

THE SLAVERY OF OUR TIMES

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The slavery of our times by Leo Tolstoy

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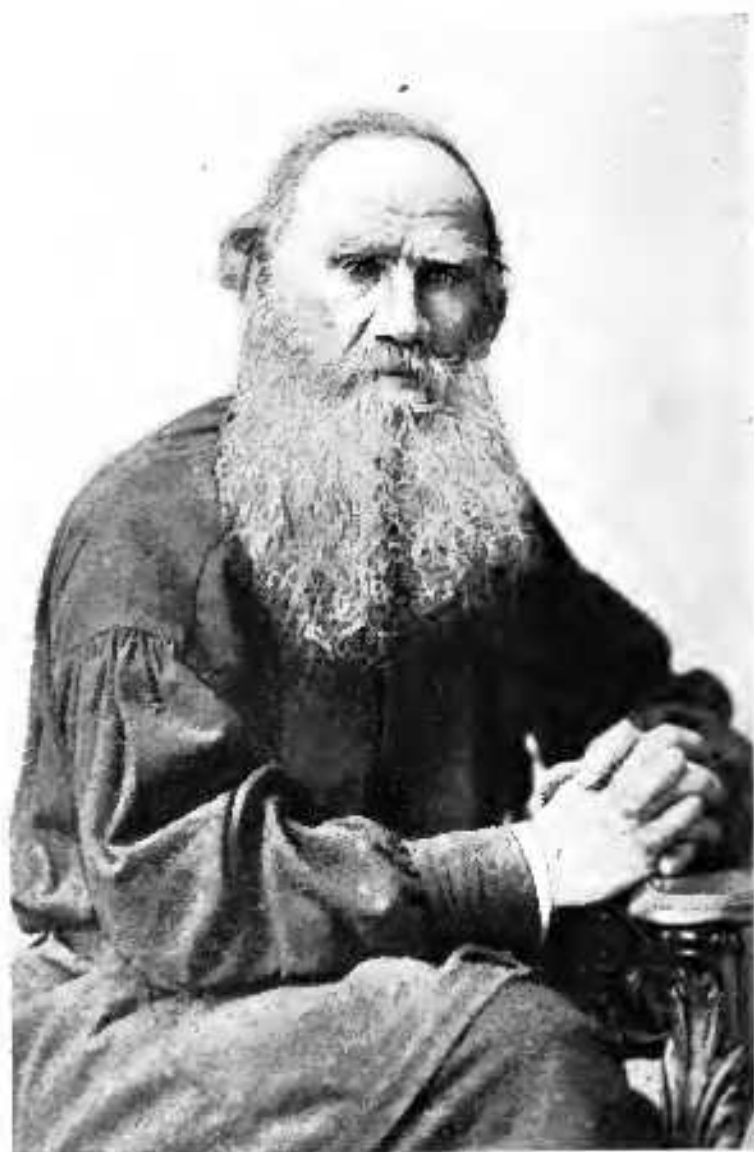
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LEO TOLSTOY

**THE SLAVERY
OF OUR TIMES**



Leo Tolstoy.

The
Slavery
of
Our Times

By
LEO TOLSTOY

*Author of "War and Peace" Anna
Karénina," Resurrection," etc.*



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INTRODUCTION

BY AYLMER MAUDE

THIS little book shows, in a short, clear, and systematic manner, how the principle of non-resistance, about which Tolstoy has written so much, is related to economic and political life.

The great majority of men, without knowing why, are still constrained to labour long hours at tasks they dislike, and often to live in unhealthy conditions. It is not that man has so little control over nature that to obtain a subsistence it is necessary to work in this way, but because men have made laws about land, taxes, and property which result in placing the great bulk of the people in conditions which compel them to labour thus, or go to the workhouse or starve.

It may be said that man's nature is so bad

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that were it not for these laws an even worse state of things would exist; that the laws we make and tolerate are outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual disgrace---the selfishness of man, which is the real root of the evil. But granting that, in a sense, this may be true, we need not suppose man's nature to be immutable, and all progress forever impossible. Nor need we suppose it our duty to leave progress in the hands of some kind of a self-acting evolution whose operations we can only watch as a passenger watches the working of a ship's engines. We may consider the effect of the laws we have made, approve or disapprove of them, discern the direction in which it is possible to advance, and take our part in furthering or hampering that advance.

Laws are made by governments and are enforced by physical violence. We have been so long taught that it is good for some people to make laws for others that most men approve of this, just as "genteel" people have been

Introduction

known to approve of wholesale when they turned up their noses at retail business; so people in general, while disapproving of robbery and murder when done on a small scale, admire them when they are organised and allots the land on which forty millions have to live to a few thousand; when it sends thousands to be killed, or when it subdivides the responsibility for an isolated murder between the queen, the hangman, and the judge, jury, and officials.

To Tolstoy's mind, violence done by man to man is wrong. We cannot escape the wrongness by doing it wholesale, or by subdividing the responsibility.

But what would happen if we ceased to abet it?

If it were possible forcibly to oblige men to cease from using force, the selfishness which is at the root of the matter would, no doubt, burst out in some fresh form. That is, in fact, pretty much what has happened. Weary of strife and private feuds, people consented to