

at that time the world's best thought was not garbled by the Russian censorship.

"Fired by such ideas, I saw the poor, degraded slaves around me, and longed to set them free. At first I believed that freedom could be reached without a radical change of government. No revolutionary spirit had yet been kindled. It was the first great era of the Liberals. The emancipation of the serfs was soon to take place; so too the introduction of trial by jury; and these promised reforms sent a social impulse sweeping through Russia. I was thrilled by the glad news. Filled with young enthusiasm, I opened a little school near our estate.

"I found the peasant an abject, ignorant creature, who did not understand even the meagre rights he already had. He could think only of his mud hut and his plot of ground. As for the government, he knew only that in peace he must pay money; in war, lives. The new rumors had kindled his old heart-deep hope of freedom. The twenty peasants in my school, like the millions in Russia, suspected that the proclamation had been hidden, and often went to the landowners demanding their freedom. At last the manifesto emancipating the serfs arrived."

This was in 1861, when Catherine was seventeen. It was an era of hope and enthusiasm among the Russian Liberals. But in some respects emancipation made the lot of the peasants worse instead of better. Under the old régime, each serf, besides cultivating his master's estates, had had a plot of ground on which he raised food for his own family. He had supposed that this plot of ground would still belong to him. He soon found his mistake.