

**"MASTER AND MAN,"
AND OTHER
PARABLES AND TALES**

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"Master and Man," and Other Parables and Tales by Leo Tolstoy

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LEO TOLSTOY

**"MASTER AND MAN,"
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"MASTER *and*
MAN" *and other*
Parables and Tales
by Count LEO
TOLSTOI. 



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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

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