

A Great Iniquity

BY LEO TOLSTOY

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RUSSIA is living through an important time destined to have enormous results.

The proximity and inevitableness of the approaching change is, as indeed is always the case, especially keenly felt by those classes of society who, by their position, are free from the necessity of physical labor absorbing all their time and power, and therefore have the possibility of occupying themselves with political questions. These men—the nobles, merchants, Government officials, doctors, engineers, professors, teachers, artists, students, advocates, chiefly townspeople, the so-called “intellectuals”—are now in Russia directing the movement which is taking place, and they devote all their powers to the alteration of the existing political order, and to replacing it by another regarded by this or that party as the most expedient and likely to insure the liberty and welfare of the Russian people. These men, continually suffering from every kind of restriction and coercion on the part of the Government, from arbitrary exile, incarcerations, prohibition of meetings, prohibition of books, newspapers, strikes, unions—from the limitation of the rights of various nationalities, and at the same time living a life completely estranged from the majority of the Russian agricultural people, naturally see in these restrictions the chief evil, and in the liberation from it the chief welfare, of the Russian people.

Thus think the Liberals. So, also, think the Social Democrats, who hope, through popular representation, by the aid of State power, to realize a new social order in accordance with their theory. So also think the revolutionaries, hoping by substituting a new Government for the existing one, to establish laws insuring the greatest freedom and welfare of the whole people.

And yet one need only for a time free oneself from the idea which has taken root amongst our intellectuals, that the work now before Russia is the introduction into our country of those same forms of political life which have been introduced into Europe and America, and are supposed to insure the liberty and