

Leo Tolstoy, 1885



Translated by N... and A.C. Fifield

[scriptorium.eu.org](http://scriptorium.eu.org) reprint



# If You Neglect the Little Fire You Can't Put Out the Big One.

“Then came Peter and said to him, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Until seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.

“Therefore is the Kingdom of Heaven likened unto a certain king which would make a reckoning with his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not wherewith to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant, therefore, fell down and worshipped him, saying, Lord have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And the lord of that servant, being moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.

“But that servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants which owed him a hundred pence; and he laid hold on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay what thou owest. So his fellow servant fell down and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay that which was due.

“So when his fellow servants saw what was done, they were exceeding sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord called him unto him, and saith to him, Thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt because thou besoughtest me: shouldst not thou also have had mercy on thy fellow servant, even as I had mercy on thee? And his lord was wroth and delivered him to his tormentors, till he should pay all that was due.

“So also shall my Heavenly Father do unto you, if ye forgive not everyone his brother from your hearts.”  
(Matt. xviii. 21-35. ASV)

---

In a certain village there lived a peasant called Iván Shtcherbakoff. He was doing well, he was in the full strength of his years and the best workman in the village, and he had three grown up sons: one was married, one was about to marry, and the third was a lad who could drive the horses, and was beginning to plough. Iván's old wife was a clever and thrifty housekeeper, and his daughter-in-law quiet and industrious. The only one of the family who had to be fed and could not work was Iván's old father, who had been lying on the oven very bad with asthma for the last seven years. Iván had plenty of everything: three horses and a foal, a cow with a calf, and fifteen sheep. The women made the men's clothes and their footwear, and worked in the fields, and the men earned the bread. There was always food enough, always last year's corn left over after the new crops. The oats alone paid all the taxes and their usual necessities. Iván might have lived in peace and content with his children, but over the hedge lived his neighbour Gabriel the Lamé—the son of Gordey Ivanoff. And there was hatred between Gabriel and Iván.

When old Gordey was alive and Iván's father was master, they had been quite friendly. If the women needed a sieve or a bucket, or the men a corn bag or a wheel, they would lend them to each other, and mutually afford help as good neighbours should. If a calf strayed into the barn, he would only be chased away and his owner asked to be careful because the corn or the hay had not been stacked yet. But they never thought of locking the animal into the shed or the barn, or of hiding things, or of slandering each other.

That was in the old men's time.

But when the young people became masters, everything changed.

It all began out of nothing.

A hen belonging to Iván's daughter-in-law began to lay early—on Holy Week (before Easter). Every day the young woman could find an egg in the cart box under the barn. One day some children frightened the hen, and she flew over the hedge into the neighbour's plot and laid there. The young woman heard her hen clucking, but she thought "I've no time now; I must clean the house up for Easter. I'll get it later." In the evening she went to look in the box under the barn, but there was no egg there. Then she asked her father and brothers-in-law whether they had taken it. No, they had not; but Tarass, the youngest brother, said: "Your hen laid an egg in the neighbour's yard; I heard her clucking there, and then she flew back over the hedge." The young woman went to look at the hen; she was sitting on the perch near the cock, her eyes half closed, and half asleep. She could not say where she had laid the egg, so it was useless to ask her; and the young woman went to the neighbours.

The old mother came to meet her.

"Well," she said, "what is it?"

"My hen flew over into your yard this morning, grandmother. I've come to see if she hasn't laid an egg somewhere."

"We never saw her. Our own hens have been laying for a long time, thank God. We have enough eggs of our own, and we don't need other people's. We don't go begging for eggs in other people's houses, my good girl."

This angered the young woman, and she answered sharply; the other woman retorted, and they began to scold. Iván's wife passed by carrying water, and she joined in. Gabriel's wife flew out of the house and began to rail at her neighbours, recalling things that had happened, and also things that had not happened. The brawl waxed high and all the women screamed together, trying to put in as many words as they could, and all the words were bad ones. "You this and that—you thief—you slut—you hussy—you let your old father-in-law starve for want of food." . . .

"And you are a beggar and have stolen my sieve ! And you've got our yoke too; give it back at once."

They caught up the yoke and began tugging at it, and spilt the water and tore each other's kerchiefs and at last came to blows. Gabriel, who was returning from the fields, came to help his wife, and then Iván and his son jumped up, and they all tumbled down in a heap together. Iván was a strong man and he soon pushed them all apart, and tore out a piece of Gabriel's beard. Then other people came running up and separated the fighters with some difficulty.

That was how it all began. Gabriel wrapped the piece of his beard in a piece of paper, and laid a complaint before the district law-court.

"I didn't grow my beard for the purpose of giving Iván the pleasure of pulling it out, curse him," he said.

And his wife boasted to the neighbours that they would have Iván judged and sent to Siberia. So the enmity continued on both sides.

The old man had remonstrated with them from the first, arguing from his stove,<sup>1</sup> but they would not listen to him.

“All this that you do is silly, children,” he said; “and you make a great noise about nothing. Just think, the whole matter began about an egg. Well, the children took the egg;—God be with them, there is no great loss in one egg. God has given enough for all. They spoke ill to you—well, correct them, teach them to speak better. You quarrelled and fought each other. Well, that does happen; men are sinful. But at least now go and make it up, and that will end it. But if you begin to pay each other back, it will be worse for you both.”

But the young people would not listen to him; they thought he was talking idle talk, and that he had grown foolish in his old age.

And Iván would not ask forgiveness of his neighbour.

“I didn’t tear out his beard. He pulled it out himself, and his son broke my button holes and tore my shirt off my back. Here it is.” So Iván also brought an action against Gabriel, and the case was judged by the justice of the peace and also in the district court. While this was going on the bolt disappeared out of Gabriel’s cart. His women accused Iván’s son. “We saw him sneaking up to the cart under our windows last night, and the woman next door said he went to the alehouse and tried to sell the bolt to the keeper.”

Again they went to law, and at home daily there was wrangling, and sometimes blows. The children quarrelled, following the example of their elders; and when the women went to the river to wash the clothes there was more nagging and wagging of tongues than scouring of linen.

At first the men accused each other falsely, but soon they really began to take each other’s things whenever they could lay hands upon them. And they taught their women and children to do the same. And their lives grew worse and worse. They went to law against each other at the village assemblies, at the justices of the peace, and at the district courts, till all the judges were sick of them. Sometimes Gabriel was fined or imprisoned for a day or two, and sometimes Iván. And the more harm they did to each other the more furious they became. When dogs attack each other the more they fight the more savage their fury becomes. If you strike the dog from behind he thinks it is his opponent and bites with added passion. It was the same with these peasants. When either was punished with imprisonment or a fine, his resentment doubled, and rankled in his heart. “Wait a bit; I’ll pay you off some day.” And so it went on for six years.

Only the old man on the stove remonstrated and tried to stop it.

“What are you doing children?” he would say. “Leave your quarrels and attend to your own affairs, and cease to bear malice. It will be much better. The more you get angry the worse it is for you all.” But they would not listen to him.

At last in the seventh year, during a marriage in the village, Iván’s daughter-in-law tried to shame Gabriel before all the people, by accusing him of having been caught stealing

---

<sup>1</sup>In the original edition “from the first, ting on thé stove”

horses.

Gabriel, who was drunk, lost control of himself, and struck the woman so hard that she fell down, and lay in bed for a week. This delighted Iván, because the woman was expecting a child. So he immediately went to the magistrate with a petition. “Now” he thought, “I’ll finish him; this time he can’t escape Siberia.” But again Iván was unsuccessful. The magistrates would not accept the petition. The woman was examined, but she had risen from her bed and there was no sign of the blow. Then Iván went to the justice of the peace, who sent the case to the district court. Here Iván took strong measures; he bribed the clerk and the elder with half a vedro (seven litres<sup>2</sup>) of the best brandy, and finally succeeded in getting Gabriel condemned to be flogged. The clerk read Gabriel’s sentence in the court: “The court has decided to punish the peasant Gabriel Gordéiff with twenty strokes of the lash, to be administered at the district law-court.”

Iván looked across at Gabriel to see how he took it. Gabriel listened to the end, grew as white as a cloth, turned on his heel, and went out into the hall. Iván also was going out, to see to his horse, when he heard Gabriel say:

“Very well; he will beat my back, and it will burn; but let him take care something of his doesn’t begin to burn before long.”

When Iván heard this he turned back immediately and said to the judges: “Righteous judges! He threatens to burn my house. Listen to him; he said it before witnesses.”

The judges called Gabriel back.

“Is it true that you said this?”

“I said nothing. Beat me: it is in your power. I am in the right, therefore I must suffer. But to him all things are allowed.”

He wanted to say something more, but his face and lips were twitching and he turned away to the wall. Even the judges were startled by his appearance. “Indeed” they thought, “he may do some evil to himself or to his neighbour.”

And one of them, an old man, said:

“Let me advise you, my friends: better make it up and come to an understanding. Do you think you did well, Gabriel, to strike a pregnant woman? It is well that God had mercy on her; else what a sin might have been yours!

Is that well? Submit and ask his pardon. And he will pardon you. And we will alter the sentence.”

The clerk heard this and said:

“That is impossible, because according to the 117th Article, the dissentient parties did not come to terms, and therefore the sentence of the court must be carried into effect.”

But the old judge would not listen.

“Don’t talk nonsense, my friend,” he said. “The article which is most important is that we must remember God, and God has ordered us to live in peace with one another.”

And again he tried to argue with the peasants. But they would not be reconciled. Gabriel interrupted him.

---

<sup>2</sup>In original text: “a gallon and a half”

“I am nearly fifty,” he said, “and I have a married son, and I have never been flogged in my life, and now Iván, curse him, has brought me to this shame, and I am to ask his pardon! Well, it is enough. He shall remember me, also.”

Gabriel’s voice broke. He could say no more, and turned and went out.

The court-house was ten versts (eleven kilometres<sup>3</sup>) from the village, and it was late when Iván returned home. The women had gone to meet the cattle, so Iván unharnessed the horse, put everything right, and went into the cottage. There was no one there; the women were with the cattle, and the children had not returned from the fields. Iván sat down on a bench and pondered. He recalled how Gabriel’s sentence had been read to him, and how white he had grown, and how he had turned his face to the wall. And Iván’s heart smote him. He thought of what he would feel if he had been condemned to be flogged, and he felt sorry for Gabriel.

Then he heard his father coughing and turning about on the stove, and soon the old man put his legs out, crawled down, tottered to the nearest bench, and sat down. The effort was too much for him, and he coughed and coughed but when at last he got his breath, he leant his arm on the table and said: “Well, is he sentenced?”

“Yes,” said Iván, “twenty strokes of the lash.”

The old man shook his head.

“You do ill, Iván,” he said. “You do great evil—not to him but to yourself. Well, they will beat him. And will you be the happier for it?”

“He won’t do it again,” said Iván.

“Do what? What has he done worse than you?”

Iván grew angry. “What has he done?” cried he. “He has beaten the girl to death, and now he threatens to burn our house. Am I to go and thank him for this?”

The old man sighed and said: “You, Iván, are free to go about all over the wide world, and I have lain for seven years on the oven. So you think you know everything and I know nothing. No, my son, you can see nothing, because hatred has blinded you. The sins of other people stand before your eyes, but your own you put behind your back. Why do you say: He does ill? If he alone did ill, there would be no evil in the world. Evil is not born from one man—it is born among two men. You see his errors, but your own you do not see. If he alone were evil and you were good there would be no evil. Who pulled out his beard? Who stole his hay? Who dragged him about the law courts? And now you turn it all upon him. You yourself live badly, and that is where the evil comes from. I did not live so, nor did I teach you to do so. Do you think that was how we managed with the old man, Gabriel’s father? We lived as good neighbours ought to live. If his flour was finished, his wife would come and say Uncle Froll, we want some flour. And I would say: Very well, my dear, go into the loft and take as much as you need. Or if he had no one to send with his horses, I would say to you: Go, Vania, look after his horses. And if I was in need of anything, I would go to him: Uncle Gordey, I want this or that. Yes, uncle Froll, take what you please. That was how things stood with us. And you could have lived just as pleasantly. And now what have you done? The other day there was a soldier here talking

---

<sup>3</sup>“seven miles” in the original edition

about Plevna. Well now, there's war between you worse than any Plevna<sup>4</sup>. Is that true life? And what a sin it is! You are the householder, the master. It will be asked of you, What are you teaching your women and children? To wrangle and to hate? The other day Tarasska, the little boy, was swearing at Arina, and his mother was delighted and laughed. Is that well? You are responsible. Think of your soul. Is it well, if you say one word to me and I answer you two? If you strike me, and I strike you back? No, my dear, when Christ lived on earth, that is not what he taught us simple people. If a man speak ill to you, answer him not, and his own conscience will smite him. That's what he taught, my son. And if he strike you, turn the other cheek, meaning: 'Strike me again if I deserve it.' And his conscience will smite him, and he will humble himself and listen to you. That is how he taught us, and not to let our backs get up. Well, don't you speak? Am I right?"

Iván listened, but was silent. The old man began to cough, and when at last he got his breath again, he went on:

"Do you think Christ taught us anything bad? It is all for our own good. Think of your earthly life even; is it better or worse since you began this Plevna between you? Try and count up what you have spent on your lawsuits, and on your food and lodging and journeys. Your sons have grown like strong eagles and ought to be living in happiness and bettering, instead of that your wealth is going.<sup>5</sup> And why? Always for the same reason. Because of your pride. You ought to be ploughing and sowing in the fields with your sons, but to harm your enemy you go to the magistrate and to the lawyer instead. And if you do not plough and sow at the right time our mother earth will not bring forth fruit. Why were the oat crops bad? When did you sow them? When you returned from town. And what did you get by your lawsuit? You only made it hotter for yourself. Why will you not keep to your work with your sons, plough the earth in the fields and look after your house, and if any man offends you, forgive him in the name of God? You will have more time for your work and your soul will know content."

Iván was silent.

"Listen to me, Vania, I am an old man. Go and harness the brown horse and get back to the court as fast as you can and stop the whole business. Next morning, go to Gabriel and make it up with him and ask him come here, which will be the more timely as to-morrow is a holiday (it was the eve of the Virgin's Nativity), buy a bottle of brandy, give him tea, finish all your quarrels, and make up your mind to have no more. And tell your women and children so."

Iván sighed, and thought, "Surely the old man speaks the truth"; and his heart grew light within him. Only he could not see how he could settle the matter, and how to make peace with Gabriel.

But the old man seemed to guess his thoughts and said:

"Go, now, Vania, do not put it off. Put out the fire at the beginning; if you let it spread, it will be too late."

---

<sup>4</sup>A town in Bulgaria, the scene of a fierce and prolonged battle between Turks and Russians in the war of 1877.

<sup>5</sup>In the original text "and bettering you, [...] instead of your wealth"



He wanted to say something more, but had no time: the women came into the room and began chattering like magpies. They had already heard everything: how Gabriel had been condemned to be flogged, and how he threatened to set fire to Iván's house. They had found out everything, and had added more of their own, and had hastened to quarrel with Gabriel's women in the meadow. Gabriel's daughter-in-law had threatened them with the magistrate. The magistrate was on Gabriel's side, and would turn the whole affair to his advantage, and the schoolmaster had already written a petition to the Emperor, and in the petition everything was set forth, also about the cart-bolt and the orchard; and half of Iván's farm would be given to Gabriel.

A master has always much to do. Iván did not stay talking with the women, but rose and left the room, and went to the barn and then to the shed. When he had finished his work he returned to the yard. The sun had set and the boys were just returning from the fields. They had been sowing the spring corn for the winter. Iván asked what they had done, helped them to put things in order, and set aside a torn horse-collar to be mended. Then he went into the shed to work at some poles. But it was getting quite dark, so he decided to leave the poles till next day, gave the cattle their food, opened the gate for Tarasska, who was leading the horses into the pasture for the night, closed it and shot the bolt. "Now supper and then to sleep," thought Iván, and taking up the horse-collar he walked to the cottage. He had quite forgotten about Gabriel and about what his father had been saying, but just as he stood with his hand on the door-handle he suddenly heard Gabriel over the hedge swearing in a hoarse voice. "May the devil take him," Gabriel shouted to someone. "I should like to kill him." All Iván's former hatred rose in his Heart at the words. He stopped, stood still and listened while Gabriel swore, shook his head, and then entered his cottage. A lamp was burning in the room, his daughter-in-law sat in a corner spinning, his old wife was preparing supper; his eldest son was plaiting bark for shoes, his second son was sitting by the table reading.

Everything would have been pleasant and cheerful, were it not for that thorn in his side—the wicked neighbour.

Iván strode in furiously, threw the cat down from the bench, and scolded the women because the wash tub was in its wrong place. He sat down, sick at heart, and began mending the horse collar, but he could not get Gabriel out of his head: how he had threatened him at court and how just now he had shouted in a hoarse voice, "I should like to kill him!"

The old woman gave Tarass his supper, and when he had finished he put on his long coat and his fur coat, tied on his girdle, took a hunch of bread and went out into the street to the horses. The elder brother was about to go with him, but Iván himself arose and went out on the steps.

The night was very dark, with great clouds overhead, and a wind had arisen. Iván went down into the street, helped his son on to the horse, drove the little foal after him, and stood looking and listening as Tarass rode down the lane, met the other boys, when they all rode out of hearing together. And Iván stood waiting and waiting in the night with Gabriel's words ringing in his ears: "Take care something of yours doesn't burn."

“He won’t care what happens to himself,” thought Iván. “The weather is dry and there is a wind. He’ll get in somewhere through the back yard and set fire to some dry stuff and get away; and he’ll burn everything and nobody will be able to prove he did it. If only I could catch him, I wouldn’t let him off so easily!” And his thoughts so took possession of him, that instead of going indoors, he went down into the street and round the corner. “I think I’d better look round the house. Who knows what he may be up to?” And stepping softly he passed the gate and crept on by the edge. He turned a corner and there, at the other end of the hedge he seemed suddenly to see something move and disappear again. Iván stopped short and listened, peering into the darkness; all was still, only the leaves whispered and the straw rustled in the breeze. It had seemed to Iván black as pitch, but now his eyes had grown accustomed to the darkness, and he could distinguish the corner, and the plough, and an opening in the hedge. He stood watching, but nothing appeared.

“I suppose it was nothing,” thought Iván. “Still I had better go round,” and he crept stealthily along the hedge. He stepped so softly in his bark shoes that he could not hear his own footfalls. He came to the corner and there, near the plough, something flashed for a second and disappeared.

Iván’s heart seemed to stop beating, and he stood breathless. There was a brighter flash on the same spot, and in the light Iván could clearly see a man crouching on the ground with his back to him, lighting a bundle of hay which he held in his hands. Iván’s heart fluttered like a bird, and he started running with great strides. He did not feel his own limbs under him.

“He won’t get away this time. I’ll catch him on the spot.” But before he had reached the opening in the hedge, there was a great blaze, which caught the straw near the barn, and a sheet of flame shot up towards the eaves. And there stood Gabriel, the lame, clearly visible.

Iván rushed at him like a hawk at a lark.

“I’ll tie you up this time,” he thought.

But the lame man heard the steps, looked behind him and like a hare hobbled swiftly along the barn-wall.

“You won’t get away,” shouted Iván, rushing at him.

He almost caught him by the collar, but Gabriel slipped out of his grip, and he clutched the lame man’s coat-tails instead. The coat tore, and Iván fell to the ground. He sprang up immediately, shouting “Stop thief,” and ran on.

Gabriel had reached his own yard, but Iván rushed in. And just as he was about to seize him, something smashed down upon his head, right on the forehead. Gabriel had seized an oak stake and struck at Iván with all his strength.

Iván turned sick and dizzy, and sparks flashed before his eyes; then all grew dark and he sank to the ground. When he came to himself, Gabriel had disappeared; all around was light as day, and behind him was a great roaring and rushing and cracking. He turned around, and there was his big barn ablaze and the little barn just catching, and the wind driving the flames and the smoke and burning shreds of straw towards the cottage.



In the light Iván could clearly see a man crouching on the ground with his back to him, lighting a bundle of hay which he held in his hands.

“Brothers, brothers<sup>6</sup>” shouted Iván, putting his hands to his thighs in despair. “Oh, if I had only pulled out the straw and stamped it out! Brothers, why didn’t I do it !” He tried to cry out, but his heart beat too quickly, and his voice failed him. He tried to run, but his legs refused to move and shook beneath him. He staggered forward, but the beating of his heart suffocated him and he had to stop and get his breath. When he had crept round the fence and reached the fire, both barns were a mass of flame, and the gate and a corner of the cottage were beginning to burn. The flames were pouring out of the windows, and it was impossible to get into the yard. A crowd had gathered but nothing could be done. The neighbouring peasants were busy getting their belongings out into the street and driving the cattle out of the yards. Soon Gabriel’s house caught, and a wind arose and carried the flames across the street, and half the village was ablaze.

At Iván’s farm they only had time to save the old man, and to run out themselves in just what they had on; nothing else could be saved. All the cattle were burnt (except the horses, who were in the field), the hens, the carts and ploughs and harrows, the women’s boxes and the corn in the bins—all were destroyed.

At Gabriel’s farm they saved the cattle and rescued some of the household things. The fire burned the whole night. Iván stood near his house, gazing into the flames and muttering unceasingly, “Brothers, what have I done? I had only to pull out the straw and stamp it out !” But when the roof fell in he rushed into the flames, caught hold of a burning log and began to pull at it. The women called him back, but he succeeded in pulling the log out, and went in after another. But he staggered and fell into the flames, and his sons rushed in and rescued him. His hair and beard and hands were burned, and his dress was spoiled, but he seemed insensible to everything.

“He has gone crazy with grief,” said the people. The fire began to slacken, and still Iván stood there, muttering “If only I had pulled it out !”

Towards morning the son of the village Elder came up to Iván.

“Uncle Iván, your father is dying and sends for you to bid him farewell.”

Iván had forgotten about his father and could not understand.

“How,” he said, “my father? Whom has he sent for?”

“He sends for you to say farewell to him. He is lying in our cottage, dying. Come, uncle Iván.” And the Elder’s son took him by the arm, and Iván followed him.

Some of the burning straw had fallen on the old man when he was being carried out, and had burned him. He had been taken to the Elder’s cottage, in a distant part of the village which had not caught fire.

When Iván reached the cottage there was no one there but the old women and the children sitting on the stove. All the others were at the fire. Iván’s father lay on the bench with a candle in his hand<sup>7</sup> and his eyes fixed on the door. When his son entered, he moved a little, and the old woman came up and told him that Iván had arrived. He called him to come nearer, and when Iván had done so he began to speak.

---

<sup>6</sup>Russian peasants address each other collectively as “Brothers,” irrespective of family relationships. — *Trans.*

<sup>7</sup>Wax candles are much used in the services of the Russian Church, and it is usual to place one in the hand of a dying man, especially when he receives unction.

“Vania, what did I tell you? Who burned the village?”

“It was he, father,” said Iván, “I caught him! I saw him thrust the fire under the eaves. If I only had pulled out the handful of burning straw and stamped out the fire, nothing would have happened.”

“Iván,” said the old man,

“I am dying, and you also will die some day. Whose fault was it?”

Iván stared at his father, and was silent, unable to say a word.

“Before God, tell me, whose fault was it? What did I say to you?”

Only then did Iván come to himself and understand. And he gave a great sob and said:

“It was my fault, father!” And he fell on his knees by the old man and wept, crying: “Forgive me, father, I have sinned before you and before God!”

The old man’s hands moved feebly; he took the candle in his left hand and tried to lift the right to his forehead to cross himself, but he had not the strength and his hand fell down helpless.

“Lord, I thank Thee! Lord, I thank Thee!”

he said and again fixed his eyes upon his son.

“Vania! Listen, Vania !”

“Yes, father.”

“What will you do now?”

Iván was still weeping.

“I don’t know, father,” he said. “Father, I don’t know how I can live now?”

The old man closed his eyes and his lips moved as if he were gathering his strength; and then he opened his eyes again and said: “It will be well. If you live with God all will be well with you.” He was silent for a while and then smiled and said: “Look you, Vania, do not tell who set fire to the house. If you hide another’s sin, God will forgive yours too.” And the old man took the candle in both hands, clasped them on his breast, sighed, and stretched out his legs, and died.

\* \* \* \*

Iván did not tell about Gabriel, so no one knew how the fire had begun; and he forgot his anger against Gabriel. Gabriel wondered why Iván had not accused him, and at first he feared him but afterwards he grew used to him again. They ceased to quarrel, and so did their families. While they were re-building they lived together in one cottage and when the village had been rebuilt on a bigger scale, they still remained neighbours as before.

And they were as good friends as the old men before them had been. And Iván always carried in mind his father’s words and God’s command that the fire must be put out in the beginning.

If any man did him an evil, he tried not to revenge himself, but to mend the evil. If any man spoke evil to him, he tried not to answer worse, but to teach the man not to speak evil. And he taught his women and children in the same way. And his affairs flourished and he lived better than before.

**The Free Age Press** is an earnest effort to spread those deep convictions in which the noblest spirits of every age and race have believed—that man's true aim and happiness is "unity in reason and love"; the realisation of the brotherhood of all men: that we must all strive to eradicate, each from himself, those false ideas, false feelings, and false desires—personal, social, religious, economic—which alienate us one from another and produce nine-tenths of all human suffering.

Of these truly Christian and universal religious aspirations the writings of Leo Tolstoy are to-day perhaps the most definite expression, and it is to the production of very cheap editions of his extant religious, social and ethical works, together with much unpublished matter and his new writings, to which we have special access (being in close touch with Tolstoy), that we are at present confining ourselves. We earnestly trust that all who sympathise will continue to assist us by every means in their power, and help to make the publications yet more widely known. It is Tolstoy's desire that his books shall not be copyrighted, and as we share this view all **Free Age Press** translations and editions (with one, as yet unavoidable exception<sup>8</sup>), are and will be issued free of copyright and may be reprinted by anyone. We have already commenced to collect all Tolstoy's essays into more permanent cloth-bound volumes.

Suggestions, inquiries, offers of help and co-operation will be gratefully welcomed. For the hundreds of sympathetic letters and the practical help in making known and circulating the books which we have received already, we are very grateful, and tender our hearty thanks.

VLADIMIR TCHERTKOFF, *Editor.*  
THOMAS LAURIE, *Publisher.*

## *The Free Age Press Leaflets. — No. 6.*

*3d. a dozen or 1s. a hundred, post free.*

---

*1d. Editions of Tolstoy's Writings. Post free, 1½d. each, or 1s. a dozen.*

**POPULAR STORIES** — (1) The Godson. (2) What Men Live By. (3) Where Love Is, There God Is. (4) The Two Pilgrims. (5) How Much Land Does a Man Need? (6) If You Neglect the Little Fire, You Can't Put Out the Big One. (7) Ivan the Fool.

**ESSAYS** — (8) How Shall We Escape? (9) My Reply to the Synod's Edict. (10) The Spirit of Christ's Teaching. (11) The Christian Teaching. (12) Modern Science. (13) The only Means (August, 1901). (14) Also The Teaching of Tolstoy. By Aylmer Maude.

---

<sup>8</sup>The copyright is now expired and will be published soon



Re-print by [scriptorium.eu.org](http://scriptorium.eu.org) 2022.

This tale is also available in German and French.

Based on the 1900 edition. Translated N., and A.C. Fifield.

Illustration from

”The Old Devil and the Three Small Devils”, 1891

A profound tale about the consequences of acting out of a thirst for revenge and not lovingly.



**Bitcoin:**

bc1qdw5z6lgruagcgl4nq  
vhqk56ejemaugtqf83456

**Paypal and other:**

[scriptorium.eu.org/donate](http://scriptorium.eu.org/donate)

Released by [scriptorium.eu.org](http://scriptorium.eu.org)

- 001 \_ Tolstoy, Leo 1885 If You Neglect the Little Fire You Can't Put Out the Big One.
- 004 \_ Rutherford, Joseph Franklin \_ 1938 \_ Face the Facts + Fill the Earth
- 005 \_ Masius, Johannes Carolus - Leixner, Otto von \_ 1681 \_ Die letzte Seele
- 007 \_ Saint-René, Martin - Alighieri, Dante \_ 1304 \_ 1936 \_ L'enfer de Dante en terza rima
- 010 \_ Tolstoy, Leo \_ 1901 \_ The Only Means.
- 011 \_ de Saint-Exupéry, Antoine \_ 1943 \_ Le Petit Prince
- 014 \_ Fr. Rose, Seraphim \_ Nihilism - The Root of the Revolution of the Modern Age
- 015 \_ Tolstoy, Leo \_ 1901 \_ Reason, Faith and Prayer - Three letters

Please donate if you want more of those texts released. Editing each page takes 15min and researching and cataloging worthy texts is also very time-consuming. We accept other payment methods as well as donations of materials (paper, ink, machines...) and time. Please reach to us on the website [scriptorium.eu.org](http://scriptorium.eu.org).

 [scriptorium.eu.org](http://scriptorium.eu.org)

N° 001