

The Fact-Story of the Russian Famine

How American Food Relieved the Suffering of Millions of Helpless and Dying Children

Soviet Officials and People Showed Thanks to America for Its Splendid Work

THIS is a semi-official, unvarnished, truthful story of the famine conditions in Russia—first hand—written by a man who from September of last year to May of this gave his entire time and effort to feeding the starving children of the district of Samara, as supervisor for the American Relief Administration.

What he writes in the series of articles beginning to-day is what he actually saw or what came to him in reports from his fellow relief workers. From the bare record of starvation to the shocking reports of cannibalism that in some places followed in its train, the story is based upon official facts.

The writer of the articles is an American. He is the son of the late Gov. Shafroth of Colorado, a graduate of the Universities of Michigan and California. He served during the war with the 78th Field Artillery. He was a member of the American Relief Administration in Poland and was chosen to head the work in the Samara district.

Article I.

NINE MONTHS IN THE RUSSIAN FAMINE AREA.

By Will Shafroth

District Supervisor American Relief Administration in the District of Samara from Sept. 15, 1921, to May 15, 1922.

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MUCH has been written about Russia since the revolution, and especially since August last year, when the Soviet Government first gave permission for certain representative American newspaper correspondents to go into that country. Some of this has been written purely for propaganda purposes and a great deal to justify the previously conceived ideas of writers who spent only a few weeks in Russia, and most of that time in Moscow itself.

It is not my desire or intention here to draw any political or economic conclusions. I lived for nine months in the City of Samara, in the heart of the famine region on the Volga River, acting as local head of the American Relief Administration there. I simply wish to give a picture of conditions as I saw them from Sept. 1 last year, when the greatest famine of all modern history began to show itself and to exact its awful toll of death, until the middle of last May, when it was met and effectively broken by the arrival of the corn which was sent by the American Nation to the starving Russian people.

We organized at Samara a relief action, beginning in a small way and culminating in the feeding of more than a million people daily. My experience with the famine and the organization of relief work to combat it, has all been in the State of Samara or Samara Gubernia as it is called, but the sights which I saw, the experiences I had and the obstacles which we had to overcome in the setting up of our organization there are more or less typical of the experiences of the American Relief Administration officials in the seven other famine-stricken states in the Volga Valley and east of it, and in the Ukraine and the Crimea.

ONLY BLANK STARVATION AHEAD.

A description of the famine conditions themselves in Samara will come in a later part of this series, but it is enough to say here that from the moment of my arrival in the famine area it was easy to see that foodstocks were almost completely exhausted and that there was only blank starvation ahead of a large majority of the population. Reports as to the seriousness of the situation had been conservative rather than exaggerated. There was no doubt of the existence of stark famine all over this area, and there is equally no doubt that at the time I left there this famine had been checked.

There has been no diminution but rather a constant increase in the need for foodstuffs, because for months past there has been practically no native food in these regions of Russia, and the fact that the famine is checked is due solely to the importation of American supplies. Should the distribution of these supplies be discontinued to-day, the Russian peasants of the Volga would die by hundreds of thousands before the harvest comes in September. In August, 1921, I was a "Baby Feeder" with the American Relief Ad-

From Associated Press Interview in London With Mr. Shafroth

"The famine in Russia is unequalled even by the dreadful famines of India, China or any other in history. In some districts the people have gone so far as to eat their own children. In some districts at night in the warehouses where dead bodies were stored and have carried off these cadavers and used them for food."

"We have been feeding more than 10,000,000 Russians and we have revived the spiritual and moral life of untold numbers. Instead of 10,000,000 crosses or mounds of earth we can point to 10,000,000 living and grateful hearts as evidence of America's great effort."

"A distracted mother of five children killed the youngest in order to appease the hunger of the rest of the flock; but the oldest boy cried bitterly when he saw his mother sever his little brother's head and place the body in a pot. He refused to eat the flesh."

"The melting snow disclosed thousands of bodies strewn over the fields and along roadways. It was impossible to bury all these, so they were placed in warehouses like logs of kindling wood."

"There is a whole vast forest in the Samara region where the bark has been stripped from all the trees and eaten by the famine sufferers. The Soviet authorities are alarmed about losing the trees, but they don't seem especially exercised over saving the people."

Mr. Shafroth said that dogs and cats were almost extinct in Russia because of their continued use as food. The new generation of rats had developed remarkable shrewdness and were much more difficult to catch than their progenitors because of being constantly hunted.

travel without interference into, out of, and through Russia, to allow us to use our own discretion as to where and whom we should feed, to give us the necessary warehouses, transportation and quarters for personnel free of cost, and had agreed to pay the overhead expenses of our Russian office personnel, etc. The able construction and clear wording of this document many times since have kept us from coming to an impasse with the Soviet authorities.

I was surprised to find Riga such a large and modern town. Before the revolution it was the fifth largest city in Russia, and the population last fall was over 200,000. The buildings are substantially built of stone, with beautiful parks and drives, and the Baltic is not far, with several attractive sea-shore resorts within twenty miles of the city. There were many attractive stores, filled principally with German goods, and the low rate of exchange brought them to the same cheap price level as Americans were finding at that time in Poland, Austria and other European countries.

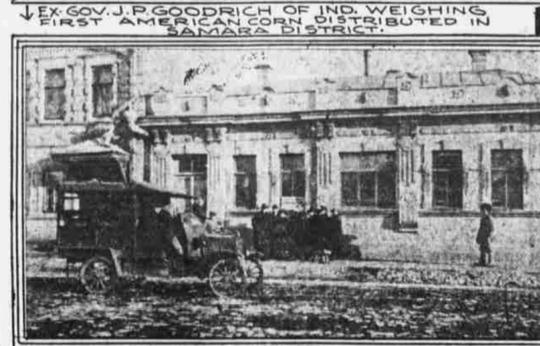
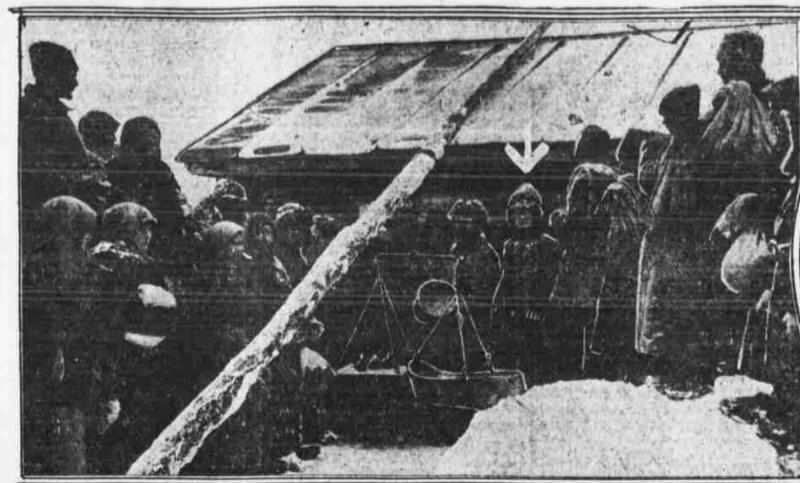
The American Relief Administration was already well known and established in Riga, for we had been feeding some 200,000 children in the Baltic States since the Armistice, and the Latvian authorities co-operated most heartily in arranging for our meetings and discussions with the Soviet authorities, as well as later of fer every facility for the movement of our foodstuffs through that country.

THE TRIP FROM RIGA TO THE INTERIOR.

My opportunities for sightseeing were less than those for becoming acquainted with the stores in Riga, however, as I was assigned to the duty of getting together the food supplies for our advance party, which pushed off from Riga at 10 o'clock on Thursday night, Aug. 25. Our group was made up of Philip H. Carroll of Hood River, Ore., formerly Chief of the American Relief Administration Mission in Serbia and later of the American Relief Administration Mission in Hamburg; John P. Gregg of Portland, Ore., formerly, like myself, with the Polish Mission; Van Arsdale Turner, of Port Deposit, Md.; John A. Lehrs, Columbia P. Murray, Washington, D. C., and Harry J. Fink of New York City.

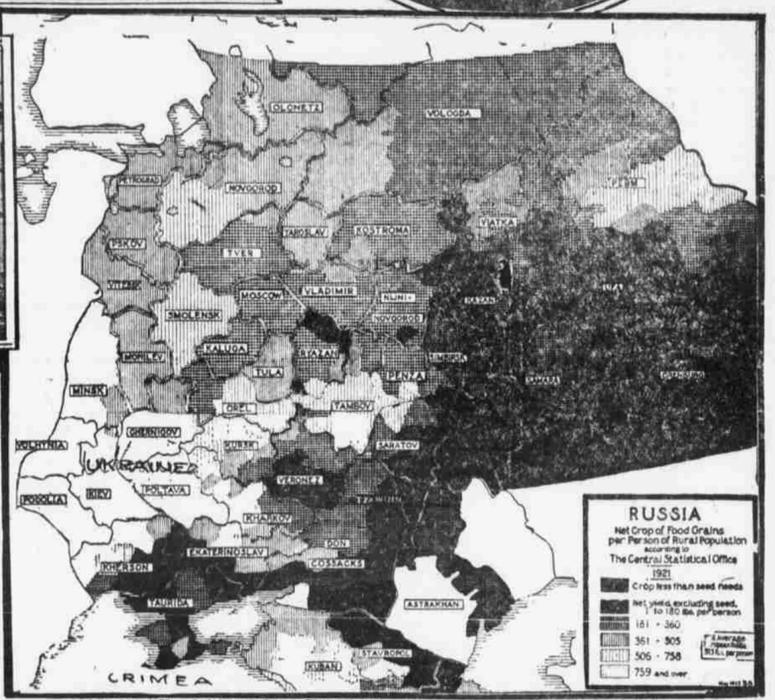
The Latvian authorities had furnished us with a main car, a wagon, a baggage car for our paraphernalia and food supplies, and a flat car for the Ford and the Cadillac we were taking with us.

After leaving Riga at 10 at night we arrived at Sebec on the new Russian frontier at 1:30 the next afternoon, and stayed there four hours, doing nothing in the customary busy Slav fashion, although our papers from the Letts and from the Soviet Mission in Riga had exempted us from Customs examination. Three more hours were consumed rather more speedily when we moved our watches up to Soviet time, which is daylight-



saving to the last degree. While at the border we ran into a returning delegate from some organization in America, just leaving Russia after a four months' stay. We were vastly interested in his impressions of Russia, but his thoughts seemed to centre around the beefsteak dinner which he was going to get at Riga, and although he hoped to arrive there early in the morning, it was apparent from his conversation that he did not intend to wait for conventional meals in order to start eating. Here we also met the first of three or four refugee trains which we saw before reaching Moscow. It consisted of twenty or thirty freight cars in which

many ragged and half-starved people were living. They had been in these rolling homes for a month and a half, having come all the way from Turkestan on the way to Latvia, for they were Letts just being repatriated. Moving on, the country through which we passed was flat and uninteresting. There seemed a great deal of uncultivated land, and we often passed large tracts of timber. The peasants seemed a little more ragged than I had grown accustomed to in Poland, and soldiers were to be seen at every station, dressed in a nondescript and very unkempt-looking uniform. Most of them had on the peaked aviator's helmet type of hat,



Grateful Russia's Thanks to the Author of These Articles

"THE kindness and charity of Americans saved countless thousands of lives, and the memory of this act will forever remain in the hearts and minds of the Russian people. As you, Mr. Shafroth, leave our country, we, the citizens and coming citizens of Samara, tell you of the glorification and admiration of the work of your organization and pray that you will convey our sincerest thanks to the American people."

—From a note accompanying a gift of flowers to Mr. Shafroth from the children of one feeding station and their parents.

"Parting from you, we must tell you that working with us you have won our deep sympathy and devotion by your gentle, unaffected and sensitive attitude toward all in the service.

"Always cheerful, you, with your untiring energy and the desire to bring help to all who are in need, inspired courage and love for the work, making it easy to overcome all difficulties in fulfilling the business of helping the people.

"Stern with yourself but indulgent toward others, you were always a welcome visitor in the kitchens, since



ILLUMINATED COVER OF ADDRESS PRESENTED TO MR. SHAFROTH BY RUSSIAN EMPLOYEES OF THE AMERICAN RELIEF ADMINISTRATION.

you were such an exemplar of the kindness and gentleness becoming a chief.

"Farewell! Please carry with you the kindest remembrances of us." —From an address from the Inspectors' Office, signed by 109 workers.

"From the very beginning your interest and humane concern toward the victims of a famine unparalleled in Russian history were as if these starving people had been your own countrymen.

"Your untiring energy, talent for organization, penetration and firm will led the ship of 'Salvation from Death' to a safe harbor.

"Sternly aloof from politics, you held the American standard of organization higher, awakening in the masses the realization of the great relief given by the American Nation to the Russian people in this year of misfortune.

"We hope, in remembering the time passed in Russia, you will not be too severe in judging your Russian co-workers. You know the conditions of life and our feelings in the last few years. As a sensitive person you will understand our fatigue and weariness, which have considerably diminished our ability for work."

—From an address signed by 144 Russian employees of the American Relief Administration at Samara.

with tucked up ear-flaps and bearing a large red star over the visor, the design of which rumor has attributed to Trotsky.

There were few cattle to be seen and the people in the fields were almost all women. Out of a dozen factory chimneys seen between Riga and Moscow, only one showed signs of activity in the factory below. At every station where we stopped there were fruit, bread and vegetables on sale.

MEETING WITH SOVIET OFFICIALS.

We arrived at the Riga station in Moscow about 6 o'clock on Saturday night, and were met by two representatives from the Foreign Office, both wearing the red five-pointed star of the Soviet Republic. They were Mr. Volodon, from the Foreign Office, formerly of New York City, and Mme. Ivanova, a fine looking girl who could speak no English, representing Mr. Kramenoff, President of the All-Russian Famine Committee. They informed us that there was not sufficient accommodation prepared for all of us, but that they would take care of three of our party for the night. Mr. Carroll replied that we would all stay on the train until permanent quarters were secured for all of us, which we were told would be on Monday, and our first interview was at an end.

The next day being Sunday we started out to see Moscow. It was the most depressing sight I had met thus far. It had the appearance of having been evacuated by all the normal city dwellers and filled again by peasants from the surrounding country, with no ideas of cleanliness or sanitation.

The old Moscow had been a city in which the modern note was still struggling with the Tartar influences of old, and new buildings on Western lines were rubbing shoulders with the mosques, the Greek churches and the Byzantine architecture of the East. But, as I saw it with its dirty streets, its boarded-up shops, its ragged buildings, and its peasant inhabitants, it seemed to have started back on the road to the semi-civilization of the Middle Ages.

At about 6 o'clock in the afternoon, with the daylight saving 6 o'clock still afternoon—two of us started

out in an old and dilapidated Russian drosky or carriage. We made a contract to be taken as far as the Bolshoi Theatre or Opera House and back, about two miles and a half each way, for 50,000 roubles, the equivalent of \$1.75 in our money. There were a number of people on the streets, but we had gone half a mile before I saw any one with anything as pretentious as a white collar.

Most often the women were typical peasant types, with shawls or just plain white linen scarves over their heads, slippers or sandals on their feet and little half socks which failed to reach the bottoms of their fairly long and often brightly colored dresses. Some few wore boots and some were barefooted. Practically all had the heavy unintelligent features of the peasant type. The men were few and not much to be seen. They wore a soldier's cap. The troops of the Red Army were everywhere, with uniforms as widely assorted as those of the enemies against whom they had fought during the last three years.

Until we arrived near the centre of the town the buildings were mostly two and two-story affairs of brick and plaster, and occasionally a taller apartment house or a row of wooden houses.

ONE STORE IN FIFTEEN WAS OPEN.

Squatted along the sidewalk, five or six in every block, were old women and little children with small baskets of apples, pears or plums for sale and their faces seemed to wear the same hopeless expression as the rundown buildings on every side. Even when we reached the heart of the "City of the White Walls," as Moscow is sometimes called, we found very few shops. On Kuznetski Most, which used to be one of the main shopping streets, only about one store in every ten or fifteen was open. Of these, flower stores and barber shops, strangely enough, seemed to predominate, but we also saw a few

millinery stores, one toy shop, one jeweller's establishment and a sprinkling of other miscellaneous traders and merchants. Of course most of the trading is done in the markets, where practically anything can be bought or sold. There is an open place here as our own vegetable and meat markets used to be, sometimes occupying two or three city blocks.

The streets themselves were dirty and unrepaid. Buildings which had been burned remained as they were the day after the fire, and everywhere were the signs of decay resulting from neglect. Occasionally there were well-dressed people to be seen, but they always excited curiosity and comment. We Americans, obviously foreigners, were even more an object of interest to the population than were the signs of decay. More than a dozen automobiles on our way, and numbers of people, evidently natives, riding in droskies. Where they got the money I don't know, as salaries were very low. For instance, the porter in a hotel, in addition to his daily ration of a pound of black bread, a small amount of sugar and some vegetables, received only 1,000 roubles a month—this when a daily newspaper cost 500 roubles a copy. Among the traders who stood on the street were some who sold sugar.

I saw some of these carrying a little board on which were set out, as though they were rare jewels, a dozen and a half to two dozen little blocks of lump sugar, and each of these cost a thousand roubles. The regular price for sugar was 50,000 roubles for a Russian pound, nine tenths of an English pound. With the official rate of exchange at 34,000 roubles to the dollar, it seemed a very costly luxury.

On returning to the station and debarking from our "sea-going backs" our coach held out for a prize, as he had gone further than he had contracted for. We ended up by giving him \$9,000, a whole pocketful of paper, and returned to our car after a most depressing ride. It was impossible not to feel intensely sorry for the people who had to live under these conditions.

(In the next article Mr. Shafroth discusses conditions in Kazan and the Tartar Soviet Republic.)