

Russia Now a Sober Nation

There is prohibition in Russia today—prohibition which means that not a drop of vodka, whisky, brandy, gin or any other strong liquor is obtainable from one end to the other of a territory populated by 150,000,000 people and covering one-sixth of the habitable globe.

The story of how strong drink has been utterly banished from the Russian Empire was related to the Associated Press by Michael Demitrovitch Tchelishsheff, the man directly responsible for putting an end to Russia's great vice, the vodka habit.

From the day this step was taken drunkenness vanished in Russia. The results are seen at once in the peasantry. Already they are beginning to look like a different race. The marks of suffering, the pinched looks of illness and improper nourishment have gone from their faces. There has been also a remarkable change in the appearance of their clothing. Their clothes are cleaner and both the men and women appear more neatly and better dressed.

Reformer Was Peasant.

The destitute character of the homes of the poor has been replaced with something like order and thrift. In Petrograd and Moscow the effect of these improved conditions is fairly startling. On holidays in these two cities inebriates always filled the police stations, and often they lay about on the sidewalks and even in the streets. Things are so different today that unattended women may now pass at night through portions of these cities where it was formerly dangerous even for men. Minor crimes and misdemeanors have almost vanished.

This miracle has been virtually accomplished by one man. He is Michael D. T. Tchelishsheff, a peasant by birth, originally a house painter by profession, then mayor of the City of Samara, and now a millionaire. Physically he is a giant, standing over 6 feet 4 inches, and of powerful build. Although he is 55 years old, he looks much younger. His movements display the energy of youth, his eyes are animated, and his black hair is not tinged by gray.

Speaking of what he had accomplished for the cause of sobriety in Russia, Mr. Tchelishsheff said:

"At Samara I decided to more than passively disapprove of vodka. At this time I was an alderman, and many of the tenants living in my houses were workingmen. One night a drunken father in one of my houses killed his wife. This incident made such a terrible impression on me that I decided to fight vodka with all my strength.

"On the supposition that the government was selling vodka for the revenue I calculated the revenue received from its consumption in Samara. I then introduced a bill in the city council providing that the city give this sum of money to the imperial treasury, requesting at the same time that the sale of vodka be prohibited. This bill passed, and the money was appropriated. It was offered to the government, but the government promptly refused it.

Bureaucracy Fights Him.

"It then dawned upon me that Russian bureaucracy did not want the people to become sober, for the reason that it was easier to rule autocratically a drunken mob than a sober people.

"This was seven years ago. Later I was elected mayor of Samara, capital of the Volda district, a district with over a quarter of a million inhabitants. Subsequently to holding this office I was elected to the дума on an antivodka platform. In the дума I proposed a bill permitting the inhabitants of any town to close the local vodka shops, and providing also that every bottle of vodka should bear a label, with the word poison. At my request the wording of this label, in which the evils of vodka was set forth, was done by the late Count Leo Tolstoi. This bill passed the дума and went to the imperial council, where it was amended and finally tabled.

"I then begged an audience of Emperor Nicholas. He received me with great kindness in his castle in the Crimea, not far from the scene of the recent Turkish bombardment. He listened to me patiently. He was impressed with my recital that most of the revolutionary and socialist excesses were committed by drunkards, and that the Sweaborg, Kronstadt and Sebastopol navy revolts and the Petrograd and other mutinous military movements were all caused by inebriates. Having heard me out, his majesty promised at once to speak to his minister of finance concerning the prohibition of vodka.

Czar Joins Movement.

"Mobilization precipitated the antivodka measure. The grand duke, remembering the disorganization due to drunkenness during the mobilization of 1904, ordered the prohibition of all drinks, except in clubs and first-class restaurants. This order, enforced for one month, showed the Russian authorities the value of abstention. In spite of the general depression caused by the war, the paralysis of business, the closing of factories and the interruption of railroad traffic, the people felt no privation.

Savings banks showed an increase in deposits over the preceding month and over the corresponding month of the preceding year. At the same time there was a boom in the sale of meats, groceries, clothing, dry goods and house furnishings.

"The 30,000,000 rubles a day that had been paid for vodka were now being spent for the necessities of life. The average working week increased from three and four days to six, the numerous holidays of the drinker having been eliminated. The working day also became longer and the efficiency of the worker was perhaps doubled. Women and children, who seldom were without marks showing the physical violence of the husband and father, suddenly found themselves in an undreamed-of paradise. There were no blows, no insults and no rough treatment. There was bread on the table, milk for the babies and a fire in the kitchen.

"The second month of abstinence made the manifold advantages so clear to everybody that when we called upon his majesty to thank him for his recent orders, he promised that the vodka business of the government would be given up forever. This promise was promulgated in a telegram to the Grand Duke Constantine."

She Help