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# Leo Tolstoy

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Diaries

Volume I: 1847–1894

Selected, edited and translated by  
R. F. Christian



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# Tolstoy's Diaries

*Volume I: 1847-1894*

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R. F. CHRISTIAN



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## Preface to the 2015 Edition

Tolstoy's literary activities famously began in the venereal diseases clinic of Kazan University in the spring of 1847, when he was eighteen years old. During the month that he spent in the clinic, in almost complete isolation, he started keeping a diary. To begin with, Tolstoy regarded his diary as a record of his hopelessly optimistic self-improvement programme. Later it became an outlet for his creative and philosophical reflections, and as such comprises an indispensable companion to his published writings, both fictional and otherwise.

Keeping a diary, for Tolstoy, was not the deeply private affair it is for most people, even if it started out that way. In the all-too-brief week between Tolstoy's proposal and marriage to Sonya Behrs in September 1862, he felt it incumbent upon him to give his young fiancée his diaries to read. The vivid realism which is the hallmark of Tolstoy's fiction is matched by the frankness of his diary entries, but he did not feel he should conceal anything in his past from his future bride.

As an innocent and inexperienced eighteen-year-old girl, who had seen little of life, Sonya was deeply shocked and upset by what she later termed his 'excessive conscientiousness', particularly when it came to reading about his sexual history with peasant girls. Nevertheless, she went ahead with the marriage and before long she and her husband were regularly and sometimes frenetically reading each other's diaries. It was a habit kept up until the very last months of Tolstoy's long life in the summer and autumn of 1910, when his deteriorating relations with Sonya led him to try for the first time to keep a diary for 'himself alone'.

Tolstoy did not keep a diary regularly throughout his life, for sometimes he transferred his exploration and articulation of psychological processes to his fictional works. Since his diaries span his entire adult life, however, they are indispensable reading for anyone seeking to look behind the scenes of the great novels and become better acquainted with their creator.

The same is true of Tolstoy's letters, and his epistolary output was, as one might expect, equally prodigious - there are 8,500 letters published in the Russian edition of his *Complete Collected Works*. Tolstoy wrote thousands of letters, to a wide manner of people, from persecuted peasant sectarians exiled to Siberia to the Romanovs, eventually addressing both *muzhik* and Tsar as 'Dear brother'.

The most touching letters Tolstoy wrote were to his immediate family - his wife Sonya, his children, his 'aunt' and surrogate mother Tatyana Alexandrovna ('Toinette'), his sister and brothers. The most important letters he wrote were to his closest friends. First there was his distant relative Alexandra Andreyevna, a lady-in-waiting at Court, for whom he had the deepest respect and affection until his defection from the Orthodox Church. Then there was the shy and retiring Nikolay Strakhov, who worked at the Imperial Library in St Petersburg, but the most frequent recipient of Tolstoy's letters was the aristocratic Vladimir Chertkov, his devoted follower. Chertkov was instrumental in disseminating Tolstoy's

religious ideas in translation, and thousands of people, from a dizzying array of faiths, felt compelled after reading them to write to the 'Sage of Yasnaya Polyana' for his advice on how to live their lives. Tolstoy tried to reply to them all.

It will be a long time before we have full English editions of the fourteen volumes of Tolstoy's diaries and the twenty-five volumes of his letters in the *Complete Collected Works*. In the meantime, we can be eternally grateful to R. F. Christian, doyen of Anglophone Tolstoy studies, for doing all the hard work for us. The result of Professor Christian's scrupulous work is four manageable volumes containing faithful translations of the most important of Tolstoy's diary entries and letters. Rendered into supple English, they are enhanced by judicious and helpful annotations, and introductions which draw on Professor Christian's deep knowledge, the fruit of a distinguished career of studying and writing about Tolstoy. It is hard to see how these invaluable editions can be surpassed.

Rosamund Bartlett

*Rosamund Bartlett is the author of Tolstoy: A Russian Life (Profile Books).*

*R. F. Christian's four volumes of Tolstoy's Diaries and Letters are all available in the Faber Finds.*

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# Introduction

Tolstoy's diaries greatly exceed in length and scope those of any other Russian author. They are usually divided into two categories. The diaries proper are written for the most part in exercise books, and are dated chronologically. The so-called 'notebooks' consist of various kinds of scribbling pads, desk calendars and loose sheets of paper, some dated, some not. Some notebooks are virtually identical with diaries in the normal sense and contain entries, usually dated, for periods when Tolstoy did not keep a regular diary. Others contain random notes and observations, lists of popular expressions and a variety of ephemeral matter. Others again, especially those of the last twenty years of his life, were essentially first drafts of what were later to become entries in his diary proper. Tolstoy's diaries and notebooks taken together occupy thirteen volumes of the ninety-volume Soviet edition of his works (the Jubilee Edition 1928-58), and it is most unlikely that they will ever be translated in full. For the purposes of this edition I have confined myself almost entirely to the diaries proper, and have only very occasionally included an extract from a notebook or sheet of paper where the content seemed to justify it. When this has been done, I have indicated it in a footnote.

Tolstoy's diaries span a period of sixty-three years. The first entry is dated 1 March 1847, when Tolstoy was aged eighteen and a student at Kazan University. The last entry was written on 3 November 1910, as he lay dying at the railway station at Astapovo. There are unfortunately considerable gaps in the record, of which the first is the three-year period from June 1847 to June 1850. It was once argued that Tolstoy had destroyed his diaries for these years, but there is no evidence to support this contention and it is no longer seriously maintained. For the period 1850 to 1865 Tolstoy kept his diary fairly regularly in the sense that there are at least some entries for every year, but those for the late 1850s and early 1860s are comparatively short. Then there is a gap of thirteen years from 1865 to 1878 when Tolstoy was wholly absorbed in writing *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* - in some respects surrogate diaries - while from 1878 to 1880 there are relatively few entries except for two sustained six-month periods in 1881 and 1884. From 1888 to 1910 Tolstoy kept his diary regularly and the older he grew the longer it became. Roughly speaking, one half of it covers the period up to 1894 when Tolstoy was already sixty-six, while the other half is devoted to the last sixteen years of his life when his greatest literary achievements were behind him and his writing became increasingly didactic and moralistic. I have deliberately included a higher proportion of what he wrote in his younger days, but even so the balance of any selection must inevitably be weighted towards the years of his decline as an artist and his rapidly growing reputation as a moral and spiritual guide.

To translate all Tolstoy's diaries into English would be a daunting task, and it is



not surprising that it has never been undertaken. A beginning was made in 1911 with *The Diaries of Leo Tolstoy. Youth, 1847-1852, translated from the Russian by C. J. Hogarth and A. Sirnis*. It was an unsatisfactory beginning, and the book has long been out of print. The year 1917 also saw the appearance of *The Journal of Leo Tolstoy; First Volume, 1895-1899*, translated by Rose Strunsky, but this translation also left much to be desired, and there was no second volume. Ten years later Louise and Aylmer Maude published *The Private Diary of Leo Tolstoy, 1853-1857*, a vast improvement over any previous translation of any portion of the diaries, but despite their great experience and intimate knowledge of Tolstoy and his family they were unable to avoid some errors in deciphering the manuscripts, while certain passages were omitted for reasons of propriety. Finally the fiftieth anniversary of Tolstoy's death in 1960 was marked by the publication in America of *The Last Diaries of Leo Tolstoy*, translated by Lydia Weston-Kesich, an accurate translation but confined to the year 1910. With the exception of Strunsky's unsatisfactory version there are no English translations in whole or part of the years between 1857 and 1909, although individual entries have of course been quoted in English by biographers with access to Russian sources.

After publishing my edition of Tolstoy's letters in 1978, the Athlone Press invited me to produce a companion edition of his diaries, also in two volumes and of roughly comparable length. My choice of what to include was made first of all on the basis of a careful reading of volumes 46-58 of the Jubilee Edition of Tolstoy's works. I then compared the passages I had chosen with the choice made in volumes 19 and 20 of the more recent edition of N. N. Akopova and others, Moscow, 1965, and made a number of changes in order to reduce the amount of my own material and make it approximate more closely to their judicious and carefully balanced selection, while retaining certain passages of a political or sensitive or indelicate nature, as well as entries which present Tolstoy in a less than favourable light and which for that reason are sometimes conveniently overlooked. In making my selection I followed the same general principles as were followed when preparing my edition of Tolstoy's letters. First of all I chose passages to do with Tolstoy the writer, his views about his own works and the works of other writers; secondly - those which concerned Tolstoy the thinker in a broader sense and expressed his attitude to the times he lived in, contemporary social problems, rural life, industrialisation, education, and more especially in his later life, religious and spiritual questions; and thirdly - those which recorded the main stages of his biography, his relations with his family and friends, and the growth and development of his own personality. When introducing Tolstoy's letters I expressed the hope that my work would stimulate others to produce a comparable edition of his diaries. I never imagined that the task would fall to me.

Tolstoy's diaries are an invaluable mine of information about his life and thought, his restless, complex, contradictory nature and his unrelenting quest for 'self-improvement' and a rational answer to the question of the purpose of existence. They are the fullest and frankest record of his dissolute bachelor days, his eventful career as a soldier, his first, faltering steps as a writer, his disorientated years divided between the capital cities and his country estate, his hesitant and

fruitless courtship of Valeriya Arsenyeva, his travels in Europe, and his eventual wooing and winning of Sofya Behrs. They are an indispensable source (together with the diaries of his wife) for the story of a most exceptional marriage, and they record his considered thoughts and ill-considered prejudices on the great variety of subjects to which he applied his powerful and unorthodox mind. They are the germ out of which his earliest 'fiction' grew, and although they tell us disappointingly little about his two great masterpieces, they reveal a lot about his literary tastes and practices. They cannot by any stretch of imagination be called works of literature. The language in which they are written is decidedly unpolished, at times ponderous and repetitive, at times laconic and abrupt. The syntax can be awkward and involved, the grammar not impeccable. The diaries abound in abbreviations, misspellings and lapses of the pen. The punctuation is unorthodox. The handwriting defies description. To charges of stylistic inelegance Tolstoy would certainly have replied that he was only concerned with what he wished to say, not how he said it, and that he was not writing with one eye on the public (not, at least, until very late in life). It does not follow, however, that the form is always redeemed by the content. It would be foolish to pretend that there are not many trivial and tedious entries, or that the thoughts which take up a disproportionate amount of space in later years have not been more cogently expressed in one or other of his numerous books and articles. Nevertheless the diaries are an unparalleled record of the stages of development of a unique personality. Tolstoy himself attached the greatest importance to them. He often referred not merely to the pleasure he got from reading and rereading them, but also to their significance for understanding him. Towards the end of his life he frankly acknowledged 'The diaries *are* me'. They are the story of his life told by himself and when read consecutively they reveal the process of his evolution as no other document can do.

The Honourable Gwendolyn Fairfax once remarked to Miss Cecily Cardew: 'I never travel without my diary. One should always have something sensational to read on the train.' If not sensational, the first entry in Tolstoy's diary was sufficiently unusual for parts of it to be omitted from Hogarth's translation, being written at the age of eighteen in a university clinic where Tolstoy was recovering from venereal disease, and it immediately strikes a note of candour and self-preoccupation. At this stage of his life Tolstoy had no audience in mind except himself and there is no reason to doubt the truthfulness of what he wrote. He began by asking himself what his motives were for keeping a diary at all and acknowledged that one comprehensive purpose was to monitor the development of his faculties, draw up tables of rules for cultivating those faculties and defining the nature and scope of his future activities. One of his first rules for developing his intellectual faculties was to evaluate and make extracts from important books he was reading, and since as a young law student at Kazan University he had been set the task of comparing Catherine the Great's *Instructions* to the commission charged with preparing a new Code of Laws with Montesquieu's *De l'esprit des lois*, it seemed appropriate for him to record in his diary his views about the Empress's manifesto. I have included these ponderous and

unremarkable views at some length as an illustration of Tolstoy's mental processes as a second-year undergraduate. In addition to registering the growth and development of his faculties, his diaries were also intended to record his frequent dissatisfaction with himself, his many falls from grace and subsequent remorse and his constant striving towards moral self-improvement. It is Tolstoy himself and not the world about him that is the centre of attention of these early entries, and the picture which emerges from them is of a young man over-addicted to self-analysis and self-reproach, vain, egotistical, prone to show of lazy, irresolute, fond of gambling and abnormally sensual. He is convinced that he is 'a remarkable person', an exception. At the same time he recognises that he must be a difficult, even an 'unbearable' man, hard to get on with, difficult to understand, 'somehow unlovable', for all the love he claims to feel towards other people. He desperately wants to be loved, to be accepted, to earn the praise of his fellow men, while being at the same time uneasily aware of his superiority over them. On at least one occasion he admits to wishing to 'influence other people's happiness', to be useful to them, but for the most part it is his own personality, its shortcomings and the need to remedy them that are his main preoccupation. As well as tabulating his weaknesses, the early diaries contain some succinct generalisations about life and death, religion and various aspects of human behaviour - as, for example, that 'the most offensive form of egoism is self-sacrifice' or 'unhappiness makes man virtuous, happiness makes him vicious'. They also include observations on the books he is reading and occasional extracts from literary or philosophical works which have impressed him. Having moved to the Caucasus in 1851 he begins to record details of army life, military actions and the officers and men with whom he lived. His entries become more self-consciously literary and he confesses to wishing to use his diaries 'to form his style', to serve in fact as trials of the pen. He seems now at times to be writing with an imaginary audience in mind and to be drafting out material which would form the basis of short stories firmly grounded in his own experience. 'I'll try and sketch Knoring's portrait', he writes of an officer colleague, adding significantly that 'it's impossible to *describe* a man, but it is possible to describe the effect he has on me'. His thumb-nail sketch of the Cossack Mark (10 August 1851) is another example of Tolstoy feeling his way as an aspiring author - and incidentally an illustration of the fact that writing did not come easily to him, as witness the phrase 'he completely satisfied the requirements of the posture of a man sitting down'! He tried his hand too at natural descriptions and recorded conversations which would reappear in revised form in his earliest fiction. He painstakingly formulated generalisations on human virtues and vices - on courage, for example, or cowardice - and on national characteristics. He also made notes about his literary plans and outlined the ideas for his early Caucasian stories and his first major work of fiction *Childhood*. It was in his diaries that he spoke for the first time about his love of history, his wish 'to compile a true, accurate history of Europe', and the need of the historian to explain every historical fact *in human terms*. Tolstoy never realised his characteristically unrealisable ambition as a historian, but his extensive historical reading and his overriding concern with the

role of the individual in the historical process provided much of the stimulus to write a full-scale novel on a major historical theme.

Scattered throughout the early diaries are numerous *obiter dicta* about writers and works of literature - interesting more for what they tell us about Tolstoy than about the authors themselves. They include references to Pushkin, Lermontov, Griboyedov, Turgenev, Pisemsky and Ostrovsky, as well as Rousseau, Balzac and George Sand, Goethe and Schiller, Dickens and Thackeray. They confirm his belief in the moral purpose of literature; they venture the opinion - welcome for him - that in contemporary works of fiction interest in the details of *feelings* is replacing interest in events themselves; and they reveal that it is the character and personality of an author as reflected in what he writes that interests him most as a reader. They also contain, incidentally, some unflattering remarks about women authors which ill accord with his later admiration for George Eliot, Mrs Gaskell, Mrs Henry Wood and others.

At this early stage in Tolstoy's life one already finds in his diaries an anti-militaristic strain, a tendency to venerate the common people at the expense of his own class of society and an orientation towards the practical and the useful which are such typical features of the mature Tolstoy - whether in his resolve to edit a journal to propagate morally useful writings or his desire to found a religion 'purged of faith and mystery, a practical religion which does not promise a future bliss but provides bliss on earth'. It was also becoming clear to him that literature was to be his true vocation; 'literary fame', as he expressed it, 'and the good which I can do by my writing'.

His writing, however, did not immediately prosper after his return to St Petersburg in 1856, and the next few years until his marriage in 1862 were difficult and unsettled ones, punctuated by travels in Western Europe, estate management and educational experiments at home, and the determination to find a wife before it was too late. His diaries give a clear, if incomplete, picture of his mental and spiritual development during his late twenties and early thirties, and drew on them extensively when constructing a picture of this period of his life in an earlier book on Tolstoy.\* As I said there, although he moved in the circles of the Moscow and Petersburg intelligentsia he was not himself an 'intellectual', and while he had certain convictions and beliefs, they did not tally with any recognisable conservative, liberal or radical viewpoint. His views altered with the company he kept. He liked upsetting other people's convictions. Although hostile to 'progress' in the sense of industrialisation, capitalist expansion or the building of railways, and to a system of priorities which put telegraphs, roads and ships before literature, he criticised the Slavophiles for their backwardness and expressed the fear that he might himself lag behind his age. Indifferent or hostile to constitutional government and unimpressed by what he saw of parliamentary democracy in the West, he noted that 'all governments are alike in their extent of good and evil: the best ideal is anarchy'. Nationalism he regarded as 'a unique obstacle to the development of freedom', although he had his moments of jingoism during the Crimean War and again during the Polish insurrection of 1863. Contemptuous of aristocratic privilege and indolence, he could also write, in

positive sense: 'Aristocratic feeling is worth a lot.' Congenitally hostile to the dogmas of Orthodoxy, he still classed himself as a believer and found inspiration though not rational satisfaction, in the ritual of the Orthodox Church. 'The nearness to death', he wrote, 'is the best argument for faith ... Better to accept the old, time-honoured, comforting and childishly simple [faith]. This is not rational, but you feel it.' Instinct and intuition counted for much with him. His powerful mind seemed able to demolish any logical theory, but only to throw him back on irrational hunches, faith, or the activity of the heart which by their very nature defy logic. Elsewhere he confessed to himself, 'The sort of mind which I have and which I like in others is the sort which does not believe in any theory.' Caught between the Scylla of faith and the Charybdis of reason, he lived in a state of constant turmoil, unsure of himself and deeply suspicious of people who subscribed to any man-made philosophy. It was bad enough, no doubt, to have to believe in God when all your reason revolted against it; but it was much better than believing in Chernyshevsky.

The single most important event in Tolstoy's life was his marriage to Sofya Behre in 1862, the prelude to, and immediate aftermath of which are recorded in his diary for that year. On the one hand his wife brought him a sense of stability which he had not previously known and created an atmosphere in which he could work with the maximum encouragement and support; on the other hand her strong personality and quick temper, and the fact that her views on many fundamental issues differed widely from his own led to increasing friction and animosity as time went by and his attitudes became more extreme. Shortly before he was married Tolstoy gave his fiancée his bachelor diaries to read and the shock which she - a sheltered girl of eighteen - experienced on learning about his sexual promiscuity was one from which she never perhaps fully recovered. Both husband and wife had recourse to their diaries at times of bitterness and tension. Each had access to what the other wrote and both said things which they bitterly regretted afterwards. 'She will remain a mill-stone round my neck and round the children until I die,' he wrote in 1884. On another occasion he wrote that it was fortunate for his daughter Masha that her mother did not love her, while his son Seryozha is described as having 'the same castrated mind' as his mother. Needless to say these were uncontrollable outbursts which later caused him great remorse. 'Some three days ago,' he observed in 1894, 'I read through my diary for 1884 and was disgusted with myself for my unkindness and the cruelty of my opinions about Sonya and Seryozha. Let them know that I take back all the unkind things I said about them.' The following year he wrote '*When reading through my diary I found a passage - there were several of them - where I repudiate those angry words which I wrote about her. These words were written at moments of exasperation. I now repeat this once more for the sake of everybody who should come across these diaries* [Tolstoy's underlining]. I was often exasperated with her because of her hasty, inconsiderate temper, but, as Fet used to say, every husband gets the wife he needs. She was - and I can see now in what way - the wife I needed. She was the ideal wife in a pagan sense, in the sense of loyalty, domesticity, self-denial, love of family - pagan love - and she has the potential to become a Christian.'

friend.' Likewise his wife had occasion to regret her more intemperate utterance - provoked by Tolstoy's absurd jealousy of the composer Taneyev she once allegedly shouted at him 'you're evil, you're a beast' - although she did not actually repudiate them in writing in the same way as her husband. A reading of both their diaries is absolutely essential to an understanding of their long, loving but at times unhappy and turbulent marriage; yet considerable allowance must be made for the fact that both partners often wrote in moments of anger or depression, and that when things were running smoothly as they often were, they seldom found the need to say so.

From the early 1880s onwards, after Tolstoy's so-called 'conversion', his diaries came to be used more and more as a vehicle for his religious, moral and social philosophy, and to include raw material which was subsequently processed into articles, letters and even works of fiction. Towards the end of his life they were written in the knowledge that they would be read outside the family (at times indeed, in the hope that they would be) and increasingly they became the subject of bitter family altercations, especially with the appearance on the scene of Tolstoy's dedicated, but dictatorial disciple Vladimir Chertkov. The story of the struggle for their possession and publication and the bitterness it created between those most closely involved - Tolstoy and his wife, their daughter Alexandra and Chertkov - has been told many times. Every entry made was certain to become public property, if not immediately, at least in the not very distant future, not excluding the so-called 'secret diary' of 1908 and the 'diary for myself alone' of 1910. In the circumstances it is not surprising that the more intimate side of Tolstoy's life is less in evidence - though frank enough when it is so - and that the prevailing tone of the later diaries is pedagogical and moralistic. The constant harping on certain themes is bound to be tedious at times, but that does not mean that there are not many shrewd observations on a wide range of subjects of universal interest. There are, for example, some pertinent remarks on social and political theories, some of which have not been widely circulated in the Soviet Union. 'It doesn't follow,' he wrote, 'that, as Marx says, capitalism leads to socialism. Perhaps it will do, but only to socialism by force.' And again: 'Even if what Marx predicts were to happen, then the only thing that would happen would be that despotism would be transferred. Now the capitalists are in power, then the workers' bosses would be in power.' The argument that the end justifies the means never weighed in the least with Tolstoy. Indeed on one occasion he referred disparagingly to what he called 'the socialist, Marxist idea that if you do something wrong for a very long time it will come right of itself'. His views on economics were concerned primarily with an answer to the question of the ownership and redistribution of land, and he believed that it was to be found in the writings of the American economist Henry George and in his Single Tax system. The most important factor in the economic equation for him was the agricultural labourer, but no economic or political changes, he reiterated, could be of lasting value as long as people remained the same. Only religion, he believed, had the power to transform people's lives and eliminate the need, inherent in all political systems, for a quite unacceptable degree of coercion. His views on

religion take up many pages of his later diaries, especially his insistence on religion as a moral code of practice, whether sanctioned by Christ or by one of the Eastern faiths to which he became increasingly attracted. His diaries reveal that he was a most unorthodox Christian and in one entry he went so far as to write 'Read an interesting book about Christ never having existed, that it was a myth. There is as much to be said *for* the likelihood that this is true as there is *against*. What one believed, however, or which of the great religious teachers of the world one turned to for support, was ultimately less important than how one lived. There was no reason why a Christian should live a better life than, say, a Hindu; but Tolstoy for his part found that the essence of Christ's teaching as he interpreted it, especially its emphasis on turning the other cheek, non-resistance to evil by force, loving one's neighbour and forgiving one's enemies, provided him with the best prescription for a happy and worthwhile life - if only he could follow it. Another theme which constantly recurs in the diaries is that of the meaning and purpose of art, an activity which he, like many other people, regarded as essentially the expression and communication of feelings. But, more than most people, he was acutely aware of the *power* of art - its power for evil as well as for good - and therefore the nature and quality of the feelings communicated by the artist must be the paramount considerations, and what was good art must ultimately be a question of ethics, not aesthetics; a quasi-religious activity with a clear moral purpose. Tolstoy's attitude to art as a necessary ingredient in his recipe for the moral and spiritual progress of mankind obviously conditioned his views about what he was reading and what he would write. Of course in later life he never wrote anything to compare artistically with *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, but he did continue to produce stories, plays and one major novel which are still widely read all over the world today. There are many references in the diaries of the last two decades of his life to *Resurrection*, *Hadji Murat*, *The Kreutzer Sonata*, *Father Sergey* and *The Fruits of Enlightenment* and also to many other minor works. They include draft plans and modifications to them, as well as various seemingly trivial details which are nevertheless important to the student of Tolstoy's literary methods and practices. He also confided to his diaries some terse, laconic pronouncements about his fellow authors, especially Russians, which, although influenced naturally enough by his general philosophy of art, were often shrewd. He praised Gorky for his great talent and knowledge of the people, but did not admire him as a psychologist and found his attribution of heroic thoughts and feelings to his characters arbitrary and exaggerated. Gogol had, in his opinion, 'an enormous talent, a wonderful heart and a weak, i.e. unadventurous, timid mind'. He acknowledged that Chekhov, like Pushkin, had made important advances in form and was enthusiastic about some of his short stories, but was disappointed by what he saw as a lack of content, more particularly in his plays. He found much to admire in *The Brothers Karamazov*, especially the Grand Inquisitor legend and the Father Zosima episode, but criticised Dostoyevsky for his 'slipshod manner of writing' and 'unnatural conversations'. Of Andreyev he said: 'His denominator is disproportionately big compared with his numerator.' Of Bernard Shaw - 'He has got more brains than

good for him'!

If Tolstoy's observations about his fellow writers are unlikely to give offence the same is not true of some of the derogatory things he said about women. 'For seventy years,' he wrote in 1899, 'I have been lowering my opinion of women more and more, and I need to lower it still further.' He also once admitted to finding it difficult to love a Jew, adding that he 'must try hard'. But it is not so much his prejudices that dominate the diaries of his old age as the personal tragedy of a man who tried to live - and to love his neighbours - in an environment from which he was growing increasingly alienated, while continuing to be surrounded by a loving family and the veneration of men and women throughout the world. These diaries record his sense of loneliness and isolation, his anguish at being continually misunderstood and on numerous occasions his wish to die. 'Living is dying,' he wrote. 'Try to die well.' The tragic events of 1910, his wife's hatred of Chertkov, her attempts at suicide and his own departure from home in the middle of the night make painful reading. The very last entry in his diary shortly before he lost consciousness, ends with the words: 'Here is my plan. *Fais ce que dois, advienne que pourra* [do what you must, come what may]. And all is for the good of others and above all for me.' Perhaps significantly, the last word he wrote was - me.

In translating the diaries I have kept as closely as possible to the sense of the original, while smoothing over some of the syntactical roughnesses and correcting obvious slips of the pen. To facilitate reading I have inserted the first person pronoun in a number of contexts where Tolstoy omits it and I have also taken liberties with the punctuation. My transliteration system and general editorial policy follow the principles set out in the preface to my edition of Tolstoy's letters. In a few cases, however, I have retranslated the titles of articles by Tolstoy, so that what was previously *A Circle of Reading* is now called *A Cycle of Reading* and *The End of an Age* has been renamed *The End of the World*. *Letter to an Indian* has been preferred to the earlier *Letter to a Hindu*, while the word *zapiski* has been consistently translated as 'notes' instead of 'memoirs' in the stories *The Notes of a Billiard Marker*, *The Notes of a Madman* and *The Posthumous Notes of Fyodor Kuzmich*. The spelling of the Cossack village where Tolstoy was first stationed has been standardised as Starogladkovskaya (different variants exist) and I have regularly used the forms Vanechka and Kostenka (not Vanichka and Kostinka) where Tolstoy's own spelling is erratic. I have used the hybrid combination Nicholas Pavlovich (not Nikolay Pavlovich) when the Tsar Nicholas is referred to by Christian name and patronymic, but Nicholas in all other contexts. With newspaper titles I have kept the widely used *Notes of the Fatherland* to translate *Otechestvenniye zapiski* and have used *The Herald of Europe* for *Vestnik Evropy* and *The Russian Herald* for *Russky vestnik*. *Sankt Peterburgskiye vedomosti* is rendered as either *The St Petersburg Gazette* or *the Petersburg Gazette*, depending on whether Tolstoy uses the full or abbreviated form. *Versta* (3,500 feet), *arshin* (28 inches) and *vershok* (1¾ inches) have not been translated. *Dvoryanstvo* has normally been translated as 'gentry', except in the standardised phrase 'Marshal of the Nobility'. I have generally preferred to



translate *khudozhestvenny* (artistic) as 'literary' or 'fictional' in a literary context, both 'hunting' and 'shooting' have been used to render *okhota* and its derivative. Generally speaking, I have tried in my translations, as I did in the *Letters*, to recapture Tolstoy's habit of repeating the same word rather than employing a synonym, and the observations I made in my preface to that edition are applicable to this one also.

The footnotes and critical apparatus are intended to be self-sufficient, but cross-references have been made to the *Letters* in cases where more detailed information might be desired, particularly where a person mentioned has a biographical entry in that edition as one of Tolstoy's family circle or a frequent correspondent. The short narrative account of Tolstoy's life, divided chronologically into periods, follows the same lines as the one originally written for the *Letters*.

I would like to express my gratitude to those members of the staff of the Tolstoy Museum in Moscow who have assisted me on a number of occasions both personally and in correspondence, and in particular to Mrs Norma Porter who typed the manuscript with exemplary patience and accuracy.

St Andrews, 1984

R. F. Christian

\* (*Tolstoy: A critical introduction*, 1969)

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## 1847-1855

Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy was born on 28 August 1828 at Yasnaya Polyana, his mother's estate some 130 miles to the south west of Moscow. His mother, born Princess Marya Volkonskaya, died before Tolstoy was two years old, and his father, Count Nikolay Tolstoy, a retired Lieutenant Colonel and veteran of 1812, only survived her by seven years. Tolstoy, who was the fourth of their five children, was left an orphan at the age of nine, and was brought up by two married aunts, the second of whom lived in Kazan, which was to become the Tolstoys' home from 1841 to 1847. In 1844 he succeeded with some difficulty in passing the entrance examinations to Kazan University, and began to study Oriental languages with the intention of becoming a diplomat. A year later he transferred to the Law Faculty, but his initial enthusiasm for the subject soon wore off, and although he passed his first-year examinations well enough, his erratic attendance in his second year coupled with a somewhat dissolute life and an attack of venereal disease led to his withdrawing from the university on grounds of 'ill health and domestic circumstances'. The circumstances referred to in his letter of withdrawal concerned the final division of his parents' estate between himself and his brothers and sister, as a result of which Tolstoy inherited Yasnaya Polyana and four other estates, a total of some 5,400 acres of land together with 330 male serfs and their families. His diary for 1847, as well as expressing at length his views about Catherine II's *Instructions* to the commission engaged in drafting a new Code of Laws which had been a special subject of study at Kazan University, also records the first stages of his new life as a landowner at Yasnaya Polyana and his determination to define the nature and scope of his future activities and to draw up rules of behaviour which would enable him to develop his mental, physical and moral faculties along the lines he desired. As a boy, he later recalled, he had been greatly impressed by reading the story of Joseph in the Bible, various tales from the Arabian Nights, the Russian *byliny* or heroic poems and the poetry of Pushkin. In his teens he became an avid disciple of Rousseau. Among other foreign authors he greatly admired Dickens, Sterne and Schiller, while nearer home he singled out Pushkin, Gogol and the early Turgenev as writers who had made a great impact on him. He also acknowledged the enormous influence on him at the time of St Matthew's Gospel and especially the Sermon on the Mount.

In autumn 1848 Tolstoy left Yasnaya Polyana for Moscow, and spent the winter in frivolous society pursuits. Early in 1849 he moved to Petersburg, but after spending a few weeks preparing to take the entrance examinations for the Law Faculty at Petersburg University and at the same time losing considerable sums of money at cards, he returned to Yasnaya Polyana and opened a school for the peasant children on his estate. For the next two years he continued to live in the country, with occasional excursions into Tula and Moscow society, devoting much

time to music, cards and gymnastics and taking his first tentative steps as writer. In 1851 he wrote the unfinished and unpublished *A History of Yesterday*, Sternean, digressive, self-conscious analysis of the life of a single day. He also translated most of Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* and began work on his own autobiographical novel *Childhood*. There are no diary entries for the period June 1847 to June 1850, although a few letters have survived from these years. The diaries for 1850-51 single out what he felt to be his greatest failings - vanity, irresolution, sensuality, cowardice and laziness; they also reveal his growing dissatisfaction with his way of life and the wish to make a fresh start. The opportunity came in April 1851 when his brother Nikolay was due to return from leave to his army unit in the Caucasus, and Tolstoy decided at short notice to accompany him. Soon after arriving in the Caucasus Tolstoy took part as a volunteer in an expedition against a local village (Georgia had been annexed by Russia in 1801 but the mountain tribes living in the north were still proving troublesome), and towards the end of 1851 he moved to Tiflis in order to prepare for examinations which would qualify him to join the army as a cadet.

Tolstoy entered the army proper in 1852 and for the next two years he was attached to an artillery brigade stationed in the Cossack village of Starogladkovskaya in the North Caucasus. He took part in a number of expeditions against the Chechen tribe led by the redoubtable Shamil, in the course of which he narrowly escaped death and capture. He received his commission in 1854 and was soon transferred to active service on the Danube where hostilities had broken out between Russia and Turkey the previous autumn. He reached Bucharest in March 1854, but saw little fighting, serving for most of the time as a staff officer and being generally in poor health, as a result of which he underwent two operations before returning to Russia in September 1854, in the same month as British and French troops landed in the Crimea. He immediately applied to be posted there and reached Sevastopol in November when it was already under siege by the Allies. He spent the next year in the Crimea and was briefly in charge of a gun battery on the outskirts of Sevastopol during some of the heaviest fighting of the war. After the town had fallen he was despatched as a courier to Petersburg, but soon afterwards he sent in his resignation from the army, which became effective in 1856.

Tolstoy's army service was by no means a full-time occupation. There was ample time for reading, writing, travel, music, gambling, womanising and many other activities. Reading for pleasure meant mainly fiction and history, with a little poetry thrown in, and with the exception of Rousseau it was largely confined to the nineteenth century, although embracing English, French and German authors no less than Russian. Tolstoy's growing urge to be a writer himself was stimulated not only by what he read, but also by what he lived through in the Caucasus and Crimea and the unexpected amount of leisure time at his disposal. His first published story, *Childhood*, appeared in 1852, followed by *The Raid* in 1853 and *Boyhood* in 1854. In 1855 he published *Sevastopol in December*, *Sevastopol in May* and *The Wood-felling*, all drawing heavily on his own experiences as an army officer, and *Sevastopol in August* followed in 1856. As he said many years later

when recalling his military career: 'I didn't become a general in the army, but I did in literature.'

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Tolstoy's diaries for the years 1851-5 take on a more conscious literary flavour as he comes to realise that literature was to be his true vocation. That they were the germ of his early fiction is a commonplace which nobody now would seriously dispute.

17 March, Kazan It's now six days since I entered the clinic,<sup>1</sup> and for six days now I've been almost satisfied with myself. *Les petites causes produisent de grands effets*. I caught gonorrhoea where one usually catches it from of course, and this trivial circumstance gave me a jolt which made me mount the step which I had put my foot on long ago, but had been quite unable to heave my body on to (probably because, withing thinking, I put my left foot on instead of my right). Here I'm completely alone, nobody disturbs me, I haven't any servants here, nobody helps me - consequently nothing extraneous has any influence on my reason or memory, and my work must necessarily make progress. But the chief advantage is that I've come to see clearly that the disorderly life which the majority of fashionable people take to be a consequence of youth is nothing other than a consequence of the early corruption of the soul.

Solitude is just as good for a man who lives in society, as social intercourse is for a man who doesn't. Let a man withdraw from society, let him retreat into himself, and his reason will soon cast aside the spectacles which showed him everything in a distorted form, and his view of things will become so clear that he will be quite unable to understand how he had not seen it all before. Let reason do its work and it will indicate to you your destiny, and will give you rules with which you can confidently enter society. Everything that is in accord with man's primary faculty - reason - will likewise be in accord with everything that exists; an individual's reason is a part of everything that exists, and a part cannot upset the organisation of the whole. But the whole can destroy the part. Therefore educate your reason so that it will be in accord with the whole, with the source of everything, and not with the part, with human society; then your reason will merge into one with the whole, and then society, as the part, will have no influence over you. It's easier to write ten volumes of philosophy than to put one single principle into practice.

18 March I've been reading Catherine's *Instructions*,<sup>2</sup> and since I've generally made it a rule when reading any serious work to think about it and copy out any remarkable thoughts from it, I'll write down my opinion here about the first six chapters of this remarkable work. [...]

Chapter I comprises a proof of the fact that Russia is a European power. Chapter II contains proofs of the necessity for autocracy, which are the most convincing in that she speaks about the Monarch in the abstract. However great a woman's mind may be, you will always find in its manifestations a certain pettiness and inconsistency, and so Catherine includes as one of her proofs of the necessity for absolute power: 'Another reason is that it is better to obey the laws under one master than to be subject to the wills of many'; or 'The intention and end of absolute government is the glory of the citizens, the state and the sovereign'. [...]

Chapter V, *On the Condition of all People in Civil Society*, begins with the philosophical idea that a happy man is a man whose will, though under the influence of external circumstances, can subdue his passions. When I read this, I thought Catherine would deduce from this proposition the notion of the law as an external circumstance influencing the will and making man happy through being subject to the law; but she passes on to the notion of the possibility of equality within the state, i.e. the subjection of all men to the same laws. Her notions of freedom under monarchical rule are as follows: freedom, she says, is man's ability to do everything he ought to do, and not to be compelled to do what he ought not to do. I would like to know what she understands by the words *ought* and *ought not*; if she means by the words *what he ought to do* the natural law, it clearly follows from this that freedom can only exist in a state in whose legislation natural law is in no way different from positive law – an idea which is perfectly correct. Further, in support of her opinion, Catherine adduces an extremely ingenious proof: freedom is the right to act in accordance with the laws. But if a citizen acts illegally, he thereby gives others the right to act likewise, and so freedom is violated. [...]

*19 March* A passion for the sciences is beginning to manifest itself in me; but although it is the noblest of all man's passions, I shall never surrender myself to it in a one-sided manner, i.e. completely destroy feeling, not concern myself with application, and only endeavour to educate my mind and fill my memory with facts. Onesidedness is the main cause of man's unhappiness.

I'll now continue my analysis of Catherine's *Instructions*. [...] She goes on to say that people can be governed by moderation, not severity (I would add to that: 'in monarchies'). She then says that punishments ought to be derived from the nature of the crime itself. I would again add: 'in monarchies'. For history shows us that the laws of Draco and Lycurgus, which were very harsh and incompatible with the nature of the crime, were tolerated; for in a republic, as Montesquieu rightly observes, the people are at once both the subordinate and the absolute power, and therefore since laws in such a case are the expression of the will of the people, they are tolerated by the people, and since the people governs itself there is no need for punishments to be derived from the nature of the crime, for in republics the will of the citizens serves as the standard of punishment. Catherine goes on to divide crimes into crimes against religion, against morals, against law and order and against the security of the citizens, and in indicating what sort of punishments ought to be applied to each class of crime, arrives at a completely false conclusion by deriving each punishment from the essence of the crime. Actually with regard to the last class of crime she says that the punishments for such crimes should be banishment, a life for a life, or a monetary fine when property has been alienated; but she also says that since for the most part those who attempt to appropriate the property of others do not own any themselves, the fine should be replaced by the death penalty. This idea is unworthy of the great Catherine. For how can an injured party be compensated for theft by the death of the other party? Surely the state can both compensate the injured party for his

loss and retain a member of society who might still be useful to it. The whole of the next chapter serves to refute this false idea. Here she argues quite correctly for the need for moderation with regard to punishments, then speaks about the mistakes sometimes made by a legislator, saying that a legislator often employs severity in order to eradicate a particular evil, but that when the main evil has been eliminated there still remains the abuse created by this severity. Further on she completely contradicts herself when she says that it is highly unjust to punish murderers and robbers in like manner, and then says that punishments which disfigure the human body should be abolished. But how can one accept the death penalty without accepting disfigurement? The chief disfigurement of the body is its separation from the soul. [...]

Chapter IX contains some rules for judicial procedure in general. [...] The idea that major criminals might choose the judges for their own trials shows Catherine's endeavour to justify monarchical rule and to contend that freedom exists in obeying laws which emanate from the monarch, but she forgets that freedom to obey laws which do not emanate from the people is not freedom. [...]

*21 March* In Chapter X the basic principles and the most dangerous errors connected with criminal legal procedure are expounded.

At the beginning of this chapter she asks herself a question. 'Whence do punishments derive, and whence the right to punish?' To the first question she replies: 'Punishments derive from the need to safeguard the laws.' To the second question she also replies very ingeniously. She says: 'The right to punish belongs to the laws alone, but only the monarch as the representative of the state as a whole can make laws.' Throughout the *Instructions* we are constantly presented with two heterogeneous elements which Catherine has constantly sought to reconcile, namely the recognition of the need for constitutional rule, and self-love, i.e. her desire to be the absolute sovereign of Russia. For example, while saying that under monarchical rule only the monarch can have legislative power, she accepts the existence of such power as axiomatic without referring to its origin. A subordinate government cannot impose punishments because it is a part of the whole, but a monarch has this right because he is the representative of all the citizens, Catherine says. But is the representation of the people by the sovereign in absolute monarchies the expression of the sum total of the free, individual will of the citizens? No, the expression of the general will in absolute monarchies amounts to the following: I tolerate a lesser evil, because if I didn't tolerate it, I would be subjected to a greater evil.

A second question concerns the proper measures necessary for keeping an accused person in custody and for detecting a crime. In trying to solve the first part of this question she says that keeping an accused person in custody is the punishment which precedes the conviction. Catherine felt the falsity of this notion and the injustice of this practice, and tried to justify it by saying that any accused person is bound to be guilty.<sup>3</sup> But why should a person who is a hundred times more guilty than the one accused, but who has not been accused because he has no enemies, not suffer an equal punishment? In my opinion, keeping an accused

person in custody can never be justified, for it is the height of injustice to subject the innocent and the guilty to the same punishments but to discriminate between the rich and the poor, for the rich can easily find bail for themselves, but the poor seldom can.

In the same chapter there occurs a purely republican idea. She actually says that hearings of cases should be in public, so that citizens should be aware of the security under the protection of the laws. But can there exist security of citizens under the protection of the laws when not only judicial sentences but even the laws themselves can be altered at the will of an autocrat? [...]

*22 March* In my opinion intention, since it is a mental act not outwardly expressed, can never be contrary to judicial law, for it is not subject to it. No mental acts can be subject to anything except the will; and the will is an unlimited faculty. Although it is said that acts which evince criminal intent are punishable these acts ought not to be punished, for the acts themselves do no harm, while the intention is subject to the influence of the will, and so an evil intention can be changed to a good one before it is realised. The most powerful manifestation of a person's conscience is usually just before the perpetration of an evil deed. [...]

*24 March* I have changed a lot; but I still haven't achieved the degree of perfection (in my studies) which I would like to achieve. I don't carry out what I prescribe for myself; what I do carry out, I don't carry out well; I don't exercise my memory. Therefore I'll write down some rules here which, it seems to me, will help me a lot if I follow them. (1) What is required to be carried out without fail, carry out in spite of everything. (2) What you do carry out, carry out well. (3) Never refer to a book if you forget something, but try to remember it yourself. (4) Make your mind work constantly with all possible vigour. (5) Always read and think aloud. (6) Don't be ashamed to tell people who interrupt you that they are interrupting you; first of all let a person feel it, but if he doesn't understand, apologise and tell him outright. In accordance with my second rule I intend without fail to finish my commentary on the whole of Catherine's *Instructions*.

Question V about the scale of punishments is resolved as follows: the evil which a punishment inflicts on a criminal ought to be greater than the good which the crime might have afforded him. I don't agree with this. Crime and punishment ought to be completely commensurate. [...]

Chapter XIII speaks about manufactured wares and trade. Catherine rightly remarks that agriculture is the basis of all trade, and that in a country where people do not own their own property, agriculture cannot flourish; for people usually take more care of things which belong to them than of things which can always be taken away from them. That is the reason why agriculture and trade cannot flourish in our country as long as serfdom<sup>4</sup> exists, for a man who is subservient to another man not only cannot be assured of owning his own property permanently, but cannot even be assured of his own personal fate. Therefore 'Skilled farmers and craftsmen ought to be given bonuses.' In my opinion it is equally necessary for a state to punish evil and to reward good.



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