LEO TOLSTOY'S INFLUENCE ON
AMERICAN SOCIAL THOUGHT
1885-1910

A Thesis

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INTRODUCTION

The emergence of a powerful and dynamic literary movement in autocratic Russia won a sympathetic audience in Western Europe at a time when Russia was under heavy attack from Western liberals. The flowering of Russian letters occurred during a period when the Western novel no longer exercised the sweep of Balzac, the compassion of Dickens, and the morality of George Eliot. In general, the Russians explored the nature of man in society with greater passion and precision than did the writers who were contemporaneous with them. Therefore, when the Russian novel first appeared in Western Europe, Western readers were immediately impressed by the power and psychological keeness of such authors as Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky.

Tolstoy's sure grasp of reality, exemplified in War and Peace and Anna Karenine, soon captivated the critics and readers of Western Europe and the United States, who were convinced that Tolstoy was a man of genius—a giant who towered over his age as the greatest literary realist. But readers were not only impressed with Tolstoy's literary skills; they also recognized his compassion, moral fervor, and concern for the lower classes. In the 1870's and 1880's, his audience grew larger and more responsive to those works which were fashioned out of a genuine sympathy
for the poor and humble peasant of Czarist Russia.

In the 1870's Tolstoy had undergone a spiritual crisis which almost caused him to commit suicide. His anguish eventually found an outlet in a meaningful confrontation with the message of Christ which was embodied in The Sermon On The Mount. Tolstoy now suggested that only through Christian charity and personal selflessness could man find meaning in an otherwise absurd universe. It was imperative that each human being undergo some type of spiritual transformation if war, poverty, and cruelty were to be eliminated from society. Herein was the essence of his message, elaborated in such books as The Kingdom of God Is In You and On Life, which found a sympathetic audience in Europe and the United States. Tolstoy felt that Christian brotherhood had its roots not in the social context of daily life but in a code of asceticism, an asceticism which demanded from each individual a renunciation of prestige and material pleasures.

Tolstoy evoked a mood which had certain intrinsic appeal for those Americans who were growing disillusioned with their society in the post Civil War era. His criticism of liberal society encouraged some Americans to re-examine more carefully the values of their own culture. The fact that Americans did sympathize with his criticisms suggests the serious disjunction then existing between the ideals and accomplishments of American civilization.
The purpose of this essay is to explore the influence of Tolstoy's message of Christian renunciation and social anarchism within American social and cultural institutions in the last twenty-five years of his life. An examination of the writings and ideas of those Americans who were deeply moved or highly critical of his position will perhaps suggest the nature of the impact made by this Russian artist on American society between 1865 and 1910.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND RECEPTION OF
TOLSTOY IN THE UNITED STATES

As early as 1862 a work by Leo Tolstoy, Childhood And Youth, had been translated into English and published in London. However, sixteen years passed before an American publisher printed a work of Tolstoy. In 1878 Scribner's published Eugene Schuyler's translation of The Cossacks but the book was entirely overlooked by the critics.

The first mention of Tolstoy in the American Press was in 1885 when the Nation reviewed War And Peace and Anna Karenina. Both works had been recently translated into French and the Nation's critic, writing from Paris, formally introduced Tolstoy to an American reading public with reviews of both books. The critic was generally very enthusiastic about these books, and he urged readers of the Nation to remember the name of this unknown Russian author, who was destined to become universally renowned in just a few years.

In March 1886 War And Peace was at last published in the United States. The Dial was one of the few journals to review this novel during the first months after its publication. The Dial critic wrote:

Tolstoy can write from the standpoint of the philosophic observer, who has studied the facts and reduced them to a system, or he can write from the standpoint of the participant, who describes but dimly
the issues concerned in the struggle, and sees only what is going on in his immediate vicinity. The Dial also reviewed Anna Karenina subsequent to its publication in May, 1886. The tone of the critic changed somewhat; his review of Anna Karenina was more critical than was his review of War And Peace.

In certain scenes the realism is too intense for our Puritan taste; and, perforce, several of these scenes have been more or less modified in the present translation.... The works of Turgenev surpasses the work of Tolstoy in revealing that final sublimation of thought and imagination which give to it an artistic value beyond that of almost any other imaginative prose. Tolstoy lacks this power of concentration and this unerring judgement in the choice of word or phrase. He cannot sum up a situation in a single pregnant sentence, but he can present it with great force in a chapter. This review of Anna Karenina suggests the extent of the Turgenev vogue in the United States in the period when Tolstoy was hardly known outside of Russia. It also indicates that Victorian tastes were even fashionable with the serious critics, who could find in Tolstoy's work "a realism too intense for our Puritan taste." But in a more important vein, the reviewer displayed a lack of literary discrimination by intimating that Tolstoy really could not measure up to the genius of Turgenev. It would only be a matter of several years before critics everywhere would applaud Anna Karenina as one of the greatest novels ever written, while Turgenev would gradually sink into a somewhat undeserved obscurity. His novels would not be as widely read as were Tolstoy's, nor would he command the respect
and attention of his erstwhile friend, who was destined to become the best known author of his day.

By 1889, twenty-seven editions of Tolstoy's novels and essays, representing sixteen different titles and twenty-one distinct translations, had been published in this country. The author of War And Peace and Anna Karenina was now established in the United States as a major European writer. Tolstoy had received the critical approval of William Dean Howells, who popularized him with the reading public of the day through his articles in Harper's Monthly. Isabel Hapgood also publicized Tolstoy's artistic talents with her essays in the Chatauquan.

When George Kennan presented Tolstoy in the role of a social critic with his essay in The Century, certain features of Tolstoy's social philosophy, such as his fierce hatred of autocracy and capital punishment, became known to Americans. Kennan had visited Tolstoy at his home in Russia and had spent several days talking with Tolstoy on such topics as penal reform, pacifism and passive resistance. Their conversations were animated and frank, but Kennan could not accept Tolstoy's views on the subject of non-resistance. The Russian remarked that "the proper way to resist evil is to absolutely refuse to do evil either for one's self or for others." Kennan categorically rejected Tolstoy's position as being unsound (and utopian); but he felt only the "warmest respect and esteem" for Tolstoy in spite of the
Of Tolstoy’s many books published in the United States between 1886 and 1900, The Kreutzer Sonata produced the greatest public reaction. The novel had as its major theme the role of chastity in marriage. Tolstoy attempted to demonstrate in this work the immoral qualities of a marriage based on the physical appetites of the husband and wife. He suggested that love between man and woman only had validity and meaning if the partners could achieve solidarity on the spiritual plane rather than on the physical level. The Kreutzer Sonata was didactic and melodramatic, a gross artistic failure after Tolstoy’s earlier success; but the novel did provoke considerable comment because it challenged the domestic values of the existing social order.

During Isabel Hapgood’s visit to Tolstoy’s home in 1889, Tolstoy commissioned her to translate The Kreutzer Sonata in preparation for the future American publication of the work. After reading the novel in Russian, Miss Hapgood refused Tolstoy’s offer because she felt that the novel was "too frank and indecent." By 1890, however, another translator completed the task which Miss Hapgood had refused, and the book was offered for sale to the American reading public in the spring of 1890. A condensed version of the novel was included in the April, 1890 edition of the Review of Reviews with a favorable essay by William T. Stead. On the other hand, the New York Times review of
The Kreutzer Sonata was critical but not entirely unsympathetic. The Times critic wrote:

As to pessimism, this new work of Tolstoy's is pessimistic to the core; in his negation of the value of life he would outdo Schopenhauer and Hartman. No wonder the book is not considered wholesome reading for the hot headed Slavs of the Russian high schools and universities. Of Tolstoy, it can be said that it is not peace, but a sword that he has brought into the world of letters by his immense talent.... The preaching it contains spoils the Kreutzer Sonata a good deal; it spoils it as a work of pure art. But full of sophistries as it is, the novel will be recognized as the product of a mighty master of art--to whom, indeed, is given the talent to hypnotize the masses by the power of his pen.13

However, a month later the New York Times reviewed the novel again, and this time another critic condemned the book as a product of a depraved imagination.

Without being an imitation of Zola the novel by Tolstoy is almost as disgusting. The literary element is strong, in so far as it is literary to give to the whole story a "tinge of horror"--that discomfort which is natural for people to feel who visit an asylum where mad persons capable of homicide are confined.14

The position of the second New York Times critic was endorsed by the reviews of serious critics who agreed with his evaluation of the work. Robert Ingersoll, writing in the North American Review, suggested that "had Tolstoy lived a few centuries ago, he might have founded a religion; but the most he can do now is perhaps to create the necessity for another asylum."15 Isabel Hapgood, writing in the Nation, felt that "such morbid psychology can hardly be of service, it seems to me, as much as I dislike to criticize Count Tolstoy."16
Several months after the publication of *The Kreutzer Sonata* in this country, Attorney General Miller of the United States adjudged the book obscene, and he requested that the Postmaster General, John Wanamaker, prohibit the distribution of the book through the public mails.\textsuperscript{17} The Postmaster General, provided with the authority to act in such cases by a Congressional statute of 1888, complied with Attorney General Miller's request, and after August 1, 1890, the book was no longer sent by government post.\textsuperscript{18}

On August 7, 1890, several book dealers in New York City were arrested for selling the novel. The prisoners were released within two days, however, after a New York judge ruled that the work was not immoral.\textsuperscript{19} Another case similar to the New York incident arose in Philadelphia when two book dealers were arrested for selling *The Kreutzer Sonata* on the streets. Judge Russel Thayer, President of Common Pleas Court, quashed the indictment against the two men when he decided that "there is nothing in this book which can by any possibility be said to commend licentiousness, or to make it in any respect attractive, or tempt any one to its commissions."\textsuperscript{20} His decision, a model of sober analysis, continued as follows:

A careful and critical reading of the whole book has clearly convinced us that it is not liable to the charge of either obscenity or indecency.... It is neither in its sentiments or language in any degree calculated to minister, to corrupt, or to gratify lewd desires, or to encourage depravity in any form.\textsuperscript{21}
Judge Thayer's decision ended the public controversy, and henceforth the book was sold over the counter without further interference from police officials. But the Post Office Department was not affected by Judge Thayer's legal opinion, and there is no evidence that the ban against the mailing of the book was rescinded or modified.

The adverse publicity arising out of *The Kreutzer Sonata* case did not affect Tolstoy's position with serious American readers. This novel was a minor effort on the part of the author, whose reputation with American readers was based on the success he had had with his major novels and his essays on the subject of social reform and pacifism. *War And Peace* and *Anna Karenina* received encomiums from the major American critics, and his philosophical essays, *My Confession* and *My Religion*, were greeted by reformers as works which inspired men to live more humanely with each other. But the initial reception of Tolstoy in the United States hardly indicated that he would soon become such a prepossessing figure for so many American readers. His increasing popularity with Americans grew out of their firm respect for his reformist zeal as well as for his distinguished qualities as a writer. In less than a decade after his first books were published in this country, Tolstoy had achieved a pre-eminence with the reading public which was not challenged by any other writer. What had endeared him to Americans was his genius as an author and his constant struggle against
the forces of tyranny and oppression.
FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER I


2Ibid., p.531.

3Nation, January 22, 1885, p.70.

4Ibid., August 6, 1885, p.112.

5Dial, March 1886, p.299.

6Ibid., May 1886, p.13.

7Ibid., p.13.


10Ibid., p.259.

11Ibid., p.264.

12Isabel Hapgood, Nation, April 17, 1890, p.315.


14Ibid., May 25, 1890, p.19.

15North American Review, September 1890, p.505.

16Hapgood, op. cit., p.315.

17New York Times, August 1, 1890, p.8.

18Ibid., p.8.

19Ibid., August 9, 1890, p.9.

20Ibid., September 25, 1890, p.1.

21Ibid., p.1.
CHAPTER II

THE IMPACT OF TOLSTOY'S THOUGHT ON AMERICAN SOCIETY, 1885-1898

Of the American critics who introduced Tolstoy to a growing reading public, no one championed his cause with greater determination than did William Dean Howells. He first became acquainted with Tolstoy in 1886 with his readings of Anna Karenina and War And Peace. Not only was Howells impressed by Tolstoy's talents as a writer, but he also admired his compassion and concern for those characters in the novels who were not part of the aristocratic caste. The moral tone of these books convinced Howells that Tolstoy employed art not for art's sake but rather for the moral improvement of humanity.

Tolstoy had not been trying to write consciously as an artist, as did Turgenev, but rather as a man who was moved by certain experiences and had to put these emotions on paper in such a way that there was an exact correspondence between the reality of his work and the reality of his experience. It was this method of writing which Howells found so attractive and meaningful. Howells was actively engaged in the attempt to describe the American scene, as he understood it, through the medium of the novel, and his contact with Tolstoy's writing enlarged his sympathy and extended his horizon. Tolstoy confirmed for Howells the notion that art not only had to disclose beauty but also
had to extract truth about men's behavior in society. Further reading in the following years reinforced Howells' belief that Tolstoy caught in his prism the fullest variety of life, refracting it with the widest possible sympathy.

In 1886 Howells began to write a regular column for Harper's Weekly. It was from his "Easy Chair" that Howells supported the cause of Zola, Tolstoy and other European authors in this country. He undoubtedly won over many skeptical readers to the cause of realism with his shrewd and intelligent defense of this unpopular literary movement. The period of genteel letters was undergoing a partial decline in the United States in the 1880's and 1890's; Howells, perhaps more than any other writer or critic, was responsible for its diminishing hold on American writers. But he also attempted to make something more of realism than the mere establishment of another literary style which in time would become archaic or rigid. He wanted the writer to become the legislator of morality and honesty, a concept which he had found imbedded in Tolstoy's later writings. Howells confessed his huge debt to Tolstoy for giving him a new approach to life when he wrote, "What I feel sure is that I can never look at life in the mean and sordid way that I did before I read Tolstoy."

In the period between 1887 and 1894, Howells published several novels which illustrated the change which took place in him as a writer. *Annie Kilburn* and *A Traveler*
From Altruria represented a new literary tack for Howells. He was now inspired by the challenge of depicting life in the new industrial order with heightened social consciousness. In a glowing tribute to Tolstoy, Howells suggested that the Russian had assisted him in the development of the new themes which he incorporated in his later novels:

His literature both in its ethics and aesthetics, or its union of them, was an experience for me somewhat comparable to the old fashioned religious experience of people converted at revivals. Things that were dark or dim before were shone upon by a light so clear and strong that I needed no longer grope my way to them. Being and doing had a new meaning and motive, and I should be an ingrate unworthy of the help I had if I did not own it, or if I made little of it. What I had instinctively known before, I now knew rationally. I need never again look for a theme of fiction; I saw life swarming with themes that filled my imagination and pressed into my hands. I had but to look about me, and there was my drama, comic or tragic, here yonder and everywhere, with the meaning that could not fail my inquiry.5

Tolstoy's criticism of modern society condemned all political and social movements not rooted in the principle of Christian anarchism. Yet many of Tolstoy's sympathizers found his position impractical and dogmatic. Howells, for one, could not abide by Tolstoy's dictum that politics was the activity of immoral bureaucrats and well-meaning charlatans. Tolstoy thought that politics of any sort in Czarist Russia was impossible, and for this reason he felt that all political activity was vain and futile. Howells felt, on the other hand, that Tolstoy's total rejection of political activity would ultimately leave society unchanged and probably worse off.6 Therefore, Howells turned to
Fabianism, the one political movement which he thought was in keeping with his beliefs. He never joined the Socialist Party, nor did he become active in politics, but he did contribute an article or two for the American Fabian.\textsuperscript{7} Converted to pacifism by Tolstoy, Howells did forthrightly condemn the American participation in the war with Spain.\textsuperscript{8}

Howells had only minor reservations about Tolstoy's indictment of modern industrial society. Although he disagreed with Tolstoy's remedies, in part, Howells realized that Tolstoy made his greatest contribution with his explicit statements about the debilitating nature of modern social organization. For this reason, Howells, a sensitive and honest man, listened to Tolstoy and was enlightened. Though Howells respected and admired Tolstoy, it was his opinion that Tolstoy vitiated his art and weakened his conception of reality by writing parables which were overtly didactic and often insipid. Howells was too much the artist to give way to banal sentiment and nostalgia. And for this reason he deplored the diminution of Tolstoy's artistic powers, evolving out of his new role of the pedagogue. Howells stated:

I think that where Tolstoy becomes impatient of his office, and prefers to be directly a teacher, he robs himself of more than half his strength with those he can move only through the realization of themselves in others.... A man's gifts are not given to him for nothing, and the man who has the great gift of dramatic fiction has no right to cast it away or to let it rust out in disuse.\textsuperscript{9}
There were other writers in the 1890's who came under the sway of Leo Tolstoy. Hamlin Garland, for instance, had felt the power of Tolstoy's pen, and he attempted to wrestle with the problem of realism, though not as successfully as Howells. His talent did not run very deep, but he made some contributions to the growth of literary realism with the assistance of Howells and the inspiration derived from his reading of Tolstoy. His telling description of farm life in the Middle Border was a perceptive appraisal of the hardships and despair suffered by many frontier settlers.

Sarah Orne Jewett was another writer who was moved, even enthralled, by her readings of Tolstoy's work. She described her reaction to Tolstoy's writings in a letter in which she could hardly restrain her joy over the discovery of his work.

That story of Tolstoy's was such an excitement that I did not sleep until almost morning. What a wonderful thing it is.... It startled me because I was dimly feeling the same kind of motive (not the same plan) in writing the "Gray Man...." I have felt something of what Tolstoy has been doing all the way along.... I never felt the soul of Tolstoy's work until last night,...but now I know what he means, and I know that I can dare to keep at the work I sometimes have despaired about....

Stephen Crane also suggested that Tolstoy was a major literary influence in his life. Crane credited Tolstoy with teaching him the meaning of realism and having inspired him to write The Red Badge of Courage following his reading of
War And Peace. Crane wrote:

The nearer the artist gets to life the greater he becomes the artist, and most of my prose writings have been towards the goal partially described by the misunderstood and abused word, realism. Tolstoy is the writer I admire most of all.12

Tolstoy's influence on the development of a more serious and realistic literature in the United States is expressed in the writings of Howells and Crane. These authors averred that Tolstoy taught them the principles of literary realism, while demonstrating in his own work the practical application of these principles. Joseph Kirkland, a realistic novelist and critic for the Dial, wrote at the time of Tolstoy's introduction in the United States:

Such books as Tolstoy make the careful observer suspect that unless English fiction can shake off some of the iron trammels that bind it, it must yield all hope of maintaining its long held supremacy.13

It was only a matter of a few years before American writers threw off the "iron trammels" and began to write with greater concern for precision and truth. Tolstoy played the role of a literary midwife for the new style of fiction which was to make its appearance in the 1890's.

Tolstoy's impact on American reformers of this period is more clearly defined than his influence with American authors. Ernest Howard Crosby was probably Tolstoy's greatest disciple in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century. A one-time aspiring Republican politician, who held Theodore Roosevelt's old seat in the New York Legislature, Crosby was to abjure his previous prestige for
the life of a reformer. He had come out of an upper class New York milieu with all the advantages of education and wealth; he had also had important contacts in Washington accruing from his favorable social and political positions in Albany and New York. Thus he received an appointment from President Harrison to the Court of Justice, seated in Alexandria, Egypt, to arbitrate claims for the Khedive. While in Alexandria, Crosby read Tolstoy's *On Life* and was immediately impressed with the insights into society which he found in the book.14

Crosby resigned his lifetime post in 1894, and left Egypt to travel to Russia where he met Tolstoy personally. There, at Yasnaya Polyana, he was received with warmth and kindness. After several long discussions with Tolstoy on the subject of non-resistance and pacifism, Crosby was convinced of his sincerity and decency. He then returned to the United States dedicated and resolute in his attempt to win adherents for the cause of reform. After Crosby's departure, Tolstoy had ironically remarked that "Crosby like all Americans is proper, not stupid, but all show."15 This remark perhaps indicated an initial hostility to Crosby; Tolstoy may have not been quite convinced of Crosby's intentions or his sincerity. But he did not have long to wait for an actual demonstration of Crosby's resolve to work for the betterment of society. Upon his return to the United States in 1894, Crosby had established a League for Social
Reform with headquarters in New York City. In addition he now began to write many articles and pamphlets with the purpose of spreading as widely as possible those criticisms which Tolstoy had made of contemporary society.\textsuperscript{16}

Crosby attacked many of the major institutions of American society. He thought that capitalism was antithetical to the interests of man, which could be served only through a genuine sense of community. He also condemned the Spanish-American War on the grounds of its patent immorality. He wrote:

There should be no "buts and if's" for Christians in this matter of war. War means hate; Christianity means love, and there can be no truce between them. No argument is admissible in its behalf, and only on the plea of some kind of insanity can the lips that defend it be recognized as other than savage and pagan. We must prick the bubble of this monstrous illusion which makes a by-word of the pretensions of the followers of the Prince of Peace.\textsuperscript{17}

Devoted to Tolstoy as Crosby was, he nevertheless grew critical of Tolstoy’s concept of renunciation of social values and goals. Like Howells, Crosby realized that man is a social animal, conditioned and played upon by the institutions which he creates. If pursued seriously, Tolstoy’s policy of renunciation would take man completely outside of society and progressive social change would become an impossibility. This is not to suggest that Crosby was opposed to Tolstoy’s definition of love as the force which bound people to one another outside the realm of social necessity, but Crosby wanted also to make love
the nexus which tied people together in general social circumstances. Love, for Crosby, was nothing more or less than a meaningful sense of community existing among people in society. It was at this point that he felt Tolstoy's defense of renunciation had serious shortcomings:

If Tolstoy and William Morris could have been united in one man, we would have had an all-round man indeed. While Tolstoy has short-comings on the external side, Morris has them on the spiritual. But would a man so balanced have been such a force in the world as either of these incomparable men? I doubt it.18

Tolstoy once remarked that Crosby was handicapped by "all the disadvantages of youth, health, and wealth."19 Indeed this was true, for Crosby had matured in the genteel world beyond the slums and despair of those millions of his native city who experienced only a life of quiet desperation. Thus, he was not forced into his commitment; he made an intellectual choice, which grew out of the conviction that various social classes were mutually responsible for each other's welfare.

Hardly known and unhonored by the majority of his countrymen, Crosby now battled against precisely those elements of American society with whom he had shared his early manhood. He attempted to counter the gospel of Social Darwinism with the Tolstoyan prescription of love and humility. Crosby captured the essence of Tolstoy's thought when he wrote:

Tolstoy's great discovery and central theory is the old, old truth that love is the natural spiritual
energy of man, and that all circumstances, laws, and institutions must bend before this prime function of his soul.... Like the Roman knight he has plunged into the abyss yawning between class and class, and in his own person is endeavoring to realize the reconciliation of a world divided against itself. Tolstoy has written many great works, but the greatest is his simple, pathetic, inevitable life.20

Crosby proselytised as best he could with the message of Tolstoy, and he sympathetically supported other ideas and causes which challenged the materialistic ethos of American society such as Henry George's single tax program. With the certainty that his cause was right and his teacher a saint, he selflessly carried Tolstoy's ideas directly to the American people. His crusade stopped only at the time of his death in the winter of 1907.

As Tolstoy's fame grew in the United States in the 1890's, a number of Americans began to visit him in Russia. Several Americans, George Kennan and Isabel Hapgood, had already personally made his acquaintance. The arrival of Crosby in 1894, however, suggested that Americans were now becoming familiar with the personality of Tolstoy.

Perhaps the best known figure to visit Tolstoy in the early 1890's was Jane Addams, who was deeply impressed by his openness and simplicity. Her contact with him was important in that he reinforced her beliefs in pacifism with his defense of peace and brotherhood.21 She also renewed her sense of dedication to her program of social welfare and settlement work when she observed how unswerving
was his devotion to the cause of justice. After her visit with Tolstoy, Miss Addams wrote a letter to Almyer Maude, a close friend of the author who had arranged her meeting with Tolstoy. In this letter, she analyzed her reactions to Tolstoy:

The glimpse of Tolstoy has made a profound impression on me—not so much by what he said, as the life, the gentleness, the Christianity in the soul of him.... A radical stand such as Tolstoy has been able to make throws all such efforts as that of the Settlements into the ugly light of compromise and inefficiency—at least so it seemed to me—and perhaps accounts for a certain defensive attitude I found in myself.22

Another distinguished American, Andrew D. White, former President of Cornell University, and one-time American Minister to Germany, came for a visit; after he left, Tolstoy sardonically remarked that "White has learned all the sciences and knows all the languages, and has read all the books—the only pity is that he has not yet begun to think."23 White, however, had considerably more astuteness than Tolstoy gave him credit for. In a magazine article published several years after his meeting with Tolstoy, White displayed keen intelligence in his logical, precise analysis of the conversation which had taken place between them. He suggested that Tolstoy was ill-informed about actual conditions in the United States, that Tolstoy was impossibly dogmatic and provincial in his views, and that he was far too isolated from centers of thought and debate. Notwithstanding his various criticisms of Tolstoy's social philosophy, White believed that the
Russian was completely sincere in his position and that his love for the underprivileged was genuine.24

While Tolstoy entertained Americans at his home, he also began to correspond with sympathizers in the United States in the period of the 1890's. He exchanged letters with Henry George and initiated correspondence with Adin Ballou, a Boston minister, on the subject on non-resistance. Tolstoy also sent many letters to Ernest Crosby expressing high regard for the work Crosby was doing on behalf of the poor and downtrodden elements of American society.

By 1898 Tolstoy had achieved a position of respect and honor in the United States which was accorded to no other writer, European or American. On September 8, 1898, at the Hotel St. Denis in New York City, over one hundred people, primarily writers and social reformers, gathered to honor Tolstoy on his seventieth birthday.25 Many leading publishers and editors attended the banquet: Albert Shaw of the Review of Reviews, E. J. Wheeler of the Literary Digest, and Brisben Walker of the Cosmopolitan.26 Israel Zangwill gave the major address of the evening. He was followed by Abraham Cahan who remarked:

When we walk the streets and find beggars in this great republic of ours, I think there is room for work like that of Tolstoy, and this very gathering shows that there are people in the United States who think that there is room for improvement, and who look forward to having an economic republic as well as a political one.27

Telegrams expressing sympathy with the objectives of
the dinner were received from John Jay Chapman, Walter
Hines Page, Richard Harding Davis and many others.28
A letter from William Dean Howells was read to the group
in which he suggested that Tolstoy had just one word for
the world and that was "peace." Howells asserted, in his
letter, that, "It has been Tolstoy's mission to give men
a bad conscience, to distress them in the opinions and
conventions in which they rested so comfortably."29

This banquet signaled the pre-eminence of Tolstoy in
certain areas in American life. He had become, in a period
of a few brief years, a sort of patron saint for many
American reformers and writers. His courage and moral
integrity had radiated from Yasnaya Polyana to all corners
of the world. His books had been banned and attacked, but
his message was translated and read by many men and women
of diverse cultures and languages, who for one reason or
another felt dissatisfied with their life and society.
For the great majority of readers, his writings may have
been entertaining and often illuminating. But for the few
readers who took him seriously, Tolstoy was, as Howells
suggested, "the writer who awakens in his reader the will
to be a man."30
FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER II


2 Ibid., April 23, 1887, pp. 299-300; May 1887, pp. 953-57; July 1887, pp. 315-20.


7 American Fabian, IV No. 2 (February, 1898), p. 2.


9 Howells, op.cit., p. 250.


14 Ernest Howard Crosby, Tolstoy and His Message, (New York: Funk and Wagnell's, 1903), p. 34.

FOOTNOTES (continued)


18 Arena, April, 1901, p.429.


20 Ernest Howard Crosby, Ibid., p.429.


24 Ibid., p.514.

25 Critic, October 1898, p.284.

26 Ibid., p.514.

27 Ibid., p.515.

28 Ibid., p.515.

29 Social Gospel, October 1898, p.23.

30 Howells, op.cit., p.248.
CHAPTER III

THE IMPACT OF TOLSTOY'S THOUGHT ON AMERICAN SOCIETY, 1898-1910

One of the unusual social experiments in American society between 1885 and 1910 was the establishment of a Christian Commonwealth community in Northern Georgia. This particular colony, established in 1897, attracted the attention of many well-known reformers and writers: Tolstoy and Keir Hardie were only two of many European reformers who expressed an interest in the experiment.¹ Jane Addams was one of several American reformers who visited the colony to observe its progress in the face of overwhelming difficulties.²

The colony was under the leadership of Ralph Albertson, a young divinity student from Oberlin College, who had read George, Bellamy, and Tolstoy, and was profoundly affected by their criticism of modern society. Albertson was also the editor of Social Gospel, the publication of the colony which had a monthly circulation of over two thousand. Tolstoy received his copy each month and was pleased with its contents. He expressed his concern for the success of the colony in a letter to Ernest Crosby:

I thank you for the information you give me, but I must say that I feel especially concerned about all that goes on in the Christian Commonwealth. I read all their journals with a deep interest and never cease to rejoice at the firmness of their views and beautiful
expression of their thoughts. I should like to get as many details concerning their life as possible.  

The colony managed to survive for three years, though beset with many extraordinary difficulties. The spread of malaria, combined with financial bankruptcy, destroyed the colony's last chance for survival in 1900. Although the Christian Commonwealth failed, it nevertheless was a grandiose experiment on the part of a hundred or so settlers to realize the teachings of Jesus. The fact that these settlers believed that all men were brothers and should share the products of their labor with each other kept the community alive for over three years. Perhaps the shrewdest evaluation of the Christian Commonwealth's success at community living was made by Jane Addams who wrote:

The visit Miss Smith and I made a year or two later to a colony in one of the Southern states, portrayed for us most vividly both the weakness and strange august dignity of the Tolstoy position. The colonists at the Commonwealth held but a short creed. They claimed in fact that the difficulty is not to state truth but to make moral conviction operative upon actual life, and they announced their intention to "obey the teachings of Jesus in all matters of labor and the use of property." They would transfer the vindication of creed from the church to the open field, from dogma to experience.  

At any rate, the colony disbanded in 1900, but not before it achieved an international reputation among men and women who sympathized with its message "of courage and good cheer to those who are capable of an earnest and faithful and cool-headed obedience to a high social ideal."
While few Americans sought refuge from the harsh realities of social life about them through the establishment of a utopian colony in Georgia, others participated more willingly in the actual affairs of day-to-day politics with aspiration of changing society from within. Samuel "Golden Rule" Jones and Brand Whitlock, reform mayors of Toledo, Ohio between 1897 and 1913 had united in a concerted effort to bring about the reforms in municipal politics necessary to protect democratic institutions from complete corruption. Jones and Whitlock shared a common outlook and love for the underprivileged of Toledo society. Brand Whitlock expressed it as follows:

It was our interest in the disowned, the outcast, and the poor, and the criminal that drew us together; that and the fact that we were gradually assuming the same attitude toward life. He was full of Tolstoy at that time, and we could talk of the great Russian.6

Jones was that phenomenal figure in American politics: the man who fought the entrenched machine and won in the face of overwhelming odds. In his last campaign for the office of mayor, Jones defeated the combined Republican and Democratic tickets for an unprecedented fourth victory. Jones, a successful business man, had reaped the whirlwind with his meteoric rise as a politician. He introduced a new concept of love and high idealism into politics without the slightest suspicion of cynicism or unscrupulousness. He had suffered the enmity of the press, the hostility of the churches, and the wrath of the Toledo business man; but
his apparent sincerity convinced an overwhelming number of local citizens that he meant everything he said in his campaign speeches. Even Tolstoy had heard of his good work as Mayor, and he wrote Jones to express his best wishes for Jones' continued success.7

Jones was a peculiar politician in many ways, but he was also an admirable man who felt that "the most conspicuous evil of our present system is found in the fact that it gives some men arbitrary power over others."8 Lincoln Steffens' vivid description of Jones as Mayor suggests the whimsical qualities of Sam Jones, man and politician:

I had stopped off in Toledo, and Brand Whitlock, who was my sort of reformer, took me to Sam Jones, who took me home, sat me down, and humorously, wonderingly, for hours read to me Walt Whitman and the New Testament. Never a word about the State or even the nation, nothing about the city, even, or politics. The poet and the prophet were his political leaders. He was practicing what they preached literally, religiously, gleefully...9

Golden Rule Jones died soon after his fourth successful election as Mayor of Toledo. He was succeeded by Brand Whitlock, his close friend and a fellow political maverick. Whitlock was a highly intelligent and literate office holder --something of an anomaly in American municipal politics. He had read widely and thought deeply about the role the politician had to play in society. And he resolved to use his skills for the benefit of the people of Toledo. Whitlock defeated the utilities and added a democratic tone to political life in Toledo while he was mayor. Tolstoy had been something of a mentor for Whitlock who expressed
familiarity with his works:

I have found help in the writings of Tolstoy, who has been said to be the only man in Christendom who literally interprets and lives the words of Jesus, and is thought crazed by all the rest of the Christians in the world. I have found especially helpful his books, *What To Do*, *My Religion* and *Resurrection*. Tolstoy had abetted Jones' and Whitlock's interest in reform and had given them a stimulus to carry the message of good government to the people. They had found in Tolstoy's writings the spirit of love and humility which they imparted to the residents of Toledo in their own unique way.

Clarence Darrow, a rising young lawyer from Chicago, was another disciple of Tolstoy. Darrow had read Tolstoy at the Sunset Club, a reading organization for liberal reformers, in Chicago in 1888, and he was impressed with Tolstoy's arguments in defense of pacifism. While acknowledging his debt to Tolstoy for introducing him to the subject, Darrow wrote his own essay, *Resist Not Evil*, on the subject immediately after the Spanish-American War. In the preface to his essay Darrow wrote:

It is not claimed that the following pages contain any new ideas. They were inspired by the writings of Tolstoy, who was the first, and in fact the only author of my acquaintance who ever seemed to me to place the doctrine of non-resistance upon a substantial basis. After reading Tolstoy I determined to make a careful study of the subject....

According to his own account, Darrow, at the beginning of the First World War, almost capitulated to the mass frenzy by supporting the Allied cause, but the lessons
learned from Tolstoy quickly brought him to his senses. Thus he condemned the war from the point of view of pacifist who refused to be drawn into the vortex of popular enthu-
siasms and elitist machinations.

Darrow heeded the object lessons of Tolstoy, a fearless and outspoken critic who had unequivocally attacked the leaders of Russia at the time of the Japanese-Russian War of 1904. Tolstoy gained the attention of the civilized world with his analysis of the foolishness of this war, or any war, involving the lives of millions of human beings. His article was printed in the New York Times of July 10, 1904. Although the Times, in an editorial, attacked his position of non-resistance, the newspaper did admit the validity of many of his arguments and suggested that "thousands of semi-intelligent Russians may thus, through Tolstoy, become acquainted with these things and their curiosity thereby stimulated to learn more...."14

Between 1900 and 1910, a virtual proliferation of articles and essays discussing Tolstoy in all of his many facets appeared in several American journals and newspapers. His seventy-fifth and eightieth birthdays were cause for considerable comment in the American press. For example, the Socialist Call, the New York Times, and the Nation were three of the leading publications which featured articles about Tolstoy's eightieth birthday. The fact that such a cross-section of the American press could find
something to say on this occasion showed the enormous reputation this man had with certain journals—journals with little in common other than their admiration for Leo Tolstoy. Simeon Strunsky, writing in the Nation, suggested that Tolstoy was the only living being who could light up the laws with his beacon fires of truth.\textsuperscript{15} And the Review of Reviews averred that Tolstoy was "one of the great moral forces of human history."\textsuperscript{16} From Cincinnati a telegram was dispatched to Tolstoy bearing forty-seven signatures of men and women who felt that the Russian was "Humanity's greatest teacher, defender of universal brotherhood, and foe of all tyranny."\textsuperscript{17}

Although Tolstoy's eightieth birthday was given wide publicity in the United States, only one journal identified him with an active reform organization. The Public, organ of the single-taxers, called attention to the fact that Tolstoy was more than a great human being or a most significant writer; he was, in effect, a radical who was calling for a resolution to the problem of war, poverty and ignorance among men in all societies.\textsuperscript{18} In other words, the sentimental eulogies which appeared in most journals really cloaked Tolstoy's criticisms of modern society by ignoring them for subject matter less controversial.

With Tolstoy's death in 1910, American newspapers and journals once again had an opportunity to evaluate the
contributions Tolstoy made both to literature and social reform. The New York Times suggested that Tolstoy "had done little or no harm. He was no political revolutionist. He had accomplished much good." 19 The Dial stated that "the exhorter in him got the better of the artist." 20 Perhaps the most eloquent tribute given to Tolstoy by an American journal was made by the Chicago Tribune:

When Tolstoy instituted peasant schools, organized relief for the starving population of middle Russia, improved the character of cheap publications, renounced property in copyright, suffered excommunication from the church, wrote so that the meanest man could understand, he was alive for God. His passionate attempt at simplicity in a complex age is finished; the wild woods and tilled fields of Yasnaya Polyana will no more suffer the impact of his bared pilgrim feet. His pursuit of happiness has carried over yet another Sierra and into another valley. His greatest honor is that he spoke the word "brotherhood" in a voice so trumpetlike that after he is dust, in earth, his accents will still reverberate. 21

At the Fels Commission Conference in New York, a resolution was passed in honor of the memory of the man "on whose woul rested so much of the burden and mystery of all this unintelligible world." 22 And at the Music Hall in Cincinnati, Ohio, on December 11, 1910, over two thousand five hundred people attended a memorial service for Leo Tolstoy, sponsored by the Fels Fund Commission. Daniel Kiefer, a leading single-tax exponent from Cincinnati, spoke at the meeting and emphasized Tolstoy's "strongly favorable attitude toward the teachings of Henry George." 23

Tolstoy was dead, but his words and ideals were
modified in the active thoughts of the living. What was precisely Tolstoy's role, his destiny? George Lukacs has recently suggested:

For Tolstoy's whole personality, that of a model of men,--naturally inseparable from Tolstoy as artist and thinker--is constantly growing in stature as a great educator of civilized men, as a mentor, an awakener and a liberator.24

This, then, was the task he performed for those Americans who continued to battle for the implementation of democracy, while the rest of the country watched and waited.
FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER III


2Ibid., p.145.


4Dombrowski, loc.cit.

5Social Gospel, February 1900, p.7.


15Simeon Strunsky, "Reformer At Eighty," Nation, August 27, 1908, p.179-82.

16Review of Reviews, October 8, 1908, pp.443-48.

17Public, September 4, 1908, p.539.

18Ibid.
FOOTNOTES (continued)

20 Dial, December 1, 1910, p. 446.
21 Chicago Tribune, November 21, 1910.
22 Public, December 2, 1910, p. 1144.
23 Ibid., December 16, 1910, p. 1188.
CHAPTER IV

THE INFLUENCE OF SOME AMERICAN THINKERS ON LEO TOLSTOY

It was often reported by American visitors to Tolstoy's home that pictures of Thoreau, Emerson, Henry George and the relatively unknown Adin Ballou were prominently displayed in his study.\(^1\) While conversing with his American guests, Tolstoy would occasionally discuss those American writers whose work he found most praiseworthy. In an article published in the North American Review in 1901, Tolstoy listed those writers whose work most influenced his own development:

If I had to address the American people, I should like to thank them for the great help I have received from Garrison, Thoreau, Ballou and Parker. And I should like to ask the American people why they do not pay more attention to these voices, (hardly to be replaced by those of financial and industrial millionaires, or successful generals and admirals), and continue the good work in which they made such hopeful progress.\(^2\)

Thoreau and Garrison, the first American writers to broach the social possibilities of civil disobedience, probably influenced Tolstoy in the years when he began to formulate his own proposals for pacifism and civil disobedience. Though Tolstoy never wrote any statement acknowledging the influence exerted on him by these two Americans, he nevertheless expressed familiarity with their writings and suggested that they were men of high intelligence and moral courage. In a conversation with George
Kennan, Tolstoy spoke warmly of Garrison and also Theodore Parker.

Tolstoy said that he regarded William Lloyd Garrison as one of the most remarkable men that America had produced. The Count also spoke with respect and admiration of Theodore Parker, whose *Discourse on Matters Pertaining to Religion* he regarded as the most remarkable effort of the American mind in that field.3

It is possible to see what these three men, Thoreau, Garrison, and Parker, contributed to Tolstoy's development from artist to moralist in the early 1880's. Thoreau and Garrison crystallized for Tolstoy the theoretical basis of non-resistance and civil disobedience; Parker called Tolstoy's attention to the values of a radical Unitarianism which abjured theological orthodoxy for a more personalized form of religious devotion.

Tolstoy, if anything, was an anarchist who rejected society and despised the typical values intrinsic to all such social forms. He sought in his later years a style of life which could transcend the earthly limitations of social necessity for a utopian commonwealth. Tolstoy's good society would be composed of men who were bound to one another through a simple, rational love of God expressed by a common devotion to those values found in the Sermon On The Mount, i.e., humility, compassion and selflessness. Thoreau and Garrison pointed to the lie of society; Parker presented the possibilities for personal reconciliation with the eternal mysteries of life. Both
of these notions permeate the writings of Tolstoy, suggesting that he shared a common set of values with these three Americans, whose writings he found admirably suited to his purposes.

When Andrew White visited Tolstoy on one occasion in Moscow, he asked Tolstoy his opinion as to who was America's greatest writer. Tolstoy surprised White with his answer that Adin Ballou was the foremost man of letters in the United States. Ballou was the organizer of the Hopedale Community near Boston in 1841 and the author of several tracts on the subject of non-resistance—tracts which Tolstoy had read and found instructive. Although Ballou's style was pedestrian and his thought inferior to that of Parker and Thoreau, Tolstoy was impressed with his book *Christian Non-Resistance*. Ballou had suggested that the only answer to those who would preach hate and destruction was love and Christian forgiveness. Tolstoy was, of course, in agreement with Ballou's solution to the vexing problem of hate and strife, and he found Ballou's argument important because it clarified in his own mind what he had to do in his personal life to find his way back to the principles of Christian Brotherhood.

Several years after Tolstoy had familiarized himself with Ballou's concepts, he published his own work on the subject of pacifism and non-resistance, which Ballou read in 1887. Ironically, Ballou, though a strong advocate of
of non-resistance, found that he was in disagreement with Tolstoy's position. He felt that Tolstoy's doctrine of non-resistance was carried to an "illogical and extravagant extreme, warranted neither by the teachings of Jesus, nor by a true regard for the welfare of the evil-doers, the irresponsible maniac, or society at large..." A brief correspondence between the two men followed in 1889, one year before Ballou's death, in an attempt to reconcile their differences. However, Ballou was not moved by Tolstoy's arguments, which he regarded as dogmatic and unrealistic.  

Though there were sharp areas of disagreement between the two men, they retained respect for one another. When Tolstoy heard of Ballou's death in 1890, at the age of eighty-seven, he mourned the loss as if Ballou were his brother. In the succeeding years, Tolstoy always spoke of Ballou with reverence and kindness.  

Of the various American writers whom Tolstoy read at one time or another, no one made a greater impact on his mind than did Henry George. Tolstoy had first read *Progress And Poverty* in 1885, and he was immediately impressed with George's analysis of the land problem, which Tolstoy thought perfectly applicable to Russia. In addition, Tolstoy found George's moral fervor and religiosity in keeping with his own feelings and beliefs. Following his reading of *Progress And Poverty*, Tolstoy
wrote a friend expressing his enthusiasm for the book:

This is an important book. It is as important a step on the path of public life as the freeing the serfs--freedom from private ownership of land. One's view on this subject is the text of a man. It is necessary to read George, who has put this question clearly and concisely. After him it is impossible to prevaricate; one must directly take a stand on his or the other side."

Tolstoy's statement is almost a summary of his views on the pressing problem of land reform in Russia. He was deeply moved by the proposals of the single-taxers because he realized the enormous consequences of an improved social life for the peasants, whom he idealized, if the land problem could be resolved in favor of progressive change.

The non-violent nature of George's ideas appealed to Tolstoy to such an extent that he incorporated the single-tax ideal into one of his major novels, Resurrection. He even wrote the Czar and his first minister, Stolypin, in an attempt to convince them of the worthiness of George's idea. From the Czar Tolstoy encountered silent resistance, and from Stolypin he received a letter suggesting that his proposals were rash and utopian.

Impressed with George's ideas, Tolstoy invited the American to visit him in Russia for the purpose of discussion and convivial association. But George's death in 1898 destroyed whatever hope Tolstoy had of meeting this man who had influenced him so significantly. He did, however, meet Henry George, Jr., in the last year of his life, when
the young George visited him at Yashna Polyana in 1909. Tolstoy was quite overjoyed by this meeting and, though he was ill, spent two days speaking with George, Jr.\textsuperscript{10}

Tolstoy probably gave the single-taxers more excellent publicity than any other advocate with the exception of Henry George himself. Tolstoy's name was soon inextricably bound up with that of Henry George in many of the single-tax journals; in every conceivable way, Tolstoy promoted the cause of the single-taxers by lending their movement the endorsement of his respected name.

The question arose as to why Tolstoy, an admitted anarchist, involved himself with a movement purporting to work within society to achieve its specific goals. He answered such queries with practical simplicity:

The method of solving the land problem has been elaborated by Henry George to such a degree of perfection that, under the existing state organization and compulsory taxation, it is impossible to invent any other better, more just, practical and peaceful solution.\textsuperscript{11}

Tolstoy found George an appealing figure for several major reasons: his non-violent solution to the land question, his deeply felt moral and religious concern for the welfare of the indigent, his uncompromising, sober analysis of social injustice. George thus gave Tolstoy a rationale for social action in keeping with the spirit of his own meliorist proposals.

Those Americans whom Tolstoy singled out for his praise and respect were precisely the thinkers who made
the greatest contribution to his development as a critic and reformer of civilization. George and Thoreau, Parker and Garrison represented the best tradition in American social criticism—critical but humane, idealistic but practical, and always sharply moral but never rigidly puritanical. These thinkers sketched for Tolstoy the role played by the individual in bringing about the highest development of his personality, while, at the same time, they fostered the notion that man was a responsible social agent.
FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER IV

1. Henry George, Jr., World's Work, October 1900, pp.12144-54.


6. Arena, December 1890, p.10.


CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Leo Tolstoy’s message of love and brotherhood inspired individual human beings to behave more humanely and intelligently with each other. His approach was not programatic or pragmatic: this was the source of Tolstoy’s virtue as a moralist, but it also was the origin of his greatest weakness. He kept his discussion of values in the realm of universals without being duly concerned with the particular application of his moral code. Tolstoy was eloquent and effective when he appealed to men to live in peace with each other, but he failed to suggest a practicable alternative to the social system which he dissected.

Yet Tolstoy was a vital force, a symbol of courage and morality, for Americans who were appalled by the state of their society and, unlike Henry Adams, wanted to do something about it. Reformers such as Brand Whitlock and Ernest Crosby, religious leaders such as Ralph Albertson, and writers such as Howells and Garland carried Tolstoy’s teachings to the American people only to discover that they were reaching out not for a great audience but for each other. There was a sense of circularity to the feverish writings and activities of those men and women who propagated the Tolstoyan doctrine in the United States.
Regardless of their failure to bring about any radical innovations in American life, they at least elevated the debate among those people who could not accept the basic life style of a society which not only worshipped at the golden calf but was prepared to manufacture it for general consumption.

Americans who were influenced by Tolstoy were few in number and fewer yet in political strength. Ironically, his message of pacifism and Christian charity was accepted by those men and women who were powerless and usually marginal in the vast confluence of American society: the artists and intellectuals. Among these few thousand radical saints and sinners, Tolstoy was appreciated as one of the great reformers and leaders of mankind. But he was, however, virtually unknown to the rest of the population, then enthralled with the high jinks of Theodore Roosevelt.

But those Americans who did admire Tolstoy's spirit and compassion were generally hostile to one of his basic propositions, that of renunciation. Tolstoy had suggested that man could only discover his true human qualities by abjuring all social ties and renouncing all social conventions—an act which would lead to the eventual establishment of universal brotherhood and peace. Ernest Crosby rejected this notion because he felt that man had to work within society to achieve any valid reform. William Dean Howells
thought that Tolstoy had taken an extremist position which was not warranted by the necessities of human life. So it appears that among his firmest American admirers, Tolstoy won little favor with his dogmatic strictures on the subject of renunciation.

On the other hand, one salient characteristic of Tolstoy's philosophy, that of pacifism, was accepted by an articulate number of Americans. Clarence Darrow and Jane Addams, Howells and Crosby, were among those Americans who refused to sound the tocsin for American expansionism at the sacrifice of democratic principles. This notion of pacifism was acceptable to many Americans because the idea was not alien to their own traditions. In other words, Americans found meaningful those ideas in Tolstoy's social philosophy, his pacifism and general criticism of social institutions, which were, in part, analogous to similar expressions in American social criticism. Therefore, Tolstoy awakened the men and women of the 1890's to a tradition of native social and philosophical radicalism inherent in the writings of the New England Transcendentalists.

So it seems that among Tolstoy's American enthusiasts there was only partial acceptance of his ideas; but his real contribution lay in the fact that he pressed home a criticism of society, the spirit of which appealed to the American sense of justice and humanitarian optimism.
Tolstoy's role then was to act as the conscience of his age.
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