man appears who announces his discovery that self-renunciation, mildness, meekness, love—that all these are vices, which are ruining humanity (he refers to Christianity, forgetting all the other religions). It is comprehensible that such an assertion should, at first, perplex people. But, after thinking a little and failing to find in his writings any proofs supporting this vague assertion, every rational man ought to reject such books, and only be surprised that nowadays there is no nonsense too arrant to find a publisher. With the works of Nietzsche that course has not been adopted. The majority of pseudo-enlightened people seriously discuss the theory of 'Superhumanity,' and acclaim its author as a great philosopher: a successor to Descartes, Leibnitz and Kant.

And all this has happened because the majority of pseudo-enlightened men of to-day dislike anything reminding them of virtue, or of its chief basis: self-renunciation and love—things that restrain and condemn the animal life they lead; and they gladly welcome a doctrine of egotism and cruelty—however poorly, unintelligibly and disjointedly expressed—which justifies the system of founding one's own happiness and greatness upon the lives of others: the system in which they live.

Christ reproached the scribes and Pharisees, because they took the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, but neither themselves entered in nor let others enter.

The learned scribes of to-day do the same: they have now taken the keys, not of the Kingdom of Heaven but of enlightenment, and neither enter in nor let others enter.

The hierophants, the priests, by all sorts of deception and hypnotism, have instilled into people an idea that Christianity is not a teaching proclaiming the equality of all men, and therefore destructive of the whole present system of life; but that, on the contrary,
it supports the existing order of things and bids us differentiate people, like the stars, and regard them as belonging to different orders—acknowledging any existing authority as ordained of God, and obeying it absolutely; in fact, suggesting to the oppressed that their position is what God wishes it to be, and that they ought to put up with it meekly and humbly, submitting to their oppressors, who need not be meek or humble, but should—as Emperors, Kings, Popes, Bishops, and secular or spiritual magnates of various kinds—correct others by teaching and punishing them, while themselves living in splendour and luxury which it is the duty of those in subjection to supply. And the ruling classes, thanks to this false teaching which they strongly support, rule over the people, obliging them to furnish means of support for their rulers’ idleness, luxury and vices. And the only men who have freed themselves from this hypnotism—the scientific people: those, therefore, who alone are able to free the people from their oppression—do not do it, though they say they wish to; but, instead of doing what might attain that end, they do just the opposite, imagining that they thereby serve the people.

One would think these men—even from casually observing what it is that those who hold the masses in subjection are most afraid of—might see what really moves men, and what really keeps them down in the places they now occupy; and would direct their whole force to that source of power. They not only do not do this, however, but they consider such action quite useless.

It is as if these men did not wish to see the facts. They assiduously, and sincerely, do all sorts of different things for the people, but they do not do the one thing primarily needful; and their activity is like the activity of a man trying to move a train by exerting his muscles, when he need only get upon the engine and do what he constantly sees the engine-driver do: move a lever to let steam into the cylinders. That steam is men’s religious conception of life. And they need only notice
the eagerness with which those in authority retain control of that motive power—by means of which the rulers lord it over the masses—and the advanced men will understand to what they must direct their efforts in order to free the people from its slavery.

What does the Sultan of Turkey guard, and to what does he cling for support? And why does the Russian

Emperor, on arriving at a town, go first thing to kiss an icon or the relics of some saint? And why, in spite of all the varnish of culture he so prides himself on, does the German Emperor in all his speeches—seasonably or unseasonably—speak of God, of Christ, of the sanctity of religion, of oaths, etc.? Simply because they all know that their power rests on the army; and that the army—the very possibility of such a thing as an army existing—rests on religion. And if wealthy people are generally particularly devout: making a show of believing, going to Church, and observing the Sabbath—it is all done chiefly because an instinct of self-preservation warns them that their exceptionally advantageous position in the community is bound up with the religion they profess.

These people often do not know in what way their privileges rest on religious deception, but their instinct of self-preservation warns them of the weak spot in that on which their power rests, and they first of all defend that place. Within certain limits these people always allow, and have allowed, socialistic and even revolutionary propaganda; but the foundations of religion they never allow to be touched.

And therefore, if history and psychology do not suffice to enable the advanced men of to-day—the learned, the Liberals, the Socialists, the Revolutionists and Anarchists—to discover what it is that moves the people, this visible indication should suffice to convince them that the motive power lies, not in material conditions, but only in religion.

Yet, strange to say, the learned, advanced people of to-day, who understand and discuss the conditions of life of various nations very acutely, do not see what is
so obvious that it strikes one's eye. If these men intentionally leave the people in their religious ignorance for the sake of retaining their own profitable position among the minority,—this is a terrible, a revolting fraud. Men who act so are the very hypocrites Christ especially denounced—the only people He did in fact denounce—and He denounced them because no monsters or malefactors ever brought so much evil into human life as is brought by these men.

But if they are sincere, the only explanation of so strange an eclipse of reason is, that just as the masses are hypnotized by a false religion, so also are the pseudo-enlightened men of to-day hypnotized by a false science which has decided that the chief motor-nerve, that now as heretofore actuates humanity, has become altogether useless, and can be replaced by something else.

This delusion or deceit of the scribes—the educated men of our world—is the peculiarity of our times, and in this lies the cause of the miserable condition in which Christian humanity now lives, as well as of the brutalization into which it is sinking deeper and deeper.

It is usual for the advanced, educated classes of our world to assert that the false religious beliefs held by the masses are of no special importance, and that it is not worth while, and is unnecessary, to struggle against them directly, as was done by Hume, Voltaire, Rousseau and others. Science, they think—that is to say, the disconnected, casual information they disseminate among the people—will of itself attain that end, and man, having learned how many million miles it is from the earth to the sun, and what metals exist in the sun and the stars, will cease to believe in Church doctrines.

This sincere, or insincere, assertion or assumption covers either a great delusion or a terrible deception. From the very earliest years of childhood—the years most susceptible to suggestion, when those who train
children cannot be sufficiently careful what they transmit to them—a child is hypnotized with the absurd, immoral dogmas of so-called Christian religion, irreconcilable with our reason and knowledge. He is taught the dogma of the Trinity, which healthy reason cannot hold; the coming of one of the three Gods to earth for the salvation of the human race, and his resurrection and ascent into heaven; is taught to expect a second coming, and punishment in eternal torments for disbelief in these dogmas; also he is taught to pray for what he wants; and many other things. And when all this (incompatible as it is with reason, contemporary knowledge, and man's conscience) is indelibly stamped on the child's impressionable mind, he is left to himself to find his way as he can amid the contradictions which flow from these dogmas he has accepted and assimilated as unquestionable truths. No one tells him how he may or should reconcile these contradictions; or if the theologians do try to reconcile them, their attempts only confuse the matter more than before. So, little by little, the man becomes accustomed to suppose (and the theologians strongly support this notion) that reason cannot be trusted, and therefore anything is possible, and that there is no capacity in man by means of which he can himself distinguish good from evil, or falsehood from truth; and that in what is most important for him—his actions—he should be guided not by his reason, but by what others tell him. It is evident what a terrible perversion of man's spiritual world such an education must produce, reinforced as it is in adult life by all the means of hypnotization which, by the aid of the priests, is continually exercised upon the people.

If a man of strong spirit, with great labour and suffering, does succeed in freeing himself from the hypnotism in which he has been educated in childhood and held in mature life, the perversion of his mind, produced by the persuasion that he must distrust his own reason, can still not pass without leaving traces—just as in the physical world the poisoning of an organism with some powerful virus cannot pass without leaving
its trace. It is natural for such a man, having freed himself from the hypnotism of this deceit, and hating the falsehood from which he has just escaped, to adopt the view advocated by advanced men, and to regard every religion as an obstacle in the path along which humanity is progressing. And having adopted that opinion, such a man becomes, like his teachers, devoid of principle—that is, devoid of conscience, and guided in life merely by his desires. Nor does he condemn himself for this, but he considers that it places him on the highest plane of mental development attainable by man.

That is what may happen with men of strong minds. The less strong, though they may be roused to doubts, will never completely free themselves from the deception in which they were brought up; but adopting or inventing various cunningly-devised, cloudy theories to justify the absurd dogmas they have accepted, and living in a sphere of doubts, mist, sophistries and self-deception, they will co-operate in the mystification of the masses and oppose their enlightenment.

But the majority of men, having neither the strength nor the opportunity to struggle against the hypnotism exercised over them, will live and die generation after generation, as they now do—deprived of man’s highest welfare, which is a truly religious understanding of life—and will remain docile tools of the classes that rule over them and deceive them.

And it is this terrible deception that advanced and learned men consider unimportant, and not worth directly attacking. The only explanation of such an assertion, if those who make it are sincere, is, that they are themselves under the hypnotism of a false science; but if they are not sincere, then their conduct is explained by the fact that an attack on established beliefs is unprofitable and often dangerous. In any case, one way or another, the assertion that the profession of a false religion does no harm—or though harmful is unimportant—and that one can therefore disseminate enlightenment without destroying religious deception, is quite untrue.
Mankind can be saved from its ills only by being freed both from the hypnotism in which the priests are holding it, and from that into which the learned are leading it. To pour anything into a full bottle one must first empty out what it contains. And similarly it is necessary to free men from the deception of their false faith, in order that they may be able to adopt a true religion: that is, a correct relation (in accord with the development humanity has attained) towards the Source of all—towards God; and that from this relation, they may obtain guidance for their actions.

'But is there any true religion? Religions are endlessly various, and we have no right to call one of them true, just because it most nearly suits our own taste,'—is what people say who look at the external forms of religion as at some disease from which they feel themselves free, but from which other people still suffer. But this is a mistake; religions differ in their external forms, but they are all alike in their fundamental principles. And it is these principles, that are fundamental to all religions, that form the true religion which alone at the present time is suitable for us all, and the adoption of which alone can save men from their ills.

Mankind has lived long, and just as it has produced and improved its practical inventions through successive generations, so also it could not fail to produce and improve those spiritual principles which have formed the bases of its life, as well as the rules of conduct that resulted from those principles. If blind men do not see these, that does not prove that they do not exist.

This religion of our times, common to all men, exists—not as some sect with all its peculiarities and perver-sions, but as a religion consisting of those principles which are alike in all the widespread religions known to us, and professed by more than nine-tenths of the
human race; and that men are not yet completely brutalized is due to the fact that the best men of all nations hold to this religion and profess it, even if unconsciously, and only the hypnotic deception practised on men by the aid of the priests and scientists now hinders men from consciously adopting it.

The principles of this true religion are so natural to men, that as soon as they are put before them they are accepted as something quite familiar and self-evident. For us the true religion is Christianity in those of its principles in which it agrees, not with the external forms, but with the basic principles of Brahmanism, Confucianism, Taoism, Hebraism, Buddhism, and even Mohammedanism. And just in the same way, for those who profess Brahmanism, Confucianism, etc.—true religion is that of which the basic principles agree with those of all other religions. And these principles are very simple, intelligible and clear.

These principles are: that there is a God, the origin of all things; that in man dwells a spark from that Divine Origin, which man, by his way of living, can increase or decrease in himself; that to increase this divine spark man must suppress his passions and increase love in himself; and that the practical means to attain this result is to do to others as you would they should do to you. All these principles are common to Brahmanism, Hebraism, Confucianism, and Mohammedanism. (If Buddhism supplies no definition of God, it nevertheless acknowledges That with which man commingles, and into Which he is absorbed when he attains to Nirvana. So, That with which man commingles, or into Which he is absorbed in Nirvana, is the same Origin that is called God in Hebraism, Christianity, and Mohammedanism.)

‘But that is not religion,’ is what men of to-day will say, who are accustomed to consider that the supernatural, i.e., the unmeaning, is the chief sign of religion. ‘That is anything you like: philosophy, ethics, ratiocination—but not religion.’ Religion, according to them, must be absurd and unintelligible
(Credo quia absurdum). Yet it was only from these very principles, or rather in consequence of their being preached as religious doctrines, that—by a long process of perversion—all those absurd miracles and supernatural occurrences were elaborated, which are now considered to be the fundamental signs of every religion. To assert that the supernatural and irrational form the essential characteristic of religion is like observing only rotten apples, and then asserting that a flabby bitterness and a harmful effect on the stomach are the prime characteristics of the fruit called Apple.

Religion is the definition of man’s relation to the Source of all things, and of man’s purpose in life which results from that relation; and it supplies rules of conduct resulting from that purpose. And the universal religion whose first principles are alike in all the faiths, fully meets the demands of this understanding of religion. It defines the relation of man to God, as being that of a part to the whole; from this relation it deduces man’s purpose, which is to increase the divine element in himself; and this purpose involves practical demands on man, in accord with the rule: Do to others as you wish them to do to you.

People often doubt, and I myself at one time doubted, whether such an abstract rule as, Do to others as you wish them to do to you, can be as obligatory a rule and guide for action as the simpler rules: to fast, pray, and take communion, etc. But an irrefutable reply to that doubt is supplied, for instance, by the spiritual condition of a Russian peasant who would rather die than spit out the Sacrament on to a manure-heap, but who yet, at the command of men, is ready to kill his brothers.

Why should demands flowing from the rule of doing to others as you wish them to do to you—such, for instance, as: not killing one’s brother man, not reviling, not committing adultery, not revenging one’s self, not taking advantage of the need of one’s brethren to satisfy one’s own caprice, and many others.—why should not they be instilled as forcibly, and become as
binding and inviolable, as the belief in the sanctity of the Sacraments, or of images, etc., now is to men whose faith is founded more on credulity than on any clear inward consciousness.

The truths of the religion common to all men of our time are so simple, so intelligible, and so near the heart of each man, that it would seem only necessary for parents, rulers and teachers to instil into children and adults—instead of the obsolete and absurd doctrines, in which they themselves often do not believe: about Trinities, virgin-mothers, redemptions, Indras, Trimurti, and about Buddhas and Mohammeds who fly away into the sky—those clear and simple truths, the metaphysical essence of which is, that the spirit of God dwells in man; and the practical rule of which is, that man should do to others as he wishes them to do to him—for the whole life of humanity to change. If only—in the same way that the belief is now instilled into children and confirmed in adults, that God sent His son to redeem Adam's sin, and that He established His Church which must be obeyed; as well as rules deduced from these beliefs: telling when and where to pray and make offerings, when to refrain from such and such food, and on what days to abstain from work—if only it were instilled and confirmed that God is a spirit whose manifestation is present in us, the strength of which we can increase by our lives: if only this and all that naturally flows from this, were instilled in the same way that quite useless stories of impossible occurrences, and rules of meaningless ceremonies deduced from those stories, are now instilled—then, instead of purposeless strife and discord, we should very soon (without the aid of diplomatists, international law, peace-congresses, political economists, and Socialists in all their various subdivisions) see humanity living a peaceful, united, and happy life guided by the one religion.
WHAT IS RELIGION?

But nothing of the kind is done: not only is the deception of false religion not destroyed, and the true one not preached, but, on the contrary, men depart further and further away from the possibility of accepting the truth.

The chief cause of people not doing what is so natural, necessary, and possible, is that men to-day, in consequence of having lived long without religion, are so accustomed to establish and defend their existence by violence, by bayonets, bullets, prisons, and gallows, that it seems to them as if such an arrangement of life were not only normal, but were the only one possible. Not only do those who profit by the existing order think so, but those even who suffer from it are so stupefied by the hypnotism exercised upon them, that they also consider violence to be the only means of securing good order in human society. Yet it is just this arrangement and maintenance of the commonweal by violence, that does most to hinder people from comprehending the causes of their sufferings, and consequently from being able to establish a true order.

The results of it are such as might be produced by a bad or malicious doctor who should drive a malignant eruption inwards, thereby cheating the sick man, and making the disease worse and its cure impossible.

To people of the ruling classes, who enslave the masses and think and say: "Après nous le déluge,"* it seems very convenient by means of the army, the priesthood, the soldiers, and the police, as well as by threats of bayonets, bullets, prisons, workhouses, and gallows, to compel the enslaved people to remain in stupefaction and enslavement, and not to hinder the rulers from exploiting them. And the ruling men do this, calling it the maintenance of good order, but there is nothing that so hinders the establishment of a good social order as this does. In reality, far from being

* Madame de Pompadour's remark, "After me (us) the deluge."
the establishment of good order, it is the establishment of evil.

If men of our Christian nations, still possessing some remnants of those religious principles which in spite of everything yet live in the people, had not before them the continual example of crime committed by those who have assumed the duty of guarding order and morality among men—the wars, executions, prisons, taxation, sale of intoxicants and of opium—they would never have thought of committing one one-hundredth of the evil deeds—the frauds, violence and murders—which they now commit in full confidence that such deeds are good and natural for men to commit.

The law of human life is such, that the only way to improve it, whether for the individual or for a society of men, is by means of inward, moral growth towards perfection. All attempts of men to better their lives by external action—by violence—serve as the most efficacious propaganda and example of evil, and therefore not only do not improve life, but, on the contrary, increase the evil which, like a snowball, grows larger and larger, and removes men more and more from the only possible way of truly bettering their lives.

In proportion as the practice of violence and crime, committed in the name of the law by the guardians of order and morality, becomes more and more frequent and cruel, and is more and more justified by the hypnotism of falsehood presented as religion, men will be more and more confirmed in the belief that the law of their life is not one of love and service to their fellows, but is one demanding that they should strive with, and devour, one another.

And the more they are confirmed in that thought, which degrades them to the plane of the beasts, the harder will it be to shake off the hypnotic trance in which they are living, and to accept as the basis of their life the true religion of our time, common to all humanity.

A vicious circle has been established: the absence of religion makes possible an animal life based on violence;
an animal life based on violence makes emancipation from hypnotism and an adoption of true religion more and more impossible. And, therefore, men do not do what is natural, possible and necessary in our times: do not destroy the deception and simulacrum of religion, and do not assimilate and preach the true religion.

xvi.

Is any issue from this enchanted circle possible, and if so, what is it?

At first it seems as if the Governments, which have taken on themselves the duty of guiding the life of the people for their benefit, should lead us out of this circle. That is what men who have tried to alter the arrangements of life founded on violence, and to replace them by a reasonable arrangement based on mutual service and love, have always supposed. So thought the Christian reformers, and the founders of various theories of European Communism, and so also thought the celebrated Chinese reformer Mo Ti, * who for the welfare of the people proposed to the Government not to teach school-children military sciences and exercises, and not to give rewards to adults for military achievements, but to teach children and adults the rules of esteem and love, and give rewards and encouragement for feats of love. So also thought, and think, many religious peasant-reformers, of whom I have known and now know several, beginning with Soutayef and ending with an old man who has now five times presented a petition to the Emperor, asking him to decree the abrogation of false religion, and to order that true Christianity be preached.

It seems to men natural that the Government—which justifies its existence on the score of its care for the welfare of the people—must, to secure that welfare, wish to use the only means which can never do people

* Mo Ti (or Mih Teih) lived a little before Mencius (about 372-289 B.C.), who wrote against the former's doctrine of universal love.
any harm, and can only produce the most fruitful results. Government, however, has not only never taken upon itself this duty, but, on the contrary, has always and everywhere maintained with the greatest jealousy any false, effete religion prevalent at the period, and has in every way persecuted those who have tried to inform the people of the principles of true religion. In reality this cannot be otherwise; for Governments to expose the falsity of the present religions, and to preach the true one, would be as if a man were to cut down the branch on which he is sitting.

But if Government will not do this work, it would seem certain that those learned men—who, having freed themselves from the deception of false religion, say they wish to serve the common people whose labour has provided for their education and support—are bound to do it. But these men, like the Government, do not do it: first, because they consider it inexpedient to risk unpleasantness and to suffer the danger of persecution at the hands of the ruling classes for exposing a fraud which Government protects, and which, in their opinion, will disappear of itself; secondly, because, considering all religion to be an effete error, they have nothing to offer the people in place of the deception they are expected to destroy.

There remain those great masses of unlearned men who are under the hypnotic influence of Church and Government deception, and who therefore believe that the simulacrum of religion which has been instilled into them is the one true religion, and that there is and can be no other. These masses are under a constant and intense hypnotic influence. Generation after generation they are born and live and die in the stupefied condition in which they are kept by the clergy and the Government; and if they free themselves from that influence, they are sure to fall into the school of the scientists who deny religion—when their influence becomes as useless and harmful as the influence of their teachers.

So that for some men the work is unprofitable, while for others it is impossible.
It looks as if no issue were possible.

And indeed for irreligious men there is not, and cannot be, any issue from this position; those who belong to the higher, governing classes, even if they pretend to be concerned for the welfare of the masses, will never seriously attempt (guided by worldly aims, they cannot do it) to destroy the stupefaction and servitude in which these masses live, and which make it possible for the upper classes to rule over them. In the same way, men belonging to the enslaved masses cannot, while guided by worldly motives, wish to make their own hard position harder by entering on a struggle against the upper classes, to expose a false teaching and to preach a true one. Neither of these sets of men have any motive to do this, and if they are intelligent they will never attempt it.

But it is otherwise for religious people: men such as those who—however perverted a society may be—are always to be found guarding with their lives the sacred fire of religion, without which human life could not exist. There are times (and our time is such) when these men are unnoticed, when—as among us in Russia—despised and derided by all, their lives pass unrecorded—in exile, in prisons, and in penal battalions—yet they live, and on them depends the rational life of humanity. And it is just these religious men—however few they may be—who alone can and will rend asunder that enchanted circle which keeps men bound. They can do it, because all the disadvantages and dangers which hinder a worldly man from opposing the existing order of society, not only do not impede a religious man, but rather increase his zeal in the struggle against falsehood, and impel him to confess by word and deed what he holds to be divine truth. If he belongs to the ruling classes he will not only not wish to hide the truth out of regard for his own advantageous position, but, on the contrary, having come to hate such advantages, he will exert his whole strength to free himself from them,
and to preach the truth, for he will no longer have any other aim in life than to serve God. If he belongs to the enslaved, then in the same way, unbiased by the wish, common among those of his position, to improve the conditions of his physical life, such a man will have no aim but to fulfil the will of God by exposing falsehood and confessing truth; and no sufferings or threats will make him cease to live in accord with that purpose which he has recognised in his life. They will both act thus, as naturally as a worldly man exerts himself and puts up with privations to obtain riches, or to please a ruler from whom he expects to receive advantages. Every religious man acts thus, because a human soul enlightened by religion no longer lives merely by the life of this world, as irreligious people do, but lives an eternal, infinite life, for which suffering and death in this life are as insignificant as are blisters on his hands, or weariness of limbs, to a ploughman when he is ploughing a field.

These are the men who will rend asunder the enchanted circle in which people are now confined. However few such men there may be, however humble their social position, however poor in education or ability, as surely as fire lights the dry steppe, so surely will these people set the whole world astir, and kindle all the hearts of men, withered by long lack of religion, and now thirsting for a renewal of life.

Religion is not a belief, settled once for all, in certain supernatural occurrences supposed to have taken place once upon a time, nor in the necessity for certain prayers and ceremonies; nor is it, as the scientists suppose, a survival of the superstitions of ancient ignorance, which in our time has no meaning or application to life; but religion is a certain relation of man to eternal life and to God, a relation accordant with reason and contemporary knowledge, and it is the one thing that alone moves humanity forward towards its destined aim.

A wise Hebrew proverb says, ‘The soul of man is the lamp of God.’ Man is a weak and miserable animal
until the light of God burns in his soul. But when that light burns (and it burns only in souls enlightened by religion) man becomes the most powerful being in the world. Nor can this be otherwise, for what then acts in him is no longer his strength, but is the strength of God.

So this is what religion is, and in what its essence consists.

[February, 1902]
XXIV

LETTER ON EDUCATION

Dear S.,

I was very glad to have a serious conversation with X. about the education of children. What he and I quite agree about, but what is only negative, is that children should be taught as little as possible.* That children should grow up without having learnt certain subjects is not nearly so bad as what happens to nearly all children, especially those whose education is directed by mothers who do not know the subjects their children learn—viz, they get educational indigestion and come to detest education. A child, or a man, can learn when he has an appetite for what he studies. Without appetite, instruction is an evil—a terrible evil causing people to become mentally crippled. For Heaven’s sake, dear S., if you do not quite agree with me, take my word for it, that were it not a matter of such enormous importance I would not write to you about it. Above all, believe your husband, who sees the thing quite reasonably.

But then comes the customary reply: If children are not taught, how are they to be occupied? Are they to play knuckle-bones with the village children, and learn all sorts of stupidities and nastiness? With our squirely way of life, this reply has some reasonable ground. But is it really necessary to accustom children to a squirely way of life, and to make them feel that all their requirements are satisfied by someone, somehow, without their having to take any part in the

* This is meant to be taken comparatively and not absolutely. Elsewhere Tolstoy has expressed the opinion that a child may reasonably do lessons for eight hours a day; though he should not be compelled to learn what he does not wish to learn.

[ 338 ]
work? I think the first condition of a good education is that the child should know that all he uses does not fall from heaven ready-made, but is produced by other people’s labour. To understand that all he lives on comes from the labour of other people who neither know nor love him, is too much for a child (God grant he may understand it when he is grown up); but to understand that the chamber-pot he uses is emptied and wiped, without any pleasure, by a nurse or a household, and that the boots and goloshes he always puts on clean are cleaned in the same way—not out of love for him, but for some other reason quite unintelligible to him—is something he can and should understand, and of which he should be ashamed. If he is not ashamed and if he continues to use them, that is the very worst commencement of an education, and leaves the deepest traces for his whole life. To avoid that, however, is very simple, and is just what (to use poetic language), standing on the threshold of the grave, I beseech you to do for your children. Let them do all they can for themselves: carry out their own slops, fill their own jugs, wash up, arrange their rooms, clean their boots and clothes, lay the table, etc. Believe me that, unimportant as these things may seem, they are a hundred times more important for your children’s happiness than a knowledge of French, or of history, etc. It is true that here the chief difficulty crops up: children do willingly only what their parents do, and therefore I beg of you, do these things. This will effect two objects at once: it makes it possible to learn less, by filling the time in the most useful and natural way, and it trains the children to simplicity, to work, and to self-dependence. Please do this. You will be gratified from the first month, and the children yet more so. If to this you can add work on the land, if it be but a kitchen-garden, that will be well; though it too often becomes a mere pastime. The necessity of attending to one’s own needs and carrying out one’s own slops is admitted by all the best schools, such as Bedale, where the director of the school himself takes a share in such
work. Believe me, that without that condition there is no possibility of a moral education, a Christian education, or a consciousness of the fact that all men are brothers and equals. A child may yet understand that a grown-up man, his father—a banker or turner, an artist or an overseer, who by his work feeds the whole family—may free himself from occupations which prevent his giving all his time to his profitable work. But how can a child—as yet untried and unable to do anything—explain to himself that others do for him what he naturally should do for himself?

The only explanation for him is that people are divided into two classes—masters and slaves; and however much we may talk to him in words about equality and the brotherhood of man, all the conditions of his life, from his getting up, to his evening meal, show him the contrary.

Not only does he cease to believe what his elders tell him about morality, he sees in the depth of his soul that all these teachings are mendacious, and he ceases to believe his parents and teachers, and ceases even to believe in the need for any kind of morality whatever.

Yet one more consideration. If it is not possible to do all that I have mentioned, at least one must set children to do things the disadvantage of not doing which would be at once felt by them—e.g., if one's clothes and boots for going out are not cleaned, one must not go out; if water has not been fetched and the crockery washed up, there is nothing to drink. Above all, in this matter do not be afraid of ridicule. Nine-tenths of all the bad things in the world are done because not to do them would be held ridiculous.

[1902 ]

This letter was written to a near relation, belonging to the upper class of Russian society, in which the children are generally sent to the high schools (gymnasium), where they are crammed with much knowledge, chiefly in order to pass examinations and to obtain certain privileges (e.g., diminution of military service). The 'X.' mentioned is the husband of the lady addressed.
XXV

AN APPEAL TO THE CLERGY

I.

Whoever you may be: popes, cardinals, bishops, superintendents, priests, or pastors, of whatever Church, forego for a while your assurance that you—you in particular—are the only true disciples of the God Christ, appointed to preach his only true teaching; and remember that before being popes, cardinals, bishops, or superintendents, etc., you are first of all men: that is, according to your own teaching, beings sent into this world by God to fulfill His will; remember this, and ask yourselves what you are doing. Your whole life is devoted to preaching, maintaining, and spreading among men a teaching which you say was revealed to you by God Himself, and is, therefore, the only one that is true and brings redemption.

In what, then, does this one true and redeeming doctrine that you preach, consist? To whichever one of the so-called Christian Churches—Roman Catholic, Russo-Greek, Lutheran, or Anglican—you may belong, you acknowledge that your teaching is quite accurately expressed in the articles of belief formulated at the Council of Nicea sixteen hundred years ago. Those articles of belief are as follows:

First: There is a God the father (the first person of a Trinity), who has created the sky and the earth, and all the angels who live in the sky.

Second: There is an only son of God the father, not
created, but born (the second person of the Trinity). Through this son the world was made.

Third: This son, to save people from sin and death (by which they were all punished for the disobedience of their forefather Adam), came down to the earth, was made flesh by the Holy Ghost and the virgin Mary, and became a man.

Fourth: This son was crucified for the sins of men.

Fifth: He suffered and was buried, and rose on the third day, as had been foretold in Hebrew books.

Sixth: Having gone up into the sky, this son seated himself at his father’s right side.

Seventh: This son of God will, in due time, come again to the earth to judge the living and the dead.

Eighth: There is a Holy Ghost (the third person of the Trinity), who is equal to the father, and who spoke through the prophets.

Ninth (held by some of the largest Churches): There is one holy, infallible Church (of, more exactly, the Church to which he who makes the confession belongs is held to be unique, holy, and infallible). This Church consists of all who believe in it, living or dead.

Tenth (also for some of the largest Churches): There exists a Sacrament of Baptism, by means of which the power of the Holy Ghost is communicated to those who are baptized.

Eleventh: At the second coming of Christ, the souls of the dead will re-enter their bodies, and these bodies will be immortal; and

Twelfth: After the second coming, the just will have eternal life in paradise on a new earth under a new sky, and sinners will have eternal life in the torments of hell.

Not to speak of things taught by some of your largest Churches (the Roman Catholic and Russo-Greek Orthodox)—such as the belief in saints, and in the good effects of bowing to their bodily remains, and to representations of them as well as of Jesus and the mother of God—the above twelve points embrace the funda-
mental positions of that truth which you say has been revealed to you by God Himself for the redemption of man. Some of you preach these doctrines simply as they are expressed; others try to give them an allegorical meaning more or less in accord with present-day knowledge and common-sense; but you all alike are bound to confess, and do confess, these statements to be the exact expression of that unique truth which God Himself has revealed to you, and which you preach to men for their salvation.

Very well. You have had the one truth capable of saving mankind revealed to you by God Himself. It is natural for men to strive towards truth, and when it is clearly presented to them they are always glad to accept it, and to be guided by it.

And, therefore, to impart this saving truth revealed to you by God Himself, it would seem sufficient, plainly and simply, verbally and through the Press, to communicate it with reasonable persuasion to those capable of receiving it.

But how have you preached this truth?

From the time a society calling itself the Church was formed, your predecessors taught this truth chiefly by violence. They laid down the truth, and punished those who did not accept it. (Millions and millions of people have been tortured, killed, and burnt for not wishing to accept it.) This method of persecution, which was evidently not suited to its purpose, came in course of time to be less and less employed, and is now, of all the Christian Churches, used, I think, only in Russia.

Another means was through external action on people's feelings—by solemnity of setting: with pictures, statues, singing, music, even dramatic performances, and oratorical art. In time this method, also, began to be less and less used. In Protestant countries—except the orator's art—it is now but little used
(though the Salvation Army, which has devised new methods of external action on the feelings, supplies an exception).

But all the strength of the clergy is now directed to a third and most powerful method, which has always been used, and is now with special jealousy retained by the clergy in their own hands. This method is that of instilling Church doctrine into people who are not in a position to judge of what is given them: for instance, into quite uneducated working people who have no time for thought, and chiefly into children, who accept indiscriminately what is imparted to them and on whose minds it remains permanently impressed.

So that in our day your chief method of imparting to men the truth God has revealed to you, consists in teaching this truth to uneducated adults, and to children who do not reason, but accept everything.

This teaching generally begins with what is called Scripture History: that is to say, with selected passages from the Bible: the Hebrew books of the Old Testament; which according to your teaching are the work of the Holy Ghost, and are therefore not only unquestionably true, but also holy. From this history your pupil draws his first notions of the world, of the life of man, of good and evil, and of God.

This Scripture History begins with a description of how God, the ever-living, created the sky and the earth 6,000 years ago out of nothing; how He afterwards created beasts, fishes, plants, and finally man: Adam, and Adam's wife, who was made of one of Adam's ribs. Then it describes how, fearing lest the man and his wife should eat an apple which had the magic quality of giving knowledge, He forbade them to eat that apple; how, notwithstanding this prohibition, the first people ate the apple, and were therefore expelled from Paradise; and how all their descendants were therefore cursed, and the earth was cursed also, so that since then
it has grown weeds. Then the life of Adam's descendants is described: how they became so perverted that God not only drowned them all, but drowned all the animals with them, and left alive only Noah and his family and the animals he took into the ark. Then it describes how God chose Abraham alone of all people, and made an agreement with him; which agreement was that Abraham was to consider God to be God, and, as a sign of this, was to be circumcised. On His side God undertook to give Abraham a numerous progeny, and to patronize him and all his offspring. Then it tells how God, patronizing Abraham and his descendants, performed on their behalf most unnatural actions called miracles, and most terrible cruelties. So that the whole of this history—excepting certain stories, which are sometimes naive (as the visit of God with two angels to Abraham, the marriage of Isaac, and others), and are sometimes innocent, but are often immoral (as the swindles of God's favourite, Jacob, the cruelties of Samson, and the cunning of Joseph)—the whole of this history, from the plagues Moses called down upon the Egyptians, and the murder by an angel of all their first-born, to the fire that destroyed 250 conspirators, the tumbling into the ground of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and the destruction of 14,700 men in a few minutes, and on to the saving of enemies with saws,* and the execution of the priests who did not agree with him by Elijah (who rode up into the sky), and to the story of Elisha, who cursed the boys that laughed at him, so that they were torn in pieces and eaten by two bears—all this history is a series of miraculous occurrences and of terrible crimes, committed by the Hebrew people, by their leaders, and by God Himself.

* Father John of Kronstadt having published an article in which he says that this passage shows Tolstoy's ignorance of the Bible, it may be well here to quote 1 Chron. xx 3: 'And he brought forth the people that were therein, and cut them with saws, and with harrows of iron, and with axes. And thus did David unto all the cities of the children of Ammon.'
But your teaching of the history you call sacred is not limited to that. Besides the history of the Old Testament, you also impart the New Testament to children and to ignorant people, in a way that makes the importance of the New Testament consist not in its moral teaching, not in the Sermon on the Mount, but in the conformity of the Gospels with the stories of the Old Testament, in the fulfilment of prophecies, and in miracles, the movement of a star, songs from the sky, talks with the devil, the turning of water into wine, walking on the water, healings, calling people back to life, and, finally, the resurrection of Jesus himself, and his flying up into the sky.

If all these stories, both from the Old and New Testaments, were taught as a series of fairy-tales, even then hardly any teacher would decide to tell them to children and adults he desired to enlighten. But these tales are imparted to people unable to reason, as though they were the most trustworthy description of the world and its laws, as if they gave the truest information about the lives of those who lived in former times, of what should be considered good and evil, of the existence and nature of God, and of the duties of man.

People talk of harmful books! But is there in Christendom a book that has done more harm to mankind than this terrible book, called 'Scripture History from the Old and New Testaments'?* And all the men and women of Christendom have to pass through a course of this Scripture History during their childhood, and this same history is also taught to ignorant adults as the first and most essential foundation of knowledge—as the one, eternal, truth of God.

You cannot introduce a foreign substance into a living organism without the organism suffering, and

* The reference here is not to the Old and New Testaments in their entirety (the extreme value of many parts of which Tolstoy does not question), but to a compilation for school use, which is largely used in place of the Bible.
sometimes perishing, from its efforts to rid itself of this foreign substance. What terrible evil to a man’s mind must, then, result from this rendering of the teaching of the Old and New Testaments—foreign alike to present-day knowledge, and to common-sense, and to moral feeling—and instilled into him at a time when he is unable to judge, but accepts all that is given him!

For a man—into whose mind has been introduced as sacred truths—beliefs in the creation of the world out of nothing 6,000 years ago; in the flood, and Noah’s ark which accommodated all the animals; in a Trinity; in Adam’s fall; in an immaculate conception; in Christ’s miracles, and in salvation for men by the sacrifice of his death—for such a man the demands of reason are no longer obligatory, and such a man cannot be sure of any truth. If the Trinity, and an immaculate conception, and the salvation of mankind by the blood of Jesus, are possible—then anything is possible, and the demands of reason are not obligatory.

Drive a wedge between the floor-boards of a granary, and no matter how much grain you may pour into the granary, it will not stay there. Just so a head into which the wedge has been driven of a Trinity, or of a God who became man and redeemed the human race by his sufferings, and then flew up into the sky, can no longer grasp any reasonable or firm understanding of life.

However much you may put into the granary which has cracks in its floor, all will run out. Whatever you may put into a mind which has accepted nonsense as a matter of faith, nothing will remain in it.

Such a man, if he values his beliefs, will inevitably, all his life long, either be on his guard (as against something harmful) against all that might enlighten him and destroy his superstitions; or—having once for all assumed (and the preachers of Church doctrine will always encourage him in this) that reason is the source of error—he will repudiate the only light given to man to enable him to find his path of life; or, most terrible of all, he will, by cunning argumentation, try
to demonstrate the reasonableness of what is unreasonable, and, worst of all, will discard, together with the superstitions that were instilled into him, all consciousness of the necessity for any faith whatever.

In either of these three cases, a man into whom, during childhood, meaningless and contradictory assertions have been instilled as religious truth—unless with much effort and suffering he free himself from them—is a man mentally diseased. Such a man, seeing around him the constantly moving and changing facts of life, cannot without a feeling of desperation watch this movement destroying his conception of life, and cannot but experience (openly or secretly) an unkindly feeling towards those who co-operate in this reasonable progress. Nor can he help being a conscious partisan of obscurity and lies against light and truth.

And such the majority of people in Christendom—by the inculcation of nonsensical beliefs deprived from childhood of the capacity to think clearly and firmly—actually are.

Such is the evil done to man’s mind by having it impregnated with Church doctrines. But much worse than this is the moral perversion which that impregnation produces in man’s soul. Every man comes into the world with a consciousness of his dependence on a mysterious, all-powerful Source which has given him life, and consciousness of his equality with all men, the equality of all men with one another, a desire to love and be loved, and a consciousness of the need of striving towards perfection. But what do you instil into him?

Instead of the mysterious Source of which he thinks with reverence, you tell him of an angry, unjust God, who executes and torments people.

Instead of the equality of all men, which the child and the simple man recognise with all their being, you tell them that not only people, but nations, are unequal;
that some of them are loved, others are not loved, by God; and that some people are called by God to rule, others to submit.

Instead of that wish to love and to be loved, which forms the strongest desire in the soul of every unperverted man, you teach him that the relations between men can only be based on violence, on threats, on executions; and you tell him that judicial and military murders are committed not only with the sanction but at the command of God.

In place of the need of self-improvement, you tell him that man’s salvation lies in belief in the Redemption, and that by improving himself by his own powers, without the aid of prayers, sacraments and belief in the Redemption, man is guilty of sinful pride, and that for his salvation man must trust, not to his own reason but to the commands of the Church, and must do what she decrees.

It is terrible to think of the perversion of thought and feeling produced in the soul of a child or an ignorant adult by such teaching.

Only to think of the things I know of, that have been done in Russia during the sixty years of my conscious life, and that are still being done!

In the theological colleges, and among the bishops, learned monks and missionaries, hair-splitting discussions of intricate theological problems are carried on—they talk of reconciling moral and dogmatic teaching, they dispute about the development or immutability of dogmas, and discuss similar religious subtleties. But to the hundred million populace all that is preached is a belief in Iberian or Kazan icons of the Mother of God, a belief in relics, in devils, in the redemptive efficacy of having bread blessed and placing candles, and having prayers for the dead, etc.; and not only is this all preached and practised, but the inviolability of these popular superstitions is guarded with particular
jealousy from any infringement. A peasant has but to omit to observe the name's day of the local saint, or to omit to invite to his house a wonder-working icon when it makes the round of his village, or he has only to work on the Friday before St. Elias's day—and he will be denounced, and prosecuted, and exiled. Not to speak of sectarianism being punished for not observing the ceremonies of the Church, they are tried for even meeting together to read the Gospels, and are punished for that. And the result of all this activity is that tens of millions of people, including nearly all the peasant women, are not only ignorant of Jesus, but have never even heard who he was, or that he existed. This is hard to believe, but it is a fact which anyone can easily verify for himself.

Listen to what is said by the bishops and academicians at their conferences, read their magazines, and you would think that the Russian priesthood preaches a faith which, even if it be backward, is still a Christian faith, in which the Gospel truths find a place and are taught to the people. But watch the activity of the clergy among the people, and you will see that what is preached, and energetically inculcated, is simply idolatry: the elevation of icons, blessing of water, the carrying from house to house of miracle-working icons, the glorification of relics, the wearing of crosses, and so forth; while every attempt to understand the real meaning of Christianity is energetically persecuted.

Within my recollection the Russian labouring classes have, in a great measure, lost the traits of true Christianity which they formerly possessed, but which are now carefully banished by the clergy.

Among the people there formerly existed (but now only in out-of-the-way districts) Christian legends and proverbs, verbally handed down from generation to generation, and these legends—such as the legend of Christ wandering in the guise of a beggar, of the angel who doubted God's mercy, of the crazy man who danced at a drum-shop; and such sayings as: 'Without God one can't reach the threshold,' 'God is not m
might, but in right,' 'Live till I eve, live for ever,' etc.
—these legends and proverbs formed the spiritual food
of the people.

Besides these, there were Christian customs: to
have pity on a criminal or a wanderer, to give of one's
last resources to a beggar, and to ask forgiveness of a
man one has offended.

All this is now forgotten and discarded. It is now
all replaced by learning by rote the Catechism, the
triune composition of the Trinity, prayers before
lessons, and prayers for teachers and for the Tsar, etc.
So, within my recollection, the people have grown ever
religiously coarser and more coarse.

One part—most of the women—remain as super-
stitious as they were 600 years ago, but without
that Christian spirit which formerly permeated their
lives; the other part, which knows the Catechism by
heart, are absolute atheists. And all this is consciously
brought about by the clergy.

'But that applies to Russia,' is what Western
Europeans—Catholics and Protestants—will say. But
I think that the same, if not worse, is happening in
Catholicism, with its prohibition of the Gospels and its
Notre-Dames; and in Protestantism, with its holy
idleness on the Sabbath day, and its bibholiatry—that
is, its blind belief in the letter of the Bible. I think,
in one form or another, it is the same throughout the
quasi-Christian world.

In proof of this, it is sufficient to remember the age-
old fraud of the flame that kindles in Jerusalem on the
day of the Resurrection, and which no one of the
Church people exposes; or the faith in the Redemption,
which is preached with peculiar energy in the very
latest phases of Christian Protestantism.

vii.

But not only is the Church teaching harmful by its
irrationality and immorality, it is specially harmful
because people professing this teaching, while living
without any moral demands to restrain them, feel quite convinced they are living a really Christian life.

People live in insensate luxury, obtaining their wealth by the labour of the humble poor, and defending themselves and their riches by policemen, law-courts and executions—and the clergy, in the name of Christ, approve, sanctify, and bless this way of life, merely advising the rich to allot a small part of what they have stolen to the service of those from whom they continue to steal. (When slavery existed, the clergy always and everywhere justified it, and did not consider it inconsistent with Christianity.)

People strive by force of arms, by murder, to attain their covetous arms, personal or public, and the clergy approve, and in Christ’s name bless preparations for war, and war itself, and not only approve, but often encourage these things; holding war—that is, murder—not to be contrary to Christianity.

People who believe in such teaching are not merely led by it into an evil way of life, but are fully persuaded that their evil life is a good one, which there is no need for them to alter.

Nor is that all: the chief evil of this teaching is, that it is so skilfully interwoven with the external forms of Christianity, that, while professing it, people think your doctrine is the one true Christianity, and that there is no other! It is not only that you have diverted from men the spring of living water—were that all, people might still find it—but you have poisoned it with your teachings, so that people cannot find any Christianity but this one poisoned by your interpretations.

The Christianity preached by you is an inoculation of false Christianity, resembling the inoculation for smallpox or diphtheria, and has the effect of making those who are inoculated immune to true Christianity.

People having for many generations built their lives on foundations irreconcilable with true Christianity, feel fully persuaded that they are living Christian
lives, and thus they are unable to return to true Christianity.

Thus it is with those who profess your doctrines; but there are others, who have emancipated themselves from those doctrines: the so-called unbelievers. They (though in most cases more moral in their lives than the majority of those who profess Church doctrines), as a result of the spiritual taunt to which they were exposed in their childhood, have an influence on their neighbours which is worse even than that of those who profess your teachings. They are specially harmful because, having in childhood shared the misfortune of the rest of the inhabitants of Christendom and been trained in the Church frauds, they have so identified Church teachings with Christianity in their own perception, that they now cannot distinguish the one from the other, and in rejecting the false Church teaching throw away with it that true Christian teaching which it has hidden.

These people, detesting the fraud that has caused them so much suffering, preach not only the uselessness but the harmfulness of Christianity, and not of Christianity only, but of any religion whatever.

Religion, in their perception, is a remnant of superstition, which may have been of use to people once, but now is simply harmful. And so their doctrine is, that the quicker and more completely people free themselves from every trace of religious consciousness, the better it will be.

And preaching this emancipation from all religion, they—including among them most educated and learned men, who, therefore, have the greatest authority with people searching for the truth—consciously or unconsciously become most harmful preachers of moral laxity.

By suggesting to people that the most important mental characteristic of rational creatures—that of ascertaining their relation to the Source of all things,
from which alone any firm moral laws can be deduced—is something man has outlived, the deniers of religion involuntarily postulate as the basis of human activity simply self-love, and the bodily appetites that flow therefrom.

And among these people sprang up that teaching of egotism, evil and hatred, which (though it was always present in hidden, latent form in the life-conception of the materialists) at first showed itself timidly, but has latterly been so vividly and deliberately expressed in the doctrines of Nietzsche, and is now spreading so rapidly, evoking the most coarsely animal and cruel instincts in mankind.

So that, on the one hand, the so-called believers find complete approval of their evil way of life in your teaching, which recognises as compatible with Christianity those actions and conditions which are most contrary to it; while, on the other hand, unbelievers—arriving at the denial of all religion, as a consequence of your teaching—wipe out all distinction between good and evil, preach a doctrine of inequality among men, of egotism, of strife, and of the oppression of the weak by the strong—and preach this as the highest truth attainable by man.

You, and none but you, by your teaching forcibly instilled into people, are the cause of this dreadful evil from which they suffer so cruelly.

Most terrible of all is the fact that, while causing this evil, you do not believe the teaching you preach; not only do not believe all the assertions of which it is composed, but often do not believe a single one of them.

I know that, repeating the celebrated credo quia absurdim, many of you think that, in spite of everything, you do believe all that you preach. But the fact that you say you believe that God is a Trinity, or that the heavens opened and the voice of God spoke from up there, or that Jesus rose up into the heavens
and will come from there to judge all mankind in their bodies, does not prove that you really believe that the things mentioned have occurred, or will occur. You believe you ought to say that you believe these things happened. But you do not believe them; for the assertions that God is One and Three; that Jesus flew up into the sky and will come back from there to judge those who will rise in their bodies—have, for you, no meaning. One may utter words that have no sense, but one cannot believe what has no sense. It is possible to believe that the souls of the dead will pass into other forms of life, pass into animals, or that the annihilation of the passions, or the attainment of love, is the destiny of man; or it is possible to believe simply that God has forbidden us to kill men, or even that He forbids us to eat—and many other things may be believed that do not involve self-contradiction—but one cannot believe that God is, at the same time, both One and also Three, or that the sky—which for us is no longer a thing that exists—is opened, etc.

The people of former ages, who framed these dogmas, could believe in them, but you can no longer do so. If you say you have faith in them, you say so only because you use the word ‘faith’ in one sense, while you apply to it another. One meaning of the word ‘faith’ refers to a relation adopted by man towards God, which enables him to define the meaning of his whole life, and guides all his conscious actions. Another meaning of the word ‘faith’ is the credulous acceptance of assertions made by a certain person or persons.

In the first sense, the objects of faith—though the definition of man’s relation to God and to the world is generally accepted as framed by those who lived previously—are verified and accepted by reason.

But in the second sense, the objects of faith are not only accepted independently of reason, but are accepted on the absolute condition that reason is not to be allowed to question what is asserted.

On this double meaning of the word ‘faith’ is founded that misunderstanding which enables people to
say they believe, or have 'faith,' in propositions devoid of sense or involving a contradiction in terms. And the fact that you are blindly credulous towards your teachers is no proof that you have faith in what—being senseless and, therefore, supplying no meaning either to your imagination or your reason—cannot be an object of faith.

The well-known preacher, Père Didon, in the introduction to his Vie de Jésus-Christ, announces that he believes, not in some allegorical sense but plainly, without explanations, that Christ, having risen, was carried up into the sky, and sits there at the right hand of his father.

An illiterate Samâra peasant of my acquaintance, in reply to the question whether he believed in God, simply and firmly replied, as his priest told me: 'No, sinner that I am, I don't believe.' His disbelief in God the peasant explained by saying that one could not live as he was living if one believed in God: 'One scolds, and grudges help to a beggar, and envies, and over-eats, and drinks strong drinks.' Could one do such things if one believed in God?'

Père Didon affirms that he has faith both in God and in the ascension of Jesus, while the Samâra peasant says he does not believe in God, since he does not obey His commandments.

Evidently Père Didon does not even know what faith is, and only says he believes: while the Samâra peasant knows what faith is, and, though he says he does not believe in God, really believes in Him in the very way that is true faith.

But I know that arguments addressed to the intellect do not persuade—only feeling persuades, and therefore, leaving arguments aside, I appeal to you—whoever you may be: popes, bishops, archdeacons, priests, or what not—I appeal to your feelings and to your conscience.

For you know that what you teach about the creation of the world, about the inspiration of the Bible by God,
and much else, is not true; how then can you teach it to little children and to ignorant adults, who look to you for true enlightenment?

Ask yourself, with your hand on your heart, do you believe what you preach? If you really ask yourself that question, not before men but before God, remembering the approaching hour of death, you cannot but answer, 'No, I do not believe it.' You do not believe in the inspiration by God of the whole of those writings which you call sacred: you do not believe all the horrors and wonders of the Old Testament, you do not believe in hell, you do not believe in an immaculate conception, in the resurrection and ascension of Christ, you do not believe in the physical resurrection of the dead, and in the trine personality of God—not only do you not believe all the articles of the creed which expresses the essence of your faith, but many of you do not even believe a single one of them.

Disbelief, if but in a single dogma, involves disbelief in the infallibility of the Church which has set up the dogma you do not believe. But if you have not faith in the Church, you will not believe in the dogmas she set up.

If you do not believe, if even you have any doubts, think what you are doing in preaching as divine, unquestionable truth—what you do not yourselves believe: and in preaching it by methods which are exceptional and unfair: methods such as you employ. And do not say you cannot take on yourselves the responsibility of depriving people of intimate union with the great or small number of your co-religionists. That is not fair. By instilling into them your special faith, you are doing just what you say you do not wish to do: you are depriving people of their natural union with all mankind, and are confusing them within the narrow limits of your single sect, thereby involuntarily and inevitably placing them, if not in a hostile, at least in an alien attitude towards everyone else.

I know that you do not consciously do this terrible thing. I know that you yourselves, for the most part,
are entangled, hypnotized, and often so situated that for you to confess the truth would mean to condemn all your former activity, the activity sometimes of several decades. I know how difficult, just for you, with the training you have had, and especially with the assurance common among you, that you are the infallible successors of the God-Christ—I know how difficult it will be for you to face sober realities and to confess yourselves wandering sinners, engaged in one of the worst activities a man can possibly pursue.

I know all the difficulties of your position; but remembering the words of the Gospels you acknowledge as divine—that God rejoices more over one sinner that repents than over a hundred righteous persons—I think that for each one of you, whatever his position may be, it should be easier to repent, and to cease to take part in what you are doing, than, not believing, to continue to do it.

Whoever you may be: popes, cardinals, metropolitans, archbishops, bishops, superintendents, priests, or pastors—think of this.

If you belong to those of the clergy—of whom there are unfortunately in our days very many (and continually more and more)—who see clearly how obsolete, irrational, and immoral is the Church teaching, but who, without believing in it, still from personal motives (for their salaries as priests or bishops) continue to preach it, do not console yourself with the supposition that your activity is justified by any utility it has for the masses of the people, who do not yet understand what you understand.

Falsehood cannot be useful to anyone. What you know—that falsehoods are falsehoods—could be known equally by the common man whom you have indoctrinated, and are indoctrinating, with them, and he might be free from them. Not only might he, but for you, free himself from these falsehoods—he might find the truth which Christ has shown, and which by your doctrines you—standing between the common man and his God—have hidden away. What you are doing, you
are doing not to serve man, but only from ambition or covetousness.

Therefore, however magnificent may be the palaces in which you live, the churches in which you officiate and preach, and the vestments in which you adorn yourselves, your occupation is not made better by these things. 'That which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.'

So it is with those who, not believing, continue to preach what is false, and to strengthen men in it.

But there are among you those also—and their number is continually increasing—who, though they see the bankrupt position of the Church creeds in our day, cannot make up their minds to examine them critically. Belief has been so instilled into them in childhood, and is so strongly supported by their environment and by the influence of the crowd, that they (without even trying to free themselves from it) devote all the strength of their minds and education to justify, by cunning allegories and false and confused reasonings, the incompatibilities and contradictions of the creed they profess.

If you belong to this class of clergy, which though less guilty is even more harmful than the class previously mentioned, do not imagine that your reasonings will quiet your conscience or justify you before God.

In the depth of your soul you cannot but know that all you can devise and invent will not make the immoral stories of Scripture history—which are nowadays in opposition to man's knowledge and understanding—or the archaic affirmations of the Nicene Creed, either moral, reasonable, clear, or accordant with contemporary knowledge and common-sense.

You know that you cannot by your arguments convince anyone of the truth of your faith, and that no fresh, grown-up, educated man, not trained from childhood to your belief, can believe you; but that such a man will either laugh, or will suppose you to be mentally afflicted, when he hears your account of the commencement of the world, of the first man, of Adam's
sin, and of the redemption of man by the death of the son of God.

All you can effect by your false, pseudo-scientific argumentations, and (what counts for more) by your authority, will be temporarily to retain in hypnotic submission to a false faith, those who are awakening from its influence and preparing to free themselves from it.

That is what you are doing; and it is a very evil work. Instead of employing your mental powers to free yourselves and others from the fraud you and they are involved in, and which causes you and them to suffer, you use your powers yet further to entangle yourselves and them.

You, the clergy of this class, should not entangle yourselves and others by obscure argumentation, should not try to demonstrate that truth is what you call truth; but, on the contrary, making an effort, you should try to verify the beliefs you have accepted as truth—by comparing them with what you and everyone else accept as sure knowledge, and also by the simple demands of common-sense. You need only sincerely set yourselves that task, and you will at once awake from the hypnotic sleep in which you now are—and the terrible delusion in which you have lived will become clear to you.

So it is with this second class, the philosophizing clergy, who in our day are very numerous and most harmful.

But there is also a third, most numerous, class of simple-minded clergy who have never doubted the truth of the faith they profess and preach. These men have either never thought about the sense and meaning of the affirmations taught them in their childhood as sacred divine truth; or, if they have thought, were so unaccustomed to independent thinking, that they did not see the incompatibilities and contradictions involved in those affirmations, or, seeing them, were yet so overpowered by the authority of the Church tradition that they have not dared to think otherwise than
as former and present ecclesiastics have thought. These men generally console themselves with the thought that Church doctrine probably has some satisfactory explanation of the incompatibilities which (as they suppose) only appear incompatibilities to them owing to their own deficiency in theological erudition.

If you belong to that class of men—sincerely and naively believing, or who, though they do not believe are yet willing to believe, and are oblivious of the obstacles to so doing—whether you are an already ordained priest, or a young man only preparing for the priesthood, pause for a while in your activity or in your preparations for that activity, and consider what you are doing or are about to do.

You are preaching, or are preparing to preach, a teaching which will define for men the meaning of their life, will define its aim, will indicate the features of good and evil, and will give direction to all their activity. And this teaching you preach not as any other human doctrine—imperfect and open to question—but as a teaching revealed by God Himself, and therefore not to be questioned; and you preach it not in a book or ordinary conversation, but either to children—at an age when they cannot understand the meaning of what is conveyed to them, but when it all stamps itself indelibly on their consciousness—or you preach it to ignorant adults unable to weigh the instruction you give them.

Such is your activity, or for such activity you are preparing.

But what if this that you teach, or are preparing to teach, be untrue?

Is it possible that this cannot be, or must not be, considered? If you consider it and compare this teaching with other teachings claiming to be equally unique and infallible, and compare it with what you yourselves know, and with common-sense; if, in a word, you consider it, not in a spirit of blind credulity, but freely—you cannot fail to see that what has been given to you as sacred truth, is not only not sacred truth, but
simply an obsolete and superstitious belief, which, like other similar beliefs, is maintained and preached by men not for the benefit of their brother-men but for some other object. And as soon as you have understood that, all those of you who look on life seriously and attend to the voice of conscience, will be unable to continue to preach this doctrine, or to prepare to preach it.

* xi.

But I hear the usual reply: 'What will become of men if they cease to believe the Church doctrines? Won't things be worse than they now are?'

- What will happen if the people of Christendom cease to believe in Church doctrine? The result will be—that not the Hebrew legends alone, but the religious wisdom of the whole world, will become accessible and intelligible to them. People will grow up and develop with unpervertet understandings and feelings. Having discarded a teaching accepted credulously, people will order their relation towards God reasonably, in conformity with their knowledge; and will recognise the moral obligations flowing from that relation.

'But will not the result be worse?'

If the Church doctrine is not true—how can it be worse for men not to have falsehood preached to them as truth, especially in a way so unfair as is now adopted for the purpose?

'But,' some people say, 'the common folk are coarse and uneducated; and what we, educated people, do not require, may yet be useful and even indispensable for the masses.'

If all men are made alike, then all must travel one and the same path from darkness to light, from ignorance to knowledge, from falsehood to truth. You have travelled that road and have attained consciousness of the unreliability of the belief in which you were trained. By what right, then, will you check others from making the same advance?

You say, that though you do not need such food, it
is needed by the masses. But no wise man undertakes to decide the physical food another must eat; how, then, can it be decided—and who can decide—what spiritual food the masses of the people must have?

The fact that you notice among the people a demand for this doctrine, in no way proves that the demand ought to be supplied. There exists a demand for intoxicants and tobacco—and other yet worse demands. And the fact is that you yourselves, by complex methods of hypnotization, evoke this very demand, by the existence of which you try to justify your own occupation. Only cease to evoke the demand, and it will not exist; for, as in your own case so with everyone else, there can be no demand for lies, but all men have moved and still move from darkness to light; and you, who stand nearer to the light, should try to make it accessible to others, and not to hide it from them.

‘But,’ I hear a last objection, ‘will the result not be worse if we—educated, moral men, who desire to do good to the people—abandon our posts because of the doubts that have arisen in our souls, and let our places be taken by coarse, immoral men, indifferent to the people’s good?’

Undoubtedly the abandonment of the clerical profession by the best men, will have the effect that the ecclesiastical business passing into coarse, immoral hands, will more and more disintegrate, and expose its own falseness and harmfulness. But the result will not be worse, for the disintegration of ecclesiastical establishments is now going on, and is one of the means by which people are being liberated from the fraud in which they have been held. And, therefore, the quicker this emancipation is accomplished, by enlightened and good men abandoning the clerical profession, the better it will be. And so, the greater the number of enlightened and good men who leave the clerical profession, the better.

So from whichever side you look at your activity, that activity remains harmful, and therefore all those among you who still fear God and have not quite stifled
the voice of conscience cannot do otherwise than exert all your strength to release yourselves from the false position in which you are placed.

I know that many of you are encumbered with families, or are dependent on parents who require you to follow the course you have begun; I know how difficult it is to abandon a post that brings honour or wealth, or even gives a competence and enables you and your families to continue a life to which you are accustomed, and I know how painful it is to go against relations one loves. But anything is better than to do what destroys your own soul and injures your fellow men.

Therefore, the sooner and more definitely you repent of your sin and cease your activity, the better it will be not only for others, but for yourselves.

That is what I—standing now on the brink of my grave, and clearly seeing the chief source of human ills— wished to say to you; and to say, not in order to expose or condemn you (I know how imperceptibly you were yourselves led into the snare which has made you what you are), but I wished to say it in order to co-operate in the emancipation of men from the terrible evil which the preaching of your doctrine produces by obscuring the truth: and at the same time I wished to help you to rouse yourselves from the hypnotic sleep in which now you often fail to understand all the wickedness of your own actions.

May God, who sees your hearts, help you in the effort.

[November 1, o.s., 1902.]
THOUGHTS SELECTED FROM PRIVATE LETTERS

Two Views of Life.

There are only two strictly logical views of life: one, a false one, which understands life to mean those visible phenomena that occur in our bodies from the time of birth to the time of death; the other, a true one, which understands life to be the invisible consciousness which dwells within us. One view is false, the other true, but both are logical.

The first of these views, the false one, which understands life to mean the phenomena visible in our bodies from birth till death, is as old as the world. It is not, as many people suppose, a view of life produced by the materialistic science and philosophy of our day; our science and philosophy have only carried that conception to its furthest limits, making more obvious than ever the incompatibility of that view of life with the fundamental demands of human nature, but it is a very old and primitive view, held by men on the lowest level of development. It was expressed by Chinese, by Buddhists, and by Jews, and in the Book of Job.

This view is now expressed as follows: Life is an accidental play of the forces in matter, showing itself in time and space. What we call our consciousness is not life, but is a delusion of the senses, which makes it seem as if life lay in that consciousness. Consciousness is a spark which, under certain conditions, is ignited in matter, burns up to a flame, dies down, and at last goes
out altogether. This flame (i.e., consciousness) attendant upon matter for a certain time between two infinities of time, is—nothing. And though consciousness perceives itself and the whole universe, and sits in judgment on itself and on the universe, and sees the play of chance in this universe, and, above all, calls it a play of chance, in contradistinction to something which is not chance—this consciousness itself is only an outcome of lifeless matter—a phantom, appearing and vanishing without meaning or result. Everything is the outcome of ever-changing matter; and what we call life is but a condition of dead matter.

That is one view of life. It is a perfectly logical view. According to this view, man's reasonable consciousness is but an accident incidental to a certain state of matter, and, therefore, what we in our consciousness call life, is but a phantom. Only dead matter exists. What we call life, is the play of death.

The other view of life is this. Life is only what I am conscious of in myself. And I am always conscious of my life, not as something that has been or will be (that is how I reflect on my life), but when I am conscious of it, I feel that—I am—never beginning anywhere, never ending anywhere. With the consciousness of my life, conceptions of time and space do not blend. My life manifests itself in time and space, but that is only its manifestation. Life itself, as I am conscious of it, is something I perceive apart from time and space. So that, in this view of life, we get just the contrary result: not that consciousness of life is a phantom, but that everything relating to time and space is of the nature of a phantom.

Therefore, in this view, the cessation of my physical existence in time and space has no reality, and cannot end, or even hinder, my true life. And, according to this view, death does not exist.

Matter in the Limit of Spirit.

The material form in which the awakening of our consciousness of true life finds us in this world, is, so
THOUGHTS FROM PRIVATE LETTERS

to speak, the boundary limiting the free development of our spirit.

Matter is the limit of spirit. But true life is the destruction of this limitation.

In this understanding of life lies the very essence of the understanding of truth—that essence which gives man the consciousness of eternal life.

Materialists mistake that which limits life, for life itself.

THE SCAFFOLDING.

We must remind ourselves as often as possible that our true life is not this external, material life that passes before our eyes here on earth, but that it is the inner life of our spirit, for which the visible life serves only as a scaffolding—a necessary aid to our spiritual growth. The scaffolding itself is only of temporary importance, and, after it has served its purpose, is no longer wanted, but even becomes a hindrance.

Seeing before him an enormously high and elaborately constructed scaffolding, while the building itself only just shows above its foundations, man is apt to make the mistake of attaching more importance to the scaffolding than to the building for the sake of which, alone, this temporary scaffolding has been put up.

We must remind ourselves and one another, that the scaffolding has no meaning or importance, except to make possible the erection of the building itself.

THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT.

There are moments when one ceases to believe in spiritual life.

This is not unbelief, but rather periods of belief in physical life.

A man suddenly begins to be afraid of death. This always happens when something has befogged him, and he once more begins to believe that bodily life is real life, just as in a theatre you may forget yourself, and think that what you see on the stage is actually
happening, and so may be frightened by what is done there.

That is what happens in life.

After a man has understood that his life is not on the stage, but in the stalls—that is, not in his personality, but outside it—it sometimes happens that, from old habit, he suddenly succumbs again to the seduction of illusion, and feels frightened.

But these moments of illusion are not enough to convince me that what goes on before me (in my physical life) is really happening.

At times when one's spirit sinks, one must treat one's self as one treats an invalid—and keep quiet!

THE FEAR OF DEATH.

It is generally supposed that there is something mystical in our view of life and death. But there is nothing of the kind.

I like my garden, I like reading a book, I like caressing a child. By dying I lose all this, and therefore I do not wish to die, and I fear death.

It may be that my whole life consists of such temporary worldly desires and their gratification. If so, I cannot help being afraid of what will end these desires. But if these desires and their gratification have given way and been replaced in me by another desire—the desire to do the will of God, to give myself to Him in my present state, and in any possible future state—then the more my desires have changed, the less I fear death, and the less does death exist for me. And if my desires be completely transformed, then nothing but life remains, and there is no death. To replace what is earthly and temporary by what is eternal is the way of life, and along it we must travel. But in what state his own soul is—each one knows for himself.

THE WAY TO KNOW GOD AND THE SOUL.

God and the Soul are known by me in the same way that I know infinity: not by means of definitions, but
in quite another way. Definitions only destroy for me that knowledge. Just as I know assuredly that there is an infinity of numbers, so do I know that there is a God, and that I have a soul. For me this knowledge is indubitable, simply because I am led to it unavoidably.

To the certainty of the infinity of numbers, I am led by addition.

To the certain knowledge of God I am led by the question, 'Whence come I?'

To the knowledge of the soul I am led by the question, 'What am I?'

And I know surely of the infinity of numbers, and of the existence of God, and of my soul, when I am led to the knowledge of them by these most simple questions.

To one I add one, and one more, and another one, and another one; or I break a stick in two, and again in two, and again, and again—and I cannot help knowing that number is infinite.

I was born of my mother, and she of my grandmother, and she of my great-grandmother, but the very first—of whom? And I inevitably arrive at God.

My legs are not I, my arms are not I, my head is not I, my feelings are not I, even my thoughts are not I: then what am I? I am I, I am my soul.

From whatever side I approach God, it will always be the same. The origin of my thoughts, my reason, is God. The origin of my love, is also He. The origin of matter, is He too.

It is the same with the conception of the soul. If I consider my striving after truth, I know that this striving after truth is my immaterial basis—my soul. If I turn to my feelings of love for goodness, I know that it is my soul which loves.

These 'Thoughts' are taken from the 1803 Moscow edition of Tolstoy's works, and (except 'Two Views,' which compare with chapter xvii. of 'On Life') are new in English.