THE TEACHING OF TRUTH

Whoever you may be, however gifted, however kind to those about you, however circumstanced, can you sit unmoved over your tea, your dinner, your political, artistic, scientific, medical or educational affairs, while you hear or see at your door a hungry, cold, sick, suffering man? . . . What, then, must be done?

You know these things, and the teaching of the truth tells you them. Go to the bottom—to what seems the bottom, but is really the top—take your place beside those who produce food for the hungry and clothes for the naked, and do not be afraid: it will not be worse, but better in all respects. Take your place in the ranks, set to work with your weak, unskilled hands at that primary work which feeds the hungry and clothes the naked: at bread-labor, the struggle with Nature; and you will feel, for the first time, firm ground beneath your feet, will feel that you are at home, that you are free and stand firmly, and have reached the end of your journey. And you will feel those complete, unpoisoned joys that can be found nowhere else—not secured by any doors nor screened by any curtains.

You will know joys you have never known before; you will, for the first time, know those strong, plain men, your brothers, who from a distance have fed you until now; and to your surprise you will find in them such qualities as you have never known: such modesty, such kindness to yourself as you will feel you have not deserved.

Instead of the contempt or scorn you expected, you will meet with such kindness, such gratitude and respect for having—after living on them and despising them all your life—at last recollected yourself, and with unskilled hands tried to help them.

You will see that what seemed to you like an island on which you were saved from the sea that threatened to engulf you was a marsh in which you were sinking, and the sea you feared was dry land on which you will walk firmly, quietly, and happily; as must be the case, for from a deception (into which you did not enter of your own wish, but into which you were led) you will escape to the truth, and from the evasion of God's purpose you will pass to its performance.

—Leo Tolstoy.