Weeds grew up in a good meadow. To get rid of them, the owners of the meadow mowed them down, but the weeds only grew more numerous. A good and wise husbandman visited the owners of the meadow, and among other instructions that he gave them, he said that the weeds ought not to be mowed down, for that made only them grow more numerous, but that they ought to be torn out by the root.

But, because the owners of the meadow did not notice the injunction about weeds among the other injunctions of the good husbandman, or because they did not understand him, or because they did not wish to do so for reasons of their own, the injunction about the weeds was not fulfilled, as though it had never existed, and the people continued to mow the weeds and to spread them. Although in the following years there were some men who reminded the owners of the meadow of the injunction of the good and wise husbandman, no attention was paid to them. The owners continued to act as before, so that it not only became a habit with them, but even a sacred tradition to mow down the weeds as soon as they appeared, and the meadow became more and more covered with weeds. It finally went so far that nothing was left in the meadow but weeds. People complained and tried to find all kinds of ways to mend matters, but they did not make use of the one means that had long ago been prescribed to them by the good and wise husbandman. And it happened that a man, who at last saw the evil plight in which the meadow was, and who in the forgotten injunctions of the husbandman had found the rule that the weeds were not to be mowed down, but to be plucked out by the root, reminded the owners of the meadow that they acted unwisely, and that their lack of wisdom had long ago been pointed out by the good and wise husbandman.

Well? Instead of verifying the correctness of what the man reminded them of, and, in case it was found to be correct, desisting from the mowing of the weeds, and, in case it was found to be incorrect, proving to him the injustice of his reminder, or recognizing the injunctions of the good and wise husbandman as ill-grounded and non-obligatory for themselves, the owners of the meadow did none of these things, but took umbrage at the man’s reminder and began to scold him. Some called him a senseless and proud man, who imagined that he was the only one of them all who understood the husbandman’s injunction. Others called him a malicious misinterpreter and calumniator. Others again, forgetting that he had not spoken in his own name, but had reminded them only of the injunctions of the universally respected wise husbandman, called him a dangerous man, who wished to spread the weeds and deprive people of their meadow.

“He says that we ought not to mow the weeds. But if we do not destroy the weeds,” they said, intentionally misrepresenting the man as saying that they ought not to destroy the weeds (he only said that the weeds should not be mowed down, but plucked out), “the weeds will grow rank and will entirely ruin our meadow. And why is the meadow given to us, if we are to raise weeds in it?”

The opinion that this man was a madman, or a false interpreter, or had in view the detriment of people, became so thoroughly confirmed that everybody scolded him and made fun of him.
And no matter how much this man explained that, far from wishing to spread the weeds, he considered the destruction of the weeds to be one of the chief occupations of a farmer, as this was understood by the good and wise husbandman, of whose words he reminded them – no matter how much he spoke of this – they paid no attention to him. It was definitely decided that he was either mad and proud, perversely interpreting the words of the good and wise husbandman, or a rascal, not calling people to destroy the weeds, but to keep and increase them.

The same thing happened to me, when I pointed out the injunction of the Gospel teaching concerning non-resistance to evil. This rule was prescribed by Christ, and after Him at all times by all His true disciples. But, either because they did not notice this rule, or because they did not understand it, or because the fulfillment of this rule appeared too difficult to them, this rule was forgotten as time went on. Matters came to such a state, as at the present time, that this rule has come to seem to people to be something new, unheard-of, strange, and even mad. The same happened to me that had happened to the man who pointed out to the people the old injunction of the good and wise husbandman, that the weeds ought not to be mowed down, but plucked out by the root.

The owners of the meadow, intentionally passing over in silence the fact that the advice was not that the weeds were not to be destroyed, but that they should be destroyed in a sensible manner, said, “We will not listen to this man. He is a madman, telling us not to mow down the weeds, but to multiply them.” In the same manner, in reply to my claim that, according to Christ’s words, it is necessary not to resist evil with violence in order to destroy it, but to destroy it by the root with love, they said, “We will not listen to him. He is a madman, advising us not to resist evil, in order that the evil may crush us.”

What I said was that, according to Christ’s teaching, evil cannot be rooted out with evil, that every resistance to evil with violence only increases the evil, and that evil is only rooted out with good. “Bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and love your enemies” – and you will have no enemies. I said that, according to Christ’s teaching, man’s whole life is a struggle with evil, a resistance to evil by means of reason and love, and that Christ excludes the one senseless means of resisting evil from all of the other means. Christ forbids fighting evil with evil.

These words of mine were understood to mean that we ought not to resist evil at all. All those whose life is based on violence, and to whom violence is therefore dear, gladly accepted such an interpretation of my words and, with them, of the words of Christ, declaring that the doctrine of non-resistance to evil is false, insipid, impious, and harmful. And people calmly continue, under the guise of destroying evil, to produce more evil.

Some people dealt in flour, milk, and all kinds of eatables. Vying with one another, in their desire to earn as much as possible and quickly grow rich, they began more and more to mix in all kinds of cheap and harmful ingredients with their wares. They mixed the flour with bran and lime, the butter with oleomargarine, and the milk with water and chalk. Everything went well so long as the commodities did not reach the consumers. The jobbers sold them to the wholesale dealers, and the wholesale dealers sold them to the retailers.
There were a large number of warehouses and shops, and the trade seemed to be brisk. The merchants were satisfied. But it was very unpleasant and dangerous for the city consumers, who did not themselves produce their provisions and so were obliged to purchase them.

The flour was bad, and so were the butter and the milk, but as none but adulterated products could be found in the markets of the cities, the city consumers continued to buy them, and accused themselves and the poor preparation of the food for the bad taste and their ill health, while the merchants kept putting more and more foreign cheap ingredients into the articles of food. Thus it went on for quite a while. The city dwellers suffered, and no one thought of expressing his dissatisfaction.

A countrywoman, who had always fed her family on home products, happened to come to the city. This woman had all her life prepared food, and although she was not a famous cook, she knew how to bake bread and cook dinners.

This woman bought provisions in the city and began to bake and cook. The loaves did not bake well, but fell. The flat cakes prepared with the oleo did not taste good. She set milk, but got no cream. She guessed at once that the provisions were not good. She examined them, and her guess proved true. In the flour she found lime, in the butter oleomargarine, in the milk chalk. When she saw that all the provisions were adulterated, she went to the market and began loudly to arraign the merchants and to demand of them either that they should keep good, nutritious, unadulterated provisions in their shops, or should stop trading and shut up their shops. But the merchants paid no attention to her and told her that their articles were of the best quality, that the city had been buying them for several years, and that they even had medals, which they showed her on their signs. But the woman would not be quieted.

“I do not need any medals,” she said, “but wholesome food, such as will not give my children any stomachache.”

“Dear woman, you have apparently not seen any real flour and butter,” the merchants said to her, pointing to the white, clean flour in lacquered flour-chests, to the miserable semblance of butter in beautiful dishes, and to the white liquid in shining transparent vessels.

“How can I help but know,” said the woman, “since I have done nothing my whole life but prepare food for my children and eat it with them? Your articles are adulterated. Here is the proof,” she said, showing them the spoiled loaf, the oleo in the cakes, and the sediment in the milk. “Your articles ought all to be thrown into the river or burned, and other, good ones ought to be got instead.”

The woman kept standing in front of the shops and calling out to the purchasers, as they came along, and the purchasers began to be disturbed.

Seeing that the bold woman might interfere with their trade, the merchants said to the purchasers, “Gentlemen, see how insane this woman is. She wants to starve people to death. She tells us to throw all the eatables into the river or burn them. What are you going to eat, if we obey her and stop selling you provisions? Pay no attention to her. She is a coarse countrywoman and does not know anything about provisions, and is attacking us only through envy. She is poor and wants us to be as poor as she.”

The merchants spoke thus to the assembled crowd, purposely concealing the fact that the woman did not wish to destroy the provisions, but only to substitute good provisions for the bad.

Then the crowd attacked the woman and began to call her names. No matter how much the woman assured them all that she did not wish to destroy the provisions, but only to substitute good provisions for the bad.
guise of food – no matter how long she spoke and what she said, no attention was paid to her, because it was decided that she wanted to deprive people of the food which was indispensable to them.

The same thing happened with me in relation to the science and art of our time. I subsisted all my life on this food, and, whether well or ill, tried to feed others whom I could reach with it. Since this is my food, and not an article of commerce or luxury, I know beyond any doubt when the food is food, and when it only resembles food. And when I tried the food that is being sold in the intellectual market under the guise of science and art, and tried to feed the people whom I love on it, I saw that a great part of this food was not genuine. When I said that the science and art in which people trafficked in the intellectual market were adulterated with great quantities of substances which were foreign to true art and true science, and that I knew this because the products bought by me in the intellectual market proved inedible both for me and for my neighbors (not only inedible, but absolutely injurious), they began to shout and yell at me, and to impress upon me that that was due to my not being learned and to my being unable to handle such profound subjects. But when I began to prove to them that the traders in these intellectual wares were themselves accusing one another of deception; when I reminded them that in all times much that was injurious and bad had been offered to people under the name of science and art, and that, therefore, the same danger confronted us in our time; when I said that this was not a trifling matter, but a spiritual poisoning, which was many times more dangerous than a poisoning of the body, and that, therefore, we had with the greatest care to examine those spiritual products which were offered to us in the form of food, and cautiously to reject everything spurious and harmful; when I began to tell them all that no one, not one man, not a single article or book controverted my arguments, they began to shout from all the shops, as to that woman, “He is mad! He wants to destroy science and art – that which we live by. Beware of him, and pay no attention to him! Come this way, gentlemen! We have the latest imported goods!”

Some people were walking. They lost their road, so that they no longer walked over a smooth road, but instead over swamps, thorn-bushes, and brushwood, which barred their way, and it became harder and harder to move on.

Then the travelers divided into two parties. One of them decided to walk straight on in the direction in which they had been walking, assuring themselves and others that they had not lost the right direction and would after all arrive at their destination. The other party decided that, since the direction in which they were now going was obviously wrong – or else they would have arrived at their destination – it was necessary to look for the road, and that, to find it, it was necessary to move as fast as possible in every direction without stopping. All the travelers were divided between these two opinions. Some decided to walk straight ahead, while the others decided to walk in all directions. There was found one man who, not agreeing with either opinion, said that, before going in the direction in which they had been walking, or beginning to move rapidly in all directions in the hope of thus finding what was right, they should first stop and reflect on their situation, and then only, after having reflected upon it, undertake one thing or another. But the travelers were so excited by their motion, were so frightened at their situation, wished so much to console themselves with the hope that they had not lost their way, but had
only for a little while got off the road and would soon find it again, and, above all, were so desirous by means of motion to drown their terror, that this opinion was met with universal indignation, rebukes, and scorn on the part of the men of either party.

“This is the advice of weakness, cowardice, and indolence,” said some.

“It is a fine way to reach our destination – just to sit in one place and not move on!” said others.

“That is what we are people for, and strength is given as precisely for struggling and laboring, overcoming barriers, and not for faint-heartedly submitting to them,” said others again.

No matter how much the man who had separated from the majority told them that by moving in a false direction, without changing it, they would certainly not reach their destination; that they would as little reach their destination if they were to toss from side to side; that the only means of arriving at their destination consisted in calculating by the sun or stars what direction would bring them to it, and then walking that way; that they must first stop, not in order to stand still, but in order to find the true path and then walk on it unswervingly; and that, for the purpose of doing all that, it was necessary first to stop and examine the situation – no matter how much he said all that, no attention was paid to him.

The first party of the travelers went in the direction in which they had been walking, while the second began to toss from one side to another, but neither of them came nearer to their destination, or got out of the bushes and thorns, and both are still wandering about.

Precisely the same happened with me, when I tried to express my doubts regarding the path on which we have blundered into the dark forest of the labor question and into the bog of the never-ending armaments of the nations, which will swallow us up. It is not quite the road over which we ought to walk, it is very likely that we have lost the road, and, therefore, it would be well for us for a time to stop going in a direction which is obviously wrong, and to reflect, first of all, according to those general and eternal principles of the truth revealed to us, whether we are going in the direction that we intended to take. Nobody answered my remarks. No one said, “We are not mistaken in the direction and are not blundering – of that we are sure for such and such reasons.” Nor did one man say that perhaps we were mistaken, but that we possessed an unquestionable means for correcting this mistake, without interrupting our motion. Nobody said either thing. But they all grew angry and hastened to talk together so as to drown my solitary voice, saying, “We are indolent and behind the times, as it is. And here he preaches to us laziness, indolence, and non-action!” Some even added, “Inaction!” “Pay no attention to him. Move on and follow them!” cried those who think that salvation lies in following the direction once chosen, without changing it, no matter what that direction may be, and also those who think that salvation is to be found in tossing in all directions.

“What is the use of standing? Why think? Move on as fast as you can! Everything will come out all right!”

People have lost their way and suffer from that. It would seem that the first great expenditure of energy, which ought to be made, should be directed, not upon the intensification of the motion that has enticed us into that false position which we now hold, but upon its arrest. It would seem to be clear that only by stopping could we in some way come to understand our position and find the direction in which we must go in order to arrive at the true good, not of one man, nor of one class of men, but at the true universal good of humanity, toward which each human heart is striving. Well? People invent everything imaginable, except the one thing that can save, or, if not save them, at least alleviate their situation: that they should stop for a moment and cease increasing their wretchedness with their false activity. The people feel the wretchedness of their
situation and do everything in their power to be freed from it, but they positively refuse to do the one thing that will certainly lighten their lot, and the advice that they do that one thing irritates them more than anything else.

If it were possible to be in doubt about our having lost our way, this response to the advice that we examine ourselves proves more obviously than anything else how hopelessly we have strayed and how great our despair is.

1895

Transcribed and edited by WWW.NONRESISTANCE.ORG.

This transcription is under no copyright protection. It is our gift to you. You may freely copy, print, and transmit it, but please do not change or sell it. And please bring any mistakes to our attention.