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A Calendar of Wisdom. Daily Thoughts to Nourish the Soul. Written and Selected from the World's Sacred Texts (Book Review)

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Leo Tolstoy. *A Calendar of Wisdom. Daily Thoughts to Nourish the Soul. Written and Selected from the World's Sacred Texts.* Trans. Peter Sekirin. New York: Scribner, 1997. 378 pp., \$19.50 (cloth).

Tolstoy spent over fifteen years collecting “the wisdom of the centuries in one book” (6). He began compiling this wisdom in written form, as quotes from the world’s sacred texts and from famous (as well as obscure) artists, in 1902–1903. The first version of the resulting book was published in 1904. It was reprinted three times during his lifetime, variously titled *Thoughts of Wise Men*, *A Circle of Reading*, or *The Way of Life*. It is this early version of the book that made it into the 1957 Soviet edition of Tolstoy’s collected works as *Krug chteniia: izbrannye, sobrannye i raspolozhennye na kazhdy den’ L’vom Tolstym mysli mnogikh pisatelei ob istine, zhizni, i povedenii*. However, between 1904 and 1907 Tolstoy worked on a substantially enlarged, revised version, which differed significantly from the first. Now the thoughts were grouped by topic—God, Intellect, Law, Love, Divine Nature of Mankind, Faith, Temptations, Word, Self-Sacrifice, etc.—and ordered as themes for each day, week, and month. In addition, he included a short story for the end of each week, and called these *The Sunday Reading Stories*. It is this second, complete version, entitled *A Calendar of Wisdom*, which Peter Sekirin has translated into English for the first time. Only *The Sunday Reading Stories* (52 vignettes in all) are not included in this translation.

The book begins with January 1. The reading for each day is contained on one page, and generally consists of one to three short quotes attributed to one of Tolstoy’s “great thinkers,” as well as a meditation authored by Tolstoy himself. In the original, Tolstoy highlighted one quote which most succinctly conveyed the day’s theme; in this book these passages are italicized. Sekirin has provided a short preface explaining the history of the *Calendar*’s writing and publication. There is also a helpful name index with a biographical sentence identifying each thinker who is quoted (from Achinsky, Daniel to Zoroaster). The full version here translated was banned in the Soviet Union, and reappeared in post-Soviet Russian for the first time only in 1995, when it promptly sold 300,000 copies.

A Calendar of Wisdom will be of considerable interest to students of Tolstoy who do not have access to the 1995 Russian language version, but it is not meant to be a scholarly edition, and it contains no bibliographical notes on the original Russian texts. Peter Sekirin’s translation is accurate and graceful, and Scribner has taken care to produce an elegant, gift-size volume. Please note that *A Calendar of Wisdom* may be located in the “Inspirational” section of your bookstore, alphabetically placed between Toler (“Little Devotional Book”) and

Toulson ("A Celtic Year"). Let us hope that in this location it will find the mass audience that Tolstoy intended it to reach.

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