

## CURRENT MAGAZINES

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**Leo Tolstoy:**—Mr. Aylmer Maude, in the *Contemporary*.

**All the World Honours Tolstoy:**—Mr. Simeon Strunsky, in *The New York Times Magazine*.

**Leo Tolstoy:**—Mr. R. Ellis Roberts, in *The Bookman*.

**Quo Vadimus?**—Lord Sydenham of Combe, in the *Nineteenth Century*.

**Seaside Socialism:**—Mr. Hamilton Fyfe, in *The Spectator*.

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LAST month fell the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of Leo Tolstoy. Needless to say, the magazine writers have been re-appraising him, though not so generally—at least in English magazines—as they have been reappraising two other publicists born in the same year, Henrik Ibsen and George Meredith. Yet in a certain sense Tolstoy was the most important of the three. The Soviet authorities have been carrying out a celebration on a vast scale, for which they invited to Moscow such guests as Bernard Shaw, Romain Rolland, Gandhi, and Rabindranath Tagore. How far the Bolshevik is entitled to use Tolstoy for advertising purposes, how far a school of such ferocious Socialism can fairly conjure with the prestige of an intense Individualist, is a point for debate. In a book entitled *The Truth About My Father*, we learn from Leo Tolstoy the younger that such proceeding might well make the dead man turn in his grave. As one remembers the central doctrines of that unbending prophet of the simple life, that contemner of the arts of government, that apostle of “Return to the Land”, that disbeliever in the whole promise of social Utopia through applied science, one is indeed puzzled by the propagandists who now quote him at the headquarters of a régime he would have abhorred. Think of such a memory now invoked in regions where—as Mr. Strunsky says—“the watchwords are industrialization, electrification, Fordization, centralization”! And yet, another Russian of the same name, Miss Rose Strunsky, has a very different view, which is at least worth examining. It is recorded that one of the first acts of the revolutionaries in March, 1917, was to make pilgrimage to the resting-place of Leo Tolstoy and to re-decorate his tomb. “They went”, says the narrator, “to tell the father of the good news, how the will of God was being established, and reason

was awakened in man". One may exclaim that they went prematurely, and that unless the spirit of Tolstoy had undergone a complete change, he might have been expected to tell them so. But Miss Strunsky's way of looking at the matter cannot be dismissed as just foolish. There is a deep plausibility in it, and herein lies the heart of the Tolstoy problem. It is to stir new reflection on the enigma of such great men that their centenaries are perhaps chiefly valuable.

To what shrine, it may be asked, could revolutionaries more fitly resort than to the grave of the prophet who had denounced property as theft and private trading as a species of swindle, who had traced all war to the greed of profiteers, despised courts of law as the suborned agencies of capitalism, demanded that all men without exception should toil with their hands, and urged every employee of government—whether military or civil—"meekly but firmly" to refuse obedience? The leaders of the March Revolution were not, indeed, prepared for anything so drastic as this creed might be supposed to imply. But there must have been many in the rank and file for whom such language would stir the blood like new wine. Could not a complete grammar of anarchy be constructed out of Tolstoyan material? No doubt. And yet one recalls how Huxley once said that a complete grammar of agnosticism might be constructed from the writings of Cardinal Newman! Moreover, it is anything but an anarchic scheme, it is rather the scheme of a State intensified and strengthened a hundredfold, that has emerged from the Russian Revolution.

The bearing of speculative literature upon practical changes in society is always, indeed, hard to judge. As a rule, such literature is symptomatic much more than it is causal. Few better comments have been made upon Bacon's *Novum Organum* than that of Joseph de Maistre—that here was a man who acted as a barometer showing a change which was to come, and who was absurdly supposed to have himself produced it. Not until we manage to forget the deluge of foolish pamphlets in which, fourteen years ago, Nietzsche and Treitschke were by turns accused of having "made the World War", will it be possible again to explain a public commotion by the explosive force of some writer's books. One might quote an ancient parallel, still closer than that of the German prophets of war. When Rome was sacked by the Goths, and men wondered at the pusillanimous collapse of a race that had once conquered the world, it was hinted that Christianity had broken down the Roman *morale*. Volusianus declared explicitly that those who believe in

turning the other cheek to the smiter could have little chance against the hosts of Alaric, and his argument called forth the memorable reply on behalf of the Church in St. Augustine's *City of God*. Whether Tolstoy's pacifist teaching was in any way responsible for the wholesale desertions from the army of Grand Duke Nicholas, is a problem of the same kind.

There is at least no doubt about the power of his appeal. How deeply he had impressed the imagination of his contemporaries was shown with dramatic vividness at the time of his death. It was on 28th October, 1911, that Tolstoy—then in his eighty-fourth year—rose at five o'clock that dreary winter morning, and stole away from home to present himself as suppliant for a resting-place at the door of a convent on a Russian steppe. He was overcome on his journey by the bitter cold, was placed for shelter in a room at a wayside station, and in a few days breathed his last. His bedside was surrounded by representatives of the highest Russian rank,—the provincial government, the imperial prime minister, the nobility, and such a multitude of admirers from every class that there was no room to accommodate them as they stayed, except in railroad cars sidetracked at the station. "Only the priests stood sullenly aloof". The telegraph offices could not cope with the enormous rush of wires and cables from all parts of the world. All the newspapers appeared in mourning for the announcement of the death, every theatre was closed, public business was everywhere suspended. The last words of the old man himself were characteristic: "There are many other sufferers to be attended. Why do you spend all your strength on Leo Tolstoy?" A scene of Russian life very different from that which we get in the press of to-day! Yet the event occurred only seventeen years ago, and historians say that national temperament endures.

As the crowd of motion-picture men stood arranging their films on the platform of that little railway-station, while all the notables came and went, they knew that from St. Petersburg to London and Tokio, from the shores of the Black Sea to Washington and Paris and Hong Kong, countless spectators would be eager to have that strange spectacle reproduced upon the screen. Would Tolstoy have been gratified at the thought that he was to figure on "the movies"? Probably the distinguished folk who came in real concern to do him honour at the end were the very last who would have been congenial company to him. That the house in which he lived should be acquired as a national treasure, and that

within a few years it should have become a place of pilgrimage, might have seemed to Tolstoy the very undoing of his life's achievement. So, at least, his hero-worshippers will be quick to urge. Others, whose critical sense is stronger than their hero-worship, will point out how mixed was his character, and how keen even to the last was a certain self-consciousness. Perhaps what lends itself to the easiest ridicule in his literary performance is the play he once wrote. The protagonist of humility depicted his own difficult rôle, the misunderstandings to which he was subjected in his household and the fruitless effort he was making with his own kindred, calling the piece by a most suggestive name—*The Light that Shineth in Darkness!* But what of that? Most characters are mixed.

There is probably no one else to whom the English reader owes quite so much as to Mr. Aylmer Maude for a disclosure of that mingled temperament. Mr. Maude has written the authoritative *Life*, from intimate personal acquaintance, with the sympathy of a friend whose friendship did not extinguish his power of criticism. In the September *Contemporary* he increases our debt by adding some fresh details alike of fact and of comment, all the more valuable because they now come at a distance in time so essential to true perspective. Seventeen years after Tolstoy's death, the enthusiasm even of his official biographer has had time to cool.

Mr. Maude, in his last article, warns us against "over-simplification", against the facile hypothesis—for example—which would account for the odder features of an odd career by an exaggerated fear of death, by absorption in the struggle of higher with lower nature, or by recoil from the errors of youth. Each of these theories has been advanced. But Tolstoy, in Mr. Maude's judgment, is not to be interpreted by any such single "key", for his was a most complex and indeed fitful nature, taking up many projects successively, and intent on each while it lasted "as though his life and the whole welfare of humanity depended on the solution of each of them in turn." There is thus no surer way of going wrong in the understanding of Tolstoy than by assuming that all parts of his life and doctrine can be fitted into some single system.

But if there is a persistent element at all in his teaching, it is at least that one which at this hour of Locarno treaties and Kellogg pacts has a special interest of its own, namely his fierce denunciation of war,—not just as "an instrument of national policy", but for any purpose and at any time. This appeared, as Mr. Maude reminds us, as early as *Sevastopol Sketches*, written during that memorable siege itself, and thus truly "a remarkable

performance to come from a young officer in active service". But not only did he hold war to be invariably wrong, like Erasmus, for example, who declared the most unjust peace to be preferable to the most just of wars. He condemned the use of physical force to restrain any human being under any circumstances! No one could ever, in a Tolstoyan state, be made accountable to any tribunal. It is the root principle of anarchy, and the seer of Yasnaya Polyana was beyond doubt an anarchist, differing from others of the name in that he would use no violence to achieve his purpose. Surely this is at least, as Tolstoy saw and insisted, the more consistent variety of that strange creed; for a violent anarchist comes near to being a contradiction in terms.

How did a man of Tolstoy's intellectual power come to adopt a doctrine which, even in its less incoherent form, seems too ridiculous for criticism? Mr. Maude reports that many correspondents of his own called this idea of Non-Resistance "so absurd that no sane Englishman would consider it for five minutes". The reason commonly put forward to explain why a man of undoubted genius was perfectly sure, not of its rationality alone, but of its truth, is of just that sort which we have been warned to suspect as "over-simplification". One hears it argued that the Tolstoy of the years after 1878, when he had passed through the terrific crisis he used to call his "conversion", was a man of genius who had become a religious fanatic. He could see no escape from exact and literal compliance with the Scripture, *Resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.* It is a cheap and easy way out of a difficulty to suppose that Tolstoy took at their superficial meaning passages which thus seem to prohibit not only self-defence but recourse for any cause whatever to a court of law. One sees, however, that it is a "way out" whose cheapness and easiness are decisive against it. Compassion for Tolstoy's simplicity of mind, and regret that he had not the advantage of "enlightened exegesis of Scripture" are quite misplaced. So far from being a narrow literalist in such matters, there is much evidence that Tolstoy was, in certain moods at least, a modernist of the most daring kind. Passage after passage can be cited from his writings subsequent to his "conversion" to show how near he was to being a Positivist, how he disavowed "any special predilection for Christianity", how he ridiculed adherence to dogmas of the fourth century which have "lost all meaning for the men of to-day", how he even explained that when he spoke of "God" he had no thought of a personal Being in mind,

for he did not acknowledge such a Being to exist. Of all the explanations which would "systematise" the Tolstoyan teaching, perhaps no other is quite so fatuous as this guess that he was tied to an infallible Scripture. But in his controversies with the Greek Church, and with all Churches, here was a weapon ready to his hand. Though Tolstoy had himself no such reverence for texts, the Church leaders at least could not disavow that authority. And Tolstoy as a controversialist had few superiors. Often his argument against some ecclesiastical dignitary calls to one's mind the words, used in similar conflict, by George Eliot. The popular preacher, she said, must learn to use the Bible differently at different times and for different purposes:

Let him be hard and literal in his interpretation only when he wants to hurl texts at the heads of unbelievers and adversaries; but when the letter of the Scriptures presses too closely on the genteel Christianity of the nineteenth century, let him use his spiritualising alembic and disperse it into impalpable ether.

Tolstoy had listened to such divines in Russia. And in his controversies with them it was not he that had need of intellectual compassion.

He was, in an extraordinary degree, an apostle of the supremacy of moral values, without attaching these to any special theory of the universe. Such apostleship is, indeed, rare, and this is perhaps the reason why Tolstoy is so enigmatic to the observers of our time. One often meets with a stern and somewhat frigid morality separate from any particular "cosmic doctrine". One meets, not infrequently, with even a passion for social justice in like detachment from any sort of "metaphysic of life". But the consuming enthusiasm of Tolstoy for working out in its last detail a scheme of human ideals and duties, as the one project that mattered most of all, and the one system that was objectively true, is hardly ever found except as the emotional consequent of a religion. Nor was Tolstoy himself able to keep it in the end so detached. One religion, and only one, ultimately seemed to consort with his ethical beliefs. If he ever reached dogma at all, it was the moral passion which formed its basis, not *vice versa*.

At his centenary one must remember that perhaps his most notable work was in that sphere upon which he so soon deliberately turned his back, but from which—try as he would—he never escaped. Thanks to his own bitter repudiation of the artist's renown, Tolstoy, the man of letters, has had his fame eclipsed by that of Tolstoy, the prophet. This threatens a real loss to the history of literature.

It has been said by some excellent judges that *War and Peace* is the greatest historical novel in the world. There Tolstoy appears as in the highest sense a "realist", presenting a whole picture, not trimming it to suit a theory, but setting into perspective and proportion the unexpurgated features of a scene. What we have before us is not the glamour and brilliance of the campaign against Napoleon, but the campaign as it was, with its horrors and confusions, its mean selfishness side by side with its heroism, its intrigues and counter-manoeuverings for place and decoration, its profiteerings in trade, its jealous nobility, its suffering among common soldiers. Compare this with Thackeray's sketch of the same period in *Vanity Fair*, and Tolstoy's depth of imagination will be realised by contrast. He brought a new note of stern and moving realism into the Russian novel. Read Maxim Gorky's appalling book, *Creatures that Once were Men*, or Dostoieffsky's *Crime and Punishment*, or almost any other novel of the class which Tolstoy inspired, and you will find that both directly and indirectly he has shown the world much that it needed to see, much that it should not have seen in Russian life without him.

His fiction will not, indeed, suit every taste. There are many who will complain that the number of different plots in a single story is excessive, that the threads become entangled with one another, that the multitude of characters makes it hard to remember who is who. *War and Peace* is specially open to this criticism, but not *Anna Karenina*, and certainly not that terrific piece of moral psychology, *Resurrection*. It may be objected, too, that there is nothing like humour in Tolstoy, though there is abundance of mordant satire. But that excellent critic, Matthew Arnold, who was very far removed from his social and political opinions, felt constrained to say of him that he was "one of the most marking, interesting, and sympathy-inspiring men of the time." Writing in 1887, just nine years after the great "conversion", Arnold declared that "Count Tolstoy has perhaps not done well in abandoning the work of the poet and artist, and might with advantage return to it". Either *Sevastopol Sketches* or *The Cossacks* would be sufficient, taken alone, to have given the author a commanding literary rank before he was forty years old, and his greatest novels were then still to be written.

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It is as a prophet, however, that he would have desired posterity to judge him, and as a prophet—according to the glib tongues of his critics—he must be judged a failure. The Tolstoyan colonies as a rule came to nothing. Whether the assistance he gave to the

Doukhobors, who, without him, might never have reached Canada, should be remembered to his credit, seems, at best, doubtful. Was he not a hopeless doctrinaire? The world as he described it, was, we are reminded, black with an Egyptian darkness, corrupt and festering through and through. But of light to clear the gloom, or of lancet and aseptics to cleanse the sore, he had no equipment. So for over forty years he kept preaching a visionary gospel such as human nature could neither adopt nor even understand. What shall we say to this line of criticism?

One must admit that it is largely true. He had no gift for politics. But is this wholly to his discredit? Leo Tolstoy is as completely open to such reproaches as, for example, any Hebrew prophet. Like the prophets, he was a radical, no believer in "evolution rather than revolution",—that phrase so convenient for clergymen in our time who desire to rid themselves of the old doctrine of repentance. He had no comfortable trust that "men, once they understand each other, will not be long ere they agree". Rather was he convinced that some human differences, particularly those in Russia, can never be composed save by a change of heart which is not within the powers of a Round Table Conference. He was satisfied that the ancient order and the new insurgents, the more fully they understood each other, would the more bitterly fight out their battle to the end. Tolstoy was of those who, with St. Paul, demand "What commerce hath light with darkness?" He was not of those who, with Mr. Lloyd George and M. Briand, are ever "exploring all the avenues" by which these may be brought into a fictitious agreement, that will last long enough for the fame of the negotiator if not for the amelioration of the world. And like all prophets, he lends himself to mockery. That the Winston Churchills of Jerusalem coined just such biting epigrams at the expense of Isaiah and Jeremiah, we cannot doubt. For Tolstoy would never co-operate with the practical men of Petrograd. The appeals of the intelligentsia and of the party of so-called "Reform" elicited from him no response.

As we try to interpret his obstinacy, perhaps the experience of these last years may not be without its suggestiveness. It was the effort to obtain a new political constitution that he was urged to support,—a cautious and moderate change by which, as our edifying phrase puts it, the masses might be "gradually and progressively associated with the machinery of government". Thus would freedom broaden down from precedent to precedent. It is indeed the method for some communities, but not for all, as we have been learning to our cost through the futile experiment of



Indian dyarchy. Tolstoy believed that something much more fundamental must precede this for Russia. Until there should be effected what we may call in Nietzschean language "a transvaluation of values", all tinkering with constitutions seemed to him idle. What the intelligentsia and the Reformers suggested was, in short, some such change as was lately called in northern Ireland "a minor rectification of boundaries, involving no transference of territory". The old principles of mensuration are plainly quite inadequate when one tries to explain this, but I understand that a key to its mysterious meaning was in the custody of forward-looking people like Lord Birkenhead. Tolstoy was not a practical politician in this sense. It was his belief that the boundary of classes in Russia required a rectification which was not "minor", and that the transference of territory would need to be rather extensive. So long as the Tsardom and the Grand Dukes and the whole circle of the Court felt as they did, so long as the hundred and forty-five million peasants remained as they were in mind and in morals, he thought it mattered little whether there was a Duma or not. And who shall say that he was wrong? Were the Young Turks, with their new constitution, any great improvement on the Sultanate? Have the infamies of Lenin and Trotsky been appreciably worse than those of Enver and Talaat? At a symposium between exiled Russian bourgeoisie and exiled Greeks or Armenians, this might be a nice problem to settle. *Quid leges sine moribus?*

Thus what Tolstoy foresaw for Russia was what Mirabeau a hundred years earlier foresaw for France,—no readjustment of detail, but *la culbute general*. Was it a visionary forecast? There was much to encourage those who thought so. The house of Romanoff, like the house of Bourbon, had lasted many a century. But it was the dreamers that were right, and the practical politicians that were wrong. In vain did foreign powers impoverish themselves by pouring money without limit into the war chest of counter-revolutionary adventurers in Russia, as a hundred years before they had menaced with their armies the frontier of republican France. In vain did diplomatists urge a policy of conciliation for which the day had long gone past. In vain they must recall the years that the locust had eaten, finding no place for repentance though they sought it carefully with tears.

After all, it may be true that wisdom lay with the prophet rather than with the lynx-eyed men of affairs. The voice crying in the wilderness and summoning to a repentance that was laughed to scorn may—like other such voices in the past—have been genuinely inspired. What we shall think about this depends on

our principles of valuation. James Anthony Froude once propounded the problem whether the world owed more to the invention of the steam-engine or to the prophecies of Isaiah. To different men different answers will appear obvious. And our estimate of Tolstoy will be determined differently, according as we believe that a preacher like St. John the Baptist or a shrewd manager like Lord Birkenhead has more to contribute to the redemption of mankind.

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**A**MONG the features of recent writing in *The Nineteenth Century* one has learned to expect the sombre reflectiveness of Lord Sydenham of Combe. The central thesis of his last article is that stores of knowledge and instruments of action are now being accumulated far in excess of what the human mind can control. Our intellectual riches are far surpassing our powers of management. The lurid picture drawn by Mrs. Shelley in *Frankenstein* is being realized in grim earnest; for the products of our own thought are dominating us. "Things are in the saddle and ride mankind". It was only the other day that Lord Sydenham found at once a token and a cause of our rapid destruction in the limits set to the power of the House of Lords. But this last seems a rather more alarming meditation.

How is the argument exemplified? It is pointed out that, in the past, discoveries and inventions have been permitted to develop their consequences at random, whereas enlightened direction would have prevented many a calamity to which they led. Why were railways, in their incipient stage a hundred years back, so hampered by "the lack of wise legislation which added enormously to their capital cost"? Because statesmen had not the brains to appraise what scientists had the brains to invent. Why are the same railways even now being ruined by competitive motor transport "destroying the amenities of the countryside"? Because, apparently, the motor mechanic making a char-a-banc has his wits about him to better effect than a cabinet minister guiding national affairs. Again, what about the 4,000 people whom motors are allowed to kill every year, about the cinema which has already done such harm as will not be remedied in a generation, about the growth of great newspaper syndicates that are destroying independence of political thought and even choking up the wells of unbiassed news? The "subversive" sheets of Red Radicalism, the congestion of business in parliament and inevitable incompetence of the ministers of King Demos for the burden laid upon them, the doctrine of mob

wisdom with its "crazy theory of democracy... that all men and all women are equal *inter se*, and now that all women are equal to all men"—whither, demands Lord Sydenham, will all this lead? The one bright sign he sees on the horizon is, one need hardly add, the spirit aroused in Italy by Mussolini.

Well, well, it is all too bad—as it was when Carlyle said the world had fourteen hundred millions of people "mostly fools". And, even farther back, Plato talked about the dark outlook for democracy. With much that Lord Sydenham says about the lack of wisdom in statesmen everybody will agree, especially Mr. H. G. Wells, who may not agree with this writer in much else, but will say Amen to his attack on "muddle". Perhaps, however, a better example might have been found than the thought that if statesmen had done their duty a hundred years ago, there would have been no such shocking manifesto as the one called *Labour and the Nation* which Mr. Ramsay MacDonald has given his imprimatur. Nor can one quite see why "mankind must become relatively more and more ignorant." It is reasonable to suppose that the intelligence which achieved these great discoveries will in time provide the method of limiting them to safe or wholesome consequence. At all events, so far it is legitimate to make what the theologians would call a "venture of faith". But one such venture seems too great even for the most faithful. They will scarcely make fresh trial of Lord Sydenham's specific—a re-establishment of the full powers of the House of Lords. In such safeguarding activities they now disbelieve—for the same reason Coleridge gave against belief in ghosts—having "seen too many".

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**A**FTER reading this lugubrious article from the pen of a noble lord, one turns with a sense of relief to the cheerier reflections by Mr. Hamilton Fyfe in *The Spectator*. "Seaside Socialism" may at once suggest that other term, "Parlour Bolshevism", which has of late come into vogue, and the Bolshevism confined to parlour debate ought surely to be as innocuous as the Socialism which just fills up intervals of sport at a seaside resort. But Mr. Fyfe means by his title to whet the reader's curiosity, and he has something quite different in mind from a flippant burlesque of the "Radicals".

He tells us how English seaside places have of late begun to cater, for the most part under municipal management, for a new kind of tourist. It is not only, nor chiefly, as of old, the tired professional man who now goes to such a place with his family,

anxious to get away from both the work and the amusement of the city, that he may enjoy "peace and quiet". When such was the chief use of a seaside, emphasis was laid on change of air, sleepy charm, beauty of natural surroundings. But the working-man now takes his wife and children to the shore. Most of the visitors at an English seaside resort in summer are of the wage-earning class, and they don't want "sleepy charm". They want a little mild excitement—music, dancing, concerts, games of one kind and another. To them this is indeed a "change", and evening diversions must be available if their holiday is to do them good.

Blackpool was long a pattern of catering to this taste, and a few other small towns gradually started tennis courts, bowling greens, pavilions, shows of varied sort. But, of late, place after place has taken it up as a public enterprise rather than a private venture. The thing unheard of by a previous generation, that "the working class" should demand their month's holiday at a Spa and entertainment to suit them, has come to pass. It is for the wage-earner more than for anyone else that a watch is now kept, and his amusement is planned in advance:

Every season the scope of this effort is widened. Some places now feed their visitors municipally, in addition to hiring out tennis courts and beach bungalows, towels and bathing suits, deck chairs and rowing boats. . . . All the wiser bodies have appointed special publicity officers, whose task it is not merely to devise schemes of advertisement and to keep a place as much in the public eye as possible, but also to study all methods by which the new holiday-makers may be attracted.

How Lord Sydenham would view this latest insurgence of the proletariat, one may conjecture at will. I found much evidence of it within the last few months in the Old Country, where such bungalows as surely never were built before may now be seen dotting the margin of lakes, and the tenants are plainly such as used to remain even in July or August where "the hot sun overhead beat on the squalid streets of Bethnal Green". Is it a change for the worse? Whatever the Duke of Rutland may think, Mr. Hamilton Fyfe has not a word to say against it. Moreover, the plan is paying the municipalities handsomely. "What need we any further witness?"

H. L. S.