"COUNT TOLSTOI, madam, is out cutting hay."
Those outwardly respectful words were eloquent of
nameless things to me, as the deep-shouldered maid-
servant stood in the doorway of the man who is great to
all the world but his own kin, and allowed a slow smile
of remembrance to break over her heavy Slav face.
I had just driven the fifteen long and rugged versts from Tula to
Yasnaya Polyana. For all that distance I had been tossed about in
a harrowingly antiquated telyaga, under the sweltering open sun
of a Russian summer, to the nerve-racking accompaniment of my
iswotschik's endless profanity.
The Countess herself and six of the children, the servant added,
were bathing down at the River. I knew enough of that half-
pagan household to deem it wiser to seek out the Count amid his
hay-cocks, than the Countess amid her nymphs.
So, with the deep-shouldered servant-maid swinging stolidly on
before me, I gathered up my dusty skirts—that Russian dust, how
deep it can lie!—and strode across the open fields, swimming in
their mid-day heat.
Count Tolstoi's estate is of rolling land, in places, and at last before
me, on the crest of a long slope of rising ground, I could see the
little group of laborers where the master was mowing among his
men—where the hand that penned "War and Peace" was hacking
determinedly at a few kopeks worth of hay-crop. Moujiks and
master seemed to stand out before me there, almost Titanic, in the
pulsating mid-day heat, silhouetted against the pale blue sky-line.
Even at a distance I saw and recognized the scholarly sloping
shoulder, the great bent frame that seemed to have shriveled so in
the last five years, the time-furrowed and thought-lined face which
no peasant's costume could disguise. And as I looked at him, swing-
ing that ponderous, primitive, incongruous scythe, outlined against
the hot turquoise sky, stubborn even in his defeat, determined even
in what all his life had sealed as a mockery, a passing sense of the
Great Man's inward isolation, of his loneliness of soul, of a spir-
Itual despair which he had not always hidden, swept over me.
My Last Memory of Tolstoi

Just why it did, I scarcely know; but that moment it came to me; and from that moment it has remained with me.

Although we had met before, more than once, the Count did not know me as I came up and stood before him. He straightened his bent back, but not without difficulty, I remember, and mopped his dripping face with his huge platok. As he did so, I caught a passing odor of violets; and then I remembered his old-time child-like love of perfumery.

He leaned on his heavy scythe, his breath still coming in gasps, and looked at me from under his shaggy brows, out of those small, close-set, penetrating, almost wolfish grey eyes. I was about to recall my name to him, embarrassed for the moment, and to explain my mission, when the petulantly wrinkled brow of a sudden relaxed. He caught up my hand, with what I have every reason to believe was genuine pleasure, dropping his scythe, and leaving it there forgotten, for the men to carry back when, half an hour later, we took our way to the house.

That, my last day at Yasnaya Polyana, was a happy one for me. A merry one I had scarcely expected it to be. Just why this was so I vaguely realized that night as we sat at dinner. Only that afternoon the Countess—I could exhaust my vocabulary in praising that sternly noble, simple, far-seeing, solicitous wife and mother and woman!—had confessed to me, with no taint of bitterness, that with her own hand she had written and re-written for her husband the manuscript of "War and Peace" twenty-one times. And she the mother of sixteen children, the manageress of an estate, the secretary of a novelist, the patient wife of an impatient genius! But as I was about to write, young people are young people the world over. And six out of the Count's nine children, who were then at home, made the company, during that meal, merry enough at times. But the shadow of a life's melancholy, the gloom of a nation's renounced sorrows, still seemed to dwell in that big, bald, crudely furnished dining-room, dominated by the grim presence of the master himself. It is true he talked a great deal that night; I even remember that he sent me down to the kitchen to have the sugarbowl refilled. I sat at his side, where the ever-watchful Countess
My Last Memory of Tolstoi

has the habit of placing the honored visitor, and I also ate meat, though I saw that my host was eating what I strongly suspect was cabbage soup, afterwards heaping his plate with his inevitable buckwheat mush. And as he devoured that penitential dish he volleyed keen question after question at me, listening intently, his pale grey eyes always alert while doing so, his massive head bowed in what might seem to the unknowing an attitude of abject humility. This appearance of humbleness, indeed, I had noticed more than once that day, as I watched him sit with his lap-board on his knees, looming ponderously over a pair of badly-made soles for a pair of badly made boots,—and I knew even then that it was all a quiet but none the less passionate oblation to those gods whom he held highest and best. Yet at most times it is his impatient strength, his rugged virility, that impresses one.

It was toward the end of that memorable dinner—memorable it shall at least stand to me—before the younger children had been sent to bed and we older people had clustered about the samovar of the Countess, that a burst of half-suppressed laughter broke out from the little ones farthest away from the Count and myself. The Count talked on, preoccupied and unheeding, until a stern word or two from his wife to the children caught his attention. Then he asked, almost querulously, I thought, what it all was.

The Countess gently protested that it was nothing, and was for talking of other things, until a youthful voice piped up (I am translating quite freely) : "No, no! We must tell papa!"

Again the Countess interposed, but it was ineffectual.

"Oh, mama," (it was really the "maman" of the French) "oh, mama, we must!" And then, amid some protest, the laughing girl went on:

"It's what Count K——— told us yesterday, papa, about you. He said that 'our Little Father' (Tzar Alexander the Third) had said to Pobedenostzer (Procurator of the Holy Synod) that it's no use bothering about you. He said that you couldn't help being just you, wherever you were, and that you wanted to be a moujik just because you happened to be born a Count! But if you'd been born a moujik, he said, you'd have wanted a heap worse to be a Count!"
My Last Memory of Tolstoi

The pale grey eyes looked in studious silence at the loquacious girl. They looked at her, I believe, for several moments. I could see the toil-hardened hand drum impatiently on the rough table. Then the great leonine man seemed to shrink back into himself, and once more I had a passing and painful sense of one lonely dreamer's isolation of spirit, of the eternal aloofness which cut him off from that more intimate world which, indeed, should have been so much to him. It was only for a moment, but the memory of it will stay with me for all time.

SERVICE INVOLVES SACRIFICE, AND, THEREFORE, IF PEOPLE REALLY WISH TO IMPROVE THE POSITION OF THEIR BROTHER MEN, AND NOT MERELY THEIR OWN, THEY MUST BE READY NOT ONLY TO ALTER THE WAY OF LIFE TO WHICH THEY ARE ACCUSTOMED, BUT THEY MUST BE READY FOR AN INTENSE STRUGGLE AGAINST THEMSELVES AND THEIR FAMILIES.

LEO TOLSTOI
THE SLAVERY OF OUR TIMES