

Last Will and Testament

Leo Tolstoy

March 27, 1895

Here is what my will should be, approximately. (Unless I write another, this shall be held valid):

1. I ask that I be interred wherever I die, in the least expensive cemetery, if it is in a town, and in the simplest sort of coffin, like the coffin of a pauper. No flowers, no wreaths, no speeches. If possible, no clergy or mass. Nevertheless, if this should be disagreeable to those in charge of my obsequies, let there be the ordinary burial ceremony, but let it be the least expensive and the simplest possible.
2. My obituary is not to be published in the newspapers.
3. All my papers are to be given for revision to my wife, assisted by V. G. Chertkov and my daughters, Tatiana and Marie. (Erasures have been made by me. My daughters are not to concern themselves with these.) I relieve my sons from the discharge of this work, not because I do not love them — God be thanked, I have loved them, in these last times more and more, and I know they love me — but because they do not know my ideas very well. They have not followed the development of these ideas, and might have personal conceptions of things which might lead them to preserve what should not be preserved and eliminate what should not be eliminated.

I ask that the journal of my unmarried life be destroyed, after whatever is of value has been extracted from it. Likewise, as to my diary after marriage, I ask that whatever might be disagreeable to any one be destroyed. Chertkov promised to do this during my lifetime and, owing to his great love for me — which I do not deserve — and to his great moral sense, I am sure that he will do this very well.

I am asking that the diary of my unmarried life be destroyed not because I wish to hide from men the record of an evil life — mine was the ordinary, miserable life of all young people without principle — but because this diary, wherein I have set down only the things that tormented me — consciousness of sin — gives a false and one-sided impression. Otherwise my diary is to remain as it stands. At least, one may see from it that, despite the vulgarity and ignominy of my youth, I was not abandoned by God, and that, as I grew towards old age, I began to understand Him a little and love Him. I am writing all this not because I attribute a more or less great importance to my papers, but because I know already that,

immediately after my death, my works will be printed and discussed, and that importance will be attributed to them. And, this being so, then at least my works shall not be such as to harm men. As to my other papers, I beg those who will classify them not to print them all, but only whatever part of them may be useful to mankind.

4. I request my heirs to restore to the public my rights in my old works — ten volumes — as well as my rights in the “Alphabet”; in other words, I request them to renounce author’s rights. I request this, but do not impose it upon them as a testator’s wish. It would be well so to do; it would be well for you if you acted thus. But if you do not act thus, that is your concern; it means that you are not yet ripe for such action. The facts that my works have been sold during the last nine years has been for me the most painful thing in my life.
5. Moreover — and this is the most important of all — I request all my friends, near and far, not to praise me (I know that they will do it, because it is done even during my lifetime and in the least praiseworthy manner). If, however, people should wish to concern themselves with my writings, let them pay heed to those passages therein which, I know, the power of God spoke through me, and let them draw profit therefrom for the concerns of their own lives.

There have been moments when I felt myself the preacher of the will of God. Often I was so impure, so full of selfish passions, that the light of His truth was obscured by my darkness. But, at times, this truth passed through me, and these were the happiest moments of my life. God grant that its passage through me may not have soiled this truth, and that men, despite the impurity which it has received from me, may, nevertheless, be enabled to have this truth enter into them. It is only herein that my writings have importance. It is for this reason that I am only to be blamed for them, and not praised. That is all.

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