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The Story of Ivan the Fool (Maudes Translation)

Leo Tolstoy

1886

Once upon a time, in a certain province of a certain country, there lived a rich peasant, who had three sons: Simon the Soldier, Tarás the Stout, and Iván the Fool, besides an unmarried daughter, Martha, who was deaf and dumb. Simon the Soldier went to the wars to serve the king; Tarás the Stout went to a merchant's in town to trade, and Iván the Fool stayed at home with the lass, to till the ground till his back bent.

Simon the Soldier obtained high rank and an estate, and married a nobleman's daughter. His pay was large and his estate was large, but yet he could not make ends meet. What the husband earned his lady wife squandered, and they never had money enough.

So Simon the Soldier went to his estate to collect the income, but his steward said, 'where is any income to come from? We have neither cattle, nor tools, nor horse, nor plow, nor harrow. We must first get all these, and then the money will come.'

Then Simon the Soldier went to his father and said: 'You, father, are rich, but have given me nothing. Divide what you have, and give me a third part, that I may improve my estate.'

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But the old man said: 'You brought nothing into my house; why should I give you a third part? It would be unfair to Iván and to the girl.'

But Simon answered, 'He is a fool; and she is an old maid, and deaf and dumb besides; what's the good of property to them?'

The old man said, 'We will see what Iván says about it.'

And Iván said, 'Let him take what he wants.'

So Simon the Soldier took his share of his father's goods and removed them to his estate, and went off again to serve the king.

Tarás the Stout also gathered much money, and married into a merchant's family, but still he wanted more. So he, also, came to his father and said, 'Give me my portion.'

But the old man did not wish to give Tarás a share either, and said, 'You brought nothing here. Iván has earned all we have in the house, and why should we wrong him and the girl?'

But Tarás said, 'What does he need? He is a fool! He cannot marry, no one would have him; and the dumb lass does not need anything either. Look here, Iván!' said he, 'give me half the corn; I don't want the tools, and of the live stock I will take only the gray stallion, which is of no use to you for the plow.'

Iván laughed and said, 'Take what you want. I will work to earn some more.'

So they gave a share to Tarás also; and he carted the corn away to town, and took the gray stallion. And Iván was left with one old mare, to lead his peasant life as before, and to support his father and mother.

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Now the old Devil was vexed that the brothers had not quarreled over the division, but had parted peacefully; and he summoned three imps.

'Look here,' said he, 'there are three brothers: Simon the Soldier, Tarás the Stout, and Iván the Fool. They should have quarreled, but are living peaceably and meet on friendly terms.

1. † 'For Christ's sake' is the usual appeal of Russian beggars or poor pilgrims.
2. † It is often arranged that the shepherd who looks after the cattle of a Russian village Commune should get his board and lodging at the houses of the villagers, passing from one to another in turn.

of the pillars of the lantern. One of the people noticed it and told Iván's wife, and she ran to her husband, who was in the field.

'Come and look,' said she. 'They say the gentleman is beginning to work with his head.'

Iván was surprised.

'Really?' says he, and he turned his horse round, and went to the tower. And by the time he reached the tower the old Devil was quite exhausted with hunger, and was staggering and knocking his head against the pillars. And just as Iván arrived at the tower, the Devil stumbled, fell, and came bump, bump, bump, straight down the stairs to the bottom, counting each step with a knock of his head!

'Well!' says Iván, 'the fine gentleman told the truth when he said that "sometimes one's head quite splits." This is worse than blisters; after such work there will be swellings on the head.'

The old Devil tumbled out at the foot of the stairs, and struck his head against the ground. Iván was about to go up to him to see how much work he had done—when suddenly the earth opened and the old Devil fell through. Only a hole was left.

Iván scratched his head.

'What a nasty thing,' says he. 'It's one of those devils again! What a whopper! He must be the father of them all.'

Iván is still living, and people crowd to his kingdom. His own brothers have come to live with him, and he feeds them, too. To every one who comes and says, 'Give me food!' Iván says, 'All right. You can stay with us; we have plenty of everything.'

Only there is one special custom in his kingdom; whoever has horny hands comes to table, but whoever has not, must eat what the others leave.

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The fool Iván has spoiled the whole business for me. Now you three go and tackle those three brothers, and worry them till they scratch each other's eyes out! Do you think you can do it?'

'Yes, we'll do it,' said they.

'How will you set about it?'

'Why,' said they, 'first we'll ruin them. And when they haven't a crust to eat we'll tie them up together, and then they'll fight each other, sure enough!'

'That's capital; I see you understand your business. Go, and don't come back till you've set them by the ears, or I'll skin you alive!'

The imps went off into a swamp, and began to consider how they should set to work. They disputed and disputed, each wanting the lightest job; but at last they decided to cast lots which of the brothers each imp should tackle. If one imp finished his task before the others, he was to come and help them. So the imps cast lots, and appointed a time to meet again in the swamp to learn who had succeeded and who needed help.

The appointed time came round, and the imps met again in the swamp as agreed. And each began to tell how matters stood. The first, who had undertaken Simon the Soldier, began: 'My business is going on well. To-morrow Simon will return to his father's house.'

His comrades asked, 'How did you manage it?'

'First,' says he, 'I made Simon so bold that he offered to conquer the whole world for his king; and the king made him his general and sent him to fight the King of India. They met for battle, but the night before, I damped all the powder in Simon's camp, and made more straw soldiers for the Indian King than you could count. And when Simon's soldiers saw the straw soldiers surrounding them, they grew frightened. Simon ordered them to fire; but their cannons and guns would not go off. Then Simon's soldiers were quite frightened, and ran like sheep, and the Indian King slaughtered them. Simon was disgraced. He

has been deprived of his estate, and to-morrow they intend to execute him. There is only one day's work left for me to do; I have just to let him out of prison that he may escape home. To-morrow I shall be ready to help whichever of you needs me.'

Then the second imp, who had Tarás in hand, began to tell how he had fared. 'I don't want any help,' said he, 'my job is going all right. Tarás can't hold out for more than a week. First I caused him to grow greedy and fat. His covetousness became so great that whatever he saw he wanted to buy. He has spent all his money in buying immense lots of goods, and still continues to buy. Already he has begun to use borrowed money. His debts hang like a weight round his neck, and he is so involved that he can never get clear. In a week his bills come due, and before then I will spoil all his stock. He will be unable to pay and will have to go home to his father.'

Then they asked the third imp (Iván's), 'And how are you getting on?'

'Well,' said he, 'my affair goes badly. First I spat into his drink to make his stomach ache, and then I went into his field and hammered the ground hard as a stone that he should not be able to till it. I thought he wouldn't plow it, but like the fool that he is, he came with his plow and began to make a furrow. He groaned with the pain in his stomach, but went on plowing. I broke his plow for him, but he went home, got out another, and again started plowing. I crept under the earth and caught hold of the plowshares, but there was no holding them; he leant heavily upon the plow, and the plowshare was sharp and cut my hands. He has all but finished plowing the field, only one little strip is left. Come, brothers, and help me; for if we don't get the better of him, all our labor is lost. If the fool holds out and keeps on working the land, his brothers will never know want, for he will feed them both.'

Simon the Soldier's imp promised to come next day to help, and so they parted.

But the Devil said, 'I do it all out of pity for you fools. If I didn't torture myself you would remain fools for ever. But, having worked with my head, I can now teach you.'

Iván was surprised.

'Do teach us!' said he, 'so that when our hands get cramped we may use our heads for a change.'

And the Devil promised to teach the people. So Iván gave notice throughout the kingdom that a fine gentleman had come who would teach everybody how to work with their heads; that with the head more could be done than with the hands; and that the people ought all to come and learn.

Now there was in Iván's kingdom a high tower, with many steps leading up to a lantern on the top. And Iván took the gentleman up there that every one might see him.

So the gentleman took his place on the top of the tower and began to speak, and the people came together to see him. They thought the gentleman would really show them how to work with the head without using the hands. But the old Devil only taught them in many words how they might live without working. The people could make nothing of it. They looked and considered, and at last went off to attend to their affairs.

The old Devil stood on the tower a whole day, and after that a second day, talking all the time. But standing there so long he grew hungry, and the fools never thought of taking food to him up in the tower. They thought that if he could work with his head better than with his hands, he could at any rate easily provide himself with bread.

The old Devil stood on the top of the tower yet another day, talking away. People came near, looked on for awhile, and then went away.

And Iván asked, 'Well, has the gentleman begun to work with his head yet?'

'Not yet,' said the people; 'he's still spouting away.'

The old Devil stood on the tower one day more, but he began to grow weak, so that he staggered and hit his head against one

at the table, but the others got only the scraps that were left over.

The old Devil sat down at the table, but the dumb girl seized him by the hands and looked at them—there were no hard places there: the hands were clean and smooth, with long nails. The dumb girl gave a grunt and pulled the Devil away from the table. And Iván's wife said to him, 'Don't be offended, fine gentleman. My sister-in-law does not allow any one to come to table who hasn't horny hands. But wait awhile, after the folk have eaten you shall have what is left.'

The old Devil was offended that in the King's house they wished him to feed like a pig. He said to Iván, 'It is a foolish law you have in your kingdom that every one must work with his hands. It's your stupidity that invented it. Do people work only with their hands? What do you think wise men work with?'

And Iván said, 'How are we fools to know? We do most of our work with our hands and our backs.'

'That is because you are fools! But I will teach you how to work with the head. Then you will know that it is more profitable to work with the head than with the hands.'

Iván was surprised.

'If that is so,' said he, 'then there is some sense in calling us fools!'

And the old Devil went on. 'Only it is not easy to work with one's head. You give me nothing to eat, because I have no hard places on my hands, but you do not know that it is a hundred times more difficult to work with the head. Sometimes one's head quite splits.'

Iván became thoughtful.

'Why, then, friend, do you torture yourself so? Is it pleasant when the head splits? Would it not be better to do easier work with your hands and your back?'

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Iván had plowed up the whole fallow, all but one little strip. He came to finish it. Though his stomach ached, the plowing must be done. He freed the harness ropes, turned the plow, and began to work. He drove one furrow, but coming back the plow began to drag as if it had caught in a root. It was the imp, who had twisted his legs round the plowshare and was holding it back.

'What a strange thing!' thought Iván. 'There were no roots here at all, and yet here's a root.'

Iván pushed his hand deep into the furrow, groped about, and, feeling something soft, seized hold of it and pulled it out. It was black like a root, but it wriggled. Why, it was a live imp!

'What a nasty thing!' said Iván, and he lifted his hand to dash it against the plow, but the imp squealed out:

'Don't hurt me, and I'll do anything you tell me to.'

'What can you do?'

'Anything you tell me to.'

Iván scratched his head.

'My stomach aches,' said he; 'can you cure that?'

'Certainly I can.'

'Well then, do so.'

The imp went down into the furrow, searched about, scratched with his claws, and pulled out a bunch of three little roots, which he handed to Iván.

'Here,' says he, 'whoever swallows one of these will be cured of any illness.'

Iván took the roots, separated them, and swallowed one. The pain in his stomach was cured at once. The imp again begged to be let off; 'I will jump right into the earth, and never come back,' said he.

'All right,' said Iván; 'begone, and God be with you!'

And as soon as Iván mentioned God, the imp plunged into the earth like a stone thrown into the water. Only a hole was left.

Iván put the other two pieces of root into his cap and went on with his plowing. He plowed the strip to the end, turned his plow over, and went home. He unharnessed the horse, entered the hut, and there he saw his elder brother, Simon the Soldier and his wife, sitting at supper. Simon's estate had been confiscated, he himself had barely managed to escape from prison, and he had come back to live in his father's house.

Simon saw Iván, and said: 'I have come to live with you. Feed me and my wife till I get another appointment.'

'All right,' said Iván, 'you can stay with us.'

But when Iván was about to sit down on the bench, the lady disliked the smell, and said to her husband: 'I cannot sup with a dirty peasant.'

So Simon the Soldier said, 'My lady says you don't smell nice. You'd better go and eat outside.'

'All right,' said Iván; 'any way I must spend the night outside, for I have to pasture the mare.'

So he took some bread, and his coat, and went with the mare into the fields.

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Having finished his work that night, Simon's imp came, as agreed, to find Iván's imp and help him to subdue the fool. He came to the field and searched and searched; but instead of his comrade he found only a hole.

'Clearly,' thought he, 'some evil has befallen my comrade. I must take his place. The field is plowed up, so the fool must be tackled in the meadow.'

So the imp went to the meadows and flooded Iván's hayfield with water, which left the grass all covered with mud.

Iván returned from the pasture at dawn, sharpened his scythe, and went to mow the hayfield. He began to mow, but had only swung the scythe once or twice when the edge turned so that it would not cut at all, but needed resharpening. Iván struggled on for awhile, and then said: 'It's no good. I must go home and bring a tool to straighten the scythe, and

And so he got no bread. Every one had gold, and no matter where the old Devil went, nobody would give anything for money, but every one said, 'Either bring something else, or come and work, or receive what you want in charity for Christ's sake.'

But the old Devil had nothing but money; for work he had no liking, and as for taking anything 'for Christ's sake' he could not do that. The old Devil grew very angry.

'What more do you want, when I give you money?' said he. 'You can buy everything with gold, and hire any kind of laborer.' But the fools did not heed him.

'No, we do not want money,' said they. 'We have no payments to make, and no taxes, so what should we do with it?'

The old Devil lay down to sleep—supperless.

The affair was told to Iván the Fool. People came and asked him, 'What are we to do? A fine gentleman has turned up, who likes to eat and drink and dress well, but he does not like to work, does not beg in "Christ's name," but only offers gold pieces to every one. At first people gave him all he wanted, until they had plenty of gold pieces, but now no one gives him anything. What's to be done with him? He will die of hunger before long.'

Iván listened.

'All right,' says he, 'we must feed him. Let him live by turn at each house as a shepherd^[2] does.'

There was no help for it. The old Devil had to begin making the round.

In due course the turn came for him to go to Iván's house. The old Devil came in to dinner, and the dumb girl was getting it ready.

She had often been deceived by lazy folk who came early to dinner—without having done their share of work—and ate up all the porridge, so it had occurred to her to find out the sluggards by their hands. Those who had horny hands, she put

The old Devil was delighted, and thought he to himself, 'Things are going right this time. Now I shall ruin the Fool as I did Tarás, and I shall buy him up body and soul.'

But as soon as the fools had provided themselves with gold pieces they gave them to the women for necklaces. The lasses plaited them into their tresses, and at last the children in the street began to play with the little pieces. Everybody had plenty of them, and they stopped taking them. But the fine gentleman's mansion was not yet half-built, and the grain and cattle for the year were not yet provided. So he gave notice that he wished people to come and work for him, and that he wanted cattle and grain; for each thing, and for each service, he was ready to give many more pieces of gold.

But nobody came to work and nothing was brought. Only sometimes a boy or a little girl would run up to exchange an egg for a gold coin, but nobody else came, and he had nothing to eat. And being hungry, the fine gentleman went through the village to try and buy something for dinner. He tried at one house, and offered a gold piece for a fowl, but the housewife wouldn't take it.

'I have a lot already,' said she.

He tried at a widow's house to buy a herring, and offered a gold piece.

'I don't want it, my good sir,' said she. 'I have no children to play with it, and I myself already have three coins as curiosities.'

He tried at a peasant's house to get bread, but neither would the peasant take money.

'I don't need it,' said he, 'but if you are begging "for Christ's sake"^[1], wait a bit and I'll tell the housewife to cut you a piece of bread.'

At that the Devil spat, and ran away. To hear Christ's name mentioned, let alone receiving anything for Christ's sake, hurt him more than sticking a knife into him.

I'll get a chunk of bread at the same time. If I have to spend a week here, I won't leave till the mowing's done.'

The imp heard this and thought to himself, 'This fool is a tough 'un; I can't get round him this way. I must try some other dodge.'

Iván returned, sharpened his scythe, and began to mow. The imp crept into the grass and began to catch the scythe by the heel, sending the point into the earth. Iván found the work very hard, but he mowed the whole meadow, except one little bit which was in the swamp. The imp crept into the swamp and, thought he to himself, 'Though I cut my paws I will not let him mow.'

Iván reached the swamp. The grass didn't seem thick, but yet it resisted the scythe. Iván grew angry and began to swing the scythe with all his might. The imp had to give in; he could not keep up with the scythe, and, seeing it was a bad business, he scrambled into a bush. Iván swung the scythe, caught the bush, and cut off half the imp's tail. Then he finished mowing the grass, told his sister to rake it up, and went himself to mow the rye. He went with the scythe, but the dock-tailed imp was there first, and entangled the rye so that the scythe was of no use. But Iván went home and got his sickle, and began to reap with that and he reaped the whole of the rye.

'Now it's time,' said he, 'to start on the oats.'

The dock-tailed imp heard this, and thought, 'I couldn't get the better of him on the rye, but I shall on the oats. Only wait till the morning.'

In the morning the imp hurried to the oat field, but the oats were already mowed down! Iván had mowed them by night, in order that less grain should shake out. The imp grew angry.

'He has cut me all over and tired me out—the fool. It is worse than war. The accursed fool never sleeps; one can't keep up with him. I will get into his stacks now and rot them.'

So the imp entered the rye, and crept among the sheaves, and they began to rot. He heated them, grew warm himself, and fell asleep.

Iván harnessed the mare, and went with the lass to cart the rye. He came to the heaps, and began to pitch the rye into the cart. He tossed two sheaves and again thrust his fork—right into the imp's back. He lifts the fork and sees on the prongs a live imp; dock-tailed, struggling, wriggling, and trying to jump.

'What, you nasty thing, are you here again?'

'I'm another,' said the imp. 'The first was my brother. I've been with your brother Simon.'

'Well,' said Iván, 'whoever you are, you've met the same fate!'

He was about to dash him against the cart, but the imp cried out: 'Let me off, and I will not only let you alone, but I'll do anything you tell me to do.'

'What can you do?'

'I can make soldiers out of anything you like.'

'But what use are they?'

'You can turn them to any use; they can do anything you please.'

'Can they sing?'

'Yes, if you want them to.'

'All right; you may make me some.'

And the imp said, 'Here, take a sheaf of rye, then bump it upright on the ground, and simply say:

'O sheaf! my slave

This order gave:

Where a straw has been

Let a soldier be seen!'

Iván took the sheaf, struck it on the ground, and said what the imp had told him to. The sheaf fell asunder, and all the straws changed into soldiers, with a trumpeter and a drummer playing in front, so that there was a whole regiment.

Iván laughed.

The soldiers were frightened, and began to act according to the King's orders. They began to burn houses and corn, and to kill cattle. But the fools still offered no resistance, and only wept. The old men wept, and the old women wept, and the young people wept.

'Why do you harm us?' they said. 'Why do you waste good things? If you need them, why do you not take them for yourselves?'

At last the soldiers could stand it no longer. They refused to go any further, and the army disbanded and fled.

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The old Devil had to give it up. He could not get the better of Iván with soldiers. So he changed himself into a fine gentleman, and settled down in Iván's kingdom. He meant to overcome him by means of money, as he had overcome Tarás the Stout.

'I wish,' says he, 'to do you a good turn, to teach you sense and reason. I will build a house among you and organize a trade.'

'All right,' said Iván, 'come and live among us if you like.'

Next morning the fine gentleman went out into the public square with a big sack of gold and a sheet of paper, and said, 'You all live like swine. I wish to teach you how to live properly. Build me a house according to this plan. You shall work, I will tell you how, and I will pay you with gold coins.' And he showed them the gold.

The fools were astonished; there was no money in use among them; they bartered their goods, and paid one another with labor. They looked at the gold coins with surprise.

'What nice little things they are!' said they.

And they began to exchange their goods and labor for the gentleman's gold pieces. And the old Devil began, as in Tarás's kingdom, to be free with his gold, and the people began to exchange everything for gold and to do all sorts of work for it.

'Let us make war,' says he, 'and conquer King Iván's country. It is true there is no money, but there is plenty of corn and cattle and everything else.'

So the King of Tarakán prepared to make war. He mustered a great army, provided rifles and cannons, marched to the frontier, and entered Iván's kingdom.

And people came to Iván and said, 'The King of Tarakán is coming to make war on us.'

'All right,' said Iván, 'let him come.'

Having crossed the frontier, the King of Tarakán sent scouts to look for Iván's army. They looked and looked, but there was no army! They waited and waited for one to appear somewhere, but there were no signs of an army, and nobody to fight with. The King of Tarakán then sent to seize the villages. The soldiers came to a village, and the people, both men and women, rushed out in astonishment to stare at the soldiers. The soldiers began to take their corn and cattle; the people let them have it, and did not resist. The soldiers went on to another village; the same thing happened again. The soldiers went on for one day, and for two days, and everywhere the same thing happened. The people let them have everything, and no one resisted, but only invited the soldiers to live with them.

'Poor fellows,' said they, 'if you have a hard life in your own land, why don't you come and stay with us altogether?'

The soldiers marched and marched: still no army, only people living and feeding themselves and others, and not resisting, but inviting the soldiers to stay and live with them. The soldiers found it dull work, and they came to the King of Tarakán and said, 'We cannot fight here, lead us elsewhere. War is all right, but what is this? It is like cutting pea-soup! We will not make war here any more.'

The King of Tarakán grew angry, and ordered his soldiers to overrun the whole kingdom, to destroy the villages, to burn the grain and the houses, and to slaughter the cattle. 'And if you do not obey my orders,' said he, 'I will execute you all.'

'How clever!' said he. 'This is fine! How pleased the girls will be!'

'Now let me go,' said the imp.

'No,' said Iván, 'I must make my soldiers of thrashed straw, otherwise good grain will be wasted. Teach me how to change them back again into the sheaf. I want to thrash it.'

And the imp said, 'Repeat:

"Let each be a straw

Who was soldier before,

For my true slave

This order gave!"'

Iván said this, and the sheaf reappeared.

Again the imp began to beg, 'Now let me go!'

'All right.' And Iván pressed him against the side of the cart, held him down with his hand, and pulled him off the fork.

'God be with you,' said he.

And as soon as he mentioned God, the imp plunged into the earth like a stone into water. Only a hole was left.

Iván returned home, and there was his other brother, Tarás with his wife, sitting at supper.

Tarás the Stout had failed to pay his debts, had run away from his creditors, and had come home to his father's house. When he saw Iván, 'Look here,' said he, 'till I can start in business again, I want you to keep me and my wife.'

'All right,' said Iván, 'you can live here, if you like.'

Iván took off his coat and sat down to table, but the merchant's wife said: 'I cannot sit at table with this clown, he smells of perspiration.'

Then Tarás the Stout said, 'Iván, you smell too strong. Go and eat outside.'

'All right,' said Iván, taking some bread and going into the yard. 'It is time, anyhow, for me to go and pasture the mare.'

Tará's imp, being also free that night, came, as agreed, to help his comrades subdue Iván the Fool. He came to the corn-field, looked and looked for his comrades—no one was there. He only found a hole. He went to the meadow, and there he found an imp's tail in the swamp, and another hole in the rye stubble.

'Evidently, some ill-luck has befallen my comrades,' thought he. 'I must take their place and tackle the fool.'

So the imp went to look for Iván, who had already stacked the corn and was cutting trees in the wood. The two brothers had begun to feel crowded, living together, and had told Iván to cut down trees to build new houses for them.

The imp ran to the wood, climbed among the branches, and began to hinder Iván from felling the trees. Iván undercut one tree so that it should fall clear, but in falling it turned askew and caught among some branches. Iván cut a pole with which to lever it aside, and with difficulty contrived to bring it to the ground. He set to work to fell another tree—again the same thing occurred; and with all his efforts he could hardly get the tree clear. He began on a third tree, and again the same thing happened.

Iván had hoped to cut down half a hundred small trees, but had not felled even half a score, and now the night was come and he was tired out. The steam from him spread like a mist through the wood, but still he stuck to his work. He undercut another tree, but his back began to ache so that he could not stand. He drove his ax into the tree and sat down to rest.

The imp, noticing that Iván had stopped work, grew cheerful.

'At last,' thought he, 'he is tired out! He will give it up. Now I can take a rest myself.'

He seated himself astride a branch and chuckled. But soon Iván got up, pulled the ax out, swung it, and smote the tree from the opposite side with such force that the tree gave way at once and came crashing down. The imp had not expected this,

'We have plenty of spirits,' said they. 'We make it ourselves; and as for caps, the women make all kinds of them, even striped ones with tassels.'

So nobody would enlist.

The old Devil came to Iván and said: 'Your fools won't enlist of their own free will. We shall have to make them.'

'All right,' said Iván, 'you can try.'

So the old Devil gave notice that all the people were to enlist, and that Iván would put to death any one who refused.

The people came to the General and said, 'You say that if we do not go as soldiers the King will put us to death, but you don't say what will happen if we do enlist. We have heard say that soldiers get killed!'

'Yes, that happens sometimes.'

When the people heard this they became obstinate.

'We won't go,' said they. 'Better meet death at home. Either way we must die.'

'Fools! You are fools!' said the old Devil. 'A soldier may be killed or he may not, but if you don't go, King Iván will have you killed for certain.'

The people were puzzled, and went to Iván the Fool to consult him.

'A General has come,' said they, 'who says we must all become soldiers. "If you go as soldiers," says he, "you may be killed or you may not, but if you don't go, King Iván will certainly kill you." Is this true?'

Iván laughed and said, 'How can I, alone, put all you to death? If I were not a fool I would explain it to you, but as it is, I don't understand it myself.'

'Then,' said they, 'we will not serve.'

'All right,' says he, 'don't.'

So the people went to the General and refused to enlist. And the old Devil saw that this game was up, and he went off and ingratiated himself with the King of Tarakán.

And the King collected so much money that he had nowhere to store it, and his life became wretched. He ceased to form plans, and would have been glad enough simply to live, but he was hardly able even to do that. He ran short of everything. One after another his cooks, coachmen, and servants left him to go to the merchant. Soon he lacked even food. When he sent to the market to buy anything, there was nothing to be got—the merchant had bought up everything, and people only brought the King money to pay their taxes.

Tarás the King got angry and banished the merchant from the country. But the merchant settled just across the frontier, and went on as before. For the sake of the merchant's money, people took everything to him instead of to the King.

Things went badly with King Tarás. For days together he had nothing to eat, and a rumor even got about that the merchant was boasting that he would buy up the King himself! King Tarás got frightened, and did not know what to do.

At this time Simon the Soldier came to him, saying, 'Help me, for the King of India has conquered me.'

But King Tarás himself was over head and ears in difficulties. 'I myself,' said he, 'have had nothing to eat for two days.'

xi

Having done with the two brothers, the old Devil went to Iván. He changed himself into a General, and coming to Iván began to persuade him that he ought to have an army.

'It does not become a king,' said he, 'to be without an army. Only give me the order, and I will collect soldiers from among your people, and form one.'

Iván listened to him. 'All right,' said Iván, 'form an army, and teach them to sing songs well. I like to hear them do that.'

So the old Devil went through Iván's kingdom to enlist men. He told them to go and be entered as soldiers, and each should have a quart of spirits and a fine red cap.

The people laughed.

and had no time to get his feet clear, and the tree in breaking, gripped his paw. Iván began to lop off the branches, when he noticed a live imp hanging in the tree! Iván was surprised.

'What, you nasty thing,' says he, 'so you are here again!'

'I am another one,' says the imp. 'I have been with your brother Tarás.'

'Whoever you are, you have met your fate,' said Iván, and swinging his ax he was about to strike him with the haft, but the imp begged for mercy: 'Don't strike me,' said he, 'and I will do anything you tell me to.'

'What can you do?'

'I can make money for you, as much as you want.'

'All right, make some.' So the imp showed him how to do it.

'Take,' said he, 'some leaves from this oak and rub them in your hands, and gold will fall out on the ground.'

Iván took some leaves and rubbed them, and gold ran down from his hands.

'This stuff will do fine,' said he, 'for the fellows to play with on their holidays.'

'Now let me go,' said the imp.

'All right,' said Iván, and taking a lever he set the imp free. 'Now begone! And God be with you,' says he.

And as soon as he mentioned God, the imp plunged into the earth, like a stone into water. Only a hole was left.

vi

So the brothers built houses, and began to live apart; and Iván finished the harvest work, brewed beer, and invited his brothers to spend the next holiday with him. His brothers would not come.

'We don't care about peasant feasts,' said they.

So Iván entertained the peasants and their wives, and drank until he was rather tipsy. Then he went into the street to a ring of dancers; and going up to them he told the women to sing a song in his honor; 'for,' said he, 'I will give you something you never saw in your lives before!'

The women laughed and sang his praises, and when they had finished they said, 'Now let us have your gift.'

'I will bring it directly,' said he.

He took a seed-basket and ran into the woods. The women laughed. 'He is a fool!' said they, and they began to talk of something else.

But soon Iván came running back, carrying the basket full of something heavy.

'Shall I give it you?'

'Yes! give it to us.'

Iván took a handful of gold and threw it to the women. You should have seen them throw themselves upon it to pick it up! And the men around scrambled for it, and snatched it from one another. One old woman was nearly crushed to death. Iván laughed.

'Oh, you fools!' says he. 'Why did you crush the old grandmother? Be quiet, and I will give you some more,' and he threw them some more. The people all crowded round, and Iván threw them all the gold he had. They asked for more, but Iván said, 'I have no more just now. Another time I'll give you some more. Now let us dance, and you can sing me your songs.'

The women began to sing.

'Your songs are no good,' says he.

'Where will you find better ones?' say they.

'I'll soon show you,' says he.

He went to the barn, took a sheaf, thrashed it, stood it up, and bumped it on the ground.

'Now,' said he:

'O sheaf! my slave

This order gave:

Where a straw has been

Let a soldier be seen!'

And the sheaf fell asunder and became so many soldiers. The drums and trumpets began to play. Iván ordered the soldiers to play and sing. He led them out into the street, and the people

in Tarás's kingdom, started a house of business, and began spending money. He paid high prices for everything, and everybody hurried to the new merchant's to get money. And so much money spread among the people that they began to pay all their taxes promptly, and paid up all their arrears, and King Tarás rejoiced.

'Thanks to the new merchant,' thought he, 'I shall have more money than ever; and my life will be yet more comfortable.'

And Tarás the King began to form fresh plans, and began to build a new palace. He gave notice that people should bring him wood and stone, and come to work, and he fixed high prices for everything. King Tarás thought people would come in crowds to work as before, but to his surprise all the wood and stone was taken to the merchant's, and all the workmen went there too. King Tarás increased his price, but the merchant bid yet more. King Tarás had much money, but the merchant had still more, and outbid the King at every point.

The King's palace was at a standstill; the building did not get on.

King Tarás planned a garden, and when autumn came he called for the people to come and plant the garden, but nobody came. All the people were engaged digging a pond for the merchant. Winter came, and King Tarás wanted to buy sable furs for a new overcoat. He sent to buy them, but the messengers returned and said, 'There are no sables left. The merchant has all the furs. He gave the best price, and made carpets of the skins.'

King Tarás wanted to buy some stallions. He sent to buy them, but the messengers returned saying, 'The merchant has all the good stallions; they are carrying water to fill his pond.'

All the King's affairs came to a standstill. Nobody would work for him, for every one was busy working for the merchant; and they only brought King Tarás the merchant's money to pay their taxes.

all the young men without exception. Then you will have five times as many soldiers as formerly. Secondly, we must get new rifles and cannons. I will introduce rifles that will fire a hundred balls at once; they will fly out like peas. And I will get cannons that will consume with fire either man, or horse, or wall. They will burn up everything!’

Simon the King listened to the new commander, ordered all young men without exception to be enrolled as soldiers, and had new factories built in which he manufactured large quantities of improved rifles and cannons. Then he made haste to declare war against a neighboring king. As soon as he met the other army, King Simon ordered his soldiers to rain balls against it and shoot fire from the cannons, and at one blow he burned and crippled half the enemy’s army. The neighboring king was so thoroughly frightened that he gave way and surrendered his kingdom. King Simon was delighted.

‘Now,’ said he, ‘I will conquer the King of India.’

But the Indian King had heard about King Simon, and had adopted all his inventions, and added more of his own. The Indian King enlisted not only all the young men, but all the single women also, and got together a greater army even than King Simon’s. And he copied all King Simon’s rifles and cannons, and invented a way of flying through the air to throw explosive bombs from above.

King Simon set out to fight the Indian King, expecting to beat him as he had beaten the other king; but the scythe that had cut so well had lost its edge. The King of India did not let Simon’s army come within gunshot, but sent his women through the air to hurl down explosive bombs on to Simon’s army. The women began to rain down bombs on to the army like borax upon cockroaches. The army ran away, and Simon the King was left alone. So the Indian King took Simon’s kingdom, and Simon the Soldier fled as best he might.

Having finished with this brother, the old Devil went to King Tarás. Changing himself into a merchant, he settled

were amazed. The soldiers played and sang, and then Iván (forbidding any one to follow him) led them back to the thrashing ground, changed them into a sheaf again, and threw it in its place.

He then went home and lay down in the stables to sleep.

vii

Simon the Soldier heard of all these things next morning, and went to his brother.

‘Tell me,’ says he, ‘where you got those soldiers from, and where you have taken them to?’

‘What does it matter to you?’ said Iván.

‘What does it matter? Why, with soldiers one can do anything. One can win a kingdom.’

Iván wondered.

‘Really!’ said he; ‘Why didn’t you say so before? I’ll make you as many as you like. It’s well the lass and I have thrashed so much straw.’

Iván took his brother to the barn and said:

‘Look here; if I make you some soldiers, you must take them away at once, for if we have to feed them, they will eat up the whole village in a day.’

Simon the Soldier promised to lead the soldiers away; and Iván began to make them. He bumped a sheaf on the thrashing floor—a company appeared. He bumped another sheaf, and there was a second company. He made so many that they covered the field.

‘Will that do?’ he asked.

Simon was overjoyed, and said: ‘That will do! Thank you, Iván!’

‘All right,’ said Iván. ‘If you want more, come back, and I’ll make them. There is plenty of straw this season.’

Simon the Soldier at once took command of his army, collected and organized it, and went off to make war.

Hardly had Simon the Soldier gone, when Tarás the Stout came along. He, too, had heard of yesterday's affair, and he said to his brother:

'Show me where you get gold money! If I only had some to start with, I could make it bring me in money from all over the world.'

Iván was astonished.

'Really!' said he. 'You should have told me sooner. I will make you as much as you like.'

His brother was delighted.

'Give me three baskets-full to begin with.'

'All right,' said Iván. 'Come into the forest; or better still, let us harness the mare, for you won't be able to carry it all.'

They drove to the forest, and Iván began to rub the oak leaves. He made a great heap of gold.

'Will that do?'

Tarás was overjoyed.

'It will do for the present,' said he. 'Thank you, Iván!'

'All right,' says Iván, 'if you want more, come back for it. There are plenty of leaves left.'

Tarás the Stout gathered up a whole cartload of money, and went off to trade.

So the two brothers went away: Simon to fight, and Tarás to buy and sell. And Simon the Soldier conquered a kingdom for himself; and Tarás the Stout made much money in trade.

When the two brothers met, each told the other: Simon how he got the soldiers, and Tarás how he got the money. And Simon the Soldier said to his brother, 'I have conquered a kingdom and live in grand style, but I have not money enough to keep my soldiers.'

And Tarás the Stout said, 'And I have made much money, but the trouble is, I have no one to guard it.'

Then said Simon the Soldier, 'Let us go to our brother. I will tell him to make more soldiers, and will give them to you to

His wife thought and thought about it, but she also was a fool.

'Shall I go against my husband? Where the needle goes the thread follows,' said she.

So she took off her royal dress, put it away in a chest, and went to the dumb girl to learn to work. And she learned to work and began to help her husband.

And all the wise men left Iván's kingdom; only the fools remained.

Nobody had money. They lived and worked. They fed themselves; and they fed others.

x

The old Devil waited and waited for news from the imps of their having ruined the three brothers. But no news came. So he went himself to inquire about it. He searched and searched, but instead of finding the three imps he found only the three holes.

'Evidently they have failed,' thought he. 'I shall have to tackle it myself.'

So he went to look for the brothers, but they were no longer in their old places. He found them in three different kingdoms. All three were living and reigning. This annoyed the old Devil very much.

'Well,' said he, 'I must try my own hand at the job.'

First he went to King Simon. He did not go to him in his own shape, but disguised himself as a general, and drove to Simon's palace.

'I hear, King Simon,' said he, 'that you are a great warrior, and as I know that business well, I desire to serve you.'

King Simon questioned him, and seeing that he was a wise man, took him into his service.

The new commander began to teach King Simon how to form a strong army.

'First,' said he, 'we must levy more soldiers, for there are in your kingdom many people unemployed. We must recruit

sent these soldiers at once, and got his own way, so that every one began to fear him, and his life was a comfortable one. Whatever he cast his eyes on and wished for, was his. He sent soldiers, and they brought him all he desired.

Tarás the Stout also lived comfortably. He did not waste the money he got from Iván, but increased it largely. He introduced law and order into his kingdom. He kept his money in coffers, and taxed the people. He instituted a poll-tax, tolls for walking and driving, and a tax on shoes and stockings and dress trimmings. And whatever he wished for he got. For the sake of money, people brought him everything, and they offered to work for him—for every one wanted money.

Iván the Fool, also, did not live badly. As soon as he had buried his father-in-law, he took off all his royal robes and gave them to his wife to put away in a chest; and he again donned his hempen shirt, his breeches and peasant shoes, and started again to work.

'It's dull for me,' said he. 'I'm getting fat and have lost my appetite and my sleep.' So he brought his father and mother and his dumb sister to live with him, and worked as before.

People said, 'But you are a king!'

'Yes,' said he, 'but even a king must eat.'

One of his ministers came to him and said, 'We have no money to pay salaries.'

'All right,' says he, 'then don't pay them.'

'Then no one will serve.'

'All right; let them not serve. They will have more time to work; let them cart manure. There is plenty of scavenging to be done.'

And people came to Iván to be tried. One said, 'He stole my money.' And Iván said, 'All right, that shows that he wanted it.'

And they all got to know that Iván was a fool. And his wife said to him, 'People say that you are a fool.'

'All right,' said Iván.

guard your money, and you can tell him to make money for me to feed my men.'

And they drove away to Iván; and Simon said, 'Dear brother, I have not enough soldiers; make me another couple of ricks or so.'

Iván shook his head.

'No!' says he, 'I will not make any more soldiers.'

'But you promised you would.'

'I know I promised, but I won't make any more.'

'But why not, fool?'

'Because your soldiers killed a man. I was plowing the other day near the road, and I saw a woman taking a coffin along in a cart, and crying. I asked her who was dead. She said, "Simon's soldiers have killed my husband in the war." I thought the soldiers would only play tunes, but they have killed a man. I won't give you any more.'

And he stuck to it, and would not make any more soldiers.

Tarás the Stout, too, began to beg Iván to make him more gold money. But Iván shook his head.

'No, I won't make any more,' said he.

'Didn't you promise?'

'I did, but I'll make no more,' said he.

'Why not, fool?'

'Because your gold coins took away the cow from Michael's daughter.'

'How?'

'Simply took it away! Michael's daughter had a cow. Her children used to drink the milk. But the other day her children came to me to ask for milk. I said, "Where's your cow?" They answered, "The steward of Tarás the Stout came and gave mother three bits of gold, and she gave him the cow, so we have nothing to drink." I thought you were only going to play with the gold pieces, but you have taken the children's cow away. I will not give you any more.'

And Iván stuck to it and would not give him any more. So the brothers went away. And as they went they discussed how they could meet their difficulties. And Simon said:

'Look here, I tell you what to do. You give me money to feed my soldiers, and I will give you half my kingdom with soldiers enough to guard your money.' Tarás agreed. So the brothers divided what they possessed, and both became kings, and both were rich.

viii

Iván lived at home, supporting his father and mother and working in the fields with his dumb sister. Now it happened that Iván's yard-dog fell sick, grew mangy, and was near dying. Iván, pitying it, got some bread from his sister, put it in his cap, carried it out, and threw it to the dog. But the cap was torn, and together with the bread one of the little roots fell to the ground. The old dog ate it up with the bread, and as soon as she had swallowed it she jumped up and began to play, bark, and wag her tail—in short became quite well again.

The father and mother saw it and were amazed.

'How did you cure the dog?' asked they.

Iván answered: 'I had two little roots to cure any pain, and she swallowed one.'

Now about that time it happened that the King's daughter fell ill, and the King proclaimed in every town and village, that he would reward any one who could heal her, and if any unmarried man could heal the King's daughter he should have her for his wife. This was proclaimed in Iván's village as well as everywhere else.

His father and mother called Iván, and said to him: 'Have you heard what the King has proclaimed? You said you had a root that would cure any sickness. Go and heal the King's daughter, and you will be made happy for life.'

'All right,' said he.

And Iván prepared to go, and they dressed him in his best. But as he went out of the door he met a beggar woman with a crippled hand.

'I have heard,' said she, 'that you can heal people. I pray you cure my arm, for I cannot even put on my boots myself.'

'All right,' said Iván, and giving the little root to the beggar woman he told her to swallow it. She swallowed it, and was cured. She was at once able to move her arm freely.

His father and mother came out to accompany Iván to the King, but when they heard that he had given away the root, and that he had nothing left to cure the King's daughter with, they began to scold him.

'You pity a beggar woman, but are not sorry for the King's daughter!' said they. But Iván felt sorry for the King's daughter also. So he harnessed the horse, put straw in the cart to sit on, and sat down to drive away.

'Where are you going, fool?'

'To cure the King's daughter.'

'But you've nothing left to cure her with?'

'Never mind,' said he, and drove off.

He drove to the King's palace, and as soon as he stepped on the threshold the King's daughter got well.

The King was delighted, and had Iván brought to him, and had him dressed in fine robes.

'Be my son-in-law,' said he.

'All right,' said Iván.

And Iván married the Princess. Her father died soon after, and Iván became King. So all three brothers were now kings.

ix

The three brothers lived and reigned. The eldest brother, Simon the Soldier, prospered. With his straw soldiers he levied real soldiers. He ordered throughout his whole kingdom a levy of one soldier from every ten houses, and each soldier had to be tall, and clean in body and in face. He gathered many such soldiers and trained them; and when any one opposed him, he