

from The Public 1904-07-30

Tolstoy and Davitt

A RECENT INTERVIEW WITH TOLSTOY.

From the London Speaker of July 9.

The Freeman's Journal published on Monday an account by Mr. Michael Davitt of a visit he had paid to Tolstoy at his home at Yasnia. The conversation naturally ran a good deal on Irish subjects. Tolstoy rejoiced in the Irish land revolution, but he thought the peasants had paid too much; and he argued that "Henry George was right and that compensation to landlords was morally wrong, rewarding a class for the successful robbery of the people." He had been so much impressed by "Progress and Poverty" that he had written to the last tsar urging him to apply George's principles to Russia. He promised Mr. Davitt to say something for the Irish cause, and prophesied that Englishmen would come round to the Irish view of home rule. Mr. Davitt described how two peasants came to see Tolstoy while he was with him to consult him about going to the front. Tolstoy told them that if they had a conscientious repugnance to shedding blood they would be quite right to refuse to serve, but that they would bring some punishment on themselves, and unless they would inflict a greater suffering on their souls by acting contrary to their consciences they would be wise to obey the law. Mr. Davitt says Tolstoy rides into Toula frequently to hear the latest war news. His opinions are well summarized in an answer he gave to some American newspaper. "When the war with Japan broke out a New York paper sent me a prepaid cable for 30 words in which message I was asked to say with which side I sympathized. I replied that my sympathies were with both the Russians and Japanese peoples, who would be the sufferers, and not with either of the governments responsible for the war."