

# TOLSTOY LETTERS

[We print below hitherto unpublished letters from Tolstoy to Chekhov which recently appeared in a Russian journal in Paris. Tolstoy's design of retiring from the world, which he carried out a few days before his death, seems to have been in his mind as early as 1895.]

From *L'Humanité*, April 3  
(PARIS RADICAL SOCIALIST DAILY)

May, 1884.

I AM spending this year in the country; and without seeking it have found a new way of living. I rise early and retire early. I write nothing, but I work a great deal. Sometimes I make shoes, sometimes I labor in the harvest-field. I say with pleasure — or is it a mere trick of fancy? — that the attitude of my family is changing; that they no longer condemn me, but begin to feel somewhat ashamed. What poor creatures we are, and how far we have wandered from the path! Just now, we have many people in the household, my children and Kusminsky's children, and I cannot always suppress my feeling of horror at seeing their immoral idleness and self-indulgence. Such a host of people, all grown-up, vigorous creatures! I appreciate and see the hard labor that it takes to keep things going. But all they do is to eat and wear out their clothes and make work for the cook, the laundress, and the chambermaid. Others toil for them and they do nothing useful either for themselves or for others. Every one of them considers this the most natural thing in the world; and I, too, thought the same formerly. I, too, have done my part to create the present situation. I see this clearly. I cannot forget it for an instant. I know that I am in their eyes a *trouble-fête* — a kill-joy. However, even they — at least it so seems to me — are beginning to realize that things are not just as they ought to be.

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June, 1895.

I wrote you in my last letter that I was quite well, but to-day, in replying to your second letter from England, which has just come, I am compelled to say that I do not feel at all well. My writing does not get on, and the physical labor that I perform seems almost useless, because I am not compelled to do it by necessity. So far as the people about me are concerned, I have practically no relations with them. Beggars come now and then, and I give them a few kopecks, and they go their way. My children are systematically demoralized before my eyes. To me it is as if one tied stones around their necks. Evidently, I am to blame. I do not wish to pretend to you that I possess a tranquility of mind which I have not got. I do not fear death. I even desire it, and it is precisely there that the evil lies. For it proves that I have lost the Son which God gave me to cure me in this life and to point out to me the path in which I would have found complete contentment. I am aware of a confusion in all my being, and I wish to die. An impulse seizes me to flee from the world, to change my manner of living utterly.

All this proves that I am weak and sinful, while I am assuming to blame others and to regard my situation as extraordinarily different. During the last six days I have been the prey of unusual melancholy. My only consolation is that it cannot continue. It is a heavy trial; but I do not despair, because I