

WHAT SHALL WE DO by Leo Tolstoy

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CHAPTER 20 All slavery is based solely on the fact that one man can deprive another of his life, and by threatening to do so can compel him to do his will. We may see for certain that whenever one man is enslaved by another, when, against his own will and by the will of another, he does certain actions contrary to his inclination, the cause, if traced to its source, is nothing more nor less than a result of this threat. If a man gives to others all his labour, has not enough to eat, has to send his little children from home to work hard, leaves the land, and devotes all his life to a hated and unnecessary task, which happens before our own eyes in the world (which we term civilized because we ourselves live in it), then we may certainly say that he does so only because not to do so would be equivalent to loss of life. Therefore in our civilized world, where the majority of the people, amidst terrible privations, perform hated labours unnecessary to themselves, the greater number of men are in a slavery based on the threat of being deprived of their existence. Of what, then, does this slavery consist? Wherein lies this power of threat? In olden times the means of subjugation and the threat to kill were plain and obvious to all: the primitive means of enslaving men then consisted in a direct threat to kill with the sword. An armed man said to an unarmed, "I can kill thee, as thou hast seen I have done to thy brother, but I do not want to do it: I will spare thee—first, because it is not agreeable for me to kill thee; secondly, because, as well for me as for thee, it will be

more convenient that thou shouldst labour for me than that I should kill thee. Therefore do all I order thee to do, but know that, if thou refusest, I will take thy life." So the unarmed man submitted to the armed one and did everything he was ordered to do. The unarmed man laboured, the armed threatened. This was that personal slavery which appeared first among all nations, and which still exists among primitive races. This means of enslaving always begins the work; but when life becomes more complicated it undergoes a change. With the complication of life such a method presents great inconveniences to the oppressor. Before he can appropriate the labour of the weaker he must feed and clothe them and keep them at work, and so their number remains small; and, besides, this compels the slave-holder to remain continually with the slaves, driving them to work by the threat of murdering them. And thus another means of subjugation is developed. Five thousand years ago (according to the Bible) this novel, convenient, and clever means of oppression was discovered by Joseph the Beautiful. It is similar to that employed now in the menageries for taming restive horses and wild beasts. It is hunger! This contrivance is thus described in the Bible: Genesis 41: 48-57— And he [Joseph] gathered up all the food of the seven years, which were in the land of Egypt, and laid up the food in the cities: the food of the field, which was round about every city, laid he up in the same. And Joseph gathered corn as the sand of the sea, very much, until he left numbering; for it was without number. And the seven years of plenteousness, that was in the land of Egypt, were ended. And the seven years of dearth began to come, according as Joseph had said: and the dearth was in all lands; but in all the land of Egypt, there was bread. And when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread: and Pharaoh said unto all the Egyptians, Go unto Joseph; what he said to you, do. And the famine was over all the face of

the earth: And Joseph opened all the storehouses, and sold unto the Egyptians; and the famine waxed sore in the land of Egypt. And all countries came into Egypt to Joseph for to buy corn; even because that the famine was so sore in all lands. Joseph, making use of the primitive means of enslaving men by the threat of the sword, gathered corn during the years of plenty in expectation of years of famine which generally follow years of plenty—men know all this without the dreams of Pharaoh—and then by the pangs of hunger he made all the Egyptians and the inhabitants of the surrounding countries slaves to Pharaoh more securely and conveniently. And when the people began to be famished, he arranged matters so as to keep them in his power forever. Genesis 47: 13-26— And there was no bread in all the land; for the famine was very sore, so that the land of Egypt and all the land of Canaan fainted by reason of the famine. And Joseph gathered up all the money that was found in the land of Egypt, and in the land of Canaan, for the corn which they bought: and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's house. And when money failed in the land of Egypt, and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came unto Joseph, and said, Give us bread: for why should we die in thy presence? for the money faileth. And Joseph said, Give your cattle; and I will give you for your cattle, if money fail. And they brought their cattle unto Joseph: and Joseph gave them bread in exchange for horses, and for the flocks, and for the cattle of the herds, and for the asses: and he fed them with bread for all their cattle for that year. When that year was ended, they came unto him the second year, and said unto him, We will not hide it from my Lord, how that our money is spent; my lord also hath our herds of cattle; there is not ought left in the sight of my lord, but our bodies, and our lands: Wherefore shall we die before thine eyes, both we and our land? buy us and our land for bread, and we and our land will be servants unto Pharaoh: and give us seed, that we may live, and not die, and that the

land be not desolate. And Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh; for the Egyptians sold every man his field, because the famine prevailed over them: so the land became Pharaoh's. And as for the people, he removed them to cities from one end of the borders of Egypt even to the other end thereof. Only the lands of the priests bought he not; for the priests had a portion assigned them of Pharaoh, and did eat their portion which Pharaoh gave them: wherefore they sold not their lands. Then Joseph said unto the people, Behold, I have bought you this day and your land for Pharaoh: lo, here is seed for you, and ye shall sow the land. And it shall come to pass in the increase, that ye shall give the fifth part unto Pharaoh, and four parts shall be your own, for seed of the field, and for your food, and for them of your households, and for food for your little ones. And they said, Thou hast saved our lives: let us find grace in the sight of my lord, and we will be Pharaoh's servants. And Joseph made it a law over the land of Egypt unto this day, that Pharaoh should have the fifth part; except the land of the priests only, which became not Pharaoh's. Formerly, in order to appropriate labour, Pharaoh had to use violence towards them; but now, when the stores and the land belonged to Pharaoh, he had only to keep these stores by force, and hunger compelled the men to labour for him. All the land now belonged to Pharaoh, and he had all the stores (which were taken away from the people); and therefore, instead of driving them to work individually by the sword, he had only to keep food from them and they were enslaved, not by the sword, but by hunger. In a year of scarcity, all men may be starved to death at Pharaoh's will; and in a year of plenty, all may be killed who, from casual misfortunes, have no stores of corn. Thus comes into operation the second means of enslaving, not directly with the sword—that is, by the strong man driving the weak one to labour under threat of killing him—but by the strong one having taken away from the weak the stores of corn which,

keeping by the sword, he compels the weak to work for. Joseph said to the hungry men, "I could starve you to death, because I have the corn; but I will spare your lives, but only under the condition that you do all I order you for the food which I will give you." For the first means of enslaving, the oppressor only needs soldiers to ride to and fro among the inhabitants, and make them fulfil the requirements of their master under threat of death. And thus the oppressor has only to pay his soldiers. But with the second means, besides the soldiers, the oppressor must have different assistants for keeping and protecting the land and stores from the starving people. These are the Josephs and their stewards and distributors. And the oppressor has to reward them, and to give Joseph a dress of brocade, a gold ring, and servants, and corn and silver to his brothers and relatives. Besides this, from the very nature of the second means, not only the stewards and their relations, but all who have stores of corn become participators in this violence, just as by the first means, based upon immediate force, every one who has arms becomes a partner in tyranny, so by this means, based upon hunger, every one who has stores of provision shares in it, and has power over those who have no stores. The advantage of this method over the former consists, first and chiefly, in the fact that the oppressor need no longer compel the workmen to do his will by force, for they themselves come to him and sell themselves to him; secondly, in the circumstance that fewer men escape from his violence. The drawback is, that he has to employ a greater number of men. For the oppressed the advantage of it consists in the fact that they are no longer exposed to rough violence but are left to themselves; and can always hope to pass from being the oppressed to becoming oppressors in their turn, which by fortunate circumstances they sometimes really do. The drawback for them is, that they can never escape from participating in the oppression of others. This new means of enslaving generally comes

into operation together with the old one; and the oppressor lessens the one and increases the other according to his desires. But this does not fully satisfy the man who wishes to take away as much as possible of the products of the labour of as many working-people as he can find, and to enslave as many men as possible; and, therefore, a third means of oppression is evolved. This is the slavery of taxation, and, like the second, it is based upon hunger; but to the means of subduing men by depriving them of bread is added the deprivation of other necessaries. The oppressor requires from the slaves so much of the money he himself has coined, that, in order to obtain it, the slaves are compelled to sell not only stores of corn in greater quantity than the fifth part which was fixed by Joseph, but the first necessaries of life as well—meat, skins, wool, clothes, firewood, even their buildings; and therefore the oppressor always keeps his slaves in his power, not only by hunger, but by thirst, cold and other privations. And thus the third means of slavery comes into operation, a monetary, tributary one, consisting in the oppressor saying to the oppressed, “I can do with each of you just what I like; I can kill and destroy you by taking away the land by which you earn your living; I can, with this money which you must give me, buy all the corn upon which you feed, and sell it to strangers, and at any time annihilate you by starvation; I can take from you all that you have—your cattle, your houses, your clothes; but it is neither convenient nor agreeable for me to do so, and therefore I let you alone, to work as you please; only give me so much of the money which I demand of you, either as a poll-tax, or according to your land or the quantity of your food and drink, or your clothes or your houses. Give me this money, and do what you like among yourselves, but know that I shall neither protect nor maintain widows nor orphans nor invalids nor old people, nor such as have been burned out: I shall only protect the regular circulation of this money. This

right will always be mine, to protect only those who regularly give me the fixed number of these pieces of money: as to how or where you get it, I shall not in the least trouble myself." And so the oppressor distributes these pieces of money as an acknowledgement that his demand has been complied with. The second method of enslaving consisted in this, that, having taken away the fifth part of the harvest, and collected stores of corn, Pharaoh, besides the personal slavery by the sword, received, by his assistants, the possibility of dominion over the working-people during the time of famine, and over some of them during misfortunes which happen to them. The third method consists in this: Pharaoh requires from the working-people more money than the value of the fifth part of corn which he took from them; he and his assistants get a new means of dominion over the working-class, not merely during the famine and their casual misfortunes, but permanently. By the second method, men retain some stores of corn which help them to bear indifferent harvests and casual misfortunes without going into slavery; but by the third, when there are more demands, the stores, not of corn only but of all other necessaries of life are taken away from them, and at the first misfortune a workman, having neither stores of corn nor any other stores which he might exchange for corn, falls into slavery to those who have money. To set the first in motion an oppressor need have only soldiers, and share the booty with them; for the second, besides the protectors of the land and the stores, he must have collectors and clerks for the distribution of the corn; for the third, besides the soldiers for keeping the land and his property, he must have collectors of taxes, assessors of direct taxation, supervisors, custom-house clerks, managers of money, and coiners of it. The organization of the third method is much more complicated than that of the second. By the second, the getting in of corn may be leased out, as was done in olden times and is

still the custom in Turkey; but by putting taxes on men there is need of a complicated administration, which has to ensure the right levying of the taxes. And therefore by the third method the oppressor has to share the plunder with a still greater number of men than by the second; besides, according to the very nature of the thing, all the men of the same or of the foreign country who possess money become sharers with the oppressed. The advantage of the third method over the first and second consists chiefly in the following fact: that by it there is no need to wait for a year of scarcity, as in the time of Joseph, but years of famine are established forever, and (whilst by the second method the part of the labour which is taken away depends upon the harvest, and cannot be augmented ad libitum, because if there is no corn, there is nothing to take) by the new monetary method the requirement can be brought to any desired limit, for the demand for money can always be satisfied, because the debtor, to satisfy it, must sell his cattle, clothes, or houses. The chief advantage to the oppressor of this method is that he can take away the greatest quantity of labour in the most convenient way; for a money-tax, like a screw, may easily and conveniently be turned to the utmost limit, and golden eggs be obtained though the bird that lays them is all but dead. Another of its advantages for the oppressor is that its violence reaches all those also who, by possessing no land, formerly escaped from it by giving only a part of their labour for corn; whereas now, besides that part which they give for corn, they must now give another part for taxes. A drawback for the oppressor is that he has to share the plunder with a still greater number of men, not only with his direct assistants, but also with all those men of his own country, and even of foreign countries, who may have the money which is demanded from the slaves. Its advantage for the oppressed is only that he is allowed greater independence than under the second method; he may live where he chooses, do what

he likes; he may sow or not sow; he has to give no account of his labour; and if he has money, he may consider himself entirely free, and constantly hope, though only for a time, to obtain not only an independent position, but even to become an oppressor himself, when he has money to spare. The drawback for the oppressed is, that on a general average their situation becomes much worse, and they are deprived of the greater part of the products of their labour, because the number of those who utilize their labour has increased, and therefore the burden of keeping them falls upon a smaller number of men. This third method of enslaving men is also very old, and comes into operation with the former two without entirely excluding them. These three methods of enslaving men have always been in operation. They may all be compared to screws which secure the board laid on the work-people which presses them down. The fundamental, or middle screw, without which the other screws could not hold, which is first screwed up, and which is never slackened, is the screw of personal slavery, the enslaving of some men by others under threat of slaughter; the second, which is screwed up after the first, is that of enslaving men by taking away the land and stores of provisions from them, such alienation being maintained by the threat to murder; and the third screw is slavery enforced by the requirement of certain money taxes; and this demand is also maintained under threat of murder. These three screws are made fast, and it is only when one of them is tightened more that the others are slackened. For the complete enslavement of the workman, all three are necessary; and in our society, all three are in operation together. The first method of personal slavery under threat of murder by the sword has never been abolished, and never will be so long as there is any oppression, because every kind of oppression is based on this alone. We are all quite sure that personal slavery is abolished in our civilized world; that the last remnant of it

has been annihilated in America and in Russia, and that it is only among the barbarians that real slavery exists, and that with us it is no longer in being. We forget only one small circumstance—those hundreds of millions of standing troops without which no state exists, and with the abolition of which all the economical organization of each state would inevitably fall to pieces. Yet what are these millions of soldiers but the personal slaves of those who rule them? Are not these men compelled to do the will of their commanders under the threat of torture and death—a threat often carried out? the difference consisting only in the fact that the submission of these slaves is not called slavery, but discipline, and that slaves are slaves from their birth, but soldiers only during a more or less short period of their so-called “service.” Personal slavery, therefore, is not only not abolished in our civilized world, but, under the system of conscription, it has of late years been confirmed; and it has remained as it has always existed, only slightly changed from its original form. And it cannot but exist, because, so long as there is the enslaving of one man by another there will be this personal slavery too, this slavery which, under the threat of the sword, maintains serfdom, land-ownership, and taxes. It may be that this slavery of troops is useful, as it is said, for the defence and the glory of the country; but this kind of utility is more than doubtful, because we see how often in the case of unsuccessful wars it serves only for the subjugation and shame of the country. But of the expediency of this slavery for maintaining that of the land and taxes there is no question. If Irish or Russian peasants were to take possession of the land of the proprietors, troops would be sent to dispossess them. If you build a distillery or a brewery and do not pay excise, then soldiers will be sent to shut it up. Refuse to pay taxes, and the same thing will happen to you. The second screw is the method of enslaving men by taking away from them their land and their stores of provisions. This method has also

always been in existence wherever men are oppressed; and, whatever changes it may undergo, it is everywhere in operation. Sometimes all the land belongs to the sovereign, as in Turkey, and there one-tenth is given to the state treasury. Sometimes a part of the land belongs to the sovereign, and taxes are raised on it. Sometimes all the land belongs to a few people and is let out for labour, as in England. Sometimes more or less large portions of land belong to the land-owners, as in Russia, Germany, and France. But wherever there is enslaving there exists also the appropriation of the land by the oppressor, and this screw is slackened or tightened only according to the condition of the other screws. Thus, in Russia, when personal slavery was extended to the majority of the working-people there was no need of land-slavery; but the screw of personal slavery was slackened in Russia only when the screws of land and tax slavery were tightened. Only when the government had appropriated the land and divided it among private individuals, and had instituted money payments and taxation, did it give the peasants personal freedom. In England, for instance, land-slavery is pre-eminently in operation, and the question about the nationalizing of the land consists only in the screw of taxation being tightened in order that the screw of land appropriation may be slackened. The third method of enslaving men, by taxes, has also been in operation for ages; and in our days, with the extension of uniform standards of money and the strengthening of state powers it has become an especially powerful influence. This method is so developed in our days that it tends to be a substitute for the second method of enslaving—the land monopoly. It is obvious from the state of the political economy of all Europe, that it is by the tightening of this screw that the screw of land slavery is slackened. In our own lifetime we have witnessed in Russia two transformations of slavery. When the serfs were liberated,

and their landlords retained the right to the greater part of the soil, the landlords were afraid they would lose their power; but experience has shown that having let go the whole chain of personal slavery, they had only to seize another—that of the land. A peasant was short of corn; he had not enough to live on. The landlord had land and stores of corn: and therefore the peasant still remained the same slave. Another transformation was caused by the government screw of taxation being pressed home. The majority of working-people, having no stores, were obliged to sell themselves to their landlords and to the factories. This new form of oppression held the people still tighter, so that nine-tenths of the Russian working-people are still working for their landlords and in the factories to pay these taxes. This is so obvious, that, if the government were to remit taxation for one year only, all labour would be stopped in the fields of the landlords, and in the factories. Nine-tenths of the Russian people hire themselves out during and before the collection of taxes. All these three methods have never ceased to operate, and are still in operation, but people are inclined to ignore them or to invent new excuses for them. And, what is most remarkable of all is, that the very means on which everything is based, that screw which is screwed up tighter than all others, which holds everything at the moment in question, is not noticed so long as it holds. When in the ancient world the entire economical order was upheld by personal slavery, the greatest intellects did not notice it. To Plato, as well as to Xenophon, and Aristotle, and to the Romans, it seemed that it could not be otherwise, and that slavery was an unavoidable and natural result of wars, without which the existence of mankind was inconceivable. Similarly, in the Middle Ages, and till recently, people did not apprehend the meaning of land-ownership, on which depended the entire economical organization of their time. So also, at present, no one sees or wants to see, that in our time the

slavery of the majority of the people depends on taxes collected by the government from its own land slaves, taxes collected by administration and the troops—by the very same troops which are maintained by these taxes.

CHAPTER 21 No wonder that the slaves themselves, who have always been enslaved, do not understand their own position, and that this condition in which they have always lived is considered by them to be natural to human life, and that they hail as a relief any change in their form of slavery; no wonder that their owners sometimes quite sincerely think they are, in a measure, freeing the slaves by slacking one screw, though they are compelled to do so by the over-tension of another. Both become accustomed to their state; and the slaves, never having known what freedom is, merely seek an alleviation, or only the change of their condition; the other, the owners, wishing to mask their injustice, try to assign a particular meaning to those new forms of slavery which they enforce in place of the older ones. But it is wonderful how the majority of the critics of the economic conditions of the life of the people fail to see that which forms the basis of the entire economic conditions of a people. One would think the duty of a true science would be to try to ascertain the connection of the phenomena and general cause of a series of occurrences. But the majority of the representatives of modern Political Economy are doing just the reverse of this: they carefully hide the connection and meaning of the phenomena, and avoid answering the most simple and essential questions. Modern Political Economy, like an idle, lazy cart-horse, goes well only down-hill, when it has no collar-work; but as soon as it has anything to draw, it at once refuses, pretending it has to go somewhere aside after its own business. When any grave, essential question is put to Political Economy, scientific discussions are started about some other matter having only in view to divert attention

from this subject. You ask, "How are we to account for a fact so unnatural, monstrous, unreasonable, and not useless only, but harmful, that some men can eat or work only according to the will of other men?" You are gravely answered, "Because some men must arrange the labour and feeding of others, such is the law of production." You ask, "What is this property-right which allows some men to appropriate to themselves the land, food, and instruments of labour belonging to others?" You are again gravely answered, "This right is based upon the protection of labour,"—that is, the protection of some men's labour is effected by taking possession of the labour of other men. You ask, "What is that money which is everywhere coined and stamped by the governments, by the authorities, and which is so exorbitantly demanded from the working-people, and which in the shape of national debts is levied upon the future generations of workingmen? Further, has not this money, demanded from the people in the shape of taxes which are raised to the utmost pitch, has not this money any influence on the economic relationships of men—between the payers and the receivers?" And you are answered in all seriousness, "Money is an article of merchandise like sugar, or chintz; and it differs from other articles only in the fact that it is more convenient for exchange." As for the influence of taxes on the economic conditions of a people, it is a different question altogether: the laws of production, exchange, and distribution of wealth, are one thing, but taxation is quite another. You ask whether it has any influence on the economic conditions of a people that the government can arbitrarily raise or lower prices, and, having increased the taxes, can make slaves of all who have no land? The pompous answer is, "The laws of production, exchange, and distribution of wealth constitute one science—Political Economy; and taxes, and, generally speaking, State Economy, come under another head—the Law of Finance." You ask finally, "Is no influence exercised

on economic conditions by the circumstance that all the people are in bondage to the government, and that this government can arbitrarily ruin them all, can take away all the products of their labour, and even carry the men themselves away from their work into military slavery?" You are answered, "This is altogether a different question, belonging to the State Law." The majority of the representatives of science discuss quite seriously the laws of the economic life of a people, while all the functions and activities of this life are dependent on the will of the oppressor. Whilst they recognize the influence of the oppressor as a natural condition of a nation's life, they do just what a critic of the economic conditions of the life of the personal slaves of different masters would do, were he to omit to consider the influence exercised on the life of these slaves by the will of that master who compels them to work on this or that thing and drives them from one place to another according to his pleasure, who feeds them or neglects to do so, who kills them or leaves them alive. A noxious superstition has been long in existence and still survives—a superstition which has done more harm to men than the most terrible religious superstitions. And so-called science supports this superstition with all its power, and with the utmost zeal. This superstition exactly resembles religious superstitions. It consists in affirming that, besides the duties of man to man, there are still more important duties towards an imaginary being—which the theologians call God, and the political scientists the State. The religious superstition consists in affirming that sacrifices, even of human lives, must be offered to this imaginary being, and that they can and ought to be enforced by every means, even by violence. The political superstition consists in the belief that, besides the duties of man to man, there are still more important duties to an imaginary being, the State; and the offerings—often of human lives—brought to this imaginary being are also essential, and can and ought to be

enforced by every means, even by violence. This superstition it is, formerly encouraged by the priests of different religions, which is now sustained by so-called science. Men are thrown into slavery, into the most terrible slavery, worse than has ever before existed; but Political Science tries to persuade men that it is necessary and unavoidable. The state must exist for the welfare of the people, and it must do its duty, to rule and protect them from their enemies. For this purpose the state needs money and troops. Money must be subscribed by all the citizens of the state. And hence all the relations of men must be considered in the light of the existence of the state. "I want to help my father by my labour," says a common unlearned man. "I want also to marry; but instead, I am taken and sent to Kazan, to be a soldier for six years. I leave the military service, I want to plough the ground to earn food and drink for my family; but I am not allowed to plough for a hundred versts around me unless I pay money, which I have not got, and pay it to those men who do not know how to plough, and who demand for the land so much money that I must give them all my labour to procure it: however, I still manage to save something, and wish to give this to my children; but a police official comes and takes from me all I had saved, for taxes: I can earn a little more, and again I am deprived of it. My entire economic activity is at the mercy of state demands; and it seems to me that my position and that of my brethren, will certainly improve if we are liberated from the demands of the state." But he is told, "Such reasoning is the result of your ignorance. Study the laws of production, exchange, and distribution of wealth, and do not mix up economical questions with those of the state. The phenomena which you point to are no restraints on your freedom; they are the necessary sacrifices which you, along with others, must make for your own freedom and welfare." "But my son has been taken away from me," says again a common man; "and they

threaten to take away all my sons as soon as they are grown up: they took him away by force, and drove him to face the enemy's guns in some country which we have never heard of, and for an object which we cannot understand. "And as for the land which they will not allow us to plough, and for want of which we are starving, it belongs to a man who got possession of it by force, and whom we have never seen, and whose usefulness we cannot even understand. And the taxes, to collect which the police official has by force taken my cow from my children, will, so far as I know, go to this same man who took my cow away, and to various members of the committees and of departments which I do not know of, and in the utility of which I do not believe. How is it, then, that all these acts of violence secure my liberty, and all this evil procures good?" You may compel a man to be a slave and to do that which he considers to be evil for himself, but you cannot compel him to think, that, in suffering violence, he is free, and that the obvious evil which he endures constitutes his good. This appears impossible. Yet by the help of science this very thing has been done in our time. The state, that is, the armed oppressors, decide what they want from those whom they oppress (as in the case of England and the Fiji-Islanders): they decide how much labour they want from their slaves—they decide how many assistants they will need in collecting the fruits of this labour; they organize their assistants in the shape of soldiers, land-owners, and collectors of taxes. And the slaves give their labour, and, at the same time, believe that they give it, not because their masters demand it, but for the sake of their own freedom and welfare; and that this service and these bloody sacrifices to the divinity called the State are necessary, and that, except this service to their Deity, they are free. They believe this because the same had been formerly said in the name of religion by the priests, and is now said in the name of so-called science, by learned men. But one need only

cease to believe what is said by these other men who call themselves priests or learned men, for the absurdity of such an assertion to become obvious. The men who oppress others assure them that this oppression is necessary for the state—and the state is necessary for the freedom and welfare of men; so that it appears that the oppressors oppress men for the sake of their freedom, and do them evil for the sake of good. But men are furnished with reason so that they may understand wherein consists their own good, and do it willingly. As for the acts, the goodness of which is not intelligible to men, and to which they are compelled by force, these cannot be for their good, because a reasoning being can consider as good only the thing which appears so to his reason. If men are driven to evil through passion or folly, all that those who are not so driven can do is to persuade the others into what constitutes their real good. You may try to persuade men that their welfare will be greater when they are all soldiers, are deprived of land, and have given their entire labour away for taxes; but until all men consider this condition to be welfare, and undertake it willingly, one cannot call such a state of things the common welfare of men. The sole criterion of a good conception is its willing acceptance by men. And the lives of men abound with such acts. Ten workmen buy tools in common, in order to work together with them, and in so doing they are undoubtedly benefitting themselves; but we cannot suppose that if these ten workmen were to compel an eleventh, by force, to join in their association, they would insist that their common welfare will be the same for him. So with gentlemen who agree to give a subscription dinner at a pound a head to a mutual friend; no one can assert that such a dinner will benefit a man who, against his will, has been obliged to pay a sovereign for it. And so with peasants who decide, for their common convenience, to dig a pond. To those who consider the existence of a pond more valuable than the labour spent on it, digging it

will be a common good. But to the one who considers the pond of less value than a day's harvesting in which he is behind-hand, digging it will appear evil. The same holds good with roads, churches, and museums, and with all various social and state affairs. All such work may be good for those who consider it good, and who therefore freely and willingly perform it—the dinner which the gentlemen give, the pond which the peasants dig. But work to which men must be driven by force ceases to be a common good precisely by the fact of such violence. All this is so plain and simple, that, if men had not been so long deceived, there would be no need to explain it. Suppose we live in a village where all the inhabitants have agreed to build a road over a swamp which is a danger to them. We agree together, and each house promises to give so much money or wood or days of labour. We agree to this because the making of the road is more advantageous to us than what we exchange for it; but among us there are some for whom it is more advantageous to do without a road than to spend money on it, or who at all events think so. Can compelling these men to labour make it of advantage to them? Obviously not; because those who considered that their choosing to join in making the way would have been disadvantageous, will consider it a fortiori still more disadvantageous when they are compelled to do so. Suppose, even, that we all, without exception, were agreed, and promised so much money or labour from each house, but that it happened that some of those who had promised did not give what they agreed, their circumstances having meanwhile changed, so that it was more advantageous for such now to be without the road than to spend money on it; or that they have simply changed their mind about it; or even calculate that others will make the road without them and that they will then use it. Can coercing these men to join in the labour make them consider that the sacrifices are enforced for their own good? Obviously not; because, if

these men have not fulfilled what they promised, owing to a change in circumstances, so that now the sacrifices for the sake of the road outbalance their gain by it, the compulsory sacrifices of such would be only a worse evil. But if those who refuse to join in building the road intend to utilize the labour of the others, then in this case also coercing them into making a sacrifice would be only a punishment on a supposition, and their object, which nobody can prove, will be punished before it is made apparent; but in neither case can coercing them to join in a work which they do not desire be good for them. If this is so with sacrifices for a work which every one can comprehend, obvious, and undoubtedly useful to everyone, such as a road over a swamp; how still more unjust and unreasonable is it to coerce millions of men into making sacrifices for objects which are incomprehensible, imperceptible, and often undoubtedly harmful, such as military service and taxation. But, according to science, what appears to every one to be an evil is a common good: it appears that there are men, a small minority, who alone know of what the common good consists, and, notwithstanding the fact that all other men consider this good to be an evil, this minority can compel the others to do whatever they may consider to be for the common good. And it is this belief which constitutes the chief superstition and the chief deceit and hinders the progress of mankind towards the True and the Good. To nurse this superstitious deceit has been the object of political sciences in general, and of so-called "Political Economy" in particular. Many are making use of its aims in order to hide from men the state of oppression and slavery in which they now are. The way they set about doing so is by starting the theory that the violence connected with the economy of social slavery is a natural and unavoidable evil; and men thereby are deceived and turn their eyes from the real causes of their misfortunes. Slavery has long been abolished. It has been abolished in Rome as well as in

America, and in Russia; but only the word has been abolished—not the evil. Slavery is the violent freeing of some men from the labour necessary for satisfying their wants, which transfers this labour to others; and wherever there is a man who does not work, not because others willingly and lovingly work for him, but because he has the possibility, while not working himself, to make others work for him, there slavery exists. Wherever there are, as in all European societies, men who utilize the labour of thousands of others by coercion, and consider such to be their right, and others who submit to this coercion considering it to be their duty—there you have slavery in its most dreadful proportions. Slavery exists. In what, then, does it consist? Slavery consists of that of which it has always consisted, and without which it cannot exist at all—in the coercion of a weak and unarmed man by a strong and armed man. Slavery in its three fundamental modes of operation—personal violence, the military, land-taxes—maintained by the military, and direct and indirect taxes put upon all the inhabitants, is still in operation now as it has been before. We do not see it because each of these three forms of slavery has received a new justification, which hides its meaning from us. The personal violence of armed over unarmed men has been justified as the defence of one's country from imaginary enemies—while in its essence it has the one old meaning, the submission of the conquered to the oppressors. The violent seizure of the labourers' land has been justified as the recompense for services rendered to an imaginary common welfare, and confirmed by the right of heritage; but in reality it is the same dispossession of men from their land and enslaving them which was performed by the troops. And the last, the monetary violence by means of taxes, the strongest and most effective in our days, has received a most wonderful justification. Dispossession of men of their liberty and their goods is said to be done for the sake of the common liberty

and of the common welfare. But in fact it is the same slavery, only an impersonal one. Wherever violence becomes law, there is slavery. Whether violence finds its expression in the circumstance that princes with their courtiers come, kill, and burn down villages; whether slave-owners take labour or money for the land from their slaves, and enforce payment by means of armed men, or by putting taxes on others, and riding armed to and fro in the villages; or whether a Home Department collects money through governors or police sergeants—in one word, as long as violence is maintained by the bayonet—there will be no distribution of wealth, but it will be accumulated among the oppressors. As a striking illustration of the truth of this assertion the project of Henry George to nationalize the land may serve us. Henry George proposes to declare all land the property of the state, and to substitute a land-rent for all taxes, direct and indirect. That is, everyone who utilizes the land would have to pay to the state the value of its rent. What would be the result? The land would belong to the state—English land to England, American land to America, and so on; that is, there would be slavery, determined by the quantity of cultivated land. It might be that the condition of some labourers would improve; but while a forcible demand for rent remained, the slavery would remain too. The cultivator, after a bad harvest, being unable to pay the rent exacted of him by force, would be obliged to enslave himself to any one who happened to have the money in order not to lose everything and to retain the land. If a pail leaks, there must be a hole. Looking at the pail, we might imagine the water runs from many holes; but no matter how we might try to stop the imaginary holes from without, the water would not cease running. In order to put a stop to the leakage we must find the place from which water runs, and stop it from the inside. The same holds good with the proposed means of stopping the irregular distribution of wealth—the holes

through which the wealth runs away from the people. It is said, Organize workmen's corporations, make capital social property, make land social property. All this is only mere stopping from the outside those holes from which we fancy the water runs. In order to stop the wealth going from the hands of the workers to those of the non-workers, it is necessary to try to find from the inside the hole through which this leakage takes place. And this hole is the violence of armed men towards unarmed men, the violence of troops, by means of which men are carried away from their labour, and the land, and the products of labour, taken from them. So long as there is one armed man, whoever he may be, with the acknowledged right to kill another man, so long will there also exist an unjust distribution of wealth—in other words, slavery. I was led into the error that I can help others by the fact that I imagined my money was as good as Semion's. But it was not so. The general opinion is that money represents wealth; that wealth is the result of work and therefore that money represents work. This opinion is as just as the opinion asserting that every form of state is the result of a contract (contrat social). All men like to believe that money is only a means of exchange of labour. I have made boots, you have made bread, he has fed sheep; now, in order to exchange our wares the more conveniently, we introduce money, which represents the corresponding share of labour, and through it we exchange leather soles for a mutton brisket and ten pounds of flour. By means of money we exchange our products and this money, belonging to each of us, represents our labour. This is perfectly true, but true only while in the community, where this exchange takes place, violence of one man towards another did not appear, violence not only over another man's labour, as happens in war and in slavery, but not even violence applied to defend the products of labour of one man against another. This could be only in a community whose members entirely fulfil the Christian law

—in a community where one gets what he demands and where one is not requested to return what he gets. But as soon as violence in any form is applied in the community, the meaning of money for its owner at once loses its significance as a representative of labour, and acquires the significance of a right, based not on labour, but on violence. As soon as there is war and one man has taken away something from another, then money cannot always represent labour; the money received by the soldier for the booty he has sold, as well as the money got by his superior, is by no means the produce of their work and has quite a different meaning from the money received for the labour resulting in boots. When there are slave-owners and slaves, as have been always in the world, then one cannot assert that money represents labour. The women have woven a quantity of linen, have sold it and received money; the serfs have woven some linen for their master, and the master has sold it and received money. The one and the other money are the same; but one is the product of labour and the other is the product of violence. Likewise, if somebody—say my father—made me a present of money and he, when giving it to me, knew, and I knew and everybody knew, that no one can take this money away from me, that if anybody tried to take it, or even merely failed to return it at the date promised, then the authorities would defend me and by force compel the man to return me this money—then again it is evident that by no means can this money be called a representative of labour, like the money which Semion got for cutting wood. Thus in a community, where by some kind of violence somebody's money is taken possession of, or the ownership of somebody's money defended against others—there money cannot always represent labour. It represents in such a community sometimes labour, sometimes violence. So it would be if only one fact of violence of one man over another appeared in the midst of perfectly free relations; but now, when the accumulated money has

passed through centuries of most various forms of violence, when these acts of violence continue under other forms; when money itself by its accumulation creates violence—which is recognized by everybody—when the direct products of labour constitute only a small part of money made up of all sorts of violence—to assert now that money represents the work of its owner is an obvious error, or an open lie. One may say it ought to be so, one may say it is desirable that it should be so, but by no means can any one say that it is so. Money represents labour. Yes; money represents labour, but whose labour? In our society it is only in the rarest cases that money represents the work of its owner. Almost always it represents the labour of other men—the past or future labours of men. It is the representative of a claim on the labour of other men by force of violence. Money, in its most exact and at the same time its simplest definition, represents conventional signs, which bestow the right—or rather the possibility—to use the work of other men. In its ideal meaning, money ought to give this right or possibility only when it serves itself as a representative of labour, and as such, money could exist in a society devoid of any kind of violence. But as soon as violence takes place in a society, i.e., the possibility of the utilizing of the labour of others by the idler—then this possibility of using the labour of others, without defining persons over which this violence is committed, is also exercised in money. The landowner taxed his serfs by a contribution in kind, making them bring a certain quantity of linen, corn, cattle, or a corresponding amount of money. One household delivered the cattle, but the linens were replaced by money. The landowner accepts the money in a certain quantity, only because he knows that for this money he can get the same pieces of linen (generally he takes a little more money to be sure that he will receive for it the same quantity of linen), and this money evidently offers for the landowner lien on other men's labour. The peasant

gives money as a security against persons unknown but numerous, who would undertake to work out so much linen for this money. Those who will undertake to work the linen will do it because they did not succeed in feeding the sheep, and for these they must pay in money; and the peasant who will get the money for the sheep will take it, only because he must pay for the corn, which was a failure that year. The same goes on in the State and all over the world. A man sells the produce of his past, present or future labour, sometimes his food-stuff, not mostly because money is a convenient exchange for him—he would exchange without money—but because he is required by means of violence to give money, as a security on his work. When Pharaoh has demanded the labour of his slaves, then the slaves have given him all their labour, but they could give only the past and present labour, and could not give that of the future. But with the spread of money tokens and their result of “credit” it becomes possible to give also one’s future work for money. Money, with the existence of violence in society, offers the means for a new form of impersonal slavery, which replaces the personal one. A slave-owner claims a right to the work of Peter, Iván, Sidor. But wherever money is required from everybody, the owner of money acquires a claim on the labour of all those unknown people who are in need of money. Money removes the painful side of slavery, by which the owner knows about his right on Iván, at the same time it removes all those human relations between the owner and the slave, which softened down the burden of personal slavery. I will not dwell on the theory that perhaps such a state is necessary for the development of mankind, for its progress and so forth—I will not dispute it. I only strive to make clear to myself the conception of money and to discover the general misconception I have made in accepting money, as a representative of labour. I became convinced by experience that money is not a representative of labour, but in the

great majority of cases is a representative of violence, or of specially complex artifices founded on violence. Money in our time has already altogether lost the desirable significance of being the representative of labour; such significance it may have in exceptional cases, but as a rule it has become the right or the possibility of using the labour of others. This spreading of money, of credit and different conventional signs, more and more confirm this meaning of money. Money is the possibility or the right to use the labours of others. Money is a new form of slavery differing from the old form of slavery only by its impersonality, by the freedom it gives from all human relations to the slave. Money is money, a value always equal to itself, and which is always considered quite correct and lawful, and the use of which is not considered immoral, as slavery was. In my young days a game of lotto was introduced in the clubs. All eagerly played the game and, as was said, many lost their fortunes, ruined their families, lost money entrusted to them, and government funds, and finally shot themselves, so that the game was forbidden and is still forbidden. I remember I have met old, hardened card players who told me that this game was especially fascinating, because one did not know whom one was to beat, as is the case in other games; the attendant does not even serve one with money, but with counters, everybody loses a small stake and does not betray grief. It is the same in roulette, which is rightly forbidden everywhere. So it is with money. I have a magical, everlasting ruble; I cut off coupons and live apart from all the affairs of the world. Whom do I harm? I am the most quiet and kind-hearted man. But this is only a game of lotto or roulette where I do not see the man, who shoots himself after having lost, and who provides for me these small coupons, which I carefully cut off under the right angle from the tickets. I have done nothing, I am doing nothing, and never will do anything, save cut off the coupons, and firmly believe that money represents labour.

This is really astounding! And people talk of lunatics! But what mania could be more horrible than this? An intelligent, learned, and in all other respects sensible man lives madly, and soothes himself by not acknowledging that one thing which he should acknowledge to make his argument reasonable, and he considers himself in the right! The coupons are representatives of labour! Of labour! Yes, but of whose labour? Not of his, who owns them, evidently, but of the one who works. Money is the same as slavery; its aim is the same and its consequences are the same. Its aim is the freeing of some men from the original law, truly called so by a thoughtful writer of the working-classes, from the natural law of life, as we call it, from the law of personal labour for the satisfaction of one's needs. The consequences of the slavery for the owner: the begetting, the invention of infinitely more and more needs never to be satisfied, of effeminate wretchedness and of depravity, and for the slaves—oppression of the man, and his lowering to the level of a beast. Money is a new and terrible form of slavery and, like the old form of personal slavery, it equally demoralises the slave and the slave-owner, but it is so much worse, because it frees the slave and the slave-owner from personal human relations.

CHAPTER 22 I always wonder at the often repeated words, "Yes, it is all true in theory, but how is it in practice?" As though the theory were only a collection of words useful for conversation, and not as though all practice—that is, all activity of life—were inevitably based upon it. There must have been an immense number of foolish theories in the world for men to employ such wonderful reasoning. We know that theory is what a man thinks about a thing, and practice is what he does. How can a man think that he ought to act in one way, and then do quite the reverse? If the theory of baking bread consists in this, that first of all one must knead the dough, then put it by to rise, anyone

knowing it would be a fool to do the reverse. But with us it has come into fashion to say, "It is all very well in theory, but how would it be in practice?" In all that has occupied me practice has unavoidably followed theory, not mainly in order to justify it, but because it could not help doing so: if I have understood the affair upon which I have meditated I cannot help doing it in the way in which I have understood it. I wished to help the needy only because I had money to spare: and I shared the general superstition that money represents labour, and, generally speaking, is something lawful and good in itself. But, having begun to give this money away, I saw that I was only drawing bills of exchange collected from poor people; that I was doing the very thing the old landlords used to do in compelling some of their serfs to work for other serfs. I saw that every use of money, whether buying anything with it, or giving it away gratis, is a drawing of bills of exchange on poor people, or passing them to others to be drawn by them. And therefore I clearly understood the foolishness of what I was doing in helping the poor by exacting money from them. I saw that money in itself was not only not a good thing, but obviously an evil one, depriving men of their chief good, labour, and that this very good I cannot give to anyone because I am myself deprived of it: I have neither labour nor the happiness of utilizing my labour. It might be asked by some, "What is there so peculiarly important in abstractly discussing the meaning of money?" But this argument which I have opened is not merely for the sake of discussion, but in order to find an answer to the vital question which had caused me so much suffering, and on which my life depended, in order to discover what I was to do. As soon as I understood what wealth means, what money means, then it became clear and certain what I have to do, it became clear and certain what all others have to do—and that they will inevitably do it, what all men must do. In reality I merely came to realize what I have long

known—that truth which has been transmitted to men from the oldest times, by Buddha, by Isaiah, by Laotse, by Socrates, and most clearly and definitely by Jesus and his predecessor John the Baptist. John the Baptist, in answer to men’s question “What shall we do then?” answered plainly and briefly, “He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise” (Luke 3: 10-11). The same thing, and with still greater clearness, said Jesus—blessing the poor, and uttering woes on the rich. He said that no man can serve God and mammon. He forbade his disciples not only to take money, but also to have two coats. He said to the rich young man that he could not enter into the kingdom of God because he was rich, and that it is easier for a camel to go through the needle’s eye than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. He said that he who would not leave every thing—his houses and children and his fields—in order to follow him, was not his disciple. He spoke a parable about a rich man who had done nothing wrong (like our own rich people), but merely dressed well and ate and drank well, yet by this lost his own soul; and about a beggar named Lazarus, who had done nothing good, but who had saved his soul by his beggar’s life. This truth had long been known to me; but the false teaching of the world had so cunningly hidden it that it became a theory in the sense which men like to attach to this word—that is, a pure abstraction. But as soon as I succeeded in pulling down in my consciousness the sophistry of the world’s teaching, then theory became one with practice and the reality of my life and the life of all men became its unavoidable result. I came to understand that man, besides living for his own good, must work for the good of others; and that if we were to draw our comparison from the world of animals, as some men are so fond of doing in justifying violence and contest by the law of the struggle for existence, we must take this comparison from the lives of social animals like bees; and therefore

man, to say nothing of that love to his neighbours which is incumbent on him, is called upon to serve his fellows and their common object, as much by reason as by his very nature. I understood that this is the natural law of man, by fulfilling which he can alone fulfil his calling and therefore be happy. I understood that this law has been and is being violated by the fact that men (as robber-bees do) free themselves from labour by violence, and utilize the labour of others, using this labour not for the common purpose but for the personal satisfaction of their constantly increasing lusts, and also, like robber-bees, they perish thereby. I understood that the misfortune of men comes from the slavery in which some men are kept by others; and I understood that this slavery is brought about in our days by military force, violence, by the appropriation of land, and by the exaction of money. And, having understood the meaning of all these three instruments of modern slavery, I could not help desiring to free myself from any share in it. When I was a landlord, possessing serfs, and came to understand the immorality of such a position, I, along with other men who had understood the same thing, tried to free myself from it. And I freed myself from this state thus. Finding it immoral, but not being able as yet to free myself wholly from it, I tried meanwhile to assert my rights as a serf-owner as little as possible. I cannot help doing the same now with reference to the present slavery—that is, I try as little as possible to assert my claims while I am unable to free myself from the power which gives me land-ownership, and from money raised by the violence of military force—and at the same time by all means in my power to suggest to other men the unlawfulness and inhumanity of these imaginary rights. The share in enslaving men consists, on the standpoint of a slave-owner, in utilizing the labour of others. (It is all the same whether the enslaving is based on a claim to the person of the slave or on the possession of land or money.) And, therefore, if a

man really does not like slavery and does not desire to be a partaker in it, the first thing which he must do is this: neither take men's labour by serving the government, nor possess land or money. The refusal of all the means in use for taking another's labour will unavoidably bring such a man to the necessity of lessening his wants on the one hand, and, on the other, of doing himself what formerly was done for him by other men. This simple and unavoidable conclusion enters into every detail of my life, changes it entirely, and at once sets me free from the moral sufferings I had endured at the sight of the misery and wickedness of men. The first cause was the accumulation of people in towns, and the absorption there of the products of the country. All that a man needs is not to desire to take another's labour by serving the government and possessing land and money, and then, according to his strength and ability, to satisfy unaided his own wants. The idea of leaving his village would never enter the mind of such a man, because in the country it is easier for him to satisfy his wants personally, while in a town everything is the product of the labour of others, all must be bought; in the country a man will always be able to help the needy, and will not experience that feeling of being useless, which I felt in the town when I wanted to help men, not with my own, but with other men's labours. The second cause was the estrangement between the poor and the rich. A man need only not desire to profit by other men's labour by serving the government and possessing land and money, and he would be compelled to satisfy his wants himself, and at once involuntarily that barrier would be pushed down which separates him from the working-people, and he would be one with the people, standing shoulder to shoulder with them, and seeing the possibility of helping them. The third cause was shame, based on the consciousness of the immorality of possessing money with which I wanted to help others. A man need only not desire

to profit by another man's labour by serving the government and possessing land and money, and he will never have that superfluous "fool's money," the fact of possessing which made those who wanted money ask me for pecuniary assistance which I was not able to satisfy, and called forth in me the consciousness of my unrighteousness.

