

LETTERS ON THE FAMINE

by Leo Tolstoy

Translated from the Original Russian and edited by Leo Wiener
Assistant Professor of Slavic Languages at Harvard University

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

The " Letters on the Famine" appeared in Russia in the years 1891 and 1892, and later, in 1895, in Switzerland ; in the latter edition many passages omitted or corrupted by the censor are given in full, but evidently other variants are due to a revision, no doubt by Tolstoy himself. The letters are here translated from the Swiss edition ; but all noteworthy divergent readings in the Russian edition which are not obviously due to the censor are given, when short, in brackets in the text, otherwise at the foot of the page, and are in either case followed by the letter R. The Swiss edition is preceded by the following introduction :

" ' The Letters on the Famine' were written by Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoy in Byegich&vka, during the very heat of his activity in arranging free eating-houses for the starving.

" At first, this article in a brief extract, thanks to the conditions of the censorship, appeared in the Weekly Books; then it appeared in an English translation, and only later, in a translation from the English, in the columns of the Moscow Gazette.

" The question as to how this exploit of the Moscow Gazette happened remains unexplained, but the consequence of the appearance of the article ' On the Famine' was this, that the administration of the city of Moscow was for some reason very much provoked by it, and began to threaten to expel Lev Nikolaevich's family from Russia.

" Under the influence of these threats, Countesses Sofya Andreevna and Tatyana Lvovna begged their husband and father to give the administration the statement demanded of him, and upon this occasion Lev Nikolaevich wrote his wife the letter which is given below."

TOLSTOY'S LETTER TO HIS WIFE

I see from your tone that I am guilty of something and that I have

to justify myself before somebody.

This tone must not be permitted.

I have for twelve years been writing what I think and what can please neither the government nor the ruling classes, and I have not been writing this accidentally, but consciously, and I not only do not intend to justify myself in this, but even hope that those who want me to justify myself will themselves try, if not to justify themselves, at least to clear themselves of what not I, but their whole life accuses them of.

In this particular case this is what is taking place: the government establishes an insipid, illegal censorship, which keeps people's thoughts from appearing in their real light, and so the involuntary result of it is that they appear abroad in a distorted form.

The government becomes agitated and, instead of honestly and openly investigating the matter, hides itself behind the censorship, at the same time pretends to be insulted, and takes the liberty of accusing others, and not itself.

Now what I have written in the article about the famine is a part of what I have been writing and saying in every manner possible for the last twelve years, and what I will say to my very death, and what everybody who is enlightened and honest in the whole world has been saying with me, what the heart of every uncorrupted

man says, and what that Christianity says which those profess who are horrified.

It is possible to keep quiet. Or, if not to keep quiet, it is possible to accuse, not the Moscow Gazette, which is not in the least interesting, and not men, but those conditions of life, with which everything is possible, which is possible with us.

Observe also that my writings, in which my views are expressed, exist in thousands of copies in all kinds of languages, and suddenly, as the result of some mysterious letters which have appeared in an English newspaper, all have suddenly come to understand what kind of a bird I am!

This is simply ridiculous!

Only those ignorant people, of whom the most ignorant are those who constitute the court, can fail to know what I have been writing and thinking; only they can think that such views as mine can change in one day and become revolutionary.

All this is ridiculous, and it is degrading and offensive for me to discuss matters with such people.

I am afraid I shall be accused of pride, but that is unjust. It is not my pride, but those foundations by which I live that cannot bend to the demands of non-Christian men.

I do not defend myself and do not feel insulted for my own sake, but for those foundations by which I live.

I write the statement and sign it, because, as Grote justly writes, the truth must always be established, if that is necessary.

But those who tear portraits have had no business to possess them.
Lev Tolstoy.

LETTERS ON THE FAMINE

i.

For the last two months there has not been a book, a periodical, a number of a newspaper, in which there were not any articles about the famine, describing the condition of the starving, who are making appeals for public or governmental assistance and who rebuke the government and society for their indifference, slowness, and apathy.

To judge from what is known through the newspapers and what I know directly about the activity of the administration and of the County Council of the Government of Tula, these reproaches are unjust. There is not only no slowness, no apathy, but it can rather be said that the activity of the administration, of the County Council, and of society has been carried to such a high degree of tension that it can only weaken, and not grow stronger. Everywhere a boiling, energetic activity is going on. In the highest administrative spheres there have been going on uninterrupted labours which have for their end the prevention of the expected calamity. Sums are assigned and given out for the distribution of assistance, for public works, and arrangements are made for the distribution of fuel. In the affected Governments supply committees and especial Government and county assemblies meet, means are devised for the collection of provisions, information is collected about the condition of the peasants, - indefiniteness is complicated, chiefly, by the discord which everywhere exists between the two main organs, the administration and the County Council.

Strange to say, the question as to whether there is a calamity which calls for activity, that is, as to whether there is a famine or not, and if there is, in what dimensions, is one which has not yet been decided between the administration and the County Councils. Everywhere the County Councils demand large sums, while the administration considers them exaggerated and superfluous, and cuts them down or completely disallows them. The administration complains

that the County Councils are carried away by the general mood and, without entering into the merits of the case, without establishing the motives, write lackadaisical literary descriptions of the popular want and demand large sums, which the government cannot grant, and which, if granted, would produce more evil than good.

" It is necessary for the masses to know their need and themselves to curtail their expenses," say the representatives of the administration, " for now everything demanded by the County Councils, and everything said in the assemblies, is transmitted to the masses in a distorted form, and the peasants expect a kind of assistance which they cannot receive. This leads to the people's not going to the work offered them, and to their drinking more than ever."

" What kind of a famine is this," say the representatives of the administration, " when the people refuse to work, when the revenue from the sale of intoxicants for the autumn months of the present year is greater than in the past year, and when the fairs where peasant wares are sold are better than they have been for years ? If we were to pay attention to the demands of the County Councils, we should have the same results from the distribution of supplies as from the distribution of seeds in certain counties, where those who did not need them received them, and thus drunkenness was encouraged." This the representatives of the administration say, and they - collect the taxes.

Thus the administration looks upon this matter, and quite justly so, if we consider the matter from a common point of view. But not less just is the view of the County Councils, when in reply to these arguments they give a description of the peasant property according to townships, from which it becomes clear that the harvest of this year is one-fourth or one-fifth of the average, and that the majority of the population have no means of support.

To cut out, prepare, and put on a patch, it is necessary to know the size of the hole.

It is as to the dimension of this hole that it seems impossible to come to an agreement. Some say that the hole is not large and that the patch may only enlarge it; others say that there is not enough material for a patch.

Who is right ?

To what extent are both right ?

As an answer to these questions may serve the description of what I saw and heard in the four counties of the Government of Tula, which have suffered from the failure of crops, and which I visited.

II.

The first county which I visited was Krapivensk County, which has

suffered in its black soil district.

The first impression, which in an affirmative way answered the question as to whether the masses are this year labouring under especially hard conditions: the bread which is used by nearly everybody is made with orache, – one-third, and in some cases one-half orache, – is black [of inky blackness – jf.], heavy, and bitter; this bread is eaten by everybody, by children, by pregnant women, by nursing women, and by sick people.

Another unquestionable proof of the peculiar state of affairs in the present year is the absence of fuel. Then, – it was still in September, – everybody complained of this want. I was told that the willow-trees in the threshing-floor yards were being cut down, and I saw that it was so; I was told that all the blocks, everything of wood, has been cut and chopped up. Many persons purchase wood in a proprietor's forest which is being cleared up, and in a grove in the neighbourhood, which is being taken off. They travel for their wood seven and even ten versts. The price for aspen wood, all cut, is ninety kopeks per shkalik, that is, per one-sixteenth of a cubic sazhen. A shkalik will last a week on a farm, so that about twenty-five roubles will be needed, if all the fuel is to be bought.

The calamity is indubitable: the bread is unwholesome, mixed with orache, and there is no firewood.

But you look at the people, at their appearance, – their faces are healthy, cheerful, satisfied. All are at work, nobody stays at home. One is threshing, another is hauling. The proprietors complain that the peasants do not want to work. When I was there, they were digging potatoes and threshing. On a church holiday they drank more than usual, and even on work-days I came across drunken persons. Besides, the orache bread itself, upon closer examination as to why and how it is used, receives a different meaning.

On the farm where I was first shown the orache bread, a threshing-machine with four horses was threshing in one of the side-yards, and there were sixty cocks of oats, giving nine measures each ; that is, at present prices, there was there three hundred roubles' worth of oats. It is true, there was but little rye left, not more than nine ch6tverts, but, besides the rye, there were there something like forty chctverts of potatoes, and there was some buckwheat, and yet the whole family, consisting of twelve souls, ate orache bread. Thus it turned out that the bread with the orache was in this case not a sign of poverty, but the method of a saving peasant, to have them eat as little bread as possible, just as for the same purpose a saving peasant will never allow, even in prosperous years, warm or even soft bread to be eaten, but instead gives his people stale bread.

" Flour is dear, and it is hard to provide for all these urchins. People eat bread with orache, – and we are no gentlemen either."

The calamity as regards the fire-wood, too, does not appear so

terrible, when the details of the situation are known. They have to buy wood for twenty-five roubles. " Where shall we get it this year ? " another peasant said to me, complaining of the hopeless condition of the present year. And yet this peasant has two sons who are hired out, one at forty, the other at fifty roubles, and he has this year married one of them, although he has enough women in his house. Besides, the lack of fuel is redeemed by the

fact that in the present year, the straw, though less than usual, is rich, with a good ear, forming excellent fodder. The reason they do not burn straw for fuel is not merely because there is little of it, but because in the present year it partly takes the place of meal food for the cattle.¹ Besides, the potatoes have grown here excellently. Thus, where on a farm with ten mouths there are twenty-five chetverts, figuring at a measure a day, the potatoes will last two hundred days, the whole winter. The main thing is the oats, which bring a high price. But not all have oats and potatoes. When I took the list of the whole village, it turned out that out of fifty-seven farms, twenty-nine were such as had no rye left, or only a few puds of it, from five to eight, and little oats, so that with the exchange of two chdtverts for a chetvert of rye, they will not have enough food to last them until New Year. This is the state of twenty-nine farms; fifteen farms are in a very bad shape: these lack the chief support of the present year, – the oats, – since these farms were badly off two years ago, and last year did not sow any oats at all. Some of them are begging even now. All of them are without help, and some of them have a bad reputation ; some are drunkards, others do not like to work, while others again are restless people; there are also among them thieves, who have been in jail. These farms are not suffering from the failure of this year's crops, but from the peculiar domestic conditions and the character of the farmers.

Such is one of the villages of Krapivensk County, and such approximately is the condition of the others. The percentage of the well-to-do, the average, the poor, is nearly the same: fifty per cent., more or less, of average

¹ This is so where there is at least some straw ; but in many counties there is no straw. The state of the majority of farms under superficial observation presents itself like this : the failure of the rye is equalized by the good crop of oats, which bring a high price, and by the good crop of potatoes. – R.

farmers, that is, such as will this year use up all their supplies by December; twenty per cent, [of well-to-do and thirty per cent. – 2?.] of very poor, who have nothing to eat now, or will have nothing in a month from now.

The condition of the peasants of Bogoroditsk County is worse. The crops, especially of rye, have been worse here. Here the percentage of the well-to-do, that is, of those who can get along with their own corn, is the same; but the percentage of the poor is greater

still. Out of sixty farms there are seventeen average ones, and thirty-two absolutely poor, just as poor as the fifteen of the first village of Kraplvensk County. And just as in Kraplvensk County, the wretched state of these poor farms was not conditioned by the famine of this year alone, but by a whole series of long active external and internal conditions : the same helplessness, large families, drunkenness, weakness of character.

Here, in Bogoroditsk County, the question of fuel is still harder to solve, as there are fewer forests. But the general impression is again the same as in Kraplvensk County. So far there is nothing peculiar to indicate a famine: the people are cheerful, ready to work, happy, healthy. The township scribe complained that the drunkenness during Assumption Day (a church holiday) was worse than ever.

The farther we proceed into Bogoroditsk County and the nearer to Efrdmov County, the worse does the condition get. On the threshing-floor there is less and less corn and straw, and there are more and more poor homes. On the border of Efremov and Bogoroditsk Counties the state is particularly bad, especially because, with the same unfavourable conditions as in Kraplvensk and Bogoroditsk Counties, and with a still greater scarcity of forests, the potatoes have been a failure. On the best fields hardly anything but enough for seed was harvested. The bread is almost everywhere made with orache. The orache is here

green and not at all mature. The white centre generally found in it is lacking entirely, and so it is not edible.

One has to know how to eat the orache bread. If a man eats it on an empty stomach, he has to vomit, and people go mad from kvas which is made of flour mixed with orache.

Here the poorest farms which have gone down in former years are now eating up their very last. But these are not yet the worst villages. There are worse ones in Efrdmov [and Epiphany - 77] County. Here is an extract from my note-book about a village in Efrdmov County. Out of seventy farms there are ten which still can " breathe." Of the others, the people of every second farm have just gone with their horses to beg alms. Those who are left eat bread with bran, which is sold to them from the storehouse of the County Council at sixty kopeks per pud. I went into one of the houses to see the bread with the bran. The peasant had received three measures for seed, when he had already done his sowing; he mixed the three measures with three measures of bran, ground this together, and got some good bread, - but it is the last. The woman told me that her girl had filled herself with orache bread, which purged her above and below, and she gave up baking with orache. The corner of the room is full of dry horse-dung, and the women collect the dung and chips.¹ The dirt of the house, the tattered condition of the clothes, in this village, is very great, but evidently this is a usual thing, because the same dirt and raggedness is to be found in the well-to-do houses. In the same village there is a settlement of landless soldier children.

[There are ten such houses. – Zu] The condition of the inhabitants of this settlement is especially pitiable. There are among them some with small families

1 The women collect the dung in the pastures, and small twigs of a finger's length and thickness in the woods. – II. and some who are artisans, and they manage to get along somehow; but the condition of the majority is very bad. They are all mendicants.

At the extreme house of this settlement, where we stopped, a tattered, lean woman came out to us, and she began to tell us her condition. She has five children. [The eldest is a daughter, ten years of age. – 7?.] Two are sick, evidently with the influenza. One, a three-year-old child, is sick with the fever, and he was carried outside and is lying on the ground, in the pasture, about eight steps from the hut, and is covered with what there is left of a peasant coat. It will be cold and wet for him, when his fever has passed, but still this is better than for him to be in the room four arshins square, with its dirt and dust and the four remaining children. This woman's husband has gone away to earn money and has not been heard of. She lives on what she can collect by begging, but the near-by people do not give much. She has to walk a long distance off, from twenty to thirty versts, but it is bad there, too, and she has to neglect her children. And so she does. She collects a lot of gifts and leaves these at home; when the alms give out, she starts out again. She was at home just then, – she had just come back the day before [and she had crusts left to last her until the next day – 77].

She is not alone in this condition, but there are some eight such houses.¹ They were in the same state the year before and two years before, and in such a state they are not alone, but there are millions of people all around us who are in the same state. In the same state are always all the families of feeble, drinking men, all the families

1 She was in the same state last year also, and two years ago ; she was even worse off three years ago, because two years ago she was burned out, and her eldest daughter was smaller, so that she had nobody to leave her children with. The only difference was, that people gave more alms, and the bread they gave was without orache. – R.

of those who sit in prisons, frequently the families of soldiers.

Such a state is, however, more easily borne in good years. Even in years when there are good crops, the women, though threatened with being beaten or being sent to jail, have been stealthily going to the woods, to steal fuel, in order to warm their freezing children, and have collected from poor people pieces of bread with which to feed their neglected children, who are dying without food.

This has always been ! We live amidst all this ! In the present year this state is not worse, because there can be nothing worse than

that a mother's children should die without help, only this year there is more of this evil

III.

There are many such villages in Bogoroditsk and in Efrdmov Counties. But there are some that are even worse. And such are the villages of Epiphany and Dankov Counties.

Here is one of them: for about six versts between two villages there is no settlement, no village. All there is there is proprietor's out-farms, lying off the main road. There is nothing but fields and fields, rich, black-earth fields, which are deeply ploughed up and beautifully seeded with rye. The potatoes have all been dug up; they are being dug up and ploughed over a second time. Here and there they are ploughing for summer crops. Fine-looking herds, belonging to the landed proprietors, are walking in the stubble. The winter crops are beautiful; the roads are properly ditched and bordered with cropped willows; in the ravines a forest has been started. Here and there are the fenced-in and well-guarded groves of the proprietors. On the out-farms along the road there is an abundance of straw, and the potatoes are being put away in cellars and basements. Everything is finished and well done; in everything is seen the labour of thousands of men, who with harrows, ploughs, scythes, and rakes have walked through all the furrows of these immeasurable, rich fields.

I arrive at the place of abode of these people. Between steep banks there is a large river, and on both sides of it there are settlements, – on this side, in Epiphany County, there are fewer of them; on the other, in Dan-

kov County, there are more. On the other side there is a church with a tower and a cross sparkling in the sun; along the bank beyond the river small pleasant houses stretch out beautifully in the distance.

I walk up to the edge of the village on this side. The first hut is not a hut, but four gray stone walls, daubed with clay and roofed with boards on which there is a mass of potato-tops. There is no yard. This is the dwelling of the first family. Here, too, in front of this structure, there stands a cart, without wheels; and not back of the yard, where the threshing-floor generally is, but in front of the hut, there is a cleared place where oats have just been threshed and winnowed.

A lank peasant in bast shoes with his shovel and his hands throws the cleanly winnowed oats from the heap into a woven basket; a barefoot woman of about fifty years of age, in a dirty black shirt, which is torn at one side, carries these basketfuls and fills with them the cart without wheels, and keeps counting, A ragged,

dishevelled girl of about seven years of age clings to the woman, interfering with her work. The peasant is the woman's friend, and he has come to help her winnow and put away the oats. The woman is a widow; her husband has been dead nearly two years, and her son is a soldier and attending the autumn exercises; her daughter-in-law is in the house with two small babies [one, a suckling babe, is in her arms ; the other, of about two years of age, is crawling over the threshold and yelling, - he is dissatisfied with something - A.].

The only good crop this year has been the oats, which will all go into the cart, - there are in all perhaps four chetverts. From the sowing there is left a bag with orache (carefully put away in the loft), weighing about three puds. No millet, or buckwheat, or lentils, or potatoes were sown or planted. Bread is baked with orache, and it is so bad that it is impossible to eat it, and this

had himself built; then he had grown feeble and become poor. In this hut two families, who have no farms of their own, are rooming. The head of one of these families is the beaten peasant. On the hanging beds, between the oven and the wall, lay the sick man, covered with mat bags; he was groaning pitifully. He was a stocky, healthy peasant of some forty years of age, with a bloodshot face and athletic muscles on his bared arm. I began to ask him questions, and he told me that two days before they had had a meeting, and that he and a friend of his had taken tickets (passports) to go down-country, and that upon that occasion he had told a peasant that it was not right for him to call names. In reply to this, the peasant knocked him off his feet and began to walk all over him, that is, beat him badly on his head and chest. It turned out that when they took their passports, they set up an eighth measure, and the elder, who had wasted fifty roubles of the communal money, being present, set up half a bucket, for having been allowed to defer his payments for three terms, - and the peasants got drunk.

I felt the sick man over and examined him. He was absolutely well, and he perspired dreadfully under the mat bags. There were no marks whatever, and apparently he was lying, and had received the holy communion only to provoke the authorities, among which he counted me, to inflict punishment on him with whom he had fought. When I told him that it was not right to go to court and that I thought that he was not dangerously knocked up and could get up, he remained dissatisfied, and the women who carefully followed my movements, and with whom the hut was filled, began impatiently to say that if it was so, " they " would kill them all.

The poverty of all three families who live here is the same. None of them has any rye. One had something like two puds of wheat, another had enough potatoes for two weeks or for a month. All had still some bread baked with orache from the rye given them for seed, but it will not last them long.

Such is the whole village of thirty farms, with the exception of two families which are well-to-do. There is no need of counting them all over, - it will all be the same.

This village half burned down last year, and they did not build it up again. Those first farms, the one where the woman was threshing oats, and the eight adjoining farms in a row, were settled there in order to comply with the rules for insurance. The majority of them are so poor that they even now are rooming with others. Even those who were not burned out are just as poor, though in general those who suffered from the fire are somewhat worse off. The condition of the village is such that twelve out of thirty farms have no horses.

The people are nearly all of them at home: some are calking their huts; others are transposing things, and others again are sitting and doing nothing. Everything is threshed, the potatoes are dug. The village is in a wretched condition, but this failure of crops presents itself as a small calamity in comparison with that chronic general calamity to which these men are apparently subject. What has brought them to this state is fires, quarrels, drunkenness.

Besides the general causes of calamities, nearly every family has its own private, internal cause, which is much more important than the exceptional cause of this year's failure of crops.

The previous elder has this trouble, that he has, under fear of court proceedings, to pay fifty roubles in three instalments, and he is selling all his oats to meet this debt. The present elder, a good joiner, is in trouble, because they have appointed him elder and so have deprived him of the possibility of hiring out. He receives a salary of fifteen roubles, and he says that he could easily earn sixty roubles and so would have had no thought of the failure of crops. The trouble with a third peasant is this, that he has for a long time been in debt, and now has to pay, and so is compelled to sell three walls of a wooden hut, keeping the fourth for fuel. He has no building to live in and so is pointing up with clay a tiny stone cell, in which to live with his wife and children. The trouble with a fourth man is this, that he quarrelled with his mother, who was living with him, and she separated from him and broke up her hut and went to live with another son of hers, taking her portion with her, and so he has nothing to live on and no place to stay in. The trouble with a fifth man is this, that he took some oats to town, where he went on a spree and spent everything he got for his oats.

Before leaving the village, I stopped near a peasant who had just brought potato-tops from the field and was putting them down along the wall of the hut.

"Where do these come from?"

"We buy them from the proprietor."

"What? What do you pay for them?"

"A desyatina to be attended to in the summer."

That is, for the right to collect the potato-tops from a desyatina

of potatoes, which have been dug up, a peasant promises to plough up, sow in, mow down, bind, and carry away corn from a desyatina, which, according to the usual cheap prices for such detailed work, is worth at least eight roubles, while according to the established price in that locality the potato-tops are worth from four to five roubles.

The peasant was talkative ; I stopped near his cart, and soon about six peasants gathered around us, and we started a conversation. Some women stood at a distance and listened. Children, munching inky black, pasty bread with orache, whirled about us, watching me and listening to the conversation. I repeated several inquiries, wishing to verify the elder's statements. Everything proved to be true. The number of peasants without horses proved even larger than the elder had said. They told of their whole poverty, not so much with dissatisfaction, as with a constant irony indefinitely directed upon somebody and something.

" Why are you in such bad shape, and why are you poorer than anybody else ? " I asked.

Several voices began to answer, – so definite was the answer.

" What are we to do ? Last summer half the village was licked clean as by a cow's tongue, – it burned down. And then the failure of the crops. It was bad enough last year, but this year it is a clear failure. What use would there be even in a good crop, when there is no land ? What land ? Just good enough for kvas!"

" Well, and how about earnings ? " I asked.

" What earnings ? Where are they ? He" (the proprietor) " has roped us in for eleven versts around. It is all his land; go where you please, – there is but one price to the land. We have to pay five roubles for tops, and they will not last for a month."

" Well, how are you going to live ?"

" The best way we can. We shall sell what we have, and then as Cod will aid us. There is nothing more to sell. Maybe we shall sell the horse-chips, – I have a whole corner of them. When you make a fire with them, it just chokes you. Pshaw! They have been writing us up, they have written us up ten times," said the elder, " but nothing has so far come of it. Evidently the writers are no good. Come, let grandfather " (he meant me) " write us up. He will do it in a mighty way. See what a pen he has," and so forth.

The peasants laugh ; evidently they know something, but are not going to tell. What is this, anyway ? Do they not understand their situation, or do they so much expect outside help that they do not wish to make any efforts ?

I may be mistaken, but it looks like it.

Just then I recalled two old peasants of Efrdmov County, who in a slightly intoxicated condition were returning from the township office, whither they had gone to find out when their sons would be demanded for the autumn practice, and who, in reply to my question how their crops had been and how they lived, answered me, although they were from the very worst locality, that, thanks to God and to the Tsar, their father, they had received seed-corn, and now would receive for their provisions thirty pounds to each person until Lent, and after Lent would get as much as a pud and a half each.

That the people of this Efremov village will not be able to live through the winter without starving, or at least dying from diseases, due to the famine and to bad food, if they do not do something, is as certain as that a beehive without honey, being left in the open, will die out toward spring.

So here is the question : will they do something ? So far it looks as if they would not. Only one of them has sold everything and is going to Moscow. The others seem to be waiting for something.

[The others do not seem to understand their situation. Do they really not understand their condition, or are they waiting to be helped from without, or are they like children who have fallen through an ice-hole or have lost their way, and who in the first moment do not understand their condition and laugh at its unfamiliarity ? Maybe both. But what is certain is, that these men are in such a state that they will hardly make efforts to help themselves. - 2?.]

IV.

Well, is there a famine, or not ?

And if there is [to what extent? - 2?.], to what extent are they to receive assistance ?

All the columns in which the property of the peasants is described do not answer, and cannot answer, these questions. This the peasants themselves, it is true, do not know. Much depends on the mood in which they will be. The administration and the County Council present to themselves the problem of feeding the starving people just like a similar problem of feeding a given quantity of cattle. For so many steers so many puds of hay, straw, mash are wanted for two hundred days of winter. This quantity of food once being provided, the steers are put in the stalls, and we may be sure that they will winter well.

With men the calculation is quite different. In the first place, for a steer or any other animal the maximum and minimum of the indispensable food are not very far from one another. When the cattle have eaten up a certain quantity of food, they stop eating and have no need of anything else, and if they do not get the necessary quantity, they soon grow sick and die. But for a man the distance between the minimum and the maximum of what he needs, not

only in the form of food, but also of other necessities, is enormous, – it may even be said, infinite: a man may live on shewbreads, as do the fasters, or on a handful of rice, as do the Chinese and the Hindoos; or he may not eat for forty days, as Doctor Tanner did, and yet remain well, or he may swallow a quantity of food and drink, which is enormous as far as cost and nutrition is concerned, and besides the food needs also many other things, which may grow to infinity and again contract to the lowest limit.

In the second place, a steer cannot provide food for himself, while a man does, and the man whom we undertake to feed is the chief provider of food, the very man who feeds us and who under the most onerous conditions provides what we undertake to feed him on.

To feed a peasant is the same as it would be if, in the spring of the year, when the grass has sprouted, we should keep the cattle in the stalls, and ourselves pick the grass for them, that is, deprive them of that enormous power of collection which is in them, and thus ruin them.

Something similar would happen with a peasant, if we fed him in the same manner, and he believed it.

The peasant budget does not balance properly, – there is a deficit, – he has nothing to live on, – we must feed him.

Yes, cast the accounts of any average peasant, not in a famine year, when everywhere about us there is only enough corn to last until New Year, and you will see that, according to the crop reports, he has nothing to live on in an average year, and that the deficit is such that he must get rid of his cattle and himself must eat but once a day.

Such is the budget of an average peasant, – to say nothing of the poor peasant, – and yet he has not only not got rid of his cattle, but has also married off his son and his daughter, has celebrated a holiday, and has spent about five roubles on tobacco. Who has not seen the fires which make a clean sweep of everything ? One would think that the sufferers from the fire would have to perish. Behold, one has been helped by a relative, an uncle; another has received assistance; a third has hired out to work; a fourth has gone out to beg alms; they strain all their energies, and behold, in two years they have come back to their old state.

And the settlers, who go away with their families, who for years support themselves by work, until they settle in some one spot ?

For some time I busied myself with the question of the past settlement of the Government of Samara, and the fact which I and all natives of Samara can testify to is this, that the majority of the settlers, who travelled by certain routes with the aid of the government, perished and fell into poverty, and the majority of fugitives, who met with obstacles only on the part of the government, arrived safely in the new settlements and grew rich.

And the landless peasants, manor labourers [and soldiers' children-J?.] ? They have all supported themselves even in years when corn was more expensive than at present.

People say that there is no work. But there are also other people, who keep saying all the time that they offer work, and that there are no labourers. And the people who say so are just as right, or just as wrong, as those who say that there is no work. I know positively that landed proprietors offer work and cannot find any labourers ; that for the work which is laid out by the forestry department there have so far appeared no labourers, as is also true in case of other work, as the newspapers have written about it. For a poor worker there is never any work, for a good worker there is always work. For a tattered man, who has spent his clothes in drink and who walks from farm to farm and from fair to fair there may be such a thing as no work; but for a good labourer who is known and who is looking for other work while still at work, there is always some work.

It is true, in the present year there is less work than usual, and so a larger number of poor labourers will be left without work ; still, a man's having or not having work does not depend on external causes alone, but on the energy of the labourer, on whether he is looking fit for work [whether he values his work - 72.] and whether he is working well.

I do not say all this in order to prove that poor labourers and their families should not be aided, but only in order to show how impossible it is to figure out the budget of a peasant farm, the income of which may be stretched to from three to thirty and more roubles per month, according to the energy of the industry and the execution of the work, while the expenses may be narrowed down to two pounds of bread with bran to each man, or may expand to drunkenness, which may in one year ruin the wealthiest farm.

The disagreement as to whether there is any famine, or not, and to what extent it exists, is due to this. To this is also due the difficulty of giving assistance.¹

To determine the degree of the need, so as to guide all the County Councils in the distribution of assistance, there have been made detailed farm lists according to counties as to the number of mouths, labourers, allotments, the quantity of all kinds of corn planted, and the harvest, the number of cattle, the average crop, and many more things. The lists have been made with an extraordinary display of columns and of details. But he who knows the every-day life of the peasants knows that these lists say very little.

To imagine that a peasant farm spends only as much as it eats up, and earns only what the peasant gets from his allotment, is a great mistake. In the majority of cases what he gets from the allotment forms but a minor part of what he spends. The chief wealth of the peasant

1 Instead of this paragraph the Russian edition reads : "The disagreement as to whether there is any famine, or not, and to what extent, is due to this, that the property budget is taken as a foundation for determining the peasant's condition, whereas the chief articles of his budget are not determined by his property, but by his labour." consists in what he and his home-folk earn, whether he earns it on his rented land, or working for the landed proprietor, or living with strangers, or in some industry. The peasant and his home-folk are always all at work. The condition of physical idleness, so common to us, is a calamity for the peasants. If a peasant has not enough work for all the members of his family [when he himself and his home-folk eat without working-72.], he considers that a calamity is imminent [something like the escape of liquor from a leaky barrel -12.], and he generally uses every effort to look for work [in order to prevent this calamity -12.]. In the peasant family all its members work and earn money from childhood to old age. A twelve-year-old boy already herds cattle, or works with the horses; a little girl spins [or knits stockings or mittens - 12.], and from the spinning there is linen left which can be sold and gives an income. The peasant is out earning either far away, or at home, or as a day-labourer, or he contracts for labour at the proprietor's, or himself rents some land. The old man weaves bast shoes: all these furnish a regular income. But there are also exclusive earnings: a boy leads about a blind man; a girl is nursing in the family of a well-to-do peasant; a boy is an apprentice ; the peasant is making bricks or baskets; the woman is a midwife or a medicine woman; a blind brother begs alms; another, who can read, reads the psalter for the dead; the old man crushes tobacco; a widow secretly traffics in liquor. Besides, one has a son who is a coachman, a conductor (a rural officer); another has a daughter who is a chambermaid or a nurse; another has an uncle who is a monk, a clerk, - and all these relatives aid and support the farm.

Out of such items, which are not entered in the columns, is the income of a peasant family formed, and the items of expenditures are even more varied and by no means limited to the food: [Crown, and - 72.] County Council taxes, the furnishing of recruits, tools, blacksmith work, ploughshares, links, wheels, axes, forks, harness, wheelwright's work, buildings, the oven, garments, footgear for oneself and for the children, holidays, preparation for communion for oneself and family, a wedding, a christening, curing, presents for children, tobacco, pots, dishes, salt, tar, kerosene, pilgrimages, - and every man has, besides, his own peculiarities of character, his own foibles, virtues, vices [which all cost money - 7?.].

On the poorest farm, consisting of five or six persons, from fifty to seventy roubles will thus be spent and earned [in a year - 2?.]; on a well-to-do farm, from seventy to three hundred ; on an average farm from one hundred to 120 roubles. Any farmer may with little effort make it 160 instead of one hundred roubles, and with a weakening of his energy, fifty instead of one hundred; with care and order, he may change the one hundred expenses to sixty, and with

carelessness and weakness make it two hundred roubles expenses instead of one hundred.

How, then, can the peasant's budget under these conditions be figured out, and how can the question be solved as to whether he is in any need and to what extent, and if he is, how can it be determined who is to be assisted, and to what extent ?

In the County Councils there have been established curators, persons whose business it is to attend to the distribution of assistance according to townships. In one of the County Councils they have even established councils under the curator's supervision, consisting of priests, elders, church elders, and two specially appointed persons, who are to decide how much is to be given to every man. But even these councils, no matter how much they resemble ministries, will in no way help the business of the distribution, because according to the lists and according to what is now known of the peasant families, it is absolutely impossible to determine what will become of them,

In order correctly to determine the degree of a peasant's wants, we do not need lists, but must call in a prophet, who will foretell what peasant and his family will be alive and well, who will live in peace with his family and will work and find work. - There are no such prophets, and it is impossible to find it out. It is impossible to find out the needy, and so it is not only difficult, but directly impossible to distribute the free assistance.

People who have little thought of the relations of the rich to the poor generally assume that all that is necessary is for the rich to give to the poor, or that they should be compelled to give part of their wealth, and all would be well. But this is a great mistake. The whole thing is in the distribution. If there is a poor man, it is always because the distribution effected by the laws in regard to the acquisition of property, the labour, and the relation of the classes is irregular; and so, to correct this irregular distribution, another has to be established. But to take from the rich and give to the poor does not mean to make a new distribution, but only to introduce a great confusion into the old distribution.

How nice and how simple it would be to solve the questions of luxury and of poverty by this simple means, which is, to take from the rich and give to the poor!

This would be so nice and so simple I

I myself at one time thought that this was so.

But, not unhappily, but happily, it is not so.

One would think that it is but a small inconvenience, and yet it is impossible to get around it, it is impossible to make a new division.

Try to distribute money to the city poor, – indeed it has been tried, and what is the result ?

About seven years ago, six thousand roubles were in Moscow, by the will of a deceased merchant, distributed to the poor, who received two roubles each. There came together such a crowd that two were crushed to death, and most of the money fell into the hands of healthy, tough people, while the feeble did not get anything.

With a free distribution, the worst passions are roused and flame up ; a crowd of greedy people comes to the front, and those who are most agile, strong, and unscrupulous get possession of the article which is being distributed. People generally think that so long as there is something to distribute, it will be an easy matter to make the proper distribution. It is true, it is generally assumed that there will be misuses and deceptions, but that all that is necessary is to be careful, to take the trouble to investigate, and then it will be possible to segregate the needy and to give only to those who are truly in need.

But this is an error ! It is impossible to do so. It is impossible to give free assistance to the needy, because there are no external signs by which the needy person may be told, while the very distribution calls to life such a greed, such jealousy, such deception, that even those signs that may have existed are destroyed.

The administration and the County Councils make endeavours to find out those who are truly in need; but all peasants, even such as are in no need at all, upon learning that something will be distributed free, try to simulate, or even actually to become needy, in order to obtain assistance without labour.

But not in this alone is there an inconvenience in the distribution of free or loan aids (this makes no difference, because the peasants consider the loans to be the same as gratis, for they know that they will never be able to return them) ; the inconvenience is also in this, that the hope of receiving these free gifts weakens the self-reliance of the masses.

[All know that it is good and praiseworthy to acquire through labour, and bad and disgraceful to acquire without labour. Suddenly there appears a new method of acquiring without labour, which has in itself nothing prejudicial. It is evident what confusion is produced in their concepts by the appearance of this new method of acquisition. – 7?.]

But how shall we wait when everybody is starving ? In a village where there is no corn until November, and where, either from laziness or from error, – whatever the cause may be, – the peasants say that there is no work, and do not work, within a week there will unquestionably be a real famine for the women, the old, the very young, and even, no doubt, for the lazy and the self-deceived who are still alive. And, then, how is it to be given ? To whom ?

If it is to be given to those only who are in need, how are the truly needy to be distinguished from those who are not really in need ?

Even if it be possible to distinguish those who are really in need, this will take in, for the most part, all careless farmers, drunkards, and loafers; why is a premium to be put on laziness and drunkenness ?

If all are to receive equal shares, as the peasants everywhere demand, saying with reason that if they are to be liable for all members, they ought at least to receive equal shares, so that they may have something to be responsible for; if all are to receive equal shares, all will have too little: for the well-to-do it will be an unnecessary addition, and for the poor an insufficient addition to save them from ruin.

But if all are to receive so much that, by receiving equal shares, the poor may get enough to provide themselves with, there would be needed such large sums [nearly a billion – 7?.] that it would be impossible to find them.

But the chief thing is, that the more aid is offered, the more is the energy of the people weakened, and the more the energy of the people is weakened, the more their needs are increased.

And yet it is impossible not to offer any aid!

In this cercle vicieux toss about the gentlemen of the

government and of the County Councils. It is this that leads to all that disorderly mass of measures which are taken against the famine of which we do not know whether it exists or not, – a disorderly mass, because we have undertaken a business which we cannot carry out.

The business which we have undertaken consists for us in nothing more or less than an attempt to feed the masses, – for us, gentlemen, to feed the masses, that is, we have taken it upon ourselves to feed the feeders, – those who have been feeding us.

We have become so confused and steeped in lie, that we have entirely forgotten who we are.

We, the gentlemen, want to feed the masses.

V.

What a wonderful thing! A suckling babe wants to feed his nurse; the

parasite takes it upon himself to feed the plant on which it feeds; we, the higher classes, who all of us live by the?n, who cannot take a step without them, we shall feed them.

It is well that they believe us! If they, God forfend, should believe that somebody is going to feed them, and should stop feeding themselves and us, they would perish, and we with them.

Children were given a horse, a real, live horse, and they drove out with it and had their fun. They drove and drove, down-hill and up-hill. The good horse was covered with sweat and out of breath, but it continued to pull them and to obey them; and the children shouted and boasted to one another as to who could lead and drive and make the horse gallop best. And it seemed to them – it always does – that, when the horse was galloping, they were galloping themselves, and they boasted of their race.

The children had their fun for a long time, without thinking of the horse, and forgetful of the fact that it lived, worked hard, and suffered, and if they noticed that it stopped, they smacked their whip in a more lively fashion and urged on the horse, and shouted.

But there is an end to everything, and there came also an end to the strength of the good horse, and, in spite of the whip, it began to stop. It was only then that the children remembered that the horse was a live animal, and that horses are fed and given drink; but the children

did not want to stop, and they began to devise how they could feed the horse while it was running. One of them fetched a handful of hay from under the seat and, jumping down from the carriage, ran alongside the horse and offered it the hay. But it was not easy to feed the horse while it was running, and so he jumped back into the carriage and the children began to devise another means. They obtained a long stick and tied the hay to the end of it, and began to offer it to the horse on the run, while they were themselves seated on the coachman's box. Besides, two of the children, observing that the horse was tottering, began to support it; they held its back with their hands, to keep it from falling to the right or to the left. The children devised many things, except what ought to have come first into their heads, – which was, that they should get down from the horse and stop driving it, and, if they really had compassion on it, unhitch it and give it its freedom.

Is it not precisely as the children did with the horse which was pulling them, that the people of the rich classes have been doing with the labouring people, when they grow weak and may refuse to pull ?

They devise everything possible, except the one thing which begs for recognition, – to get off the horse which they pity, stop travelling with it and driving it.

The masses are starving, and we, the higher classes, are very much

worried by this and want to help them. And for this purpose we have meetings, choose committees, collect money, and send it to the masses, but do not for a minute stop driving them.

And what is it that makes them poor and starving ?

Is it really so hard to understand this ?

Is it really necessary to calumniate them, as some unscrupulously do, saying that the masses are poor because they are lazy and drunkards ? or to deceive ourselves, as others do, saying that the masses are poor because they have not yet had time to adopt our culture, and that we shall begin with to-morrow, without concealing anything, to transmit to them all our wisdom, and then they will stop being poor; and so we have no cause for being ashamed because we are living on their backs, – we are doing it all for their good.

Is it indeed necessary to search for this midi d quatorze heures, when it is so clear and so simple, especially for the masses themselves, on whose backs we are sitting and whom we are driving ? Children may imagine that it is not the horse that is pulling them, but that they are themselves moving on by means of the waving of the whip, but we, the grown persons, if we are not insane, ought to understand, it seems, whence the famine of the masses comes.

The masses are hungry because we are too well fed.

How can the masses help being hungry, since under the conditions under which they are living, that is, with those taxes, with that want of land, with that abandonment and savagery in which they are kept, they are compelled to produce all that terrible labour, the results of which are swallowed up by the capitals, the cities, and the country centres of the rich ?

All these palaces, theatres, museums, all those paraphernalia, all that wealth, – all this is worked out by the very starving people, who do all these things which are unnecessary to them only because they make a living by it, that is, always with this enforced labour save themselves from a famine death, winch is always hanging over them.

Such has always been their condition.

The present year has merely shown, in consequence of the famine, that the string is too tightly drawn.

The masses are always kept by us half-starved. This is our means for compelling them to work for us.

But this present year their starving condition has proved too great. Nothing new or unexpected has happened, and it seems to us that it is possible to know why the masses are hungry.

The society endeavours to aid the masses in the calamity are similar

to the endeavours at establishing the Red Cross in war-time. The energy of some in war is directed toward committing murder, and this activity is considered normal, and to counteract it they establish another activity, – that of curing these people who are being killed.

All this is very nice, so long as the activity of the war and also the activity of the exhaustion of the masses, of their oppression, are considered to be normal; but as soon as we begin to assert that we are sorry for the people who are killed in a war and for starving people, would it not be simpler not to kill the people and not to establish means for curing them ? Would it not be simpler to stop doing all that which ruins the well-being of the masses, than, continuing to ruin them, to make it appear that we are worried about their well-being ?

This lie is always startling, but at the present time it is detestable.

We assure ourselves and others that we are very much worried by the famine, that we are disturbed by the condition of the Russian people, that we are prepared for any sacrifices, and yet by our lives we show that all this is nothing but words and that we are lying, because this lie has become a conventional lie, common to all men. And nobody shows up another for fear of being shown up himself.

If we collate everything which has been written in the newspapers about the present condition of the Russian people, we shall approximately get this: forty millions of Russians are starving, and there is hardly any possibility of helping them. If we assume that all the corn which there is will be given to the starving, which it is impossible to assume, – there will still be lacking one-fourth of what is necessary for the feeding of all the starving. There is little chance that we shall be able to buy and bring from abroad the corn needed, so that it should reach us at an accessible price, and so one-fourth of forty millions are in danger of death from starvation.

Death from starvation, according to the information of the newspapers and according to rumours, has already begun. Cases have happened where mothers have brought their children to the township offices and have cast them away there, saying that they had nothing to feed them on.

They tell of a mother who killed herself with her children; they tell of another who hanged herself, so as not to see her dying children. They give the description of three children who died from starvation. In many places people are falling sick and swelling from hunger, and now, during the warm autumn weather, the famine typhus is becoming epidemic. What will happen in winter, when it will be cold in those places where they generally use straw for fuel, and where there is none this present year and wood cannot be procured any nearer than one hundred or one hundred and fifty versts ?

We all read about this, or if we do not read we inevitably hear of it, out of decency shrug our shoulders, sigh, make small money contributions, and say, " Yes, it is terrible !" and we continue our habitual lives.

Even though there are men and establishments which contribute money, and though there are others who serve in the administration and in the County Councils, who are busy providing for the needy, buying up corn, selling it at a low price, making lists of the farms, etc., yet, in spite of the money contributions which a few make, and in spite of the cares taken by the officials in respect to the furnishing of the supplies, our society, that is, all men, both those who contribute and those who do not, those who serve and those who do not, remain, in spite of the mutual accusations of indifference, absolutely calm and indifferent to what is supposedly a terrible calamity, which is now taking place and is imminent, and which no one denies.

I say that society remains entirely indifferent to the imminent calamity, not because it so seems to me and because I want to say so, but because there is a well-known and unquestionable sign of real sympathy, which now is lacking in the whole of Russian society.

We only know that a man is not indifferent and truly sympathizes with what has taken place or is about to take place, only when this news changes his life ; when he stops doing that which he has been doing, eating as he ate, sleeping as he slept, living as he lived. Much more does this sign of indifference or of sympathy show in reference to an event which has not yet taken place, but is only menacing.

When a man at dinner receives news that a man is drowning in the river near his house, and he, continuing to eat, gives his commands about furnishing a rope which is necessary in order to save the drowning person, it makes no difference what he may say about his sympathy for the drowning person, we shall not believe him, and we shall know that he is indifferent to the event which is taking place. Such an indifference now exists in our society in respect to the calamity which the newspapers describe and predict. People go on dining, and show their sympathy by not being sorry for the time which they have lost in giving orders about the rope, nor even for the rope itself. The life of the men of our society continues in its usual current: there are the same concerts and theatres, – if there are no balls, this is due only to the example of the emperor, – the same dinners, costumes, races, horses, carriages, hunts, expositions, flowers, novels, and so forth. Life has not changed in the least and has not been adapted to the existing calamity, but, on the contrary, the famine has been adapted to the common current of life, the famine fait les frais de la conversation in drawing-rooms, fills the columns of newspapers and forms an interesting subject of correspondences, serves as an excuse for the arrangement of bazaars, theatres, concerts, volumes of collections. Life has not only not changed, in order to serve the famine, but the famine has become an indispensable part of life; the famine has come to occupy the place

of a modern, fashionable subject of interest, a place which has always to be filled. Nor can it be different; the famine does, not touch us, but, as we imagine, men who are entire strangers to us, who are united with us only by the abstract conception that they and we are Russians.

Voltaire says that if it were possible by touching a button in Paris to kill a mandarin in China, few Parisians would deprive themselves of this pleasure.

Why not tell the truth ? If it were possible by pressing a button in Moscow or St. Petersburg to kill a peasant in Mamadyshi or Tsarevokokshaysk, so that no one could find it out, I do not think there would be found many men who would keep from pressing the button, if this could afford them the least pleasure.

Between a man of our wealthy circle, – a gentleman with a starched shirt, an official, a landed proprietor, a business man, an officer, a scholar, an artist, – and a peasant, if we were to tell the truth, there is as little connection as between a Parisian and a mandarin.

It is impossible to conceal what we all know! We do not say all this, but it is simply because with us there has established itself among the cultured people a custom of professing love for the peasant, the lesser brother, for the sake of propriety; but we all know that between us, gentlemen, and the peasants there is an abyss.

There are masters and slaves. The first are respected, the second are despised, and between the two there is no connection. They are two entirely different categories of men, two different castes. Gentlemen never marry peasant women and never give their daughters in marriage to peasants and labourers; gentlemen never treat peasants as their acquaintances, do not eat with them, and do not even sit with them; gentlemen say " thou " to labourers, and labourers say " you " to gentlemen. Gentlemen are admitted to clean places and are let in to the front in churches; the others are not let in and " get it in the neck;" the latter are whipped, and the first are not.

They are two different castes.

Though the transition from the lower to the higher is possible, yet, so long as the transition has not taken place, there exists a most distinct division, and between a gentleman and a peasant there is as little connection as between a Parisian and a Chinaman; so that to allow a peasant to die is the same as allowing the hen to die that lays the golden eggs.

And I do not say this because I have just taken it into my head to say a lot of unpleasant things to the rich Russians among whom I belong, but because it is so. As a proof and confirmation of this serves the whole Russian life, everything which incessantly is taking place in the whole of Russia.

All wealthy Russians incessantly press the button, not even for the pleasure of an interesting experiment, but for the most insignificant of purposes. To say nothing of the generations of factory hands, who perish from their senseless, painful, corrupting work in the factories for the gratification of the rich, all the agricultural population, or an immense proportion of it, having no land from which to make a living, is compelled to undergo a terrible strain of work, which destroys their physical and their spiritual forces, only that the gentlemen may be able to increase their luxury. The whole population is made drunk and is exploited by the commercialists for this purpose. The population degenerates, the children die before their time, only that the wealthy gentlemen and merchants may be able to live their distinct lordly lives, with their palaces, dinners, concerts, horses, carriages, lectures, and so forth.

Do not, now, the people, as they say, die like flies from hunger, the proprietors, the merchants, and, in general, the wealthy, sit with supplies of corn, waiting for still higher rises in the prices? Do the officials stop receiving their salaries, which are collected from the starving? Do not all the intelligent classes continue to live in the cities for their own superior purposes, if we are to take their word for it, – devouring there, in the cities, those means for the support of life which are taken there for them, and the lack of which causes the masses to die?

All the instincts of every one of the gentlemen, the learned, the official, the artistic, the domestic, are such as have nothing in common with the life of the people. The masses do not understand the gentlemen, and the gentlemen, though imagining that they understand the masses, do not understand them, because their interests are not only not identical with those of the gentlemen, but are always diametrically opposed to them.

We need the masses only as a tool, and the gentlemen make use of this tool, not from hard-heartedness, but because their life is so circumstanced that they cannot help making use of it, and their advantages (no matter how much one may say the opposite to console oneself) are always diametrically opposed to the advantages of the masses.

"The more salary and pension I am given," says the official, "that is, the more is taken from the masses, the better it is for me."

"The higher the price is at which corn and all the necessary articles will be sold to the masses and the harder it will be for them, the better it will be for me," say the merchant and the landowner.

"The cheaper the labour will be, that is, the poorer the masses will be, the better it is for us," say all the people of the wealthy classes.

Where can there be any sympathy among us for the masses?

Between us and the masses there is no other connection than an inimical one, that of the master and the slave. The better it is for me, the worse it is for him. The better it is for him, the worse it is for me. And under these conditions we have suddenly begun to assure ourselves and others that we are very anxious to bring them out from that condition of poverty, in which we ourselves have placed them, and which is necessary for us.

It is this conventional lie, which by all men is taken for the truth, that forms the cause of the strange confusion of ideas in the people of our circle who discuss the present wretched condition of the masses.

VI.

If a man of society really wants to serve the masses, the first thing he has to do is clearly to understand his relation to them. So long as nothing is undertaken, the lie, remaining a lie, is not particularly harmful; but when, as at present, men want to serve the masses, the first and chief thing which is necessary is to reject the lie, clearly to understand our relation to them. Having come to understand our relation to the masses, which consists in this, that we live by them, that their poverty is due to our wealth, and their famine to our satiety; if we sincerely want to serve the masses, we shall first of all stop doing what causes their ruin.

If we truly pity the horse which we are driving, we shall first of all get down and walk.

First of all, let us try to retire gorge, to return to the masses what we have all the time been taking from them; let us stop taking from them what we have been taking, and then let us change our lives, let us demolish the caste line, which separates us from the masses, and let us go to them, not only as to equals, but as to our better brothers, toward whom we have for a long time been guilty, — let us go to them with repentance, meekness, and love.

"I do not know whether the masses, the whole people, will find enough food or not," will say every man who takes this point of view, "and I cannot know: to-morrow there may be a pest or an invasion, from which the masses will die without a famine, or to-morrow there will be discovered a new nutritive substance which will feed all,

or, what is simplest of all, I shall die to-morrow, and so shall not learn anything about whether the masses will find enough food or not. But the main thing is, that nobody is appointing me to the business of feeding forty millions of people, who are living within certain boundaries, and I can obviously not attain the external end

of feeding certain people and freeing them from misfortune, – I can do but one thing, and that is, use my strength in the best manner possible for the purpose of contributing to the welfare of my brothers, considering all without exception my brothers.

And, wonderful to say, a man need but turn away from the problem of solving the external questions and set before himself the one true internal question, which is proper for a man, " How can I in this year of hard trials pass my life in the best manner possible ?" in order that these questions may receive an answer.

The common governmental activity, which does not change its relation to the masses, sets before itself an enormous aim, which it does not attain.

The personal activity sets before itself an internal aim, and it attains even the one which it has not set before itself.

The common governmental activity busies itself with the external aim of feeding and maintaining the welfare of forty millions of people, and, as we have seen, it meets on its path insurmountable obstacles.

(1) There is absolutely no possibility of determining the degree of the imminent want among the population, which maintains itself and is capable in this maintenance of manifesting the greatest energy or the most absolute apathy.

(2) If we admit that this determination is possible in accordance with the information collected by the government's agents, the amount of the sums demanded is so great that there is no probability that it will be obtained.

(3) If we admit that these means will be found, the free distribution of the same to the population will weaken the energy and self-reliance of the masses, which form the chief means for supporting them.

Even if we admit that the distribution will take place in such a way that it will not weaken the self-reliance of the masses, there is no possibility of correctly distributing the aid, and those who are not in want will get the portions of those who are, and the needy will after all, in many cases, remain without aid and will perish.

The personal activity, which sets before itself the internal aim, will remove all these obstacles. For this activity there is no question as to the number of those who are in need. For this

activity there have always been and always are those who need, and the question consists only in this, how much of my strength I can give to the needy.

It is this activity, which in the present famine year, in one locality (I have seen this more than once), makes a peasant woman, the hostess, at the words, " For Christ's sake," which she hears at the window, shrink and frown, and yet take down from the shelf the last newly started loaf, and cut off a tiny piece, of the size of half a palm, and, making the sign of the cross, hand it to the beggar. And it removes all the obstacles which have impeded the governmental activity with its external aim.

For this activity there does not exist the first obstacle, – the determination of the degree of the want of those who are in need: " They beg Christ for the sake of Mavra's orphans." She knows that they cannot get it anywhere, and she gives them the alms.

There also does not exist the second obstacle, – the enormous number of the needy: the hostess who gives the alms does not need to figure out how many millions of starving there are in Russia, or what the price of corn is in America, at what price it will reach our ports and our elevator, and how much it will be possible to take under warrant. For her there exists but one question : How to insert the knife into the loaf, whether so as to cut off a thick slice or not. But whether the slice which she gives is thick or thin, she knows indubitably that, if everybody will break off from his own, there will be enough for everybody, no matter how many there may be.

Still less does the third obstacle exist for the peasant woman. She is not afraid that the offer of this tiny slice will weaken the energy of Mavra's children, that it will encourage them in idleness and beggary, because she knows that these children understand how dear the slice which she is cutting off is to her.

Nor does the fourth obstacle exist. The peasant woman need have no care whether there is any truth as to the need of those who are now standing at the window, and whether there are not other needy persons who ought to get that slice. She is sorry for Mavra's orphans, and she gives them the alms, knowing that if all will do likewise, nobody will starve, not only the present year in Russia, but everywhere, at all times.

It is this activity, which has only the internal aim, that has saved, and that will now save, men.

It is this activity that ought to be practised by those who wish during this present, hard time to serve others.

[This activity saves people, because it is that smallest of all the grains, which grows into a very large tree. What one man, two, ten men can do, living in the village among the starving and aiding them, is so insignificant; but here is what I saw during one of my journeys. Lads were walking from Moscow, where they had been

working. One of them had grown sick and had fallen behind his companions. He sat and lay for some five hours on the edge of the road, and dozens of peasants passed by him. A peasant was driving home to dinner with potatoes, and he talked to the lad and, upon finding out that he was sick, took pity on him and carried him with him to the village. "Who is this? Whom did Akim bring along?" Akim told them that the lad was sick, that he was thin because he had not eaten for two days, — that he ought to be pitied. And one woman brought him some potatoes, another — a cake, a third — some milk. « Oh, dear man, he is so starved! How can one help pitying him? One's own child!" And the same lad, past whom, in spite of his miserable appearance, dozens of men had passed without giving him any thought, became an object of pity and dear to all, because one had taken pity on him. The activity of love is important for the very reason that it is infectious. The external activity, which is expressed in a free distribution, according to regulations and lists, provokes the very worst of sentiments, greed, envy, hypocrisy, condemnation; the personal activity, on the contrary, evokes the best sentiment, love, and the desire of sacrifice. "I have worked and laboured, and I get nothing, while a lazybones and drunkard is rewarded. Who told him to spend everything in drink? A thief suffers justly," say the well-to-do and the average peasants, who receive no assistance. With not less malice the poor peasant says of the rich peasant, who demands an equal share, "It is through them that we are poor. They suck us dry, and they want to get our share, too; they are sleek enough as it is," and so forth. Such sentiments are evoked by the distribution of the free aid. But, on the contrary, let a man see another divide his last possessions, to labour in behalf of the poor, and he feels like doing the same. In this does the force of the activity of love consist. Its force consists in this, that it is infectious, and so long as it is infectious, there is no limit to its diffusion.

As one candle lights another, and thousands are lighted from one, so one heart lights up another, and thousands are lighted from it. Millions of roubles will do less than

even a small diminution of greed and the increase of love in the mass of men. Let but love increase, — and the miracle will take place which was performed during the distribution of the five loaves. All will have enough to eat, and there will be left some. — A.]

This activity demands first of all the cessation of the caste relation to the masses, which is contrary to love, and the cessation of their exploitation, and demands a direct relation with them, a change, a simplification of life, — it demands a life with them, with those masses whom we wish to serve.

This activity presents itself to me like this: a man of the wealthy classes, who in the present calamitous year wants to do his share in the common calamity, first of all arrives in one of the localities which have suffered, and begins to live there, spending in Mamadyshi, Lukyanov, Efremov Counties, in a famine village, those

usual tens of thousands or hundreds of roubles, which he is in the habit of spending annually, and devoting his leisure, which in the city he used for amusements, to such an activity in favour of the starving people as will be according to his strength.

The mere fact that he will live there and spend what he usually spends will bring material assistance to the masses; and the fact that he will live amidst the masses, not even with any sense of self-sacrifice, but only without any selfish motives, will be of material aid to him and to the masses. It is evident that a man who has come to a famine locality for the purpose of being useful to the masses, will not limit himself to living for his pleasure alone amidst this starving population. I imagine such a person, man or woman, or a family with average means, let us say with one thousand roubles per year, as having settled in the famine district.

This person, or family, rents, or receives a dwelling from the proprietor, who is a friend, or chooses, or hires a

good hut: he has it papered, fixes the floors, provides himself with wood and supplies, buys himself a horse and fodder, and gets settled. All this means bread for the masses; but the relations of this family to the masses cannot be limited to this. Beggars with wallets will come to the kitchen. Alms must be given. The cook complains that too much bread is given out. It becomes necessary to refuse chunks, or to bake more loaves. More loaves are baked, and more people begin to come. From a family which is out of bread and has nothing to eat they have come to ask for some, and it becomes necessary to send some there. It turns out that the cook cannot manage it all, and that the oven is too small. It becomes necessary to hire a hut for the loaves, and to get another woman to do the baking. This costs money. There is no money. The person that has settled here has friends, or acquaintances, who know that he or she has gone to live in a famine district. He or she receives from them money which is to be used in assisting people. In the hired hut bread is distributed, but there come for it people who are not in absolute want of it, and they take the bread and sell it, – there begins a deception. To prevent the temptation of using the distributed bread for personal advantage, such people as come are given something to eat, instead of receiving bread. They prepare soup, beets, oat or starch broth, lentils, peas, – an eating-house is established.

[It seems to me that the eating-houses, places where those who come are fed, are naturally the form of assistance which will arise from the relations of the rich to the starving, and will be of the greatest use. This form more than any other calls forth the direct aid of him who brings assistance, more than anything else brings him in contact with the masses, less than any other is subject to misuse, and makes it possible with the least means to feed the greatest number of men.

In Dankov and Epiphany Counties such eating-houses were opened in September. The people have named them " orphan homes," and, it

seems, the name itself prevents any misuse of these establishments. An able-bodied peasant, who has the least chance of providing himself with food, will not himself go to these eating-houses to eat the orphans' food, for, so far as I have observed, he considers this a disgrace. Here is a letter which I have received from my friend, a member of the County Council, and a constant resident in the country, in relation to the activity of these orphan homes:

" Six orphan homes have been opened not more than ten days, and there already are two hundred people who are receiving food in them. The superintendent of the eating-houses is compelled, with the advice of the village elder, to admit eaters only after examination, – the number of the needy is so great. It turns out that the peasants do not feed by families, but that those who are in want themselves offer their candidates, who are nearly all of them old women and children. Thus, for example, the father of six children, in the village of Pashkovo, asked me to admit two of them, and then, two days later, brought a third child. The elder said, ' It gives one a special pleasure to see how the younger children have taken to the beet stew.' The same elder told me that sometimes the mothers themselves bring the children. * They are lying, when they say that it is to give them courage, for they will look about and eat themselves.' As you hear these words of the elder, you understand that it is not a lie, and that it is not possible to invent such words. Has the famine really not yet begun ? We, of course, know that the wolf is at the door; but the trouble is that the wolf breaks into so many families simultaneously that I am afraid we shall not have supplies enough. A calculation has shown that we use for each mouth one pound of bread and one pound of potatoes each day, and in addition to this we need fuel and a number of trifles, onions, salt, beets, and so forth. We are most troubled by the fuel; it is the most expensive of all the materials. The peasants have arranged to haul by rotation, and thus bring in the supplies. The organization demands a good administrator, and the finding of the supplies is a troublesome matter; but the orphan homes themselves need no supervision in the disbursement of the supplies : the hostess herself has been so much accustomed all her life to look after small matters, and the guests themselves watch the business of their eating-house so much, that the least neglect would immediately become known and then would be removed of its own accord. I have had two new cellars dug, and three hundred chetverts of potatoes have already been put into them, but this is too little, as the need grows from day to day. It seems that the aid has struck the nail on the head. A man has been placed in charge of six eating-houses, but it is time to widen the circle of the activity of the eating-houses, and the time has not yet passed.

" I feel how joyous the work will be in the eating-houses ; one does feel pleasure when watering plants in a drought: what joy, then, must it be every day to feed the starving little children ! "

I think that this form is convenient and possible, but I repeat that this form does not exclude other forms. The persons who live in the villages will have occasion to aid with money, and with grain, and

with flour, and with bread, and with a horse, and simply with food.

All that is necessary is that there should be men. But these men exist, they surely do. I have visited four counties, and in each there are already men who are ready for this activity, and who in some counties have already begun it. -72.]

However sure I am In advance, having learned this from bitter experience, that my idea will be misinterpreted, that people will purposely make it appear that they do not understand it, and will take one part and will say that in it lies the whole idea, I null none the less express my idea in full, without curtailing it, and without giving it in a softened form, so as to become unrecognizable, but in its full significance, and with the greatest clearness of expression that I am able to give to it.

My idea is this, that what saves men from calamities of every kind, among them famine, is nothing but love. But love is never limited to words, - it is always expressed in acts.

Now the acts of love in relation to the starving consist in giving one's own piece of bread to the hungry, as this was said, not even by Christ, but by his predecessor John, that is, it consists in sacrifice.

And so I think that the greater the sacrifice, the more love will there be, and the more fruitful will the acts be, - the more will people profit by it. And so I think that the best and most fruitful thing that can be done by those who understand the necessity of changing their lives now, in order to assist the needy, consists in settling now, in the present year, immediately, amidst the starving, living with them, eating with them, sleeping with them, dividing with them.

Although I am used to the misinterpretation of my ideas, it none the less pains me to think that this idea, too, will be misinterpreted, and that it will be deprived of the value which it might have, and so I beg leave to say just now how I understand what I have spoken of above.

I know in advance that people will say, "Tolstoy asserts that every person who wants to assist the starving ought to go at once and settle in a cold hut, live with lice, eat bread with orache, and die in two months or two weeks, and that everybody who does not do so offers no assistance."

I do not say so.

I say that to do so, to live and die with those who will die in two months or two weeks, would be very nice and beautiful, - just as beautiful as Damien's life and death among the lepers. But I do not say that everybody should and could do so, and that he who does not do so is doing nothing. I say that the nearer a man will act like that, the better it will be for him and for others, and that every

person who will come to the starving in the villages, and so will in some measure approach the ideal, will be doing well.

There are two limits: one is to give one's life for one's friends; the other is, to live without changing the conditions of one's life. All men find themselves between these two limits: some are on the level with Christ's disciples, who left everything and followed Him; the others are on a level with the rich young man, who immediately turned around and went away when he was told of the change of life.

Between these two limits are found all kinds of Zacchaeuses, who have only partially changed their lives. But, in order to be a Zacchaeus, it is necessary all the time to strive after the first limit.

All men who understand that the means for helping the present famine-stricken people consists in the removal of the partition which separates us from the masses, and who in consequence of this have changed their life, will inevitably, according to their moral and physical forces, take up their positions between these two limits.

Some will settle in a village and will arrange their lives in a way more or less close to the first manner of life: they will live and eat with the starving, departing from this according to their weakness; others will live and eat separately, but will manage kitchens and eating-houses, will serve the hungry at their dinner, will furnish them with food, and will give food to be taken home for the sick and the children ; others again will only superintend the eating-houses, and will visit and watch the eating-houses ; others – I can imagine – will live in a hungry village, spending their incomes there and alleviating as much of the need as they hear of; others, living in the city, where the most varied moral necessities may retain them, will change their mode of life by curtailing their own expenses and aiding those who will live in the villages to widen their activity.

Such, I imagine, will be the activity of the men who have come to understand their sin of separation from the masses and who wish to repent of it and to redeem it in the present year of wretchedness, which calls for redemption.

There can be none but a living help for men.

Such is the law. To wish to do good without sacrifice is the same as wishing to move a body without a loss of force.

The external governmental activity in behalf of the famine-stricken is an activity without sacrifice, hence its lack of success until the present, and, in my opinion and in the opinion of the actors themselves, the impossibility of success, to say nothing of the fact that the obstacles to this activity are found, as we have seen, in the impossibility of determining the degree of the people's need, the weakening of the energy of the people themselves, and the

impossibility of such a distribution that the aid shall reach the most needy.

The inconvenience of this activity consists in this, that people look upon the government aid as upon their lawful possession, to which they have a right, as upon an increase of income, and the jealousy of acquisition flames up when they receive the aid. All those who receive assistance see only persons who distribute money which is not their own, and who receive salaries for doing so, and such a distribution only develops in them greed for the greatest acquisition.

If the people in the famine district – all kinds of people, those who stand on the lowest round of poverty, and the rich men who live in the county seats, and all people between the two, – proprietors, both large and small, officials, merchants, innkeepers, millers, well-to-do and average peasants – see, as they see now, all people busy and very eagerly busy acquiring and increasing their means of subsistence, – proprietors and merchants who deal in high-priced corn, wood, potato-tops, who make use of everything in order to increase their incomes, and who side by side with it continue their usual round of life, with their hunts, city visits, and celebrations, they are, every one of them, infected by the same egotistical life and try out of everything they can, among the rest out of the assistance offered to men, to get hold of as much as possible and to give as little aid as possible.

The egotistical life and the chase after advantages is infectious. But just as infectious, and even more so, is the unegotistical activity of love, – the activity of sacrifice.

Every centre of men who live only in order to aid the starving and who have changed their lives for this purpose will be the centre of an infection of goodness. Looking at these people, the rich man who lives in the county seat, and the proprietor, and the merchant, will give more, and so, above all, will the average man, of whom there are thousands, and who will cut off a larger slice for Christ's sake. There are millions of these people, and millions of the roubles of a rich man will do less than an ever so small diminution of greed and an increase of love in men. And so soon as there shall be an infection of sacrifice, there will happen what was accomplished at the distribution of the five loaves.

All will have enough to eat, and there will be left some.

But, in order that this may happen, that love may make its appearance, it is indispensable that the activity should not arise from the desire, while remaining in our former relations to the masses, to maintain in them the working force which we need, but from the consciousness of guilt toward the masses, of the impression exerted against them, and of the separation from them, – from repentance and humility.

Not on the proud consciousness of our indispensableness to the

masses, but on humility can grow up the activity which can save the masses.

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