

A. A. Donskov, ed. *L. N. Tolstoi i N. N. Strakhov: Polnoe sobranie perepiski*. Sostaviteli L. D. Gromova, T. G. Nikiforova. Ottawa: Slavic Research Group at the University of Ottawa and State L. N. Tolstoy Museum, Moscow, 2003. 2 vols., 1079 pp (paper).

Tolstoy scholars will greet this book with cheers and applause—at last, a complete edition of the correspondence between Tolstoy and his long-term friend, Nikolai Strakhov, philosopher, journalist, and critic. The bond, perhaps surprisingly strong, that linked these two men was formed in the early 1870s and lasted until Strakhov's death in 1896. Strakhov became a frequent visitor at Iasnaia Poliana, not only as a favoured intellectual companion for the master, but a family friend, welcomed by the Countess and the children. When separated—Strakhov lived in St. Petersburg—he and Tolstoy wrote each other quite frequently, discussing whatever was on their minds—works-in-progress, future plans, business (Strakhov often served as Tolstoy's agent in dealings with publishers, also editor and proof-reader), philosophy, religion, mutual acquaintances, health, gossip, the weather. Fortunately, each participant preserved most of the other's letters (how many of us today do that with our e-mails?), and since their first publication in 1914¹ they have been a gold mine for Tolstoy biographers and scholars, a priceless source of insight into the workings of his mind. They rank alongside Tolstoy's other most revealing long-term intellectual correspondence, that with his distant relation, Countess Aleksandra Andreevna Tolstaia (Alexandrine).

somewhere else. Others had not yet come to light. Furthermore, Modzalevskii stops in 1894, two years before Strakhov's death. Finally, only a few letters from Strakhov to the Countess were included or of the letters the two Tolstoys wrote him jointly. These latter lacunae had already been made up by Professor Donskov and his distinguished Russian associates with the publication of another volume in this series.² Now *all* (or almost all, see below) the Tolstoy-Strakhov letters plus the letters to Strakhov from Tolstoy and his wife together have been brought together in two convenient volumes, for which we should all give thanks. A fact that adds even greater excitement to this new edition is that it includes no less than nineteen letters from Strakhov to Tolstoy never published before.

To be sure, there are still some lacunae in the correspondence, gaps that will probably never be filled. For example, Tolstoy seems to have saved only two of Strakhov's letters in 1872, while writing 37 of his own, carefully preserved by his addressee. Likewise, quite a few of Tolstoy's letters from 1886-1887 seem to be lost. But once again, it is a joy to have the surviving letters so accessible.

The edition is an attractive one, nicely printed on good paper. Besides the letters, it contains an informative and illuminating introduction by Professor Donskov, the harbinger of a more substantial study still to come. It offers a translation by John Woodsworth of a small part of the 1896 Strakhov biography by Boris Nikol'skii³ and many

2. A. A. Donskov, ed., *L. N. Tolstoi i S. A. Tolstaia. Perepiska s N. N. Strakhovym* (Ottawa, 2000)

Istoy's whom he planned to use as the prototype for the central character in the unfinished story *Truzhdaiushchie i obremenennye* [*Those Who Labour and are Heavy Laden*]. This Gorchakov rose to be a major general and military governor in Reval, but was then disgraced, convicted of speculation and banished to Siberia. D conveys none of this. Similarly, on pp. 436-37 M gives a detailed characterization of Tolstoy's old friend Ivan Ivanovich Raevskii (1835-?), at whose estate he stayed while working on famine relief in 1891. D (p. 885) hardly identifies him at all. Lack of space can hardly be the excuse, for there are in D a great many superfluous notes. How many times, for instance, need we be told that when Strakhov sends his greetings to "the Countess" (Grafine) he means S. A. Tolstaia? Did we really have to be informed that Balzac was "a French writer, author of the epic *La Comédie humaine*, comprising 90 novels and stories"? On the other hand, cross-referencing is quite sporadic, and one must often resort to the index to find where a character was first mentioned and annotated.

In conclusion, I am pleased to be able to offer in homage one little factlet, an amplification to the annotations. The "Kopteva" mentioned by Strakhov in his letter of 21 April 1877 and described by him as "an old maid ... former beauty and nihilist, extremely well read and advanced in her views" is given no footnote at all. In the index she is identified only as "an acquaintance of Strakhov's." Surely this is Mar'ia Nikolaevna Kopteva, sweetheart of Leskov's "enigmatic" friend Artur Benni and the model for Liza Bakhareva in *Nekuda* [*No Way Out*]. Alas, I do not know her dates.

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