

# Work and Wages in the Russian Empire



HOME OF A WELL-TO-DO RUSSIAN WORKMAN.



RUSSIAN CUTLERY GRINDER.

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**N**IJNI NOVGOROD, Aug. 10.—(Special Correspondence of the Bee.)—Sooner or later the Russians will be our chief competitors in the markets of Europe and Asia. They have greater material resources than any other country outside the United States and by far the largest number of white laborers. They are naturally skillful and will work for less than any people except the Chinese, Japanese and East Indians. There are now 130,000,000 of them in the Russian empire, and of these more than 100,000,000 belong to the laboring classes. The factory hands are steadily increasing, and there are tens of millions who work at their homes.

An enormous amount of house industry is done here. Hundreds of articles now sold at the Nijni Novgorod fair were made in thatched huts. Many of the staple products are turned out by the farmers, who till the land in the summer, and devote themselves to their trades in the winter. Our farmers lie idle six months of the year. More than 8,000,000 Russian farmers devote the cold weather to outside work, making things to sell, which bring them in an annual profit of \$250,000,000, without leaving their homes or neglecting their farms. These figures are given me by the government officials.

This work has been going on for years and it has resulted in building up a class of skilled laborers who can turn out a better product for the same money than any other people in Europe. They can compete with and beat American machinery. Take our shoes, for instance. In some districts here calfskin shoes are made so cheaply that they can be sold at wholesale for 45 cents a pair, a figure which crowds out forever our \$3 article.

The work done in the houses is of every description. In some districts they make razors, knives, locks and all kinds of hardware. Each cabin has its little blacksmith shop, and the man works away manufacturing a small product each day. Here in Nijni Novgorod thousands of peasants are making wooden spoons, which are sold in Europe and in different parts of Asia. They enamel the spoons, and also carve and paint them from designs furnished by the Russian government. Altogether, they make more than 100,000,000 spoons a year, and 60,000,000 of these are exported to China and to south and west Asia.

In six provinces of European Russia there are something like 30,000 lace makers, who make more than 500,000,000 yards of lace every year. Some of the lace is very fine and other kinds exceedingly coarse. The peasants use lace of different colors for trimming their dresses and aprons, and every man's Sunday shirt has more or less lace stitched down the front. The output of this kind amounts to something like \$1,000,000 a year.

I wish I could show you some shawls that are for sale here at the Nijni fair. They are made of the finest wool, so fine and



WAITING FOR JOBS AT TWO CENTS AN HOUR.

soft that you can draw a shawl as big as a bed quilt through a finger ring. Don't laugh! I have done this myself, and I bought such a shawl the other day for less than \$5. These shawls are made by the women of Orenburg and are sold all over the empire.

In the Kimri district the people make boots and shoes. They turn out 3,000,000 pairs of boots every year, and it is estimated that there are 20,000 persons engaged in that industry. In another government district there are 30,000 more, and in Tobolsk the annual value of the leather made is more than \$1,000,000. There are 10,000 peasants in Vladimir and Moscow who spend the winter weaving silk and something like 200,000 who are engaged in making carriages and wagons.

Many of these farmers and farm hands have co-operative associations. They club together and build little factories in their villages, which they fit up with lathes, engines and other machines. Sometimes they borrow the money, putting in a few dollars each at the start, and sometimes go away to work for it. After the factory is established they will labor there during the winter months and at the close divide the profits.

In some such establishments along the Volga cheap jewelry is made. Fifty villages make a specialty of it. They manufacture earrings, bracelets, lockets and rings and gild them. They make copper and brass jewelry and ship it to Asia. The product is enormous.

There are many thousands engaged on icons, or the pictures of saints cut out of metal and painted, which are found in every Russian home. They sell for from a few cents to many dollars, and are ex-

ported to all countries where the Greek church has a foothold. There are some engaged in printing, others color lithographs and many make boxes of paper mache and enamel them. There is one town where old-fashioned wall clocks are turned out and another where they make little looking glasses so cheaply that 1,000 can be sold at wholesale for \$20 and still leave the manufacturers a profit of about \$3. In the same villages more expensive wares are produced, including costly pier and mantel glasses. But I might fill this paper with the different articles made in these home associations. They embrace everything used in Russia, from textiles to machinery, and the cheapness of manufacture must be taken into consideration by the Americans who are pushing the commercial invasion.

Goods are sold so low that the profits are small. It is chiefly a question of raw material, the labor cost being little. In some of the associations men, women and children work from daylight to dark, and if each makes a few cents a day he is satisfied. Take the lock makers. There are thousands of them, and in Tula alone the locks sold bring in \$1,000,000 a year. Some are so cheap that they sell for 15 cents a dozen, and others so dear that they are each worth \$2.50. The latter are door locks which ring a bell when you turn them. Men engaged in lockmaking average less than \$2 a week, and if one can net \$50 in a winter he does extraordinarily well. Saddlers make about the same and weavers much less.

Along the Volga there are thousands of women who weave fishing nets, using a million pounds of hemp and other raw material every year. They labor on the farms

in the summer and do this work in the winter. Their average earnings are about 10 cents per day, while the children who help them are glad to get 5, 6 or 7 cents.

Within the last generation a great number of big factories have been established in Russia. The millions who are working in their homes are to a large extent skilled laborers, and it takes but little time to teach them to handle machinery. The result is there is an abundance of cheap labor and all the industrial centers are growing. St. Petersburg has become a manufacturing city, and it has iron works of all kinds. Warsaw has now about 750,000 people, who are largely engaged in textile industries, and Lodz, a great cotton town of western Russia, is now growing faster than any town in the United States. It was a village only a few years ago. It had about 100,000 population in 1890, and now it has more than three times that many. It makes goods for shipment to all parts of Russia and to Siberia, China, Turkestan and Persia.

Russia has now great linen and woolen mills. It has in its textile factories altogether more than 6,000,000 spindles and something like 150,000 looms employing more than 300,000 hands. There are 60,000 engaged in dyeing, bleaching and printing and almost 750,000 employed on textiles alone.

There are 500,000 Russians employed in mining and smelting and fully that number in making foodstuffs. There are 300,000 men in the iron works and thousands at work in the oil fields.

Within the last few years the English, French, Germans and Americans have been establishing factories in Russia to avoid the tariff and to take advantage of Russian cheap labor. The country is open to foreign capital, and many of the foreign establishments are making money. I have spoken of the Westinghouse airbrakes works and those of the New York Airbrakes company. The Westinghouse company has electrical works in south Russia and others of our manufacturers will likely establish plants on account of the present discrimination against the United States, which can be avoided by making the goods here. I am told that American capital will be welcomed and that it will have every advantage possessed by the natives.

The wages in the Russian factories are 2 cents an hour and upwards. There are thousands who work for a cent an hour and tens of thousands who do not receive 20 cents a day for ten, eleven and more hours' work. I have before me some figures given by the order of Mr. Witte, the Russian minister of finance. They state that in the two great industrial provinces of Vladimir and Moscow the men on the average earn from \$7.50 to \$8 a month. This would be \$2 a week or 33 cents a day. Women get \$5.25 a month or about \$1.30 per week and boys of sixteen \$4 a month or less than 15 cents a day, while children

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