

TRADE WITH RUSSIA

VISIT OF DR. KLATCHKO.

HOBART, Tuesday.

At the invitation of the Russian Consul in Hobart, there was a large representative gathering of members of the Hobart Chamber of Commerce and visitors at the Imperial, Collins-street, this afternoon, to meet Dr. M. E. Klatchko, Russian Trade Commissioner, who is visiting Australia with a view to establishing better relations, commercial and otherwise between his country and the Commonwealth.

Mr. Asbolt, in introducing Dr. Klatchko, said that that gentleman was out in Australia on a mission that would appeal to all Australians at the present time, namely, the fostering of intercourse between the Russian Empire and that portion of the British Empire lying beneath the Southern Cross. (Applause.) The Russian Government had conceived the idea of establishing a Bureau of Information and Commerce, and such an organisation had recently been brought into existence in Melbourne. The objects of the bureau were as follows:—(a) To promote measures calculated to encourage trade relationship between the Russian Empire and Australia; (b) to watch over and protect the general interests of Russian-Australian commerce; (c) to break down the barriers of ignorance and misunderstanding which have hitherto retarded commerce between the two countries; (d) to collect and disseminate information throughout the Russian Empire on all matters pertaining to the commercial and economic conditions of Australia; (e) to promote measures calculated to develop the establishment of direct means of transport and communication between the two countries; (f) to establish a general code of practice whereby transactions of commerce between the two countries may be co-ordinated, simplified, and regulated; (g) to arbitrate on all commercial matters submitted by disputants. He would leave Dr. Klatchko to explain the objects of the bureau more in detail. Hobart had seen the effects of the enterprise of Mr. Baillieu and his colleagues in the zinc works at Redon. (Applause.) And the fact that he had lent this scheme of the Russian Government his support showed that they were not merely wasting words. In the past Germany had succeeded in securing the bulk of the Russian foreign trade, which might have gone to Britain, but all this would have to be altered in the future. It was for Britain and France to establish a trade connection with the Great Empire of which they knew so little, and that connection could only be established by getting rid of our old ignorance and our old prejudices. (Hear, hear.) The Hon. W. H. Burgess, who as French Consul would have been keenly interested, was too ill to attend.

Dr. Klatchko, who was greeted with loud applause, said that he must apologise for his English, which was not very good. (Laughter and cries of "You'll get on all right!") He wished to thank the Consul for giving him the opportunity of meeting so large and representative an assembly of business men,

and for the chance accorded of discussing with them the problem of establishing trade relations with Russia. It was early as yet to talk of forming a Russian Chamber of Commerce in Australia, for as yet the Australian people knew very little about the country he represented. The first thing people thought about in connection with a visit to Russia was the need for numerous passports and photographs. The second was bombs. (Laughter.) The third were wolves that infested the streets. (Laughter.) This bureau of information was the first step towards the establishment of a Russian Chamber of Commerce in Australia, and would help, he thought, to spread knowledge about the Russian Empire and its resources. Probably a Russian newspaper written in English would be founded in Australia, and an Australian paper in Russian would be circulated in Russia. Then there probably would be a line of ships from Odessa to Colombo, and thence to Australia and Vladivostok. These lines would be subsidised by the Russian Government, and it was hoped that this steamer service would induce Australians to visit Russia. To all who did so any assistance possible in the way of guides and information would be given. Referring to the foreign trade, Dr. Klatchko said that, as they all knew, Germany had commercially a tight grip on Russia before the outbreak of war. They knew the methods German merchants usually adopted. They lent money to business men of all kinds, and then, having got a hold, forced their debtors to take German goods. It went without saying that to defeat Germany in this war it would be necessary to fight her not only on the battlefield, but in the world of commerce. (Hear, hear, and applause.) He hoped that the new bureau would help them to defeat Germany after the war—(Hear, hear)—and in this Russia wanted the co-operation of Australia. There were many things in Australia and Russia that could profitably be exchanged. He had tried the Tasmanian cider, for instance, and it was very good. (Laughter.) There was also jam, of which there was very little in Russia. At first he did not like jam, but he had now been in Australia eight months, and had begun to like it very much. In the Commonwealth there was plenty of timber, while in Russia there was plenty of furs, in which a trade could be done. There were lots of other things he could not think of for the moment, but he thought he had said enough to give them an idea of the objects for which the bureau had been founded. He wished to thank those present for their attendance, and hoped that some day they would come along to the bureau. (Applause.)

Mr. Baillieu, asked by the chairman to give some information regarding the Russian Bureau in Melbourne, said that he thought their visitor, imperfect though his English might be, had done very well indeed—a great deal better than any one of those present would have done if asked upon to speak in Russian. (Hear, hear.) Dr. Klatchko had made it quite plain what the changes would be, and that

quite plain what the changes would be, and that openings for business between Australia and Russia would be considerable. Of course organisations such as a bureau of information and Chamber of commerce had to be formed, but at the same time he did not think

that they would prove effective instruments towards promoting the relations they would all like to see. Everything would have to be placed in the hands of the Government. Germany had not got her tentacles on the foreign trade by the efforts of private individuals, but by the work of the Government, and in the same way this movement for promoting trade between Russia and Australia would have to be directed by an able and far-sighted official, upon whose energy and wisdom they could rely. The Russian Consul in Melbourne was known to be an able man, and assisted by Dr. Klatchko would do much towards establishing proper relations between the two countries. He again expressed his pleasure at being present, and concluded by saying that he was sure Dr. Klatchko had the good wishes of all in his efforts to promote friendly relations between his country and the Commonwealth. (Applause)

Mr. T. Murdoch said at present Australia was governed by professional politicians, and if things went on as they were going we would soon land in a mess. He hoped that more commercial men would take up the work of Government.

Mr. Ashbolt said that one thing Dr. Klatchko had mentioned privately to him, but had not touched on in his speech, was the desire of the Russian Government to induce Australians to travel home to England through Siberia. The only other business that afternoon was the election of a representative to the council of the bureau in Melbourne. He was not in a position to accept any offer in this direction, as he was already acting as Russian Consul, and felt that it would be desirable that an independent gentleman should be appointed, and one who had the leisure to devote to his duties. Mr. L. F. Piesse was then unanimously elected.