

Letters from Russia

Misery in the Wolga Colonies of Russia

Splawnucha (Huck), 3 July 1924

To Mr. G. Repp, Portland, Or.

I still remember myself as if it were first happening today, how you came to the colony of Huck back in 1921 when our need was at its peak and quickly answered it with American aid. It was to me at that time as if you were an Angel sent by God to rescue us, he with his opportune help thus made you appear and bid an end to the terrible grasp of death from starvation. Had the Americans not dug so deep, had they not valued brotherly help enough, many are the appreciative hearts of the German Wolga colonists whose lives are no longer consigned to oblivion. Still today, our hearts overflow with praise and thanks for all the joyous gifts, so many, yes, that one could truly say, that the majority, with your plentiful donations, have, as it were, been snatched from death by starvation. God reward you richly for what you have done for us.

Now however, after we have recovered somewhat, we are again going through another total disaster. The same direful situation has come, yes, one could say, an even greater one. Over the last three months it has still not rained one time. As a consequence we see our fields and gardens and forests are really parched and looking desolate. Man and beast thirst for rain! But not withstanding the heated prayers and sighs that daily and (word obscured) to God for His help to bolster us in our time of need, the heavens never the less, remain closed.

It appears as if our Lord has totally forgotten us and this year won't give us anything. He has totally withdrawn his blessings from us and rightly so. We deserve what our deeds have brought us. On this account we don't want to grumble but we are bent down very much under the fearsome hand of God. What will yet happen to us, only God alone knows?

Provisions, whether for man nor beast, are quickly disappearing, maybe next to nothing set aside. And now man and beast can look forward to an entire year's worth of troubles and malnourishment. One's hair stands on end when one only thinks about it! Our government seeks to console our discouraged farmers not to lose heart and uplift their courage; then they want to provide for seed, bread and fodder. But, in spite of the benevolent promises, involuntarily "doubting Thomas" awakes in most hearts. Now, already many are without Bread, worn down, half naked, and grasping, again condemned to wander and beg and in this way seek to eke out a living, but that will also not be possible for very long. If you tarry, aid from America will be in vain, in this year of hunger. It is God's will, what will become of us, if we are left to our own devices? Should it be ultimately true after all, that the funeral oration over our so widely known, so blessed Wolga colonies will be; died of Hunger, and in need, and gone miserably into the earth? God forbid and preserve us from it! You loving highly esteemed Americans, unless you deliver uncommon aid as it was in the year 1921, we are lost. So let yourselves individually make it your business with your friends and acquaintances with as much as is within your power, to rush to our aid. Have pity on us and let us not entirely go into the ground in our distress, that you again have regard for us.

Many Americans cannot rightly imagine our need and misery. They read about it in the papers in which the entire state of affairs is written of in heart gripping words, but only he, he who must see it with his own eyes can rightly judge the shuddering, horrible reality of it; and must experience first hand in its entirety, how difficult it is to live closed off in misery and distress. I, myself, am already often glancing into the (*words obscured*) future, the wish that my living heart could be laid with loved ones at peace in the grave instead of again having to stand by and watch the distress of starvation.

So, once again I repeat in urgent supplication: whoever, in America, still has feelings for their needy and distressed brethren in the German Wolga Colonies do not be slow in giving once again in this year of hunger, let your riches flow. A happy giver is beloved by God. And God will also richly reward them all again; the more we give, the more we shall receive.

My dear esteemed brother Repp: Here, in the brief time that we met, I came to know that your heart is devoted to the poor and needy, so I turn to you once more with the humblest plea: bear with me and also grieve with me: you can, indeed, if it can possibly be done, provide me with sage methods of assistance, if only you wish. You are widely known and are capable of finding ways to help me. Now, with the writing of these words, I am scrupulously trusting that you yourself will take pains to search for a source of aid for me.

In my area, this year, I stand to claim no salary because the farmers are harvesting next to nothing. If you were to deny me your help, then I would have to spend my old age enduring bitter need, or falling prey to a terrible death from starvation. I should like all of my many former students who are absentmindedly living here and there in America, who were, in their dear old homeland, in their tender years instructed in the doctrine of salvation, and with diligence and passion, had all the good in their youthful hearts eternally implanted, to think about me in my old age, and not forget me in my difficult time of need but demonstrate their gratitude for it to me now and then with thoughtful little gifts of love. This would make me very happy and cause me to forget my troubles. You, all of my dear students, think lovingly of your old schoolmaster.

Esteemed Mr. Repp: Don't be angry with me for sending this plea to you, I was persuaded in doing this by my thoughts of you, and I am certain, have not done so in error. If you are supportive, you can be of use by taking my letter to your newspaper publisher; he is yet the judge of its contents.

We are both still healthy and wish you and your dear wife the same. Greet your dear wife for us both as strangers

In the hope that he can herewith be permitted to lay claim to your humanity, the undersigned sends his best greetings and good wishes from house to house, faithfully yours,

J. Rusch, Schoolmaster