

MY RELIGION

by Leo Tolstoy

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I have not always been possessed of the religious ideas set forth in this book. For thirty-five years of my life I was, in the proper acceptation of the word, a nihilist—not a revolutionary socialist, but a man who believed in nothing. Five years ago faith came to me; I believed in the doctrine of Jesus, and my whole life underwent a sudden transformation. What I had once wished for I wished for no longer, and I began to desire what I had never desired before. What had once appeared to me right now became wrong, and the wrong of the past I beheld as right. My condition was like that of a man who goes forth upon some errand, and having traversed a portion of the road, decides that the matter is of no importance, and turns back. What was at first on his right hand is now on his left, and what was at his left hand is now on his right; instead of going away from his abode, he desires to get back to it as soon as possible. My life and my desires were completely changed; good and evil interchanged meanings. Why so? Because I understood the doctrine of Jesus in a different way from that in which I had understood it before. It is not my purpose to expound the doctrine of Jesus; I wish only to tell how it was that I came to understand what there is in this doctrine that is simple, clear, evident, indisputable; how I understand that part of it which appeals to all men, and how this understanding refreshed my soul and gave me

happiness and peace. I do not intend to comment on the doctrine of Jesus; I desire only that all comment shall be forever done away with. The Christian sects have always maintained that all men, however unequal in education and intelligence, are equal before God; that divine truth is accessible to every one. Jesus has even declared it to be the will of God that what is concealed from the wise shall be revealed to the simple. Not every one is able to understand the mysteries of dogmatics, homiletics, liturgics, hermeneutics, apologetics; but every one is able and ought to understand what Jesus Christ said to the millions of simple and ignorant people who have lived, and who are living to-day. Now, the things that Jesus said to simple people who could not avail themselves of the comments of Paul, of Clement, of Chrysostom, and of others, are just what I did not understand, and which, now that I have come to understand them, I wish to make plain to all. The thief on the cross believed in the Christ, and was saved. If the thief, instead of dying on the cross, had descended from it, and told all men of his belief in the Christ, would not the result have been of great good? Like the thief on the cross, I believe in the doctrine of Jesus, and this belief has made me whole. This is not a vain comparison, but a truthful expression of my spiritual condition; my soul, once filled with despair of life and fear of death, is now full of happiness and peace. Like the thief, I knew that my past and present life was vile; I saw that the majority of men about me lived unworthy lives. I knew, like the thief, that I was wretched and suffering, that all those about me suffered and were wretched; and I saw before me nothing but death to save me from this condition. As the thief was nailed to his cross, so I was nailed to a life of suffering and evil by an incomprehensible power. And as the thief saw before him, after the sufferings of a foolish life, the horrible shadows of death, so I beheld the same vista opening before me. In all this I felt that I was like the thief. There

was, however, a difference in our conditions; he was about to die, and I—I still lived. The dying thief thought perhaps to find his salvation beyond the grave, while I had before me life and its mystery this side the grave. I understood nothing of this life; it seemed to me a frightful thing, and then—I understood the words of Jesus, and life and death ceased to be evil; instead of despair, I tasted joy and happiness that death could not take away. Will any one, then, be offended if I tell the story of how all this came about?

LEO TOLSTOY Moscow, January 22, 1884.

Chapter 1 I shall explain elsewhere, in two voluminous treatises, why I did not understand the doctrine of Jesus, and how at length it became clear to me. These works are a criticism of dogmatic theology and a new translation of the four Gospels, followed by a concordance. In these writings I seek methodically to disentangle everything that tends to conceal the truth from men; I translate the four Gospels anew, verse by verse, and I bring them together in a new concordance. The work has lasted for six years. Each year, each month, I discover new meanings which corroborate the fundamental idea; I correct the errors which have crept in, and I put the last touches to what I have already written. My life, whose final term is not far distant, will doubtless end before I have finished my work; but I am convinced that the work will be of great service; so I shall do all that I can to bring it to completion. I do not now concern myself with this outward work upon theology and the Gospels, but with an inner work of an entirely different nature. I have to do now with nothing systematic or methodical, only with that sudden light which showed me the Gospel doctrine in all its simple beauty. The process was something similar to that experienced by one who, following an erroneous model, seeks to restore a statue

from broken bits of marble, and who with one of the most refractory fragments in hand perceives the hopelessness of his ideal; then he begins anew, and instead of the former incongruities he finds, as he observes the outlines of each fragment, that all fit well together and form one consistent whole. That is exactly what happened to me, and is what I wish to relate. I wish to tell how I found the key to the true meaning of the doctrine of Jesus, and how by this meaning doubt was absolutely driven from my soul. The discovery came about in this way. From my childhood, from the time I first began to read the New Testament, I was touched most of all by that portion of the doctrine of Jesus which inculcates love, humility, self-denial, and the duty of returning good for evil. This, to me, has always been the substance of Christianity; my heart recognized its truth in spite of scepticism and despair, and for this reason I submitted to a religion professed by a multitude of toilers, who find in it the solution of life—the religion taught by the Orthodox Church. But in making my submission to the Church, I soon saw that I should not find in its creed the confirmation of the essence of Christianity; what was to me essential seemed to be in the dogma of the Church merely an accessory. What was to me the most important of the teachings of Jesus was not so regarded by the Church. No doubt (I thought) the Church sees in Christianity, aside from its inner meaning of love, humility, and self-denial, an outer, dogmatic meaning, which, however strange and even repulsive to me, is not in itself evil or pernicious. But the further I went on in submission to the doctrine of the Church, the more clearly I saw in this particular point something of greater importance than I had at first realized. What I found most repulsive in the doctrine of the Church was the strangeness of its dogmas and the approval, nay, the support, which it gave to persecutions, to the death penalty, to wars stirred up by the intolerance common to all sects; but my faith was chiefly shattered by

the indifference of the Church to what seemed to me essential in the teachings of Jesus, and its partiality for what seemed to me of secondary importance. I felt that something was wrong; but I could not see where the fault lay, because the doctrine of the Church did not deny what seemed to me essential in the doctrine of Jesus; this essential was fully recognized, yet in such a way as not to give it the first place. I could not accuse the Church of denying the essence of the doctrine of Jesus, but it was recognized in a way which did not satisfy me. The Church did not give me what I expected from her. I had passed from nihilism to the Church simply because I felt it to be impossible to live without religion, that is, without a knowledge of good and evil aside from animal instincts. I hoped to find this knowledge in Christianity; but Christianity I then saw only as a vague spiritual tendency, from which it was impossible to deduce any clear and peremptory rules for the guidance of life. These I sought and these I demanded of the Church. The Church offered me rules wherein I not only sought in vain the practice of the Christian life so dear to me, but which drove me still further away. I could not become a disciple of the Church. An existence based upon Christian truth was to me indispensable, and the Church only offered me rules completely at variance with the truth that I loved. The rules of the Church touching articles of faith, dogmas, the observance of the sacrament, fasts, prayers, were not necessary to me, and did not seem to be based on Christian truth. Moreover, the rules of the Church weakened and sometimes destroyed the Christian disposition of soul which alone gave meaning to my life. I was troubled most that the miseries of humanity, the habit of judging one another, of passing judgment upon nations and religions, and the wars and massacres which resulted in consequence, all went on with the approbation of the Church. The doctrine of Jesus—judge not, be humble,

forgive offences, deny self, love—this doctrine was extolled by the Church in words, but at the same time the Church approved what was incompatible with the doctrine. Was it possible that the doctrine of Jesus admitted of such contradiction? I could not believe so. Another astonishing thing about the Church was that the passages upon which it based affirmation of its dogmas were those which were most obscure. On the other hand, the passages from which came the moral laws were the most clear and precise. And yet the dogmas and the duties depending upon them were definitely formulated by the Church, while the recommendation to obey the moral law was put in the most vague and mystical terms. Was this the intention of Jesus? The Gospels alone could dissipate my doubts. I read them once and again. Of all the other portions of the Gospels, the Sermon on the Mount always had for me an exceptional importance. I now read it more frequently than ever. Nowhere does Jesus speak with greater solemnity, nowhere does he propound moral rules more definitely and practically, nor do these rules in any other form awaken more readily an echo in the human heart; nowhere else does he address himself to a larger multitude of the common people. If there are any clear and precise Christian principles, one ought to find them here. I therefore sought the solution of my doubts in Matthew 5, 6, and 7, comprising the Sermon on the Mount. These chapters I read very often, each time with the same emotional ardor, as I came to the verses which exhort the hearer to turn the other cheek, to give up his cloak, to be at peace with all the world, to love his enemies—but each time with the same disappointment. The divine words were not clear. They exhorted to a renunciation so absolute as to entirely stifle life as I understood it; to renounce everything, therefore, could not, it seemed to me, be essential to salvation. And the moment this ceased to be an absolute condition, clearness and precision were at an end.

I read not only the Sermon on the Mount; I read all the Gospels and all the theological commentaries on the Gospels. I was not satisfied with the declarations of the theologians that the Sermon on the Mount was only an indication of the degree of perfection to which man should aspire; that man, weighed down by sin, could not reach such an ideal; and that the salvation of humanity was in faith and prayer and grace. I could not admit the truth of these propositions. It seemed to me a strange thing that Jesus should propound rules so clear and admirable, addressed to the understanding of every one, and still realize man's inability to carry his doctrine into practice. Then as I read these maxims I was permeated with the joyous assurance that I might that very hour, that very moment, begin to practise them. The burning desire I felt led me to the attempt, but the doctrine of the Church rang in my ears—Man is weak, and to this he cannot attain;—my strength soon failed. On every side I heard, "You must believe and pray"; but my wavering faith impeded prayer. Again I heard, "You must pray, and God will give you faith; this faith will inspire prayer, which in turn will invoke faith that will inspire more prayer, and so on, indefinitely." Reason and experience alike convinced me that such methods were useless. It seemed to me that the only true way was for me to try to follow the doctrine of Jesus. And so, after all this fruitless search and careful meditation over all that had been written for and against the divinity of the doctrine of Jesus, after all this doubt and suffering, I came back face to face with the mysterious Gospel message. I could not find the meanings that others found, neither could I discover what I sought. It was only after I had rejected the interpretations of the wise critics and theologians, according to the words of Jesus, "Except ye... become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18: 3)—it was only then that I suddenly understood what had been so meaningless

before. I understood, not through exegetical fantasies or profound and ingenious textual combinations; I understood everything, because I put all commentaries out of my mind. This was the passage that gave me the key to the whole:— “Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil.” (Matthew 5: 38, 39.) One day the exact and simple meaning of these words came to me; I understood that Jesus meant neither more nor less than what he said. What I saw was nothing new; only the veil that had hidden the truth from me fell away, and the truth was revealed in all its grandeur. “Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil.” These words suddenly appeared to me as if I had never read them before. Always before, when I had read this passage, I had, singularly enough, allowed certain words to escape me, “But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil.” To me it had always been as if the words just quoted had never existed, or had never possessed a definite meaning. Later on, as I talked with many Christians familiar with the Gospel, I noticed frequently the same blindness with regard to these words. No one remembered them, and often in speaking of this passage, Christians took up the Gospel to see for themselves if the words were really there. Through a similar neglect of these words I had failed to understand the words that follow:— “But whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also,” etcetera. (Matthew 5:39) Always these words had seemed to me to demand long-suffering and privation contrary to human nature. They touched me; I felt that it would be noble to follow them, but I also felt that I had not the strength to put them into practice. I said to myself, “If I turn the other cheek, I shall get another blow; if I give, all that I have will be taken away. Life would be an impossibility. Since life is given to me, why should I deprive myself of it? Jesus cannot demand as much as that.” Thus I

reasoned, persuaded that Jesus, in exalting long-suffering and privation, made use of exaggerated terms lacking in clearness and precision; but when I understood the words "Resist not evil," I saw that Jesus did not exaggerate, that he did not demand suffering for suffering, but that he had formulated with great clearness and precision exactly what he wished to say. "Resist not evil," knowing that you will meet with those who, when they have struck you on one cheek and met with no resistance, will strike you on the other; who, having taken away your coat, will take away your cloak also; who, having profited by your labor, will force you to labor still more without reward. And yet, though all this should happen to you, "Resist not evil"; do good to them that injure you. When I understood these words as they are written, all that had been obscure became clear to me, and what had seemed exaggerated I saw to be perfectly reasonable. For the first time I grasped the pivotal idea in the words "Resist not evil"; I saw that what followed was only a development of this command; I saw that Jesus did not exhort us to turn the other cheek that we might endure suffering, but that his exhortation was, "Resist not evil," and that he afterward declared suffering to be the possible consequence of the practice of this maxim. A father, when his son is about to set out on a far journey, commands him not to tarry by the way; he does not tell him to pass his nights without shelter, to deprive himself of food, to expose himself to rain and cold. He says, "Go thy way, and tarry not, though thou should'st be wet or cold." So Jesus does not say, "Turn the other cheek and suffer." He says, "Resist not evil"; no matter what happens, "Resist not." These words, "Resist not evil," when I understood their significance, were to me the key that opened all the rest. Then I was astonished that I had failed to comprehend words so clear and precise. "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil." Whatever

injury the evil-disposed may inflict upon you, bear it, give all that you have, but resist not. Could anything be more clear, more definite, more intelligible than that? I had only to grasp the simple and exact meaning of these words, just as they were spoken, when the whole doctrine of Jesus, not only as set forth in the Sermon on the Mount, but in the entire Gospels, became clear to me; what had seemed contradictory was now in harmony; above all, what had seemed superfluous was now indispensable. Each portion fell into harmonious unison and filled its proper part, like the fragments of a broken statue when adjusted in harmony with the sculptor's design. In the Sermon on the Mount, as well as throughout the whole Gospel, I found everywhere affirmation of the same doctrine, "Resist not evil." In the Sermon on the Mount, as well as in many other places, Jesus represents his disciples, those who observe the rule of non-resistance to evil, as turning the other cheek, giving up their cloaks, persecuted, used despitefully, and in want. Everywhere Jesus says that he who taketh not up his cross, he who does not renounce worldly advantage, he who is not ready to bear all the consequences of the commandment, "Resist not evil," cannot become his disciple. To his disciples Jesus says, Choose to be poor; bear all things without resistance to evil, even though you thereby bring upon yourself persecution, suffering, and death. Prepared to suffer death rather than resist evil, he reproved the resentment of Peter, and died exhorting his followers not to resist and to remain always faithful to his doctrine. The early disciples observed this rule, and passed their lives in misery and persecution, without rendering evil for evil. It seems, then, that Jesus meant precisely what he said. We may declare the practice of such a rule to be very difficult; we may deny that he who follows it will find happiness; we may say with the unbelievers that Jesus was a dreamer, an idealist who propounded impracticable maxims; but it is impossible not to admit that he expressed in a manner at

once clear and precise what he wished to say; that is, that according to his doctrine a man must not resist evil, and, consequently, that whoever adopts his doctrine will not resist evil. And yet neither believers nor unbelievers will admit this simple and clear interpretation of Jesus' words.

Chapter 2 When I apprehended clearly the words "Resist not evil," my conception of the doctrine of Jesus was entirely changed; and I was astounded, not that I had failed to understand it before, but that I had misunderstood it so strangely. I knew, as we all know, that the true significance of the doctrine of Jesus was comprised in the injunction to love one's neighbor. When we say, "Turn the other cheek," "Love your enemies," we express the very essence of Christianity. I knew all that from my childhood; but why had I failed to understand aright these simple words? Why had I always sought for some ulterior meaning? "Resist not evil" means, never resist, never oppose violence; or, in other words, never do anything contrary to the law of love. If any one takes advantage of this disposition and affronts you, bear the affront, and do not, above all, have recourse to violence. This Jesus said in words so clear and simple that it would be impossible to express the idea more clearly. How was it then, that believing or trying to believe these to be the words of God, I still maintained the impossibility of obeying them? If my master says to me, "Go; cut some wood," and I reply, "It is beyond my strength," I say one of two things: either I do not believe what my master says, or I do not wish to obey his commands. Should I then say of God's commandment that I could not obey it without the aid of a supernatural power? Should I say this without having made the slightest effort of my own to obey? We are told that God descended to earth to save mankind; that salvation was secured by the second person of the Trinity, who suffered for men, thereby redeeming them from sin, and gave them the Church as the

shrine for the transmission of grace to all believers; but aside from this, the Saviour gave to men a doctrine and the example of his own life for their salvation. How, then, could I say that the rules of life which Jesus has formulated so clearly and simply for every one—how could I say that these rules were difficult to obey, that it was impossible to obey them without the assistance of a supernatural power? Jesus saw no such impossibility; he distinctly declared that those who did not obey could not enter into the kingdom of God. Nowhere did he say that obedience would be difficult; on the contrary, he said in so many words, “My yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11: 30). And John, the evangelist, says, “His commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5: 3). Since God declared the practice of his law to be easy, and himself practised it in human form, as did also his disciples, how dared I speak of the impossibility of obedience without the aid of a supernatural power? If one bent all his energies to overthrow any law, what could he say of greater force than that the law was essentially impracticable, and that the maker of the law knew it to be impracticable and unattainable without the aid of a supernatural power? Yet that is exactly what I had been thinking of the command, “Resist not evil.” I endeavored to find out how it was that I got the idea that Jesus’ law was divine, but that it could not be obeyed; and as I reviewed my past history, I perceived that the idea had not been communicated to me in all its crudeness (it would then have been revolting to me), but insensibly I had been imbued with it from childhood, and all my after life had only confirmed me in error. From my childhood I had been taught that Jesus was God, and that his doctrine was divine, but at the same time I was taught to respect as sacred the institutions which protected me from violence and evil. I was taught to resist evil, that it was humiliating to submit to evil, and that resistance to it was praiseworthy. I was taught to judge, and to inflict punishment. Then I was

taught the soldier's trade, that is, to resist evil by homicide; the army to which I belonged was called "The Christophile Army," and it was sent forth with a Christian benediction. From infancy to manhood I learned to venerate things that were in direct contradiction to the law of Jesus—to meet an aggressor with his own weapons, to avenge myself by violence for all offences against my person, my family, or my race. Not only was I not blamed for this; I learned to regard it as not at all contrary to the law of Jesus. All that surrounded me, my personal security and that of my family and my property—depended then upon a law which Jesus reproved—the law of "a tooth for a tooth." My spiritual instructors taught me that the law of Jesus was divine, but, because of human weakness, impossible of practice, and that the grace of Jesus Christ alone could aid us to follow its precepts. And this instruction agreed with what I received in secular institutions and from the social organization about me. I was so thoroughly possessed with this idea of the impracticability of the divine doctrine, and it harmonized so well with my desires, that not till the time of awakening did I realize its falsity. I did not see how impossible it was to confess Jesus and his doctrine, "Resist not evil," and at the same time deliberately assist in the organization of property, of tribunals, of governments, of armies; to contribute to the establishment of a polity entirely contrary to the doctrine of Jesus, and at the same time pray to Jesus to help us to obey his commands, to forgive our sins, and to aid us that we resist not evil. I did not see, what is very clear to me now, how much more simple it would be to organize a method of living conformable to the law of Jesus, and then to pray for tribunals, and massacres, and wars, and all other things indispensable to our happiness. Thus I came to understand the source of error into which I had fallen. I had confessed Jesus with my lips, but my heart was still far from him. The command, "Resist not evil," is the central point of Jesus'

doctrine; it is not a mere verbal affirmation; it is a rule whose practice is obligatory. It is verily the key to the whole mystery; but the key must be thrust to the bottom of the lock. When we regard it as a command impossible of performance, the value of the entire doctrine is lost. Why should not a doctrine seem impracticable, when we have suppressed its fundamental proposition? It is not strange that unbelievers look upon it as totally absurd. When we declare that one may be a Christian without observing the commandment, "Resist not evil," we simply leave out the connecting link which transmits the force of the doctrine of Jesus into action. Some time ago I was reading in Hebrew, the fifth chapter of Matthew with a Jewish rabbi. At nearly every verse the rabbi said, "This is in the Bible," or "This is in the Talmud," and he showed me in the Bible and in the Talmud sentences very like the declarations of the Sermon on the Mount. When we reached the words, "Resist not evil," the rabbi did not say, "This is in the Talmud," but he asked me, with a smile, "Do the Christians obey this command? Do they turn the other cheek?" I had nothing to say in reply, especially as at that particular time, Christians, far from turning the other cheek, were smiting the Jews upon both cheeks. I asked him if there were anything similar in the Bible or in the Talmud. "No," he replied, "there is nothing like it; but tell me, do the Christians obey this law?" It was only another way of saying that the presence in the Christian doctrine of a commandment which no one observed, and which Christians themselves regarded as impracticable, is simply an avowal of the foolishness and nullity of that law. I could say nothing in reply to the rabbi. Now that I understand the exact meaning of the doctrine, I see clearly the strangely contradictory position in which I was placed. Having recognized the divinity of Jesus and of his doctrine, and having at the same time organized a life wholly contrary to that doctrine, what remained for me but to look upon the

doctrine as impracticable? In words I had recognized the doctrine of Jesus as sacred; in actions, I had professed a doctrine not at all Christian, and I had recognized and revered the anti-Christian customs which hampered my life upon every side. The persistent message of the Old Testament is that misfortunes came upon the Hebrew people because they believed in false gods and denied Jehovah. Samuel accuses the people of adding to their other apostasies the choice of a man, upon whom they depended for deliverance instead of upon Jehovah, who was their true King. "Turn not aside after tohu, after vain things," Samuel says to the people; "turn not aside after vain things, which cannot profit nor deliver; for they are tohu, are vain." "Fear Jehovah and serve him.... But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king". And so with me, faith in tohu, in vain things, in empty idols, had concealed the truth from me. Across the path which led to the truth, tohu, the idol of vain things, rose before me, cutting off the light, and I had not the strength to beat it down. On a certain day, at this time, I was walking in Moscow towards the Borovitzky Gate, where was stationed an old lame beggar, with a dirty cloth wrapped about his head. I took out my purse to bestow an alms; but at the same moment I saw a young soldier emerging from the Kremlin at a rapid pace, head well up, red of face, wearing the State insignia of military dignity. The beggar, on perceiving the soldier, arose in fear, and ran with all his might towards the Alexander Garden. The soldier, after a vain attempt to come up with the fugitive, stopped, shouting forth an imprecation upon the poor wretch who had established himself under the gateway contrary to regulations. I waited for the soldier. When he approached me, I asked him if he knew how to read. "Yes; why do you ask?" "Have you read the New Testament?" "Yes." "And do you remember the words, 'If thine enemy hunger, feed him...'" I repeated the passage. He

remembered it, and heard me to the end. I saw that he was uneasy. Two passers-by stopped and listened. The soldier seemed to be troubled that he should be condemned for doing his duty in driving persons away from a place where they had been forbidden to linger. He thought himself at fault, and sought for an excuse. Suddenly his eye brightened; he looked at me over his shoulder, as if he were about to move away. "And the military regulation, do you know anything about that?" he demanded. "No," I said. "In that case, you have nothing to say to me," he retorted, with a triumphant wag of the head, and elevating his plume once more, he marched away to his post. He was the only man that I ever met who had solved, with an inflexible logic, the question which eternally confronted me in social relations, and which rises continually before every man who calls himself a Christian.

Chapter 3 We are wrong when we say that the Christian doctrine is concerned only with the salvation of the individual, and has nothing to do with questions of State. Such an assertion is simply a bold affirmation of an untruth, which, when we examine it seriously, falls of itself to the ground. It is well (so I said); I will resist not evil; I will turn the other cheek in private life; but hither comes the enemy, or here is an oppressed nation, and I am called upon to do my part in the struggle against evil, to go forth and kill. I must decide the question, to serve God or tohu, to go to war or not to go. Perhaps I am a peasant; I am appointed mayor of a village, a judge, a juryman; I am obliged to take the oath of office, to judge, to condemn. What ought I to do? Again I must choose between the divine law and the human law. Perhaps I am a monk living in a monastery; the neighboring peasants trespass upon our pasturage, and I am appointed to resist evil, to plead for justice against the wrong-doers. Again I must choose. It is a dilemma from which no man can escape. I do not speak

of those whose entire lives are passed in resisting evil, as military authorities, judges, or governors. No one is so obscure that he is not obliged to choose between the service of God and the service of tohu, in his relation to the State. My very existence, entangled with that of the State and the social existence organized by the State, exacts from me an anti-Christian activity directly contrary to the commandments of Jesus. In fact, with conscription and compulsory jury service, this pitiless dilemma arises before every one. Every one is forced to take up murderous weapons; and even if he does not get as far as murder, his weapons must be ready, his carbine loaded, and his sword keen of edge, that he may declare himself ready for murder. Every one is forced into the service of the courts to take part in meting out judgment and sentence; that is, to deny the commandment of Jesus, "Resist not evil," in acts as well as in words. The soldier's problem, the Gospel or military regulations, divine law or human law, is before mankind to-day as it was in the time of Samuel. It was forced upon Jesus and upon his disciples; it is forced in these times upon all who would be Christians; and it was forced upon me. The law of Jesus, with its doctrine of love, humility, and self-denial, touched my heart more deeply than ever before. But everywhere, in the annals of history, in the events that were going on about me, in my individual life, I saw the law opposed in a manner revolting to sentiment, conscience, and reason, and encouraging to brute instincts. I felt that if I adopted the law of Jesus, I should be alone; I should pass many unhappy hours; I should be persecuted and afflicted as Jesus had said. But if I adopted the human law, everybody would approve; I should be in peace and safety, with all the resources of civilization at my command to put my conscience at ease. As Jesus said, I should laugh and be glad. I felt all this, and so I did not analyze the meaning of the doctrine of Jesus, but sought to understand it in such a way that it might not

interfere with my life as an animal. That is, I did not wish to understand it at all. This determination not to understand led me into delusions which now astound me. As an instance in point, let me explain my former understanding of these words:— “Judge not, that ye be not judged.” (Matthew 7: 1.) “Judge not, and ye shall not be judged; condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned.” (Luke 6: 37.) The courts in which I served, and which insured the safety of my property and my person, seemed to be institutions so indubitably sacred and so entirely in accord with the divine law, it had never entered into my head that the words I have quoted could have any other meaning than an injunction not to speak ill of one’s neighbor. It never occurred to me that Jesus spoke in these words of the courts of human law and justice. It was only when I understood the true meaning of the words, “Resist not evil,” that the question arose as to Jesus’ advice with regard to tribunals. When I understood that Jesus would denounce them, I asked myself, Is not this the real meaning: Not only do not judge your neighbor, do not speak ill of him, but do not judge him in the courts, do not judge him in any of the tribunals that you have instituted? Now in Luke (6: 37-49) these words follow immediately the doctrine that exhorts us to resist not evil and to do good to our enemies. And after the injunction, “Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful,” Jesus says, “Judge not, and ye shall not be judged; condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned.” “Judge not;” does not this mean, Institute no tribunals for the judgment of your neighbor? I had only to bring this boldly before myself when heart and reason united in an affirmative reply. To show how far I was before from the true interpretation, I shall confess a foolish pleasantry for which I still blush. When I was reading the New Testament as a divine book at the time that I had become a believer, I was in the habit of saying to my friends who were judges or attorneys, “And

you still judge, although it is said, 'Judge not, and ye shall not be judged'?" I was so sure that these words could have no other meaning than a condemnation of evil-speaking that I did not comprehend the horrible blasphemy which I thus committed. I was so thoroughly convinced that these words did not mean what they did mean, that I quoted them in their true sense in the form of a pleasantry. I shall relate in detail how it was that all doubt with regard to the true meaning of these words was effaced from my mind, and how I saw their purport to be that Jesus denounced the institution of all human tribunals, of whatever sort; that he meant to say so, and could not have expressed himself otherwise. When I understood the command, "Resist not evil," in its proper sense, the first thing that occurred to me was that tribunals, instead of conforming to this law, were directly opposed to it, and indeed to the entire doctrine; and therefore that if Jesus had thought of tribunals at all, he would have condemned them. Jesus said, "Resist not evil"; the sole aim of tribunals is to resist evil. Jesus exhorted us to return good for evil; tribunals return evil for evil. Jesus said that we were to make no distinction between those who do good and those who do evil; tribunals do nothing else. Jesus said, Forgive, forgive not once or seven times, but without limit; love your enemies, do good to them that hate you—but tribunals do not forgive, they punish; they return not good but evil to those whom they regard as the enemies of society. It would seem, then, that Jesus denounced judicial institutions. Perhaps (I said) Jesus never had anything to do with courts of justice, and so did not think of them. But I saw that such a theory was not tenable. Jesus, from his childhood to his death, was concerned with the tribunals of Herod, of the Sanhedrim, and of the High Priests. I saw that Jesus must have regarded courts of justice as wrong. He told his disciples that they would be dragged before the judges, and gave them advice as to how they should comport themselves. He

said of himself that he should be condemned by a tribunal, and he showed what the attitude toward judges ought to be. Jesus, then, must have thought of the judicial institutions which condemned him and his disciples; which have condemned and continue to condemn millions of men. Jesus saw the wrong and faced it. When the sentence against the woman taken in adultery was about to be carried into execution, he absolutely denied the possibility of human justice, and demonstrated that man could not be the judge since man himself was guilty. And this idea he has propounded many times, as where it is declared that one with a beam in his eye cannot see the mote in another's eye, or that the blind cannot lead the blind. He even pointed out the consequences of such misconceptions—the disciple would be above his Master. Perhaps, however, after having denounced the incompetency of human justice as displayed in the case of the woman taken in adultery, or illustrated in the parable of the mote and the beam; perhaps, after all, Jesus would admit of an appeal to the justice of men where it was necessary for protection against evil; but I soon saw that this was inadmissible. In the Sermon on the Mount, he says, addressing the multitude, "And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also." (Matthew 5: 40.) Once more, perhaps Jesus spoke only of the personal bearing which a man should have when brought before judicial institutions, and did not condemn justice, but admitted the necessity in a Christian society of individuals who judge others in properly constituted forms. But I saw that this view was also inadmissible. When he prayed, Jesus besought all men, without exception, to forgive others, that their own trespasses might be forgiven. This thought he often expresses. He who brings his gift to the altar with prayer must first grant forgiveness. How, then, could a man judge and condemn when his religion commanded him to forgive all trespasses, without limit? So

I saw that according to the doctrine of Jesus no Christian judge could pass sentence of condemnation. But might not the relation between the words "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged" and the preceding or subsequent passages permit us to conclude that Jesus, in saying "Judge not," had no reference whatever to judicial institutions? No; this could not be so; on the contrary, it is clear from the relation of the phrases that in saying "Judge not," Jesus did actually speak of judicial institutions. According to Matthew and Luke, before saying "Judge not, condemn not," his command was to resist not evil. And prior to this, as Matthew tells us, he repeated the ancient criminal law of the Jews, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." Then, after this reference to the old criminal law, he added, "But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil"; and, after that, "Judge not." Jesus did, then, refer directly to human criminal law, and reproved it in the words, "Judge not." Moreover, according to Luke, he not only said, "Judge not," but also, "Condemn not." It was not without a purpose that he added this almost synonymous word; it shows clearly what meaning should be attributed to the other. If he had wished to say "Judge not your neighbor," he would have said "neighbor"; but he added the words which are translated "Condemn not," and then completed the sentence, "And ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven." But some may still insist that Jesus, in expressing himself in this way, did not refer at all to the tribunals, and that I have read my own thoughts into his teachings. Let the apostles tell us what they thought of courts of justice, and if they recognized and approved of them. The apostle James says (4: 11, 12):— "Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest

another?" The word translated "speak evil" is the verb [Greek word] which means "to speak against, to accuse"; this is its true meaning, as any one may find out for himself by opening a dictionary. In the translation we read, "He that speaketh evil of his brother, ... speaketh evil of the law." Why so? is the question that involuntarily arises. I may speak evil of my brother, but I do not thereby speak evil of the law. If, however, I accuse my brother, if I bring him to justice, it is plain that I thereby accuse the law of Jesus of insufficiency: I accuse and judge the law. It is clear, then, that I do not practise the law, but that I make myself a judge of the law. "Not to judge, but to save" is Jesus' declaration. How then shall I, who cannot save, become a judge and punish? The entire passage refers to human justice, and denies its authority. The whole epistle is permeated with the same idea. In the second chapter we read:— "For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy is exalted above judgment." (James 2: 13.) (The last phrase has been translated in such a way as to declare that judgment is compatible with Christianity, but that it ought to be merciful.) James exhorts his brethren to have no respect of persons. If you have respect of the condition of persons, you are guilty of sin; you are like the untrustworthy judges of the tribunals. You look upon the beggar as the refuse of society, while it is the rich man who ought to be so regarded. He it is who oppresses you and draws you before the judgment-seats. If you live according to the law of love for your neighbor, according to the law of mercy (which James calls "the law of liberty," to distinguish it from all others)—if you live according to this law, it is well. But if you have respect of persons, you transgress the law of mercy. Then (doubtless thinking of the case of the woman taken in adultery, who, when she was brought before Jesus, was about to be put to death according to the law), thinking, no doubt, of that case, James says that he who

inflicts death upon the adulterous woman would himself be guilty of murder, and thereby transgress the eternal law; for the same law forbids both adultery and murder. "So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy is exalted above judgment." (James 2: 12, 13.) Could the idea be expressed in terms more clear and precise? Respect of persons is forbidden, as well as any judgment that shall classify persons as good or bad; human judgment is declared to be inevitably defective, and such judgment is denounced as criminal when it condemns for crime; judgment is blotted out by the eternal law, the law of mercy. I open the epistles of Paul, who had been a victim of tribunals, and in the letter to the Romans I read the admonitions of the apostle for the vices and errors of those to whom his words are addressed; among other matters he speaks of courts of justice:— "Who, knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them." (Romans 1: 32.) "Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things." (Romans 2: 1.) "Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" (Romans 2: 4.) Such was the opinion of the apostles with regard to tribunals, and we know that human justice was among the trials and sufferings that they endured with steadfastness and resignation to the will of God. When we think of the situation of the early Christians, surrounded by unbelievers, we can understand that a denial of the right to judge persecuted Christians before the tribunals was not considered. The apostles spoke of it only incidentally as an evil, and denied its authority on every occasion. I examined the teachings of the early

Fathers of the Church, and found them to agree in obliging no one to judge or to condemn, and in urging all to bear the inflictions of justice. The martyrs, by their acts, declared themselves to be of the same mind. I saw that Christianity before Constantine regarded tribunals only as an evil which was to be endured with patience; but it never could have occurred to any early Christian that he could take part in the administration of the courts of justice. It is plain, therefore, that Jesus' words, "Judge not, condemn not," were understood by his first disciples, as they ought to be understood now, in their direct and literal meaning: judge not in courts of justice; take no part in them. All this seemed absolutely to corroborate my conviction that the words, "Judge not, condemn not," referred to the justice of tribunals. Yet the meaning, "Speak not evil of your neighbor," is so firmly established, and courts of justice flaunt their decrees with so much assurance and audacity in all Christian societies, with the support even of the Church, that for a long time still I doubted the wisdom of my interpretation. If men have understood the words in this way (I thought), and have instituted Christian tribunals, they must certainly have some reason for so doing; there must be a good reason for regarding these words as a denunciation of evil-speaking, and there is certainly a basis of some sort for the institution of Christian tribunals; perhaps, after all, I am in the wrong. I turned to the Church commentaries. In all, from the fifth century onward, I found the invariable interpretation to be, "Accuse not your neighbor"; that is, avoid evil-speaking. As the words came to be understood exclusively in this sense, a difficulty arose—How to refrain from judgment? It being impossible not to condemn evil, all the commentators discussed the question, What is blamable and what is not blamable? Some, such as Chrysostom and Theophylact, said that, as far as servants of the Church were concerned, the phrase could not be construed as a prohibition of censure, since the apostles

themselves were censorious. Others said that Jesus doubtless referred to the Jews, who accused their neighbors of shortcomings, and were themselves guilty of great sins. Nowhere a word about human institutions, about tribunals, to show how they were affected by the warning, "Judge not." Did Jesus sanction courts of justice, or did he not? To this very natural question I found no reply—as if it was evident that from the moment a Christian took his seat on the judge's bench he might not only judge his neighbor, but condemn him to death. I turned to other writers, Greek, Catholic, Protestant, to the [others], to the historical school. Everywhere, even by the most liberal commentators, the words in question were interpreted as an injunction against evil-speaking. But why, contrary to the spirit of the whole doctrine of Jesus, are these words interpreted in so narrow a way as to exclude courts of justice from the injunction, "Judge not"? Why the supposition that Jesus in forbidding the comparatively light offence of speaking evil of one's neighbor did not forbid, did not even consider, the more deliberate judgment which results in punishment inflicted upon the condemned? To all this I got no response; not even an allusion to the least possibility that the words "to judge" could be used as referring to a court of justice, to the tribunals from whose punishments so many millions have suffered. Moreover, when the words, "Judge not, condemn not," are under discussion, the cruelty of judging in courts of justice is passed over in silence, or else commended. The commentators all declare that in Christian societies tribunals are necessary, and in no way contrary to the law of Jesus. Realizing this, I began to doubt the sincerity of the commentators; and I did what I should have done in the first place; I turned to the textual translations of the words which we render "to judge" and "to condemn." In the original these words are [Greek word] and [Greek word]. The defective translation in James of [Greek word], which is

rendered "to speak evil," strengthened my doubts as to the correct translation of the others. When I looked through different versions of the Gospels, I found [it] rendered in the Vulgate by condemnare, "to condemn"; in the Slavonic text the rendering is equivalent to that of the Vulgate; Luther has verdammen, "to speak evil of." These divergent renderings increased my doubts, and I was obliged to ask again the meaning of [the word], as used by the two evangelists, and as used by Luke who, scholars tell us, wrote very correct Greek. How would these words be translated by a man who knew nothing of the evangelical creed, and who had before him only the phrases in which they are used? Consulting the dictionary, I found that the word had several different meanings, among the most used being "to condemn in a court of justice," and even "to condemn to death," but in no instance did it signify "to speak evil." I consulted a dictionary of New Testament Greek, and found that was often used in the sense "to condemn in a court of justice," sometimes in the sense "to choose," never as meaning "to speak evil." From which I inferred that the word might be translated in different ways, but that the rendering "to speak evil" was the most forced and far-fetched. I searched for the word which follows [it], evidently to define more closely the sense in which the latter is to be understood. I looked for [it] in the dictionary, and found that it had no other signification than "to condemn in judgment," or "to judge worthy of death." I found that the word was used four times in the New Testament, each time in the sense "to condemn under sentence, to judge worthy of death." In James (5: 6) we read, "Ye have condemned and killed the just." The word rendered "condemned" is this same [as it], and is used with reference to Jesus, who was condemned to death by a court of justice. The word is never used in any other sense, in the New Testament or in any other writing in the Greek language. What, then, are we to say to all this? Is my

conclusion a foolish one? Is not every one who considers the fate of humanity filled with horror at the sufferings inflicted upon mankind by the enforcement of criminal codes—a scourge to those who condemn as well as to the condemned—from the slaughters of Genghis Khan to those of the French Revolution and the executions of our own times? He would indeed be without compassion who could refrain from feeling horror and repulsion, not only at the sight of human beings thus treated by their kind, but at the simple recital of death inflicted by the knout, the guillotine, or the gibbet. The Gospel, of which every word is sacred to you, declares distinctly and without equivocation: “You have from of old a criminal law, An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth; but a new law is given you, That you resist not evil. Obey this law; render not evil for evil, but do good to every one, forgive every one, under all circumstances.” Further on comes the injunction, “Judge not,” and that these words might not be misunderstood, Jesus added, “Condemn not; condemn not in justice the crimes of others.” “No more death-warrants,” said an inner voice —“no more death-warrants,” said the voice of science; “evil cannot suppress evil.” The Word of God, in which I believed, told me the same thing. And when in reading the doctrine, I came to the words, “Condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven,” could I look upon them as meaning simply that I was not to indulge in gossip and evil-speaking, and should continue to regard tribunals as a Christian institution, and myself as a Christian judge? I was overwhelmed with horror at the grossness of the error into which I had fallen.

Chapter 4 I now understood the words of Jesus: “Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, That ye resist not evil.” Jesus’ meaning is: “You have thought that you were acting in a reasonable manner in defending yourself by violence

against evil, in tearing out an eye for an eye, by fighting against evil with criminal tribunals, guardians of the peace, armies; but I say unto you, Renounce violence; have nothing to do with violence; do harm to no one, not even to your enemy." I understood now that in saying "Resist not evil," Jesus not only told us what would result from the observance of this rule, but established a new basis for society conformable to his doctrine and opposed to the social basis established by the law of Moses, by Roman law, and by the different codes in force to-day. He formulated a new law whose effect would be to deliver humanity from its self-inflicted woes. His declaration was: "You believe that your laws reform criminals; as a matter of fact, they only make more criminals. There is only one way to suppress evil, and that is to return good for evil, without respect of persons. For thousands of years you have tried the other method; now try mine, try the reverse." Strange to say, in these later days, I talked with different persons about this commandment of Jesus, "Resist not evil," and rarely found any one to coincide with my opinion! Two classes of men would never, even by implication, admit the literal interpretation of the law. These men were at the extreme poles of the social scale—they were the conservative Christian patriots who maintained the infallibility of the Church, and the atheistic revolutionists. Neither of these two classes was willing to renounce the right to resist by violence what they regarded as evil. And the wisest and most intelligent among them would not acknowledge the simple and evident truth, that if we once admit the right of any man to resist by violence what he regards as evil, every other man has equally the right to resist by violence what he regards as evil. Not long ago I had in my hands an interesting correspondence between an orthodox Slavophile and a Christian revolutionist. The one advocated violence as a partisan of a war for the relief of brother Slavs in bondage; the other, as a partisan of revolution, in

the name of our brothers the oppressed Russian peasantry. Both invoked violence, and each based himself upon the doctrine of Jesus. The doctrine of Jesus is understood in a hundred different ways; but never, unhappily, in the simple and direct way which harmonizes with the inevitable meaning of Jesus' words. Our entire social fabric is founded upon principles that Jesus reprobated; we do not wish to understand his doctrine in its simple and direct acceptance, and yet we assure ourselves and others that we follow his doctrine, or else that his doctrine is not expedient for us. Believers profess that Christ as God, the second person of the Trinity, descended upon earth to teach men by his example how to live; they go through the most elaborate ceremonies for the consummation of the sacraments, the building of temples, the sending out of missionaries, the establishment of priesthoods, for parochial administration, for the performance of rituals; but they forget one little detail—the practice of the commandments of Jesus. Unbelievers endeavor in every possible way to organize their existence independent of the doctrine of Jesus, they having decided a priori that this doctrine is of no account. But to endeavor to put his teachings in practice, this each refuses to do; and the worst of it is, that without any attempt to put them in practice, both believers and unbelievers decide a priori that it is impossible. Jesus said, simply and clearly, that the law of resistance to evil by violence, which has been made the basis of society, is false, and contrary to man's nature; and he gave another basis, that of non-resistance to evil, a law which, according to his doctrine, would deliver man from wrong. "You believe" (he says in substance) "that your laws, which resort to violence, correct evil; not at all; they only augment it. For thousands of years you have tried to destroy evil by evil, and you have not destroyed it; you have only augmented it. Do as I command you, follow my example, and you will know that my doctrine is true." Not

only in words, but by his acts, by his death, did Jesus propound his doctrine, "Resist not evil." Believers listen to all this. They hear it in their churches, persuaded that the words are divine; they worship Jesus as God, and then they say: "All this is admirable, but it is impossible; as society is now organized, it would derange our whole existence, and we should be obliged to give up the customs that are so dear to us. We believe it all, but only in this sense: That it is the ideal toward which humanity ought to move; the ideal which is to be attained by prayer, and by believing in the sacraments, in the redemption, and in the resurrection of the dead." The others, the unbelievers, the free-thinkers who comment on the doctrine of Jesus, the historians of religions, the Strausses, the Renans—completely imbued with the teachings of the Church, which says that the doctrine of Jesus accords with difficulty with our conceptions of life—tell us very seriously that the doctrine of Jesus is the doctrine of a visionary, the consolation of feeble minds; that it was all very well preached in the fishermen's huts by Galilee; but that for us it is only the sweet dream of one whom Renan calls the "charmant docteur." In their opinion, Jesus could not rise to the heights of wisdom and culture attained by our civilization. If he had been on an intellectual level with his modern critics, he never would have uttered his charming nonsense about the birds of the air, the turning of the other cheek, the taking no thought for the morrow. These historical critics judge of the value of Christianity by what they see of it as it now exists. The Christianity of our age and civilization approves of society as it now is, with its prison-cells, its factories, its houses of infamy, its parliaments; but as for the doctrine of Jesus, which is opposed to modern society, it is only empty words. The historical critics see this, and, unlike the so-called believers, having no motives for concealment, submit the doctrine to a careful analysis; they refute it systematically, and prove that Christianity is

made up of nothing but chimerical ideas. It would seem that before deciding upon the doctrine of Jesus, it would be necessary to understand of what it consisted; and to decide whether his doctrine is reasonable or not, it would be well first to realize that he said exactly what he did say. And this is precisely what we do not do, what the Church commentators do not do, what the free-thinkers do not do—and we know very well why. We know perfectly well that the doctrine of Jesus is directed at and denounces all human errors, all tohu, all the empty idols that we try to except from the category of errors, by dubbing them “Church,” “State,” “Culture,” “Science,” “Art,” “Civilization.” But Jesus spoke precisely of all these, of these and all other tohu. Not only Jesus, but all the Hebrew prophets, John the Baptist, all the true sages of the world denounced the Church and State and culture and civilization of their times as sources of man’s perdition. Imagine an architect who says to a house-owner, “Your house is good for nothing; you must rebuild it,” and then describes how the supports are to be cut and fastened. The proprietor turns a deaf ear to the words, “Your house is good for nothing,” and only listens respectfully when the architect begins to discuss the arrangement of the rooms. Evidently, in this case, all the subsequent advice of the architect will seem to be impracticable; less respectful proprietors would regard it as nonsensical. But it is precisely in this way that we treat the doctrine of Jesus. I give this illustration for want of a better. I remember now that Jesus in teaching his doctrine made use of the same comparison. “Destroy this temple,” he said, “and in three days I will raise it up.” It was for this they put him on the cross, and for this they now crucify his doctrine. The least that can be asked of those who pass judgment upon any doctrine is that they shall judge of it with the same understanding as that with which it was propounded. Jesus understood his doctrine, not as a vague and distant ideal

impossible of attainment, not as a collection of fantastic and poetical reveries with which to charm the simple inhabitants on the shores of Galilee; to him his doctrine was a doctrine of action, of acts which should become the salvation of mankind. This he showed in his manner of applying his doctrine. The crucified one who cried out in agony of spirit and died for his doctrine was not a dreamer; he was a man of action. They are not dreamers who have died, and still die, for his doctrine. No; that doctrine is not a chimera! All doctrine that reveals the truth is chimerical to the blind. We may say, as many people do say (I was of the number), that the doctrine of Jesus is chimerical because it is contrary to human nature. It is against nature, we say, to turn the other cheek when we have been struck, to give all that we possess, to toil not for ourselves but for others. It is natural, we say, for a man to defend his person, his family, his property; that is to say, it is the nature of man to struggle for existence. A learned person has proved scientifically that the most sacred duty of man is to defend his rights, that is, to fight. But the moment we detach ourselves from the idea that the existing organization established by man is the best, is sacred, the moment we do this, the objection that the doctrine of Jesus is contrary to human nature turns immediately upon him who makes it. No one will deny that not only to kill or torture a man, but to torture a dog, to kill a fowl or a calf, is to inflict suffering reprobated by human nature. (I have known of farmers who had ceased to eat meat solely because it had fallen to their lot to slaughter animals.) And yet our existence is so organized that every personal enjoyment is purchased at the price of human suffering contrary to human nature. We have only to examine closely the complicated mechanism of our institutions that are based upon coercion to realize that coercion and violence are contrary to human nature. The judge who has condemned according to the code, is not willing to hang the criminal with his own hands; no clerk

would tear a villager from his weeping family and cast him into prison; the general or the soldier, unless he be hardened by discipline and service, will not undertake to slay a hundred Turks or Germans or destroy a village, would not, if he could help it, kill a single man. Yet all these things are done, thanks to the administrative machinery which divides responsibility for misdeeds in such a way that no one feels them to be contrary to nature. Some make the laws, others execute them; some train men by discipline to automatic obedience; and these last, in their turn, become the instruments of coercion, and slay their kind without knowing why or to what end. But let a man disentangle himself for a moment from this complicated network, and he will readily see that coercion is contrary to his nature. Let us abstain from affirming that organized violence, of which we make use to our own profit, is a divine, immutable law, and we shall see clearly which is most in harmony with human nature—the doctrine of violence or the doctrine of Jesus. What is the law of nature? Is it to know that my security and that of my family, all my amusements and pleasures, are purchased at the expense of misery, deprivation, and suffering to thousands of human beings—by the terror of the gallows; by the misfortune of thousands stifling within prison walls; by the fear inspired by millions of soldiers and guardians of civilization, torn from their homes and besotted by discipline, to protect our pleasures with loaded revolvers against the possible interference of the famishing? Is it to purchase every fragment of bread that I put in my mouth and the mouths of my children by the numberless privations that are necessary to procure my abundance? Or is it to be certain that my piece of bread only belongs to me when I know that every one else has a share, and that no one starves while I eat? It is only necessary to understand that, thanks to our social organization, each one of our pleasures, every minute of our cherished tranquility, is obtained by the

sufferings and privations of thousands of our fellows—it is only necessary to understand this, to know what is conformable to human nature; not to our animal nature alone, but the animal and spiritual nature which constitutes man. When we once understand the doctrine of Jesus in all its bearings, with all its consequences, we shall be convinced that his doctrine is not contrary to human nature; but that its sole object is to supplant the chimerical law of the struggle against evil by violence—itself the law contrary to human nature and productive of so many evils. Do you say that the doctrine of Jesus, “Resist not evil,” is vain? What, then, are we to think of the lives of those who are not filled with love and compassion for their kind—of those who make ready for their fellow-men punishment at the stake, by the knout, the wheel, the rack, chains, compulsory labor, the gibbet, dungeons, prisons for women and children, the hecatombs of war, or bring about periodical revolutions; of those who carry these horrors into execution; of those who benefit by these calamities or prepare reprisals—are not such lives vain? We need only understand the doctrine of Jesus, to be convinced that existence—not the reasonable existence which gives happiness to humanity, but the existence men have organized to their own hurt—that such an existence is a vanity, the most savage and horrible of vanities, a veritable delirium of folly, to which, once reclaimed, we do not again return. God descended to earth, became incarnate to redeem Adam’s sin, and (so we were taught to believe) said many mysterious and mystical things which are difficult to understand, which it is not possible to understand except by the aid of faith and grace—and suddenly the words of God are found to be simple, clear, and reasonable! God said, Do no evil, and evil will cease to exist. Was the revelation from God really so simple—nothing but that? It would seem that every one might understand it, it is so simple! The prophet Elijah, a fugitive from men, took

refuge in a cave, and was told that God would appear to him. There came a great wind that devastated the forest; Elijah thought that the Lord had come, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind came the thunder and the lightning, but God was not there. Then came the earthquake: the earth belched forth fire, the rocks were shattered, the mountain was rent to its foundations; Elijah looked for the Lord, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. Then, in the calm that followed, a gentle breeze came to the prophet, bearing the freshness of the fields; and Elijah knew that God was there. It is a magnificent illustration of the words, "Resist not evil." They are very simple, these words; but they are, nevertheless, the expression of a law divine and human. If there has been in history a progressive movement for the suppression of evil, it is due to the men who understood the doctrine of Jesus—who endured evil, and resisted not evil by violence. The advance of humanity towards righteousness is due, not to the tyrants, but to the martyrs. As fire cannot extinguish fire, so evil cannot suppress evil. Good alone, confronting evil and resisting its contagion, can overcome evil. And in the inner world of the human soul, the law is as absolute as it was for the hearers by Galilee, more absolute, more clear, more immutable. Men may turn aside from it, they may hide its truth from others; but the progress of humanity towards righteousness can only be attained in this way. Every step must be guided by the command, "Resist not evil." A disciple of Jesus may say now, with greater assurance than they of Galilee, in spite of misfortunes and threats: "And yet it is not violence, but good, that overcomes evil." If the progress is slow, it is because the doctrine of Jesus (which, through its clearness, simplicity, and wisdom, appeals so inevitably to human nature), because the doctrine of Jesus has been cunningly concealed from the majority of mankind under an entirely different doctrine falsely called by his name.

