

# **Famine and Relief – 1892-1893**

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Note: Information within [brackets] are comments by the translator.

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## **Year of Hunger and Aid — 1892-1893**

by Arnulf Baumann

One hears a lot these days about “developing countries” and their problems. It has not been long since the word was invented. The term “developing country” is new, but the problems of such countries have existed for a long time. Even the countries that are fully developed today once went through periods that in many ways resemble the current problems of the “Third World”. Let us make it sufficiently clear that Bessarabia, during a large part of the history of our ethnic group, was very much a developing country, which more than once found itself in extreme distress and was dependent on outside help in order to survive.

One is reminded of it when, suddenly, one comes across the following appeal in an old edition of a German church newspaper *General Evangelical Lutheran Church Newspaper—(Allgemeine Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirchenzeitung, Leipzig, 26th year, No. 1, of 6 January, 1893)*:

### **Requests from the Hunger Districts of the Lutheran Church of South Russia.**

As is already generally known, the emergency in the communities of the first Provost District in southern Russia, including the Akkerman district, Bessarabia Governorate, is very severe; accordingly, under the leadership of Provost Faltin, an emergency committee of five pastors has been convened in Kischinev. The undersigned has been entrusted with the care of the four large parishes of Arcis, Fere Champenoise [also known as Alt-Elft], Klöstitz, and Tarutino, with a total population of 30,000 souls, for the welfare of those in distress. According to the reports received, at least about 6,000 people in these parishes are in need of aid and support, and around 4,000 people are facing not only ruin but also famine.

This is not exaggerated, but the full, terrible, and sad truth. Even the ordinary farmers are in distress; for if the farmer, who depends on the harvest, has not even been able to retrieve the sowing this year after some poor harvests due to the persistent drought, one can imagine how miserable and sad his situation is. Now there are many in our communities who do not own land, but rather lease it, or work as day laborers for other farmers. But if the farmer harvests nothing, he also has no work for the day laborer, and how is he supposed to pay for the leased land along with the various fees and taxes, and provide for himself and his family? It may indeed also be the fault of the municipalities who, during the good years, did not plan ahead for the lean years, but often it is also the case that during the good years they have to cover the wounds and debts of the lean years, and then it becomes difficult to prepare for the drought years. There is a lack of bread, a lack of seed, a lack of fodder for the livestock, and unfortunately also a lack of work in the winter; under such conditions, one cannot make roads, bridges, or dams, plant trees, or build houses. But people want to eat and are also willing to work, if only they could get work and bread. The distress is great, and the need no less. If one calculates the latter at just 8 kopecks per person per day, then for the 4,000 people without bread in the four mentioned parishes, 200 rubles would be needed daily, which amounts to a sum of 6,000 rubles per month. Oh, dear fellow Christians, help those suffering from distress; give them food, even if only for the period from Christmas to Easter. Since Easter falls early next year, it would only be three months. If you can and want to do more, then also help them to sow. They will thank you for it, and the Lord will reward you and bless you for it, you and your children, in time and eternity according to His gracious promise. May the Lord graciously grant that this request finds a receptive and willing ear with you, and give you the desire and joy to help here again and to practice kindness and mercy. If you want to do it, then send your gifts, the sooner the better, directly or through your pastor to Provost Faltin in Kischinev in Southern Russia.

Klöstitz, in December 1892.  
S. Peters, Pastor at Klöstitz in Southern Russia.

Provost Faltin immediately adds to this appeal with further information, from which the following concerning Bessarabia are derived:

In the urgent appeals from my Provost District, the extremely sad condition of the fields in the two governorates of Bessarabia and Kherson has already been described. Since then, the distress has grown worse day by day, and the requests and reports I have received from the colonies depict the misery in a heart-wrenching manner. Requests come both from the pastors of my Provost District, who seek support for their parishioners, and from individual families, who in the name of Jesus plead for immediate aid. And these requests are increasing in number and becoming ever more urgent. According to the most recent reports, there are the following numbers of families who must be provided for immediately:

1. In the Kischinev Parish 160 families;
2. In Klöstitz 115 families;

3. In Tarutino 110 families;
4. In Fere-Champenoise 130 families;
5. In Arcis 75 families;
6. In Sarata 45 families;
7. In Benkendorf-Akkerman 60 families.

Pastor Jundt of Fere-Champenoise wrote to me on 7 November, 1892: “The misery in the Freudenfeld leasehold colony (parish of Fere-Champenoise) cannot be described. Of the 45 families there, about half have had only one meal a day for two months. The livestock there has already decreased to about 40 head. The rest has been butchered or sold to buy bread, or even given away cheaply due to a lack of feed.” And further: “Just as I finished this report, two men from Freudenfeld, sent by the community, arrived and begged for help for God’s sake. The people are on the verge of despair. 30 families are facing death from starvation.” Furthermore, I have a report from the sexton of the community in Neu-Sarata near Leowo. It states there: “In Neu-Sarata there are 16, in Romanowa 24, in Saraziga 38, in Dankensfeld 17, and in Jargara 10 families, a total of 501 souls, many of whom already have no bread today and prolong their lives through extremely meager earnings, variously by borrowing small portions of food and in other pathetic ways. But all of this will come to an end because of the approaching cold, and everywhere one encounters people seeking ways to just get through another day for themselves and their families.” The sexton himself is also in the greatest distress, especially since he bears the responsibility of supporting his large family. He has also harvested nothing. He has bread left for only fourteen days.

In my Provost District, there are no fewer than 1,000 families who are already without bread and therefore need support. Unfortunately, this number is likely to triple in the coming year. So far, we have been able to donate very little to those in need, as very few charitable contributions have come in. And yet, the dear fellow believers are in great need of assistance if they are not to be struck by illness and worse misery, or even death from starvation. I therefore ask that this report be made accessible to as wide an audience as possible, so that everyone can contribute their small share to alleviating the distress. May the faithful Lord, in His grace, bless every gift!

Provost R. Faltin, Division Preacher in Kischinev

A few months later, another announcement appeared in the same newspaper (No. 20, from 19 May, 1893):

### **A New Call for Help from Southern Russia.**

Overwhelmed with work and utterly exhausted by the emergency situation in my Provost District, particularly by the enormous task of feeding the hungry who come to the city seeking work, I am unable to provide any detailed reports or more precise information. I had hoped to manage with the resources already received and those still expected. However, this hope has been terribly frustrated by sudden storms, cold, and snowstorms. There is a lack of fodder for the cows and the few horses, so that the fields cannot be cultivated. The misery is as great as it has never been before. From all sides, I am besieged with letters, telegrams,

and petitioners, so that at times I do not know which way to turn. Some of the poor pastors in my district are also heavily overworked. Once again, I therefore come to you with a call for help, you dear brothers and sisters near and far. For me, this is the central collection point, but also the central distribution point. All the wonderful gifts of love in money and goods that have been received have been used not just to the last gift for thousands of people, but debts had to be incurred in the hope of receiving additional gifts! Therefore, dear fellow believers, once again open your generous hand, and those of you who have not yet done so, open it now! Perhaps God may move the heart of a wealthy man to lend a few thousand rubles in this terrible emergency, until the debt can be repaid partly from the charitable donations still to be hoped for, and partly from the future harvest. Please help very soon! May God grant His rich blessing to this request!

Provost R. Faltin in Kischinev

Donations accepted: Pastor Paul Müller in Hamburg, Hühnerposten 23.

So far as to the appeals and reports from Bessarabia in the *Allgemeinen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirchenzeitung*. “Famine District”—that is a strong word. Are not the pastors exaggerating a bit? Quite obviously not, because there are sufficient records and recollections from that time that speak of the total crop failure of 1892 and confirm the reports of the pastors. In the various village chronicles, in the local history book, and in the history of the Brotherhood communities, I have found more or less detailed references to the 1892 crop failure for the following places: Alt-Elft, Basyrjamka, Eigenheim, Freudenfeld, Köstitz, Kurudschika, Leipzig, Maraslienfeld, Seimeny, Tarutino, and Teplitz; this list could certainly be considerably extended with more thorough research. It is indeed the case: the year 1892 was a year of great hardship in Bessarabia and beyond.

But how did such crop failures come about, and why did they have such catastrophic effects? Why this happened can be said quickly: the rain did not come. Even in good years, Bessarabia could not expect a large amount of rainfall; if no rain fell for a long time, drought set in. What this meant is vividly described by A. Mannuel in the *Klöstitz Chronicle*, based on old letters (p. 55):

The spring remained very dry. The winter fodder was running out, and nothing had yet grown on the large pasture outside. The cattle were driven out, but they came back home hungry. What to feed them with? There was little more than old straw available. With anxiety, people looked at the cloudless sky every day. So April passed, then May. At the end of May, a bit of rain. It was like a drop on a hot stone. The time for haymaking came, but nothing had yet grown. The sparse grass was too small to mow. The grain in the fields began to turn yellow before the ears had developed. Vineyards and fruit trees were still the only joy for the eyes; they still looked nice.

On 6 June, there was a violent downpouring rainstorm unlike anything seen in decades.

But the rain came too late for the summer harvest. On the best land, one might still harvest a bit more than the sown seed, but there was not even that on many fields. In the Upper Village, it was said to be even worse than in the Lower Village. Above all, the shortage of fodder was already causing worries in the summer. There had been almost no hay at all. The livestock still had to be fed morning and evening. In July, one could finally drive them onto the harvested grain fields. Here, after the great drought, some green growth had returned. But how long would that last with the large herds? After 6 June, the sun again dried out the thirsty earth for weeks. The fields were grazed down all too quickly, and only dust covered the dry soil. Another two months without rain! It was a miracle how the fruit trees and vineyards could still look so lovely, laden with fruit. The potato harvest varied, but was still average. But why had people in Bessarabia focused on growing a lot of potatoes? Throughout the whole autumn it remained dry, no rain. The winter crops had to be sown into the dry soil and in some cases did not sprout at all. There was some maize (*Welschkorn*), but still too little of it was planted. There was even plenty of wine, but the wine lay in the cellar and could not be sold. Whoever could raise some money had to buy bread and fodder. Winter, the harsh, long winter, was at the door.

It was not only like this in Klöstitz. A diary from that year also reports from Teplitz (according to H. Weiß, *History of the Teplitz Colony*, p. 99):

The harvest result is zero. There was little winter moisture. The spring was dry. From mid-April to mid-October, there was almost no rainfall. What did grow was destroyed by the field hares (*Erdhasen*). The total crop failure was felt most painfully in the shortage of fodder, a situation which forced many people to sell even the last piece of livestock at a ridiculously low price. It is terrible how many farmers, who had lived in organized conditions, fell into such hardship in the years 1891-1892 that many had to sustain themselves and their families in winter through the collections contributed.

These reports make it very clear how such a prolonged drought, combined with the subsequent failure of the grain harvest and livestock feed, could push many people to the brink of ruin. However, the two detailed reports now come from old mother colonies like Teplitz and Klöstitz, which had already had time to consolidate since they had settled, and where there were already many wealthy people. But what must the crop failure have meant in places that were just beginning, in the newly founded villages, especially in those where settlers had leased land? In the 1870s and 1880s, many new villages were founded, and many of them had no land of their own but were established on the estates of large landowners who were interested in the rental income.

Pastor Peters also particularly pointed out the plight of the tenants, as well as the day laborers, in his appeal. If one pays attention to this, it becomes noticeable that the number of people in need of support, according to the information provided by Provost Faltin, is especially large in the parishes to which also most of the new villages belonged. The villages specifically mentioned by name in the report of Faltin are almost all leasehold colonies that had only been founded

shortly beforehand: Neu-Sarata was founded in 1889, specifically on property, but there was a large debt to be repaid; Jargara gradually came into existence from 1882 onwards, Romanowa (Rohrbach) in 1887, Saraziga (Fundu Sarazika) in 1891-1892; the Dankensfeld mentioned by Faltin probably took its name from the landowner Danko, from whom the land of Jargara also originated; presumably this place—possibly as a result of 1892—disappeared again, as there is no reference to it in the *Homeland Book*.

It is repeatedly reported that some leasehold colonies had to be dissolved or at least suffered heavy losses due to migration. A particularly harmful factor was that the owners or managers insisted on receiving the full lease payment even in poor years; otherwise, the tenants had to leave behind everything they had created. Such malicious practices led to the ruin of Freudenfeld (*Heimatsbuch*, p. 219) and Maraslienfeld (p. 404); larger migrations are reported from Basyrjamka (*Chronik*, p. 10), Kuruschika (*Heimatsbuch*, p. 309), and also from Klöstitz (*Chronik*, p. 57). Where there were no supplies and no money, the drought intensified into a disaster.

In the face of such an emergency across almost the entire country, self-help was not enough, far from it. The government organized relief efforts in all affected parts of Russia. Mammel reports on this in the *Klöstitz Chronik* (p. 56):

During the winter of 1892-1893, the government spent over 22 million rubles on seeds, fodder, and the nourishment of those in need. Crown kitchens were set up everywhere, where the needy received food that, though meager, was still filling. A government lottery generated a profit of 5,000,000 rubles, which was directed to the famine-stricken areas. All this was only part of the aid, but the distress was greater than what could have been eliminated through state assistance.

That government assistance was not helpful everywhere is shown by a report from Teplitz (*Chronik* p. 99):

In September of 1892, the Semstwo [regional administration] informed the community about which estate owners were selling straw and hay and at which locations one could mow reed for fodder or shelter the sheep and cattle over the winter. The community declined the assistance from the Semstwo, as it demanded too high a price for the wheat: it wanted 1 ruble 30 kopecks per pud [1 pud = 36 lbs / 16.38 kg], whereas in Teplitz wheat could be bought for 1 ruble 5 kopecks to 1 ruble 8 kopecks. In addition, the community would have had to transport the wheat from the Leipzig station at its own expense. Teplitz wanted to manage with its own resources.

It is not possible to determine what amounts reached the German settlements in Bessarabia at the time through State Aid. On the other hand, more precise information can be obtained about the Church Relief efforts.

As soon as the impending emergency began to become apparent, under the leadership of Provost Faltin, a so-called “Emergency Committee” was formed, which was intended to draw attention to

the distress through appeals in the press and in other appropriate ways, and to collect and distribute the incoming donations. (A very similar approach was taken during the next major crop failure in 1899, as can be seen from the *Teplitz Chronik*, p. 100.)

To begin with, people naturally turned to their fellow believers in the Russian Empire, whose willingness to help had been expressed through the so-called “Support Fund. (*Unterstützungskasse*). This organization, comparable to our “Evangelical Relief Organization”, was able to provide some funds immediately on a smaller scale and, in turn, called for donations. The donations came primarily from the “East Sea Provinces”, that is, the Baltics, but also from the Volga region, where people had themselves experienced much hardship in previous years, but had also received help. A report in the *Allgemeinen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirchenzeitung* (1894, col. 294) speaks of a pleasantly increased willingness to give in 1892 and provides further details on the amounts.

However, the cries for help printed at the beginning did not appear in a church magazine in Russia, but in the *Allgemeinen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirchenzeitung* published in imperial Germany—in Leipzig, the leading paper of the confessional Lutherans of those days. The readers of this paper were not unfamiliar with the name of Provost Faltin: As early as 1884 (cols. 207 ff.), a tribute to his personality had appeared there on the occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> In-service Anniversary of Faltin, written by the prominent Leipzig theology professor Franz Delitzsch. He had therefore taken a special interest in Faltin because, in Kischinev, several Jews—including a former rabbi—had converted to the Christian faith under the enthusiastic promotion of the Provost, which had raised great expectations for a movement of Jews toward Christianity. (A short biography of Faltin, by O. Ensslen, was published in the *Kirchlichen Nachrichten*—supplements to the *Mitteilungsblatt*—on 15 January, 1958.)

The appeals must have reached as far as America at that time, for many of the donations also came from there. An intermediary there was likely Pastor Paul Müller in Hamburg, mentioned by Faltin in the second “Call for Help” as the recipient of donations from Germany. According to the Hamburg Established Church Archive, he was the son of a famous theology professor and had been a pastor in Odessa since 1882, from where he—after a short interim stop—went to Hamburg in 1885, where he worked for the Evangelical Lutheran Emigration Mission until his death in 1912. Müller was therefore personally acquainted with Faltin and also knew the conditions in southern Russia from his own experience. As an emigration mission pastor, he undoubtedly also had many connections in North America, which he probably also used in the service of this good cause. His name was also mentioned in this context in Bessarabia; Mutschall mentions in his *Chronik von Tarutino* (pp. 79 and 180) that, through the mediation of Müller, 12,000 rubles came to Tarutino in 1892, to which another 8,000 rubles—donated by the Volga colonists, presumably through the “Support Fund”—were added. A note published in 1894 in the *Allgemeinen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirchenzeitung* (col. 553) informs about the overall result of the church fundraising campaign:

Regarding the funds that were received for the relief of the famine among the Lutherans in Russia in the winter of 1892-1893, Provost Faltin published an accounting, as far as the shipments that reached him and the pastors of the 1<sup>st</sup> South Russian Provost District. In total, 1,168 shipments were received from all

parts of the Russian Empire, as well as from Germany and America. The total amount of all donations amounted to 108,738 rubles and 27 kopeks, of which at least one-third came from America. The experience that had been gained earlier during the famine on the Volga, namely that gifts without any benefit tend to have a demoralizing effect, has been dismally utilized, and wherever possible, work was required in exchange for the gifts, which for the most part was gladly and willingly carried out. In this way, many useful things were accomplished that otherwise might not have been achieved for a long time, or perhaps never at all. A lot of love was given and received, and this certainly does not go without spiritual blessing.

The hardship back then did not remain without spiritual effects: From Leipzig (Hommel, p. 130) and Alt-Elft (p. 23, almost word-for-word identical information, probably based on the same report, in the *Allgemeine Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirchenzeitung* 1894, col. 294) reports of great revivals from that time are mentioned. That the church in Dennewitz could be consecrated in 1894 is probably not unrelated to the year of distress, but also to the following year 1893, which consistently brought an above-average good harvest and thus quickly helped overcome the time of need.

From the consideration of that year of hunger and aid, two conclusions can be drawn. The first: It is by no means the case that knowledge about the past of Bessarabia can only be found in the old homeland or in memory; many discoveries can still be made here as well. Who would suspect letters from Bessarabian pastors in a Reich German church newspaper? The second: When our old homeland endured the hardships of a developing country, our fathers received diverse help. We should remember this when today we are called upon to commit ourselves to and sacrifice for “Bread for the World” and development aid in general.

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