is the second consequence of the use of intoxicating beverages.

The third and most horrible consequence of intoxicating beverages is that liquor darkens the intellect and conscience of men; from the use of liquor men grow coarser, stupider, and wickeder.

What advantage is there from the use of intoxicating drinks?

None!

The advocates of vodka, wine, beer, assure us in advance that these drinks enhance the health and strength, that they warm and cheer. But now it is indisputably proved that this is not true. Intoxicating beverages do not improve the health, because they contain a violent poison,—alcohol,—and the use of a poison cannot fail to be injurious.

That wine does not increase a man's strength has been proved many times, and by the fact that when the work of a drinking mechanic and of a mechanic who does not drink are compared, during the course of months and years, it is always proved that the non-drinking man does more work and better work than the drinker; and by the fact that in those companies of soldiers which on campaigns use vodka there are always more incapacitated and more stragglers than in those where vodka is not used.

In exactly the same way it has been proved that liquor does not warm, and that the heat felt after drinking liquor does not hold out long, and that the man, after the brief increase in temperature, soon grows colder than ever, so that a drinking man always finds it much harder to endure prolonged cold than a nondrinker. People who freeze to death every year are frozen, for the most part, because they warm themselves with liquor.

It is not necessary to prove also that the gaiety that comes from wine is not real and not a joyous gaiety. Every one knows what sort of thing this drunken gaiety is. All that it requires is to take a look at what is done in cities on holidays, at the drinking-places, and in the rural districts; at what is done on holidays or at weddings and christenings. This drunken gaiety always ends with insulting words, fights, injured members, all kinds of crimes, and the loss of human dignity.

Wine does not conduce to the health or the strength, or the warmth or the gaiety, but only brings great injury to men. And therefore it would seem to be the wise course for every reasonable and decent man, not only not to use intoxicating drinks himself and not to set them before others, but also to try with all his might to stop the common use of this unprofitable and injurious poison.

But unfortunately this is not at all the case. Men are so wedded to old habits and customs, and find it so difficult to do away with them, that there are in our day very many good, kind,

and reasonable men who not only do not forswear the use of intoxicating beverages and the regalement of others with them, but even defend it with all their ability. "Wine," they say, "is not to blame, but drunkenness is to be condemned. King David said, 'Wine cheers the heart of man.' Christ in Cana of Galilee sanctified wine. If it were not for the drinking habit government would be deprived of its chief revenue. It is impossible to celebrate a holiday, to hold a wedding, or a christening, without wine. One must drink something at the conclusion of a bargain or a sale, or at the meeting with a dear friend."

"In our poverty and in our labor we must drink," says the poor laboring man.

"If we drink only occasionally and temperately, we do no harm to any one," say well-to-do people.

"The gaiety of Russia is in drinking," said Prince Vladimir.

"By our drinking we do no harm to any one but ourselves. And if we harm only ourselves then that is our affair; we don't want to teach any one and we don't want to be taught by any one; we did not begin this and it is not for us to put an end to it," say frivolous people.

Thus talk drinking men of various conditions and ages, trying to justify themselves. But these justifications, which availed some decades of years ago, now no longer avail. It was well enough to say this when all men thought that the use of intoxicating drinks was a harmless pleasure, that intoxicating drinks enhanced a man's health and strength; when they did not, as yet, know that wine contained a poison always injurious to the health of men; when men did not, as yet, realize the terrible consequences of drunkenness, which are now patent to all eyes.

It was possible to say this when there were not, as yet, these hundreds and thousands of men prematurely dying in cruel torments simply because they had learned to drink intoxicating beverages, and could not, as yet, abstain from the use of them. It was well to say that wine is a harmless pleasure before we had seen those hundreds and thousands of poor tormented women and children suffering because their husbands and fathers had learned to drink wine.

It was well enough to say this before we had witnessed these hundreds and thousands of criminals filling the jails; the exiles, galley-slaves, and ruined women, who had fallen into this condition owing to wine.

It was well enough to say this before we knew that hundreds of thousands of men, who might have lived their lives with delight to themselves and others, have ruined their energies and their intellects and their souls simply because intoxicating beverages existed and they were tempted by them.

And therefore it is no longer possible, in our time, to say that the drinking or non-drinking of wine is a private affair, that we do not consider the moderate use of wine injurious to ourselves, and do not wish to teach any one or be taught by any one, that we did not begin it and it is not for us to end it. It is impossible to say this now; the use of wine or abstinence from it is, in our day, not a private matter, but a public matter.

Now all men—it is all the same whether they wish it or do not wish it—are divided into two camps: those in the one camp are fighting against the employment of a useless poison—intoxicating drinks—both by word and deed, not using wine and not offering it to others; those in the opposite camp uphold both by word and, more powerfully than all else, by force of example the use of this poison, and this contest is going on at the present time in all nations, and now for twenty years with especial violence in Russia.

"As long as you did not know you were without sin," said Christ. But now we know what we are doing and whom we are serving when we use wine and offer it to others, and consequently,

if we, who know the sin of using wine, go on drinking or offering it to others, then we have no justification.

And let not men say that it is impossible to avoid drinking and offering wine on special occasions—on holidays and at weddings and similar occasions; that all do this, that our fathers and grandfathers did this, and therefore it is impossible for us alone to stand out against all the rest.

This is false; our fathers and grandfathers did away with those evil and harmful practices, the ill effects of which became manifest to them; in the same way also we are bound to do away with the evil which has become manifest in our day. And the fact that wine has become a frightful evil in our day is beyond all question.

How, then, if I know that the use of intoxicating drinks is an evil, destroying hundreds of thousands of men, can I offer this evil to my friends who come to my house for a festival, a christening, or a wedding?

Not always was everything as it is now, but everything has changed from worse to better; and the change has come about, not of itself, but by people fulfilling what has been demanded of them by reason and conscience. And now our reason and our conscience in the most actual manner demand of us that we cease drinking wine and offering it to others.

As a general thing men consider worthy of censure and scorn such drunkards as go to taverns and drinking-rooms, and get so full that they lose their reason, and become so addicted to wine that they cannot control themselves, and drink up all they have. The very men who buy wine for home use drink every day and in moderation, and offer wine to their guests in circumstances when it is used—and such men are considered good and honorable and not as doing any harm. And yet these very people are more worthy of censure than the drunkards. The drunkards have become drunkards simply because those that were not drunkards, those that did themselves no harm, taught them to drink wine, tempted them by their example.

Drunkards never would have become drunkards if they had not seen honored men, men respected by every one, drinking wine and offering it to others. A young man who has never taken wine will know the taste and the effect of wine at festivals, at weddings, at the houses of these honored people who are not themselves drunkards, but who drink and set it before their guests on certain occasions.

And so he who drinks wine, no matter how moderately, or offers it in whatever special circumstances, commits a great sin. He tempts those whom he is commanded not to tempt, of whom it is said, *Woe to him that tempts one of these little ones.*

It is said, "We did not begin it, it is not for us to end it."

It is for us to end it if we only understand that for every one of us the drinking or non-drinking of wine is not a matter of indifference; that with every bottle of wine bought, every glass of wine imbibed, we are serving that terrible devilish deed whereby the best strength of humanity is wasted; but, on the other hand, by refraining from wine for ourselves, and by doing away with the senseless custom of using wine at festivals, weddings, and christenings, we are performing a work of the utmost importance—our soul's work, God's work. As soon as we have understood this, then will drunkenness be stopped by us.

And therefore, my reader, whoever you may be—a young man only just entering upon life, or a grown man who have already established your life, a master of a house or a mistress of a house, or an aged man,—for whom now the time is near for accounting for the deeds you have done, whether you are rich or poor, famous or unknown, whoever you are, it is impossible for you to

stand between these two camps; you must infallibly choose one of the two: oppose drunkenness or cooperate with it—serve God or mammon.

If you are a young man who have never as yet taken liquor, never as yet been poisoned by the poison of wine, treasure your innocence and freedom from temptation. If you taste, the temptation will be all the harder for you to overcome it. And do not believe that wine will increase your gaiety. At your time of life gaiety is natural, genuine, good gaiety; and wine only changes your true, innocent gaiety into a drunken, senseless, vicious gaiety.

Above all beware of wine, because at your time of life it will be harder for you to resist other temptations; wine weakens in you the force of reason, which is most needful at your age to help you resist temptations. After you have imbibed you will do what you would not think of doing when sober. Why subject yourself to such a terrible risk ? If you are a grown man who have already got into the habit of using intoxicating drinks, or who are just beginning to form that habit, make haste while there is yet time to get out of this awful habit, or else before you look around it will get control of you, and you may become like those that are irrevocably drunkards, who have perished by reason of wine. All of them began just as you have. Even if you have the ability throughout your life to use intoxicating drinks in moderation, and may not yourself become a drunkard, yet if you continue to drink wine and serve it at your table, you may perhaps make your younger brother, your wife, your children, drunkards, for they may not have the strength as you have to confine themselves to a moderate use of wine.

And above all understand that on you as a man, who have reached the very prime of life, as the master of the house, as the controller of the destiny of others, rests the responsibility of guiding the lives of your household. And therefore if you know that wine brings no advantage, but causes great evil to men, then not only are you not obliged slavishly to do as your fathers and grandfathers used to do,—to use wine, to buy it and serve it to others,—but, on the contrary, you are bound to avoid this habit and keep it from others.

And be not afraid that the change in the custom of drinking wine at festivals, christenings, and weddings, will very deeply humiliate or trouble people. In many places they have already begun to do this, substituting for the wine appetizing viands and temperance drinks, and people only at first, and the very stupidest, wonder, but quickly get used to it and approve.

If you are an old man, at an age when you will very shortly be called upon to render your account to God, how you have served Him, and instead of warning the young and inexperienced from wine, the terrible evil of which you must have seen in the course of your life, you have tempted your neighbor by your example, drinking wine and offering it to others, you have been committing a mighty sin.

Woe to the world because of temptations! Temptations must come into the world, but woe to him through whom they come.

Only let us understand that in the matter of using wine there is no half way, and we either desire it or do not desire it—we must choose between two courses—serving God or serving mammon. *He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathers not for me scatters abroad.*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew xii. 30.

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