

[PDF] The King Of Vodka: The Story Of Pyotr Smirnov And The Upheaval Of An Empire

Linda Himelstein - pdf download free book

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Author: Linda Himelstein

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Description:

From Publishers Weekly Journalist Himelstein recaptures Russia's golden age through the eyes of the former serf-turned vodka entrepreneur, Pyotr Arsenievich Smirnov (1831–1898). From his early days as a small-time liquor peddler to one of Russia's richest men, Smirnov was the nemesis of teetotaling Tolstoy—who blamed the country's late 19th-century woes on his countrymen's thirst for alcohol. As the first Russian brand architect and seller of high-quality, low-cost liquor, Smirnov makes for a fascinating subject in his trajectory and outsize ambition. He applied for the title of Purveyor to the Imperial Court, but the tsar's refusal, rather than deflating Smirnov's outsized ambition, emboldened it. It aroused something deep inside the man, a creative spark that transformed Smirnov from a competent businessman into one of the most ingenious marketers of his

time. While the dozens of obstacles, including the closure of the Imperial Archives and a dearth of information about Smirnov's years of serfdom, might have deterred lesser researchers, Himelstein has triumphed with a timeless book that entertains, informs and inspires any would-be entrepreneur to chase his dreams. *(May)*

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From Had Pyotr Smirnov (1831-98) been literary-minded, he might have entitled a memoir *Up from Serfdom*. But he was all business, as recounted in this history of the famous vodka brand. Recalling the entrepreneurial milieu in which Smirnov distilled and marketed his way to success, Himelstein points to the Muscovite uncle in the vodka trade who provided her provincial protagonist's toehold in the world of commerce. Smirnov's acumen was liberated by the great reforms of Tsar Alexander II in the 1860s, two of which were fateful for Smirnov: the abolition of serfdom and a reform in the taxation of vodka. As she describes Smirnov's innovations that induced customer loyalty, Himelstein highlights the ex-serf's parallel striving for social respectability as, a generous philanthropist, he sought and received many tsarist honors. But alas for his capitalist fortune. What the second generation of Smirnovs didn't squander, the Bolsheviks expropriated. Capping the saga with the legal survival of the Smirnov trademarks, Himelstein's storytelling success distills diligent research into something appealing to popular tastes for family and Russian history alike. --Gilbert Taylor

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