

ST. PETERSBURG WORKING CLASSES

Various Pursuits in Which They Are Employed --Bad Conditions of Life From Which the Industrial Population Suffers --A Typical Russian Factory --Labor Enactments in a Very Backward State.

THE conditions of the working classes in Russia are the outcome of certain peculiar features of national economy which existed in no other country, at all events, in modern times. Russian industries were originally either the result of State action (the so-called "possession factories"), or that of the enterprise of landowners who used a part of their serfs to work their mills (the "proprietary factories"). In most cases the enormous majority of the workmen employed were occupied in industrial pursuits only during the winter, returning in the summer to their villages to attend to agricultural labors. This state of affairs was in part due to the serf system, which tied the peasant to the soil and only allowed him to leave it temporarily; but it has outlasted serfdom, and obtains to some extent even to this day. Wages are 10 to 20 per cent. higher in summer than in winter, and there is usually a shifting of hands at Easter and in November, so that in many factories the majority of the men are changed every six months. But a permanent factory class has gradually been growing up in Russia, and now there are few important factories where the number of men employed during the summer is appreciably less than in the winter. This is particularly the case in St. Petersburg, where the large factories are worked on modern industrial lines, and the working-class population is beginning to resemble that of other countries.

Labor legislation, however, is still in a very backward state, as the authorities are always extraordinarily nervous lest anything done in favor of the working classes might form a desire for liberties of a political character.

Hours of labor, which were formerly unlimited have now been fixed at eleven and a half, but in some establishments they are voluntarily reduced to ten and a half or eleven, and in many cases no night work is done at all. But it is in the conditions of life that the Russian industrial population is particularly badly off.

The typical Russian factory was a vast establishment, usually in a rural district at some distance from a town, but forming a large village or small town in itself. Here the workmen were lodged, fed, clothed, educated, amused, and policed by the factory owners and formed a little world to themselves. But with the growth of the industrial movement in the towns these conditions have to a great extent ceased to be. At the same time, while agriculture no longer supports anything like the whole population, the industrial development is not yet sufficient to deal with the surplus, and the supply of labor is always far in excess of the demand. The conditions of life for working men are exceptionally hard in the large towns, especially in St. Petersburg, where the rents are very high. The squalor of working men's dwellings is such as would not be tolerated in other countries. The Government has done nothing to bring about an improvement in this connection. It regards ordinary artisans with suspicion, and actually places difficulties in the way of their settling down in large numbers in any particular quarter of the town most convenient to their work, as it fears that close contact may generate dangerous political movements and facilitate revolutionary propaganda. Everything that has been done to improve their lot is due to the philanthropic initiative of certain firms. The ordinary lodging houses of the Russian workmen are simply unspeakable. To find seven or eight persons of four or five different families is by no means uncommon, and in fact, it is quite a common occurrence to find corners of rooms are let separately. Working men's wages range in St. Petersburg from sixty kopecks a day to three rubles for the foreman (37 cents to \$1.00), but in many instances they are even lower. Rents, on the other hand, are proportionately very high. In one large factory in St. Petersburg, in which some 7000 hands are employed, a good deal has been done for the benefit of the workmen, somewhat on the lines of the old Russian factories. Large tenements have been built, sheltering 1500 out of the 7000 persons employed; a certain number of the employees whose continual presence on the premises is desirable are lodged free, and in these cases there is no limit as to overcrowding. The rest are lodged at the rate of nine rubles a month (\$4.75) for one room, and here the company has fixed a limit of six persons per room. The law has established no limitation. The management of this firm is trying to instill the necessity for cleanliness into the workmen, but as a rule their conditions are of the filthiest. There is a difference, however, in favor of the workmen of non-Russian extraction—Germans, Finns, etc.—who seem to be better in every way. The Russian workman works hard and steadily, and learns easily, but he has absolutely no ideas of his own or initiative. He will do what he is told, but does not care to know why he is doing it.

Another philanthropic work undertaken by the same firm is the establishment of schools for the children of the employees.

Another factory which I visited was

a large cotton mill belonging to a Russian company, but worked largely under English management. It employs some 600 or 700 men and women (no children). The English overseers seemed to be satisfied with the Russian workmen as a whole, and were of opinion that if they were better paid, lived in better lodgings, and had better food they would be equal to the workmen of most other countries; but in the conditions in which they exist no real improvement is possible. The average wage being twenty to twenty-two rubles or \$10.50 a month (in many cases it is even less), a large part of which goes in house rent, they cannot grow up healthy or with highly developed intelligence. In his ten or eleven hours a day he does less work and less good work than an English or American workman in eight or nine. Nor can education mend matters to any great extent, as the Government purposely discourages it, again for political reasons.

Another system which tends to depress the Russian working classes is the credit system which obtains in the provision shops and eating-houses. Each workman has a credit book at the eating house which he frequents, and his debt is allowed to mount up until pay day (which is usually once a fortnight or once a month). Then he pays if he can, and if not the credit is carried on, but one-quarter of his wages can be seized by the shopman. If the artisan loses his employment supplies are cut off until he gets another job. Thus the one possible advantage of the system—that of giving credit during bad times—is done away with. If he obtains another job the shopman is down on him at once, and again retains a quarter of his wages from his new employer. Owing to the passport system all escape is impossible. In some cases the shop belongs to the employer, and thus we have the truck system in its worst form. If, on the other hand, the debt is paid and anything remains over, it is all spent in vodka. The Russian is naturally inclined to drunkenness—even in the highest circles of society it is by no means uncommon for men to get drunk every night after dinner—and for the poor it is the only pleasure in life. Attempts have been made in St. Petersburg by the Temperance Society to instill a taste for rational amusements unaccompanied by alcohol among the lower classes, and the handsome and well-managed Narodny Dom (People's House) was started for this object. There one can enjoy music, light, warmth, and cheerful surroundings for ten copecks, while at the same time good refreshments are supplied at moderate prices. But the place has become chiefly the resort of the lower bourgeoisie. The working man does not go there, for he can seldom afford the ten copecks entrance, and even the cheap prices of the food are not cheap enough for him. If he has a little money to spare he prefers to spend it on drink, and although the total quantity which he consumes in a year is not large, he takes enough each time to make himself thoroughly drunk. It may be said that the wretched conditions of the industrial classes are no worse than those in which their peasant fathers and mothers lived. But apart from the fact that the food in the latter case was often really better than in life former and the overcrowding less great, the country air and the country life tended to make up for otherwise unsatisfactory conditions, whereas Russian workmen in the factories suffer all the disadvantages of industrial civilization without its compensations.—London Times Correspondence.

No Porter Needed to Guard.

"Some people," remarked an employer at Broad Street Station, "have their own ways of doing things. The other day a party of four persons arrived at this station from one of the summer resorts. They were laden with a miscellaneous assortment of luggage, and the head of the family had an immense white bulldog. The luggage was so heavy that they were compelled to call upon the porters for help.

"When they reached the cafe door they directed the porters to pile the luggage in a heap on the floor. Then, their request being complied with, they placed the bulldog on the top of the heap and went into the restaurant and dined, failing to appear for two hours.

"In the meanwhile the dog was 'marched' all he surveyed, for no one dared go nearer than ten feet of him. The party finally took a train to one of the suburbs."—Philadelphia Press.

Natural Ignorance.

Miss Marie Manning, the author of "Judith of the Plains," tells this incident of her recent European trip. The novelist was seeking home for the first time, and in the course of her sight-seeing was anxious to include a visit to the tomb of Caesar. Meeting a citizen on the streets she inquired, in her best Italian, the location of the tomb.

The man looked greatly embarrassed.

"I am, desolated, Signorina," he apologized, speaking in excellent English. "I do not know. Caesar has been dead so long!"—Harper's Weekly.

A SERMON FOR SUNDAY

AN ELOQUENT DISCOURSE BY THE REV. HUGH BLACK, M. A.

Subject: "Jesus His Own Sign and Miracle"—"Mere Wonder Working is No Evidence of the Things Christ Came to Teach the World."

NEW YORK CITY.—Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, which is a very large building, was filled in evening with a congregation to hear the Rev. Hugh Black, M. A., associate of Dr. White in the Free St. George's Church, Edinburgh, Scotland. The subject was "Jesus His Own Sign and Miracle." The text was from Matthew xii:38: "Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, We desire a sign from thee. But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it. And after the prophet Jonas." Mr. Black said:

We gather from its source, as coming from the Pharisees, that this question had a malicious purpose in view, to undermine the authority of the new Teacher with the people by asking from Him what He could not or would not perform, but from the historical connection in which the evangelists place the purpose was not only malicious, but almost insulting. Our Lord had been in the pursuit of His beneficent healing ministry, had cured many suffering men and women, and the Pharisees' explanation was that He had power from an evil source; He did it, they asserted, by virtue of His connection with Beelzebub, the prince of devils. And after the explanation of the signs and wonders Jesus did among men, they came with the insulting question, "Master, we would see a sign from thee." What sort of a sign did they want, and what sort of evidence could convince them if they could attribute His healing ministry to diabolic art? The veiled insult of the demand is here, and of all He had done, so as if it did not count and as if He must now begin to do something of sufficient magnitude to convince them that His pretensions were trustworthy.

Now there is a demand for evidence which is legitimate, evidence which is necessary for the highest faith, but in this case, apart from the hypocrisy of the question, there underlay a wrong conception of revelation and a wrong conception of the nature and the place of miracles. They wanted Christ to perform some prodigy, as if a piece of wonder-working could be an evidence of spiritual things; hence, our Lord's rebuke. It is a religious rebuke. God should be recognized for what He is, and the recognition of Him should be dependent upon external signs, which in themselves, after all, have no spiritual significance. Christ's feeling as regards this is seen from a graphic illustration given by St. Mark, who writes that when the Pharisees came seeking a sign from Him Jesus sighed deeply in His spirit; He showed His grief at the blindness of their souls, to think that the recognition of the spiritual should be made to hang on prodigies and on miracle-working of any kind. There shall no sign be given to this generation." This attitude of our Lord, notice, is not contradictory to the value He elsewhere placed on miracles as evidence. He pointed, you remember, to the needs of mercy to whom they were given when, as in the case of John the Baptist, there was a sincere desire to know the marks of the Messiah, but His miracles were more to reveal than to reveal, and to surprise and to astonish. He knew from sad experience that it was possible for men to believe in the reality of miracles and at the same time to be utterly incredulous, even to ascribe it to evil powers as the Pharisees did.

"There shall be no sign given to curiosity-mongers." There can be no sign given to those who are seeking for a sign which can be proved by the material. Mere wonder-working is no evidence of the things which Jesus came to teach the world. Men are not to be led to God, then or now, by the recognition of His miracles. The same mistake is possible to us, and possible to us in many ways and forms. We make the same mistake, for example, when we think that faith in God is to be revealed to us if only we could see some physical evidence, especially designed to convince men of His reality; or when we think that merit their rebuke when we sign for the certitude which we imagine would come from a celestial appearance or from a voice from heaven, or if we could put our finger into the side of the man who speaks. To understand Christ's attitude on this question we need to have our minds disabused of the idea that a mere miracle in the sense of the material world is an evidence of spiritual things. Some miracles are signs indeed, but only when there is spiritual evidence in them; that is, when they are more than mere wonder-working, which the Pharisees here desired. For example, our Lord's healing ministry was a great and constant sign of the love of God, carrying a revelation with it as truly as any sign of His power. He lets His light shine upon the true way in which to view the whole question. Our Lord's miracles cannot be separated from the great revelations which He gave to the world. His words and His works are correlated; the miracles are not to be looked on as isolated exhibitions of power, but as themselves contributing to the revelation. They were not signs, but vehicles of teaching. They are not signs externally attached to the teaching to give it weight, and therefore make it more credible; but unexplained occurrences testifying in a mysterious fashion to the possession of divine power; they did not evidence the teaching, they themselves are the teaching. They are not signs in the sense of 'in words, moral' and 'spiritual in their effect, not evidential at all, except by the way. They are an integral part of the revelation of the love of God in Christ Jesus. Our Lord. They have an essential place in the whole round of the Christian revelation as fruits—fruits of the pity of God, as manifestations of His love and wisdom; they are part of the manifestation of Christ; they are not guarantees of His message as the Pharisees here meant them, but parts of the message itself, as much evidences of God's love as His gracious, tender words are or ever could be, therefore Christ's miracles are never to be conceived of as mere displays of power. He persistently refused to give them to work wonders to make men believe. It is not that the demand for evidence is wrong; it is a natural demand that proof should be given of all claims; but we must make sure what really is evidence. A miracle is in itself no proof of a moral truth, and a miracle can never in itself engender spiritual faith in the heart of man. We rightly ask for evidence, but what evidence, and evidence of what? We say we would believe in Christ if only we could be convinced, but convinced how, and by what? We have sometimes asked, with an injured air, why they could not be convinced by an unmistakable sign from heaven, why Christ if He should wish to win men to Him, should not have supernatural means the barriers of unbelief and forcibly open the door of the

heart, and find entrance? What would such an entrance be worth morally? A mere sensuous or intellectual gratification which might come from a sign from heaven would be quite outside the purpose aimed at by our Lord. What would persuade the carnal mind of the spiritual, what not the carnal, surely. Not if one rose to the death of Christ, was accounted to His generation, not by this or that sign or wonder-working, but by His whole ministry, by Himself, by His life and teaching. If Himself was that sign, if the sign of Jesus will not be to Jerusalem what the sign of Jonah was to Nineveh, would a moment of astonishment at some prodigy working outside the purpose aimed at by our Lord? What would persuade the carnal mind of the spiritual, what not the carnal, surely. Not if one rose to the death of Christ, was accounted to His generation, not by this or that sign or wonder-working, but by His whole ministry, by Himself, by His life and teaching. 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