

THE HOLIDAY OF ENLIGHTENMENT OF THE 12TH OF JANUARY

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What can there be more terrible than village holidays ? In nothing is so palpably expressed all the savagery and monstrosity of the national life as in the village holidays. During work-days the people live, eating wholesome food moderately, working industriously, communing with one another amicably. Thus it goes for a week, sometimes for months, and suddenly this good life is impaired without any visible cause. On one definite day all stop working at the same time, and in the middle of the day begin to eat unaccustomed dainties, and to drink the specially prepared wine and vodka. All drink : the old make the young, and even children, indulge in drink. All congratulate one another, kiss, embrace, shout, sing songs ; now they are meek, now they brag, now feel offended ; all talk, and no one listens ; one hears cries, quarrels, and often sees fights. Toward evening some stumble, fall, and go to sleep wherever they happen to be ; others are taken away by those who are still in their senses, and others again wallow on the ground and writhe, filling the air with the stench of alcohol.

On the next day all these men awaken sick and, coming to a little, go to work until the next similar day.

What is it? Why is it so? – Why, it is a holiday, a church holiday. In one place it is Visitation, in another, Presentation, in a third, the Virgin of Kazan. What is meant by Visitation and Virgin of Kazan, nobody knows. All they know is that it is a church holiday, and that it is necessary to celebrate. And they wait for this celebration, and after their hard life of labour are glad when that time comes.

Yes, this is one of the most striking expressions of the savagery of the working people. Wine and celebration are for them temptations which they cannot withstand. When a holiday comes, each one of them is prepared to get intoxicated to a point where he loses his human semblance.

Yes, the masses are savage. But here comes the 12th of January, and in the newspapers the following announcement is printed : " A social dinner of the alumni of the Imperial Moscow University will take place on founder's day, January 12th, at five o'clock, in the restaurant of Grand Hotel, Moscow, entrance through the main door. Tickets for the dinner at six roubles may be had . . . (Follows a list of places where tickets may be obtained.)

But this is not the only dinner ; there will be dozens of such dinners, – in Moscow, in St. Petersburg, and in the provinces. The 12th of January is the holiday of the oldest Bussian university, a holiday of Bussian enlightenment. The flower of enlightenment is celebrating its holiday.

One would think that men who stand at the two extreme ends of enlightenment, the wild peasants and the most cultured of Bussian men, – the peasants who celebrate Presentation or the Virgin of Kazdn, and the cultured people who celebrate this very holiday of enlightenment, – ought to celebrate their holidays in quite different manners. But it turns out that the holiday of the most cultured of people in no way differs from that of the most savage of men, except in external forms. The peasants stick to Visitation or the Virgin of Kazan without the slightest reference to the meaning of the holiday, in order to eat and drink ; the cultured use as a pretext the day of St. Tatiana, in order to stuff themselves with food and drink, without the slightest reference to St. Tatiana. The peasants eat gelatine and noodles; the cultured eat sea crabs, different kinds of cheese, soups, fillets, etc. The peasants drink vodka and beer ; the cultured drink liquors of every description, – wines, vodkas, liqueurs, – dry, and strong, and weak, and bitter and sweet, and white and red, – and champagne. The cost of each peasant's treat is from twenty kopeks to one rouble ; the treat of the cultured costs from six to twenty roubles for each. The peasants talk of their love for their gossips, and sing Russian songs ; the cultured speak of loving their Alma Mater, and with faltering tongues sing senseless Latin songs. The peasants fall into the mud, and the cultured – upon velvet divans. The peasants are taken and dragged home by their wives and sons, and the cultured – by scornful, sober lackeys.

Indeed, it is terrible ! Terrible, because people who, in their opinion, stand on the highest level of human education, are not able in any other way to celebrate the holiday of enlightenment except by eating, drinking, smoking, and shouting senselessly for several hours in succession. What is terrible is this, that old men, the guides of the young, contribute to poisoning them by means of alcohol, – which poisoning, like quicksilver poisoning, never disappears entirely and leaves traces for the rest of the life. (Hundreds and hundreds of young men have, encouraged by their teachers, for the first time become beastly drunk upon this holiday of enlightenment, thus ruining and corrupting themselves for the rest of their lives.) But most terrible is this, that the men who are doing all this have to such an extent befogged themselves in their conceit that they are unable to distinguish between what is good and what bad, between what is moral and what immoral. These people have so convinced themselves that the condition in which they are is a condition of culture and enlightenment, and that culture and enlightenment give them the right to pamper to all their weaknesses, that they are unable to see the beam in their own eyes. These people, who abandon themselves to what cannot be called otherwise than monstrous drunkenness, amidst this debauch admire themselves and commiserate the unenlightened masses.

Every mother suffers, – I shall not say at the sight of her drunken son, but even at the thought of such a possibility ; every master avoids a drunken labourer ; every un corrupted man is ashamed of himself, if he has been drunk. All know that drunkenness is bad. But here cultured, enlightened men are drunk, and they are fully convinced that there is not only nothing shameful or bad in it, but that it is very charming, and with pleasure and laughter narrate episodes from their past drunken bouts. Things have come to such a pass that the most abominable orgy, in which young men are made drunk by their elders, – an orgy which is annually repeated in the name of education and enlightenment, – does not offend anybody, and does not keep people, during their drunkenness and after it, from admiring their exalted sentiments and thoughts, and boldly judging and valuing the morality of other people, and especially of the coarse and ignorant masses.

Every peasant regards himself as guilty when he is drunk, and begs everybody to forgive him for his drunkenness. In spite of his temporal fall, the consciousness of what is good and bad is alive in him. In our society this consciousness is being lost.

Very well, you are in the habit of doing so and cannot refrain from it, – all right, continue doing so, if you cannot restrain yourselves ; but know this much, that on January 12th, 15th, and 17th, and in February, and in all the other months, this is disgraceful and low, and, knowing this, abandon yourselves to your vicious inclinations in secret, and not as you do now, – triumphantly, entangling and corrupting the youth and your so-called younger brothers. Do not confuse the youth with the doctrine that there is another, a civil morality, which does not consist in restraint, and another, a civil immorality, which does not consist in lack of restraint. All know, and you know it, too, that before all other civil virtues one needs restraint from vices, and that every lack of restraint is bad, and that especially the lack of restraint in drinking is ' exceedingly dangerous, because it kills conscience. All know this, and so, before speaking of any exalted sentiments and objects, we must free ourselves from the base and savage vice of drunkenness, and not speak of exalted subjects while we are drunk. Do not deceive yourselves and other men, especially do not deceive the youths : the youths feel that, taking part in the savage custom, they are not doing the right thing, and lose something very precious and irretrievable.

And you know this, – you know that there is nothing better and more important than physical and spiritual purity, which is lost in drunkenness ; you know that all your rhetoric, with your eternal Alma Mater, does not move you, even when you are half-drunk, and that you have nothing to give to the youths in place of that innocence and purity which they lose when taking part in your monstrous orgies. Do not debauch them, nor confuse them, but know that as it was with Noah, as it is with every peasant, so it has been and will be with each person : it is disgraceful not only to get so drunk as to yell, swing people, get up on the tables, and do all kinds of foolish things, but also, without any need, in

commemoration of the holiday of enlightenment, to eat savoury food, and become intoxicated with alcohol. Do not debauch the youths, and do not debauch the servants which surround you by your own example. The hundreds and hundreds of people who serve you, who bring to you wine and food, and take you to your homes, are men, live men, for whom there exist, as for all of us, the most important questions of life, as to what is good and what bad. Whose example are they to follow ? It is fortunate that all these lackeys, drivers, porters, these Russian villagers, do not regard you as what you think yourselves to be, and as what you would like others to regard you, – as representatives of enlightenment. If this were the case, they, looking upon you, would be disappointed in all enlightenment, and would despise it ; but even now, though they do not consider you to be representatives of enlightenment, they none the less see in you learned gentlemen, who know everything, and who, therefore, can and must be emulated. And what is it that they, the unfortunate, learn from you ? It is a good question to put to yourselves.

What is more powerful, that enlightenment which is disseminated among the masses by the giving of public lectures, and by museums, or that savagery which is supported and disseminated among the masses by the spectacle of such holidays as that of the 12th of January, which is celebrated by the most enlightened men of Russia? I think that if all lectures and museums came to a stop, and if at the same time all such celebrations and dinners were given up, and the cooks, chambermaids, drivers, and janitors communicated to one another in conversations that all the enlightened people whom they serve never celebrate the holidays by gorging themselves with food, and getting drunk, but know how to make merry and converse without wine, the enlightenment would not lose anything by it. It is time to understand that the enlightenment is disseminated, not only by magic lantern and other pictures, not only by the oral and the printed word, but by the striking example of the whole life of people, and that an enlightenment which is not based on the moral life has never been and never will be an enlightenment, but only an eclipse and a corruption.