

**THE FIRST STEP: AN ESSAY
ON THE MORALS
OF DIET, TO WHICH
ARE ADDED TWO STORIES**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649395958

The First Step: An Essay on the Morals of Diet, to which are Added Two Stories by Leo Tolstoy

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LEO TOLSTOY

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The First Step.

BY
LEO TOLSTOY.

AN ESSAY
ON THE MORALS OF DIET.
TO WHICH ARE ADDED TWO STORIES.

TRANSLATED BY
AYLMER MAUDE.

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
WILLIAM E. A. AXON.



Manchester:
ALBERT BROADBENT.
1900.



SIXPENCE.

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Introduction.

EVERY age and every country has its prophets, who call the people to repentance and amendment of life. At the present moment, Europe has no more prophetic figure than Tolstoy, the preacher of work, of fraternal love, of self-denial and self-mastery. Born one of a privileged class, yet an advocate of equality and brotherhood; an apostle of peace, who has served with distinction in war; a man of genius, who has known all that the world can give of fame and admiration, and who has turned aside from imaginative literature, in which he has attained the highest success, to teach the people lessons of truth, peace, mercy, and humaneness. In him the spiritual vision of the East appears conjoined to the harsher logic of the West. Whilst he is one of the keenest observers of the life that now is, with its contradictions, falsehoods, miseries, aspirations, and efforts, he desires also to be the light-bearer, showing the path to a purer and happier condition of the world.

Count Leo Nicoláevitch Tolstoy was born on his father's estate at Yásnaya Polyána, in the Government of Tula, on August 28th, 1828. He belongs to a family that has given several men of distinction to literature and public life in Russia, but none of them has attained to the fame and influence of Leo Tolstoy. Of his boyhood and youth he has written an interesting account in one of his autobiographical works. He was educated

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at home, partly at Moscow, partly at Yásnaya Polyána, until he was fifteen, when he went to the University of Kazan, which he left in 1851, to join the army. His military experiences covered the campaign of the Caucasus, and the siege of Sebastopol in 1855. At the close of the Crimean War he retired from the army. The publication of "Boyhood and youth," and "Memoirs of Neklúdoff" had already gained him distinction as an author, and all that was best and most captivating in the brilliant society of St. Petersburg was now open to him. To this period belong his sketches of Sebastopol during the war. Then he travelled in Germany and Italy, and wrote "The Snow Storm," "Polikóshka," and other novels. In 1862 he married, and since then has written "War and Peace," a terrible picture of Napoleon's invasion of Russia, and "Anna Karénina," in which the tragic possibilities of every day life are brought out in a strong light. It is a work of great but gloomy power.

And now the prophetic function has overshadowed, though it has never extinguished, that of the poet. The miseries and inequalities of existence, death from starvation on the one side, and death from luxury on the other, impressed him with horror, and his later writings all, with more or less distinctness, aim at a striking presentation of the problems of life or are attempts at their solution. "Where love is, there is God," "The Feast of Enlightenment," "The Power of Darkness," "What I believe," "The First Step," "The Kreutzer Sonata," are amongst the writings of his later years. He abstains from wine and flesh-meat, and shuns the possession of property. When Russia was visited in 1891-2 by the horrors of famine, Tolstoy was a good angel to the stricken populations. He has not escaped calumny, yet there is

overwhelming testimony not only to his genius — for that is impossible to deny — but to his courage, sincerity, and goodness.

Gradually the social and religious problems of the age have absorbed his interest. The conventional morality and the conventional theology alike failed to satisfy him, and he has constructed for himself a theory of the conduct of life, by reverting to what he regards as a primitive form of Christianity. Tolstoy makes no claim to be the Prophet of a new Gospel, but only to restore the teaching of Jesus as a vital force. In the distinctions of rank, in the existence of classes that "toil not, neither do they spin," in the cruelties of "sport," in the barbarities of the battlefield, and in war itself, he sees flat contradictions of Christianity, wrongfully tolerated by the Churches which claim an exclusive right to be the interpreters of Christ's Gospel. In the common use of intoxicants and narcotics, such as wine, opium and tobacco, he sees an effort to drug the conscience.

Tolstoy attempts to live in accordance with the principles of which he is the prophet. He has renounced, as far as may be, the privileges of his rank and position, and seeks to vindicate his claim to daily bread by the sweat of his brow, as well as by the sweat of his brain. That he has not been able to carry all things to their logical conclusion in the ordering of his daily life, need not be a matter of surprise, for changes so radical and so complete as those he desires to see accomplished are not to be achieved by a single stroke. No man in this century has given us a loftier example of plain living and high thinking. Let those do as much who think he should have done more.

Tolstoy is a vegetarian alike in theory and in practice. Let us see first the principle on which his vegetarianism

is based. One of the very best books in the whole range of vegetarian literature is "The Ethics of Diet," in which Mr. Howard Williams has marshalled as witnesses against flesh-eating, Plutarch, Montaigne, Shelley, and other great thinkers and poets of the past. Incidentally, this fine work has rendered another service to the humanitarian cause, as it has led Tolstoy to make a full declaration of his vegetarian faith. This was written as an introduction to the Russian translation of Mr. Howard Williams' learned and eloquent *Catena*. Tolstoy's essay deals with the relation of diet to ethical and social reform, and bears the significant title of "The First Step."

What, then, is the moral significance of vegetarianism, as understood by the great Russian thinker? In the Pagan ideal of life, as set forth by Plato, there is a succession of virtues, in which Abstinence, Courage, Wisdom and Justice follow each other, and the loftiest height is reached in the last. In the Christian ideal there is a different order—Self-Denial, Obedience to the Divine Will, and above all, Love. The Pagan and the Christian morality coincide in taking Abstinence, Self-Denial, Renunciation, as the foundation of the truly moral life. This fundamental truth has been obscured by form and dogma, which have largely supplanted individual responsibility. "Looked at" says Tolstoy, "from any point of view, — the lowest, Utilitarian, the higher, Pagan, which demands Justice, or especially from the highest, the Christian, which demands Love, — it should surely be clear to every one that a man who uses for his own pleasure (which he might easily forego) the labour, often the painful labour, of others, behaves badly, and that this is the very first wrong action he must cease to commit, if he wishes to live a good life." When such tests are applied to