

The Chronicle

Carolyn McMartin, Woodbridge, Virginia

Editor's Note: Carolyn McMartin is an independent scholar who has undertaken the project of translating N. N. Gusev's Chronology of the Life and Work of Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoy, a work that will be exceptionally useful to Tolstoy scholars.

Gusev has chronicled Tolstoy's daily life as represented in the usual sources such as Tolstoy's diaries and letters. He has also drawn on memoirs, official documents, letters written by those who knew Tolstoy, and other materials, and has included detailed documentation. Thus, a person researching, say, Tolstoy's quarrel with Turgenev can find, as only one example of this long-running dispute, the following entry for 6 February 1856:

"Over dinner at Nekrasov's Tolstoy sharply attacked the views of George Sand on the woman question, setting him at loggerheads with Turgenev. (Diary, 7 Feb.; Turgenev's letter to V. P. Botkin dated 8 Feb. 1856, V. P. Botkin and I. S. Turgenev. Unpublished Correspondence, "Academia," M-L, 1930, pp. 78-9; Nekrasov's letter to Botkin dated 7 Feb. 1856, Nekr., X, No. 220; D. V. Grigorovich, Literary Memoirs, Complete Collected Works, Vol. XIII, Marks, StP, pp. 326-7.) Note: In Tolstoy's Diary, the quarrel with Turgenev is noted as having been on 7 Feb. 1856, while Nekrasov and Turgenev date it in their letters as on 6 February. We believe that Nekrasov and Turgenev are correct, as Tolstoy's note was among others which he made for several days at once and thus might be incorrect."

As I continued my translation, I began to wonder how Gusev came to undertake the compiling of this chronology. I found surprisingly little about him in Tolstoy biographies other than his connection with Tolstoy's last years. Gusev is mentioned briefly in connection with Tolstoy dictating thoughts to him. By assembling the bits and pieces about Gusev scattered throughout the Tolstoy literature, I have managed to construct the following brief treatment of his life.

In the introduction to his Two Years With L. N. Tolstoy, Gusev tells us that he first became acquainted with the work of Tolstoy in 1901 when he read The Gospels in Brief. He was 19 years old, a marxist and revolutionary by his own definition, and he admits that he read the book primarily because it had been banned. Marxist philosophy, however, did not satisfy him in a moral sense. "Having accepted the teaching that everything in the world in general, and in my life in particular, happens according to inevitable

historical laws on which my will can exert no influence, I lost any kind of reasonable direction and feeling of responsibility for my actions..." He had had a very religious upbringing, he tells us, and although he had lost his faith under the influence of marxism, he retained "those high moral ideals which are the basis of faith."

Before reading The Gospels in Brief, Gusev had come to the conclusion that moral demands must serve as the main guide in life, but he had not defined just what those moral demands are and what they are based on. He did not expect to find the answer in Tolstoy, because he had been "prejudiced against Tolstoy by revolutionary literature, primarily because of his advocacy of nonresistance to evil. From the words of revolutionary writers I acquired the idea that nonresistance to evil meant submissiveness to evil, reconciliation with it."

The Gospels in Brief staggered Gusev with its power. It completely satisfied "those moral questions which had forced me to renounce blind faith in materialistic philosophy." He began to read literary criticism about Tolstoy. It wasn't until two years later, in 1903, that he finally wrote to Tolstoy expressing his admiration for him and his work. Two weeks later he received an answer written by Aleksandra Tolstaya, and a month later Tolstoy himself sent a letter. In mid-September 1903, Gusev visited Tolstoy, and from that visit a correspondence began.

A note to the 26 October 1907 entry in Tolstoy's diary says that Gusev began working for the Posrednik publishing house in 1905. Gusev seems to have won the confidence of Vladimir Chertkov, which was, of course, essential to anyone who wished to become close to Tolstoy at the end of his life. In 1907, when Chertkov found it necessary to return to England on business, he suggested that Tolstoy invite Gusev to be his secretary, helping with correspondence and other duties. Gusev accepted this invitation and moved into the house at Aleksandra's estate at Telyatinki which was 3 versts from Yasnaya Polyana.

Gusev was arrested twice because of his connection with Tolstoy. In October 1907 he was arrested on the basis of rumors that he held gatherings in his room in which the Tsar was abusively mentioned. In The Tragedy of Tolstoy, Aleksandra Tolstaya relates that a search of his room revealed copies of Tolstoy's article "The One Thing Needed," in which Gusev had inserted the passages which the censor had prohibited, most of which were unfavorable references to the Tsar. Gusev was sent to Krapivna, thirty versts from Yasnaya Polyana. Tolstoy intervened with authorities on Gusev's behalf, and after two months' arrest, he was released.

On 4 August 1909, Gusev was once again arrested and exiled to Cherdyn, charged with "propagating revolutionary ideas." Aleksandra Tolstaya suggests that "the government continued to fight my father, not by interfering with him personally, but by persecuting his friends.

It would have been impossible to invent a worse punishment for him." Tolstoy once again tried to intervene with authorities on Gusev's behalf, but this time he was unsuccessful in obtaining Gusev's release.

In her biography of Tolstoy's wife Sonya, Ann Edwards says that Aleksandra was "intensely jealous of Gusev's privileged position" in her father's life. Unfortunately, Ms. Edwards does not document her book, and there is no way of assessing the validity of that assertion other than to look at Aleksandra's own statements about Gusev. In The Tragedy of Tolstoy, Aleksandra complains that Gusev noted down all the intimate details of our life," depriving the Tolstoy family of the "common human satisfaction of living unobserved." She describes how he "shook his head judiciously and left the room" one night, expressing disapproval of a song about the passion of love, saying "it's so characteristic of the surroundings in which Tolstoy lives." She criticizes the letters he wrote on her father's behalf to people who had written to Tolstoy with questions. From these examples it is difficult to tell just what Aleksandra's true attitude toward Gusev was, for by the time she was writing this, nearly 25 years had passed since her father's death, and she would have known of the work that Gusev was doing to preserve information about her father's life and work.

In addition to Two Years With L.N. Tolstoy, Gusev compiled a four-volume series entitled L.N. Tolstoy: Material for a Biography, the volumes covering the years 1828-1855, 1855-1869, 1870-1881, 1881-1885. He died before he could complete this series. A small fifth volume covering the years 1886-1892 was published in 1979 under the authorship of L.D. Opulskaya, Gusev's assistant.

Gusev compiled the chronology of Tolstoy's life, a two-volume work entitled Chronicle of the Life and Work of L.N. Tolstoy, the first volume covering the years 1828-1890, and the second volume covering 1891-1910. This is an essential reference work for all Tolstoy scholars. Gusev has consulted and incorporated into the chronology many works which are unavailable to scholars outside the Soviet Union. It is the definitive source for dates. It is from Gusev that I verified the date of his arrest in 1909 which has been variously reported as 4 August and 5 August. In Gusev we can find exact dates of births, deaths, and other significant events in the lives of those who were close to Tolstoy. For example, Tolstoy's father, Nikolay Ilich, was born on 26 June 1794; was liberated in Paris on 19 March 1814; was discharged on 14 March 1819; married Marya Nikolayevna Volkonskaya on 9 July 1822, and so on. Regarding Tolstoy's mother, we learn that her death on 4 August 1830 was recorded as resulting from "fever"; and that Yuliya Mikhaylovna Ogareva, a family friend who was present when she died, wrote a book entitled Voice of the Past in which she described the cause of death as a "nervous fever," meaning that the illness lasted only a few days.

As an example of the paths this type of research can lead to, I had noted a reference to Yu. M. Ogareva in Shklovsky's book: "Ogarev was another frequent visitor, and the children did not know that Ogarev's wife and their father were lovers" (53). Gusev makes no mention of this relationship in the chronicle, but does relate the following in Material for a Biography, 1828-1855: "After his wife's death, N.I. Tolstoy did not enter into a second marriage. There is some information about his passion for his neighbor, Yuliya Mikhaylovna Ogareva, the wife of the owner of the estate of Telyatinki...retired Lieutenant Colonel Ivan Mikhaylovich Ogarev" (96). Telyatinki is the estate which later passed to Tolstoy's daughter Aleksandra.

SOURCES

A.F. Shifman, "N.N. Gusev," Zvezda, no. 8 (1978), pp. 128-130.

Bolshaya sovetskaya entsiklopediya, English-language edition, volume 7, o, 493.

Tolstoy's Diaries: Volume II, 1895-1910, ed. and trans. R.F. Christian, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1985.

Alexandra Tolstoy, The Tragedy of Tolstoy, New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1933.

Henri Troyat, Tolstoy, New York:Harmony, 1980.

Viktor Shklovsky, Lev Tolstoy, Eng. edition, Moscow: Progress, 1978.

L. D. Opulskaya, Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy: Materiali k biografii s 1886 po 1892 g, Moscow: Nauka, 1979.

Ernest J. Simmons, Leo Tolstoy, Boston: Little, Brown: 1946.

Cynthia Asquith, Married to Tolstoy, Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1961.

Tikhon Polner, Tolstoy and His Wife, New York: Norton, 1945.

Anne Edwards, Sonya: The Life of Countess Tolstoy, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981.

My interest in Gusev led me to the decision to begin a publication - a sort of newsletter - based on Gusev chronology. I called it The Tolstoy Chronicle. The following is an extract from the first issue.

CHRONICLE OF THE LIFE AND WORK OF
LEV NIKOLAYEVICH TOLSTOY*

[Editor's note: the Chronicle begins with a long entry for 1828, the year of Tolstoy's birth.]

1830

2 March 1830: The birth of Mariya Nikolayevna Tolstaya (died 6 April 1912). (T.A. Yergolskaya's notebook, GMT; letter from M.N. Tolstaya to L.N. Tolstoy, 3 March 1851, GMT)

Note: In the Kochak Village Church Registry of Births, Marriages, and Deaths (GMT), the birth of M.N. Tolstaya, daughter is antedated 7 March.

4 August 1830: The death of Tolstoy's mother, Mariya Nikolayevna Tolstaya. (T.A. Yergolskaya's notebook, GMT)

Note: In the Kochak Village Church Registry of Births, Marriages, and Deaths (GMT), the death of M.N. Tolstaya "from fever" is antedated 7 August 1830. In the memoirs of Yu. M. Ogareva, who was present at the death of Tolstoy's mother, the cause of death is said to have been "nervous fever," which is to say that the illness lasted only a few days. (Voice of the Past, 1914, 11, p. 113).

1832

15 March, 1832: The date of the extract from the journal of the Tula Nobility Deputy Assembly concerning the financial position of Nikolay Ilich Tolstoy. In the various villages of Tula and Orlov provinces, "793 male and 800 female souls" of serf peasants, including 219 "souls" in the village of Yasnaya Polyana were included in his accounting. ("For the Biography of L. N. Tolstoy," Russkaya mysl, 1911, 4, pp. 108-110)

1833

Tolstoy is transferred to the supervision of F.I. Rossel, his older brothers' tutor. (My Life)

Note: F.I. Rossel is portrayed in Childhood and Youth as Karl Ivanovich Mauer.

1833-1834

Nikolenka Tolstoy announced to his brothers that he knew the secret of how to make it so that people knew no unhappiness, never argued or got angry, and all would love one another and would always be happy. "He told us this secret was written on a green stick, and this stick was buried by the road at the edge of the ravine of the "Old Forest Reserve." (Reminiscences, ch. "Fanfaron Mountain")

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Note: The "Old Forest Reserve" was the name of the forested section half a kilometer from the Yasnaya Polyana house. Tolstoy willed that he should be buried at this place, which he was.

1835

The earliest preserved example of Tolstoy's handwriting is in a notebook entitled "Child's Play. The First Part. Natural History. Written by. C.L.Ni.To." (i.e., Count Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy).

This notebook contains a short description of seven types of birds: the eagle, falcon, owl, parrot, peacock, hummingbird, and rooster (Jub. 90)

1835-1836(?)

Fedor Ivanovich Tolstoy - the American - arrived at Yasnaya Polyana. "I remember his beautiful face: tanned, clean-shaven, with thick white side-whiskers to the corners of his mouth, and similar curly white hair. I would very much like to tell about this unusual, felonious and attractive uncommon man." (Reminiscences, ch. "Brother Seryozha")

1836

Tolstoy read Pushkin's poems "To the Sea" and "Napoleon" aloud to his father, who was struck by his inspired reading. (Reminiscences, ch. III; S.A. Tolstaya, Material for a Biography of L.N. Tolstoy, GMT)

GMT=State Museum of L.N. Tolstoy in Moscow

The above is a translation of N.N. Gusev's Chronicle of the Life and Work of Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy, 1828-1890, Moscow: Khud. lit., 1958.

I sent out advertisements offering The Tolstoy Chronicle to colleges and universities with Russian studies departments, but the lack of response at that time caused me to suspend my efforts on the newsletter. I have continued my translation of the chronology, and I invite anyone who is interested in my work to write to me at the following address:

Carolyn McMartin
13309 Nickelson
Woodbridge, VA 22193