

Resurrection-Leo Tolstoy

“Joy was everywhere, in plants and birds, insects and children. But the people—the adults, the grown-ups—continued to deceive and torment both themselves and each other. The people saw nothing sacred or significant in this spring morning, this God-given worldly beauty, a happy gift to the whole of creation, a beauty inclining towards peace, harmony and love; no, for them the sacred and the significant meant anything they could devise to gain power over others.”

“Now began a new life for Maslova, of the kind which chronically violates every commandment of God and man, though it is led by hundreds, nay hundreds of thousands, of women with the approval, and even active encouragement, of a government concerned with the welfare of its citizens, and for nine women out of ten it ends in painful disease, premature decrepitude, and death.”

“It never entered into his head that his work in court—which involved bringing people to swear an oath on the Bible, in which the swearing of oaths was specifically forbidden—was bad work, and not only was he not worried about it, he actually liked this familiar task, in the course of which, incidentally, he often came across a nice class of person.”

“Then, he had been an honest, unselfish youngster, ready to devote himself to any good cause; now, he was a dissolute and sophisticated egoist who thought of nothing but his own pleasure. Then, God’s world had seemed like a mystery that gave him joy and excitement as he tried to unravel it; now, that life and everything in it was plain and simple, determined only by the circumstances in which he happened to find himself. Then, it had been necessary and important to get close to nature and to the thinking and feeling people who had gone before him (through philosophy and poetry); now, the only necessary and important things were him and institutions and mixing with his friends. Then, woman had seemed filled with mystery and enchantment, an enchanting creature because of the mystery; now the meaning of woman, any woman except for his relatives and his friends’ wives, was clearly defined: woman was one of the finest instruments for the provision of enjoyment. Then, he had had no need of money, and he could have got by on a third of what his mother allowed him, he could refuse to accept an inheritance from his father and give it away to the peasants; now, the fifteen hundred roubles a month provided by his mother left him short, and he had unpleasant arguments with her over money. Then, he had considered his true self to be found in his spiritual being; now he found his real ego in a joyous and red-blooded animal existence. **And the whole of this ghastly change had come about in him purely because he had stopped believing in himself and started believing in others...** And Nekhlyudov, with his passionate personality, gave himself up body and soul to his new way of living that everyone approved of and completely drowned out the voice that was demanding something else.”

“Nekhlyudov, like all people, consisted of two persons. One was spiritual, seeking benefit for himself only if it would be a benefit to others; the other was animal, seeking benefit only for himself, and for that benefit prepared to sacrifice a whole world of benefit to others.”

“And in his mind he went through the common experience whereby the face of someone loved but not seen over a long period seems at first to show nothing but the changes that have been wrought in it during the period of absence, only for it to become little by little exactly the same as it was years ago, as the changes slip away and the eyes of the spirit begin to focus on the expression that belongs to that unique and exclusive spiritual personality.”

“Missy was very anxious to be married, and Nekhlyudov was a good match. More than that, she actually liked him and she had taught herself to believe that one day he would be hers (no that she would be his, he would be hers), and in order to achieve her purpose she was subconsciously using all the persistence and ingenuity of someone who was mentally ill.”

“Then, he had been a bold and free spirit, with unlimited possibilities ahead of him; now, he felt trapped on all sides, caught up in the meshes of a stupid, empty, aimless life from which he could see no way of extricating himself, and for the most part didn’t want to. He could remember once having prided himself on being as straight as a die, always telling the truth as a matter of principle, whereas nowadays he lived wholly submerged in falsehood, the most terrible falsehood, which everyone around him took to be the truth. And this falsehood, at least as far as he could see, offered no way out. He was mired in it, he had grown used to it, and he now wallowed in it.”

“This was his prayer, for God to help him, teach him, enter into him and purify him, but even as he prayed for these things, they had already come about. God, who had been alive within him, had now awoken in his conscious mind.”

“And he remembered his intention, arrived at yesterday, to tell all to her husband, ask his forgiveness and commit himself to any kind of satisfaction. But this morning things didn’t seem quite as simple as yesterday.”

“The surprising thing was that the moment Nekhlyudov saw himself as vile and repellent, he stopped seeing other people as repellent.”

“The thing that shocked him most was that Maslova, far from being ashamed of her situation, not as a prisoner—she was ashamed of that—but as a prostitute, she actually seemed to be happy with it, almost proud of it. And yet, it couldn’t have been otherwise. In order to sustain any activity, all people are obliged to regard what they are doing as useful and good. It follows that, whatever situation people may find themselves in, they will always work out an attitude to human life in general that accommodates their activity as something that seems useful and good.”

“Nekhlyudov felt strangely drawn to the prisoners, but his sympathy was mixed with horror and bewilderment at the thought of those who had put them inside and were keeping them there, and an inexplicable sense of shame at his own ability to look on this and stay calm.”

“What made him feel sorry for her was the obvious muddle that existed inside her head. She obviously saw herself as a heroine, willing to lay down her life for the cause, even though she was scarcely capable of explaining what the cause was, or how to measure its success.”

“He was a stickler for carrying out orders from above and very proud of doing so. He was so obsessed with fulfilling orders from above that he now considered anything in the world might be subject to change other than orders from above.”

“Nekhlyudov listened carefully, trying to understand what was going on in front of him, but, as in the District Court, the greatest obstacle to understanding was the fact that they were discussing not the subject that arose naturally as the most important one, but things that were completely irrelevant. The case concerned a newspaper article which had exposed the crooked dealings of a company chairman. One might have thought that the only thing that mattered was whether the company chairman had been fleecing his shareholders, and how to stop him doing so. But not a word of this. The only question up for discussion was whether the publisher did or did not have a legal right to publish its columnist’s article, and what law had been broken by publishing it.”

“He thought of himself as a believer, yet he knew with every fiber of his being that this faith was emphatically ‘not quite right’. And this was why his eyes were never without sadness.”

“ ‘Man’s animal nature is revolting,’ he thought, ‘but as long as it is there in a pure form, you can look down on it from the heights of your spiritual life and despise it, and whether you give in or resist, you stay as you were, but when this animal nature hides itself under a thin cover of poetic charm and pseudo-aestheticism and demands and attitude of worship, then by glorifying your animal nature you let it swallow you up, and you can’t tell good from evil.’”

“ ‘Well, if the Senate has turned it down, it must have been submitted on insufficient grounds’ said Ragozhinsky, evidently sharing the widespread belief that truth is a product of justice.”

“What I mean is this. When you get down to it, there are only two rational forms of punishment, which used to be applied in the olden days—corporal punishment and the death penalty.”

“All people live and function partly by their own ideas, and partly by the ideas of other people. How far they live by their own ideas and how far by the ideas of others is one of the best ways of distinguishing between them. There are some people who largely treat their own ideas like a little intellectual exercise; their reason works like a fly-wheel with no drive-belt, and their actions are determined by other people’s ideas, by custom, tradition or law. There are others, by contrast, who consider their own ideas to be the main motive power behind their activities, and they almost invariably listen to the dictates of their own reason and submit to it, only occasionally falling back on what other people have decided, and then only after critical consideration.”

“In spiritual terms he was Simonson’s exact opposite. Simonson was one of those predominantly masculine types for whom action derives from thought and is determined by it. Novodvorov, by contrast, was a kind of feminine character in whom all mental activity is associated either with the realization of aims inspired by emotion, or with the vindication of actions already taken on the basis of emotion.”

“The general had belonged to that category of enlightened military men who believed in compromise between his profession and the ideas of humanitarianism. But, being by nature a clever and kindly man, he soon saw the impossibility of any such compromise, and, in order to blot out the inner contradictions he had constantly to live with, he gave in progressively to the habit of drinking which is so widespread among the military, and he had become such a slave to this habit that after thirty-five years of service as an army man he had turned into what doctors describe as an alcoholic.”

“And then something happened to Nekhlyudov, the kind of thing that often occurs with people living a spiritual life. What happened was that an idea that at first had seemed weird, paradoxical, maybe even ridiculous, after being confirmed time after time by the process of living, suddenly presented itself as a simple, incontrovertible truth.”