

THE CZAR'S RIGHT HAND MAN

An Interview With Sergius Witte, the Business Manager of the Russian Empire.

(Special Correspondence of the Deseret News by Frank G. Carpenter.)



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ST. PETERSBURG.—I have had an interview here with the greatest man in Russia if not the greatest man in earth. His name is Sergius Witte, he is the right hand of the czar, and the business manager of the great Russian empire. He handles all the money of a billion dollars a year, taking it in from thousands of sources and distributing it with an even hand to the necessities of Russia in Europe and Asia.

He is one of the world's greatest bankers, being at the head of the treasury of Russia and of the vast government banking system whose capital runs into the hundreds of millions. He is one of the world's great railroad men, having an enormous network of state lines in Russia, in central Asia and in Siberia the longest line of the world. From the czar's crown estates he collects about \$40,000,000 a year, and from the debts owing him gets a revenue of \$16,000,000. He handles the mines belonging to the crown and draws forth gold and silver, iron and coal in the tens of millions from the bowels of the earth. He is in charge of the tax system and the customs duties and he is a mighty manufacturer. Stranger than all he is the greatest saloonist of the world. He does an alcohol business which dwarfs that of the American whisky trust, making and selling, as a government proposition, every ounce of alcohol consumed by more than 100,000,000 people. All this Witte does ably, honestly and

for his master, the czar. He has acquired his prominence by his own work, and is what would be called in America a self-made man. He came from the southeastern part of the empire, born of parents comparatively poor. He had a fair education and began life as a clerk in a railroad office. This was at Odessa on the Black sea. He did his work well and rose to be manager. Then he was advanced to another road which ran from Odessa to Moscow and managed that. His ability here was such that he was recommended again and again to the government, and finally became a government director of railroads. He revised the railroad tariff, reorganized the routes, rebuilt many of the lines and showed himself to be the ablest railway man of the empire. He was then put in charge of the board of public works and railroads, the position now held by Prince Ilkoff, and a little later on was made minister of finance, by far the most important office in the cabinet of the czar.

This was 11 years ago, and since then Witte has almost revolutionized the financial condition of Russia. He has pushed its trade into all parts of Asia, and has reorganized the business at home. He has completed the Trans-Siberian road, has extended the roads in Turkistan, has put Russia on a gold standard and has filled the treasury, without oppressing the people. He is today full of new ideas for the improvement of the empire, and he is slowly but surely bettering the country in commerce and industry along the lines of modern development.

HOW SERGIUS WITTE LOOKS.

It was through the American ambassador to St. Petersburg that I got access to Mr. Witte. He received me in the finance department, a great brown building not far from the Nevski on Moika street. He is a busy man, and 4 o'clock had been fixed for the appointment. At five minutes before that hour I

Who He Is, What He Is and How He Looks—He Handles a Billion Dollars a Year and Controls the Biggest Business on Earth—A Chat With Him About the American Invasion—Opportunities For American Capital in Russia—The Tariff—How Russia Feels Toward the United States and a Message To Us—The Future of Russia—The Alcohol Business Managed by the Government—It More Than Pays the Expenses of Army and Navy—A Visit to A Government Saloon—Something About Russian Taxes.

stepped from my droschky and was admitted to the department by two stern-looking Russians, long-haired and long-bearded, wearing top boots, and liveried coats which fell almost to the instep. One of them helped me off with my overcoat, the other took my hat and umbrella, and both directed me to the top floor. There was no elevator, and I walked, hearing an electric bell ringing, announcing, as I supposed, my approach. On the third floor I found more dunks, in livery, and also a bright young official in uniform, who spoke English fluently, although he was a Russian. He told me that the minister was expecting me, and a moment later opened the door of his excellency's office and asked me to enter. I did so, and was in the presence of the Russian secretary of the treasury.

Mr. Witte rose, came toward me and held out his hand. He made me welcome and gave me a seat near his desk and then sat down himself and talked with me through an interpreter in response to my questions. I had a good chance to study him during the interview. He is very impressive, but simple and unostentatious. He talks quietly, does not get excited and apparently has himself well in check. He is a big man. He stands six feet one in his stockings, and his face is strong-lined and muscular. His forehead is very high and full, with brown hair rising from it, and combed straight back without a part. He has a rich brown beard and brown eyes rather thoughtful than otherwise. He was dressed in a morning suit at the time, but in asking for his signature on a photograph he wrote it on one representing him in his court dress, which is covered with medals and gold lace. He smoked a cigarette as he talked, and I noticed beside his chair a tea table with a glass of tea with a lemon floating upon it, such as the Russians drink everywhere.

THE AMERICAN INVASION.

My first question was as to the American invasion. I wanted to know something as to the chances for American capital and American goods in the land of the czar. His excellency said: "There are plenty of openings here for foreign capital in the way of manufactures. We already have some American factories, and others could be introduced at a profit. We have a vast number of people and a very large country, and the growth must continue for a long time to come. As to the profits, they will depend largely on the management of the business. Russia is glad to welcome foreign capital, and to do anything that will materially improve the condition of the country."

"Is capital safe in Russia?" I asked. "It is as safe as anywhere," said Mr. Witte. "The only questions are those of management and business ability."

HOW AMERICAN TRADE WITH RUSSIA—CAN IT BE INCREASED?

"That is a difficult question," replied the minister of finance. "Russia and the United States are of much the same character. We both have an abundance of raw material, such as grain, lumber and minerals. We have petroleum, and so have you. The result is you do not need what we have to sell, and there is not that mutual exchange of commodities that forms the basis of profitable commerce. Nevertheless, many of your manufactures are in demand here. This is especially so with your farming and other machinery."

THE TARIFF.

"How about the tariff which you have recently put on American goods. Will it affect our trade to any great extent?" "That tariff was one of the necessities of the time," replied Mr. Witte. "It relates only to certain classes of American goods and does not touch others. It will probably lessen the importation of some things, but other branches of the trade will continue to prosper. It was a business necessity."

"What is the feeling in Russia toward the United States?"

"Politically it is the best possible. The two governments are on the friendliest terms. Commercially our relations may be somewhat strained, but that is the outcome of conditions which Russia could not control."

"What is Russia doing in Manchuria, your excellency?" said I. "It is charged that you are colonizing the country and intend to hold it."

"That is not true," replied the minister of finance. "We are doing nothing of the kind, and it is the intention of the Russian government to refrain from extending its rule in that direction. We have a dozen times asserted that we will give the government over to the Chinese just as soon as we possibly can, and this we expect to do."

THE FUTURE OF RUSSIA.

"Your excellency is considered the most advanced statesman in Russia. It is generally conceded that within the past ten years you have done more than any other man for your country and people along broad political lines. I would like to ask you what you hope for the Russia of the future."

"The future," replied Mr. Witte, after thinking a moment, "is in the hands of God and destiny. What it will be I do not venture to predict, but if we may judge what is to come by the past, this country will one day be the great country of the world. This empire is an autocratic one, and its condition largely depends on the individuality of its rulers. If those to come are to possess the great ability of those we have had since the time of Peter the Great I have no fear of the Russia of the future."

A MESSAGE TO THE UNITED STATES.

Before leaving I asked Mr. Witte to give me a message for the American people. He replied:

"You may say that Russia is a friend of the United States. She has always been so and she is more so today than ever. She considers the United States one of her best friends among the nations. She rejoices in America's prosperity and hopes that the friendly relations which now obtain will be perpetual."

THE CZAR A LIQUOR DEALER.

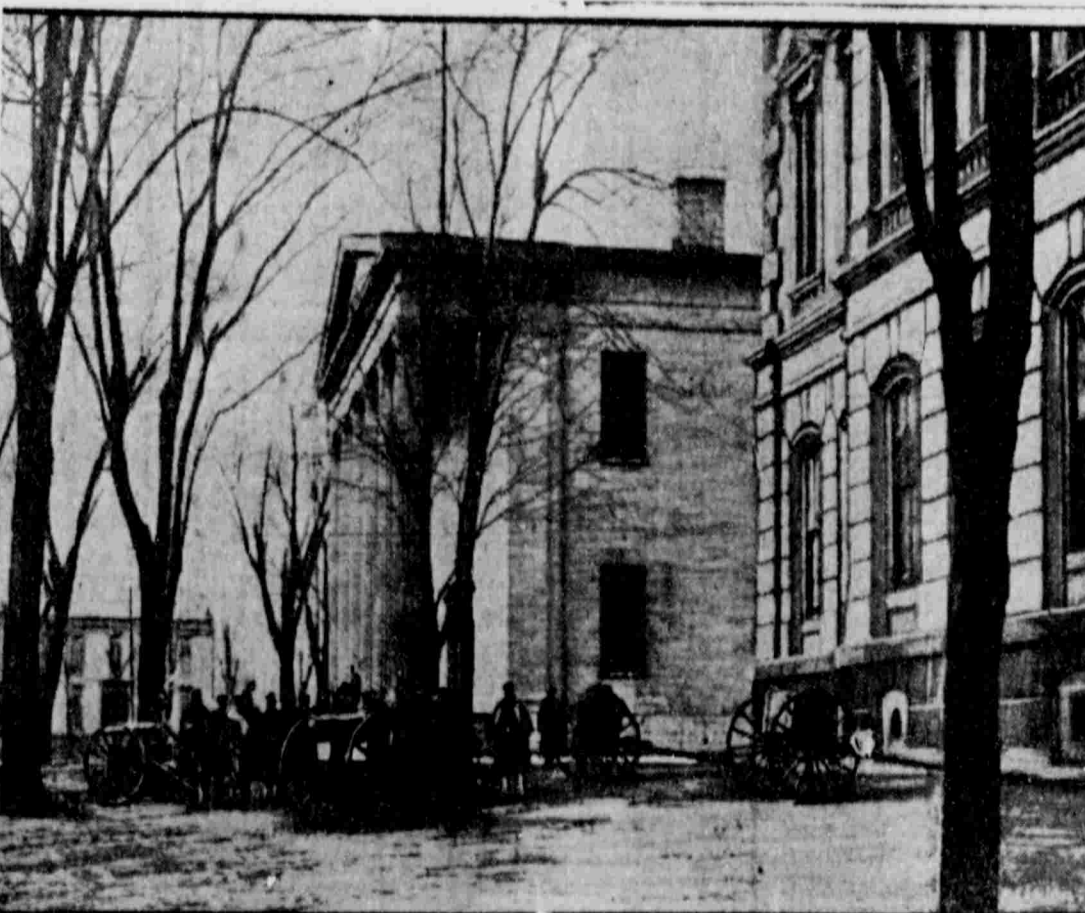
During my stay in the finance department, at the direction of Mr. Witte, I was given information concerning the Russian government as a liquor dealer. The movement was originated by Alexander III. It was introduced in several provinces by Mr. Witte on the 1st of January, 1885, and it has now been extended to almost the whole of Russia in Europe. The government has taken entire charge of the manufacture and sale of all alcoholic liquors. It has its liquor shops in every city and village, and it is against the law for any private person to make or sell vodka, as this Russian whisky is called. This work was begun to protect the people from the liquor dealers and to improve their conditions generally. In the past there were grog shops scattered over the empire, many of them operated by unscrupulous people, who sold drinks on credit and finally got away the lands and most of the property in their neighborhood. The business was enormously profitable. Many Russians had grown rich from it. They were not only robbing the people, but they were selling them bad vodka when Mr. Witte issued his decree that it must be stopped, and that after a time the government would manage the business itself. Of course there was a great outcry. Had there been a congress, or any purchasable commodity, the order would have probably been remanded, but the government here is supreme, and the liquor dealers went out of business.

Since then great factories have been established to make the vodka, and the

GOVERNMENT LIQUOR FACTORIES.

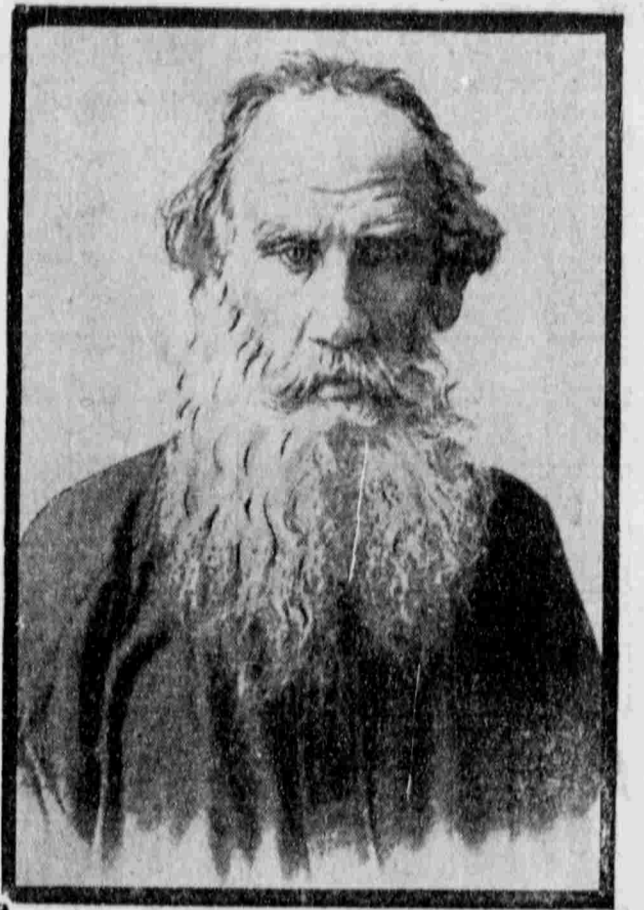
The English are the greatest drinkers of brandy. Drinking is common all over the empire, and I see many drunk men. I do not know that they are as bad as the English in this respect, but they certainly drink more than the Americans. The above figures are the profits of the business, and they give a small idea of the enormous consumption, which will probably increase as the people grow richer. The Russians are great brandy drinkers, for after all vodka is a species of brandy. Drinking is common all over the empire, and I see many drunk men. I do not know that they are as bad as the English in this respect, but they certainly drink more than the Americans. The above figures are the profits of the business, and they give a small idea of the enormous consumption, which will probably increase as the people grow richer.

KENTUCKY FEUD CASE.



Inside the Court House at Jackson, Kentucky, J. Curtis Jett and Tom White are incarcerated awaiting a verdict in their sensational trial for the assassination of Judge Marcum—an exciting incident which is shaking all Kentucky. Outside the State House a military guard armed with deadly gatling guns keeps constant watch against an organized attempt to rescue the prisoners. The men are instructed to commence wholesale firing at the first signs of disorder and the situation is far from being opera bouffe.

THE TOLSTOI CHARGES.



Tolstoy, Russia's fearless author and philosopher, has come boldly out with an accusation that Russia is directly responsible for the Kishineff massacres. He proclaims himself the friend of the Hebrews and says they are an inoffensive people. His remarks have caused intense indignation in Russian ecclesiastical circles. Above is the latest photograph of the famous sage.

thing like \$100,000,000 a year. There is a tax on matches which produces more than \$15,000,000, and one on sugar which is expected to yield \$38,000,000 in 1903. Then there are stamp duties and inheritance taxes. If you transfer a piece of real estate 4 per cent of the value of the property goes to the government, and if you do any banking you must use government stamps.

The taxes are different in different parts of the empire. There is a wagon tax, a tax levied on the natives of the

Caucasian mountains by which they are freed from military service, and a tax on cattle owned by the Tartars, who live in tents. The taxes on real estate are comparatively light and the customs duties comparatively heavy. There are a large number of licenses and also certain taxes on incomes and on industrial establishments. A large part of the revenue, however, comes from the government monopolies, the czar being the greatest land owner and the greatest capitalist of the world.

FRANK G. CARPENTER.

AMONG THE AUTHORS.

Special Correspondence.

New York June 2.—Will N. Harben was on a train going out of New York the other day when a newsboy approached him with an armful of books. He promptly offered Mr. Harben his own novel, "The Substitute."

"It's by the author of 'Abner Danahel,'" explained the boy. "Have a copy?"

"I've read it," replied the author, shaking his head.

"Oh, you have!" exclaimed the boy as a couple of passengers leaned forward to listen. "How did you like it?"

"Pretty well," said Mr. Harben. Then, thinking of the tedious hours spent in revisions of the manuscript and proof reading, he added impressively, "I have read it five times."

"Five times!" exclaimed the boy. And the two passengers promptly purchased copies of the enterprising bookseller moved on through the car saying: "The Substitute"—new book, just out; one man read it five times. Only a few copies left!"

There is one story of his newspaper experience that Elliott Flower, the author of "Policeman Flynn" and "Alder-

man Kriesler's Defeat," still occasionally tells with great delight. Flower was on the Chicago Tribune as a special writer, and R. W. Patterson was the managing editor. Patterson sent for Flower and told him he wanted to make a case against the gamblers, who were thriving, although sub rosa, at the time.

"I don't want any hearsay evidence," he explained. "I want you to play in every game that you write up. I want proof that there is gambling in Chicago and plenty of it in spite of what the police say."

He then gave Flower \$50 for expenses, and the trouble began. A day or so later he was moved to inquire what progress had been made.

"I'm broke," said the writer, "but I've got a good deal of evidence."

Another \$50 was immediately forthcoming, and the game went merrily on. Then the article was prepared and published, and after that came the expense account. Patterson ran down it hastily and saw the footing. He went over it again and looked solemn. The total of the losses was \$140.

"I'll never forget Patterson's face," says Flower, "when he found the paper was indebted to me \$40 for expenses over and above what had been already advanced. He went over the list of gambling houses three times and shook his head every time he reached the footing. Then he swung round in his swivel chair and asked almost plaintively, 'Good heavens, young man, didn't you win anywhere?' with the accent on 'anywhere'—a strong accent."

TO SETTLE FEUD BY PEACE.



General O. O. Howard, one of the most famous and distinguished United States officers on the retired list, will go into commission again, although not under orders from the war department. His mission this time will be one of peace and not of the sword. The aged general is confident that he can settle some of the deadly feuds that have been agitating West Virginia, Tennessee and Kentucky. He will go among the desperate mountaineers to bring his influence to bear in the directions of peace.



CHARLES L. EIDLITZ

Charles L. Eidlitz, a prominent New York contractor, is at the head of a \$500,000,000 employers' union, the largest organization of its kind ever attempted. The movement is the outcome of the recent building strikes which have tied up New York's construction work. While the organizers of the new union claim to look upon the unions in a most friendly light, it is understood generally that the powerful capitalistic organization will wage a war against the labor body which controls the strike.