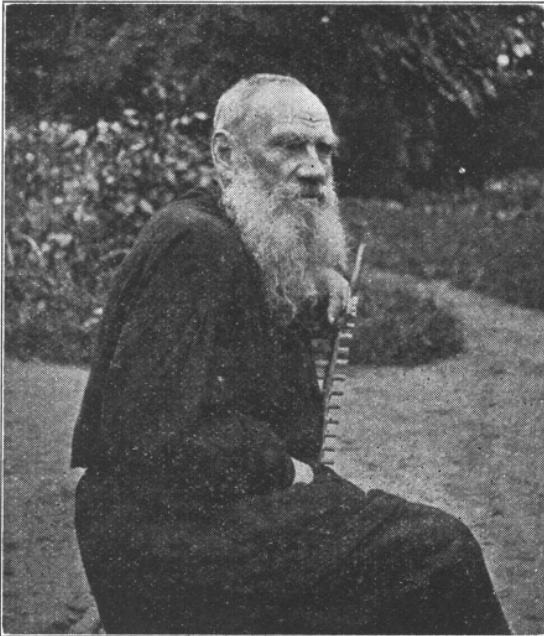


HOW MY FATHER AND I SETTLED THE LAND QUESTION

By Countess Tatiana Tolstoy

(Published here for the first time by courtesy of
Mr. Aylmer Maude)



LEO TOLSTOY

Some years later I took to Henry George's books and studied them conscientiously. When I had understood his system I was seized with such a wave of enthusiasm at the clear justice of the masterly teaching that I wished to communicate what I had experienced to everyone else as quickly as possible.

I am convinced that no sincere, unprejudiced man can fail to succumb to the magic of the powerful logic expressed in Henry George's teaching, based—as everything great is—on a religious principle. That man developed his system not by detailed work in the study but by his life as a common workman who had on one occasion been driven to ask a stranger in the streets for money to buy medicine for his sick wife. He reached the truth by his personal sufferings, by the genius of his head and the nobility of his warm heart. In all that happens in life, that truth is proclaimed by nature herself, with all her unlimited resources, though till now people are afraid to trust to that holy solution of the land question at which Henry George arrived. I do not doubt, nevertheless, that humanity will some day open its eyes to this simple method of universal welfare, and that the riches of mankind will be so increased that there will no longer be, as now, people dying in hunger.

Moral life founded on a religious principle is the most advantageous, but age after age passes and people still fear to acknowledge it.

Is it surprising that, reading the powerful words of the Author of *PROGRESS AND POVERTY*, another great soul, filled with the same love for truth and for men, on the opposite side of the globe, was moved and responded to the call.

From the time my father read the books of Henry George he never omitted an opportunity of disseminating that teaching. Conversations often took place in my presence on this theme, and I listened sympathetically to them.

One thing perplexed me. Although for the accomplishment of that system in life no rude seizure* was necessary of the kind that, like all violence, was repulsive to my father, yet the tax on land will have to be collected by the Government, and Government is based on violence.

I spoke of this to my father. He replied to me that that was what sometimes perturbed him, but that with the existing order it was, nevertheless, the best solution of the land question. My father imagined to himself a social order in which the guidance of the people would be different from the present kind of government, and would be voluntary.

At Yasnaya Polyana papers were received specially devoted to the propaganda of Henry Georgeism, as well as many of his books, which at my father's instigation were translated into Russian. I read everything that came to hand on that question.

Having read all Henry George's books I began to read works by other authors relating to the same question, thinking that perhaps I should find in them something new or something that refuted his theory. Then I obtained and read criticisms of Henry George; thinking that there might be refutations that had not occurred to my father or to me; but on the land question I found nothing comparable to Henry George, and in the Russian criticisms of him I found only glaring ignorance of his works. Having read a pile of books I remained of the same opinion—that I had found nothing simpler, clearer, more profitable, or more just, than Henry George's system.

How I wished that the whole world would become acquainted with that system. I did not doubt that to know it meant to accept it; but what could one do to direct people's eyes towards it?

I decided to write a popular book expounding his teaching. It seemed to me that I should be able to do this. I knew by my own experience how difficult it is for one unacquainted with the science of political economy and who is undeveloped on that side, immediately to seize and assimilate the thought of the great American economic philosopher.† Many special terms are obscure to the uninitiated. Knowing how much I had had to read, to meditate, and to ask, before I clearly understood Henry George, I wished to express his views in popular language, intelligible to any ordinary reader.

Many times I re-wrote and rearranged the commencement of my book, trying simply clearly and intelligibly to expound the thoughts I prized. I was often seized with doubt as to whether I was writing what was wanted, and as it was wanted, and whether in general my work was required.

Of course the best judge of this would have been my father, but I was hindered from submitting my work to his criticism by the knowledge that, receiving it from me, he would not be able to judge of it freely and impartially. So I decided to send him the first part of the book anonymously.

I typed out my manuscript on a Remington, and also typed a letter in which I asked L. N. Tolstoy to reply to me in Moscow to a given address. I signed with the

* Under Henry George's system a single tax is put on the land, as on something not produced by human toil. All other taxes are abolished. Anyone unable to pay the single tax on the land he has, passes the land over to the common council, from which it can be taken by anyone who can pay for its use.

† English readers usually find Henry George very easy to read, but allowance must be made for the difficulty that would naturally be encountered by a Russian lady reading an American work on economics, either in English or in a Russian translation—which latter might be by no means equally simple.—A.M.

first name that occurred to me "P. A. Polilov." To Moscow I wrote a letter asking a friend to forward to me, to my address in the country, his letter as soon as it should arrive. I awaited a reply with the greatest impatience, but it did not come. It happened that just at that time there was some upset with the Post Office notification of registered letters,* and instead of being delivered to us they reached our neighbours. I grew impatient, excited, reproached everybody, and did not know what to do with myself.

At last I decided to go to Yasnaya Polyana.

I arrived in the morning, but as my father was busy I did not interrupt his work. I asked my sister, Sasha, what had been happening at Yasnaya, what visitors had come, and what letters had been received. She said that among other interesting letters Papa had received a manuscript from a certain Polilov, with which he had been very much pleased. She told me that he praised the article very highly and had written Polilov a long letter, a kind of essay, which he had revised several times. She handed me the letter from the pseudo-Polilov enclosing my article. On the envelope in my father's hand was written "Answered" and lower down he had written "Interesting." I asked Sasha for the copy of my father's reply. She got it out and handed it me. With a quickly beating heart and the greatest excitement I read the following:—

6th November, 1909,
Yasnaya Polyana.

"PETER ALEXANDROVICH,—Your article, with your letter to me, has afforded me great pleasure. I have long ceased to interest myself—and in fact I never interested myself—in political questions; but the question of the land, that is of land slavery, though it is considered a political question, is, as you quite correctly say, a moral question, a question of the violation of the most elementary demands of morality, and therefore that question not only occupies my mind but torments me. I am tormented by the stupid cynical decision of that question accepted by our unfortunate Government, and by the complete misunderstanding of it by people who are considered advanced.

"You can therefore imagine the joy I experienced on reading your admirable article, which so clearly and powerfully sets forth the essence of the matter.

"This question so torments me that I recently had a vivid dream in which, being in a company of 'the learned,' disputing their views, I expounded just the view of the existing crying injustice of private property in land which is so admirably expressed in your article. I jotted that dream down roughly and wished, after correcting it, to have it printed, but my dream has been accomplished in you and in your article.†

"God help you to complete your work, and the sooner the better.

"Do you know Nikolaev? ‡ Get to know him.

* In Russia the procedure with a registered letter was that the Post Office sent a notification of arrival, and personal application for the letter had to be made at the Post Office.—A.M.

† Had Tolstoy's exposition of the unfairness of the relative positions of the landowners and peasants received attention, and had this injustice been modified by lightening the taxation of the people by the imposition of a considerable land tax on landed estates, recent Russian history would have been entirely altered and the main cry that enabled the Bolsheviks to obtain peasant support and to seize power would have lacked efficacy.—A.M.

‡ I was not only acquainted with S. D. Nikolaev, but had received from him much help both in advice and in books. He placed at my disposal his whole library on the land question, and from it I had drawn much of my information.—T.T.

He is such a *connoisseur* of Henry George and such a passionate partizan to his teaching, and such an admirable man, as one seldom meets.

"I am very grateful to you for the pleasure you have afforded me.

"It seems to me that the question of the injustice of land slavery, and the necessity of emancipation from it, now stands on the same stage of recognition on which the question of the emancipation of the serfs stood in the fifties of the last century; there is the same conscious indignation on the part of the people, who are vividly aware of the injustice done to them, and the same consciousness of this injustice among the few best representatives of the wealthy classes, and the same coarse, partly unintentional and partly intentional, misunderstanding of the question by the Government.

"The difference is only that then, to help the emancipation of the serfs, the Government had the example of Europe, and above all of America. Now such an example is lacking, or, if it exists, the example given consists in the formation of small private landed property, which not only does not free the people from land slavery, but, on the contrary, strengthens it, and the Government, people standing as usual on the lowest moral and intellectual stage at the present time (1905-6) having become particularly self-confident and bold, particularly after their triumph over the revolution, and being unable to think independently or to understand the immorality of landed property, are recklessly breaking up the age-long supports of Russian life, in order to bring the Russian people to that horrible, immoral, and ruinous condition in which the peoples of Europe are. These people with their limitations and immorality do not understand that the Russian people are not now in a position in which it would be natural to compel them to imitate Europe and America, but in one in which they should show other nations the path along which the emancipation of people from land slavery can be accomplished. §

"If the Government were, I do not say wise or moral, but if it were at least to some degree what it boasts of being, namely *Russian*, it would understand the Russian people, with their ingrained consciousness that the land is God's and may be common property but can in no way be an object of private possession. It would understand that the Russians stand in this important question of our day far ahead of other nations. If our Government was not a coarse and stupid institution quite estranged from the people, it would understand not only the great rôle it is called upon to perform by formulating the advanced ideals of the people—but it would understand also that the tranquillization and pacification of the people—which it is now trying to attain by executions unheard of since the days of Ivan the Terrible, and by all kinds of horrors—might certainly be attained just by one thing, the realization of the

§ The question whether, in order to progress, Russia had to learn to follow paths already traversed by the Western nations, or whether it could find a short cut to a superior organisation of life, was one which lay at the basis of the discord between two schools of reformers; and unfortunately for Russia, it happened that Tolstoy's sympathies ran counter to the Constitutional movement which was the only alternative to an autocracy or a dictatorship.—A.M.

Harry Llewelyn Davies' Memorial Edition of
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general popular ideal: the emancipation of land from private ownership. It would then not be necessary for the Tsar or for his Ministers, like criminals, to hide themselves from the people behind three rows of Guards. Only announce a Manifesto, as was done at the time of the Emancipation of the Serfs, that the Government is occupied with emancipation from land-slavery, and the people, better than any other guards, would defend the Government which they would then acknowledge as being their own. The blindness of the people of our so-called highest society is amazing.

"The Duma?" At all my encounters with members of the Duma I have considered it my duty to beg them at least to raise in the Duma the question of the emancipation of the land from the claims of private property and to introduce a land tax in the manner of Henry George. Their reply is always one and the same: "We have not occupied ourselves with that question and are not acquainted with it. Above all that matter would in no case be accepted for discussion." Evidently those gentlemen are too ardently occupied with thrashing empty straw to find leisure to think of that which *alone* is important and necessary. They are blind and—what is worst of all—are convinced that they see.

"So how can I help rejoicing in your activity? Please write me of the success of your work.

"I press your hand in friendship and gratitude.

"LEO TOLSTOY."

Very complex and mixed feelings arose in me on reading that letter. I was in ecstasy at my father's approval.

But at the same time I had a feeling of shame and repentance at the mystification I had practised. I only now realised that on learning who the real author was, my father would be grieved and disappointed that it was not from a new hearth that the knowledge and propaganda of Henry George's idea had arisen, but that it had come from one of his own flesh and blood.

When my mother got up, she also told me that papa was always talking of an article he had received from someone named Polilov and praising it very much, and that talk about Henry George had again started, of which she was quite tired.

I awaited my father's appearance with agitation. At last he came out of his study into the large room. We greeted him, and he sat down at table. He was very merry and narrated what letters he had received that morning. After a little silence, I asked him:

"You were pleased by Polilov's article?"

"Yes, very pleased. Why? Do you know him?"

"Yes. I . . . You know that is a pseudonym? Polilov is a woman."

My father stopped eating and raised his head.

"Impossible!"

"No. It's true."

"Who is it?"

I laughed.

"And a woman who is very near to you,"

"Impossible!!"

"No, it is true."

"Who is it?"

"I."

"Impossible!!!"

Then I told him all about it, What I had thought, and why I sent him the article under a pseudonym.

He did not reproach me, but I felt I had guessed right when I feared he would be disappointed. He did not show it, but between people so near to one another as we were no shadow can pass unnoticed.

I discussed very seriously with him how the book ought to be written, and explained to him my plan for it.

The book, he said, should consist of three parts. First the principles, the immorality of land-ownership; secondly, an exposition of the existing agrarian programmes and a criticism of them; and thirdly, an exposition of the economic system of Henry George.

I remonstrated about the second part. It would be difficult to select what was considered important on the question. I had obtained a pile of books, but many as I had read, there were still other competent authors whom I had not yet read. I had read or ganced through Marx, Kautsky, Conrad Schmidt, Herzstein, Chernov, Tugan Baranovski, and many other authors, but not being specially educated in that direction it was difficult for me to steer my course among the great number of such authors.

My father, as usual, did not give me any advice, but at the end of our talk he laughed and said:

"But where is Polilov? I imagined him to myself so clearly. Neat, and dressed in a dark blue pea-jacket."

Then he added, patting me on the head:

"Well, if you don't finish that book you will be a real woman."

Alas! I was not false to my sex. I have remained a real woman, and my manuscript remains till to-day unfinished.

5th July, 1923. Moscow.

Tolstoy's warm approval of Henry George's land policy referred to in the above article is also expressed in two letters of his in the volume entitled *ESSAYS AND LETTERS* in the World's Classics series, Oxford University Press.—A.M.

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A TOLSTOY SOCIETY FORMED

Mr. Aylmer Maude writes: "A Tolstoy Society has been formed, one of the main objects of which is to secure the publication of a reliable and complete Centenary Edition of Tolstoy's works. This plan should result in making all that Tolstoy wrote on the land question readily accessible, in convenient form in our public libraries. The Secretary of the Tolstoy Society, Miss A. B. Hodgson, Ladywell, Great Baddow, Chelmsford, will be glad to answer inquiries and to supply all particulars to anyone interested in the matter."

A correspondent (G. G. A., Richmond) who is keen in the distribution of leaflets, writes:—"I have distributed sets of your leaflets in the urban districts of Barnes and Ham, Surrey, 800 sets of one kind and 200 of another. I have been at this work during the past two or three years. I calculate I have taken altogether 4,105 separate pieces of literature to Barnes and Ham; in every case I included your No. 31, *THE LATEST LESSON FROM DENMARK*. In Richmond I distributed all I had—they are included in the above figures.

* * *

This is work of a commendable character and we could wish that more of our people would engage in it. It is easy to publish pamphlets and leaflets and their appearance fortifies a great many who are encouraged always to know that such propaganda is going forward. The difficulty always is in the distribution. There are always some services available for distributing leaflets at meetings especially at election times—but that is not enough. There is room for zeal and activity in this line of business between times and A. G. G. has given a cheerful example of what one man can do.