

# In the Midst of the Starving

Leo Tolstoy

1892

Our activity since the time of the last report has been as follows:

First, and foremost, our work has consisted in the establishment and carrying on of free eating-rooms.

The eating-rooms, which at the time of our last report numbered seventy-two, continued to multiply, and now, in four districts,<sup>1</sup> amount to one hundred and eighty-seven. This increase has proceeded, and still proceeds, in the following manner : from villages, contiguous to those in which we have established eating-rooms, either individual peasants or men selected with the starosta, come to us and petition us to open free dining-rooms for them.

One of us goes to that particular village from which the petitioners have come, and after making a tour of the homes, draws up a list of the property of the poor inhabitants. Sometimes, though very rarely, it seems that the village from which the deputies have come is not so very poor, and that there is no actual need of giving aid ; but in the majority of cases the one of us who visits the village, finds as it always happens in a careful examination of peasant poverty that the situation of the poor families is so bad that help is indispensable, and this help has been given by means of establishing free eating-rooms, in which are admitted the weakest members of the poor families. In this way the number of free eating-rooms has increased and still continues to increase in the direction where need is greatest and less provided against, but notably toward the Yefremovsky District and especially toward the Skopinsky District, where assistance is particularly lacking.

The eating-rooms were one hundred and eighty-seven in all, one hundred and thirty of which give the pensioners privarok, or stew and bread, and fifty-seven where they get only stew. This division into dining-rooms that give bread and dining-rooms that do not has been instituted since March, in consequence of the fact that since that month, in the Dankovsky District, in the poorest villages where our eating-rooms have been established, the zemstvos began to advance grain in the form of a loan at the rate of thirty pounds to each person, and in the Yepifansky District even more than thirty pounds, so that in these districts the poor population was almost or wholly supplied with grain and lacked only the privarok - potatoes, cabbage, and other vegetables which, even if some of the poor people had been having it, by March had entirely disappeared. For these poor people our " breadless eating-rooms " were opened, to which the pensioners come, bringing their own bread. Accustomed to receive bread also at the eating-rooms, the peasants were at first

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<sup>1</sup> Yepifansky, Yefremovsky, Dankovsky, and Skopinsky Uyezdui. 259

dissatisfied at this change, and declared that the advantage obtained from these dining-rooms did not compensate for their labor in carrying fuel from the forest to the dining-rooms, and that they did not want to use these dining-rooms. But this dissatisfaction did not last very long. Only the rich ones refused, and then very soon they also began to ask to be admitted to the tables.

The expense of the distribution of provisions for these "breadless" dining-rooms for ten persons a week was as follows :

Rye meal, for kvas ... 5 lbs.  
Wheat flour, for preparing porridge 2 "  
Pea meal, oatmeal, or Indian meal, for k sel 10 "  
Pease ..... 10 "  
Millet, for kasha gruel or kulesh . 10 "  
Potatoes 2 measures.  
Beets ... 1 measure.  
Sauerkraut vedro.  
Hempseed oil 1 lb.  
Salt 4lbs.  
Onions 1 lb.

Moreover during the winter each eating-room consumed a pound<sup>2</sup> and a half of kerosene a week, and sixty puds of firewood a month.

With this distribution comes to every man two pounds of vegetables, that is potatoes, cabbage, and beets, and a half pound of flour food, that is to say, millet, pea, or rye meal, which gives when boiled more than four pounds a day for each person.

The eating-rooms are especially interesting, from the fact that they are an ocular proof of the mistaken notion obtaining among the majority of the peasants themselves that rye bread is the most nourishing, the wholesomest, and at the same time the cheapest food. These eating-rooms have shown beyond a peradventure that pease, millet, maize, potatoes, beets, cabbage, oat and barley kisel, constitute a more nourishing and a wholesomer and a cheaper food than bread. Persons who come to the "breadless" eating-rooms bring very small pieces of bread, and sometimes come without any bread at all, and they passed the winter satisfied and healthy, eating every day two kopecks' worth of broth and two or three kopecks' worth of bread, when, if they had fed on bread only, it would have cost them at least seven and a half kopecks' worth.

Here is the bill of fare for a week, compiled by one of our assistants :

Monday Shchi (cabbage soup), kasha-gruel.  
Tuesday Potato soup (pakhliobka) , kisel of pease ; for supper the same.  
Wednesday Pea soup, boiled potatoes ; for supper, pease.  
Thursday Shchi, kisel of pease ; for supper, the same with kvas.  
Friday Potato soup, kulesh of millet ; for supper, the same.  
Saturday Shchi, boiled potatoes ; for supper, potato with kvas.  
Sunday Pea soup, kasha ; for supper, gorokh with kvas.

The compiler of this bill of fare was guided by those products which were to be had at his disposal at any given time. With beets, out of which all winter long the svekolnik, so much liked by every one, can be prepared, and with oatmeal, the bill of fare may be more varied, without making the food any more expensive.

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<sup>2</sup> A pound is one sixty-fourth of a chetverik, which is 5.77 gallons of tepid water; a vedro is 2.70 gallons.

Our eating-rooms are now distributed in localities thus :<sup>3</sup> In all the eating-rooms of the four districts at the present time nine thousand ninety-three men are being fed. Such was one of our undertakings, and the principal one.

Another of our undertakings in the last winter months consisted in furnishing wood to the needy population. This need, with each winter month, became more and more noticeable, and by the middle of the winter especially, when provisions had already been more or less distributed, had become our chief lack. In the localities hereabouts, where there is no firewood or peat, and it was out of the question to think of straw for ovens, this scarcity after the middle of winter became very great. Very frequently it was possible to find, not only children, but even grown persons, not on the oven, but in the oven, that had been heated the evening before and still retained a little heat ; and in many homes they had burnt up the woodwork, the barns, the sheds, even the hay, employing straw and wattles and rafters for fuel.

Owing to the generous contributions of wood which we received from various persons, we were enabled to distribute more than three hundred sazhen 2 of wood among the population, besides what is required for our eating-rooms. The method of distribution was this :

To the more opulent peasants we sold the wood at our own price reckoning the average price for wood bought in the forest or at Smolensk at five kopecks a pud ; to the average peasant we let it go on shares at the station called " Klekotki," thirty versts away, so that one half they took for themselves, and the other half they delivered to us. To the poor peasants who had horses we gave wood gratuitously, but on condition that they should themselves get it to their homes from the station. For the poorest of all the peasants who had no horses we delivered the wood at their homes the same wood which was brought by those who got it for us on shares.

Our third undertaking was the sustenance of the peasants' horses. Besides the eighty horses which in the early winter were sent to the government of Kaluga, twenty were taken to board by Prince D. D. O., ten by a merchant, Mr. S., and forty were put into Mr. E.'s yard, where they were fed on two carloads of hay contributed by P. A. Y. and on old straw given by the owner, and on some additional feed purchased.

Before spring, from the month of February on, two places were arranged for taking care of and feeding the peasants' horses : one at Mr. S.'s dvor, the other at Mr. M.'s in the Yefremovsky districts. For the feed of the horses ten thousand puds of straw, two carloads of chaff, were bought, three hundred puds of millet meal were laid in for scattering over it. By these means two hundred and seventy-six horses were kept during the course of the past two months.

Our fourth undertaking consisted in the gratuitous distribution of flax and linden-bark for working up, for those that need foot-gear and cloth. One carload of flax at six hundred and sixty rubles was distributed among the needy without payment being required, and another eighty puds and one hundred puds, contributed, was distributed on shares. The linen cloth which should come to our share has not hitherto been received ; so that we have not as yet been able to supply the demand of Mrs. N. N. who sent us one hundred and twenty rubles for cloth, of that of Mrs. K. M. who also proposed to buy the peasants' cloth for furnishing remunerative work to peasant women.

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<sup>3</sup> The list of eating-rooms according to districts, villages, as well as the contributors and the amounts contributed, were included in Count Tolstoy's original "Report for April 24, 1892," but are omitted in the reprint, and noted accordingly. ED. 2 Seven hundred and four cords.

Linden bark was contributed to us : one car-load by P. A. Y., one hundred puds by L., and one thousand puds were bought for two hundred and nineteen rubles. A part of this linden bark was sold at a low price, a part was given gratuitously to the most needy, another part was distributed on shares for the pleating of lapti.

The lapti brought to us have been partly distributed, and are being distributed. This undertaking, the furnishing of material for remuneration later, was less successful than anything else. The business is so petty, so inconvenient to us, who stand toward the peasants in the relation of distributors of contributions standing in the position of employers demanded such a strict account of the use of the employment of the material, that this part of our work was a bad failure, eliciting only unwarranted expectations, envy, and unkind feelings. Much the better way would have been to do as we are now doing selling these articles at very low prices to those that can buy them, and giving them gratuitously to those that cannot afford them to the poor.

Our fifth undertaking, begun in February, consisted in establishing eating-rooms for very small children, those of a few months, nursing babies, and up to three years of age. We thus arranged these eating-rooms :

Having inscribed all the homes where there are children of this age, and where there is no milk, we selected a matron who had a milch cow, and proposed to her in return for a compensation of fifteen puds of firewood, four puds of bran a month equivalent to a wage of three rubles to take her milk and make kasha gruel enough for ten children, out of millet for children from a year and a half to three years old, and of buckwheat for babies. For a child a year and a half to three years old, two pounds of millet is required a week, and for babies a pound of buckwheat.

In the large villages, these eating-rooms were thus arranged : milk is bought at the rate of forty kopecks a vedro ; a pound of millet a week is allowed to each baby up to a year ; two pounds to children from a year to two years old ; a glass of milk a day is given to each very young child, two glasses to those older ; those that have no cows receive milk and millet in the form of kasha ; those that have a cow receive the kasha, giving milk in exchange.

The mothers come sometimes alone after their gruel and carry it home ; sometimes they bring their children and feed them there. Generally at the arrangement of these " asylums," the mothers, yes, and all the peasants, propose, instead of a free eating-room at one house, a personal distribution of millet and buckwheat, declaring that milk is always to be found at the houses of decent people. But we think that for the security of health for little children our arrangement is precisely the one that is requisite. Having received her five or ten pounds of millet and wheat, every peasant woman, however good a mother she might be, would look on this millet and wheat as on a store of provisions belonging to the whole household, and would use it as her whim or her appetite or the will of her husband might dictate; so that in many cases this millet and wheat would not get to the children at all. But if every day she receives a portion of milk kasha already prepared for her child, then she infallibly gives it to him and feeds him.

We have now established about eighty of these asylums, and new ones are being established every day. These asylums, which at first called forth considerable doubt, have now come into regular evidence, and almost every day women come with babies from villages in which there are none and beg us to establish them. These asylums cost about sixty kopecks a month for each child.

Thus it is entirely impossible in such a complicated and constantly varying enterprise as we are engaged in to tell once and for all how much money we shall need for carrying on till the new harvest all that we have undertaken to do ; and, therefore, we do not begin a work which we

cannot bring to a conclusion. Then, according to all probability, there will remain in our hands unexpended funds from the newly received contributions and from the money which we have lent and may be returned in the autumn. The very best disposition to make of these surplus funds, I think, would be in the continuation of such asylums for little children for the coming year also. If, as I am persuaded, money is provided for this work and people, then why should they not become a perpetual institution? The establishment of such institutions everywhere might in a high degree diminish infant mortality. Such was our fifth enterprise.

Our sixth undertaking, which is now begun and which apparently will be carried through in one way or another, consists in distributing among needy peasants for sowing a sufficient quantity of oats, potatoes, hemp, and millet. This distribution of seed is especially needful in our locality because, over and above the sowing of the corn-field, there was an unexpected need of sowing over again a considerable portion about one-third of the rye, which failed in several places.

These seeds were distributed by us among the neediest of the peasants, among those whose land would remain infallibly unproductive if they did not receive the seed; yet we did not absolutely give them away, but only on the condition that they should return an equal quantity from the new crop, independently of the present price and that which should then be attached to such commodities. The money received for these commodities might be employed for the establishment of the infant asylums for the coming winter.

The purchase and distribution of horses constitutes our seventh form of activity. Besides the large percentage of those lacking horses, who always lack horses, reaching one-third in many villages, this year there are many peasants who have eaten up their horses, and who must now infallibly fall into absolute poverty, or practical servitude, unless they get horses. To such peasants we sell horses. Since spring we have bought sixteen such, and it is essential that we buy about one hundred more in the places where we have established our free tables. We sell these horses for about twenty-five rubles apiece on these conditions: the one receiving the horse enters into an obligation to cultivate two portions of land for the widows and orphans, or peasants who have no horses.

Our eighth undertaking was the sale of rye, meal, and baked bread at low prices. This enterprise the sale of bread continuing on a small scale through the winter, now with the approach of spring is enlarging. We have established and are establishing bakeshops for the sale of bread at a low price, at the rate of sixty kopecks a pud.

Besides these separate departments, for which we have used, and are still using, the contributions of money, small sums have been used by us in outright gifts to the needy for imperative necessities: funerals, the payment of debts, for the maintenance of minor schools, the purchase of books, building, and the like. Such expenses were very few, and may be seen from the financial report.

Such in general outlines were our undertakings during the course of six months. Our principal enterprise during this time was the feeding of the needy by means of free eating-rooms. In the course of the winter months this form of help, in spite of abuses, which were met with, in its principal purpose, that of insuring a perfectly poverty-stricken and enfeebled population the children, the old people, the sick, and the convalescent from starvation and poor food, was entirely successful.

But with the approach of spring considerations present themselves, demanding a change in the existing method of arranging and conducting the free eating-rooms.

With the approach of spring we are confronted in the first place with the new condition that many who now come to the eating-rooms will be at work or off after horses, and it will be impossible for them to be present at dinner or supper time ; in the second place, that in summer, owing to the increased heat in the dining-rooms, fires will be likely to break out. If as a consequence of this our activity changes, we will report upon it if it is possible.

Together with this we present a brief report of the contributions received by us and the use we made of them. A detailed report we will furnish if we have time, and have printed afterwards.

Part 2

#### REPORT ON THE USES MADE OF THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF MONEY FOR THE STARVING<sup>4</sup>

OUR work during the course of the summer has consisted in the following :

- I. In maintaining the former eating-rooms and establishing new ones ;
- II. In arranging for the asylums for babies and little children ;
- III. In distributing seed for the spring sowing;
- IV. In the purchase of horses ; and,
- V. In the establishment of bakeshops and the sale of bread.

Our first enterprise, the free eating-rooms, continued from April 24th till the third of August in almost the same form as in the preceding months, with only this difference, that, fearing the risk of fires from hot ovens, we gave up the baking of bread in the dining-rooms. Wherever we could do so, we furnished baker's bread ; and where it was impossible to prepare a sufficient quantity of bread, we distributed meal in rations. In many villages some of our coadjutors proposed to give out rations also of privarok.<sup>5</sup>

This change was at first welcomed with delight, but very speedily in the most of the villages the peasants themselves desired to return to the old way.

The need of free dining-rooms was felt in summer in the long days and the hard work more than in winter. Very often in many villages the women begged that in place of the dinner, to which they had a right, in the evening they might bring their husbands and their fathers who came late from their work.

The number of free eating-rooms at this time notably increased.

The whole number of eating-rooms was two hundred and forty-six, and there were simultaneously fed in them from ten to thirteen thousand persons more or less.

Our second enterprise the arrangement of priyutui, or asylums, for by this incorrect term we called the kitchens for the preparation of milk porridge for babies continued on the former basis and was widely developed. For some of the asylums, in villages where there were few cows and in our circuit there were villages where sixty out of a hundred homes had no cows at all, we purchased cows on the stipulation that those that received them should furnish milk for the children assigned to them. For some, where this was possible, we bought milk.

In one hundred and twenty-four of these asylums between two and three thousand were fed.

Our third enterprise, consisting in the distribution of seeds, oats, potatoes, millet, hemp, we arranged as follows :

Arriving at a village from which petitioners had come, we would invite three or four well-to-do householders who needed no assistance, and assign to them the duty of making a list of such persons as needed seed; and according to the representations of these inspectors we indicated the

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<sup>4</sup> Between April 24 and August 3, 1892.

<sup>5</sup> Privarok is boiled beef and broth.

quantity necessary for each petitioner. Sometimes we made it more, sometimes less ; sometimes we erased some names and substituted others not included on the lists.

Our fourth occupation the distribution of horses to those who were carrying on farming, but had either eaten up their horse or had met with some unfortunate accident was made especially difficult by the fact that the help given to any one person was disproportionately large, and therefore elicited envy, reproaches, and dissatisfaction among those whom we had to refuse. We determined this assistance just as in the case of the seeds, by the reports of the referees of the village from which the petitioners came.

In these two activities we saw with especial clearness the sharp distinction between the charity which has for its purpose the feeding of the hungry and attained by the free eating-rooms, and the charity having for its purpose the giving of assistance to the peasant husbandry in which we were involved in distributing oats, millet, hemp, potatoes, and horses.

Having taken as our object the relieving of the inhabitants of a certain locality from the danger of pining away, of becoming sickly, and perishing from lack of food, we would first establish free eating-rooms in this locality, and thus completely attain our end. Even if there were occasionally abuses that is, if there were people able to subsist at their own homes, who yet got food at the eating-rooms these abuses were of small importance where the cost of food amounted to no more than from two to five kopecks a day.

But, having taken as our object to help the peasant husbandry, we were immediately confronted, in the first place, with the insurmountable difficulty of determining whom to help, how to help, and in what way ; in the second place, with the magnitude of the need to cover, which would require a hundred times more means than we had at our disposal ; and in the third place, with the possibility of the greatest abuses, such as always accompany a gratuitous, or even a loan, distribution.

Neither of these undertakings, notwithstanding the great efforts which we made to carry them out, confirmed in our minds the consciousness that by so doing we had conferred any real benefit on the peasants of our locality.

Our fifth activity was the baking of bread and selling it at a low price. At first we sold it at eighty kopecks, then at sixty kopecks, a pud, and this has continued to be the price till now.

This enterprise went, and is still going, very well. The people very gladly prize the opportunity of always having cheap bread at hand. Often, especially in summer, people came for it ten versts or more, and if they were not in time for the first baking, which would be already disposed of, they would have their names entered, as at the box office of the theaters, for ten pounds of the next baking, and they would wait till noon for their share.

By the end of July we planned to discontinue the free tables, keeping on only with the bakeries and the children's asylums, which were still needed, and on which we still spent the money remaining at our disposal. But we did not succeed in discontinuing the free tables, because in consequence of the cessation of the activities of the "Red Cross," it was essential to arrange immediately to establish eating-rooms for all those who had been under the care of the "Red Cross," and who had been since the first of August without oversight. From the first of August we established seventy eating-rooms, for the most needy of the "Red Crossites," who were very speedily joined by the poorest of the territorial peasants. Their number has been constantly increasing.

The harvest this year in the region of our activity has been like this : in a circle with a diameter of about fifty versts, in the center of which we are established, the harvest of rye is worse than a failure. In many villages along the Dona, Nikitskoye, Myasnovka, Pashkovo,

where I was early in September, there was no rye at all. What there was had been sowed and eaten up. Oats had not grown at all ; rarely had any one enough for seed. There were fields of oats which had not been mowed. Potatoes and millet were good, but not everywhere. Moreover, not all sowed millet.

To the question as to the economical situation of the people this year, I could not answer accurately. I could not answer it because, in the first place, all of us who were busied last year in helping to feed the people had got into the condition of a doctor who, having been summoned to a man with a dislocated leg, should see that the man was thoroughly diseased. What answer would the doctor give, if he were asked as to the patient's condition ? " What do you want to know about ? " the doctor will ask, in return. " Do you inquire about his leg, or his general condition ? The leg is of no consequence, it is merely dislocated, it is an accident, but his general condition is bad."

But, moreover, I could not answer the question as to the situation of the people, "whether it is serious, very serious, or not serious ? " because all of us who live near to the people are too much accustomed to their continually and gradually deteriorating condition.

If any inhabitant of a city should come, in bitter cold weather, to an izba which had been slightly warmed the evening before, and should see the occupants of the izba crawling down, not from the top of the stove, but from the oven itself, in which they will take turns in spending the day, that being their only means of getting warm, or burning the roofs of their homes and hay for fuel, living on nothing but bread made of equal parts of meal and the worst kind of bran, and grown men quarreling and fighting because the slice cut off the loaf did not reach the designated weight by an eighth of a pound, or men unable to leave the izba because they had nothing to wear or nothing to put on their feet, then he would be struck by what he saw. We have got so accustomed to such things that they do not impress us. And so the question, in what condition the people of our locality are, would be answered better by a person who should come here for the first time than by us. We have grown hardened, and no longer see anything.

Some idea of the situation of the people in our locality may be gathered from the following statistical data, extracted from the Tula Gazetted.

In the four districts, Bogoroditsky, Yepifansky, Yefremovsky, Novosil'sky, during the four fruitful years from 1886 to 1890, on the average, in the five months from February to June inclusive, there were 9.761 deaths and 12.069 births. During the famine year, 1892, in these same districts during the same five months, there were 14.309 deaths and 11.383 births. In ordinary years the birth rate exceeds the death rate, on the average, by 2.308 ; in this unfruitful year the death rate exceeds the birth rate by 2.926. So that, in consequence of the failure of the crops in these four districts, the diminution of the population, as opposed to ordinary years, was 5.234.<sup>6</sup> In comparison with other districts in fruitful years, the following results are obtained : In the four fertile districts, Tul'sky, Kashirsky, Odoyevsky, Byelevsky, in 1892, in the course of the same five months, there were 8.268 births and 6.468 deaths. In these districts, when the harvest failed, there were 11.383 births and 14.309 deaths, so that in those districts that fruitful year the birth rate, compared to the death rate, was approximately as four to three, while in those districts when there was loss of the crop, the death rate was to the birth rate as seven to five ; in other words, when the districts had good harvests to every four births there were three deaths, when the crops failed there were, to every seven deaths, only five births.

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<sup>6</sup> Tul'skiya Gubernskiya Vyedomosti.

In the percentage of these relations the condition of the localities under the failure of the crops is shown with especial distinctness by the death rate in the month of June. In the Yepifansky District sixty per cent more died in 1892; in the Bogoroditsky District one hundred and twelve per cent, and in the Yefremovsky district one hundred and sixteen per cent more than in ordinary years.

Such were the consequences of the failure of the crops last year, notwithstanding the increased assistance rendered by government, by the "Red Cross," and by private charity. What will happen this year in our region, where rye has turned out worse than last year, oats have entirely failed, fuel is lacking, and the last energies of the population were exhausted a year ago?

How is it? Must they starve again? Starve? Free tables! free tables! Starve! This is an old story, and so terribly wearisome. It is a bore to you in Moscow and Petersburg, but here, when from morning till evening they stand under your windows or at your door and you cannot go along the street without hearing always the same sentence: "We have not tasted food for two days; we have eaten our last oats; what shall we do? the last end has come; must we die?" and so on, here, however shameful it is to acknowledge it, it has already become so irksome that you begin to look on them as your enemies!

I get up very early; 'tis a clear, frosty morning with a beautiful sunrise; the snow creaks under my feet; I go outdoors, hoping that no one is as yet out, so that I may have time to take a turn. But no; as soon as I have opened the door, already there are two there: one a tall, broad-shouldered muzhik in a short, ragged sheepskin jacket, in broken linden-bark shoes, with an emaciated face, with a bag over his shoulder, they all have emaciated faces, so that these faces have become typical of the muzhik. And with him is a lad of fourteen without any shuba, in a ragged little jacket, also wearing linden shoes and also carrying a bag and a stick.

I try to go past them; the low bows begin and the usual colloquy. There is nothing for it. I have to return indoors. They follow me.

"What do you want?"

"Have pity on us!"

"What?"

"Have pity on us!"

"What do you need?"

"We come for help."

"What kind of help?"

"To save our lives."

"But what do you need?"

"We are starving to death. Help us a little!"

"Where are you from?"

"From Zatvornoye."

I know that is a miserable rundown community, where we have not, as yet, opened a free eating-room. Beggars come from there in dozens, and I immediately reckon this man as one of these professional beggars, and I feel indignant at him, and indignant because they bring their children with them and spoil them.

"What do you ask for?"

"Give us your advice!"

"But how can I give you my advice? We here can't do anything. We have nothing here to eat."

But he pays no attention to me ; and once more begin the same old stories heard a hundred times, and seeming to me to be made up out of whole cloth :

” Nothing grew ; eight in the family ; I am the only worker ; the old woman has died ; last summer we had to eat the cow, at Christmas the last horse died ; wherever I go there is nothing, the children are crying for hunger ; there is nowhere to turn to ; we have not anything to eat for three days.”

This is the usual story. I wait, wondering if he will soon end it. But he keeps speaking.

” I thought I could live somehow ; but I have struggled till I have no strength left. I never expected to have to beg, but God has brought me to it ! ”

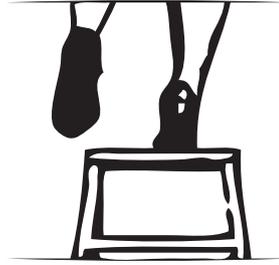
” Very good, very good ; we will come ; then we will see what can be done,” I say, and I wish to go, and my eyes suddenly rest on the boy. The boy is looking at me piteously with his beautiful brown eyes full of tears and hope, and one bright tear-drop already hangs on his nose, and at the same instant falls off and drops on the wooden floor covered with trampled snow. And his pretty, agonized face, with ruddy hair blown by the breeze around his head, is all convulsed with restrained sobs. For me, the father’s words are the old well-worn yarn. But to him that repetition of the horrible time which he and his father had experienced together, and the repetition of it all in the triumphant moment when they had at last reached me, reached help, affected his nerves so shaken by famine. To me all this was only a bore, a bore ; all I can think of is how soon they would squander what I should give.

To me it is an old story, but to him it is frightfully new.

Yes, to us it is a bore. But still, they have such a longing to eat, such a longing to live, such a longing for happiness, for love, as I could see by his charming tear-brimming eyes fastened on me, that he had this good, pitiful lad, tormented by poverty and full of an innocent pity for himself!

BYEGITCHEVKA, September 23, 1892.

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