

Why do People Stupefy Themselves? (Illustrated) (Best Illustrated Books Book 62)

Leo Tolstoy Why do People Stupefy Themselves?



*Illustrated Why do People Stupefy Themselves? is a book by Leo Tolstoy. Here are some passages from this book: IN this only is the reason for the spread of all kinds of stupefying things, and among others of tobacco, perhaps the widest spread and most dangerous of them all. It is taken for granted that tobacco enlivens and clears the mind, that, like every other habit, it allures to itself, in no case producing that effect of deadening conscience such as is caused by wine. But all it requires is to look more carefully at the conditions in which special temptation to smoke appears, in order to be convinced that the stupefaction caused by tobacco, just the same as that caused by wine, affects the conscience, and that men consciously have recourse to this form of stupefaction, especially when they need it for this object. If tobacco merely cleared the mind and made men cheerful, then there would not be any of that terrible necessity of using it and especially in certain definite circumstances, and men would not say that they had rather give up bread than their tobacco, and they would not in reality often prefer smoking to eating. That cook who murdered his baruinya said that, when he went into her bedroom and cut her throat, and she fell back with the death rattle, and the blood spurted out in a torrent, a panic seized him. I could not finish the job, he said; I went from the bedroom into the drawing-room, sat down there, and smoked a cigarette. Only when he had stupefied himself with tobacco, did he feel sufficiently fortified to return to the bedroom, and finish despatching the old lady, and examine her things. Evidently the need of smoking at that minute was induced in him, not by the desire to clear or cheer his mind, but by the necessity of drowning something which prevented him from accomplishing the deed he had planned. Such a definite necessity of stupefying oneself by tobacco in certain

very difficult moments will occur to every smoker. I remember that in the days when I smoked I used to feel the special need of tobacco. It was always at moments when I wanted not to remember what I remembered, wanted to forget, wanted not to think. I am sitting alone, I am doing nothing, I know that I ought to begin my work, and I do not feel like it. I smoke and continue sitting idle. I promised some one to be at his house at five o'clock and I have stayed too long. I remember that I am late, but I do not want to remember it, and I smoke. I am annoyed, and I say something disagreeable to a man, and I know that I am doing wrong, and I see that I ought to stop doing so, but I feel an inclination to my bad temper. I smoke, and I continue to be angry. I am playing cards, and I am losing more than I wanted to hazard. I smoke. The true life of Raskolnikof was not accomplished when he killed the old money-lender and her sister. While he was killing the old woman, and especially her sister, he was not living his true life, but was acting like a machine, doing what he could not help doing, discharging the cartridge with which he had long ago been loaded. One old woman lay killed, the other was before him there; the ax was in his hand. The true life of Raskolnikof was not proceeding at the time when he met the old woman's sister, but at the time when he had not as yet killed even the old woman herself, had not yet entered another person's room with murder in view, had not taken the ax in his hand, had not the noose under his cloak on which he hung it, before he had ever thought of the old woman; but it was while he was lying on the divan in his own room, not even thinking of the old woman or even whether he could or could not at the will of another man wipe from the face of the earth a useless and dangerous person, but was deciding whether it was suitable or not for him to live in Petersburg, whether it was suitable or not for him to take money from his mother, and other questions not at all affecting the old woman.

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