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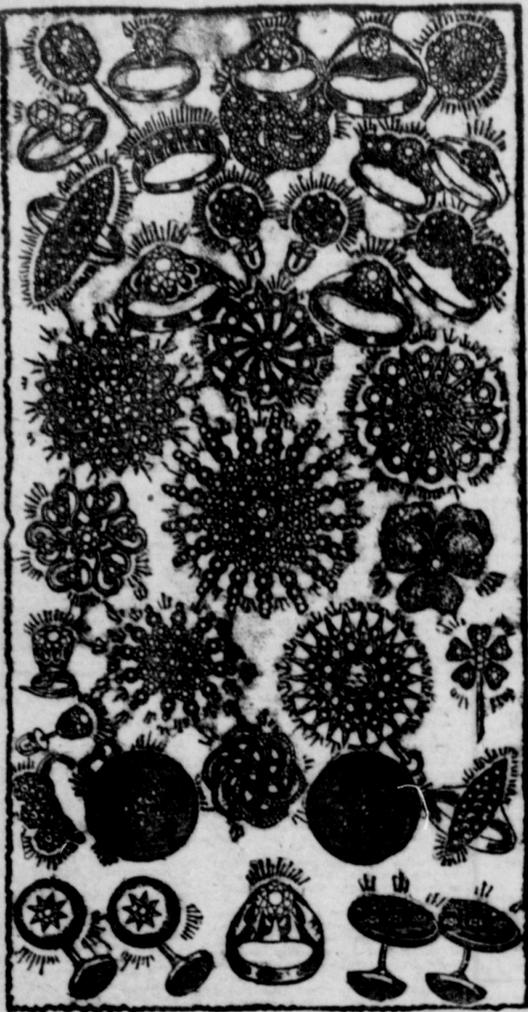
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PITIFUL CONDITION OF RUSSIAN PEASANTS --BUSY IN SUMMER, IDLE IN WINTER

**SUPERSTITIOUS, IGNORANT AND DEGRADED, THEY EKE OUT A MISERABLE EXISTENCE—
HOME OF A PEASANT A HATCHERY FOR VERMIN—GREEK PRIESTS SUPPOSED TO POSSESS
EVIL EYE AND POOR FEAR THEM**

BY JOHN VANDERCOOK,
Newspaper Enterprise Association's
Special Commissioner to Russia.

MOSCOW, Russia.—Only 5 per cent of the vast number of the czar's subjects live in the cities or towns. The rest are farmers, or, as they are called in Europe, peasants. They are no people whose existence is more dreary. The summer season is short and very warm. From the first day the frost breaks to the time when the north wind again freezes everything, the peasant's labor is unceasing.

Only by desperate exertion can they raise sufficient to support them through the six months of winter. Through the summer, owing to the northern latitude, the days are long, so that 18 hours' work a day for the peasant, his wife and his children is not uncommon.

American agricultural machinery is used on the larger estates, making work easier, but on the peasant farms there are only the most primitive appliances. Wooden plows and wooden implements make agriculture a drudgery to an extent which the most-hardworked American farmer could not believe.

In October winter begins, and everything is frozen solid until May. At once the peasant's life becomes one of idleness. To milk the cows and get in wood from the forest is all there is to do. Even the stabling is made easier from the practice of never removing the litter from the stalls during the cold weather. The fifth piece up under the cattle until it is three or four feet deep.

A larger proportion of cattle die of disease in Russia than in any other country, but the Russian sticks to his method of stabling because of the quantity of manure which he has ready for his fields in the spring.



Russian Peasant's Dining

Philanthropic people in St. Petersburg and Moscow are trying to relieve the dreary monotony of the peasant's life by introducing cottage industries and circulating reading matter. But as 75 per cent of the people, including probably 98 per cent of the women, in Russia, cannot read or write, village library clubs do not make much headway. The men receive the rudiments of education when they are in the army, but for them the long winter is usually spent keeping drunk. The peasant used to make their own vodka from spoiled potatoes, but lately the government has prevented this by making the production of alcohol a government monopoly. At the same time vodka is exceedingly plentiful, very intoxicating and in the usual relief practiced during the winter.

By failing to ventilate, the peasant is able to economize on fuel, and though it is pitiful enough this seems a great object to him. His windows are always built so that they cannot be opened. The door is never opened except when someone



To a traveler one of the most extraordinary things in Russia is that nobody seems to have the slightest idea on the subject of ventilation. Most of the buildings are hermetically sealed in October and not aired until May, so that by mid-winter the stench even in fairly good hotels is overpowering. Churches and many public buildings are just as bad, but for the climax in bad air you have to visit the home of a peasant. The average peasant's house is a crude structure of logs and thatch, sometimes with only one room and sometimes with two. In the living room is a great stove of brick so constructed that a very small amount of fuel will heat it and it will continue to give out heat long after the fire has gone out.

In addition to the other terrors, there is an immense and noisome population of insects. Somehow the peasants are used to them and do not give them much thought. The chief outside influence in the peasant's life is religion, but this is in many cases degraded to a mere superstition. Each house has its own little icon or picture of a saint and this is often literally worshipped. The peasants also hold strange pagan ideas on many subjects which have survived from the darker ages of Russia. Witches are implicitly believed in, and in extreme cases, where the water wheel of a mill, for

instance, is supposed to be bewitched, the miller will go to the length of kidnapping a child and driving it under the wheel so as to appease the sorcery.

With so religious a people, it might be supposed that the priests would have great power. To a certain extent they do have. It was a device of Peter the Great to abolish the system of Russian church government by which the Greek church was ruled by one patriarch and to make the czar head of the church. Today there are three metropolitan bishops of equal rank and the czar is the head of all. The idea is to teach the people that the czar is the appointed head of the church and the religious machinery of the country is worked to this end.

The priest does not have the same authority as in other places. As a matter of fact, Russian peasants think that all priests possess the evil eye, and whenever a priest comes into their house or speaks to them in the street, they always cross their fingers until he has gone away. If they did not cross their fingers when a priest was about they would expect all sorts of trouble.

The degraded condition of the Russian peasants is especially discouraging to those who hope for a revolution. It is hopeless to talk about the rights of man to a dirty, superstitious savage who cannot

read and write, whose vocabulary is seldom more than 150 words, who does not even know how to ventilate his house, and who in his moments of leisure is engrossed, not in sorting out ideas inside his head, but in catching insects which worry the outside of it.

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