

FAMINE OR NO FAMINE?

by Leo Tolstoy

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This winter I received a letter from Mrs. Sokolov, describing the want of the peasants in the Government of Voronezh. This letter, with a note from me,¹

¹ Tolstoy's note to the editor of the Russian Gazette runs as follows :

" Dear Sir – I think that the publication of the enclosed private letter from a person who knows the peasantry well, and correctly describes its condition in her own locality, would be useful. The condition of the peasants in the locality described forms no exception ; precisely the same, as I know full well, is the condition of the peasants in certain localities of Kozlôv, Eléts, Novosi'lsk, Chérnski, Efrémov, Zemlyânski, Nizhnedyevftsk, and other counties of the black earth zone. The person writing the letter did not even think of its being published, and only consented at the request of her friends.

" It is true, the condition of the majority of our peasantry is such that it is often very hard to draw a line between what may be called a famine and what a normal condition, and that the aid which is particularly needed in the present year might have been needed, even if not to such a degree, last year or at any other time ; it is true, philanthropic aid to the population is a very difficult matter, because it frequently provokes the desire for making use of this aid in those who could get along without this aid ; it is true, what private individuals can do is but a drop in the sea of the peasant distress ; it is also true that aid given in the form of eating-houses, of the lowered price of corn or of its distribution, of the feeding of the cattle, and so forth, is only a palliative and does not remove the fundamental causes of the calamity. All that is true, but it is also true that aid given in time may save the life of an old man, or a child, may change the despair and enmity of a ruined man into faith in the good and in the brotherhood of man. And, what is most important, it is an indubitable truth that every man of our circle, who, instead of thinking of nothing— but amusements, such as theatres, concerts, subscription dinners, races, exhibitions, and so forth, will think also of that extreme want, as compared with the showy life of the cities, a want in which just now live many, many brothers of ours, will, if he tries, however awkwardly, to sacrifice even a small portion of his pleasures, unquestionably aid himself in the most important matter in the

world, – in the rational comprehension of life and in the fulfilment of his human destiny in it.”

I turned over to the Russian Gazette, and since then several persons have begun to send to me contributions for the aid of needy peasants. These small contributions – two hundred roubles– I directed to a good acquaintance of mine in Zemlyanski County ; some monthly contributions of Smolensk physicians and other small contributions I sent to Chérnski County of the Government of Tula, to my son and my wife, requesting them to distribute the aid in their locality. But in April I received new and quite considerable contributions : Mrs. Mévius sent four hundred roubles ; three hundred roubles were collected in small sums, and S. T. Morozov sent one thousand roubles, – in all there were about two thousand roubles, and, as I did not think I had the right to refuse to act as a mediator between the contributors and the needy, I decided to go to the spot, in order to distribute the aid in the best manner possible.

As in the year 1891, I considered the best form of aid to consist in eating-houses, because only with the establishment of eating-houses is it possible to provide good daily food for old men and women and the children of sick people, which, I assume, is the wish of the contributors. This end is not attained with the distribution of provisions, because every good householder, having received some flour, will first of all mix it with the provender of the horse with which he has to plough (and in doing so he will act wisely, because he has to plough the soil on which to raise foodstuffs for his family, not only for this year, but also for next), while the feeble members of the family will not get enough to eat during this year, even as before the distribution, so that the aim of the contributors will not be attained.

Besides, only in the form of eating-houses for the feeble members of the family is there any limit at which one can stop. In the personal distribution the aid goes to the household, but, to satisfy the demands of a ruined peasant household, it is absolutely impossible to decide what is urgently needed, and what is not urgently needed : urgently needed are a horse, a cow, the release of the pawned fur coat, the taxes, seeds, a house. Thus, in making personal distributions it becomes necessary to give arbitrarily, at haphazard, or the same amount to all alike, without any distinction. For this reason I determined to distribute the aid in the form of eating-houses, as in the years 1891 and 1892.

In determining the most needy families and the number of persons in each, who were to be admitted to the eating-houses, I was guided, as before, by the following considerations : (1) the number of cattle, (2) the number of allotments, (3) the number of the members of the family earning wages, (4) the number of eaters, and (5) the extraordinary misfortunes that had befallen the family, such as fire, sickness in the family, the death of a horse, and so forth.

The first village to which I went was old, familiar Spasskoe, which used to belong to Ivan Sergyéevich Turgenev. Upon talking with the elder and some old men concerning the condition of the peasants of this village, I convinced myself that it was far from being as bad as had been the condition of the peasants among whom we had established eating-houses in 1891.

On every farm there were horses, cows, sheep, and potatoes, and there were no dilapidated houses ; thus, judging from the condition of the Spasskoe peasants, I thought the rumours about the distress of the present year might be exaggerated.

But a visit paid to the next village of Malaya Gubarevka and to other villages, which were pointed out to me as being very poverty-stricken, convinced me that Spasskoe was under exclusively fortunate conditions, through good allotments and through the accidentally good crop of the year before.

Thus, in the first village to which I went, in Malaya Gubarevka, there were four cows and two horses to ten farms, two families were out begging alms, and the distress of all the inhabitants was terrible.

About the same, though a little better, is the condition of the villages of Bolshaya Gubarevka, Matsnevo, Protâ-sovo. Chapkino, Kukuevka, Gushchino, Khmyélinski, Sheldmovo, Lopashchino, Sidorovo, Mikhaylov Brod, Bobrik, the two Kamenkas.

In all these villages the people do not get enough bread to eat, but the bread is pure and not mixed, as was the case in the year 1891. Nor are the people, at least the majority of them, without boiled vegetables,—millet, cabbage, potatoes. Their food consists of herb soup, whitened with milk if they have a cow, and not whitened if they have none, and bread alone. In all these villages the majority have sold or pawned everything that can be sold or pawned.

Thus the dire distress in the surrounding country — in the radius of seven to eight versts — is so great, that, after having established fourteen eating-houses, we have been every day receiving requests for aid from other villages that are in the same plight.

What eating-houses are established are doing well — the cost comes to about one rouble fifty kopeks for each man per month, and, apparently, they satisfy the aim we had in view of supporting the life and health of the feeble members of the most needy families.

Last night I went to the village of Gushchino, which consists of forty-nine farms, twenty-four of which are without horses. It was supper-time. In the yard, under two penthouses, which had been cleaned up, eighty diners sat about five tables : old men, alternating with old women, sat on benches around large tables, and children sat around small tables, on blocks of wood with boards thrown over them. The diners had just finished their first course (potatoes with kvas), and the second course — cabbage soup — was

being brought in. The women with dippers poured the steaming, well-cooked soup into wooden bowls ; the eating-house-keeper, with a round loaf and a knife in his hands, went from table to table and, pressing the loaf against his breast, cut off and handed out slices of fine, fresh, fragrant bread to those who had eaten up theirs.¹ The householder's wife and one of those who dine there tend on the adults, and the householder's young daughter tends on the children.

The people who were eating their supper were for the most part emaciated, lean, scanty-bearded, gray-haired, and bald-headed old men in threadbare garments, and wizened old women. There was an expression of calm and satisfaction upon all the faces. All these men were apparently in that peaceful and joyous frame of mind, and even in that state of excitement, which is produced by the use of sufficient food after having been deprived of it for a long time. One could hear the sounds of eating, a subdued conversation, and now and then the laughter at the children's tables. There were present two transient mendicants, and the eating-house-keeper excused himself for having admitted them to supper.

Everything proceeded in an orderly and quiet fashion, as though this order had existed for ages. From Gushchino I went to the village of Gnyévishchevo, from which peasants had come two or three days before to ask for aid.

¹ We had succeeded in buying on the southeastern road two carloads of flour at seventy-five kopeks, when it was at ninety kopeks in our place, and the flour turned out to be so unusually good that the women who set the bread cannot say enough in its praise,— it kneads so well, — and the diners say that the bread is just as good as cake. —Author's Note.

This village, like Gubarevka, consists of ten farms. The ten farms have together four horses and four cows ; there are hardly any sheep ; the houses are all so old and rickety that they barely stand up.

All are poor, and all beg to be aided. " If we could only satisfy the children," say the women. " They ask for pap, and there is nothing to give them, and so they fall asleep without eating anything."

I know that there is a grain of exaggeration in this, but what a peasant in a caftan torn at the shoulder says is certainly not any exaggeration, but the truth. " If we could just shove off two or three of them from the bread," says he. " As it is, I have sold my last blouse in the city (the fur coat has been there for a long time), and brought home three puds for eight people, — how long will that last ? And I do not know what to take down next." I asked him to change me three roubles, but not a rouble in money could be found in the whole village.

It is evidently necessary to establish an eating-house even here. The same, apparently, has to be done in the two villages from which

peasants came with requests.

We are, besides, informed that in the southern part of Chéruski County, on the border of Efremov County, the distress is very great, and that so far no succour has been offered. It would seem to be obvious that the matter should be continued and expanded, and this is possible, since of late other considerable contributions have been received: five hundred roubles from Princess Kudashev, one thousand roubles from Mrs. Mansurov, two thousand roubles from dramatic people.

But it turns out that it is almost impossible, either to expand, or even to continue the matter. It is impossible to continue it for the following reasons : The governor of Orel does not allow any eating-houses to be opened,— (1) without the consent of the local curatorship, (2) without discussing the question of the opening of each individual eating-house with the County Council chief, and (3) without a previous statement to the governor as to the number of eating-houses that are to be opened in a given locality. So, too, a rural officer has come from the Government of Tula, demanding that no eating-houses be established without the governor's permission. Besides, all the local inhabitants are forbidden to take part or aid in the establishment of eating-houses without the governor's permission ; but without the participation of such assistants, who are specially occupied with the complex and troublesome business of the eating-houses, their establishment is impossible. Thus, in spite of the unquestionable distress of the people, in spite of the means furnished by contributors for alleviating the distress, our cause cannot only not be expanded, but is in danger of being completely interrupted.

Consequently the above mentioned sums, received by me of late, amounting to 3,500 roubles, and a few other smaller contributions remain unexpended and will be returned to the contributors, if they do not wish to give them for any other use.

Such is my personal affair ; now I shall try to answer the general questions to which my activity has brought me, — questions which, to judge from the papers, have interested society of late.

These questions are : Is there a famine this year, or not ? What is to be done that the distress be not repeated and may not demand special measures for its alleviation ?

To the first question I will answer as follows :

There exist statistical investigations, from which it may be seen that Russians do not get within thirty per cent, of what a man needs for his normal nutrition ; we have, besides, some information as to this, that the young men of the black earth zone have for the last twenty years less and less satisfied the demands for a good constitution for military service ; and the census has shown that the increment of the population, which twenty years ago was the largest in the agricultural zone, has been steadily diminishing,

until at the present time it has reached zero in these Governments. But even without studying the statistical data we need only to compare the average shrivelled-up, sallow-faced agricultural peasant of the central zone with the same peasant when he has come to be a janitor, a coachman, – when he gets good food, – and the motions of this janitor or coachman, and the work which he is able to accomplish, with the motions and the work of a peasant who lives at home, to see to what extent the insufficient food weakens the strength of this peasant.

When, as formerly used to be done, and even now is being done by unreasoning farmers, cattle are kept for the sake of the manure, being fed in a cold yard on anything there may be, only to be kept from dying, it happens that of all these animals only those which are in full strength' endure the strain without danger to their organism ; but the old, the feeble, and the half-grown animals either die off or, if they remain alive, do so at the expense of their young ones and of their health, while the young animals remain alive at the expense of their growth and their constitution.

In precisely this condition are the Russian peasants of the black earth zone. So that, if by the word " famine " we understand such underfeeding that in consequence of it men are immediately assailed by disease and death, as, to judge from descriptions, was lately the case in India, no such famine existed in the year 1891, or in the present year.

But if by famine we mean such underfeeding as does not lead immediately to death, but keeps men alive, though they live badly, dying before their time, becoming maimed, ceasing to multiply, and degenerating, such a famine has existed for twenty years for the majority of the black earth centre, and is particularly severe this present year.

Such is my answer to the first question. To the second question, as to what is the cause of it, my answer consists in this, that the cause of it is spiritual and not material.

Military people know what is meant by the spirit of the army; they know that this intangible element is the first condition of success and that in the absence of this element all other elements become inactive. Let the soldiers be well dressed, fed, armed ; let the position be as strong as possible, – the battle will be lost if that intangible element called the spirit of the army be lacking. The same is true of a struggle with Nature. The moment the masses lack the spirit of alacrity, assurance, hope of a greater and ever greater amelioration of their condition, and, on the contrary, are possessed by a consciousness of the vanity of their efforts, by despondency, – the masses will not subdue Nature, but will be subdued by it. Precisely such is in our time the condition of all our peasant class, and especially of those in the agricultural centre. They feel that their condition as agriculturists is bad, almost hopeless, and, having adapted themselves to this hopeless condition, they no longer struggle with it, but live on and do only as much as

the instinct of self-preservation demands of them. Besides, the very wretchedness of the condition to which they have arrived intensifies their dejection of spirit. The lower the masses descend in their economic well-being, like a weight on a lever, the more difficult it is for them to rise, and the peasants feel this and, as it were, let everything go to the dogs. "What's the use?" they say. "We don't mean to fatten, - we just want to live!"

There are very many symptoms of this dejection of spirit. The first and foremost one is the complete indifference to all spiritual interests. The religious question does not exist at all in the agricultural centre, not at all

because the peasant firmly holds to Orthodoxy (on the contrary, all the reports and all the statements of the priests confirm the fact that the people are getting more and more indifferent to the church), but because they have no interest in spiritual questions.

The second symptom is their inertia, their unwillingness to change their habits and their condition. During all these years, while in other Governments steel ploughs, steel harrows, grass seeding, the planting of costly plants, cattle-raising, and even mineral fertilizers have come into general use, - in the centre everything has remained as of old, with wooden ploughs, three field divisions, cut up by wolds of the width of a harrow, and all the methods and customs from the days of Kurik. There are even the fewest migrations from the black earth centre.

The third symptom is the contempt for agricultural labour, - not indolence, but limp, cheerless, unproductive labour, as an emblem of which may serve a well from which the water is not drawn by a sweep or by a wheel, as used to be done formerly, but simply by means of a rope, with the aid of the hands, and is brought out in a leaky bucket, from which one-third of the water is lost before it reaches the place where needed. Such is almost all the labour of a black earth peasant, who, leaving clods of earth, manages somehow in sixteen hours, with the help of a nag that barely drags along her feet, to plough up a field which, with a good horse, good food, and a good plough, he could do in half a day. With this the desire to forget oneself is natural, and so the use of liquor and tobacco is becoming more and more widespread, and of late mere boys have taken to drinking and smoking.

The fourth symptom of the dejection of spirit is the lack of obedience of sons to their parents, of younger brothers to their elder brothers, the neglect to send money earned elsewhere back to the family, and the tendency of the younger generations to free themselves from the hard, hopeless life in the country and to find something to do in the cities.

As a striking symptom of the dejection of spirit, which has come about during the last seven years, has appeared to us the fact that in many villages adult and apparently well-to-do peasants begged to be admitted to the eating-houses, and attended them, if permitted to

do so. That was not the case in 1891. Here, for example, is a case which shows all the degree of poverty and lack of confidence in their own powers, at which the peasants have arrived.

In the village of Shushmino of Chérnski County, a landed proprietress has been selling land to the peasants through the bank. She demands of them ten roubles per desyatna, dividing the sum into two payments of five roubles each, giving them the land all sowed in and two chétverts of oats for the summer sowing. And in spite of these strikingly advantageous conditions the peasants hesitate and undertake nothing.

Thus the answer to my second question consists in this, that the condition in which the peasants are now is due to their having lost their alacrity, the confidence in their strength, the hope of bettering their condition, – to their having become dejected.

And the answer to the third question as to how to succour the peasants in their wretched condition results from this second answer. To aid the peasants, one thing is needed, and that is, to raise their spirit, to remove everything which oppresses them.

What oppresses the spirit of the masses is the nonrecognition of their human dignity by those who govern them, the assumption that a peasant is not a man, like any one else, but a coarse, irrational being, who must be protected and guided in every matter, and so, under the guise of caring for him, a complete restriction of his freedom and debasement of his personality.

Thus, in the most important, the religious relation, every peasant feels himself to be, not a free member of his church, who freely chooses or at least recognizes the faith professed by him, but a slave of this church, who is obliged without murmuring to carry out all the demands made upon him by his religious chiefs, who are sent to him and put over him independently of his desire or choice. That this is an important cause of the oppressed condition of the masses is confirmed by the fact that at all times and everywhere the spirit of the peasants, when they free themselves from the despotism of the church and become what is called sectarians, immediately rises, and immediately, without exception, their economic well-being is established.

Another pernicious manifestation of this concern for the masses is the exclusive laws for the peasants, which in reality reduce themselves to the absence of all laws and the full arbitrariness of the officials detailed to rule the peasants.

For the peasants there nominally exist certain special laws, in relation to the ownership of land, the allotments, the inheritance, and all their obligations, but in reality there is an incredible hodge-podge of peasant decrees, illustrations, common law, cassation rulings, and so forth, in consequence of which the peasants quite justly feel themselves to be in absolute dependence on the arbitrariness of their innumerable superiors.

Now the peasants recognize as their superiors, not only the hundred-man, the elder, the township chief, and the scribe, but also the rural judge, and the rural officer, and the rural magistrate, and the insurance agent, and the civil engineer, and the mediator in the allotments, and the veterinary surgeon, and his assistant, and the doctor, and the priest, and the judge, and the investigating magistrate, and every official, and even the landed proprietor, – every gentleman, because he knows from experience that every such gentleman may do with him what he pleases. But what most dejects the spirits of the masses, though this is not visible, is the disgraceful torture with rods, – disgraceful, of course, not to its victims, but to its participants and instigators, – which, like the sword of Damocles, hangs over every peasant.

Thus, in reply to the three questions put in the beginning, as to whether there is any famine or not, what is the cause of the people's distress, and what ought to be done, in order to succour this distress, my answers are as follows : there is no famine, but a chronic underfeeding of the whole population, which has been lasting for twenty years and is getting worse all the time, and which is particularly noticeable this year, in connection with the poor crops of last year, and which will be even worse than that of last year. There is no famine, but a far worse condition. It is as though a physician, upon being asked whether the patient has the typhus, should answer, "No, he has no typhus, – he has rapidly developing consumption."

My answer to the second question consists in this, that the cause of the wretchedness of the people's condition is not of a material, but of a spiritual nature, that the chief cause is their dejection of spirit, so that, so long as the masses will not be uplifted in spirit, they will not be aided by any external measures, nor by the ministry of agriculture and all its inventions, nor by exhibitions, nor by agricultural schools, nor by the change of the tariff, nor by the abolition of the emancipation payments (which ought to have been done long ago, since the peasants have long ago paid more than what they have borrowed, if the present rate of percentage be applied), nor by the removal of duties from iron and machinery, nor by the now favourite, approved remedy for all diseases, – the parish schools, – they will not be aided by anything, if the condition of their mind remains the same. I do not say that all these measures are not useful ; but they become useful only when the spirit of the masses is uplifted and the masses are consciously and freely desirous of using them.

My answer to the third question – as to what to do in order that this distress may not be repeated – consists in this, that it is necessary, I do not say to respect, but to stop despising and insulting the masses by treating them as beasts ; it is necessary to give them freedom of belief ; it is necessary to submit them to general, and not especial laws, – not to the arbitrariness of County Council chiefs ; it is necessary to give them freedom of study, freedom of reading, freedom of migration, and, above all, to

take off that disgraceful brand, which lies upon the past and the present reigns, – the permission to practise that savage torture, the Hogging of adults for no other reason than that they belong to the peasant class.

If I were told, " You mean the good of the masses, so choose one of these two things, – give all the ruined people three horses, two cows, three manured desyatfnas, and a stone house for every farm, or only the freedom of religious instruction, and migration, and the abolition of all the special laws," I should without hesitancy choose the second, because I am convinced that, no matter what material benefits are conferred on the peasants, while they are left with the same clergy, the same parish schools, the same Crown saloons, the same army of officials, who pretend to be concerned for their well-being, they will in twenty years again have spent everything and will be left as poor as they were. But if the peasants are freed from all trammels and all humiliations which oppress them, they will in twenty years acquire that wealth which is offered them, and much more than that.

The reason I think so is, in the first place, because I have always found more intelligence and actual knowledge, such as men need, among the peasants than among the officials, and so I think that the peasants will discover more quickly and in a better way what they need most ; in the second place, because the peasants, whose welfare is the subject of concern, know better what it consists in than the officials, who more than anything else are concerned for the payment of their salaries ; and, in the third place, because the experience of life shows constantly and without fail that the more the peasants are subjected to the influence of officials, as is the case at the centres, the more do they become impoverished, and, on the contrary, the farther the peasants live away from officials, as, for example, in Siberia, in the Governments of Samara, Orenburg, Vyatka, Vologda, Oldnetsk, the greater, without exception, is their welfare.

Such are the thoughts and sentiments which my familiarity with the distress of the peasants has evoked in me, and I considered it my duty to give expression to them, in order that sincere people, who really want to repay the masses for everything which we have been receiving from them, might not waste their efforts in vain upon an activity of secondary importance, which frequently is false, but might use all their efforts upon that without which no aid can be effective, – upon the abolition of everything which crushes the spirit of the masses and upon the establishment of everything which might arouse it.

May 26, 1898.

Before sending off this article, I decided to go down to Efrémov County to visit some of the localities, of whose wretchedness I had heard from people who inspired the fullest confidence.

On my way down I had to cross the whole length of Chérnski County. The crop of rye in the locality in which I lived, that is, in the northern part of Chérnski and Mtsénski Counties, has been very poor this year, worse than last, but what I saw on my way to Efrémov County surpassed all my most sombre expectations.

The locality which I traversed, – about thirty-five versts in length, – from Gremyachevo to the borders of Efrémov and Bogoroditsk Counties, and for about twenty versts in width, as I have been told, a terrible calamity awaits the peasants in this year and in next. The rye on the whole extent of this quadrangle, amounting to about one hundred thousand desyatinas, is completely lost. As I travelled a verst, two, ten, twenty versts, I saw on both sides of the road nothing but orache on the land of the proprietors, and even no orache on the land of the peasants. Thus the condition of the peasants of this locality during next year (and I have been told that the rye was a complete failure in other localities as well) will be incomparably worse than this year.

I am speaking only of the condition of the peasants, and not of that of the agriculturists in general, because it is only for the peasants, who live directly on the corn, especially on the rye, of their fields, that the failure of the rye crop has a decisive significance, as a question of life and death.

The moment a peasant has an insufficiency of his own corn for the whole house, or for a large part of it, and corn is expensive, as in the present year (at about a rouble), his condition threatens to become desperate, like the condition, let us say, of an official who has lost his place and salary, and who continues to support his family in the city.

To exist, an official without a salary must either spend his provisions or sell his chattels, and every day of his life brings him nearer to complete ruin. Even so a peasant, who is obliged to purchase expensive corn above a certain amount that is secured by a definite income, is doomed, but with this difference, that, while an official, falling lower and lower, is not during his lifetime deprived of the chance of getting another place and improving his condition, a peasant, in losing his horse, his field, his seed, is absolutely deprived of the possibility of bettering his condition.

In such a threatening condition are the majority of the peasants of this locality ; but next year this condition will not merely be threatening, – for the majority nothing but ruin will ensue.

And so aid, both from the government and from private sources, will be indispensable during next year, and yet, just now, the most energetic measures are being taken in the Governments of Orél and Ryazan, and elsewhere, for counteracting all private endeavour in any form whatsoever. It is evident that these measures are meant to be universal and constant. Thus, in Efrémov County, whither I went, no outsiders whatsoever are allowed to furnish aid to the needy. A bakery, which had been opened by a person who arrived with

contributions from the Free Economic Society, was closed, and the person himself was sent away, as had been other persons who had come there before him. It is assumed that there is no distress in this county and that no aid is needed. Thus, though I could not for personal reasons carry out my desire and visit Efremov County, my travel thither would have been useless and would have produced unnecessary complications.

In Chérnski County the following took place during my absence, as my son told me : the police authorities, arriving in a village where there were eating-houses, forbade the peasants to go for their dinners and suppers to the eating-houses ; to be sure of the execution of their order, the tables on which people dined were broken up, and the police authorities calmly went away, without giving the hungry people anything in place of the piece of bread which was taken from them, except the command of unconditional obedience. It is hard to make out what is going on in the heads and hearts of others, of those people who consider it necessary to prescribe such measures and to execute them, that is, who verily do not know what they do, – to take the bread of alms out of the mouths of the hungry and sick, of old men and children. I know those considerations which are brought forward in defence of these measures : " In the first place, it is necessary to prove that the condition of the population entrusted to our care is not so bad as the people of the opposite party wish to represent ; in the second place, every institution (eating-houses and bakeries are institutions) must be subjected to the control of the government, though there was no such control in the years 1891 and 1892; in the third place, the direct and close relations of people who are aiding the masses may evoke in them undesirable thoughts and sentiments." But all these considerations, even if they were true, – they are all false, – are so trifling and insignificant that they can have no meaning in comparison with what is done by the eating-houses and the bakeries that distribute bread to the needy.

The whole matter stands like this : there are certain people who – we shall not say, are dying, but are in want; there are others, who live in abundance, and who from a kind heart give this abundance to others ; there are still others who wish to be mediators between the two and who give their labour for this purpose.

Can such activities be harmful to any one ? and can it be part of the government's duty to counteract them ?

I can understand why the soldier on guard in the Boro-vitski Gate should have kept me from giving anything to a mendicant, and why he paid no attention to my reference to the Gospel, asking me whether I had read the military regulations ; but a governmental institution cannot ignore the Gospel and the demands of the most primitive morality, that is, that men should aid other men. A government exists for no other reason than that it should remove everything which interferes with such aid.

Thus the government has no grounds whatsoever for counteracting such

an activity. And if the falsely directed organs of the government should demand submission to such a prohibition, it behooves every private individual not to submit to such a demand.

When the rural judge, who came to us, told me that it would not be much for me to petition the governor for the permission to establish eating-houses, I answered him that I could not do so, because I did not know such a law as would prohibit the establishment of eating-houses : and if there existed such, I could not submit to it, because, in submitting to such a law, I might to-morrow be put to the necessity of submitting to the prohibition of distributing Hour or giving alms without the permission of the government, whereas the right to give alms has been established by the highest authority and could not be put aside by any other authority.

It is possible to close the eating-houses and bakeries, and send away from the county those men who came to succour the population, but it is impossible to keep the men who have been sent away from one county from living in another with their friends or in a peasant hut and serving the people by any other means, still continuing to "ive their means and labours in the service of the people. It is impossible to fence off one class of people from another. Every attempt at such a fencing off produces the same consequences which this fencing off intends to avoid.

It is impossible to break up thq intercourse among people : it is only possible to impair the regular current of this intercourse and to give it a harmful direction, where it might have been beneficent. What can succour the people in the present, as in any other human calamity, is only the spiritual elevation of the people (by the people I do not mean the peasants alone, but all the working people and the wealthy classes as well) ; but the elevation of the people can take place in only one direction, – in a greater and ever greater union of the people, and so, to aid the masses, this union has to be encouraged, and not interfered with. Only in such a greater fraternal union than before will the present and the expected calamity of the next year be overcome, and the well-being of the decaying and ever more decaying peasantry be raised, and the repetition of the distresses of the years 1891 and 1892 and of the present year be averted.

June 4, 1898.