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Charity within the Estates in the Russian Empire in the 19th Century

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Abstract

The article deals with the issues of implementing the principle of estates in the system of social care in the 19th century in Russia, a country with the centuries-old tradition of charity and the population's structure that was represented with social estates as the main social groups vested with statutory duties and rights. The analysis focuses on the main forms and features of intra-estate charity among Russian peasants and merchants. The peasantry was the largest Russian estate, which, due to its social and financial position, had a constant need for large-scale social assistance in its various forms. The merchant class was the most secure, having a rich history of charitable activity in relation to representatives of all economically insolvent social groups, and, like all other Russian social estates, was vested with the primary statutory duty to take care of the "insufficient" members of their class.

Keywords: Estates, Peasants, Merchants, Intra-estate charity, Public charity, The Charter on Public Charity, the Russian Empire.

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Introduction

Scientists who study the history of the formation and evolution of the phenomenon of Russian charity determined that practically all legislative and administrative steps of the authorities of pre-revolutionary Russia in the field of charity were based on the principle of estates [9; 120-121]. Based on the fact that Russian estates were formed due to the relations of various social groups with the state that was guided primarily by their administrative, fiscal, military, economic and other interests [5; 9], it looks quite logical. The implementation of the principle of estates in beneficence allowed the authorities to control the activities of all estates, from rural ones to noblemen, in such a controversial area as social charity.

The Charter on Public Charity, which was the basic document regulating the activities of all subjects in the above-mentioned sphere [14], guided by the idea of responsibility, first of all, of estate groups for caring for members of these groups who needed social assistance, defined, essentially, the content of estates in charity in paragraphs 483-584 of the second book.

Since the class picture of pre-revolutionary Russia is quite extensive, let us turn to the formulation of the social charity case of two estates: the peasantry and the merchantry. The first was the most numerous that survived in the 19th century the liberation from serfdom, whereas the second was the most secure, and, therefore, had fewer facilities and more funds for charity and intra-estate charitable assistance.

Methods of Research

The main principles of the research included objectivity, historicism, the principle of social approach to the study of history and the principle of a comprehensive study of the problem.

Within the mentioned principles the authors used the structural-functional method as a general scientific method to study the content and the main stages of the social processes that determined the development of charity in the Russian Empire in the 19th century, including its intra-estate component.

The historical-systematic method allowed defining the place and relation of intra-estate (peasant and merchant) charity in the Russian system of beneficence during its evolution within the considered period.

The use of the historical-comparative research method gave an opportunity to study the contents of the historical picture of implementing the most characteristic forms of intra-estate charity of Russian peasants and merchants.

Discussion and Research Results

In the context of the preparation of peasant reform, when considering the issues of peasant management, public care for peasants was considered as something that would have to be resolved more specifically later and on its own, because society lived anticipating further reforms, and first of all, the creation all estate zemstvo institutions.

Nevertheless, it turned out that at least some detailed measures in the matter of estate charity in the legislative terms were developed specifically for the peasantry. The duties of other estates in relation to their own needy were defined only indirectly and implied approximately what is fixed in article 200 of the Charter on Public Charity: the fee for hospitals "for poor patients belonging to different departments or to urban and rural societies, shall be collected from designated departments or societies whose responsibility it to take care of those in need" [14, 35].

On the basis of the articles of "the General Provision on Peasants Who Left Serfdom" [11; 141-169] peasants were granted the rights of free rural inhabitants, both personal and property, and charity was interpreted as part of the issue of secular peasant duties [11; 163]. Such duties were implied primarily in monetary terms. It had to be implemented from special secular funds and could be both rural and volost, depending on the subject matter of the duty.

It was here that the first stumbling block in the proper organization of peasant intra-estate care was laid. With the well-known pre-reform mass poverty of the Russian peasantry and the imperfection of the reform of 1861, estates in charity for peasants meant "helping those in need solely by those who were part of rural and volost societies: the poorer the latter were, the more among them were in need and the less money there was to meet their needs" [6; 51].

Chapter 5 of the Charter on Public Charity "On the Charity of the Poor Rural Inhabitants" in articles 580-582 laid primary responsibility for care of elderly, decrepit and disabled members of rural societies who were not "able to acquire food by labor" on their relatives, and only after that on peasant societies, for which taking care of the above-mentioned categories of people and orphans was a compulsory secular duty [14; 106]. In article 583, responsibility for order in hospitals, almshouses and other institutions of public charity, if they were established by rural or volost society at their own expense, was assigned to rural and volost elders. Rural authorities were to be informed about the same members of rural societies, "who, due to laziness, go around the world asking for alms" [14; 106] and to perform the intended actions.

The main sources from which peasant societies assembled funds to provide charitable assistance, in accordance with the current legislation, included: 1) public money; at the same time, costs were covered at the expense of special capital or interest from them, or of current funds; 2) various kinds of special charges; 3) public property: buildings, land, grain stocks, etc.; 4) natural duties in the form of: a) compulsory execution of one or another work according to resolutions of a gathering; b) the provision of certain food to orphans or incapable of labor.

In the richest provinces, such as Stavropol, where at the end of the 19th century there were 22 independent peasant communities [12; 24] and serfs on the eve of the reforms accounted for 2% of the total peasant population, with the purpose of more successful adaptation of all members of the community to the new economic life, the creation of village banks run by the community in large villages was practiced. It indicated the presence of preventive charity in a number of rural communities. Such banks were established at the turn of the 19-20th centuries by the decision of the rural community, which also determined the amount of public money to allocate for the fixed capital, appointed an accountant and board members, allocated money for the purchase of furniture and office supplies. For deposits in these banks, 8% per annum were credited, for loans it was 10%. The community's decision also determined the maximum amount of loans granted, usually 200–300 rubles.

As for the funds proper, according to the data presented by the zemstvo leaders and peace mediators to the Chancellery of His Imperial Majesty on the Empress Mary's institutions at the beginning of the 20th century, it was clear that special charity funds were an exceptional phenomenon. They were manifested in the form of capital of imperial departments intended to help imperial peasants (Vologda, Saratov, Oryol Provinces), capital donated by landowners to "yard people" (Kursk Province), special capital collected as a result of the different charges, fines, and intended for targeted assistance: almshouses, liquidation of the consequences of fires and other emergencies [2; 94-95].

In this regard, an example of the creation and activities of a rural orphanage in the village of Beloyarsky, Shadrinsky District, Perm Region is quite typical. It was founded in 1894 for orphans at the expense of zemstvo funds, but it mainly functioned due to peasant charges of 3 kopeks per year from a person (up to 370 rubles per year in total). Peasant orphans from the nearest four volosts of Shadrinsky District resided there. Already in 1895 there were 30 children in the orphanage. The orphanage was allocated a plot of land of 46 acres and money for the purchase of equipment and necessary benefits.

Over time, their own farm became the main source of funds for the orphanage, and the children almost entirely served themselves. In the orphanage, they studied almost all the peasant crafts: they worked in the field, in the garden and in the livestock yard, they carried out the entire cycle of field work, they harrowed, plowed, reaped grain. For threshing, a horse thresher was bought, for winnowing an improved winnowing

machine "Bostonka" was purchased. The orphanage had its own rural bank. The crops of the orphanage farm were very solid: up to 36,000 pounds of oats, 25,000 pounds of wheat, 21,600 pounds of potatoes, 3,600 pounds of rye and 3,600 pounds of peas. The children not only provided for themselves but sold surplus. In addition, boys were trained shoemaker skills, carpentry and plumbing, weaving baskets and mats. Girls studied weaving, for which self-spinning and weaving looms of a new modification were purchased to the orphanage [1; 96]. Although there were few such rural orphanages in the country, financed by estates, and they were mainly maintained at the expense of zemstvos and charitable organizations, it would be necessary to quote the words of a contemporary who noted the special desire of these new educational institutions "to give orphans agricultural upbringing, to make them literate peasant masters, who could by personal example spread the new concepts of agriculture among the people" [4; 76].

However, in general, judging by the reports of zemstvo leaders and other officials [2; 96], charges for charitable institutions were rare, were accidental in nature, primarily because of poverty, as well as the negative attitude of peasants to charitable institutions.

The organization of public charity for peasants, according to V.F. Deryuzhinsky, who devoted an extensive article to the given issue, was almost everywhere unsatisfactory [3; 86]. It can be seen from the data reported by the provincial gatherings in response to a request from the Ministry of Interior Affairs. In many provinces (for example, in Volyn, Vladimir, Grodno, Olonets, Orenburg, Oryol, Podolsk, Poltava, St. Petersburg, Tauride, Chernigov) there was little or no public charity, even in its most elementary form. In some provinces, bread was distributed from public stores; in other provinces (Kostroma, Perm and Ryazan), poor peasants were either given cash benefits or allotted plots of land, or, finally, they themselves were given to the care of certain individuals, with the latter being rewarded by peasant society (for example, in Voronezh, Samara, Tambov, Tula Provinces). But all these measures were so primitive and scanty that almost all provincial gatherings reported that in the villages and "there was no public charity in fact".

Only in some of them the expenditure on charity reached 1.0-1.5% of the total secular expenses in the late 1890s, but in the vast majority of them it accounted for only 0.3% or even less, such as in the Bessarabia, Vilna, Vladimir and many other provinces. Only Baltic provinces spent relatively much on this matter; their expenditure at the turn of the century reached 10-15% of the total expenses [13; 58].

The total amount of all expenses for charity from secular funds amounted to 45,232 rubles in 1894 in Russia, that is, about 7.6% of the total budget expenditure of peasant societies. From this sum, volost funds covered 165,502 rubles, whereas 295,530 rubles were taken from the funds of rural societies. It implies that the volost expenditures for charitable assistance were almost half the expenditures from rural amounts [2; 96].

It is natural to assume that organized estate care for those who need it could be noticeable, above all, among the merchantry, where "however, in view of the relative economic viability of this estate, it was least needed" [6; 51].

Due to the fact that statistics give only the most generalized idea about the size and orientation of charitable assistance provided by merchant societies within the estate, we will try to follow the trends in the development of such assistance among Moscow merchants according to the source that most fully reflects, in our opinion, the social life of merchants, that is, public decisions of the Moscow Merchant Society [7, 8].

The concept "merchant" appeared in Russian legislation in the 18th century, and merchants were distanced from townspeople by the decree "On Collecting 1% from the Declared Capital of Merchants and their Distribution to Guilds" [10; 145-147]. According to it, those who declared capital from 500 to 1,000 rubles were related to the third guild, the second guild included merchants with the declared capital from 1,000 rubles to 10,000 rubles and the first guild included those with more than 10,000 rubles. In view of the above, we consider the period of the decisions of the third guild's merchants, when the Moscow merchant estate was formed and strengthened as an influential force in the urban community.

It is known that in the mid 1770s at the expense of the merchants, there were two almshouses in Moscow, male and female (more than 270 people) [7; 41], although they were officially listed under the Order of Public Charity. In April 1775, in connection with the dilapidation of buildings and the lack of necessary funds for clothing and food in these almshouses, where merchants and townspeople were provided charity, the necessary funds were raised amounting to 1,850 rubles 45 kopecks [7; 43-44]. Fundraising was initiated by the city head Meshchaninov. Subsequently, maintaining and expanding these almshouses became the subject of constant consideration of the Moscow Merchant Society. However, the following fact should be noted. In February 1788, at one of the gatherings of Moscow merchants the decision of the City Magistrate, requiring an audit of 235 poor members of society, partly (111 people) living in the almshouses and partly in apartments, and providing them decent financial support, was proclaimed. In response to this the Moscow Merchant Society reminded the City Magistrate that these almshouses had been opened and maintained for poor merchants and townspeople, however, since there was the Order of Public Charity that received funds, from the Merchant Society as well, the Society will conduct an audit, but "will not provide them with their own merchant funds" with 17 rubles 40 kopecks per person a year, "since the financial support of those is provided by law " [7; 61]. In this decision, the qualities that allowed these people to become merchants could be noted, such as good judgment, the ability to see perspective, determination and rigidity even in relation to corporate colleagues in the unwillingness to spend money when others are obliged to do it by law. However, under the pressure of circumstances, in 1791, the Society agreed to support the mentioned 150 poor people, placing them in the Preobrazhensky almshouse of the Order of Public Charity and allocating 17 rubles 40 kopecks per year for each person with the condition "not to place people of different ranks among them" [7; 107] and reserving the right to control. Starting that year, concerns about the search and maintenance of premises, staff and the expansion of almshouses became customary in the agendas and activities of the Moscow Merchant Society.

Another form of intra-estate charity in the Moscow merchant environment was to let a certain number of "the most impoverished merchant daughters who have reached the age of majority" get married with a reward of 100 to 250 rubles. It was practiced, for the most part, with "the highest celebrations in the Imperial family" [7; 144, 396] or with such important events for the country as, for example, the capture of Paris by allied forces [8; 33].

A serious preventive step included the creation of a commercial class in a public merchant dependency in Moscow, "in which poor merchants' and townspeople's children and orphans up to 50 people were to be kept" [7; 274]. Then a commercial school to train "children of poor merchants and townspeople and orphans (50 boys)" with annual financing of 15,000 rubles was established in 1804 [7; 276-277].

These initiatives emerged simultaneously and, most likely, in response to the decision of Empress Maria Fyodorovna to allow the building of the former St. Andrew monastery be modified into almshouses for merchants and townspeople [7; 274]. Moreover, the empress was expected to agree to take under her patronage the newly created commercial school that was established following the pattern of St. Petersburg school "to arrange uniform rules of learning" [7; 283]. However, there was another reaction of the Moscow Merchant Society to a letter from the Audit Department of the Moscow City Government, which offered to maintain townspeople's children up to 50 people in the main public school [7; 274], and then to support the poor and orphans of merchants, townspeople's children of 50 boys in the commercial school with an annual maintenance of 15,000 rubles in 1804 [7; 276-277].

In 1799, the answer was as follows: the school was established by means of city incomes of 1,000 rubles per year by the Order of Public Charity, let it remain the same, since "it does not have special funds to support itself" [7; 189]. Moreover, in response to the proposal of the Moscow City Government in April 1800 to continue, after four years of support, the further maintenance of six orphans of merchants in the

main public school, there was the following rejection: "since the four-year period has already passed, Moscow merchants are unwilling to support them any longer" [7; 242].

In 1818, bailing "poor merchants and townspeople [8; 125, 233, etc.] was added to the already mentioned forms of charitable assistance for merchants, who were kept under guard for debts, however, these measures were taken, in the overwhelming majority of cases, due to the dates of royal celebrations [8, 125, 325, etc.]. However, as it is known, in July 1797, the demands of the Moscow Magistrate to send insolvent payers from merchants to community service in order to pay a debt of 12 rubles a year for them were rejected based on the following: "since the Moscow Merchant Society owned no institutions where such labor could be used due to articles 18 and 19 of the City Provision, and there was no extra money waste" [8; 175]. Donations of part or all of their capital (by wills) were practiced for charitable purposes by merchants within their estate [8; 233, 330, 332, etc.], which also often coincided with events in the royal family.

Conclusion

The analysis carried out in the article showed that, when mass poverty of the peasantry was one of the main socio-economic characteristics of Russia during the period under study, the statutory obligation of estates to maintain insufficient members of the peasant estate meant that there was no prospect of providing effective assistance within the given class. Even in the context of the initial interest of the community to maintain the normal condition of each of its members as obliged to bear equal tax burden with everyone else. It turned out that the poorer the rural communities were, the more their members needed assistance and the less means they had to provide such assistance.

The analysis of the sources from the sphere of the merchant estate life gives the reason to talk about the tendency to take care of the needy fellows inside the merchant class even with more than sufficient funds, which, of course, did not have a strong effect on the general level of life of the estate.

Obviously, estate-based charity could not become decisive in the cause of beneficence in Russia due to the fact that the poorest estates, mainly producing those in need due to certain poverty, did not have necessary means to provide full-fledged assistance to their neighbors. At the same time, charity within reach estates, even with the right approach, did not solve the problem of need that pursued the country at all stages of its pre-revolutionary history.

Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that the data do not contain any conflict of interest.

Footnotes

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