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| FICTION |

MASTER AND MAN
AND OTHER PARABLES
AND TALES
BY COUNT LEO TOLSTOY

INTRODUCTION

TOLSTOI was still a young man when the Crimean War broke out; but we may date from the years of Tchernaya and Sevastopol the change in him, which at length turned him from a novelist into a fabulist and maker of parables. After the war he enjoyed two years of St Petersburg society, where his rank and his fame as a soldier and as a writer opened to him all that was most alluring, most likely to attract a man of his temper. But like John Ruskin in England, who was, in those middle years of last century, going through much the same moral experience, and being driven thereby to question the whole tenure of art, he was not satisfied either with what advantage birth and opportunity had given him, or with the selfish philosophy he found current. And then, like the king in the parable, he wished to put and to answer the three Essential Questions of the Hour, the Man and the Deed; in other words, the right time to do or to begin to do; the right man to teach how to do it; and the right thing to be done? But as it was a Hermit in a wood who resolved these three questions for the King, so Tolstoi was driven in working out his destiny to become his own Hermit in a wood.

In his *Confessions*, written at a later time, he arraigned himself as he was in those St Petersburg days; himself a typical but sensitive product of the circle of habit and pleasure in which its good society revolved. He left the capital, and

retired to his country estate, and set about bettering the old conditions as he best could, and doing what he could to anticipate the hour of the emancipation of the serfs. In the following year he married, and took up with kindling ideas and profound intelligence the patriarchal life that fell to the lot of such a landed proprietor, a Mujik surviving 1861 and the Freedom of the Serf. This indeed was the second event, the Crimean War being the first, which served to give to Count Tolstoi his new deliverance. It gave him a hope for Russia and for the state of mortal man everywhere, which acted powerfully on his imagination and his noble ideal. Living at Yasnaya Polyana, near Toula, he gave himself resolutely and with absolute conscience to the work that awaited him as a landowner, and a working farmer and agriculturist. Children were born to him (thirteen in all, of whom eight survived infancy). He had a large ring about him of family and blood relations. Human experience touched him as it only can touch a man who is daily and hourly responsible for the whole welfare of a little community of people, and who has the sympathetic nerves in his nature alert and always vibrating. His practical faith may be inferred from the tales and fables which follow and which are indeed the natural secretion of that life of his, carried out to its moral ultimate.

Men had gone on in the same old way for a long time, he said (this was when he had passed forty years and more in the wilderness as a complex hermit), before they learnt that all men might be made happy. "Even now only a few have really begun to divine that work ought not to be a byword or a slavery, but should be a thing common to all and so ordered as to bring all happily together in peace and unity."

It sounds very like some of John Ruskin's sayings, does it not?

The lightening of the Atlas burden of labour, the right and the human need of happiness, and the alleviation of the trouble of life and the bitterness of death by the faith in God—these are the cardinal articles of Tolstoi's creed. In trying to give a new and proverbial expression of them in essential forms of art which all could understand, he gave up the secondary complicate modes of fiction in which he had shown himself a master, and took the primary modes instead. He returned for his model to the folk tale and the fable. The result is that he has added some new words to the spiritual vocabulary of man, and added some new fables to the world's stock. Such are those in the pages that follow, tales told poignantly and with the force of simple and universal utterances spoken from the heart and with the whole heart and mind, so as to sink at once into the memory of a child, or to touch the very springs of thought in men and women. Some of Tolstoi's critics have regretted that he gave up being a novelist. But he did so in order to become a new fabulist and maker of parable, and as the true fabulists are few, comparatively, surely ours is the gain?

English Translations of Tolstoy's Works:—

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The following are the principal *Separate Works*. The dates following the titles are those of first publication in Russian; where no translation is given they will be found in the last-mentioned of the collected works and, in most cases, in the other collections:—*Childhood and Youth* (1852); trans. by M. von Mysenbug, London, 1862; by I. F. Hapgood, New York, 1886; by Constantine Popoff, London, 1890; *Morning of a Landed Proprietor* (1852); translated

by N. H. Dole, New York and London, 1887. *The Invaders* (1852). *The Cossacks* (1852); translated by E. Schuyler, London and New York, 1878; London, 1887; translated by N. H. Dole, London, 1888. *Boyhood* (1854), translations as *Childhood* above. *The Cutting of the Forest* (1854-1855). *Sevastopol* (1854-1856); translated by F. D. Millet, New York, 1887; translated by Isabel F. Hopgood, London, 1889. *Youth* (1855-1857), translations as *Childhood* above. *Meeting a Moscow Acquaintance at the Front* (1856). *The Snow-Storm* (1856). *Memoirs of a Marker* (1856); translated by N. H. Dole, New York and London, 1887. *Two Huzzars* (1856); translated by N. H. Dole, New York and London, 1887. *Albert* (1857); translated by N. H. Dole, New York and London, 1887. *Lucerne* (1857); translated by N. H. Dole, New York and London, 1887. *Three Deaths* (1859); translated by N. H. Dole, New York and London, 1887. *Domestic Happiness* (1859). *Polikushka* (1860). *Linen Measurer (History of a Horse)*, 1861. *Pedagogical Articles from Yasnaya Polyana* (1862). *The School at Yasnaya Polyana* (1862). *The Decembrists* (1863-1878). *War and Peace* (1864-1869); London, 1886; translated by N. H. Dole, New York and London, 1889. *Fables for Children* (1869-1872). *Stories for Children* (1869-1872). *Natural Science Stories* (1869-1872). *Anna Karenin* (1873-1876); London, 1884; translated by N. H. Dole, New York, 1886; London, 1889. *On Popular Education* (1875). *My Confession* (1879-1882); translated as *Christ's Christianity*, London, 1885; London, 1889. *What Men Live by* (1881); London, 1897. *Critique of Dogmatic Theology* (1881-1882). *The Four Gospels Harmonized and Translated* (1881-1882); as *The Gospel in Brief*, New York and London, 1896. *My Religion* (1884); translated as *What I Believe*, by C. Popoff, London, 1885; translated by H. Smith, New York, 1885; London, 1889; London, 1909. *The Death of Ivan Ilich* (1884-1886); translated, with other stories, by N. H. Dole, New York, 1887; and London, 1889; translated by H. Bergen, London, 1905. *The Three Hermits* (1884). *Neglect the Fire and You cannot Put It Out* (1885); with *The Two Pilgrims*, London, 1897. *The Candle* (1885). *The Two Old Men* (1885). *Where Love is there God is also* (1885); London, 1897; *Texts for Chap-book Illustrations* (1885). *Ivan, the Fool* (1885); translated with three other parables, London, 1895; London, 1896. *Thoughts on God* (1885-1900). *On the Meaning of Life* (1885-1900). *What Shall We Do There?* (1886). *Popular Legends* (1886). *The Power of Darkness* (1886); as *The Dominion of Darkness*, London, 1888. *The First Distiller* (1886). *On Life* (1888); translated by J. F. Hopgood, New York, 1888; Do., London, 1889. *The Fruits of Enlightenment* (1889); translated by E. J. Dillon, London, 1890, with Introduction by A. W. Pinero, London, 1891; translated as *The Fruits of Culture*, by G. Schunn, Boston, 1891. *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1889); translated by B. R. Tucker, Boston, 1890; London, 1890; translated by W. M. Thomson, London, 1896. *Epilogue to Kreutzer Sonata* (1890). *The Relation between the Sexes* (1890).

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MASTER AND MAN

I

It was in the seventies, the day after the feast of Saint Nicholas in the winter. There had been a festival in the parish, and the church sexton, Vassili Andreitch Brekhunoff, (who was also a merchant of the second guild), had been forced to remain at home, since not only was his presence necessary at the church, but he had been receiving and entertaining some of his friends and relations. Now, however, the last of his guests had departed, and he was able to get himself ready to visit a neighbouring landowner, for the purpose of buying some timber for which he had long been in treaty. He was in a hurry to be off, lest rival buyers from the town should deprive him of this eligible bargain. The only reason why the young landowner had asked ten thousand roubles for the timber was that Vassili Andreitch had offered him seven—and seven represented about a third of its value. Perhaps Vassili might have gone on haggling still further (for the wood was in his own district, and there was a recognized agreement between the local merchants and himself that one merchant should not bid against another in the same district), were it not that he had heard that the Government forest contractors were also thinking of coming to treat for the Goviatchkinsky timber, and therefore he had better make up his mind to go at once and clinch the matter. So, as soon as ever the festival was over, he took seven hundred roubles of his own out of the strong-box, added to them two thousand three hundred more out of the church funds which he had by him (making three thousand in all), and counted them carefully. Then he placed them in his pocket-book and got ready to go.

Nikita—the only one of Vassili's workmen who was not drunk that day—ran to put the horse in. Nikita

was not drunk that day for the reason that he had formerly been a toper, but, after pawning his jacket and leather boots for drink during the flesh-eating days, had suddenly foresworn liquor altogether, and drunk nothing during the second month. Even on the present occasion he had kept his vow, in spite of the temptation of the liquor which had flowed in all directions during the first two days of the festival.

He was a *muzhik* of about fifty, and hailed from a neighbouring village—where, however, it was said that he was not a householder, but had lived most of his life among strangers. Everywhere he was valued for his handiness, industry and strength, as well as, still more, for his kindly, cheerful disposition. Yet he had never remained long in any one place, since twice a year, or more, he had been accustomed to get drunk, and at those times would not only pawn everything he possessed, but grow uproarious and quarrelsome as well. Vassili himself had dismissed him more than once, yet had always taken him on again because of the store which he set by his honesty, care for animals, and (most important of all) cheapness. In fact, Vassili allowed Nikita a wage, not of eighty roubles a year—the true market value of such a workman—but of forty only. Moreover, this wage was doled out irregularly and in dribbles, as well as, for the most part, not in cash at all, but in the form of goods purchased at a high price from Vassili's own store.

Nikita's wife, Martha—a rugged dame who had once been good-looking—lived at home with their little lad and two girls, but never invited her husband to come and see her; since, in the first place, she had lived for the last twenty years with a cooper (originally a *muzhik* from a distant village who had come to lodge in the hut), and, in the second, because, although she could do what she liked with her husband when he was sober, she dreaded him like fire when he was drunk. Once, for instance, when drunk at home he had seized the occasion to avenge himself upon his wife for all his submissiveness to her when

sober by breaking into her private box, possessing himself of her best clothes, laying all the gowns and other gewgaws upon the wood-block, and chopping them into shreds with an axe. Yet all his earnings were handed over to Martha. Never once had he disputed this arrangement. In fact, only a couple of days before the festival she had driven over to Vassili's store, and been supplied by him with white meal, tea, sugar, and a pint of *vodka*, to the value of three roubles, as well as with five roubles in cash—for all of which she had thanked Vassili as for a particular favour, although, as a matter of fact, Vassili was in Nikita's debt to the extent of at least twenty roubles.

"What agreement need you and I make together?" Vassili had said to Nikita. "Take what you need as you earn it. I don't do business as other folks do—keep my creditors waiting, and go in for detailed accounts and deductions and so on. You and I can trust one another. Only serve me well, and I shall never fail you."

In saying this, Vassili really had believed that he was being good to Nikita, for he could speak so persuasively and had always been so entirely supported in his decisions by his dependents, from Nikita upwards, that even he himself had come to feel comfortably persuaded that he was not cheating them, but actually benefiting them.

"Yes, yes, I understand you, Vassili Andreitch," Nikita had replied. "I understand you perfectly well, and will serve and work for you as for my own father."

Nevertheless Nikita had not been ignorant that Vassili was cheating him. He had only felt that it would be no use his trying to get a detailed account out of his master, and that, in default of another place to go to, he had better grin and bear it and take what he could get.

So, when ordered to harness the horse, Nikita proceeded to the stable in his usual cheerful, good-natured manner, and with the usual easy stride of his rather

waddling legs. There he took down from a peg the heavy headstall, with its straps and tassels, and, rattling the bit against the side-pieces, proceeded to the stall where the horse was standing which he was to get ready.

"Oh ho, so you find time long, do you, my little beauty?" he said in reply to the low whinny of welcome which greeted him from the shapely, middle-sized, low-rumped, dark-brown stallion cob which was the sole occupant of the loose-box.

"Nay, nay," he went on. "You are in a hurry to be off, I daresay, but I must water you first," (he always spoke to the animal as one might speak to a being capable of understanding human speech). Then, having wiped the sleek, though dusty and harness-galled, back of the cob with a cloth, he adjusted the headstall to the handsome young head, pulled the ears and forehead-tuft through, let down the halter, and led the animal out to drink. As soon as Brownie had picked his way gingerly out of the dung-heaped stall he grew lively and threw up his heels, pretending that he wanted to kick Nikita as the latter trotted beside him to the water-trough.

"Quiet then, quiet then, you little rascal!" exclaimed Nikita, though well aware that Brownie was taking good care to throw out his hind leg in such a manner as only to graze Nikita's greasy fur coat, not strike it direct—a trick which Nikita always admired. Having drunk his fill of cold water, the animal snorted as he stood twitching his strong, wet lips, from the hairs of which the bright, transparent drops kept dripping back into the trough. Then he stood motionless for an instant or two, as though engaged in thought, and then suddenly gave a loud neigh.

"You don't want any more. You wouldn't get it even if you did, so you needn't ask for it," said Nikita, explaining his conduct to Brownie with absolute gravity and precision. Then he set off running back to the stable, holding the spirited young cob by the halter as the animal kicked and snorted all across

the yard. None of the other workmen were about—only the cook's husband, who had come over for the festival from another village.

"Go in, will you, my boy," said Nikita to this man, "and ask which sledge I am to get ready—the big one or the little one?"

The man disappeared into the house (which was iron-roofed and stood upon a raised foundation), and returned in a moment with a message that it was the little sledge which was to be used. Meanwhile Nikita had slipped the collar over the cob's head and adjusted the brass-studded saddle-piece, and was now walking, with the light-painted *douga*¹ in one hand and the end of the cob's halter in the other, towards the two sledges standing beneath the shed.

"If the little sledge, then the little sledge," he remarked, and proceeded to back the clever little animal into the shafts (it pretending meanwhile to bite him) and, with the other man's assistance, to harness it to the vehicle. When all was ready and there remained only the reins to be put on, Nikita sent his assistant to the stable for some straw, and then to the store-house for a sack.

"There now, that will do," said Nikita as he stuffed into the sledge the freshly-cut oaten straw which the man had brought. "But nay, nay" (to Brownie). "You need not prick your ears like that!—Well, suppose we put the straw so, and the sack on the top of it. Then it will be comfortable to sit upon,"—and he suited the action to the words by tucking the edges of the sack under the straw disposed around the seat.

"Thank you, my boy," he added to the cook's husband. "Two pairs of hands work quicker than one." After that he buckled the loose ends of the reins together, mounted the splashboard, and drove the good little steed, all impatient to be off, across the frozen dung of the yard to the entrance-gates.

¹ The curved frame, fitted with bells, which surmounts the collar in Russian harness.

"Uncle Mikit, Uncle Mikit!" came the shrill little voice of a seven-year-old boy from behind him, as the youngster ran hastily out of the porch into the yard—a youngster who was dressed in a short jacket of black fur, new white bast shoes, and a cosy cap. "Let me get up too," he implored, fastening his jacket as he ran.

"Well, well! Come here then, my dear," said Nikita, pulling up. Then, seating his master's pale, thin little son behind him, he drove the boy, beaming with pleasure, out into the street.

It was now three o'clock in the afternoon and freezing hard, the thermometer registering only ten degrees; yet the weather was dull and gusty, and fully half the sky was covered by a low, dark bank of cloud. In the courtyard the air was still, but directly one stepped into the street outside the wind became more noticeable and the snow could be seen twirling itself about in wreaths as it was swept from the roof of a neighbouring outbuilding into the corner near the bath-house. Hardly had Nikita returned through the gates and turned the cob's head towards the steps when Vassili Andreitch—a cigarette between his lips, and a sheepskin coat upon his shoulders, fastened tightly and low down with a belt—came out of the house-door upon the high, snow-trampled flight of steps, making them creak loudly under his felt boots as he did so.

Drawing the last whiff from his cigarette, he threw down the fag end and stamped it out. Then, puffing the smoke out of his moustache, he glanced at the cob as it re-entered the gates, and began to turn out the corners of his coat-collar in such a way that the fur should be next his face on either side (his face was clean-shaven, except for a moustache), and yet not liable to be fouled with his breath.

"So you have managed it, you little monkey?" he exclaimed as he caught sight of his little boy seated in the sledge. Vassili was a little animated with the wine which he had been drinking with his guests,

and therefore the more ready to approve of all that belonged to him and all that he had done in life. The aspect of his little son at that moment—of the little boy whom he intended to be his heir—afforded him the greatest satisfaction as he stood blinking at him and grinning with his long teeth. In the porch behind Vassili stood his pale, thin wife, Vassilia Andreitcha. She was *enceinte*, and had her head and shoulders muffled up in a woollen shawl, so that only her eyes were visible.

"Had not you better take Nikita with you?" she said, stepping timidly forward from the porch. Vassili returned her no answer, but merely frowned angrily as though somehow displeased at her words, and spat upon the ground.

"You see, you will be travelling with money on you," she continued in the same anxious tone. "Besides, the weather might grow worse."

"Don't I know the road, then, that I must needs have a guide with me?" burst out Vassili with that unnatural stiffening of his lips which marked his intercourse with buyers and sellers when he was particularly desirous of enunciating each syllable distinctly.

"Yes, do take him, for heaven's sake, I implore you," repeated his wife as she shifted her shawl to protect the other side of her face.

"Goodness! Why, you stick to me like a bathing-towel!" cried Vassili. "Where can I find room for him on the sledge?"

"I am quite ready to go," put in Nikita, cheerfully. "Only, someone else must feed the other horses while I am away," (this last to his mistress).

"Yes, yes, I will see to that, Nikita," she replied. "I will tell Simon to do it."

"Then I am to go with you, Vassili Andreitch?" said Nikita, expectantly.

"Well, I suppose I must humour the good lady," answered Vassili. "Only, if you go, you had better put on a rather better, not to say warmer, diplomatist's uniform than that,"—and he smiled and

winked one eye at Nikita's fur jacket, which, truth to tell, had holes under its two arms, down the back, and round the sides, besides being greasy, matted, shorn of hooks, and torn into strips round the edges.

"Here, my good fellow! Come and hold the cob, will you?" shouted Nikita across the yard to the cook's husband.

"No, no, let *me* do it," cried the little boy, drawing his small, red, frozen hands out of his pockets and catching hold of the chilly reins.

"Don't be too long over your new uniform, please," said Vassili to Nikita with a grin.

"No, no, Vassili Andreitch—I shan't be a moment," protested Nikita as he went shuffling hurriedly off in his old felt boots towards the servants' quarters across the yard.

"Now then, my good Arininshka, give me my *khalat*¹ from the stove! I am going with master!" shouted Nikita as he burst into the hut and seized his belt from a peg. The cook, who had been enjoying a good sleep after dinner and was now getting tea ready for her husband, greeted Nikita cheerfully, and, catching the infection of his haste, began to bustle about as briskly as he himself. First she took from near the stove a shabby, but well-aired, cloth *khalat*, and set about shaking and smoothing it out with all possible speed.

"You are far more fit to go with the master than I am," he said to the cook, in accordance with his usual habit of saying something civil to everyone with whom he came in contact. Then, twisting about him the shabby, well-worn belt, he succeeded first in compressing his not over-prominent stomach, and then in drawing the belt with a great effort over his fur coat.

"There you are!" he said (not to the cook but to the belt) as he tucked its ends in. "You can't very well burst apart like that." Then, with a hoist and much heaving of the shoulders, he drew the cloth

¹ A kind of frock-coat.

khalat over all (stretching its back well, to give looseness in the arms), and patted it into place under the arm-pits. Finally he took his mittens from a shelf.

"Now," said he, "I am all right."

"But you have forgotten about your feet," cried the cook. "Those boots are awful."

Nikita stopped as if struck by this.

"Yes, perhaps I ought to ch—" he began, but changed his mind, and exclaiming, "No, he might go without me if I did—I have not far to walk," bolted off into the yard.

"But won't you be cold in that *khalat* only, Nikita?" said his mistress when he reached the sledge.

"No indeed! How should I? It is *very* warm," answered Nikita as he disposed the straw over the forepart of the sledge in such a manner as would conceal his feet after he had mounted, and thrust the whip (not needed for so willing a steed) under the straw.

Vassili had already taken his seat, his broad back, with its double covering of furs, filling almost the entire rear part of the sledge. Then, taking up the reins, he flicked the cob with them, while Nikita jumped into the forepart of the sledge just as it started, and sat leaning forward to the left and sticking out one leg.

II

THE good little cob moved the sledge rapidly along with a light creaking of the runners as he trotted at a round pace over the well-beaten, frozen piece of road leading to the village.

"Hullo! What have *you* jumped up for?" cried Vassili, suddenly, clearly enjoying the fact that an unauthorized passenger was trying to perch himself upon the runners behind. ("Give me the whip, Nikita!" he interjected). "*I'll* thrash you, you young rascal! Run along home to your mother!"

The boy jumped off. Brownie broke into a gallop, but soon changed to a trot again.

Kresti, where Vassili lived, was a hamlet of six houses only, and when they had got beyond the blacksmith's hut at the end they at once perceived that the wind was much stronger than they had thought it to be, and that the road ahead was almost invisible. The track of the sledge became snowed over almost as fast as made, and only the fact that the road was a little higher than the ground on either side of it rendered it at all distinguishable. The snow was whirling over the whole country-side and blotting out the horizon, while the Teliatinsky forest—generally clearly visible—now showed only as a dark mass looming at intervals through the snow-dust. The wind was blowing from the left, and kept turning Brownie's mane over his thick, fat neck and blowing his feathery tail,—bound at the top in a plain knot,—across his flank. Owing to the wind, too, Nikita's tall coat-collar, where he sat on the weather side of the sledge, kept pressing itself tightly against his cheeks and nose.

"The cob can't get up much of a pace to-day; there's too much snow on the ground," said Vassili, who prided himself on the excellence of his steed. "Once I drove him to Pashutino in half an hour."

"What did you say?" asked Nikita, whose tall coat-collar had prevented him from hearing what was said.

"I said that I have driven to Pashutino in half an hour," bawled Vassili.

"That's something to boast of indeed! He's a good animal if ever there was one!" commented Nikita, after which they kept silence for a while. Vassili, however, was inclined to be talkative.

"What do you think? I told your wife the other day not to let her cooper drink all the tea," he bawled once more, in the firm conviction that Nikita must be feeling flattered at being talked to by such an important and highly-educated man as himself, as well as so greatly taken with his own joke about the cooper that it never entered into his head that the topic