

Iowa Corn for Russians

A severe drought in 1891, following two or three unfavorable seasons, caused crop failure in many parts of Russia. The peasants had no food reserves. Famine and disease spread until American gifts of medicine and grain relieved the suffering. In Iowa representative committees solicited aid in every part of the State. This story of Iowa's friendly contribution to stricken Russia half a century ago is adapted for THE PALIMPSEST from an account by B. F. Tillinghast, the secretary of the Iowa Russian Famine Relief Commission, as published in The Midland Monthly, Vol. 1, pp. 325-338, 409-426, April and May, 1894. — The Editor.

During the early months of the year 1892 five steamships, loaded with grain, flour, provisions, and hospital stores, departed from two eastern cities for Russian ports on the Baltic Sea. This fleet of ships had no admiral, its course was shaped by no government, and the orders were unsealed and open to the world. I have read of no other instance where millions of people, without official direction or support, subscribed money, gave of their abundance, sometimes from their very poverty, and chartered large ocean freighters; where carrying corporations and telegraph

companies vied with the people in sending supplies and substantial cheer to other and unknown millions suffering and dying from wide-spread famine.

In the summer of 1891 the crops had failed over a large area of European Russia. Earlier partial failures made this one more grave, and every account during the fall of that year intensified the situation. The territory of the famine was so distant, the communication was so slow, and the reports were so conflicting that the horrible truth did not come out for months. By midwinter the sympathy of America had been aroused and prominent citizens were actively engaged in raising funds and gathering food supplies. There were four centers of the movement, each quite independent of the others — in Iowa, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, and New York. A ship-load of flour was procured largely through the influence of Thomas DeWitt Talmage's appeals in the *Christian Herald*.

The real inception of the effort to relieve the famine-stricken Russians can not be accurately determined. One of the first to commend the sending of food was Miss Frances E. Willard. In her annual report as president of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, read in Boston on November 13, 1891, Miss Willard presented an

appeal for a Thanksgiving collection in the churches. She believed that to succor the starving poor in Russia would be an act pleasing to God and helpful to the holy cause of human brotherhood. About that time others were talking privately. Among them were Iowa men and women of warm heart, bright mind, and quiet deed. I chanced to know of Miss Alice French, the "Octave Thanet" of literature, and others in Davenport. W. C. Edgar, editor of the *Northwestern Miller*, Minneapolis, had suggested a ship-load of flour to be given by the millers of the northwest. On December 6th, the Davenport *Democrat* urged that the relief work be broadened, systematized, and hastened.

But how could the movement be organized and conducted to a satisfactory conclusion? What doubts and difficulties might arise when the undertaking had been well begun? In the event that offerings should get to Russia, what then? Some believed Russian officials would confiscate the supplies, burn the ships that transported them, and send to Siberia any Americans with the temerity to go and proffer the food. But it must be confessed that with many people in the northern States the sentiment of gratitude to Russia for historic acts of steadfast friendship quickened the promptings of pure charity. They could not for-

get the fact that in the dark days of the Civil War, when Louis Napoleon had invited Russia, as he had England, to unite with him in breaking the blockade of the Confederacy, the Czar of Russia sent his men-of-war to New York and San Francisco. Their mission became a record of history later when it was learned upon authority of Prince Gortschakoff that an order was written by Alexander's own hand, directing his admiral to report to President Lincoln for orders in case England or France gave undisguised support to the Confederates.

When it came to deciding upon the agency through which Iowa's gift, without loss on the one hand or increase of expense on the other, should reach the end in view, there was not one minute's doubt. The American Red Cross was known, and its honored president, Miss Clara Barton, who never failed to hear and answer the appeals of stricken humanity in war, pestilence, fire, flood, and famine, was the one unquestioned recourse. Miss Barton had informed herself of the suffering in the Russian provinces, and she had anticipated the outpouring of American relief. With a woman's tact, a diplomat's art, and a benefactor's forethought she had called upon James G. Blaine, then Secretary of State, and also upon Alexander Gregor, Russian charge d'affaires, at Washing-

ton. In brief, the way was not only opened, but paved. Russia would thankfully accept any relief tendered; and, more, she would send her ships to New York or charter American vessels to convey the gift to her own ports, from which the imperial railroads, boats, and other conveyances would carry it to the scenes of destitution. That Russia should come to our shores like a mendicant was not to be allowed. The Red Cross and Iowa would deliver the relief they gave. W. I. Buchanan, then chief of the agricultural department of the Columbian Exposition, an Iowa man of boundless energy, enlisted the cooperation of the railroads in shipping the grain.

When most of the preliminary uncertainties had been removed and the project seemed assured of success, a Sunday conference was held with Governor Horace Boies at his home in Waterloo. The Governor entered quickly and cordially into the proposed relief work. Personally and officially he extended every aid within his power.

The Iowa Russian Famine Relief Commission, as named by Governor Boies, was composed of B. F. Tillinghast, Davenport; H. C. Wheeler, Odebolt; J. J. Fleming, Burlington; S. H. Mallory, Chariton; William Larrabee, Clermont; A. Slimmer, Waverly; J. G. Hutchinson, Ottumwa; T. M. Lenihan, Fort Dodge; John Hayes, Red Oak;

W. W. Witmer, Des Moines; and C. J. Ives, Cedar Rapids — a member for each congressional district. In his letter of notification, Governor Boies urged that a meeting be held at the capitol in Des Moines on December 29th, "to perfect plans for the organization of sub-committees in the several counties of the State and to inaugurate the work of collecting and forwarding supplies at once." Ex-Governor Larrabee could not be present but sent as his substitute a check for \$100. S. H. Mallory responded in a like encouraging way, and all others were in sympathy with the movement. Eventually S. L. Dows, Alexander Charles, Albert W. Swalm of Oskaloosa, W. B. Barger of Chariton, B. F. Clayton of Macedonia, and M. D. O'Connell of Fort Dodge served on the commission. H. C. Wheeler was chosen president, B. F. Tillinghast, secretary, and Byron A. Beeson, treasurer.

The main problem was, what to do and how to do it. "Why not send corn?" several committeemen asked. Iowa had, in the year of the famine, produced its largest corn crop — 335,031,598 bushels, valued at \$100,509,479. One queried, "What do Russians know about corn?" Another referred to the Irish famine of 1847 when Indian corn from America, improperly cooked, was tried because there were no potatoes. Others held that

corn in the unbroken kernel would be fit only for horses. If ground into meal, it would heat and spoil on the long ocean voyage. But some knew that a dollar in corn is worth two dollars in wheat, and that as a food for cold climates corn is most valuable, being rich in fatty and starchy matter, two heat-giving elements. The scoffers against corn were all put to ignoble rout by a letter from Colonel Charles J. Murphy, special agent in Europe of the Department of Agriculture. And so golden corn was Iowa's gift to Russia, and it was more acceptable than silver.

Organization was pushed from the eleven congressional districts into the ninety-nine counties, and from many of the counties into the townships and school districts. Volunteers were eager for enrollment and the prospects were auspicious. Miss French thought the women should have their own relief organization. Her always busy and facile pen was turned from romance to reality. With unwavering zeal she wrote, spoke, traveled, and appealed; not for days but for months.

On January 27, 1892, Governor Boies appointed the Iowa Woman's Auxiliary to the Red Cross, the use of the name having been sanctioned by Miss Barton. Mrs. William Larrabee of Clermont was designated as president, Miss Alice French of Davenport, secretary, and the follow-

ing members for the different districts: first, Mrs. M. J. Ketcham, Mount Pleasant; second, Mrs. Evelyn Schuyler Schaeffer, Iowa City; third, Mrs. Matt Parrott, Waterloo; fourth, Mrs. N. C. Deering, Osage; fifth, Mrs. W. P. Brady, Cedar Rapids; sixth, Mrs. Perry Engle, Newton; seventh, Mrs. Ella Hamilton Durley, Des Moines; eighth, Mrs. J. B. Harsh, Creston; ninth, Mrs. Julian Phelps, Atlantic; tenth, Mrs. John F. Duncombe, Fort Dodge; and eleventh, Miss Lucy Patterson, Sioux City. To this list there were some additions. Mrs. John T. Stoneman of Cedar Rapids, Mrs. A. W. Swalm of Oskaloosa, and others were appointed later.

Miss French appeared in the double rôle of secretary and evangelist. She addressed gatherings of women in hotels, private parlors, and club-rooms. She told the story of the famine out of her full information, and those who listened were convinced of the righteousness of the cause and of the terrors of the peasant victims. In their different local fields other women found themselves possessed of talents which were not buried but put to work. The people of Iowa became aroused because they had learned the awful truth. Their response was characteristic.

It may well be doubted if so many agencies in Iowa were ever before united in one purpose, and

that for no personal or common gain. To attempt enumeration is to fail in some respects, and to assign order of prominence is hopeless. The daily, weekly, and monthly press opened its pages without restraint or charge in a single instance. Appeals, circulars, letters, directions and orders were issued by the score. They were published and in this way the workers were always kept in touch with each other. The churches made it a seven-day campaign, where no Sunday papers were printed. Protestant and Catholic, Jew and Gentile were in accord, and it seemed as if the brotherhood of man embraced all. The Sunday schools, the private schools, even the kindergartens were together. The railroads offered not only their cars, but their trains; for corn moved out of Iowa literally by the train-load. Where it was hinted that reduced fares would further the work, passes came in blocks, and when the bottom fell out of the wagon roads because of the heavy rains and the disappearing frost and snow, the railroads extended the sixty-day limit of free transportation for another month. Postage stamps were getting expensive, and so correspondence was entrusted to the telegraph wires and packages to the express companies, books of franks having been tendered, thereby saving precious time and hundreds of dollars.

Numerous and varied were the ways devised for raising money. In Davenport the comic opera "Mikado" was given, and \$600 added to the \$2500 before subscribed. To see a staid school principal impersonating "Ko-Ko" was a cure for the worst case of depression. In Cedar Rapids the W. J. Florence Club presented "Everybody's Friend". In Ottumwa a musical entertainment crowded the opera-house, to which not a single complimentary ticket was issued. At the State University a mock national political convention was held, all the receipts going to the Russians. George Kennan, who was lecturing in Iowa, forwarded his check for \$100. "To aid in the humane work that the Red Cross is doing for the relief of the famine-stricken people of Russia; and I wish you God-speed," he wrote. In one place the lawyers and the doctors met in a spelling contest for money. There were Russian teas and peasant receptions. And so, in almost countless ways, money materialized.

It was deemed best not to send any money abroad. There were two reasons. Its value in food bought here would be greatly increased. Free carriage to the interior of Russia was promised, thus adding a three-fold power to every dollar. It was also wisely determined to convert all money advanced into shelled corn, if possible

in the locality where the money was given. Farmers could furnish grain often with less trouble than cash.

The first cars of corn were shipped during the second week in February; the last cars on April 1st. In all, 225 car loads, exceeding five hundred bushels each, were sent out of Iowa. A few of them contained flour. The work of shelling, loading, and clerical care required in billing was not small. Particular attention was paid to the grade and condition of the grain put into every car, since damp corn would grow more damp on the way. Attached to either side of every car was a large placard with a red cross. This was a talisman everywhere. All cars were consigned to Miss Barton in New York, and all reached her agents there without accident.

The loading of the *Tynehead* required several days, the weather being rainy, and pains being taken to keep the grain dry. On Monday, May 2nd, the hatches were closed and sealed. The custom-house papers had been procured; the surveyor of the board of underwriters had allowed the last pound of freight consistent with safety; and the captain's papers had been signed specifying Riga as the Russian port of entry. A tug, hauled the ship out into the river at high tide. She was greeted by saluting whistles of passing fer-

ries, yachts, and steamers, waving flags, and cheers from thousands.

The *Tynehead's* cargo comprised 95,565 bushels of corn in bulk; 21,201 bushels in bags; 402 sacks of meal; 731 sacks of flour; ten bags of wheat; nine bags of rye; two boxes of hospital stores; one barrel of bacon; one box of canned goods, and one barrel of grain and one box of drugs, the latter specially given for Count Tolstoi.

The cargo just itemized does not contain the full measure of Iowa's gratuity to Russia. The millers of some forty towns gave 51,160 pounds, or 260 barrels of flour, which went by the steamship *Missouri*, in March. The people of Cedar Falls sent direct to the American legation in St. Petersburg, \$1033. And there were in the hands of Treasurer Beeson and others, after it was too late to convert the money into corn, \$4,959, which amount was remitted to Miss Barton. I have reason to believe that at least \$5000 was forwarded to Russia by individuals and church societies which did not pass through the Iowa commission. The total realized was, therefore, population considered, larger than the aggregate of any other State, while in the actual number of contributors Iowa was far in the lead.

After a voyage of baffling winds and heavy seas the *Tynehead* reached Riga on May 27th.

J. B. Hubbell, the General Field Agent of the American Red Cross, invested with full power to act both for the society and the Iowa donors, was already at the Baltic port.

"I came here", he wrote on May 27th, "with Count Bobrinsky, who represents the committee of the Grand Duke, and who has had charge of loading and forwarding to the interior all the American cargoes that have arrived in Russia. We were met by our American consul, Mr. Bornholdt, a large shipping merchant of this city, whose business is also unloading of ships, and it is he who has unloaded all the other relief cargoes here and at Libau. We paid our respects to the governor of the city and province. He understood our business, wrote an order for his ship to be ready at five o'clock, and invited us to accompany him to meet the *Tynehead* which must anchor some miles outside the city — an hour's ride by steamer — till she can unload a part of her cargo by lighters. Three hundred and twenty imperial cars are already here to take the grain. As soon as these are loaded they are to be started forward, and have the right of way over all trains. The Iowa cargo will be more widely distributed than any other that has been received. Some of it must be carried nearly 3500 miles."

The formal tender of the Iowa food supplies by

Dr. Hubbell of the American Red Cross to General Kauffmann, president of the Red Cross of Russia, was an act requiring more than ordinary prudence and discernment in view of all the circumstances that existed. General Kauffmann was counsellor in the department of economics, having to consider all proposed questions of change or modification in the economies of the empire before final approval of the czar.

"I desire to express my thanks for the courtesies and privileges of being acquainted with the every-day, practical work of the Red Cross of Russia, as shown by the kindness of your secretaries", began Dr. Hubbell. "Nowhere have I seen more completely comfortable and generous provision for the general care of the sick than here in the institutions of the Red Cross and under its work. And there can be no doubt that the practical experience that the workers are receiving daily will greatly increase their efficiency for service in time of war. It will be a pleasure to make a report to the American Society of the thorough work of the Russian Society in time of peace.

"Regarding the arrival of the cargo by the ship *Tynehead*, I trust your excellency has already understood by our charge d'affaires that no public demonstrations are desired. This cargo is from the people of the agricultural State, Iowa, some of

whom have suffered from failure of crops in their own country and thus the more keenly appreciate similar conditions that others may suffer when such a vast territory as the interior of the Russian empire is denied rain season after season in succession; and they have simply taken this method of expressing their sympathy, for it is their custom to give in a like manner in their own country wherever occasions of calamity or suffering of any kind require the aid of outside help.

“At this particular time they feel that, perhaps, the same rains which were withheld from their brothers in Russia have given the increase to their own crops, which have been unusually abundant the past year, and thus added duty to desire. Moreover there is a deep brotherly feeling throughout the nation, for our people as a people never forget that Russia has always been the friend of America.”

Dr. Hubbell has been quoted as saying that no American cargo was so widely distributed as that furnished by Iowa. It is difficult to realize the true force of this without verification by the map. The official order made out in advance, a copy of which is before the writer, covers several sheets of foolscap and itemizes, in the most scrupulous tabular order, the name of the province, the name of the person to whom assigned, the center of dis-

tribution, the number of pounds of maize flour, of wheat flour, the pounds of bacon, the number of cars — so that every article can be traced to its destination. The recipients include men and women of high and low station, in one case a university professor, in the next a prince, in the third a pastor, in the fourth a colonel in the army, a general, an engineer, a count, a doctor, to the number of eighty individuals. A single mention must suffice: Count Tolstoi received fourteen carloads of shelled corn. In every instance the character of the recipient was above reproach and well known as worthy of every confidence. It would be wearisome to name the many towns, there being an average of five for every province, and there were sixteen provinces — Kazan, Simbirsky, Perm, Saratoff, Samara, Reazan, Tamboff, Orloff, Toula, Smolenshky, Ufa, Nyegorod, Charkoff, Orenburg, Worouesh, and Peuza.

While America was so active in this charity, what was the government of Russia doing for its own unfortunates? This question in all its forms has been asked. It was often propounded during the Iowa campaign. Let the United States ambassador at St. Petersburg, Charles Emory Smith, an official who informed himself on the subject, answer. "In the presence of this national disaster the Russian government has not been passive", he

reported. "Without reviewing the administrative system, it must be said that it has sought to grapple in liberal measures with the tremendous problem. Before the first of March, 1892, it had appropriated 150,000,000 rubles, or \$75,000,000 for this purpose, and the direct outlay by June can hardly be less than 200,000,000 rubles. Besides this, taxes have been remitted, and work has been furnished where practicable. Vast quantities of grain have been bought and brought from the rich fields of the Caucasus, though, with the limited means of communication and the loss of horses, it has been difficult to convey it to the regions remote from the railroads. Large public works, employing hundreds of thousands of men, have been undertaken. The forests of the imperial domain have been opened to the peasants for fuel. The proprietary class have, as a rule, in this emergency, proved worthy of their position and responsibilities. There are single families taking care of as many as twenty thousand people. The women, especially, have come forward with a consecration and self-sacrifice which command admiration. If it were not invidious or indelicate many cases might be cited of ladies of gentle birth who have left their homes, braved the dangers of disease, faced the hardships of an unaccustomed and trying life, and given up weeks and months to

the feeding of the hungry and ministering to the sick. One thing ought in fairness be said. The emperor has been published abroad as indifferent. It is only just to remark that this peculiar kind of indifference has been manifested not merely in a vigorous direction of the later governmental operations of relief, even to the summary dismissal of inefficient agents, but in gifts from his private purse, which, if the belief of St. Petersburg can be accepted, amount to fifteen or twenty times all the contributions of all the world outside of Russia."

The mayor of St. Petersburg, in an address on behalf of that city to American donors, declared: "The Russian people know how to be grateful. If up to this day these two great countries, Russia and the United States, have not only never quarreled, but, on the contrary, wished each other prosperity and strength always, these feelings of sympathy shall grow only stronger in the future — both countries being conscious that, in the season of trial for either, it will find in the other cordial succor and support. And when can true friendship be tested if not in the hour of misfortune?"

B. F. TILLINGHAST