

The ethics of wine-drinking and tobacco-smoking / [Leo Tolstoi].

Contributors

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THE ETHICS OF WINE-DRINKING AND TOBACCO-SMOKING.

I.

WHAT is the true explanation of the use which people make of stupefying stimulants and narcotics, of brandy, wine, beer, hashish, opium, and of others less extensively indulged in, such as morphia, ether, fly-agaric? How did it first originate, and what caused it to spread so rapidly and to hold its own so tenaciously among all sorts and conditions of men, savage and civilised? To what are we to attribute the incontrovertible fact that wherever brandy, wine, beer, are unknown, there opium, hashish, fly-agaric, &c., are sure to be common, while the consumption of tobacco is universal?

What is it that impels people to stupefy themselves? Ask any man you meet what it was that first induced him to drink alcoholic liquors and why he drinks them now. He will reply: "It is pleasant to do so; every one drinks"; and he may possibly add, "to keep up my spirits." There is another category of persons—those who never take the trouble to ask themselves the question whether it is right or wrong to drink alcoholic liquors—who will urge as an all-sufficient reason, that wine is wholesome, and imparts strength to him who drinks it—viz., they plead as a satisfactory ground a statement which has been long ago proved to be utterly false.

Put the same question to a smoker: ask him what first led him to smoke, and what compels or induces him to keep up the habit now, and the answer will be the same: "To drive away melancholy; besides, the habit is universal; everybody smokes."

The same or some analogous plea would most probably be advanced by those who indulge in opium, hashish, morphia, and fly-agaric.

"To drive off the blues; to keep up my spirits; because every one does the same." Reasons of this kind might, without glaring absurdity, be advanced as grounds for the habit of twirling one's fingers,

of whistling, of humming tunes, of playing a tin whistle ; in a word, of occupying oneself in any one of a thousand ways that do not entail the destruction of natural riches, nor necessitate an enormous expenditure of human labour, of doing something, in fine, which is not fraught with mischief to oneself and others. But none of the habits in question are of this harmless character. In order that tobacco, wine, hashish, opium, may be produced in sufficient quantities to keep pace with the present enormous rate of consumption, millions and millions of acres of the best soil, among populations sorely in need of land, are set apart for the cultivation of rye, potatoes, hemp, poppy, vines, and tobacco, and millions of human beings—in England one-eighth of the entire population—devote all their lives to the manufacture of these stupefying stimulants. Nor is this all. The consumption of these products is, beyond all doubt, highly pernicious, is fraught with terrible evils, the reality of which are admitted by all—evils that work the ruin of more men and women than are laid low by all the bloody wars and infectious diseases that decimate the human race. And people are aware of this ; so perfectly well aware of it, indeed, that the statement cannot for a moment be credited that they set in motion the baneful cause of it all, merely *to drive away melancholy, to keep up their spirits*, or solely because *every one does it*.

It is obvious, therefore, that there must be some other explanation of this strange phenomenon. On all the highways and byways of life we are continually meeting with affectionate parents who, though perfectly ready to make any—the heaviest—sacrifice for the welfare of their offspring, do not hesitate one moment to squander upon brandy, wine, beer, opium, hashish, and tobacco, a sum of money amply sufficient to feed their miserable, hunger-stricken children, or at least to insure them against the worst kinds of privation. It is perfectly evident, therefore, that the man who, placed by circumstances or his own acts in a position that imposes upon him the necessity of choosing between the infliction of hardship and misery upon the family that is dear to him, on the one hand, and abstinence from stupefying stimulants and narcotics, on the other, chooses the former alternative, is impelled to this choice by something far more potent than the desire to keep up his spirits, or the speculative consideration that every one else does the same. And so far as I am competent to hazard an opinion—and my qualifications consist solely in a theoretical knowledge of the judgments of others, gleaned from book-reading and in close personal observation of men, of my own self in particular at a time when I still drank wine and smoked tobacco—I would formulate that potent cause as follows :—

Man, during the course of his conscious existence, has frequent opportunities for discerning in himself two distinct beings : the one blind and sensuous ; the other endowed with sight, spiritual. The

former eats, drinks, rests, sleeps, perpetuates itself, and moves about just like a machine duly wound up for a definite period; the seeing, spiritual being, which is linked to the sensuous, does nothing itself, but merely weighs and appreciates the conduct of the sensuous being, actively co-operating when it approves, and holding aloof when it disapproves the actions of the latter.

We may liken the being endowed with sight to the needle of a compass, one extremity of which points to the north and the other to the south, and the entire length and breadth of which is covered by a layer of some opaque substance. The needle thus remains invisible so long as the ship or vehicle that carries the compass is moving in the direction towards which the needle is pointing; nor does it move or become visible until the vessel or vehicle deviates from that direction.

In like manner, the seeing, spiritual being, whose manifestations we are wont in the language of every-day life to term conscience, always points with one extremity to good, and with the opposite one to evil, nor do we perceive it until such time as we swerve from the direction it indicates—viz., from good to evil. But no sooner have we performed an action contrary to the direction of our conscience than the consciousness of the spiritual being manifests itself, indicating the degree of the deviation from the direction pointed out by conscience. And as the mariner who has discovered that he is not moving towards the port for which he is bound cannot continue to work with his oars, his engines, or his sails until he either rights the vessel and steers her in accordance with the indications of the compass, or else succeeds in shutting his eyes to the fact that there is a deviation, so also the man who discerns the discord between his conscience and his sensual activity cannot continue to exercise that activity until he either brings [it once more into harmony with the dictates of his conscience, or else hides from himself the testimony borne by his conscience to the irregularity of his animal life.

All human life may be truly said to be made up of one of two kinds of activity; (1) The bringing of one's conduct into harmony with the dictates of conscience; or (2) the concealing from oneself the manifestations of conscience, in order to make it possible to continue to live as one is living.

Some people are engaged in the former occupation, others in the latter. There is but one way to accomplish the former: moral enlightenment, increase of light within ourselves, and of attention to what the light reveals. There are two methods of attaining the second object—that of concealing from ourselves the manifestations of conscience: an external and an internal method. The former leads us to engage in occupations calculated to withdraw our attention from the

teachings of conscience, while the latter consists in darkening the conscience itself.

Just as a man has it in his power to blind himself to an object that is immediately under his eyes in one of two ways: either by fixing them upon other and more striking objects, or by obstructing the organs of vision—thrusting some foreign body upon them—so, in like manner, a man can hide from himself the manifestations of his conscience, either by having all his attention engrossed by occupations of various kinds, cares, amusements, pastimes, or else by obstructing the organ of attention itself. When it is a question of persons of a blunted or limited moral sense, outward distractions are frequently quite sufficient to hinder them from noting the testimony borne by their consciences to the irregularity of their lives. With people of sensitive moral organisation such mechanical devices are seldom enough.

External means do not entirely draw off the attention, or wholly prevent it from recognising the discord between actual life and the requisitions of conscience. And the knowledge of this antagonism hinders people from living; in order, therefore, to remove this obstacle, and continue to live irregularly, they have recourse to the unfailing internal method of darkening conscience itself. And this is effectually accomplished by poisoning the brain by means of stupefying stimulants and narcotics.

Let us suppose, for instance, that a man's life is not what, according to the promptings of conscience, it should be, and he does not possess the force necessary to remould and reform it in accordance with these exigencies. On the other hand, the distractions which should have diverted his attention from the consciousness of this antagonism are either insufficient in themselves, or else repetition has worn off their point, and they no longer produce the looked for result. It is then that a man, desirous of continuing to live in spite of the testimony of his conscience to the irregularity of his life, determines to poison, to paralyse completely for a time, that organ through which the warnings of conscience are made manifest, just as a person might throw a handful of flour or snuff in his eyes in order to deliver himself from the sight of a disagreeable object.

II.

It is not inclination, therefore, nor pleasure, nor distraction, nor amusement that gives us the clue to the universal habit of consuming hashish, opium, wine, and tobacco, but the necessity of concealing from oneself the records of one's conscience.

One day, while walking along a street, I passed by a number of *droschky*-drivers, who were gathered together in groups conversing,

when I was struck by the remark which one of them addressed to another: "Who doubts it? Of course he would have been ashamed to do it if he'd been sober."

A sober man scruples to do that which a drunken man will execute without hesitation. These words embody the essential motive that induces people to have recourse to stupefying drugs and drinks. People employ them either for the purpose of stifling remorse, after having performed an action disapproved of by their conscience, or else in order to induce a state of mind in which they shall be capable of doing something contrary to the dictates of their conscience, and to which the animal nature of man is impelling him.

A sober man has conscientious scruples to visit lewd women, to steal, to commit murder. A drunken man, on the contrary, is troubled with no such scruples. Hence it is that if a person wishes to do something which his conscience forbids him to do, he first stupefies his faculties.

I recollect being struck by the statement made by a man-cook on his trial for the murder of the old lady—a relative of mine—in whose service he had been living. From the account he gave of the crime, and the manner in which it was perpetrated, it appears that when he had sent his paramour, the maid-servant, out of the house, and the time had come for him to do the deed, he seized a knife and repaired to the bedroom where his intended victim was; but as he drew near he felt that in his sober senses he could not possibly perpetrate such a crime. "A sober man has conscientious scruples." He turned back, gulped down two tumblers of brandy that he had provided beforehand, and then, and not before, felt that he was ready to do the deed, and did it.

Nine-tenths of the total number of crimes that stain humanity are committed in the same way: "First take a drink to give you courage."

Of all the women who fall, fully one-half yield to the temptation under the influence of alcohol. Nearly all the visits made by young men to disorderly houses take place when the faculties have been blunted and dulled by intoxicating liquor. People are well acquainted with this property of alcohol to deaden the voice of conscience, and they deliberately make use of it for this very purpose.

Nor is this all. Not only do people cloud their own faculties, in order to stifle the voice of conscience, but, knowing what the effect of alcohol is, whenever they wish to make other people perform an act that is contrary to the dictates of their conscience, they purposely stupefy them, in order to render them temporarily deaf to its remonstrances. In war, soldiers are always made drunk, when they are about to be sent into close hand-to-hand combat. During the storming of Sebastopol, all the French soldiers were completely intoxi-

cated. After the storming of a fortress in the Central Asian War, when the Russian soldiers showed no inclination to plunder and kill the defenceless old men and children of the place, Skobeleff ordered them to be duly plied with brandy till they were drunk. Then they rushed out to accomplish the ghastly work.

Every one is acquainted with individuals who have drunk themselves out of their social sphere in consequence of crimes that tortured their conscience. It requires no extraordinary powers of observation to remark that people who in their lives set at naught the moral laws are much more addicted than others to stupefying stimulants and narcotics. Brigands, gangs of robbers, prostitutes, cannot dispense with alcohol.

Every one knows and acknowledges that indulgence in these things is a consequence of the remorse of conscience ; that in certain immoral avocations stimulants are employed for the purpose of stifling the conscience. In like manner, every one knows and avows that the use of these stimulants does effectually deaden the voice of conscience, that a drunken man is capable of accomplishing acts, from the very contemplation of which in his sober moments he would have shrunk back in horror. About this there is no conflict of opinion. It is admitted on all hands without demur or reserve. And yet, strange to say, whenever the consumption of stupefying stimulants does not result in such acts as robbery, murder, violence, &c. ; whenever they are indulged in, not as a consequence of remorse for terrible crimes, but by persons who follow professions which we do not regard as immoral, and are taken not all at once in large quantities, but continually, in moderate doses, it is taken for granted—no man can say why—that these stupefying stimulants have no effect upon the conscience, and certainly do not stifle or even deaden its voice.

Thus it is taken for granted that the daily consumption by a Russian in easy circumstances of a small glass of brandy before each meal, and of a tumbler of wine during the repast ; by a Frenchman of his daily allowance of absinthe ; by an Englishman of his port wine and porter ; by a German of his lager-beer, and the smoking by a well-to-do Chinaman of a moderate dose of opium, besides a certain quantity of tobacco, are indulged in solely for pleasure, and have the desired effect on the animal spirits, but none at all on the conscience.

It is furthermore taken for granted that if after this customary stupefaction no robbery, murder, or other heinous crime is perpetrated, but only foolish and evil acts are performed, these acts are spontaneous, and are in no way the result of the stupefaction. It is taken for granted that if these persons committed no criminal act, they had therefore no need to gag their consciences, and that the life led by people addicted to the continual use of stimulants and narcotics is in every way excellent, and would have been in no respect

different if these people had abstained from thus clouding their faculties. It is taken for granted, in fine, that the continuous consumption of stupefying stimulants does not in the least obscure the conscience of those who thus indulge in them.

On the one hand, then, every one knows by experience that his frame of mind, his mental mood, undergoes a change after he has indulged in alcohol and tobacco, and that what he was, or would have been, ashamed of before this artificial excitation, he has absolutely no scruples about afterwards; that after every sting of conscience, after the least painful of its pricks, one is possessed by a violent longing for some stimulant or narcotic; that under the influence of such stimulants it is very difficult to survey one's life and position; and that the continual consumption of an invariable moderate quantity of stimulants produces precisely the same kind of physiological effect as the instantaneous consumption of an excessive quantity. And on the other hand, people who indulge moderately in drinking alcohol and smoking tobacco flatter themselves that they take these things, not at all to silence their conscience, but solely to please their taste and obtain pleasure.

But one has only to give the matter a little serious, unprejudiced consideration—without attempting to cover and excuse one's own action—in order to acquire the conviction, in the first place, that if a man's conscience be deadened by his taking a large dose of alcoholic or narcotic preparations, the result is identical when he indulges in them continuously, though in smaller doses; for stimulants and narcotics always produce the same physiological action, which begins by abnormally intensifying, and ends by proportionately dulling and blunting the activity of the brain; and this, independently of the circumstance whether they are taken in greater or smaller quantities. In the second place, if these stimulants and narcotics possess at any time the property of benumbing the conscience, they are equally endowed with this property at all times, to the same extent if murder, robbery, and violence be perpetrated under their influence, as when only a word is spoken, a thought harboured, a feeling cherished, which would not have been spoken, harboured, or cherished without their influence. In the third place, if these brain-poisoning stimulants and narcotics are indispensable to robbers, brigands, and professional courtesans in order to drown the voice of their consciences, they are not less necessary to persons who follow certain other professions which are condemned by their own consciences, although regarded as legal and honourable by the vast majority of their fellow men.

In a word, it is impossible not to see that the habit of indulging in intoxicating stimulants in large or small doses, periodically or continuously, in the higher or the lower social circles, is always

induced by the same cause, namely, the need of muffling the voice of conscience, in order not to be compelled to take notice of the jarring discord between actual life and the requisitions of conscience.

III.

Therein lies the true cause of the universality of the habit of indulging in brain-poisoning stimulants, among others in tobacco, which is probably the most wide-spread and baneful of all.

It is claimed for tobacco that it gladdens the heart of the smoker, clears up his thoughts, attracts and gratifies him in precisely the same manner as any other habit he may have acquired, but that under no circumstances has it the effect possessed by alcohol of paralysing the activity of the conscience. But it is only necessary to analyse more carefully than is the wont, the conditions under which a peculiarly strong craving for tobacco manifests itself, to acquire the conviction that brain-clouding by means of tobacco fumes, like brain-clouding by means of alcohol, exerts a direct action on the conscience, and that the need for this kind of stimulant is peculiarly intense precisely when the desire to stifle the voice of conscience is at its height. If it were true that tobacco only gladdens the heart and clears up the thoughts, no such passionate craving for it would be felt under such clearly defined circumstances, and people would not be heard averring that they are ready to dispense with food rather than deny themselves a smoke, a statement which, in many cases, we know to be literally true.

The male cook already alluded to, who murdered his mistress, told the court, on his trial, that when he had entered the bedroom and cut her throat with the knife, and seen her fall back uttering a hoarse, guttural sound, while the blood spurted out in a torrent, he was struck aghast at what he had done. "I had not the courage to finish her," he exclaimed, "so I went out of the bedroom into the parlour, sat down, and smoked a cigarette." It was only after he had clouded his brain with tobacco fumes that he summoned up the force necessary to return to the bedroom and ply the knife until his victim was dead, when he began to ransack her movable property.

Now, it is obvious that the craving he felt to have a smoke under these peculiar circumstances was not due to a desire on his part to clear his thoughts or gladden his heart, but to the necessity of stifling a voice that was hindering him from consummating the deed he had planned and partially executed.

Every smoker can, if he will, discern the same clearly defined need of stupefying his thinking faculties with tobacco fumes at certain critical moments of his life. Speaking for myself, I can distinctly call to mind the times when I, while yet a smoker, felt this peculiarly

pressing need of tobacco. It was always on occasions when I was desirous not to remember things that were thrusting themselves upon my memory, when I was anxious to forget, to suspend all thought. At one time I would be sitting alone, doing nothing, conscious that I ought to be engaged at my work, but averse to all occupations. I would then light a cigarette, smoke it, and continue to sit in idleness. Another time I would remember that I had an engagement for five o'clock, but that I had lingered too long in another place and it was now too late. The thought that it was too late being disagreeable to me, I would take out a cigarette and drive it away in tobacco fumes. If I felt cross and peevish, and was offending another man by the tone or contents of my speech, and recognising my duty to cease, yet resolved to give way to my peevishness, I would smoke and continue to show my ill-temper. When sitting at the card-table I had lost more than the sum to which I had determined to limit my losses, I would light a cigarette and play on. Whenever I had placed myself in an awkward position, had done anything reprehensible, had made a blunder, and feeling myself bound to acknowledge the true state of affairs in order to extricate myself from it, was yet unwilling to do so, I shifted the blame on to others, took out a cigarette and smoked. If, when working at a book or story I felt dissatisfied with what I was writing, and saw it to be my duty to cease, but felt an inclination to finish what I had thought out, I took out a cigarette and smoked. Was I discussing some question, and did I see that my opponent and myself, viewing the matter from different angles of vision, did not and could not understand each other, if I felt a strong desire to make him hear me out notwithstanding, I began to smoke and continued to talk.

The characteristic that distinguishes tobacco from other kinds of brain-clouding stimulants, besides the rapidity with which it stupefies the faculties, and its apparent harmlessness, consists in what may be termed its portativeness, in the ease with which it can be employed upon every trivial occasion. Thus the consumption of opium, alcohol, hashish involves certain arrangements which one cannot make at all times and in all places, whereas the tobacco and paper necessary for making cigarettes you can always carry about with you without the slightest personal inconvenience. Then, again, the opium-smoker and the drunkard excite loathing and horror, whereas there is nothing repulsive about the tobacco-smoker as such; but, over and above these advantages, tobacco possesses another property that materially contributes to render it popular; while the stupefaction induced by opium, hashish, alcohol, extends to all impressions received, and to all actions performed over a relatively long period of time, the deadening effect on the brain of tobacco can be regulated in accordance with the exigencies of each particular case. Do you wish, for instance, to

do something which you know you ought not to do? Smoke a cigarette, muddle your faculties just to the extent that is absolutely indispensable to enable you to do what you should have left undone, and you are at once as fresh as ever, and can think and speak with your wonted clearness. Are you too painfully conscious that you have done something which you should have refrained from doing? Smoke a cigarette, and the gnawing worm of conscience will be quickly smothered in the fumes of your tobacco, and you can turn forthwith to another occupation, and forget what occasioned your annoyance.

But making an abstract from all those particular cases in which every smoker has recourse to tobacco, not for the purpose of satisfying a habitual craving, or of whiling away the time, but as a means of silencing the voice of his conscience, which protests against certain acts that he has already performed or intends to perform, do we not clearly discern the strictly defined relation and interdependence between people's way of living and their passionate love of smoking?

When do boys begin to smoke? Almost invariably when they have lost the innocence of childhood. Why is it that people addicted to smoking can leave it off the moment they raise themselves up to a higher moral level, and others recommence as soon as they drift into a dissolute social circle? Why is it that almost all gamblers are smokers? Why is it that among the female sex the women who lead blameless, regular lives are the least frequently addicted to smoking? Why do courtesans and the insane all smoke without exception? Habit, no doubt, is a factor in these cases which cannot be ignored, but after having given it our fullest consideration, we must still admit that there is a certain well-defined, undeniable interdependence between smoking and the need for silencing one's conscience, and that smoking does undoubtedly produce that effect.

To what extent can smoking stifle the voice of conscience? We have no need to seek for the materials for a solution of this question in exceptional cases of crime and remorse; it is amply sufficient to observe the behaviour of the ordinary—one might almost say of any—smoker. Every smoker abandoning himself to his passion, loses sight of, or rides roughshod over, certain of the most elementary rules of social life, the observance of which he demands from others, and which he himself respects in all other cases, whenever his conscience is not completely silenced by tobacco. Every person of moderately good breeding in our social sphere holds it to be unseemly, ill-mannered, churlish, merely for his own pleasure to interfere with the peace and comfort of others, and *à fortiori* to injure their health. No one would take the liberty to flood with water a room in which people were sitting; to scream and yell in it; to turn on hot, cold, or foetid air, or to perform any other acts tending to disturb or injure others; and yet out of a thousand smokers scarcely one will hesitate to fill

with noxious fumes a room the atmosphere of which is being breathed by women and children who do not smoke. If before lighting their cigarette or cigar, they ask the company present, "Have you any objection?" every one knows that he or she is expected to answer, "Not the least!" (although it is inconceivable that it should be anything but disagreeable to a non-smoker to have the air he respire poisoned, and to find stinking cigarette ends in glasses, tumblers, cups, plates, candlesticks, or even were it only in ash-trays). And even if we suppose that non-smoking adults can support the discomforts in question, surely no one will maintain that it is agreeable or wholesome for children, whose permission nobody ever thinks of asking. And yet people who are perfectly honourable and humane in all other respects smoke in the company of children, at table, in small rooms, poisoning the air with the fumes of tobacco, and never feel the faintest prick of conscience.

It is commonly urged in favour of the practice—and I used to advance the plea myself—that smoking conduces to efficient mental work; and there is no doubt that if we confine our consideration to the quantity of intellectual work done, we shall find this plea well grounded. To a man who is smoking, and who has consequently ceased to gauge and weigh his thoughts, it naturally seems that his mind has suddenly become thronged with ideas. As a mere matter of fact, however, his ideas have not become more numerous, but he has simply lost all control over them.

A man who works is always conscious of two beings within himself—the one who is engaged in work, and the one who sits in judgment upon the work done. The severer the judgment he passes, the slower and the more perfect is the work done, and *vice versâ*. If the judge be under the influence of a stimulant or a narcotic, there will be more work done, but of an inferior quality.

"If I do not smoke, I cannot work; I cannot get my thoughts upon paper; and even when I have begun, I cannot go on." So people commonly say, and so I said myself in times gone by. Now, what is the meaning of this statement? It means that you have nothing to say, or that the ideas to which you are endeavouring to give expression have not matured in your consciousness—are only dimly dawning upon you—and the living critic within you, unclouded by tobacco fumes, tells you so. Now, if you were not a smoker, you would, under these circumstances, either wait patiently until you had acquired a clear conception of the subject about which you wished to write, or else you would strive, by throwing yourself manfully into it, to master it thoroughly, weighing and discussing the objections that suggest themselves to your mind, and generally elucidating your thoughts to yourself. Instead of this, however, you take out a cigarette, and smoke; the living critic within you becomes clouded,

stupefied, and the hitch in your work is removed; that which seemed petty, unworthy, while your brain was still fresh and clear, now appears great, excellent; that which struck you as obscure is no longer so; you make light of the objections that occur to you, and you continue to write, and find to your joy that you can write quickly and much.

IV.

“But can it be possible that such a slight, almost imperceptible, change as is produced by the mild flush of excitement that ensues upon our moderately indulging in wine or tobacco should work such grave results? No doubt, to a person who smokes opium, takes hashish, drinks alcohol so immoderately that he falls down helpless and bereft of his reason, the consequences may be very grave indeed; but it is very different when a person only takes as much as suffices to cause a pleasurable excitement. This state can surely be productive of no such wide-reaching results.” This is the objection that people usually make. It seems to them that mere incipient inebriation—the partial eclipsing, or rather the mellowing, of the light of consciousness cannot entail serious results of any kind. Now, it is as reasonable to think thus as to imagine that, although a watch may be seriously injured by striking it against a stone, it is not liable to any damage whatever from the introduction of a splinter of wood, or some other foreign body, into its internal mechanism.

It should not be lost sight of that the labour which is mainly instrumental in moving and moulding human life does not consist in the movement of human hands, feet, or backs, but in modifications of consciousness. Before a man can perform anything with his hands and feet a certain change must necessarily have taken place in his conscience. And this change determines all the ensuing actions of the man. Now, these modifications of human consciousness are always slight, well-nigh imperceptible.

The Russian painter Bruloff was once engaged in correcting a drawing of one of his pupils. He touched it very slightly with his pencil here and there, with the result that his pupil cried out: “Why you have only given the drawing one or two scarcely appreciable touches, and it has undergone a complete transformation!” Bruloff sententiously replied: “Art begins only there where scarcely perceptible touches effect great changes.”

This saying is strikingly true, and not merely when restricted to art, but when applied to all human existence. We are justified in affirming that true life begins only where scarcely perceptible touches begin to tell, where such changes as are produced are infinitesimally small, and seem to us of no account. It is not where vast outward changes take place, where people move backwards and forwards, cross-

ing each other, clashing with each other, fighting and slaying each other, that true life is to be found; it is where infinitesimal differential changes occur.

Take Rasskolnikoff,* for instance. His true life did not coincide with the moment when he killed the old woman or her sister. When he set about murdering the old woman, and especially when he was killing her sister, he was not instinct with genuine life; he was acting as a wound-up machine acts, doing what he could not possibly refrain from doing; firing off the charge that he had accumulated within himself long before. One old woman lay killed before him, the other stood there in his presence, and the axe was ready in his hand.

Rasskolnikoff's true life coincided not with the moment when he met the old woman's sister, but the time when he had not yet killed either of the two, when he had not yet entered a stranger's lodging bent upon murder; when he had no axe in his hands, no loop in his greatcoat on which to hang it, when he had no thoughts of the old woman whatever; it coincided with the time when, lying on the sofa in his own room, not thinking of the old woman, nor of the question whether it was lawful or not in obedience to the will of one human being to wipe out the earthly existence of another unworthy human being, but was debating with himself whether he should or should not live in St. Petersburg, whether he should or should not take his mother's money, and meditating upon other matters that had no reference whatever to the old woman. It is at such conjunctures that the greatest attainable clearness of mental vision is of the very utmost importance for the right solution of such questions as may then arise; it is at such moments that one glass of beer drunk, one little cigarette smoked, can hinder that solution, can cause it to be put off, can silence the voice of conscience, and can bring about a solution of the question in a sense favourable to our baser nature, as was the case with Rasskolnikoff.

Upon what takes place after a man has already formed his decision and has begun to embody it in action, many important issues of a material order may, no doubt, depend; edifices may be pulled down in consequence, riches may be scattered to the winds of heaven, human bodies may be deprived of life; but absolutely nothing can be done but what was already included in the consciousness of the man himself. The limits of what can take place are fixed by this consciousness.

Let me not be misunderstood. What I am saying now has nothing in common with the question of free will and determinism. The discussion of such matters is superfluous here, seeing that it has no connection with the question at issue, and I believe I may say it is quite superfluous for any intelligible purpose whatever. Putting aside, then, the question whether a man is or is not free to act as he pleases

* The hero of Dostoïeffsky's novel, "Crime and Punishment."

(a problem which, it seems to me, is not properly stated), all that I am here concerned to maintain is, that as human activity is determined by scarcely appreciable changes in consciousness, it follows (whether we admit so-called free will or not) that too much attention cannot possibly be given to the state of mind in which these changes occur, just as the most scrupulous care should be taken of the condition of the scales in which we are about to weigh precious objects. It is incumbent upon us, as far as in us lies, to surround ourselves and others with the conditions most favourable to that precision and clearness of thought which are so indispensable to the proper working of our consciousness; and we should certainly refrain most scrupulously from hindering and clogging this action of consciousness by the consumption of brain-clouding stimulants and narcotics.

For man is at once a spiritual and an animal being. His activity can be set in motion by influencing his spiritual nature, and it can likewise receive an impulse by influencing his animal nature. In this he resembles a watch which can be moved by moving either the hands or the main wheel. And as it is much more expedient to regulate the movement of a watch by its internal mechanism than by moving its hands, so it is far more judicious to determine a man's activity by means of his consciousness than by means of his animal nature. And as in a watch we should be most concerned to maintain those conditions which ensure the smooth working of the inner mechanism, so in man we should lay most stress on the attainment and maintenance of unclouded purity and sharpness of consciousness, through which man's activity is most easily and most conveniently determined. Of this there can be no doubt; every one feels and knows that it is true. But very often people also feel the necessity of deceiving themselves. They are not so much concerned that their consciousness should work smoothly and well, as that they should persuade themselves that what they are bent on doing is right and good; and in order to acquire that persuasion they deliberately have recourse to means which they know will interfere with the right working of their consciousness.

v.

People drink and smoke, therefore, not merely for want of something better to do to while away the time, or to raise their spirits; not because of the pleasure they receive, but simply and solely in order to drown the warning voice of conscience. And if that be so, how terrible are the consequences that must ensue! In effect, just fancy what a curious building the people would construct who, in order to adjust the walls to a perpendicular, should refuse to employ a straight plumb-line, and for the purpose of measuring the angles should object to use an ordinary carpenter's square, preferring to the

former a soft plastic plumb-rule, that bends and adjusts itself to all the irregularities of the walls, and to the latter a carpenter's square that folds and yields to the touch and adjusts itself equally well to an acute and an obtuse angle !

And yet this is exactly what is done in every-day life by those who stupefy themselves. Life is not regulated by conscience, it is conscience that plies and adjusts itself to life.

This is what we see taking place in the life of private individuals. This it is which also takes place in the life of all humanity—which is but the sum total of the lives of private individuals.

In order thoroughly to realise all that is involved in this clouding of one's consciousness, the reader has only to call distinctly to mind his frame of mind at each of the chief periods of his life. He will remember that at each of these periods he found himself face to face with certain moral problems which he was bound to solve in one sense or the other, and upon the right solution of which the well-being of his whole life depended. To arrive at this solution after an exhaustive survey of all the factors and phases of the problem is an utter impossibility without putting a very severe strain upon the attention. Now, this effort of attention constitutes work. Whatever work we put our hands to, there is always a period in its progress—generally the commencement—when its disagreeable features very strongly impress us, when it seems peculiarly arduous and irksome, and human nature in its weakness suggests the wish to abandon it altogether. Physical work seems irksome in the beginning, intellectual labour appears still more irksome. As Lessing remarks, people have the habit of ceasing to think as soon as the process of thinking becomes difficult, and in my opinion precisely when it becomes fruitful. A man feels instinctively that the problems that come up before him clamouring for a solution, the Sphinx's riddles that must be answered on pain of death, cannot be properly thought out without strenuous and, in many cases, painful labour, and this he would gladly shirk. Now, if he were bereft of the means of clouding his mental faculties, it would be impossible for him to expunge from the tablets of his conscience the questions on the order of the day, and, *nolens volens*, he would find himself in conditions that necessitated an answer, and admitted neither of excuse nor delay. But, behold, he discovers an effective means of putting off these questions whenever they present themselves for a solution ; and he does not fail to make use of it. The moment life demands an answer to these questions, and they begin to worry and harass him, he has recourse to those artificial means, and delivers himself from the vexation of spirit engendered by the disquieting questions. His consciousness no longer presses for a speedy solution, and the problems remain unsolved until the next interval of lucidity. But when the following period of lucidity comes round the same thing is repeated, and the individual continues to stand for

months, for years, sometimes during his whole life, face to face with the same moral problems without moving one step forward in the direction of a solution. And yet all the movement and progress of human life consists exclusively in the right solution of moral problems. This curious mode of procedure presents considerable analogy with the conduct of a man employed to recover a lost pearl lying at the bottom of a shallow river, who, to escape entering the cold water, prevents himself from seeing the pearl by deliberately stirring up the mud, and repeating the process whenever the water shows signs of becoming clear again. A man addicted to the habit of stupefying his faculties by artificial means will often continue stagnant during the whole course of his existence, standing in the same place, looking out upon the world through the mist of the vague self-contradictory life-philosophy that he once accepted; at the beginning of every new period of lucidity pressing hard against the same wall, against which he pressed in the same way ten, fifteen, twenty years before, and in which he lacks the means to make a breach, because he persists in deliberately blunting the edge of the thought which alone was capable of effecting it.

Every one has it in his power to verify the truth of this assertion upon himself and upon others. Let him conjure up before his mind's eye the principal events of his own life for the period during which he has been indulging in smoking and drinking, and let him pass in review the same period in the life of others. He will then clearly perceive the line of demarcation, the characteristic trait that separates smokers and tipplers from people who are free from those habits. For the more a man stupefies himself with these stimulants and narcotics the more stolid, quiescent, and stagnant he becomes intellectually and morally.

VI.

Terrible indeed are the evils that have been more than once described to us, which opium and hashish bring upon those who consume them; terrible, likewise, are the effects—which we can every day observe—of alcoholism upon the inveterate drunkard; but more terrible beyond comparison for the entire community at large are the effects of moderate drinking and smoking, habits largely indulged in as harmless by the majority of the people, more especially by the so-called educated classes of our social world.

These consequences cannot be otherwise than terrible if we admit what it is impossible to deny, that the guiding force of the community—political, administrative, scientific, literary, artistic—is wielded for the most part by men who are not in a normal condition of mind, by men who, to call things by their names, are in a state of intoxication. It is usually taken for granted that a man who, like most of the members of our well-to-do classes, indulges in a little spirits every

day before each meal, is during the hours of work next day in a perfectly normal state of mind. This is a grievous error. The man who yesterday drank a bottle of wine, a tumbler of *vodka*, or two large measures of beer, is to-day in a state of subsiding intoxication or incipient sobriety, a state of dejection which follows upon yesterday's excitement; consequently, he is mentally oppressed as well as depressed, and this feeling is but intensified by smoking. A man who drinks and smokes moderately but regularly every day, requires—in order to restore his brain to its normal condition—at least one week, probably more than a week, of total abstinence from spirits and tobacco. Now, no smoker or bibbler ever voluntarily abstains for such a long time.

It follows, therefore, that by far the greatest part of all that is done in this world of ours, both by those whose profession it is to guide and teach others and by those who are thus guided and taught, is done in a state of ebriety.*

And I trust this will not be taken either as a joke or an exaggeration: the extravagant disorder, and especially the senselessness and folly, of our life springs mainly from the state of continuous inebriation in which the majority of people deliberately place themselves. Is it conceivable that people not drunk should calmly set about doing all the extraordinary things that are being accomplished in our world, from the Eiffel Tower to obligatory military service? It is utterly inconceivable. Without the slightest need, or even semblance of need, a company is formed, a large capital subscribed; people go to work to make estimates and draw plans; millions of working days and millions of *poods* † of iron are spent in the construction of a tower; and, when finished, millions of persons consider it their duty to repair to the summit of this tower, stay a short time, and then crawl down again, and the only effect produced on the minds of men by this tower, and the frequency with which ascents are made in it, is the desire and the resolve to go and erect still loftier towers in other places. Now, is it conceivable that these things should be done by sober people? Or, take another case; all European States are, and have

* But how are we to explain the undeniable fact that people who neither drink nor smoke are frequently on an incomparably lower intellectual and moral level than inveterate toppers and smokers? And how is it that people who drink and smoke often give proof of the highest intellectual and moral qualities?

To this objection the answer is, in the first place, that we are ignorant of the degree of excellence which these persons would have attained if they never drank nor smoke. In the second place, from the circumstance that spiritually vigorous people, while subjecting themselves to the debasing action of brain-poisoning stimulants, yet manage to perform marvellous and sublime deeds, we can only draw the conclusion that they would have accomplished still greater things had they not clouded and clogged their faculties. It is highly probable that, as an acquaintance of mine once remarked, Kant's books would not have been written in such strange, clumsy language had their author not been such an inveterate smoker. Lastly, it should not be forgotten that the lower a man's position in the moral and intellectual sphere, the less acutely he feels the jarring discord between consciousness and life, and, consequently, the less pronounced is the need of stupefying himself; it is for a like reason that the most sensitive natures, those who are painfully, nay, morbidly conscious of this discord between life and conscience, become addicted to narcotics, which work their ultimate ruin.

† A Russian pood is about thirty-six English pounds.

for scores of years been, busily engaged in inventing and perfecting effectual weapons to kill people ; and they carefully teach the science of organised murder to all young men who have reached manhood's estate. All are well aware that incursions of barbarians are no longer possible, and that these preparations for murder are intended by Christian, civilised nations to be employed against each other ; all feel that this is unseemly, painful, nefarious, ruinous, immoral, impious, and senseless ; and yet all persist in carrying out their preparations for mutual destruction : some by arranging political combinations, making alliances, and settling who is to slaughter whom ; others by directing the work of those who are engaged in getting things ready for the slaughter ; and others, again, by submitting against their own will, against their conscience, against their reason, to these preparations for murder. Now, could sober men act in this way ? None but drunken men, men who never have a lucid interval of sobriety, could do these things, could live on in spite of this perpetual, irreconcilable, terrible conflict between life and conscience, in which not only in this matter, but in all other respects, the people of our world live and have their being.

At no other period of the world's history, I feel convinced, did mankind lead an existence in which the dictates of conscience and their deliberate actions were in such evident conflict as at present.

It seems as if the human race in our days had got fastened to something that is holding it back, impeding its progress. There would seem to be some external cause which hinders it from attaining the position that belongs to it of right, in virtue of consciousness. The cause in question—or, if there be several, the main cause—is the physical state of stupefaction to which the overwhelming majority of human beings reduce themselves by means of alcohol and tobacco.

The deliverance of humanity from this terrible evil will mark an epoch in the life of the race, and, apparently, this epoch will arrive in the near future. The evil is already recognised. A change in the consciousness of men in reference to the use of brain-poisoning stimulants and narcotics has already taken place : people are beginning to realise the terrible mischief they produce, and they are manifesting this feeling in acts ; and this imperceptible change in their consciousness must inevitably bring in its train the emancipation of humanity from the influence of all such brain poisons. This emancipation of mankind from the thralldom of brain poisons will open their eyes to the demands of their consciousness, and they will forthwith begin to put their life in harmony with its dictates.

This process seems to have already begun. And, as is usual in such cases, it is beginning in the higher social classes, after all the lower orders have become infected with the evil.

LEO TOLSTOI.





