

# Research Note

## **Tolstoy's Original Letter Found: On Benedict Prieth, Ernest Crosby and Aphorisms of Immortality in *The Whim***

**W**hat is the likelihood of discovering a new Tolstoy original in the twenty-first century? Not as dismal as it may seem. Tolstoy manuscripts are headquartered and stored at the legendary Steel Room, steps away from The State Tolstoy Museum in Moscow. They were all drawn together during the long gestation and production of the Jubilee edition (released from 1928-1958). Excepting these, there still remain numerous letters by Tolstoy “known to be unknown” or lost. Missing letters are inventoried in the Index (supplemental) volume of the Jubilee edition—and the list is not short. A fraction of Tolstoy's letters published in the Jubilee consists of those not based on an original—never found—but on a copy “almost indistinguishable from the original,” as a footnote to the text of the letter would inform the reader.

In reverse ratio to the volume of mail that had to be managed by him per diem, the smallest percentile of unaccounted-for letters written by Tolstoy falls in the period after 1900, especially his final five years (1905-10). This is due to the institution, in 1894 and on Vladimir Chertkov's initiative, of so-called “copy books.” With the use of a copy press, every handwritten letter sent out by Tolstoy was transferred onto a rather decent copy (hence, the “almost indistinguishable from the original” epithet quoted above). This copying system resulted in a total of nine copy books and proved its efficiency by becoming a mainstay of the work routine at Yasnaya Polyana before and after Chertkov was sent into exile abroad. Stalin deemed Tolstoy originals to be the estate of the Soviet nation and summoned all manuscripts to come back home. But many letters never came back.

During the years leading up to the Jubilee, Tolstoy correspondence and letters were handled by members of the editorial board or by those hired on special contract. These people had either been involved in the letter copying business during Tolstoy's lifetime, or else were made privy to all details for working with Tolstoy's epistolary materials through special coaching (e.g., the future manager of the edition Nikolai Rodionov was tutored personally by Chertkov). The Jubilee editors compiled a template for a questionnaire that was sent to all known correspondents of Tolstoy as well as members of their family and friends. These individuals were contacted primarily in hopes that the originals of Tolstoy's letters preserved or owned by them would be returned. Mapped out in the hopeful 1920s, the questionnaire sought only to ask for basic data to be shared out of sheer love for Tolstoy. Nothing untoward was demanded, nothing was extorted by fiat. Information was needed to answer questions related to Tolstoy's chronology, environment or creative biography that would be of incalculable use to editors faced with the task of producing lengthy commentary for a vast and motley epistolary apparatus.

Fortunately for the Jubilee, the ingenious questionnaire sparked an informal but busy exchange of material at home and abroad. The process continued unobstructed for a short time only. From about 1934 and through 1953, the varying obscurity of domestic and international recipients of the questionnaire was a factor defined by complex variables. Sometimes information volunteered in response to the questionnaire could spell arrests, camps or death sentences. Sometimes, many years after the receipt of the questionnaire, owners of letters suddenly wrote to Rodionov or to the Director of the Tolstoy Museum in Moscow trying to sell the letters and thus save their family from extreme destitution. Sometimes, international deliveries

between the USSR and foreign countries were embargoed. Sometimes recipients preferred to hoard their Tolstoy treasures rather than submit to what could be, in their view, a ploy of the Bolshevik regime. Sometimes the questionnaire arrived too late: the recipient was dead and her archive either dumped or deposited randomly by indifferent or unsuspecting relatives, to whose doorstep Tolstoy experts had not yet found their way.

The letter located by the author of this note in May 2010 at the Manuscript Division of Firestone Library at Princeton University first caught my eye when several items of a newly created electronic catalogue of the general manuscript collection were advertised on the library website. By following one link after another I was able to get on a tiny trail in the collection and view the bottom two lines of the letter ascribed to Leo Tolstoy. It did look like Tolstoy's own hand: only the text displayed on the bottom of the electronic card did not match the Jubilee version of it. This led to an appointment and a discovery of Benedict Prieth's folio within which Tolstoy's original letter was indeed enclosed, along with one letter by Prieth's nephew, ascertaining the impressive auction value of the letter in the 1920s, and Prieth's letter to his son-in-law the following day bequeathing the letter to his daughter and her husband.

### **The Grammar of Ascent: Tolstoy's Letter to Benedict Prieth**

The letter by Tolstoy to Prieth does not belong in the category of "known to be unknown," but in the category of "unknown original of the known copy." A copy of this letter written January 30/February 12, 1907 in response to American journalist Benedict Prieth informing Tolstoy of the death of Ernest Howard Crosby, his older colleague and mentor, may be found in the seventh of Tolstoy's "copy-books" (leaf 253). The discovered original confirms the overall accuracy of the pressed copy. But the short analysis offered below demonstrates that the copy is still distinguishable from the original. Al-

though the cost of the proverbial "almost" distinguishing the original from the copy in this particular case is quantitatively minimal, it is qualitatively high. Moreover, the marginalia added by the letter recipient (Prieth) permits a fascinating glimpse into Tolstoy's American friendships: how well they read his humor and bias, how quick they were to grant him his otherness and let go of their egalitarian instinct when dealing with the living genius, and these details the copy could not have communicated.

Here is the text of Tolstoy's letter to Benedict Prieth as it appeared in volume seventy-seven of the Jubilee:

Jan 30/12 Febr. 1907  
Yasnaya Polyana  
Mr. Benedict Prieth

Dear Sir,

I delayed my answer to your letter because of illness. I knew the sad news of Ernest Crosby's death before, but nevertheless I thank you for your letter.

Though a sad one, it is satisfaction to see a true appreciation of the rare qualities and high character of one's best friends.

What you say of him, that he never said an evil word of anyone, is one of the greatest commendations that can be said of any man. I hope that E. Crosby could not estimate me more than I loved and estimated him.

Yours truly

Leo Tolstoy (PSS 77: 24)

In the text below I offer a transcript of Tolstoy's original letter (Fig. 1)<sup>1</sup> with his exact spellings and grammatical mannerisms:

Jan. 30/12 Febr. 1907  
Mr. Benedict Prieth

Jasnaya Poliana

Dear Sir,

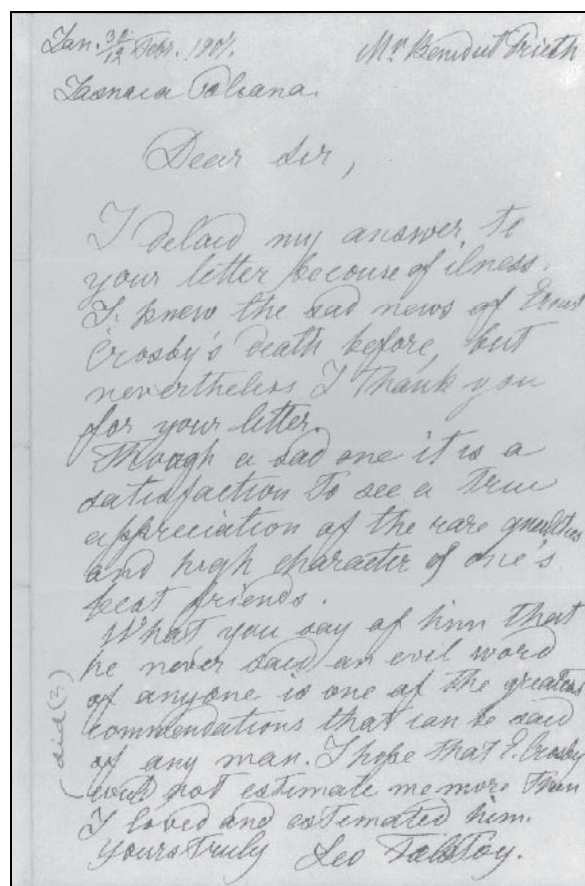


Fig. 1: Tolstoy's original letter.

I delaid [sic] my answer to your letter because of illness [sic]. I knew the sad news of Ernest Crosby's death before, but nevertheless I thank you for your letter.

Though a sad one it is a satisfaction to see a true appreciation of the rare qualities and high character of one's best friends.

What you say of him that he never said an evil word of anyone is one of the greatest commendations that can be said of any man. I hope that E. Crosby (will/would?/could? Illegible) not estimate me more than I loved and estimated him.

Yours truly

Leo Tolstoy

When he opened the envelope (Fig. 2) at his "Newark N.J 75 Market St. USA Америка" address and

perused the short letter,<sup>2</sup> Prieth puzzled over the use of future tense in the sentence that could possibly be deciphered as: "I hope that E. Crosby will/would not estimate me more than I loved and estimated him." He added a meaningful query ("did?") in the margin next to Tolstoy's "will/would" under the impression that the great man must have confused his English tenses when referring not just to a deceased person, but of that deceased person's esteem for Tolstoy.

Let us note also that the Jubilee editors in charge of volume seventy-seven (V.A. Zhdanov and E. Ye. Zaidenshnur) entered their own corrections of Tolstoy's grammar and spellings. In addition to fixing the spelling of "delayed" and "illness" they made a conservative decision viz. the tense and kept the last sentence agreeably tamed by making it soundly provisional: "I hope that E. Crosby could not estimate me more than I loved and estimated him" (PSS 77:24). Completed in the late 1930s, the volume was revised according to the new ideological guidelines and was being rushed into publication on the wrong side of the fifties—when Tolstoy's knowledge of English grammar could not be held suspect in the eyes of the world. In reality, Prieth and the Jubilee crew may have overlooked what is a deliberate, but heartfelt confusion on Tolstoy's part: When we examine the word closely, it is impossible to tell Tolstoy's intent, and we might speculate that such confusion was not accidental: Instead of the cautious subjunctive mood, its moodiness may well be spiritual. If grammar of any sort is involved, this is a plea uttered by Tolstoy to the spirit of his late friend in the language and syntax of their grammar of ascent.

What may have been perceived by some as only as a matter of speaking or a verbal prank, was sacramental knowledge and part of the language of kinship between Tolstoy and Crosby. We should not forget that Crosby was the man who gave up his brilliant legal career and state service in high

office to embark on an unpredictable idealistic vocation after reading Tolstoy's *On Life*. He paid his new Russian friend a visit en route to America after quitting a brilliant post in Egypt as the result of reading Tolstoy. Tolstoy's confused use expresses a hope, based on his and Crosby's shared religious conviction that was reinforced by Tolstoy on every occasion after *On Life*. It was constantly echoed by Crosby as well: that physical death is a fiction and that reasonable communication is never interrupted by the physically manifest cessation of being.

The details of Tolstoy's friendship with Crosby are given ample voice in their own words addressed to each other through their correspondence.<sup>3</sup> Tolstoy was subjected to unsparing yet loving analysis in Crosby's books on his views, life program, and educational method. There are twelve books in all by Crosby preserved in Tolstoy's personal library at Yasnaya Polyana, although—significantly—not a single volume of the two written by Crosby on Tolstoy himself: *Tolstoy as a Schoolmaster* (1904) and *Tolstoy and His Message* (1904) are not there.

Crosby, too, may have influenced Tolstoy well—or on the contrary, not well at all. Of the books by Crosby preserved in Tolstoy's library, his militant brochure against Shakespeare in "Shakespeare's Attitude toward the Working Classes" (1902) accelerated Tolstoy's completion of his crusade against the bard in his own notorious essay. Crosby's hymn of non-violent resistance "Fiat lux" from *Plain Talk in Psalm and Parable* (1899) inspired Tolstoy's prose translation of the poem (40: 341-42). *Plain Talk* and the more heavily annotated pages of Crosby's *The Earth-for-all-Calendar* (1900) motivated Tolstoy to compile *The Circle of Reading* (Круг чтения, 1903-08).

In keeping with his propagandistic method, Crosby never hesitated to quote Tolstoy's approval of his work or draw examples from Tolstoy's life and pamphlets for the most radical authorization of unusual kinds of social reform. Judging by this brief citation from an entry on Crosby from *The*

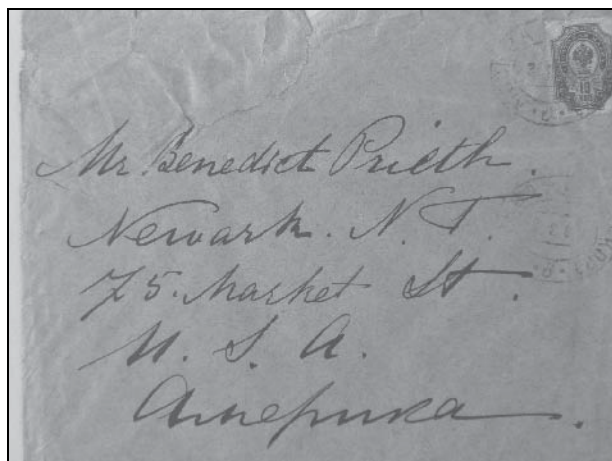


Fig. 2: Envelope

*National Cyclopedia of American Biography*, he succeeded:

Referring to his [Crosby's] new book of verse, "Plain Talk in Psalm and Parable" (1899), Tolstoy wrote: "I like the book very, very much. Some of the pieces—the choice is difficult because all are very good—I will have translated into Russian and published. There is nothing more new and interesting than the most common subjects looked at from a Christian point of view, and that is what you are doing in your book, and doing with talent and sincerity. (10: 61)

Crosby was not in the least timid, quoting Tolstoy's blurbs about himself in the pages of *The Whim* which he edited with Prieth:

Hear what great men and good say of *Plain Talk in Psalm and Parable*, by Ernest Crosby. COUNT TOLSTOY says: I like the book very much. Some of the pieces—the choice is difficult because all are good—I will have translated into Russian and published. (Front Matter, December 1901)

The above volume, "handsomely printed & bound, gilt-edged on deckle-edge paper" (ibid.) would not have sold so well at its \$1.50 price without Tolstoy's endorsement.

These elements of “back-slapping,” this free exchange and fair use of religious chants and canticles between Tolstoy and Crosby, are important for a better understanding of Tolstoy’s interest in American reform movements and their literary expressions at the turn of the century.

The book that Tolstoy “had translated into Russian and published” took a new turn to become *The Circle of Reading*. It underwent vigorous editing before its second edition during the last full year of Crosby’s life, which was the year after *The Whim* ceased to exist. *The Whim* played a role in this transformation of Tolstoy’s project, and Tolstoy’s familiarity with Crosby’s and Prieth’s journal merits closer examination. In the space remaining, I shall concentrate on the journal and on Crosby’s and Prieth’s contributions in it as the two co-editors, and on Tolstoy’s responses to the journal, as well as his mostly non-annotated borrowings from it for *The Circle of Reading*.

#### **A Periodical without a Tendency (On Whim-Whams and Whimsies of Anti-Militarism)**

*The Whim* was founded in 1901 in Newark, New Jersey, and purported to publish twelve issues a year, on sale for a nickel each or fifty cents for an annual subscription. The journal began as “the official organ of the *Grand Order of Whimsical Folk*” under whose auspices it was supposed to be “published ever and anon, or say once every month at 26 Campbell St., Newark, N.J.” People who think droll or whimsical thoughts” were asked to contribute with the promise of a royalty of “one thank per page” (Front Matter, September 1901). With this free-floating tendency the journal seemed to be imitating its British non-sectarian brother *The Crank* where Crosby was publishing his poetry. And so he was in *The Whim* as well, such as this gem from the melancholy garden of pseudo-Victorian delights:

I spied beside the garden bed  
A tiny lass of ours,  
Who stopped and bent her sunny head

Above the red June flowers.

Plunging her nose in the petals at the end of the poem the girl asks the rose if she “smells just as sweet to you/As you smell sweet to me!” (“In the Garden” 132).

The journal was discontinued, however, in 1905, a little less than two years before Crosby died. Its brisk and hopeful start and then a speedy downward trajectory were due to its lack of focus, absence of talented content, and erratic political substance: the editors never resolved the question of coverage for their journalistic task.

In the first years, happy parents were sending in testimonials about the demonstrated practicability of Tolstoyan non-violent methods in raising their children. In one instance, a parent at first found it incredulous that Tolstoy would instruct his young daughter Sasha not to pummel a naughty boy who had struck her. But he bethought himself after an incident in his own family and contributed a story about how Tolstoy had helped him change his mind. His son Howard came home complaining one day about a bad boy next door who kept trouncing and stoning him, and the parent—this testimonial appeared anonymously—surprised even himself when he suddenly advised his boy to bring sweet peaches to his enemy. “The peach was accepted. The enemy was thus at small cost killed, so to speak, & a lasting lesson of the uses & powers of love was left in the mind of my boy. He has no enemies now and needs no protection” (“Another” 20-21).

From the very beginning, the journal took a humorously-satirical approach to social ills and governmental folly. In his story “Wanted: A Statesman” the author Lee Byron warned against encouraging a complacent attitude in government servants who failed to protect the populace from the greedy Morgans and Rockefellers. In a feature “Luxuries of Modern Dying,” C.P. Holt attacked the wasteful habits of philistines who catered to the ever-growing appetites of the funeral industry.

But gradually even stories about garden roses and the virtuous upbringing of children began to sting and the after-taste was acrimonious. Witness the following ham-fisted allegory from Bolton Hall, one of the journal's more prominent voices:

"Now, Georgie dear, there's your bayonet."

"But can't I stick somebody with it?"

"No, love, it's only for Sunday School drill."

"But I want to shoot something with my gun, some Spaniards or strikers or somebody."

"Oh, Georgie, that would be wicked—at least—it would be wicked unless the President or a real Captain told you to. But what are you going to call your company?"

"Well, Miss Church, you said we could call it after anyone we revered, didn't you?"

"Yes, dear, and I thought the Christian Corps would be best. You know you're soldiers of the cross."

"Yes, teacher, we want Christ in it, although he wasn't so good a fighting man as general Hell-Roaring Jake Smith; so we are just going to call it the 'L Roaring Christian Brigade'" ("Church Militant" 142-143).

Beneath this shouting match with militancy there appeared a symbol of the Spanish fly and beneath it a non-authored inscription: "The adoration of a piece of colored bunting is frequently called Patriotism. This is a misnomer. It's (sic) correct name is Idolatry or Fetish Worship" (143). Compare this with a religious levity of the earlier Hall: "'Fear the lord,' said the Clergyman. But my Soul answered: 'I am not afraid of God. He is a friend of mine' (Bolton Hall)" (Back Cover, volume 2, December 1901).

*The Whim* soon stopped being witty; and when this happens, a journal of this kind is no longer worthy of serious attention. Non-sectarian elegance and charlatanry with a calculated lack of tendency turned into dull screechy anger. (The early *Whim* was something of a cross between "Shouts and Murmurs" of *The New Yorker*, the self-help pages of *The Christian Science Monitor* and send-ups of political judgments in *n<sup>+</sup>*). But in its third year, *The*

*Whim* was already showing signs of exhaustion and powerlessness as regards its societal effect. Readers who used to like spending their nickels on "The Organ of no particular class of people," a periodical that "confined itself to no particular set of ideas" but chose as its purpose "steadfastly to seek after Light and Truth, even if it grope and stumble in so doing" (the obverse of *The Whim's* earlier front covers) began to complain. Instead of listening, the editors laughed the complaints off, retorting with an acrostic with a phony signature in an issue from August 1903:

A question while I write the name:

Why this 'without a tendency'—  
How can you, making such a claim,  
In each page 'roast' so heartily  
Militarism's deeds of shame?

J. Spargo. (Front Cover)

But it turned out to be no more than a makeshift to switch gears from "whim-whams" to "whimsies" in the subheading for that section of the journal that traditionally served both editors and contributors as an outlet for venting their social anger. One of the best features of the journal used to be its apocryphal whimsies, many borrowed and paraphrased from Tolstoy and ascribed to sages with Arabic names from the glorious epochs of Cordoba and Granada. But many real sages from early and modern eras had also been included, from the likes of Firdausi, Lao Tzu, Rumi and Sakuntala alongside Epictetus and Carlyle.

These inspirational short sayings provided a breathing space between the mounting political bullfights. As years went on, the sayings were replaced with quotes from the American Constitution and the Founding Fathers, replete with doomsday captions to their dashed hopes. The journal was also morosely self-centered and preachy about its most precious ideological concepts, sometimes wholly without concern for the context. For example, this adage appeared in its



pages in the month of April 1903, when the more serious periodicals that cared about non-violence and state-sponsored crime were responding in editorial columns, forums and op-ed pieces to the vicious pogrom in Kishinev: “No one can injure a man who refuses to be hurt. You may kill him, but you cannot touch the man in him” (“Unsigned aphorism”). This was a very unwise tone for a periodical whose editor and chief spokesman (Crosby) was Chairman of the New York Committee of Friends of Russian Freedom.

Of the contributors, only Crosby had the wherewithal to keep the journal’s intellectual level sufficiently elevated. Participation from other sturdy minds like Aylmer Maude or Bolton Hall was too episodic. Crosby’s stakes in the periodical were not as high as Prieth’s, who was still an apprentice in the publishing business and for whom *The Whim* was not only his best brain child to date, but also a welcome occasion to cure the amateur stutterings of a beginner writer. The latter sound loudly in “Plutocrat’s Chant”:

Tell me not in mournful numbers  
Trusts are but an empty dream,  
And the merger dead that slumbers  
And things are not what they seem.  
Trusts are real, trusts are earnest,  
Wealth unbounded is their goal,  
Dust thou art, to dust returnest  
Was not spoken of King Coal.

Snugly inserted on to the next page (facing the poem) was a prose sketch by Prieth titled “A Tragedy.” In this sketch, the reader is given to believe that a desperado, who calls a revolver his “best and only friend” while taking it out of its holster now that the “fatal hour has come,” will shoot himself that very instant—perhaps uttering another one of these pompous concluding remarks. Prieth killed the philistine and the Jewish usurer with a single stone when he upset expectations and created a questionable anti-climax:

Come, old friend, and may God forgive me...So saying, the man looked fixedly at the gleaming weapon a long, long while. Then he replaced it in it’s case (sic) and took it to Mr. Solomon Levy, where he pawned it for \$3.75. –B.P. (163)

Crosby used the journal for other purposes, first of all to publicize his own forthcoming books and other authors friendly with his agendas. Secondly, he sprinkled its pages with multiple references to, and quotes from, Tolstoy, who in fact never once published there. And thirdly, he on occasion used *The Whim* to record his courageous contests with the establishment, rejected or silenced by the leading conservative media, which he wished to see publicly disputed. Consider, for instance, Crosby’s “A Word to Dr. Talmage,” earlier rejected by *The Christian Herald*. In 1901 when *The Whim* had just started, Crosby may have entertained higher ambitions for the periodical, publishing such serious pieces as the poem “Ye Anglo-Saxons,” which begs comparison in subject matter, at least, with Burns or Shelley. But in 1902-1906, Crosby was already a recognized author with a life of his own. He published in too many venues at once, which guaranteed that *The Whim* would remain what it was—a whim.

It had become an unaffordable expense in 1905 when it was discontinued, a year or so before the time of Crosby’s death, after a short bout with pneumonia, on January 3, 1907, at age fifty. A half-year before Crosby died, Tolstoy had written him (late in April 1906) that he wished to see him again at Yasnaya Polyana, chastising Crosby for wearing himself out. (This was in the same letter where Tolstoy congratulated Crosby’s mounting output and remarked on his Garrison book only tepidly.) He hoped that Crosby could find the time to visit at some point in 1906. He knew this would be their last meeting but he was sure that the first departure would be his, not Crosby’s:

You are still a young man and can have the opportunity to see the great change. Not so I.

Therefore the sooner you come the more chances I will have to see you again before my great voyage.

Your friend

Leo Tolstoy (PSS 76: 138).

Had Crosby paid that visit, the conversation would surely have turned to *The Circle of Reading*, which was being heavily revised. They would also have discussed the recently retired *The Whim*—which was, as yet, the undisclosed source of many citations in Tolstoy's famous calendar of wisdom.

Tolstoy's first mention of *The Whim* ("ВИМ" (Vim) in his pronunciation) occurs at the end of April 1904, when thanking Crosby for sending him the existing issues (by then, volume seven through issue number three had already appeared). He did not expand on his reactions beyond observing that he was glad to notice Crosby's own verses in print. In the same letter, Tolstoy informed Crosby of a special fancy he had developed for using Crosby's verses as epigraphs for his own work. Again, Tolstoy avoided any specifics, noting only that the prefaced work in question was written against "this abominable war" (PSS 75: 89). The work was "Be-think Yourselves!" ("Одумайтесь!" 1904). This long tract against The Russo-Japanese War is famous not only as a brilliant piece of Tolstoy's mature pacifism, but also as a multi-genre literary parade of multilingual aphorisms. Tolstoy chose only the best entries as vehicles for his cause, and his selections are all very inventive and fitting.

Without exception, they are also skilled adaptations. Tolstoy's prosaic paraphrase of Crosby's anti-war canticle singing the joys of non-violent strength places the poem after the philosophical dispute between Origen and Celsus, but before Kant (adapted from *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*) and before Epictetus witnessing before God (PSS 76: 132).

Goodness of heart and honesty aside, Tolstoy knew that his American friend was still too much the son of Presbyterian clergyman and scholar, still

somewhat the high profile career lawyer and less-than-mediocre poet. When he spoke on spiritual topics alone, Crosby was often verbose and bombastic. But Tolstoy was also quick to notice Crosby's other virtues, his shrewd and pithy oracular art that clothed a passionate religious message in political or civic rhetoric. The aphorisms in *The Whim* that accomplished this were all short, pungent, playful, on the mark, and many of a loosely attributed sort, more of an interface of world wisdom, than a calque from language to language.

Ever since the 1840s, Tolstoy had been routinely rewriting everyone across languages and genres, ignoring the divisions between the sacred and profane: Catherine the Great's *Instructions*; Laurence Sterne; Russian and European holy vitae for his ABCs and Readers; Plato, Victor Hugo, and Maupassant for his cheap popular editions. By 1880, Tolstoy regularly prefaced his work with verses from the gospels and a few favorite thinkers like Pascal or Kant.

From the early to mid-1880s, Tolstoy's roster of prophets and sages worthy of inclusion in his "forum for reading" was expanding to include Xenophon, Socrates, Jesus, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, the Brahmins, Buddhists and Hindus, Lao Tzu, Confucius, and his favorite moderns, from Rousseau, Voltaire and Lichtenberg to Kant and Schopenhauer. Yet it was only in the years following Crosby's *Plain Talk in Psalm and Parable* (1899) and *The Earth-for-All-Calendar* (1900) and then in the short era of *The Whim* (1901-1905) that Tolstoy increased the representation of his contemporaries. These included Arnold, Ruskin, Amiel, and a large number of Americans: Emerson, Thoreau, Channing, George, Mallory and also Judge Parker, whom Crosby had supported in his bid for Presidency against Theodore Roosevelt and his imperialist policies.

Of course Tolstoy's *Harmony and Translation of the Four Gospels*, as well as his lifelong career of selective and wholly unembarrassed adaptations of the world's wisdom, served him as a blueprint for



his trademark creative misprision of the holy in *The Circle of Reading*. This important antecedent he sat down to explain on his birthday (August 28, 1904 (old style)) after a full season of immersion in *The Whim*-sies since April that year:

But what bad there may be if people who love some authors would try to represent them in such a way so that these authors would be more comprehensible and appealing to readers? ...If only this were a longstanding attitude toward the Bible and especially toward the gospels. (PSS 42: 472)

When he was writing this, issues of *The Whim* were still arriving: the first (August) issue of volume eight must have been already on his desk at the end of the month. In the Preface, Tolstoy wrote: “The thoughts assembled here have been borrowed by me from a very large amount of writings and collections of thoughts, primarily in English (a list of all these books and collections is appended at the end).” Tolstoy goes on to explain that most of the multilingual sources represented in his collection were really all translated from English sources and that he was shortening and paraphrasing everything relentlessly. The goal he was trying to achieve was to shear off all error from the long-winded wrong-headed wisdoms “with their poor, superstitious, often silly and crude aspects” and rephrase them in his own words, thus bringing out their edifying and pleasurable effect. Tolstoy apologized in advance for these views on translation which he was sure would be considered “criminal” (преступным), but he also advised us to reconsider as superstitious our hoary reverence for intellectual property: what matter is it *to whom* any given work is ascribed (кому приписывается сочинение)? (42: 470-73). Tolstoy reduces the problem to that of

property, leaving out other issues: respect for others’ opinions, convictions, intonations and wordings—and for the whole of another’s system of thought. Nonetheless, Tolstoy warned the intrepid who might dare to trace his renditions back to their original sources:

If there would be those willing to translate this book into other languages, I’d advise them against trying to locate in their native tongues the originals by the Englishman Coleridge, or the German Kant, or the Frenchman Rousseau, so if they would really like to translate, let them translate from mine (переводить с моего). (PSS 42: 473)

This was the longer version in the draft of the Preface, beyond a doubt the most explicit of all comments Tolstoy ever made about his entitlement to poetic appropriation and mystification. The final and very short preface for the second edition completed in March 1908 shows more deference for the original and the reader (PSS 41:9). Still, Tolstoy was a writer very little burdened by “anxiety of influence.” It was mostly through Crosby and his acquaintance with the Anglophone collections of beautiful thoughts that Tolstoy honed his skill as creative pilferer of others’ aphoristic sayings in the early 1900s. *The Earth-for-All Calendar* and *The Whim* are short-listed in the acknowledged sources or major sources (Список основных источников) for the collection (PSS 42: 586-89). From that moment on, Tolstoy may have enjoyed writing long tracts as an excuse for having many chapters “epigraphed” with a *Whim*-styled adage. Tolstoy’s own “Bethink Yourselves!” was put on the same short list of sources for *The Circle*.

Crosby was very much an integral part of Tolstoy's daily readings and preoccupation from August 1906 through January 1907. The use of an unexpected tense in Tolstoy's letter to Prieth commemorating Crosby, which was grammatically consonant *only* with immortality, was not the sole good-spirited forgery committed by Tolstoy for the sake of Crosby and on Crosby's prompt. Thus in the *Circle of Reading* for 17 November we read:

Нет ни прошлого, ни будущего, потому что кто же когда проникал в эти призрачные царства. Есть только настоящее. Не беспокойся о завтрашнем, потому что нет завтра. Живи в нынешнем и для нынешнего, и если твое нынче хорошо, то оно добро навсегда.—Журнал “Вим”

[There is neither past nor future, for who has ever penetrated those nebulous kingdoms. There is only the present. Don't worry about the future, because there is no tomorrow. Live in the present and for the present and if your present is good, it will be good forever. —The journal *Whim*] (PSS 42: 259)

To anyone who has read Tolstoy's *On Life* (1887), this thought appears to be coming directly out of that tract or the many rehearsals of the same thought before and after 1887. Tolstoy's notations on his copies of *The Whim* demonstrate convincingly that spiritual aphorisms were about the only thing that interested him in the journal.<sup>4</sup> He frequently underlined and circled most of these, at least fifteen per issue.

The above, however, is neither a real borrowing of anonymous nor apocryphal wisdom from the journal. In the August issue (number one of volume eight) for 1904 that had appeared shortly before Tolstoy started on his Preface, we find a long discursive obituary written by Crosby to one Mayor Jones of Toledo, who was described as epitomizing Tolstoy's very understanding of living lovingly and well as if there were no tomorrow.

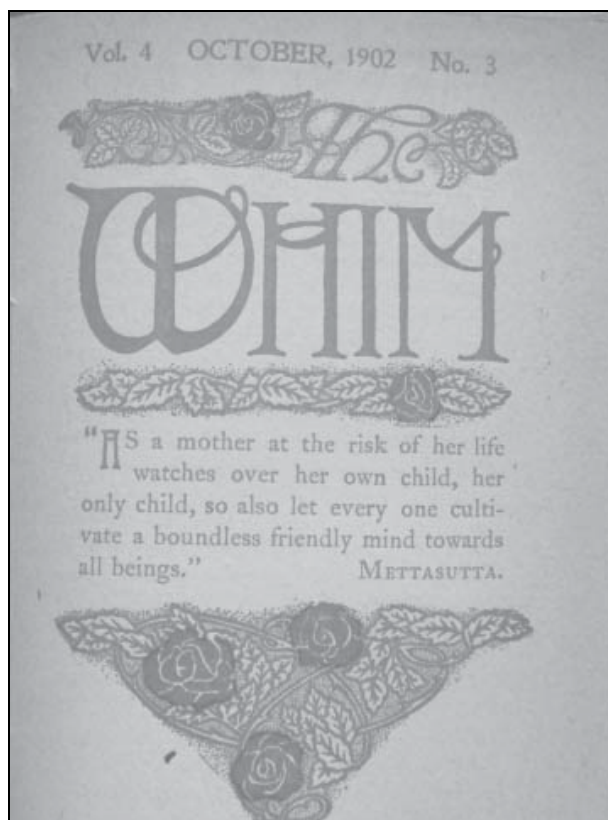


Fig. 3: October 1902 front cover of *The Whim*.

Tolstoy's similes of readiness to die are quoted in the obituary. *The Whim* also lamented:

It is an unfortunate fact that most of us live largely in the future. This is not always the result of an optimistic temperament. [...] But yesterday a friend said to me ‘at least there is always something to look forward to’. Deluded soul! Is the future, then, fraught with greater significance than this very moment to which you accord scarcely a passing thought?...Away with these shadows and phantoms! Only the present is real, the golden Present, and no time is so important and critical as this very moment. ...Let the dead Past bury its dead. Let us pray for strength to meet the Future valiantly. Today is today, and it behooves us to live it bravely and gladly. You say this day maybe your last on earth? So much greater reason then, for making the most of its every second. (“Notes”)

In a grateful gesture to the journal, Tolstoy forgave *The Whim* its distaste and attributed to it a thought that was really his own. There were opposite examples as well. After placing a quote from Crosby's poem, previously utilized as an epigraph for chapter ten of "Bethink Yourselves!" for the readings on January 27, Tolstoy leaves unattributed to *The Whim* a quote from Mettasutta right below Crosby's poem, borrowed by him from an October 1902 front cover (Fig. 3):

As a mother at her risk of her life watches over her own child, her only child, so also let everyone cultivate a boundless friendly mind towards all beings. (Front Cover)

Tolstoy translates the thought beautifully, and keeps it as his own selection, leaving *The Whim* "uncredited":

Как мать, рискуя своей жизнью, воспитывает и оберегает свое детище, свое единственное детище, так пусть каждый человек воспитывает и оберегает в себе дружелюбное чувство ко всему живущему—*Мемма-сумма* (PSS 41: 62).

### **Benedict Prieth: The Vim and Vigor of a Good Life**

A few final words are in order to commemorate the second man on *The Whim* team.<sup>5</sup> The man who preserved Tolstoy's letter was the namesake of his father, Benedict Prieth Sr, a first-generation emigrant from Germany who settled in Newark where he founded a German-language newspaper, *Freie Zeitung* (1858). When he died in 1879, Prieth's mother, Theodora, took over the business. Benedict Junior was born in 1869 or 1870 and attended Princeton University, graduating high in the class of 1891 ("Great Day"). In 1893, he joined his brother Edwin in managing *Freie Zeitung* while trying his hand at political journalism and publishing entrepreneurship.

Prieth earned notoriety as an anti-American German gadfly publishing frequently against American participation in World War I. His letter

to the editor of *The New York Times* appeared on December 19, 1914 under the heading: "Some Dissenting Views. German-Americans Want Fatherland to Fight to the End." Prieth wrote:

We Americans of German extraction want Germany to fight to the bitter end, and we are encouraging her to do so with every means in our power. We are sending large sums of money to the German and Austrian Red Cross and we are encouraging our German friends and relatives to keep up the fight, as we all know that Germany will triumph in the long run.

A year later Prieth still persisted, as in this letter to the editor:

The Germans have been outnumbered from the very beginning and still are, but superior discipline, organization, experience, and efficiency have enabled them to triumph so far, and will no doubt continue to do so until their enemies are completely overthrown. ("The Need")

A campaign of victimization soon ensued. On May 2, 1916 *The New York Times* published documents proving Prieth's backing of anti-Presidential critics. His letters to the New Jersey Republican State Committee were publicized as evidence. Although he still managed to publish on December 26, 1916 a short denunciation of Wilson's plans to enter the Allies' bid for territorial conquest, this was the last he wrote on the war to *The New York Times*. In 1917, his feature articles in *Freie Zeitung* were construed as seditious and treasonous acts. Under the Penal Code of the United States for Espionage the brothers Prieth were arrested, and their newspaper offices raided. They were put on trial in the fall of 1918, which ended in a disagreement and all indictments were dismissed.

Even as they stood trial the brothers turned their newspaper over to their employees as a cooperative venture and Benedict ran for commissioner in Newark while under indictment. He was defeated. Prieth died of a heart ailment aged 64 on

October 1, 1934. His obituary was published in *The New York Times* October 2, 1934.

It is hard to say why Prieth recalled Crosby's and Tolstoy's letters in 1925 and decided it was time to take steps to preserve them from a loss in case he died suddenly. It is unclear also why he first wrote to his nephew, Faber Eberhard, asking him to assess the letters' value. On November 30, 1925 Faber supplied this information to his uncle:

I return herewith your original letters from Leon Tolstoy and Ernest Crosby. They are both immensely interesting. I happened to show a connoisseur of important letters the one from Tolstoy and he estimated that it would be worth at least \$600.00; so you better take great care of it. I appreciate very much the opportunity of seeing these two originals.

With best regards,  
As ever F.

P.S-Did Feick succeed in breaking your rib?<sup>6</sup>

The very next day, Prieth wrote a lengthy letter to his son-in-law, Phil Townley, also of New Jersey, husband of daughter Marcia, explaining that he wished them to have the letters as precious gifts:

Dear Phil:

Enclosed I am sending you two letters which I received long ago, one is from Ernest Crosby, and the other from Leo Tolstoy. You will note that each of them bears date of Feb. 12<sup>th</sup>, though one was written in 1906 and the other in 1907. Also a letter from (title illegible) Faber in which he says something about the value of the Tolstoy manuscript. I know that the letters in his handwriting are very rare, inasmuch as his ordinary correspondence was taken care of by his emissaries. But he loved Ernest Crosby so much that he wrote me in his own hand, knowing how closely Crosby and I were associated. These letters are a present from (end of first

page) me to you, and you have my permission to dispose of them as you see fit.

I am very sure that you will hold them in the same veneration as I have always done. I am giving them to you because I thought that in case of my sudden death they might be overlooked and possibly thrown away and would grievously vex my spirit [illegible] amid my death—drinking ancestors in Walhalla, surrounded by and wailed upon by Walküres of matchless beauty.

Now that you know what sort of an old Teuton Heathen I am, and believe in the mighty fists and unquenchable thirst of Thor, Wotan, Loki and other gods of the ancient Nordic hagiography, I trust you will pardon my shortcomings and pray to whatever gods you believe in to absolve me.

As ever,

your Dad<sup>7</sup>

Prieth is right about being proud that Tolstoy wrote to him in his own hand: on the same day in February 1907, Tolstoy only dictated and simply signed his condolences to Crosby's sister, Grace Ashton Crosby (PSS 77:22-23). We will never know the reasons for this urgency and why Prieth did not write to his daughter or to Firestone Library directly. In December 1925, Chertkov's questionnaires already existed, although only in their pre-*Jubilee* informal versions: Did Chertkov, who had been writing to Crosby frequently, suddenly write to Prieth? We can only guess whether Prieth was nudged or whether his own Walhalla hunch was triggered.

What is absolutely clear, however, is that either he or his family made a donation to the library and never charged a penny for the treasure.<sup>8</sup> Crosby's letter ended up not being in the same folio. With luck, it will be found soon: Prieth's Tolstoy folio was pulled out of the miscellanea collection. Cros-

by's letter might have been attached elsewhere (for the time being).<sup>9</sup>

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## Notes

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1. Courtesy of the Rare Books and Special Collections Division of Firestone Library at Princeton University (C 1241/1/4, leaf 2).

2. Courtesy of The Rare Books and Special Collections Division of Firestone Library at Princeton University (C 1241/1/4, leaf 3).

3. For a series of concise and informative summaries, see Alexeeva (Алексеева 34-37; 62-64; 211-212).

4. This follows from the notations in the pages of Tolstoy's copies of *The Whim* generously shared with me by Galina Alexeeva. The notations Tolstoy made in all foreign periodicals in his possession are soon forthcoming in a sequel to previous volumes of bibliographic descriptions of Tolstoy's library of which Galina Alexeeva will be the editor.

5. My brief comments on Prieth's life are based on the scanty records in his Princeton folio and on the information from *The New York Times* where he published and his activities were frequently featured.

6. Courtesy of the Rare Books and Special Collections Division of Firestone Library at Princeton University (C 1241/1/4, leaf 4). Feick was the husband of Prieth's sister married to Charles A. Feick of Short Hills, N.J.

7. Courtesy of the Rare Books and Special Collections Division of Firestone Library at Princeton University (C 1241/1/4, leaves 5, 6 (letter) and 7, envelope).

8. I thank Don Skemer, Curator of Manuscripts at Firestone, for his explanation about how manuscripts from the general collection could accede to the division.

9. To honor him posthumously as a remarkable human being, Firestone Library included Prieth's journalism among the items exhibited from the writings of Princeton University alumni over the 175 years in the history of the university. There was a feature on the exhibit published in *The New York Times* February 14, 1937.

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