

A Letter to a Hindu

The Subjection of India – Its Cause and Cure

by Leo Tolstoy

The following is a translation of Tolstoy's letter written in Russian in reply to one from the Editor of *Free Hindustan*. After having passed from hand to hand, this letter at last came into my possession through a friend who asked me, as one much interested in Tolstoy's writings, whether I thought it worth publishing. I at once replied in the affirmative, and told him I should translate it myself into Gujarati and induce others to translate and publish it in various Indian vernaculars.

The letter as received by me was a typewritten copy. It was therefore referred to the author, who confirmed it as his and kindly granted me permission to print it. To me, as a humble follower of that great teacher whom I have long looked upon as one of my guides, it is a matter of honor to be connected with the publication of his letter, such especially as the one which is now being given to the world.

It is a mere statement of fact to say that every Indian, whether he owns up to it or not, has national aspirations. But there are as many opinions as there are Indian nationalists as to the exact meaning of that aspiration, and more especially as to the methods to be used to attain the end.

One of the accepted and time-honored methods to attain nationalism is that of violence. The assassination of Sir Curzon Wylie was an illustration of that method in its worst and most detestable form. Tolstoy's life has been devoted to replacing the method of violence for removing tyranny or securing reform by the method of non-resistance to evil. He would meet hatred expressed in violence by love expressed in self-suffering. He admits of no exception to whittle down this great and divine law of love. He applies it to all the problems that trouble mankind.

Tolstoy is one of the clearest thinkers in the western world and one of its greatest writers, and as a soldier he has known what violence is and what it can do. When a man like him condemns Japan for having blindly followed the law of modern science, falsely so-called, and fears for that country "the greatest calamities," it is for us to pause and consider whether, in our impatience of English rule, we do not want to replace one evil by another one that is worse. India, which is the nursery of the great faiths of the world, will cease to be nationalist India when she becomes so "civilized" that she uses her sacred soil to reproduce gun factories and the hateful industrialism which has reduced the people of Europe to a state of slavery, and all but stifled among them the best instincts which are the heritage of the human family.

If we do not want the English in India, we must pay the price. Tolstoy indicates it. "Do not resist evil, but also do not yourselves participate in evil: in the collection of taxes, and in the violent deeds of the law courts and (what is more important) the soldiers. Then, no one in the world will enslave you," passionately declares the sage of Yásnaya Polyána. Who can question his truthfulness when he says, "A commercial company enslaved a nation of two hundred million people. Tell this to a man free from superstition and he will fail to grasp what these words mean. What does it mean that thirty thousand people, not athletes, but rather weak and ordinary people,

have enslaved two hundred million vigorous, clever, capable, freedom-loving people? Do not the figures make it clear that it is not the English, but the Indians, who have enslaved themselves?"

One need not accept all that Tolstoy says (some of his facts are not accurately stated) to realize the central truth of his indictment of the present system. The truth that is to be realized is love, which is an attribute of the soul that has an irresistible power over the body, and over the brute or body force generated by the stirring up of evil passions in us.

There is no doubt that there is nothing new in what Tolstoy preaches. But his presentation of the old truth is refreshingly forceful. His logic is unassailable. And above all he endeavors to practice what he preaches. He preaches to convince. He is sincere and in earnest. He commands attention.

M. K. Gandhi
November 19th, 1909

1

All that exists is One. People only call this One by different names. *The Vedas*

God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.
1 John 4:16

God is one whole; we are the parts. *Exposition of the teaching of the Vedas by Vivekananda*

Do not seek quiet and rest in those earthly realms where delusions and desires are engendered, for if you do, you will be dragged through the rough wilderness of life, which is far from Me. Whenever you feel that your feet are becoming entangled in the interlaced roots of life, know that you have strayed from the path to which I beckon you, for I have placed you in broad, smooth paths, which are strewn with flowers. I have put a light before you, which you can follow and thus run without stumbling. *Krishna*

I have received your letter and two issues of your periodical, both of which interest me extremely. The oppression of a majority by a minority, and the demoralization inevitably resulting from it, is a phenomenon that has always occupied me and has done so most particularly of late. I will try to explain to you what I think about that subject in general, and particularly about the cause from which the dreadful evils of which you write in your letter, and in the Hindu periodical you have sent me, have arisen and continue to arise.

The reason for the astonishing fact that a majority of working people submit to a handful of idlers who control their labor and their very lives is always and everywhere the same, whether the oppressors and oppressed are of one race or whether, as in India and elsewhere, the oppressors are of a different nation.

This phenomenon seems particularly strange in India, for there more than two hundred million people, highly gifted both physically and mentally, find themselves in the power of a

small group of people quite alien to them in thought, and immeasurably inferior to them in religious morality.

I have read your letter and the articles in *Free Hindustan*, as well as the very interesting writings of the Hindu Swami Vivekananda and others. It appears that, as is the case in our time with the ills of all nations, the reason lies in the lack of a reasonable religious teaching. By explaining the meaning of life, such a teaching would supply a supreme law for the guidance of conduct and would replace the more than dubious precepts of pseudo-religion and pseudo-science and the immoral conclusions deduced from them, which are commonly called "civilization."

Your letter, the articles in *Free Hindustan*, and Indian political literature generally show that most of the leaders of public opinion among your people no longer attach any significance to the religious teachings that were and are professed by the peoples of India. They recognize no possibility of freeing the people from the oppression they endure except by adopting the irreligious and profoundly immoral social arrangements under which the English and other pseudo-Christian nations live today.

And yet the chief if not the sole cause of the enslavement of the Indian peoples by the English lies in this very absence of a religious consciousness and of the guidance for conduct which should flow from it – a lack common in our day to all nations East and West, from Japan to England and America alike.

2

O you, who see perplexities over your heads, beneath your feet, and to the right and left of you – you will be an eternal enigma to yourselves until you become humble and joyful as children. Then will you find Me, and having found Me in yourselves, you will rule over worlds. And looking out from the great world within to the little world without, you will bless everything that is, and find all is well with time and with you. *Krishna*

I must go farther back to make my thoughts clear to you. We do not, cannot, and I venture to say need not know how men lived millions of years ago or even ten thousand years ago. But we do know positively that, as far back as we have any knowledge of mankind, it has always lived in special groups of families, tribes, and nations in which the majority, in the conviction that it must be so, submissively and willingly bowed to the rule of one or more persons – to a very small minority. Despite all varieties of circumstances and personalities, these relations manifested themselves among the various peoples of whose origin we have any knowledge. And the farther back we go the more absolutely necessary did this arrangement appear, both to the rulers and the ruled, to make it possible for people to live peacefully together.

So it was everywhere. But though this external form of life existed for centuries and still exists, very early (thousands of years before our time) amid this life based on coercion, one and the same thought constantly emerged among different nations: that in every individual a spiritual element is manifested that gives life to all that exists, and that this spiritual element strives to unite with everything of a like nature to itself, and attains this aim through love. This thought appeared in various forms at different times and places, with varying completeness and clarity. It found expression in Brahmanism, Judaism, Mazdaism (the teachings of Zoroaster), Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, in the writings of the Greek and Roman sages, and in Christianity and

Islam. The mere fact that this thought has sprung up among different nations and at different times indicates that it is inherent in human nature and contains the truth. But this truth was made known to people who considered that a community could only be kept together if some of them restrained others, and so it appeared to be quite irreconcilable with the existing order of society. Moreover, it was at first expressed only fragmentarily, and so obscurely that, though people admitted its theoretic truth, they could not entirely accept it as guidance for their conduct. Then, too, the dissemination of the truth in a society based on coercion was always hindered in one and the same manner. Those in power, feeling that the recognition of this truth would undermine their position, consciously or sometimes unconsciously perverted it by explanations and additions quite foreign to it, and also opposed it by open violence. The truth was and is that this life should be directed by the spiritual element that is its basis, which manifests itself as love, and which is so natural to man. But this truth, in order to force a way into man's consciousness, had to struggle not merely against the obscurity with which it was expressed and the intentional and unintentional distortions surrounding it, but also had to struggle against deliberate violence, which by means of persecutions and punishments sought to compel men to accept religious laws authorized by the rulers and conflicting with the truth. Such a hindrance and misrepresentation of the truth, which had not yet achieved complete clarity, occurred everywhere – in Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and in your Brahmanism.

3

My hand has sowed love everywhere, giving to all who will receive. Blessings are offered to all My children, but many times in their blindness they fail to see them. How few there are who gather the gifts that lie in profusion at their feet. How many there are who, in willful waywardness, turn their eyes away from them and complain with a wail that they have not that which I have given them. Many of them defiantly repudiate not only My gifts, but Me also – Me, the Source of all blessings and the Author of their being. *Krishna*

I tarry awhile from the turmoil and strife of the world. I will beautify and quicken your life with love and with joy, for the light of the soul is Love. Where Love is, there is contentment and peace; where there is contentment and peace, I am also there in their midst. *Krishna*

The aim of the sinless One consists in acting without causing sorrow to others, although he could attain to great power by ignoring their feelings. The aim of the sinless One lies in not doing evil to those who have done evil unto him. If a man causes suffering even to those who hate him without any reason, he will ultimately have grief that will not be overcome. The punishment of evil-doers consists in making them feel ashamed of themselves by doing them a great kindness. Of what use is superior knowledge in the one, if he does not endeavor to relieve his neighbor's want as much as his own? If, in the morning, a man wishes to do evil to another, in the evening the evil will return to him. *The Hindu Kural*

Thus it went on everywhere. The recognition that love represents the highest morality was nowhere denied or contradicted, but this truth was so interwoven everywhere with all kinds of distorting falsehoods that finally nothing of it remained but words. It was taught that this highest morality was only applicable to private life – for home use, as it were – but that in public life all forms of violence – imprisonment, executions, and wars – might be used for the protection of the majority against a minority of evildoers, though such means were diametrically opposed to any vestige of love. And though common sense indicated that if some men claim to decide who is to be subjected to violence of all kinds for the benefit of others, these men to whom violence is applied may, in turn, arrive at a similar conclusion with regard to those who have employed violence to them. The great religious teachers of Brahmanism, Buddhism, and above all of Christianity foresaw such a perversion of the law of love and have constantly drawn attention to the one invariable condition of love: the enduring of injuries, insults, and violence of all kinds without resisting evil by evil. Even so, regardless of all that leads man forward, people continued to try to unite the incompatibles: the virtue of love and the restraining of evil by violence. And such a teaching, despite its inner contradiction, was so firmly established that the very people who recognize love as a virtue at the same time accept as lawful an order of life based on violence and allow men not merely to torture but even to kill one another.

For a long time people lived in this obvious contradiction without noticing it. But a time arrived when this contradiction became more and more evident to thinkers of various nations. And the old and simple truth that it is natural for men to help and to love one another, but not to torture and to kill one another, became ever clearer, so that fewer and fewer people were able to believe the sophistries by which the distortion of the truth had been made so plausible.

In former times the chief method of justifying the use of violence and thereby infringing the law of love was by claiming a divine right for the rulers: the Czars, Sultans, Rajahs, Shahs, and other heads of states. But the longer humanity lived the weaker grew the belief in this peculiar, God-given right of the ruler. That belief withered in the same way and almost simultaneously in the Christian and the Brahman world, as well as in Buddhist and Confucian spheres. In recent times it has so faded away as to prevail no longer against man's reasonable understanding and the true religious feeling. People saw more and more clearly, and now the majority see quite clearly, the senselessness and immorality of subordinating their wills to those of other people just like themselves, when they are bidden to do what is contrary not only to their interests but also to their moral sense. And so one might suppose that, having lost confidence in any religious authority for a belief in the divinity of potentates of various kinds, people would try to free themselves from subjection to it. The rulers, who were considered supernatural beings, benefited by having the people in subjection, but unfortunately they were not the only beneficiaries. As a result of the belief in, and during the rule of, these pseudo-divine beings, ever larger and larger circles of people grouped and established themselves around them, and took advantage of the people under an appearance of governing. When the old deception of a supernatural and God-appointed authority had dwindled away, the only concern of these men was to devise a new deception that, like its predecessor, should make it possible to hold the people in bondage to a limited number of rulers.

4

Children, do you want to know by what your hearts should be guided? Throw aside your longings and strivings after that which is null and void. Get rid of your

erroneous thoughts about happiness and wisdom, and your empty and insincere desires. Dispense with these and you will know Love. *Krishna*

Be not the destroyers of yourselves. Arise to your true Being, and then you will have nothing to fear. *Krishna*

New justifications have now appeared in place of the antiquated, obsolete, religious ones. These new justifications are just as inadequate as the old ones, but as they are new the majority of men cannot immediately recognize their futility. Besides this, those who enjoy power propagate these new sophistries and support them so skillfully that they seem irrefutable, even to many of those who suffer from the oppression these theories seek to justify. These new justifications are called “scientific.” But by the term “scientific” is understood just what was formerly understood by the term “religious.” Just as formerly everything called “religious” was held to be unquestionable simply because it was called religious, so now all that is called “scientific” is held to be unquestionable. The obsolete religious justification of violence consisted in the recognition of the supernatural personality of the God-ordained ruler (“there is no power but of God”). This has been superseded by the “scientific” justification.

“Science” puts forward, first, the assertion that because the coercion of man by man has existed in all ages, it follows that such coercion must continue to exist. This assertion that people should continue to live as they have done throughout past ages, rather than as their reason and consciences indicate, is what “science” calls “the historic law.”

The second “scientific” justification lies in the statement that, because there is a constant struggle for existence among plants and wild beasts that always results in the survival of the fittest, a similar struggle should be carried on among human beings. This is in spite of the fact that humans are gifted with intelligence and love, faculties that are lacking in lower creatures subject to the struggle for existence and survival of the fittest.

The third, most important, and unfortunately most widespread justification is just a minor alteration of the age-old religious justification: in public life the suppression of some for the protection of the majority cannot be avoided. This makes coercion unavoidable, however desirable reliance on love alone might be in human relationships. The only difference in this justification by pseudo-science consists in the fact that pseudo-science now gives a different reply than that given by religion to the question of why such and such people and not others have the right to decide against whom violence may and must be used. Religion declared that the right to decide was valid because persons possessed of divine power pronounced it. “Science” says that these decisions represent the will of the people, which under a constitutional form of government is supposed to find expression in all the decisions and actions of those who are at the helm at the moment.

Such are the scientific justifications of the principle of coercion. They are not merely weak but absolutely invalid, yet they are so much needed by those who occupy privileged positions that they believe in them as blindly as they formerly believed in the Immaculate Conception, and propagate them just as confidently. And the unfortunate majority of men is so dazzled by the pomp with which these “scientific truths” are presented that, under this new influence, it accepts these scientific stupidities for holy truth, just as it formerly accepted the pseudo-religious justifications. And that unfortunate majority continues to submit to the present holders of power, who are just as hard-hearted but rather more numerous than before.

Who am I? I am that which you have searched for since your baby eyes gazed wonderingly upon the world, whose horizon hides this real life from you. I am that which in your heart you have prayed for and demanded as your birthright, although you have not known what it was. I am that which has lain in your soul for hundreds and thousands of years. Sometimes I lay in you grieving because you did not recognize me. Sometimes I raised my head, opened my eyes, and extended my arms calling you either tenderly and quietly, or strenuously, demanding that you should rebel against the iron chains that bound you to the earth. *Krishna*

So matters went on, and still go on, in the Christian world. But we might have hope that in the immense Brahman, Buddhist, and Confucian worlds this new scientific superstition would not establish itself. We might hope that the Chinese, Japanese, and Hindus, once their eyes were opened to the religious fraud justifying violence, would advance directly to a recognition of the law of love inherent in humanity, and which the great Eastern teachers had so forcibly enunciated. But what has happened is that the scientific superstition replacing the religious one has been accepted and has secured a stronger and stronger hold in the East.

In your periodical you set out the following maxim as the basic principle which should guide the actions of your people: "Resistance to aggression is not simply justifiable but imperative; non-resistance hurts both Altruism and Egotism."

Love is the only way to rescue humanity from all ills, and in it you too have the only method of saving your people from enslavement. In very ancient times love was proclaimed with special strength and clarity among your people to be the religious basis of human life. Love and forcible resistance to evildoers involve such a mutual contradiction as to utterly destroy the whole sense and meaning of the concept of love. And what follows? With a light heart and in the twentieth century you, an adherent of a religious people, deny their law, feeling convinced of your scientific enlightenment and your right to do so. You repeat (do not take this wrongly) the amazing stupidity indoctrinated in you by the advocates of the use of violence, the enemies of truth and the servants first of theology and then of science, who are your European teachers.

You say that the English have enslaved your people and hold them in subjection because the latter have not resisted resolutely enough and have not met force by force. But the case is just the opposite. If the English have enslaved the people of India, it is just because the latter recognized, and still recognize, force as the fundamental principle of the social order. In accord with that principle they submitted to their little rajahs, struggled on their behalf against one another, fought the Europeans and the English. You are now trying to fight with them again.

A commercial company enslaved a nation comprising two hundred million people. Tell this to a man who is free from superstition and he will fail to grasp what these words mean. What does it mean that thirty thousand men – not athletes but rather weak and ordinary people – have subdued two hundred million vigorous, clever, capable, and freedom-loving people? Do not the figures make it clear that it is not the English who have enslaved the Indians, but the Indians who have enslaved themselves?

When the Indians complain that the English have enslaved them, it is as if drunkards complained that the spirit-dealers who have settled among them have enslaved them. You tell them that they might give up drinking, but they reply that they are so accustomed to it that they

cannot abstain, and that they must have alcohol to keep up their energy. Is it not the same thing with the millions of people who submit to thousands, or even to hundreds, of others of their own or other nations?

If the people of India are enslaved by violence, it is only because they themselves live and have lived by violence and do not recognize the eternal law of love inherent in humanity.

Pitiful and foolish is the man who seeks what he already has, and does not know that he has it. Yes, pitiful and foolish is he who does not know the bliss of love which surrounds him and which I have given him. *Krishna*

The law of love, which excludes all resistance by violence, is natural to men's hearts and is even now revealed to them. As soon as men live entirely in accord with this law and hold aloof from all participation in violence, not only will hundreds be unable to enslave millions, but not even millions will be able to enslave a single individual. Do not resist the evil-doer and take no part in doing so, either in the violent deeds of the administration, in the law courts, in the collection of taxes, or above all in soldiering, and no one in the world will be able to enslave you.

6

O you who sit in bondage and continually seek and pant for freedom, seek only for love. Love is peace in itself and peace that gives complete satisfaction. I am the key that opens the portal to the rarely discovered land where contentment alone is found. *Krishna*

What is now happening to the people of the East and West is like what happens to every individual when he passes from childhood to adolescence and from youth to manhood. He loses what had hitherto guided his life and lives without direction, not having found a new standard suitable to his age, and so he invents all sorts of occupations, cares, distractions, and stupefactions to divert his attention from the misery and senselessness of his life. Such a condition may last a long time.

When an individual passes from one period of life to another, a time comes when he cannot go on in senseless activity and excitement as before. Instead, he has to understand that, although he has outgrown what before used to direct him, this does not mean that he must live without any reasonable guidance. Rather, he must formulate for himself an understanding of life corresponding to his age, and having elucidated it must be guided by it. In the same way, a similar time must come in the growth and development of humanity. I believe that such a time has now arrived, not in the sense that it has come in the year 1908, but that the inherent contradiction of human life has now reached an extreme degree of tension. On the one side there is the consciousness of the beneficence of the law of love, and on the other is the existing order of life, which has for centuries occasioned an empty, anxious, restless, and troubled mode of life, conflicting as it does with the law of love and built on the use of violence. This contradiction must be faced, and the solution will evidently be favorable, not to the obsolete law of violence, but to the truth which has dwelled in the hearts of men from remote antiquity: the truth that the law of love is in accord with the nature of man.

But men can only recognize this truth to its full extent when they have completely freed themselves from all religious and scientific superstitions and from all the consequent

misrepresentations and sophistic distortions by which its recognition has been hindered for centuries.

To save a sinking ship it is necessary to throw overboard the ballast, which though it may once have been needed would now cause the ship to sink. And so it is with the scientific superstition that hides the truth of their welfare from mankind. Men must embrace the truth, not in the vague way they did in childhood, nor in the one-sided and perverted way presented to them by their religious and scientific teachers, but embrace it as their highest law. The complete liberation of this truth from all and every superstition, both pseudo-religious and pseudo-scientific, and by which it is still obscured, is essential. It cannot be a partial, timid attempt, reckoning with traditions sanctified by age and with the habits of the people. It cannot be such as was effected in the religious sphere by Guru-Nanak, the founder of the sect of the Sikhs, and in the Christian world by Luther, and by similar reformers in other religions. It must be a fundamental cleansing of religious consciousness from all ancient religious and modern scientific superstitions.

If only people freed themselves from their belief in all kinds of Ormuzds, Brahmas, Sabbaoths, and their incarnation as Krishnas and Christs; from belief in Paradises and Hells; from belief in reincarnations and resurrections; from belief in the interference of the Gods in the external affairs of the universe; and above all, from belief in the infallibility of all the various Vedas, Bibles, Gospels, Tripitakas, Korans, and the like. If only they also freed themselves from blind belief in a variety of scientific teachings about infinitely small atoms and molecules, in all the infinitely great and infinitely remote worlds, in their movements and origin, in the infallibility of the scientific law to which humanity is at present subjected, in historic and economic laws, and in the law of struggle and survival. If only people freed themselves from this terrible accumulation of futile exercises of our lower capacities of mind and memory called the “sciences,” and from the innumerable divisions of all sorts of histories, anthropologies, homiletics, bacteriologies, jurisprudences, cosmographies, and strategies – their name is legion. If only they freed themselves from all this harmful, stupefying ballast, then the simple law of love, which is natural to man, accessible to all, and solves all questions and perplexities, would of itself become clear and obligatory.

7

Children, look at the flowers at your feet and do not trample upon them. Look at the love in your midst and do not repudiate it. *Krishna*

There is a higher reason, which transcends all human minds. It is far and near. It permeates all the worlds and at the same time is infinitely higher than they are. A man who sees that all things are contained in the higher spirit cannot treat any being with contempt. For him to whom all spiritual beings are equal to the highest, there can be no room for deception or grief. Those who are ignorant, and are only devoted to religious rites, are in a deep gloom. But those who are given up to fruitless meditations are in a still greater darkness. *Upanishads, from Vedas*

Yes, in our time all these things must be cleared away in order that mankind may escape from self-inflicted calamities that have reached an extreme intensity. Whether an Indian seeks liberation from subjection to the English, or anyone else struggles with an oppressor of his own

nationality or of another; whether it is a Negro defending himself against the North Americans; or whether Persians, Russians, or Turks defend themselves against the Persian, Russian, or Turkish governments; or whether any man is seeking the greatest welfare for himself and for everyone else – they do not need explanations and justifications of old religious superstitions such as have been formulated by your Vivekanandas, Baba Bharatis, and others, or in the Christian world by a number of similar interpreters and exponents of things that nobody needs. Nor do they need the innumerable scientific theories about matters not only unnecessary, but for the most part harmful. (Nothing is indifferent in the spiritual realm; what is not useful is harmful.)

What are wanted for the Indian as well as for the Englishman, the Frenchman, the German, and the Russian are not Constitutions and Revolutions, nor all sorts of Conferences and Congresses, nor the many ingenious devices for submarine and aerial navigation, nor powerful explosives, nor all sorts of conveniences to add to the enjoyment of the rich ruling classes, nor new schools and universities with innumerable faculties of science, nor an augmentation of papers and books, nor gramophones and cinematographs, nor those childish and for the most part corrupt stupidities termed art. Only one thing is needful: the knowledge of the simple and clear truth that finds place in every soul that is not stupefied by religious and scientific superstitions. This is the truth that for our life one law is valid: the law of love, which brings the highest happiness to every individual as well as to all mankind. Free your minds from those overgrown, mountainous imbecilities which hinder your recognition of it, and at once the truth will emerge from amid the pseudo-religious nonsense that has been smothering it. It is the indubitable, eternal truth inherent in man, which is one and the same in all the great religions of the world. It will in due time emerge and make its way to general recognition, and the nonsense that has obscured it will disappear of itself, and with it will go the evil from which humanity now suffers.

Children, look upwards with your beclouded eyes, and a world full of joy and love will disclose itself to you, a rational world made by My wisdom, the only real world. Then you will know what love has done with you, what love has bestowed upon you, what love demands from you. *Krishna*

Yásnaya Polyána
December 14th, 1908

October 1st, 1909

Count Tolstoy:

I take the liberty of inviting your attention to what has been going on in the Transvaal (South Africa) for nearly three years.

There is in that Colony a British Indian population of nearly 13,000. These Indians have, for several years, labored under various legal disabilities. The prejudice against color and in some respects against Asians is intense in that Colony. It is largely due, so far as Asians are concerned, to trade jealousy. The climax was reached three years ago, with a law that many others and I considered to be degrading and calculated to unman those to whom it was

applicable. I felt that submission to a law of this nature was inconsistent with the spirit of true religion. Some of my friends and I were and still are firm believers in the doctrine of nonresistance to evil. I had the privilege of studying your writings also, which left a deep impression on my mind. British Indians, before whom the position was fully explained, accepted the advice that we should not submit to the legislation, but that we should suffer imprisonment, or whatever other penalties the law may impose for its breach. The result has been that nearly half of the Indian population, which was unable to stand the heat of the struggle or to suffer the hardships of imprisonment, have withdrawn from the Transvaal rather than submit to the law that they have considered degrading. Of the other half, nearly 2,500 have for conscience's sake allowed themselves to be imprisoned, some as many as five times. The imprisonments have varied from four days to six months, in the majority of cases with hard labor. Many have been financially ruined. At present there are over a hundred passive resisters in the Transvaal jails. Some of these have been very poor men, earning their livelihood from day to day. The result has been that their wives and children have had to be supported out of public contributions, also largely raised from passive resisters. This has put a severe strain upon British Indians, but, in my opinion, they have risen to the occasion. The struggle still continues and one does not know when the end will come. However, some of us at least have seen most clearly that passive resistance will and can succeed where brute force must fail. We also notice that, in so far as the struggle has been prolonged, it has been due largely to our weakness and, hence, to a belief having been engendered in the mind of the Government that we would not be able to stand continued suffering.

Together with a friend, I have come here¹ to see the Imperial authorities and to place before them the position, with a view to seeking redress. Passive resisters have recognized that they should have nothing to do with pleading with the Government, but the deputation has come at the instance of the weaker members of the community, and it therefore represents their weakness rather than their strength.

But, in the course of my observation here, I have felt that if a general competition for an essay on the Ethics and Efficacy of Passive Resistance were invited, it would popularize the movement and make people think. A friend has raised the question of morality in connection with the proposed competition. He thinks that such an invitation would be inconsistent with the true spirit of passive resistance and that it would amount to buying opinion. May I ask you to favor me with your opinion on the subject of morality? And if you consider that there is nothing wrong in inviting contributions, I would ask you also to give me the names of those whom I should specially approach to write upon the subject.

There is one thing more with reference to which I would trespass upon your time. A copy of your *Letter to a Hindu* on the present unrest in India has been placed in my hands by a friend. On the face of it, it appears to represent your views. It is the intention of my friend, at his own expense, to have 20,000 copies printed and distributed and to also have it translated. We have, however, not been able to secure the original, and we do not feel justified in printing it unless we are sure of the accuracy of the copy and of the fact that it is your letter. I venture to enclose herewith a copy of the copy, and should regard it as a favor if you kindly let me know whether it is your letter, whether it is an accurate copy, and whether you approve of its publication in the above manner. If you will add anything further to the letter, please do so. I would also venture to make a suggestion. In the concluding paragraph you seem to dissuade the reader from a belief in reincarnation. I do not know whether (if it is not impertinent on my part to mention this) you

¹ London.

have specially studied the question. Reincarnation or transmigration is a cherished belief with millions in India, and also in China. With many, one might almost say, it is a matter of experience, and no longer a matter of academic acceptance. It explains reasonably the many mysteries of life. With some of the passive resisters who have gone through the jails of the Transvaal, it has been their solace. My object in writing this is not to convince you of the truth of the doctrine, but to ask you if you will please remove the word "reincarnation" from the other things you have dissuaded your reader from. In the letter in question, you have quoted largely from Krishna and given reference to passages. I should thank you to give me the title of the book from which the quotations have been made.

I have wearied you with this letter. I am aware that those who honor you and endeavor to follow you have no right to trespass upon your time, but it is rather their duty to refrain from giving you trouble, so far as possible. I, however, who am an utter stranger to you, have taken the liberty of addressing this communication in the interests of truth, and in order to have your advice on problems, the solution of which you have made your life's work.

With respect, I remain,
Your obedient servant,
M. K. Gandhi

October 7th, 1909

Mr. Gandhi:

I have just received your very interesting letter, which gave me much pleasure. May God help our dear brothers and co-workers in the Transvaal! Among us, too, this fight between gentleness and brutality, between humility and love and pride and violence, makes itself ever more strongly felt, especially in a sharp collision between religious duty and the State laws, expressed by refusals to perform military service. Such refusals occur more and more often.

I wrote the *Letter to a Hindu*, and am very pleased to have it translated. The Moscow people will let you know the title of the book on Krishna. As regards "re-birth," I for my part should not omit anything, for I think that faith in a re-birth will never restrain mankind as much as faith in the immortality of the soul and in divine truth and love. But I leave it to you to omit it if you wish to. I shall be very glad to assist your edition. The translation and diffusion of my writings in Indian dialects can only be a pleasure to me.

The question of monetary payment should, I think, not arise in connection with a religious undertaking.

I greet you fraternally, and am glad to have come in touch with you.

Leo Tolstoy

October 11th, 1909

Count Tolstoy:

I beg to tender my thanks for your registered letter in connection with the *Letter to a Hindu*, and with the matters that I dealt with in my letter to you.

Having heard about your failing health and wanting to save you the trouble, I refrained from sending an acknowledgment, knowing that a written expression of my thanks was a superfluous formality. Mr. Aylmer Maude, whom I have now been able to meet, reassured me that you were keeping very good health indeed and that you unfailingly and regularly attended to your correspondence every morning. It was very gladsome news to me, and it encourages me to write to you further about matters that are, I know, of the greatest importance according to your teaching.

I beg to send you herewith a copy of a book written by a friend, an Englishman who is at present in South Africa, in connection with my life, insofar as it has a bearing on the struggle with which I am so connected, and to which my life is dedicated. As I am very anxious to engage your active interest and sympathy, I thought that it would not be considered by you as out of the way for me to send you the book.

In my opinion, this struggle of the Indians in the Transvaal is the greatest of modern times, inasmuch as it has been idealized both as to the goal and as the methods adopted to reach the goal. I am not aware of a struggle, in which the participators are not to derive any personal advantage at the end of it, and in which 50% of the persons affected have undergone great suffering and trial for the sake of a principle. It has not been possible for me to advertise the struggle as much as I should like. You command, possibly, the widest public today. If you are satisfied as to the facts you will find set forth in Mr. Doke's book, and if you consider that the conclusions I have arrived at are justified by the facts, may I ask you to use your influence in any manner you think fit to popularize the movement? If it succeeds, it will be not only a triumph of religion, love and truth over irreligion, hatred and falsehood, but it is highly likely to serve as an example to the millions in India and to people in other parts of the world who may be down-trodden, and will certainly go a great way towards breaking up the party of violence, at least in India. If we hold out to the end, as I think we would, I entertain not the slightest doubt as to the ultimate success, and your encouragement in the way suggested by you can only strengthen us in our resolve.

The negotiations that were going on for a settlement of the question have practically fallen through, and together with my colleague I return to South Africa this week, and invite imprisonment. I may add that my son has happily joined me in this struggle, and is now undergoing imprisonment with hard labor for six months. This is his fourth imprisonment in the course of the struggle.

I am hoping that this will find you in good health.

I remain,
Your obedient servant,
M K Gandhi

April 4th, 1910

Count Tolstoy:

You will remember that I last wrote to you from London, where I stayed in passing. As your very devoted adherent, I send you, together with this letter, a little book I have compiled in which I have translated my own writings from Gujarati. It is worth noting that the Indian government confiscated the original. For that reason I hastened to publish the translation. I am afraid of burdening you, but if your health permits and you have time to look through the book, I need not say how much I shall value your criticism of it. At the same time I am sending you a few copies of your *Letter to a Hindu*, which you allowed me to publish. It has also been translated into one of the Indian dialects.

Your humble servant,
M. K. Gandhi

May 8th, 1910

Mr. Gandhi:

I have just received your letter and your book, *Indian Home Rule*.

I have read the book with great interest, for I consider the question there dealt with – Passive Resistance – to be of very great importance, not only for Indians, but also for the whole of mankind.

I cannot find your first letter, but in looking for it have come upon Doke's biography, which much attracted me and enabled me to know you and understand you better.

I am not very well at present, and therefore refrain from writing all that is in my heart about your book and about your activity in general, which I value highly. I will however do so as soon as I am better.

Your friend and brother,
Leo Tolstoy

August 15th, 1910

Count Tolstoy:

I am much obliged to you for your encouraging and cordial letter of the 8th of May. I very much value your general approval of my booklet, *Indian Home Rule*. And, if you have the time, I shall look forward to your detailed criticism of the work, which you have been so good as to promise in your letter.

Mr. Kallenbach has written to you about Tolstoy Farm. Mr. Kallenbach and I have been friends for many years. I may state that he has gone through most of the experiences that you have so graphically described in your work, *My Confession*. No writings have so deeply touched Mr. Kallenbach as yours. As a spur to further effort in living up to the ideals held before the world by you, he has taken the liberty, after consultation with me, of naming his farm after you.

The issue of *Indian Opinion* I am sending herewith will give you full information regarding his generous action in giving the use of the farm for passive resisters.

I should not have burdened you with these details but for the fact of your taking a personal interest in the passive resistance struggle that is going on in the Transvaal.

I remain,
Your faithful servant,
M. K. Gandhi

September 7th, 1910

Mr. Gandhi:

I received your journal, *Indian Opinion*, and was glad to see what it says of those who renounce all resistance by force, and I immediately felt a wish to let you know what thoughts its perusal aroused in me.

The longer I live – especially now when I clearly feel the approach of death² – the more I feel moved to express what I feel more strongly than anything else, and what in my opinion is of immense importance, namely, what we call the renunciation of all opposition by force³, which is simply the law of love unperverted by sophistries. Love, the striving of men's souls towards unity and the submissive behavior to one another that results from it, represents the highest and indeed the only law of life. Every man knows and feels this in the depths of his heart (we see it most clearly in children) and knows it until he becomes involved in the lying net of worldly thoughts. This law was announced by all the philosophies: Indian, Chinese, Jewish, Greek, and Roman. Most clearly, I think, was it announced by Christ, who said explicitly that on it hang all the Law and the Prophets. More than that, foreseeing the distortion that has hindered its recognition and may always hinder it, he specifically indicated the danger of a misrepresentation that presents itself to men living by worldly interests. Such men claim a right to defend their interests by force or, as he expressed it, to repay blow by blow and recover stolen property by force. He knew, as all reasonable men must, that any employment of force is incompatible with love as the highest law of life, and that as soon as the use of force appears permissible, even in a single case, the law itself is immediately negated. The whole of Christian civilization, outwardly so splendid, has grown up on this strange and flagrant misunderstanding and contradiction, which is partly intentional but chiefly unconscious. Fundamentally, however, the law of love is, and can be, no longer valid if defense by force is set up beside it. And if once the law of love is not valid, then there remains no law except the right of might. Christendom has lived in that state for 1,900 years. Certainly men have always let themselves be guided by force as the main

² Transcriber's note – Tolstoy died on November 20th, 1910.

³ Transcriber's note – Nonresistance.

principle of their social order. The difference between the Christian nations and all other nations is only that in Christianity the law of love has been more clearly and definitely given than in any other religion, and that its adherents solemnly recognize it. Yet despite this they deem the use of force to be permissible, and base their lives on violence. The life of the Christian nations therefore presents a greater contradiction between what they believe and the principle on which their lives are built, a contradiction between love, which should prescribe the law of conduct, and the employment of force. This force is recognized under various forms such as governments, courts of justice, and armies, which are esteemed and accepted as necessary. This contradiction increased with the development of the spiritual life of Christianity and in recent years has reached the utmost tension.

The issue now is that we must choose one of two things: either to admit that we recognize no religious ethics at all but let our conduct of life be decided by the right of might, or to demand that all compulsory levying of taxes be discontinued and that all our legal and police institutions, and above all, military institutions, be abolished.

This spring, at a scripture examination in a Moscow girls' school, first their religious teacher and then an archbishop, who was also present, questioned the girls on the Ten Commandments, especially on the sixth. After the commandments had been correctly recited the archbishop sometimes put the question, "Is it always and in every case forbidden by the law of God to kill?" And the unfortunate girls, misled by their instructor, had to answer and did answer, "Not always, for it is permissible in war and at executions." When, however, this customary additional question – whether it is always a sin to kill – was put to one of these unfortunate creatures (what I am telling you is not an anecdote, but actually happened and was told me by an eyewitness) the girl blushed and answered decidedly and with emotion, "Always!" And despite all the customary sophistries of the archbishop, she held steadfastly to it – that to kill is under all circumstances forbidden even in the Old Testament, and that Christ has not only forbidden us to kill, but in general to do any harm to our neighbor. The archbishop, for all his majesty and verbal dexterity, was silenced, and victory remained with the girl.

Yes, we may write in the papers of our progress in mastery of the air, of complicated diplomatic relations, of various clubs, of discoveries, of all sorts of alliances, and of so-called works of art, and we can pass lightly over what that girl said. But we cannot completely silence her, for every Christian feels the same, however vaguely he may do so. Socialism, Communism, Anarchism, Salvation Armies, the growth of crime, freedom from toil, the increasingly absurd luxury of the rich and increased misery of the poor, and the fearfully rising number of suicides are all indications of that inner contradiction which must and will be resolved. And, of course, it must be resolved in such a manner that the law of love will be recognized and all reliance on force abandoned. Your work in the Transvaal, which to us seems to be at the end of the earth, is yet in the centre of our interest and supplies the weightiest practical proof, in which the world can now share, and not only the Christians but all the peoples of the world can participate.

I think it will please you to hear that here in Russia, too, a similar movement is rapidly attracting attention, and refusals of military service increase year by year. However small the number is of those with you who renounce all resistance by force, and with us the number of men who refuse any military service – both the one and the other can say, "God is with us, and God is mightier than man."

There is an obvious contradiction that cries to heaven between belief in the necessity of armies with preparations to slaughter on an ever-increasing scale and a simultaneous confession of Christianity – even a Christianity deformed as is that taught among us. Sooner or later, but

probably quite soon, this contradiction must appear in the light of day in its complete nakedness. That, however, will either annihilate the Christian religion, which is indispensable for the maintenance of the State, or it will sweep away the military and all the use of force bound up with it, which the State needs no less. All governments are aware of this contradiction, your British as much as our Russian, and therefore its recognition will be more energetically opposed by the governments than any other activity inimical to the State, as we in Russia have experienced and as is shown by the articles in your magazine. The governments know from what direction the greatest danger threatens them, and are on guard with watchful eyes not merely to preserve their interests but actually to fight for their very existence.

With my perfect esteem,
Leo Tolstoy

THE LATE LAMENTED TOLSTOY THE GREAT

The great Tolstoy has quit this corporeal frame at the ripe old age of 82. It is truer to say that “he has quit this corporeal frame” than that “he has died”. There can be no death for Tolstoy’s soul. His name will ever remain immortal. Only his body, which was of dust, has returned to dust.

Tolstoy is known to the entire world, but not as a soldier, though once he was reputed to be an expert soldier; not as a great writer, though indeed he enjoys a great reputation as a writer; nor as a nobleman, though he owned immense wealth. It was as a good man that the world knew him. In India, we would have described him as a *maharishi* or *fakir*. He renounced his wealth and gave up a life of comfort to embrace that of a simple peasant. It was Tolstoy’s great virtue that he himself put into practice what he preached. Hence thousands of men clung loyally to his words and his teaching.

We believe Tolstoy’s teaching will win increasing appreciation with the passage of time. Its foundation was religion. Being a Christian, he believed that Christianity was the best religion. He did not, however, denounce any other religion. He said, on the contrary, that truth was undoubtedly present in all the religions. At the same time, he also pointed out that selfish priests, Brahmins, and Mullahs had distorted the teaching of Christianity and other religions and misled the people.

What Tolstoy believed with special conviction was that, in essence, all religions held soul-force to be superior to brute force and taught that evil should be requited with good, not evil. Evil is the negation of religion. Irreligion cannot be cured by irreligion, but only by religion. There is no room in religion for anything other than compassion. A man of religion will not wish ill even to his enemy. Therefore, if people always want to follow the path of religion, they must do nothing but good.

In his last days, this great man wrote a letter to me to acknowledge copies of *Indian Opinion* in which I expressed these same ideas. The letter is in Russian. We give in this issue a Gujarati translation of it, based on an English translation⁴. The translation is worth reading. What he has

⁴ Transcriber’s note – Tolstoy’s letter of September 7th, which appears above.

said there about *satyagraha*⁵ deserves to be pondered over by all. According to him, the Transvaal struggle will leave its mark on the world. He says that everyone has much to learn from it. He extends encouragement to the *satyagrahis* and assures them of justice from God, if not from the rulers. The latter, being enamored of their strength, will certainly not be pleased with *satyagraha*. Despite that, *satyagrahis* must have patience and continue to fight. Citing further the example of Russia, Tolstoy states that there, too, soldiers everyday turn their backs upon their profession. He is convinced that, though this movement has had no tangible results in the present, it will mushroom in the end and Russia will be free.

It is no small encouragement to us that we have the blessings of a great man like Tolstoy in our task. We publish his photograph in today's issue.

M. K. Gandhi
Indian Opinion, November 26th, 1910

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⁵ Transcriber's note – Literally “truth-force,” the policy of nonviolent resistance developed by Gandhi as a means of pressing for political reform in South Africa and India.