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Tolstoy & Bryan

This article is about a Russian and an American and about a gospel of love and its interpretation. The meeting between Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoy and William Jennings Bryan, between aristocrat and statesman, was in Imperial Russia. The young world of the open American Midwest encountered, for a moment, the old world of the Russian forests. It is the history of the spiritual influence of the Sage of Yasnaya Polyana as master on The Great Commoner as disciple. Only the Bible was more important as spiritual inspiration for Bryan. For twenty-five years, in Bryan's preaching and politics, in speech, in the written word, and even over the airwaves, the Nebraskan came to personify the ideals of millions of Americans; he also familiarized them with the name of Tolstoy.

Somewhat liberated from political worries after his second presidential bid in 1900, Bryan now had more time to devote to other concerns, including spiritual values. For twenty-two years his newspaper, *The Commoner*, reached out to homes across the nation. *The Commoner* afforded an excellent vehicle for a crusade for the passage of positive legislation for a better government guided by a benevolent God. In this, Bryan was reflective of a particular and recurrent variety of reformism, relating progressive change to the reassertion of old virtues that reformers thought to be under siege.

Bryan took inspiration from the Russian nobleman Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoy.

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By Kenneth C. Wenzer

Tolstoy by now was a gigantic figure, an embodied moral conscience with many followers. Admirers throughout the world sought his guidance, from the young Indian Mohandas Gandhi, then in South Africa, to the German poet Ranier Maria Rilke. Tolstoy found his eternal truths in the moral purity of Jesus' teachings, but it was a Jesus shorn of divinity and dogma.

Tolstoy reinterpreted the Gospels, especially the Sermon on the Mount, as a message of human unity in love and nonviolence.¹ Love, he thought was a way station between an earthly paradise and a spiritual eternity. Tolstoy sought the moral regeneration and perfection of man through an inward transformation.² The eternal was to be sought in the uncoerced ethical goodness of people, especially the toiling peasant.³ Transcendent perfection can follow from a simple life and the renunciation of desire and of ego, from reaching out from self and family to all humanity, all living creatures, the universe, and God.⁴ "The world," Tolstoy taught, "is a huge temple in which light falls in the center. All people who love light strive towards it. . . . Unity is attained only . . . when [one] seeks not unity, but the truth. . . .

Seek the truth and you will find unity."⁵ Tolstoy considered the laws of nations to be capricious and a form of mental slavery when compared with "the single, eternal, truthful and general law of God."⁶ Tolstoy, then, preached a spiritual anarchist ethic. His philosophy was an ethos of nonresistance and love that could equally move an impassioned believer, a secular radical, and even an ardent mainstream religious believer seeking cures to the ills of society.

Bryan was among the many enthralled by Tolstoy's appeal. For Bryan, Tolstoy was "the intellectual giant of Russia, the moral titan of Europe and the world's most conspicuous exponent of the doctrine of love."⁷ Evidence of Bryan's attraction to Tolstoy's teachings can be found in the first issue of *The Commoner*, which featured a scathing quotation from Tolstoy condemning the imperialistic aggression of a hypocritical, liberty-preaching American government, backed by commercial forces.⁸ The fourth issue praised Tolstoy's doctrine of love, brotherhood, and nonresistance, and the fifteenth extolled him as a "heroic figure" and "one of the greatest men in history." A few weeks later, *The Commoner* lamented Tsar Nicholas II's failure to respond to Tolstoy's appeal to end tyranny and religious persecution and to create happiness for the Russian people.⁹

Desirous of seeing the Old World, Bryan and his son William Jr. steamed off for Europe in late 1903.¹⁰ Despite meetings with the British prime minister and the pope the prospect of meeting Tolstoy was more exciting. Traveling across Europe, Bryan reached Russia.

Tolstoy and Bryan

The Great Commoner, well enough known internationally in his own right, received an audience with Nicholas II. Bryan boldly reminded the Tsar of All the Russians of his promise to give a degree of self-government and free speech to his people. Nicholas diplomatically responded that plans were being carried out for democratization and expressed his continued friendship for the United States.¹¹

But what was a mere emperor or pope compared to the Sage of Yasnaya Polyana! At 1 A. M. on December 3 Bryan, his son, a correspondent, and a translator stepped down from a mail train at Tula and immediately proceeded to a hotel in piercing winter weather. At daybreak, they reached Tolstoy's residence after a hazardous journey in a closed landau over a tortuous road. At Yasnaya Polyana the entourage was escorted on a short tour of a peasant village. The contrast with American life amazed the Nebraskan. Afterwards Tolstoy, in peasant garb, greeted his guests. Bryan was described by one Russian eyewitness as clean-shaven, affable, and energetic, but composed and resonant "like a bird singing on a branch." He won Tolstoy's immediate liking.¹² Having expected to meet a narrow politician, Tolstoy found "a thoughtful serious man . . . animated by very lofty aspirations." It was odd, ruminated Tolstoy, that "he can give his heart to political activity."¹³

Tolstoy never deviated from his morning exercises, but a prolonged and lively conversation in English about the problems of the world and man immediately engrossed the Russian. Tolstoy beamed with joy, apparently a rare event in his later years. The tribune of the American farmer and the prophet of the Russian peasant were at one in their belief in universal love, the dignity of labor, spiritual values, and the agrarian life as the cradle of virtue.¹⁴ After a meal Tolstoy invited Bryan for a short horse ride, for the aged Russian didn't want to fatigued the American, a story Bryan would later love to relate. Tolstoy's



Lev Nikolaeivich Tolstoy. From William Jennings Bryan, *The Old World and Its Ways* (St. Louis: Thompson Publishing, 1907)

daughter Alexandra ran outside to see the most unusual sight, "for the huge American wore a fur coat of city cut, which looked absurd with a plain leather belt strapped over it, and a warm cap with earlaps. He rode a small

light mare whose back bent like an arc when he climbed up on her."¹⁵

At this time Tolstoy was penning an introduction to a biography of William Lloyd Garrison. He told of Bryan's playing Devil's Advocate to Tolstoy's doctrine of nonresistance. Bryan asked whether force was not permissible for the sake of saving a child from a malefactor. The Russian responded that during his life he never met such a monster, but

I have not seen . . . the ending of one, but of millions of robbers, who have violated children, women, grown-ups, the elderly and all working people in the name of the permissible right of force. . . . When I said this, my dear interlocutor in his own quick peculiar way of understanding, did not give me an argument, but smiling, recognized my reasoning with satisfaction.¹⁶

Bryan actually cancelled another appointment with the Tsar to stay longer with Tolstoy and did not leave until 11 P.M. Promising that he would someday return with his wife, Mary, Bryan exclaimed that this was "the most wonderful day in my life." Shortly thereafter, Tolstoy wrote,

With all my heart I wish you success in your attempts to destroy the trusts and to aid the laborers to enjoy the fruits of their toil; but I think that these are not the major goals in your life. The most important thing is to know the will of God, i.e., to know what He wishes, so that we can fulfill it. I think that you are doing this and I wish you the greatest luck.¹⁷

Tolstoy's words must have resonated powerfully with Bryan's deeply felt religious convictions for this meeting with the novelist was a watershed in his life. Until then, he had esteemed Tolstoy; now he became a disciple. Bryan did not totally share Tolstoy's more extreme views, but he cherished a potent spiritual idealization of Tolstoyan philosophy for the rest of his life. He revered Tolstoy as the living incarnation of the doctrine of love and the purest example of man's potential to achieve universal brotherhood, next only to Jesus. A photograph of his meeting with Tolstoy graced Bryan's living room. Tolstoy had the same photograph in his lower library.¹⁸

Returning from Europe in early 1904, Bryan in September 1905 set out for a year's tour across the globe with his family. Headlines across the United States echoed that in the *Chicago Daily Tribune*: "Bryan's Travels Have Made Him Known the World Over." This time he visited not only Europe but Asia and the Mideast. His *Under Other Flags* and *The Old World and Its Ways* went to press. He welcomed the Russian Revolution of 1905 as a harbinger of "progress toward the American ideals of democracy," and he had the enviable opportunity to attend a session of the Duma.¹⁹

Bryan commented in *The Commoner* that although it was disappointing that Tolstoy did not use his influence to further democracy in Russia it was understandable, because he was subject to a tyranny. The time, however, was not far off before there would be a universal regeneration of people which Tolstoy envisioned.²⁰ Tolstoy was not, in fact, quite fully estranged from the political world. During Bryan's third presidential campaign in 1908, the Sage of Yasnaya Polyana wrote to an American:

I can express very frankly the wish for Bryan's successful candidature for the United States presidency. From my point of view, since I do not recognize any kind of government, which is based on force, I cannot justify the presidential [executive] function in a republic, but in as much as this capacity still exists, I am assuredly desirous that it should be fulfilled by people who are worthy of trust.

I speak of Mr. Bryan with great respect and feeling. I know that the principles on which he bases his [platform] are congruent with mine, in regard to our [mutual] sympathy for the workers, antimilitarism, and the recognition of the evils engendered by capitalism. I still do not know, but I hope, that Mr. Bryan will be an advocate of land reform in the spirit of Henry George and his single tax system, the realization [of which] I consider to be totally essential and which every leading reformer should keep foremost in mind.²¹

High tribute from the world's most noted spiritual anarchist!

As the illnesses of old age plagued Tolstoy, Bryan closely followed his mentor's health from afar. Never par-



Bryan, Tolstoy, and William Jennings Bryan, Jr. at Yasnaya Polyana. From William Jennings Bryan. *Under Other Flags, Travels, Lectures, Speeches* (Lincoln, Nebr.: 1904)

ticularly fond of Theodore Roosevelt, the Nebraskan probably was incensed when he read an article by the former president condemning the aging Tolstoy's philosophy. The Rough Rider termed the Russian "a mystical zealot... . [with] a dark streak which tells of moral perversion." The June 18, 1909, issue of *The Commoner* reprinted a *Detroit Times* editorial denouncing Roosevelt, which probably echoed Bryan's feelings:

This attack upon the dying Tolstoy, this gentle, unresisting man, is from the pen of Roosevelt, the killer and the jingoist. Tolstoy is not a man or beast killer and he abhors war. . . . The czars . . . will hail and cheer their Bwana Tumbo. Every puny despot of every decaying monarchy will receive with ecstasy this verbal llogging of the Modern Elijah at Yasnaya Polyana.²²

On November 25, 1910, *The Commoner* announced the death of Tolstoy: the "most impressive figure of his age



Bryan in front of *The Commoner* office in Lincoln, 1908. NSHS-B915-64

Tolstoy and Bryan

finds his soul's peace." The next issue of *The Commoner* said of Tolstoy:

He has been called the apostle of love, and no one since the Apostle Paul has preached it more persistently or practiced it more consistently . . . The night is darker because his light has gone out; the world is not so warm because his heart has grown cold in death.²¹

It has been said that Bryan traveled more miles than any other public figure of his times. He gave thousands of speeches on special occasions and on the Chautauqua circuit. From 1874 until 1924, millions flocked to get a bit of culture, entertainment, and moral uplift. In its last year twelve thousand Chautauqua gatherings drew thirty millions, or about a third of the population of the country.²² Many once legendary speakers, musicians, and performers now forgotten over the years were huge draws. But one name lived on as the grandest of them all—the name of Bryan.

As the greatest living orator, Bryan was an American institution, and his life on the Chautauqua circuit was legendary. The magnificent and resonant voice that without aid of amplification could be heard across town or over a storm brought complete silence during the talks and then ear-deafening ovation at the conclusion. From him numberless listeners heard the name of Tolstoy, linked to their own ideals. For Bryan religion, economic and social morality, good government, and universal brotherhood imbued with the Holy Spirit abided in harmony.

The first product of Bryan's reaffirmation of religious ideals was *The Prince of Peace*. This most famous of his circuit speeches looked not only to the Bible for inspiration but also to Tolstoy. Tolstoy, Bryan related, taught that religion was based upon "man's consciousness of his finiteness amid an infinite universe and of his sinfulness." Tolstoy had defined religion "as the relation between himself and his God, and morality as the outward manifestation of this inward relation." A personal Jesus was to be the source of salvation and moral-

ity. "Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself" was to be the key to happiness. The divine consciousness, capable of performing any miracle, "is the most potent influence upon a human life."²³ Bryan's illustration of this point with a tale of the watermelon growing into a forty-pound giant from a mere seed as a symbol of God's presence is legendary.

To impress his readers with the power of an ideal and the transformation that the individual and the nation must go through, Bryan depicted the spiritual crisis of Tolstoy in *The Value of an Ideal*. Life, Bryan wrote, despite great honors, was devoid of meaning for the Russian, and he contemplated suicide. What stopped him? A change in ideals: a craving to lead the simple life of the peasant in concordance with divine love. Tolstoy's metamorphosis, Bryan stated, had made the world a better place.²⁴ In *The Price of the Soul*, another of his famous Chautauqua addresses, the Nebraskan warned in Tolstoyan fashion that unjust monetary gain "shrivels the soul."²⁵ *The First Commandment*, yet another Bryan talk, contained a description of a conversation in which Tolstoy declared that the love of God is even more important than the command of neighborly love.²⁶

The dignity of earning a living by the sweat of one's brow, Bryan explained in a Labor Day Speech of 1908, made for the sympathetic bonding among human beings that Tolstoy defined; in denouncing the plutocratic rich he appealed to Tolstoy's denunciation of an unjust capitalist system. The labor union, imbued with the spirit of service, Bryan argued, was the affirmation of humanity in its goal of securing an equitable portion of the nation's toil and helping establish equality. Only the Democratic Party could represent the ideals of the struggling man and create a just society.²⁷ To this end, Bryan repeatedly proposed an industrial peace plan to settle labor disputes.

Prior to World War I Bryan's vision of the spread of Christianity across the globe was indistinguishable from his

faith in a perceived spiritual rebirth. In "The Next Awakening," Bryan declared as early as 1905 that "mankind . . . is about to be seized with a frenzy, a madness of love."

No one . . . has contributed more largely to the awakening than the great philosopher of Russia, whose confidence in the law of love is so great that he is willing to trust it unarmed and undefended to conquer the armies of the world. Love, Tolstoy thinks, needs not even sling or pebble to overcome the Goliath of evil.²⁸

In a speech in Lima, Peru, in 1910 Bryan praised the people of that country for adopting the American standard of popular government, which he defined as belonging to the moral revolution prophesied by Tolstoy. It was America's "glorious destiny" to spread democracy and "conquer the world . . . not with arms, but with ideals."²⁹ Tolstoyan love in action was synonymous with the freedoms of the forefathers of the North American republic. If they are good enough for us, he assured his listeners, they are good enough for the world.

Within the great moral awakening that Bryan envisioned, the perfecting of the individual was to come about and harmony among nations was imminent. To this end he attended numerous peace gatherings and became prominent in this growing international movement. Bryan believed that all nations should be bound not only by an international tribunal but by treaties that accentuated investigation, mediation, and a cooling-off period. By these means, war everywhere might virtually be eliminated. President Taft thought such treaties were practical, but the Senate scotched his efforts. This rejection did not deter Bryan's belief in their efficacy. He agreed that Jesus taught mankind that the olive wreath, not the battlefield, is the harbinger of peace. Further,

The most significant example in all this world today of one who preaches this doctrine of love, and lives as he preaches is Tolstoy. He is not only a believer in . . . [this], but he is a believer in the doctrine of non-resistance, and there he stands proclaiming to the world that he believes that love is a better protection than force. . . .

And what is the result? He is the only man in Russia on whom the czar, with all his army, dare not lay his hand. . . . The power that is in him is proof against the violence of the czar. I believe it would be true of a nation.³²

The United States, Bryan proclaimed, should emulate Tolstoy and renounce war. Bryan urged the United States to establish mediation by an international tribunal as the only way of solving problems, although the Russian was not, in fact, convinced of the efficacy of arbitration and treaties. Our country would become, he argued, like Tolstoy — impervious to attack and an example to the world. Bryan's *The Message from Bethlehem* censured the capitalists who fomented war and created hatreds among nations and argued instead that the moral principles that apply to people must be applicable across national lines. Tolstoy, Bryan continued, "has bluntly argued that killing, even in self-defense, costs more lives than it saves. With a growing regard for the sacredness of life it is natural that wholesale slaughter should become more and more repugnant to the conscience of organized society."³³

Bryan, in a prolonged Democratic convention and then in the resulting three-way presidential campaign in 1912, rendered great service to Woodrow Wilson. Although Wilson had previously considered Bryan foolish, he adopted much of the Nebraskan's reforming spirit.³⁴ The newly elected president offered Bryan the secretary of state's portfolio. Bryan agreed to accept this high position only if his peace treaties could be negotiated. Wilson readily consented. As the advocate of the Prince of Peace, the new secretary awakened hope in many religious people, but more polished diplomats only thought him naive.³⁵ Although his actions were not always consistent with pacifism — he supported a controversial involvement in the Caribbean and in Mexico — he was the first American statesman to attempt to apply its principles. Under his guidance the United States signed more bilateral peace trea-

ties with other nations than at any other time before or since. The kind of "cooling-off" treaty he preferred covered disputes of all kinds. A permanent international tribunal would investigate disputes during a waiting period of one year with a provision forbidding hostilities before any final decision. In all, thirty nations were signatories with the United States, representing more than three-quarters of the world's population.

Then came August 1914 and the mockery of Bryan's hopes. The British ambassador, Cecil Spring Rice, shortly afterwards wrote to Bryan: "No one who has studied the diplomatic history of the events leading to the present disastrous war can ever speak lightly of your idea again. For it is abundantly manifest that even one week's delay would probably have saved the peace of the world."³⁶ The reinstatement of a just peace now became Bryan's central objective.³⁷ In a letter to Wilson, Bryan asked the president to offer mediation: "It is not likely that either side will win so complete a victory . . . and . . . [that] will probably mean preparation for another war."³⁸

Although not totally neutral himself, Bryan believed Wilson's foreign policy was tilting too far toward the Allies. Becoming increasingly alarmed, he warned Wilson of the potential, soon realized, of retaliation. The Kaiser's government had warned Americans not to travel on ships carrying munitions in a war zone; the president's refusal to caution Americans against traveling was creating a *casus belli*.³⁹ After repeated efforts to convince Wilson by letter and talk, Bryan tendered his resignation on June 9, 1915, over a note to Germany that he thought redolent of the old system of force and coercion and an occasion for war. Wilson, who had come to have a strong affection for Bryan, was genuinely upset. Paolo Coletta, Bryan's biographer, considered the resignation to reflect in part the influence of Tolstoy.⁴⁰

As a private citizen Bryan stumped the country for peace and noninvolvement. In true Tolstoyan fashion, he

thought he could awaken the pacifist sentiments that Americans, like the rest of humanity, must have latent within them. Bryan believed Wilson's misguided policies were ignoring the people's true desires. The preparedness campaign could only benefit the arms manufacturers and was tantamount to a declaration of war, for it "involves the preaching of the gospel of hatred" and was the work of the Devil.⁴¹ Wilson, he proclaimed, "is joy-riding with jingoes and is applauded by the grand-standers whose voices are unfamiliar to Democratic ears."⁴² Strict neutrality and a meditative role, founded on the gospel of love, Bryan argued, was the possible key to peace.

But on April 6, 1917, Congress declared war. Deciding that victory for the Allies with the United States would, in the long run, be better for the furthering of the millennium, Bryan turned from pacifism. At the age of fifty-seven he immediately offered himself as a private. Solicitous of the spiritual and moral welfare of the soldiers, Bryan urged religious comfort for soldiers of all Christian denominations and for Jews.⁴³ The pages of *The Commoner* called out for the support of the war and a speedy termination, warned against any discord or unpatriotic utterances, and encouraged readers to buy liberty bonds, to accept the draft willingly, and to conserve food and goods. Many pacifists were chagrined with his new turnabout. But in consonance with his morally informed populism Bryan demanded the taxing of plutocracy's excessive war profits and denounced its unpatriotic plundering.⁴⁴

In giant letters, the November 1918 issue of *The Commoner* announced "PEACE." Bryan was elated and looked forward to an era without bloodshed. It would come through the abolition of secret alliances, the reduction of armaments, and a universal application of his arbitration treaties, along with continued domestic reform. Although Bryan held certain reservations, he supported the League of Nations and earnestly desired his nation's entry. It was typical of

Tolstoy and Bryan



Secretary of State Bryan signing one of his "cooling-off" treaties with representatives of France, Great Britain, Spain, and China, September 15, 1914. NSHS-B915-375x

him not to see it as the complete product of national ambitions compounded with an unstable good will, an institution unreliable but better than nothing. No, that would not have satisfied this Tolstoyan disciple. He declared the spirit of the League to be infused with the Nazarene's love. He had reason for pleasure: provisions of Article XII of the Covenant were in character with his treaty plans. His country's failure to join the League did not, however, put a

damper on his expectations.

The war advanced the cause of prohibition. Bryan, its most prominent advocate, had looked to Tolstoy for inspiration. As early as 1915 the Russian was cited in *The Commoner* as prominent in the temperance movement in his homeland, a sure sign of this growing worldwide trend.⁴⁵ "Prohibition and the Farmer," which Bryan wrote two years later, exalted the virtues of rural life and charged that alcohol was corrupting the

farmer, the community, politics, and patriotism. Since Tolstoy defined morality as the outward manifestation of a spiritual life, then drinking could not be merely a separate and tolerable vice; it was an offense to God.⁴⁶

Correspondence testifies to Bryan's compassion for sufferers. Like Tolstoy, he received countless letters seeking advice. One correspondent considered him to be more "Christlike" than any man alive for making religion "human

and loveable."⁴⁷ Although he regarded Eastern religions lightly, his respect and equal regard for Catholics and Jews sets him apart from many later fundamentalists. He was a staunch defender of both the Old and New Testaments as equally divinely inspired, respected the Bible's different interpretations, and vehemently denounced anti-Semitism. Many Jews appreciated his tireless efforts. It was the fate of this man of wide sympathies, however, to embark in his latter days on a mission that for generations marked him as a fanatic reactionary at the famous Scopes Trial of 1925.

To understand the mind of Bryan in the last years of his life, go back to World War I. All that was or could be good and pure in life and close to God and earth gave way to the four-year carnage of No Man's Land that produced a cold, mechanistic Bolshevism. It contradicted his hope that a new time of peace was awakening; it horrified the Tolstoyan Christian. It also revealed that his country, which he had believed in with a Midwestern patriot's heart, was no longer an innocent among the corrupt. The United States was now the most powerful country in the world. The forces of materialism were erupting in an increasingly consumerist and standardized economy wrought by complicated machines and colossal factories; great cities were throwing their arrogant shadow over the simple countryside. The fundamental truths of religion and morality were under siege. A sense of alienation tinged with xenophobia reigned in the country. Bryan may have achieved a more profound sense of spirituality, possibly much like that of Tolstoy; his religion, at any rate, was acquiring a more intense expression. People must have a firm belief in God, he felt, and like Tolstoy, he described morality as an outward manifestation of that faith. Anything that jeopardized that communion, he feared, was immoral.⁴⁸ It was therefore the duty of every Christian to defend his faith.

At the core of the new secularism Bryan reiterated was Darwin's theory of

evolution with its projection of a simian prehuman ancestry. Despite his history as a pacifist, Bryan sharpened his sword and polished his armor in this new war. The battle lines were not over a patch of land; they were for God's loving divinity, the souls of people, the Mosaic account of creation, a special destiny of Man, and the imminent universal brotherhood. Without Biblical miracles the world would be devoid of meaning and immortality called into question. Those who espoused evolution were infidels engaged in "insidious attacks . . . upon every vital part of the Word of God." Frederich Nietzsche "carried Darwinianism to its logical conclusion and laid the foundation for the world's bloodiest war."⁴⁹ The same scientists who proclaimed evolution had "mixed the poisonous gases . . . [Their] worldly wisdom . . . made war so hellish."⁵⁰

More and more, Christian fundamentalism marshaled its forces in its fight against the "godless rationalists" even within the fold of its own churches. Bryan battled with the modernists in his own divided Presbyterian denomination. Pastors of any persuasion, he believed, who sought to reconcile God and evolution, were doing greater harm than atheists and should be excised from the church.⁵¹ As Bryan's view of religious liberals hardened, so did their views of him. "I am not nearly so much interested," a minister from Marquette, Michigan, wrote to Bryan, "in how much brute there is back of me as in how much brute there may be in me. In men everywhere, I see incarnations of the pig, the ass, . . . and others. The present condition, not their past history, constitutes the real concern and shame of men. I will tell you what brute I am descended from when you tell me what one you resemble most."⁵²

Some laymen accused Bryan of "preaching a new auto de fe, attempting to establish an inquisition for the trial of science at the bar of theology!"⁵³ Many others cheered him in his fight against the enemy, and his works were quite popular. All forms of communication,

including the new radio, were mustered. It was a fight between farm and city, between the common man and the urban sophisticate. Tolstoy, Bryan observed, had declared that "the 'cultured crowd' regard religion as superstition. [only] good enough for the ignorant. . . . Tolstoy's rebuke to them is the strongest I have read."⁵⁴ Previously Bryan believed in strict separation of church and state, but now the mixing of faith and legislation became more blurred than ever. There was now only black and white, evil and good. Civilization, Bryan exclaimed, could only be gauged by the "moral revolt against the cruel doctrine developed by Darwin."⁵⁵

Nowhere, he argued, was this evil of evolution more present than in America's educational institutions, poisoning children and turning out thousands of agnostics and atheists. Christianity, Bryan declared, was not afraid of scientific facts, even welcomed advances, but must destroy theories based on unsupported guesses. "Tolstoy insists that the science of How to Live is more important than any other science." Children were being taught "that [it] is more important to know the age of rocks than to trust in the 'Rock of Ages.'"⁵⁶ Why should Christian taxpayers allow the Bible to be trampled on by the teachings of Darwin, have Jehovah's creation laughed at, negate the miracles of God, and rob Jesus of his virgin birth, thus relegating him to a descendant of an ape?⁵⁷

In 1925, in the last days of his life, Bryan was in Dayton, Tennessee, to uphold the state's antievolution law and help to prosecute John Scopes, who had violated it. The trial has been described as a circus-like affair. In the legal sense Bryan won, for Scopes was convicted, but the aging lawyer came across as shallow, unable to reconcile morality with fundamentalism. The story has been retold many times, depicted in print, and portrayed on the stage and cinema, and it has given posterity the image of Bryan as an ignorant balloon.

And who was Bryan's archenemy at

Tolstoy and Bryan



Clarence S. Darrow. Courtesy Bryan College, Dayton, Tennessee

Dayton? It was another Tolstoyan, Clarence Darrow, defense attorney for Scopes, who had written *Resist Not Evil*, a book on Tolstoyan nonresistance. For two decades Darrow had debated with Marxists on the virtues of pacifism against the rightness of the class struggle, penned articles on Tolstoyan philosophy, advocated nonviolence, and given numerous lectures on the Russian.⁵⁸ Could each of the two antagonists have thought that he was defending the verities of the inspired teacher?

In Chattanooga, during a respite from the trial on July 19, Darrow gave a lecture on Tolstoy.⁵⁹ Six days later Bryan, in his last conversation with his wife, discussed the sacred Tolstoyan relation between man and God. The next day he died, happy in his belief in God. As Bryan had proclaimed Tolstoy the modern Elijah, so did many memorials eulo-

gize him. Even during his lifetime poems had compared Bryan to Tolstoy.⁶⁰

Bryan's Christianity had not been obscurantist. He was a disciple of one of the most revolutionary moral thinkers of the time, enemy to wealth, privilege, and war. Like his great teacher, he attempted to delve to God's essence. And what he found there was a simple creed of love and service that he expressed more humanely than any other American politician. Just after Tolstoy's death, a global era came to an end. Bryan's death too represented a passing of an American age. An old simple way of life and labor receded before the exigencies of an impersonal science and an impatient automation, inimical to a spirituality, in which Bryan insists is "the foundation upon which civilization rests."⁶¹ A 1909 issue of *The Commoner* carries Tolstoy's "Farewell" message. "The spirit," Tolstoy declared,

lives in all men. . . . And as the spirit is one in all men, it asks for the happiness of all. To wish all men happiness . . . means to love all men. And the more a man loves, the freer and the more joyful is his life. . . . We reach salvation only by realizing that our life does not rest in the body, but in the spirit of God which lives within us . . . each must extend his love . . . to all men. . . . One who truly loves does not perish.⁶²

Notes

¹ Theodore Redpath, *Tolstoy, Studies in Modern European Literature and Thought* (London: Bemis and Bowes, 1960), 6. André Creeson, *León Tolstoi: Sa Vie Sa Œuvre* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950), 75. Special thanks is extended to Lily Griner, Patricia Heron, and Terry Saylor's interlibrary loan staff at the University of Maryland's McKeldin Library (College Park); Mary Wolfskill and her coworkers at the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress; James E. Potter of this journal; and Professors Thomas R. West, Paolo Coleita, and Robert W. Cherny for their insight.

² V. A. D'jakov, "L. N. Tolstoi o zakonomernościakh istoricheskogo protessa. roli lichnosti i narodnykh mass v istorii" (L. N. Tolstoi on the Regularity of the Historical Process, the Role of Personality and People in History), *Voprosy istorii* (Questions of History) 8 (Aug. 1978): 31.

³ W. B. Gallie, *Philosophers of Peace and War*: Kant, Clausewitz, Marx, Engels and Tolstoy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 124.

⁴ Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoy, "Dnevniki i zapisnye knizhki" (Diaries and Notebooks), vol. 51, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow: Gosudarstvo izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1928-1961), 88. (Hereinafter the complete works of Tolstoy will be designated as *Pss*).

⁵ Ibid., "Dnevniki i zapisnye knizhki" (Diaries and Notebooks), *Pss*, 50:92.

⁶ Ibid., "O Znachenii russkoi revoliutsii" (The Meaning of the Russian Revolution), *Pss* 36: 358. 347.

⁷ William Jennings Bryan, "Tolstoy, the Apostle of Love," *The Commoner* 4 (Feb. 19, 1904): 3.

⁸ "Tolstoi on Imperialism," *The Commoner* 1 (Jan. 23, 1901): 6.

⁹ "Tolstoi's Noble Appeal," *The Commoner* 1 (May 3, 1901): 1.

¹⁰ Bryan's wife, Mary Baird Bryan, remained home because she thought she was pregnant and her daughters stayed with her.

¹¹ Bryan, "Russia and Her Czar," *The Commoner* 1 (Feb. 5, 1904): 3.

¹² Peter A. Sergeenko, *Ocherki Tolstoi i ego souremennikov* (Essays, Tolstoy and his Contemporaries) (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo V. M. Sablina, 1911), 213-41.

¹³ As early as 1899 Tolstoy had praised Bryan for his struggle against the imperialistic manicism and the "nasty immorality" of America's war in the Philippines. Tolstoy, Pis'mo, "Gruppe shevdskoj intelligentsii" (Letter, to a Group of Swedish Intellectuals), Jan. 7 or 9, 1899, *Pss* 72: 12-13.

¹⁴ In Bryan's book, *Under Other Flags*, a chapter entitled "Attractions of Farming" refers to Tolstoy. See *Under Other Flags. Travels, Lectures, Speeches* (Lincoln, Neb.: The Woodruff-Collins Printing Co., 1904), 281 and 287-88.

¹⁵ Alexandra Tolstoy, *The Tragedy of Tolstoy*, trans. Elena Varneck (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1933), 146.

¹⁶ Tolstoy, "Predislovie k angliiskoi biograffi Garrisona, sostavlennoi V. G. Chertkovym i F. Khola" (Preface to the English Biography of Garrison, composed by V. G. Chertkov and F. Khola), *Pss* 36: 97-98.

¹⁷ Ibid., Pis'mo, "Vil'iamy Bralany" (Letter, to William Bryan), Feb. 2, 1901, *Pss* 75: 17.

¹⁸ F. Bulgakov, *O Tolstom vospominania i rasskazi* (On Tolstoy: Remembrances and Stories) (Tula: Priokskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1974), 174.

¹⁹ There is no indication why Bryan did not visit Tolstoy again, but the Russian was plagued by declining health during the last years of his life. He died in 1910.

²⁰ "Tolstoy on Government," *The Commoner* 5 (Apr. 7, 1905): 23.

²¹ Tolstoy, Pis'mo, "Raiersony Dzheningsy" (Let-

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ter, to Ryerson Jennings), Sept. 28(?), 1908, *Pss* 78: 231.

²⁰ "Roosevelt and Tolstoy," *The Commoner* 10 (June 18, 1909): 5.

²¹ "Tolstoy," *The Commoner* 10 (Dec. 2, 1910); 2. In the 1910 and 1912 annual Christmas greetings in *The Commoner*, Bryan connects Tolstoyan universal love with that of Jesus: a spiritual continuity between the originator of his beloved religion and its greatest modern exponent.

²² Victoria and Robert O. Case, *We Called It Culture: The Story of Chautauqua* (New York: Doubleday, 1948), 3.

²³ Bryan, *The Prince of Peace* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1914), 7-8.

²⁴ Bryan, *The Value of an Ideal* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1914), 20-22.

²⁵ Bryan, "The Price of a Soul," *Speeches of William Jennings Bryan*, Vol. 2 (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1909), 349-50.

²⁶ Bryan, *The First Commandment* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1917), 11-13. Many of Bryan's religious works, such as *Heart to Heart Appeals*, *Famous Figures of the Old Testament*, *Christ and His Companions*, and *The Making of a Man*, as well as others, cited Tolstoy.

²⁷ Bryan, "Mr. Bryan's Labor Day Speech," *The Commoner* 8 (Sept. 11, 1908): 1-4.

²⁸ Bryan, "The Next Awakening," *The Commoner* 5 (June 16, 1905): 1-3.

²⁹ Bryan, "Mr. Bryan at Lima," *The Commoner* 10 (Feb. 25, 1910): 1-2.

³⁰ Bryan, "Mr. Bryan at Lake Mohonk," *The Commoner* 10 (July 8, 1910) 3.

³¹ William Jennings Bryan, *The Message from Bethlehem* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1914), 20.

³² Arthur S. Link, *Wilson: The Road to the White House* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1947), 527.

³³ Oscar S. Strauss, New York, to Bryan, Mar. 4, 1913, Box 29, Folder 1, William Jennings Bryan Papers, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as Bryan Papers).

³⁴ Cecil Spring Rice, Washington, D.C., to Bryan, Oct. 6, 1914; Box 30, Folder 6, Bryan Papers.

³⁵ Bryan, "Mr. Bryan's Address Before the American Peace Society," *The Commoner* 15 (Jan 1915): 6-7.

³⁶ Bryan, Asheville, N.C., to Woodrow Wilson, Sept. 19, 1914, Box 30, Folder 5, Bryan Papers.

³⁷ Bryan, Washington, D.C. (?) to Woodrow Wilson, Apr. 19, 1915, Box 30, Folder 11, Bryan Papers.

³⁸ Bryan, "Mr. Bryan Resigns as Secretary of State," *The Commoner* 15 (June 1915) 2, and Paolo E. Coletta, *William Jennings Bryan*, vol. 1, *Political Evangelist, 1860-1908* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), 318.

³⁹ "Mr. Bryan's Lecture," *The Commoner* 15 (Sept. 1915): 7, and *Ibid.*, 15 (Oct. 1915): 2.

⁴⁰ "The Duty of a Friend," *The Commoner* 16 (Feb. 1916): 1.

⁴¹ Bryan, Washington, D.C., to Secretary of War Newton D. Baker, Apr. 20, 1917, Box 31, Folder 17, Bryan Papers.

⁴² Bryan, "The President's Appeal" and "The New Revenue Bill," *The Commoner* 18 (June 1918): 1

⁴³ "Worldwide Temperance Wave," *The Commoner* 15 (June 1915): 30.

⁴⁴ Bryan, "Prohibition and the Farmer," *The Commoner* 17 (Sept. 1917): 8.

⁴⁵ Fred Emerson Brooks, San Francisco, to Bryan, May 18, 1917, Box 31, Folder 18, Bryan Papers.

⁴⁶ Bryan, "Tampering with the Mainspring," 40 pamphlet in Box 50, Folder 8, Bryan Papers.

⁴⁷ Bryan to Rev. E. W. Blakeman, Oct. 4, 1921, Box 34, Folder 8, Bryan Papers.

⁴⁸ Bryan, "Tampering with the Mainspring," 57.

⁴⁹ Bryan to Rev. Paul Moore Strayer, Dec. 19, 1921, Box 34, Folder 13, Bryan Papers, and Bryan, *It Is Written* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1924).

⁵⁰ Pastor Horace F. Ferry, Marquette, Michigan, to Bryan, Apr. 16, 1923, Box 37, Folder 10, Bryan Papers.

⁵¹ Undated newspaper article fragment, Edwin Grant Conklin, *The New Orleans* (?), Box 62, Folder 8, Bryan Papers.

⁵² Bryan, "Science vs. Evolution," *The Commoner* 23 (Apr. 1923): 4

⁵³ Bryan, *The Menace of Darwinism*, 15-16; Undated pamphlet in Box 49, Folder 14, Bryan Papers.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 6

⁵⁵ Bryan, *Is the Bible True?* (Chicago: The Bible Institute Colportage Association of Chicago, n.d.), Bryan Papers. From a speech delivered at Ryman Auditorium (Nashville) on Jan. 24, 1924. See also *It Is Written*, Bryan Papers. From a speech delivered at the Southern Bible Conference (Miami) on Feb. 17, 1924.

⁵⁶ See Arthur and Lila Weinberg, *Clarence Darrow: A Sentimental Rebel* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1980). Consult also Box 5, Folder 8, the Clarence S. Darrow Papers, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress.

⁵⁷ Ray Ginger, *Six Days or Forever? Tennessee v. John Thomas Scopes* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), 147.

⁵⁸ Undated newspaper article fragment from Mrs. W. R. Smith, *News* (?), July 22, 191[?]; Bryan Papers, box 60, folder 8

⁵⁹ Telegram, Bryan to William S. Woods, Apr. 5, 1923, Box 37, Folder 8, Bryan Papers

⁶⁰ "Tolstoy's Farewell," *The Commoner* 9 (Dec. 31, 1909): 2-3