

Tolstoy As Believer

Leo Tolstoy's reputation rests primarily on two great novels—*War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*—written during his middle years. But Count Tolstoy was a man of unconventional beliefs. A would-be social reformer in tsarist Russia, ever at war with himself and his family, he died in 1910 trying to escape home, fame, and fortune. Critic Martin Green looks at the evolution of Tolstoy's disruptive ideas, which came to influence, in turn, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King.

by Martin Green

Although most people would rank Leo Tolstoy among the world's giants because he wrote *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, the novelist himself, in the second half of his life, thought of those great epics as works to be ashamed of.

Indeed, when Lev Nikolayevich, Count Tolstoy died, in 1910, his devotees (including novelist William Dean Howells in America) regarded him primarily as a moral reformer, a strong critic of injustice, war, and, among other things, exactly the kind of fiction he had created in his biggest novels.

To ideological Tolstoyans, his spiritual heir would not be the Nobel laureate in literature, Boris Pasternak, but Mahatma Gandhi, who, in turn, influenced Martin Luther King.

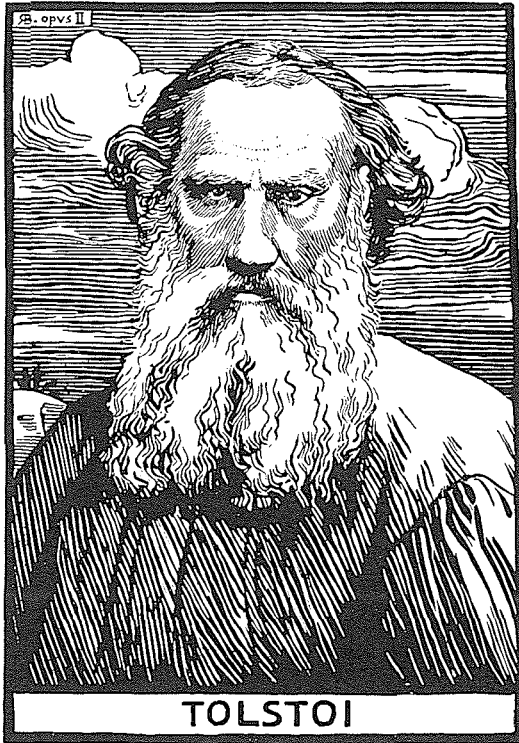
Tolstoy's piety and sense of justice were evident early in his life. A hypersensitive child, he was known to the rest of his family as "*Lyova*

Ryova" (Leo the cry-baby) because of his emotional responses to others' sufferings (and joys).

Tolstoy was born in 1828 into what he called the military "caste" in Russia. Even during the 19th century, tsarist Russia had a peculiarly rigid social structure; and the term "caste" was not inappropriate. The aristocrats were soldiers, and their sons became soldiers after them. When they were not in the Army (or serving as civil administrators), they lived on their vast rural estates, with hundreds of serfs to tend the fields.

Tolstoy's family owned a beautiful place, *Yasnaya Polyana*,* 130 miles south of Moscow. Tolstoy described the rolling countryside, and the hunting there, over and over again in his novels. His father (portrayed as the dashing Nicholas Rostov in *War*

*Tolstoy biographer Henri Troyat translates *Yasnaya Polyana* as "Clear Glade," or "Ash Glade."



Tolstoy at age 73. By the time of this 1901 woodcut, Tolstoy had renounced his famous novels and had become a staunch advocate of nonviolence and of a stern Christian faith.

By R. Bryden for Woodcut Portraits of Twelve Men of Letters of the 19th Century. J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1899.

and Peace) had been an officer in the Army that fought against Napoleon at the turn of the 19th century. And his grandfather (the sardonic Prince Bolkonsky in *War and Peace*) had been a general under Catherine the Great. Of the four Tolstoy brothers, three, including Leo, became officers in the tsarist Army.

Tolstoy drifted, more or less, into military service. Having left Kazan University in 1847 without taking a degree, the young man was tempted for a time to give up his property and live the simple contemplative life at Yasnaya Polyana.

Yet, ever torn by contradictory desires, Tolstoy also longed to be a dandy, like poet Aleksandr Pushkin,

and to cut a handsome figure in the drawing rooms of St. Petersburg, to gamble and duel, to drink and dance with the gypsies.* "A man who pronounced French badly," he wrote at the time, "aroused in me a feeling of contempt." Later, he said of his youth, "I began to grow depraved. . . . I tried to be elegant."

Alternating between the rustic life and the *dolce vita*, the young Tolstoy faithfully recorded, in a diary, his escapades and gambling losses and then severely chastised himself for his profligacy.

*A remote cousin—called the "American Tolstoy" because of his trip to Alaska, from which he returned tattooed—was a famous duelist and gambler, who married a gypsy.

Bored and unhappy, he went south to the Caucasus in 1851. There he joined his older brother, Nicholas, whose regiment was battling the rebellious Muslim tribesmen of that mountainous territory, which Russia had annexed but not absorbed. (This war lasted more than a half-century, and Russia only won it in 1859 after committing some 200,000 troops.) Tolstoy arrived as an observer, but after going along on a number of expeditions, he signed up as a cadet, or *junker*, in the 4th Battery, 20th Artillery Brigade.

Contradictory Feelings

During the next five years, the future pacifist pamphleteer fought in three wars. In addition to service in the Caucasus, Tolstoy participated in an 1854 campaign in Bessarabia against the failing Turkish empire, and in the Crimean War (1853–56) against the British and French. He was intensely patriotic. In his diary sketches from *Sevastopol* (1855–56), the young artilleryman predicted that the stout defense of the besieged Crimean seaport, “whose hero was the Russian people, will leave mighty traces in Russia for a long time to come.”

Yet, even during the 1850s, Tolstoy expressed contradictory feelings about war and imperialism. He was aware of the horror of the one and fretted occasionally about the injustice of the other. As long as he could take a predominantly aesthetic atti-

tude toward life, in which conflicting feelings fitted together like contrasting colors, the excitement of war subsumed its terror. Even so, in his Crimean War diary, he announced—quite unexpectedly—that he was thinking of devoting the rest of his life to founding a new religion, a demythologized Christianity. The impulse faded, momentarily.

Tolstoy had begun writing autobiographical stories while he was in the Caucasus. His first published work, “Childhood,” appeared in the magazine *Sovremennik* in 1852. It was followed by two sequels (“Boyhood” and “Youth”) and by his first war stories, “The Raid” and “The Woodfelling.”

His ambiguous feelings about war, when given literary expression and resolution, helped to make him a great writer. Together with Stendhal, Tolstoy was the progenitor of all modern imaginative treatments of war, in literature and on film. Equally important, Tolstoy’s combat experience planted the seeds of his later pacifism. He wrestled with his feelings about war all his life. In the 1870s, he renounced all violence. Much later, he condemned the Russo-Japanese War (1904–05); yet he still hoped for a Russian victory.

Yet another ambiguity enriched Tolstoy’s early great novels. As a writer, Tolstoy could successfully depict both romantic love and domesticity—an unusual talent in a novelist of adventure. An author who es-

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pouses one cannot easily celebrate the other. One does not find in Hemingway (or in any other American writer, for that matter) the celebration of family life evident in, for instance, the Kitty and Levin episodes of *Anna Karenina*.

By extolling the virtues of hearth and home, Tolstoy implicitly criticized war and adventure while appealing to the bourgeois sentiments of Russia's novel-reading public during the mid-19th century. Although there is often conflict in Tolstoy's writing, as in his beliefs, traditional domestic values clearly triumphed.

Tolstoy had admired many women and had dallied with prostitutes. But he *believed in* a proper marriage to a young and well-educated girl. He wanted to re-create the happy life of his parents at Yasnaya Polyana. Levin's parents, Tolstoy tells us in *Anna Karenina*, "had lived the sort of life which seemed to Levin the ideal of perfection, and which he had dreamed of restoring with a wife and family of his own."

None of Tolstoy's siblings, who were older, had achieved happiness in the wedded state; thus, his faith in marriage had a certain obstinate quality. He savored the works of English novelists Charles Dickens, George Eliot, and Charlotte Brontë, who all celebrated respectable marriage and domestic happiness.

In 1862, Tolstoy, 34, was five years out of the Army. He hated the new ideas on sex and marriage that were circulating in radical circles in St. Petersburg and Moscow.* Feeling that this was his last chance at hap-

piness, he discarded his peasant mistress and married 18-year-old Sonia Bers. He took her away from Moscow to his home in the country; there, he believed, they would raise a big family and live out an idyll of domesticity.

Sonia believed in traditional marriage with a passion equal to Tolstoy's own. She came from a large, happy clan. Her father, a German Lutheran doctor, raised his daughters (who were older than his sons) to look after their siblings. They were trained as schoolteachers and were also proficient housekeepers—ideal 19th-century wives and mothers. Sonia brought sheets to Yasnaya Polyana as part of her dowry; her new husband and his brothers were used to sleeping under blankets on straw mattresses.

"Do As You Like!"

Sonia also had literary taste. She had fallen in love with Tolstoy when she read, and memorized passages of, "Childhood." The wedding seemed to both of them the beginning of life-long happiness.

Before his marriage, Tolstoy had felt the urge to help the less fortunate. He had been engaged in educational experiments with peasant children, operating a free school in his home at Yasnaya Polyana. He and the student-teachers whom he hired toyed with progressive methods. Their school's motto was "Do as you like!" There was no set curriculum, and lessons took the form of informal chats. By the 1860s, Tolstoy had started 14 such schools in his home district of Krapivna (population: 10,000). Tolstoy also tried working and eating with the peasants in the fields, to their astonishment.

Once married and settled down, Tolstoy entered with new intensity

*The new "theories" were the work of three groups: feminists, who championed equal rights for women; populists, who wanted educated young people not to pursue private happiness but to serve "the people"; and variously flavored socialists, who wanted to liberalize marriage, as well as society.

upon the task of writing *War and Peace*. But this enormous enterprise, he said ruefully, took him away from the People and his efforts at social uplift.

Sonia, unimpressed, encouraged Tolstoy to write. "He disgusts me with his People," she confided to her diary. And she hated the presence of his ex-mistress, Aksinia, who lived in the village of Yasnaya Polyana with her son by Tolstoy. Although Sonia did not lack pity for the poor, she belonged to Moscow, to upper-class social life, and to the world of the arts.

Praising Marriage

During the first 16 years of their marriage, however, Sonia's preference for the sophisticated life was submerged by her preoccupation with her children (she bore 13, of whom 8 grew to maturity). In those years, her family came first, with Leo's writing a close second. She took on a large share of the burden of transcription, later claiming to have copied out most of *War and Peace* seven times, in various drafts.

Although *War and Peace* (1865-69) presents the saga of Napoleon, Tsar Alexander, and the great war between Russia and France, it also reflects the personal relations of various Tolstoys and Leo's in-laws. Because it praised marriage and tranquility in private life, *War and Peace* was widely read in the Russian intellectual world of the 1860s as a salute to conservatism. At the time, young Russian student activists were bent on disrupting the status quo and altering all aspects of society, including marriage and the family.

In 1862, a leader of Russian radicalism, N. G. Chernyshevsky, had begun to publish (from prison) a novel called *What Then Must We Do? or Tales of the New People*. It too was

about marriage, but as practiced among young radicals. Though artistically without merit, it became immensely popular among the young; 30 years later, Lenin was influenced by it. It told of a marriage entered into by both parties solely to help the woman achieve economic and political freedom; of husband and wife working for social reform; and of the husband sacrificing his joyous marriage (by pretending suicide) in order to give her still more freedom.

Chernyshevsky portrayed the ideal marriage as a two-person political cell; Tolstoy portrayed it as the joint creation and enjoyment of children, books, ideas, and feelings. Tolstoy's *War and Peace* obliquely contradicted Chernyshevsky and his admirers. And the obliqueness of Tolstoy's criticism was in itself a further provocation to the radicals. During the 1860s in Russia, as during the late 1960s in America, literary fashion demanded that every artistic creation be "relevant," that it make a radical "statement" of some kind. Thus, the anonymous critic for the *Illustrated Gazette* called *War and Peace* "an apologia for gluttonous aristocrats, sanctimony, hypocrisy and vice."

Loving the Peasants

At this stage, Tolstoy opposed political radicalism; he was interested in domesticity, artistic and intellectual freedom, religion, and the aristocracy. Although he had tried more than once before the Emancipation of 1861 to free his own serfs, without success for one reason or another, he did not want them to cease being peasants. He was as enamored of the peasant life as he was of the countryside itself.

"This summer," he wrote a friend in 1870, "I work, chop, spade, mow



In this turn-of-the-century cartoon, Tolstoy, in rural garb, expresses his dismay to two peasants over Western-style high society fashions in Moscow.

and, luckily for me, do not give one thought to that lit-tra-tyure and those awful lit-try folk." Tolstoy detested towns, factories, and industrialism. He cherished the memory of his parents' aristocratic life.

But even when acting the part of a conservative landowner and famous novelist, Tolstoy was afflicted by contending interests and convictions. He hated the bureaucratic apparatus and autocratic cruelty of the Russian state. He loved the peasants, although they often exasperated him with their suspiciousness and stubbornness, and he admired the primitive tribesmen of the Caucasus and Samara. These feelings soon fired his desire to transform society—in his own fashion. To this end, he sought a religion he could believe in.

Tolstoy was attracted by the ascetic Christianity symbolized by the Sermon on the Mount, but he resisted the dogmatic theology, sacraments, and rituals of the Russian Orthodox Church. He despised the magic and mystery of religion. "To reinforce the teachings of Christ with miracles," he proclaimed, "is like holding a lighted candle in front of the sun in order to see it better."

During the 1870s, while he was writing *Anna Karenina*, he managed, for a time, to assent to the church's teachings. It was the obvious religious option for a wealthy landowner. But he soon found the church's elaborate theology and political subservience to the Tsar unacceptable. According to Tolstoy, church leaders had "cut up the



Drawing by Ilya Repin.

teachings into shreds and tacked their idiotic, vile explanations—hateful to Christ—onto every morsel.”

Meanwhile, the outside world intruded on the private enclave of Yasnaya Polyana. Tolstoy's children began to need tutors, and tutors in late 19th-century Russia were ex-students who were also likely to be ex-revolutionaries.

The first tutor Tolstoy hired for Sergei, his oldest son, had been a member of the revolutionary avant-garde in Russia during the 1860s. This militant socialist, named Alekseev, had even journeyed abroad to live in an agricultural commune in Kansas. When Alekseev came to live at Yasnaya Polyana in 1877, Tolstoy, always interested in what made such men tick, eagerly conversed with him. The two men were to influence each other profoundly on political and religious issues. Sergei later described Alekseev as the first Tolstoyan. But, insofar as the prime elements in the new creed they dis-

cussed were meekness and humility, Alekseev far better exemplified those virtues than did Tolstoy.

Their long discussions occurred against a backdrop of increasing unrest in Russia. During the 1860s, Tsar Alexander II antagonized liberal aristocrats by refusing their plea for a national assembly. Newly freed serfs were bitter about the Emancipation of 1861 because they were now forced to pay for land to which they felt they had a natural right. Inspired by writers like Chernyshevsky, and other radicals, hundreds of university students went to the countryside in 1873–74 to incite the peasants to rebel. The young agitators were sent off to prison or exiled to Siberia. In 1876, the Land and Freedom Party was formed by dissident students and the radical intelligentsia; one anarchist faction urged the assassination of public officials.

In 1881, Russia's political malaise reached a climax. Tsar Alexander II was assassinated in St. Petersburg by a band of students, who were soon arrested and sentenced to be executed. Tolstoy could not accept their fate. Dangerous as it might be, he decided to make a personal protest to the new Tsar, Alexander III. He turned to Alekseev for advice in composing his letter. When Sonia discovered what the two men were planning, she furiously (and unsuccessfully) demanded Alekseev's dismissal. Tolstoy's idyll of marriage was beginning to come apart.

After this incident, Sonia made it clear that she opposed any political activity, however high-minded it might be, that threatened her family's security. Later that year, when Sergei was old enough for college, Sonia insisted that they all move to Moscow, where the children could take part in the social life of their

class. From then on, the Tolstoy family lived at Yasnaya Polyana only in the summers; Tolstoy became, in effect, a lodger in his own house, disapproving of his family's stylish ways in silence.

Moscow's fashionable social life, and the grim existence of the under class, profoundly depressed Tolstoy.* But the more he wanted to leave, the more obligations his wife pressed upon him. She nagged him about his duty to family, friends, and country and threatened to commit suicide if he left her.

During the next 30 years, Tolstoy became a savage critic of the old order and an advocate of nonviolent resistance to it. When workers rioted in 1901, Tolstoy wrote to the Tsar: "The army, that is, the men who are prepared to commit murder, is the cause not only of all the calamities, but also of all the corruption of manners in the world."

He wrote no more novels like *War and Peace*. Instead, he turned out inspirational books and pamphlets, led protests against compulsory military service, took up the causes of political prisoners, denounced Russian foreign policy so harshly that he was threatened with imprisonment, and attacked the church so severely that he was excommunicated.

Tolstoy's religious beliefs were very much intertwined with his efforts to reform Russia. In effect, he created the religion he had been seeking in the Sermon on the Mount (and in Buddhist doctrine). This radical faith taught that evil (both government oppression and revolutionary terrorism) must not be re-

sisted by force. The authoritarian state, like violent revolution, was unacceptable to a man of religion; culture, which reflected the state's will, was also contaminated. Tolstoy read, among others, the American abolitionists, men like William Lloyd Garrison, James Russell Lowell, and Henry David Thoreau—and Christian Socialists like Adin Ballou, a Unitarian-Universalist minister who had long been forgotten by his fellow Americans when Tolstoy discovered him in 1889.

No More Meat

Ballou founded a Christian community in Hopedale, Massachusetts, in the 1840s and published *Christian Non-Resistance*. The community broke up in the 1850s, partly because two of its members found a way to make money there. The son of one of them became a general in the Civil War and later ambassador to Italy, and his daughter married an Italian prince. Thus, by 1889, the ideals of Hopedale had, as so often happens in the history of reform, foundered on personal ambition. But Ballou was still alive to receive Tolstoy's enthusiastic letters. Tolstoy saluted him as one of mankind's greatest blessings, translated his book, and wrote an introduction to it that grew into *The Kingdom of God Is Within You* (1894).

In keeping with his professed beliefs in a simple religion and a spartan life, Tolstoy gave up hunting, meat, wine, and tobacco. Whether in Moscow or at Yasnaya Polyana, he wore peasant smocks, hauled wood, and fetched water for his family.

Under his influence, scores of young Russians refused military service; priests left the ministry; writers became civil resisters; city men went to live on agricultural communes. Many of Tolstoy's disciples were ex-

*Always drawn to the poor, Tolstoy volunteered to help take the 1881 Moscow census. He insisted on canvassing the worst slums and wrote about these visits in his own *What Then Must We Do?* (1902).

iled and quite a few ended their lives in prison or Army penal battalions.

Tolstoy's acolytes came from the aristocracy as well as the peasantry; they wanted revolution, but not violence. It was a doomed, almost quixotic movement. Despite the preachings of Tolstoy and his followers, the tsarist government grew more rigid, and its other opponents, more violent. It was not until some seven years after Tolstoy's death that the Russian Revolution successfully dethroned the Tsar. Then or later, there was little role for pacifists to play.

The Dukhobors

Yet Tolstoy scored some minor victories in his time. Perhaps the most useful was persuading the Russian government to let the Dukhobors emigrate in 1898. The Dukhobors, a Christian communitarian sect in the Caucasus, believed that it was wrong to bear arms; they refused military service. The state confiscated their goods, imprisoned their young men, and sent in the Cossacks.

Tolstoy and his followers, Vladimir Chertkov and Paul Biriukov (who were exiled for their efforts), aroused public opinion on the Dukhobors' behalf inside Russia and out (the English and American Quakers were especially responsive). Money was raised by the sale of a new Tolstoy novel, *Resurrection* (1899), the first in more than 20 years. In the end, the Tsar relented, and thousands of Dukhobors were allowed to leave Russia and settle in Canada.

The scant fiction Tolstoy wrote during the latter part of his life was not like *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*. He wrote short tales—"God Sees the Truth but Waits," "How Much Land Does a Man Need?"

and "Master and Man"—on subjects taken from folklore or religious tradition. Written so they could be understood even by barely literate peasants, these stories championed the uncomplicated life and faith of the poor and rejected the accumulation of property. Artistically, these tales are very simple and very beautiful.

Tolstoy also wrote straight polemics—*A Critique of Dogmatic Theology* (1891), *What Then Must We Do?* (1902), *A Confession* (1882)—against the Orthodox Church, the state, the ruling class.

It was one of these tracts, *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, that had an overwhelming effect on Gandhi, who was inspired by it to lead his life of political and moral protest. Describing Tolstoy in 1909 as the "Titan of Russia," Gandhi declared himself to be Tolstoy's "humble follower." For his part, Tolstoy, having read Gandhi's manifesto, respected the young reformer, "except for his Hindu patriotism, which spoils everything."

Sonia's Distress

Tolstoy's tracts were mostly banned from publication in Russia. They were printed abroad, however, notably in Geneva, where Biriukov had settled, and in England, where Chertkov had set up the Free World Press. In one of the few books that did come out in Russian, *What Is Art?* (1898), Tolstoy finally repudiated high art and his own work as a novelist.

For the artist, Tolstoy wrote, "it is more important and useful to compose a tale, a touching little song, a *divertissement* or sketch or light interlude, or draw a picture that will delight dozens of generations, that is, millions of children and adults, than



The last photograph of Leo and Sonya together, taken at Yasnaya Polyana in 1910, the year Tolstoy died.

Photo by S. A. Tolstoy.

a novel, symphony or painting that will enchant a few representatives of the wealthy classes and then be forgotten forever."

Tolstoy thought of *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* as having been written for the few. "Art must not be regarded as a means of procuring pleasure," he argued, "but as an aspect of social life." The mark of quality for a work of art, he felt, was the approval of the masses.

Although his later books were regularly suppressed by church and state censors during the 1880s and '90s, everything Tolstoy said and did aroused excitement. He had, of course, lost his former allies among the conservatives, men like the poet Afanasy Fet and the Slavophiles Yuri Samarin and Ivan Aksokov. And he was not acceptable to Marxist revolutionaries because he repudiated violence. But, between those extremes, there were thousands of Russians to whom Tolstoy was a hero.

When the tsarist authorities banned the distribution of *What I Believe* (1883) after the book was printed, no copies were actually destroyed, and Tolstoy's words found their readers. Many other manuscripts, with titles like "Shame!" and "Is There No Way Out?" were copied by hand or typed and circulated clandestinely—like the present-day *Samizdat* literature of Soviet dissidents.

None of this, of course, pleased Tolstoy's wife. His new argumentative style seemed to Sonia boring and harsh; his new egalitarian ideas impractical when they were not wrong.

In his diary, Tolstoy outlined the ideal existence for his family: "Our life, food and clothes will be of the utmost simplicity. Everything superfluous, piano, furniture, coach horses, will be sold or given away. Concentrate exclusively on the sciences and arts that can be under-

TOLSTOY AND THE 1905 REVOLUTION

On Sunday, January 22, 1905, Russian workers marched on Tsar Nicholas II's Winter Palace in St. Petersburg demanding an eight-hour workday and a national constitution; several hundred were slain by the Tsar's guards. "Bloody Sunday" was followed by scattered uprisings, culminating in a nationwide railroad strike and the short-lived formation, in St. Petersburg, of a Soviet of Workers' Deputies. At Yasnaya Polyana, Tolstoy was upset by the civil unrest. He sided with the workers' push for change. But he detested both the use of violence in trying to achieve it and the rhetoric of the radical activists who invoked Karl Marx and Georgy Gapon. Here, in a letter dated September 20, 1906, he gives his views to an admirer, critic V. V. Stasov, head of the St. Petersburg Public Library:

Unless the people, the real people, the hundred million peasants who work on the land, by their passive non-participation in violence make all this frivolous, noisy, irritable and touchy crowd harmless and unnecessary, we shall certainly arrive at a military dictatorship, and arrive at it by way of the great crimes and corruption which have already begun. In order to replace an obsolete system by another one, it is necessary to set up an ideal which is lofty, universal and accessible to all the people. But the intelligentsia and the proletariat who are goaded on by them have nothing like that—they have only words, and not their own, but other people's. So this is what I think: I rejoice for the revolution, but grieve for those who, imagining that they are making it, are destroying it. The violence of the old regime will only be destroyed by non-participation in violence, and not at all by the new and foolish acts of violence which are now being committed.

stood by all. Equal treatment for all, from governor to beggar."

To Sonia, such notions simply reflected the old socialist ideas of men like Chernyshevsky, who had earlier extolled the glories of the "new" marriage. As she saw it, Tolstoy during the 1880s and '90s was behaving and writing like his radical critics of the 1860s.

Saluted by much of liberal Europe and Russia as the victim of authoritarian repression, Tolstoy was no hero in his own house. Almost his entire family—not just Sonia—was against him. His five sons rejected his schemes for reforming society

and found his preaching foolish. They and Sonia allowed him to have his opinions as long as he merely wrote them down and "did nothing about them." While he lived with his family, Tolstoy remained under their control. By living at home, he also lived in considerable comfort; hence, as critics noted, his public sermons on simplifying one's life seemed tinged with hypocrisy.

To keep peace in the family, Tolstoy transferred to Sonia the copyrights on his early books and gave her control over his property. But he continued to reside at Yasnaya Polyana or at the house in Moscow. He

believed private property was evil; "Property equals theft," he proclaimed. But self-dispossession was as far as he felt he could go toward poverty without incurring the wrath of his demanding clan.

Tolstoy might wear a peasant blouse, cobble his own shoes, eat only oatmeal, but he was served by footmen wearing white gloves. His daughters wore the latest fashions, played tennis, and listened to the gramophone. Celebrities came to dinner. To his family, servants, and guests, he was still Count Tolstoy, the nobleman and novelist who had an odd growing penchant for asceticism.

As we have seen, the government, too, coddled Tolstoy. It let him write his subversive books and publish them abroad or circulate them secretly. It did not punish him; it arrested those who read the books and tried to implement their teachings. To the Russian authorities, Tolstoy was a valuable national property, albeit a man with ill-considered theories that were heretical and potentially dangerous.

This suppression by indulgence was soft torture for Tolstoy. But he submitted himself to it, accepted it as a form of martyrdom that came his way, even though it was psychologically more painful than the outright punishment (prison or the gallows) he expected and half hoped for.

In October 1910, he awoke one night at Yasnaya Polyana to find Sonia rifling his desk drawers seeking his diary. Fed up with this control and his self-contradictory life, Tolstoy, at age 82, tried to run away and hide.

This was, of course, impossible. He was recognized everywhere he went; newspapers carried the story. His wife summoned her children and hired a special train to pursue him. At one point, he fell ill and was taken to the stationmaster's house in the village of Astapovo, 200 miles southwest of Moscow. When Sonia arrived, she was not allowed to see him. Even the cameramen of Pathé-News were there, recording the domestic tragedy—photographing Sonia peering through the windows of the house in which her husband lay stricken with pneumonia. He finally died on November 20, 1910.

An Enduring Power

Thus, Tolstoy's 30-year crusade to transform Russian society started in his middle years, after the two great novels, and ended with a frantic, doomed attempt to escape from his family, his fame, and his wealth. All had conspired to exacerbate the ambiguities of his life.

Although he had inspired scores of young Russians and had helped to bring the inequities of the tsarist regime to the fore, his pacifism and religiousity were inevitably spurned by the anarchists and militant Marxists who turned Russian society upside down in 1917 and gave us the Soviet Union.

In the end, Tolstoy's love of social justice and his credo of nonviolence found no place in his own culture. His ideas could not prosper in Russia. Transformed into action in other settings, first by Mahatma Gandhi in British India, and later by Martin Luther King in the American South, however, these ideas developed a power that endures to this day.