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M. W. T. Tolstoy

# COUNT TOLSTOI

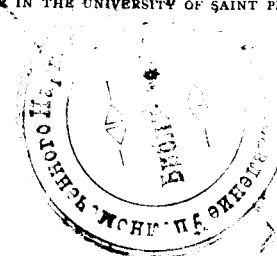
AS NOVELIST AND THINKER.

LECTURES DELIVERED AT THE ROYAL INSTITUTION.

BY

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## PREFACE.

THE first three sections of this little book form, with considerable portions that had to be omitted in the course of delivery, a series of three lectures which I was invited to read before the Royal Institution in June of the present year. The limited time at my disposal compelled me to pass over in all but complete silence two of Count Tolstoi's capital works; and to make my criticism as complete as possible, I have added two chapters, one on his story, *The Death of Ivan Ilyitch*, and the second on his drama, *The Power of Darkness*. I wish to add that in those portions of the lectures treating of Count Tolstoi's moral theory, I have made use of Obolensky's *Philosophical and Moral Ideas of Count L. N. Tolstoi*, a work from which I have borrowed the more freely, because it has never been translated, and is therefore entirely unknown to the English reader.

ST. PETERSBURG,  
July 1883.

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## INTRODUCTORY.

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As Count Tolstoi is still living, and has more than once expressed an unwillingness that the story of his private life should be made public, it would be unbecoming on my part to attempt more in this place than to give the few biographical details necessary to enable the reader to follow with interest a critical study of the leading works of the author of *War and Peace*.

Count Leo Nicholaevitch Tolstoi was born August 28, 1828, at Clear Streak—Yásnaya Políana—in the government of Toula. His mother, Princess Marie Volkonsky, whose portrait the novelist has sketched to us in the person of the Princess Marie, died when he was two years old, and soon after her death the family removed to Moscow. They had not been long there, when the father, whose character and habits are partially depicted in Nicholas Rostoff, was suddenly taken

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ill and died, and the future novelist, together with his sister Marie and his younger brother Demetrius, returned to Clear Streak. It was now that for the first time he was brought into close connection with the peasants on the family estate, and derived those impressions of Russian country life, of which later he was to become the greatest interpreter. He was only in his sixteenth year when he matriculated at the University of Kazan, where he remained three years, after which he once more went back to his favourite country home. In 1851 he entered the military service as a junker, and joined the brigade into which he was drafted at Staroe-Lidovskoe on the banks of the Terek.

Not without reason has the Caucasus been termed the cradle of the Russian muse. Many of the earlier poems of Poushkin and the most characteristic of Lermontoff's compositions, as well as Griboyedoff's brilliant comedy, *The Misery of Being too Wise*, were written under the inspiration of the beauty and grandeur of Caucasian scenery. Nor can we doubt that the picturesque wildness of a country so rich in poetry and in legends of savage heroism, and the marked individuality of character that distinguished then even more than now the rude mountain tribes by whom he was surrounded, produced a strong impression on young

Tolstoi, served to stimulate a mind unusually receptive, and first suggested to him the outline of his Cossack stories. During his residence there, he wrote his reminiscences of *Childhood* and *Boyhood*, and also composed his *Memoirs of Prince Nekloudoff*, and *The Cossacks*. Of these, his earliest productions, I have spoken at length in my first lecture. Political events caused him to quit the Caucasus and to join his elder brother, Nicholas, in the Crimea. He took an active part in the disastrous campaign against Turkey and the allied forces, being attached to the staff of Prince Gorchakoff, and was present at the storming of Sevastopol on August 27, 1855. The history of the terrible siege forms the subject of his three striking sketches: *Sevastopol in December 1854*, *Sevastopol in May 1855*, and *Sevastopol in August 1855*. We may safely conclude that what he then saw and experienced contributed to inspire him with that aversion to war and military glory, which in many of his tales, and particularly in his later works, he has so eloquently and so energetically denounced.

After the conclusion of the war, Count Tolstoi, then twenty-six years of age, finally retired from military service, and spent a few months at St. Petersburg, where he was brought into close relationship with the leading literary men of the capital.