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GREAT SHADOW



LUIGI VILLARI

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"THE LATEST FROM THE FRONT,"
READING THE WAR TELEGRAMS IN THE BAZAR.

Frontispiece.

RUSSIA UNDER THE GREAT SHADOW

LUIGI VILLARI

AUTHOR OF "GIOVANNI SEGANTINI," "ITALIAN LIFE
IN TOWN AND COUNTRY," ETC.

WITH EIGHTY-FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS



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PREFACE

WHILE the attention of the whole civilized world is riveted to the tremendous struggle in the Far East, and its various phases and aspects are followed day by day, it is interesting to watch the effects of the war on the conditions and development of the two belligerent States. Japan is being welded by the blood ordeal into a Power of the first rank, a Power that the oldest and mightiest of European and American nations may well be proud to call their equal. Russia, on the other hand, after having remained almost untouched by modern ideas, unaffected by the three great movements that have moulded European history during the last five centuries—the classical Renaissance, the Reformation, and the French Revolution—is at last awakening to the need for radical changes in consequence of this same war. What reforming Tzars, dreamy revolutionists, and insensate terrorists had been unable to achieve is being brought about on the stricken fields of the Manchurian plains. The masses of the Russian people, including the majority of the upper classes, were content to be governed by an iron autocracy and an oppressive clique of reactionary bureaucrats on old-time methods, which had been discarded by Western Europe because they believed that in this way

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only they could enjoy an almost omnipotent military prestige. Autocracy gave them an armed power, of which the whole world stood in awe. The drawbacks and oppressive character of the *régime* were admitted and deplored, but the people, even the intelligent classes, were willing to submit to it as the price of a splendid international position. In this belief the Russians were not alone; it was shared by many other more progressive nations. It was, to some extent, the creed of many Germans, including some of the highest personages in the land. Even the late Lord Salisbury stated in a speech on Army reorganization, delivered during the South African campaign, that a democracy was not a satisfactory form of government for war purposes, and many lesser lights have been deceived by what is apparently an obvious truism. In Russia, however, the idea was universal and unquestioned, save by an infinitesimal minority.

The course of the Russo-Japanese war has proved a rude and terrible awakening. The one justification of a military despotism is that it should be militarily efficient; in the case of Russia it has been proved that it does not possess even this merit. Whatever the ultimate end of the present struggle may be, the unbroken series of defeats, the astounding exhibition of unpreparedness and of military inefficiency have shaken the nation's confidence in autocracy, and caused a widespread feeling of discontent among all classes, a feeling so deep and so general that it seems impossible that the bureaucracy can now hold out against it. The movement in favour of political

reform undoubtedly existed before the war, but it was limited to a small class, whereas now we see symptoms of discontent on all sides, and although as yet no radical alterations have been effected in the form of government, the mind of the people is very different, and the days of autocracy are numbered. It may last for some time yet, perhaps, but the state of ideas which made its indefinite continuance possible is no more. It was killed at Port Arthur, on the Yalu, at Liao-Yang, at Mukden.

But another effect of the war on Russian affairs is the serious economic crisis which it has brought about. In these days of costly armaments the financial consideration is of paramount importance, and not only the actual result of the struggle, but even the future position of the belligerent Powers is very largely dependent on their respective economic staying power. Economically as well as militarily Russia was not prepared for war, and although the Government had large reserve funds for emergencies, the nation was suffering from original poverty, enhanced by the mad fever of speculation and over-production of the last twenty years. Consequently, the war has proved most disastrous to its economic activities. Many factories had to shut down, all, or nearly all, were forced to work short time, and with a reduced staff, stocks accumulated through the absence of buyers, credit went, hundreds of thousands of men were thrown out of work, while a much larger number earned even less than the low wages to which they were accustomed in normal times. Moreover, vast quantities of men were drafted off to fight in a war

of which they did not understand the cause, which was profoundly unpopular, and of which they realized only too well the hardships and suffering. Their families, deprived of the bread-winners, were brought to starvation. All this served to increase the general discontent, especially among the business classes and the factory workers, who are coming to play an ever more important *role* in the country, and is extending to the peasantry. It has proved that, however rich the State may be, although even on this point many authorities are sceptical, unless the nation is really prosperous a terribly expensive war like the present one cannot be undertaken without disastrous effects. The mad policy of indefinite expansion, which was the bread of life to the bureaucracy, has found its logical outcome in the Manchurian campaign, and it is now sapping the blood of the country with no adequate result. Russia, an immense country, rich in natural resources, inhabited by a people who, if primitive and ignorant, have many very fine qualities, strong, capable of the hardest toil, inured to the struggle with nature, brave, intelligent, and religious, has been kept out of the march of progress in a condition of semi-Asiatic barbarism for the sake of impossible schemes of universal dominion.

It has been my object in the course of many a stay of many months in Russia, during which I visited all the chief towns of the country, to examine these consequences of the war on the internal situation, both economic and political. For this purpose I consulted a number of people in all ranks of life, whom I thought could give me information—officials, foreign diplomats,

and consuls, university professors, and, above all, practical men of business and manufacturers, who are in closest touch with the real conditions of the nation. I have not attempted to write a general treatise on Russia, dealing with all the aspects of national existence, both because there are so many excellent works of that character, beginning with Sir Donald Mackenzie Wallace's masterpiece; and the exhaustive volume of M. Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu, and because to do so would require a much greater knowledge of the country than I could pretend to have acquired in the time. I do not profess to be in the confidence of Grand Dukes, Ministers of State, or Nihilist conspirators. I have limited myself to recording a traveller's impressions of Russia during the war, giving especial prominence to the economic side of the subject—the present condition of Russian industry, the state of the peasantry, the development of an industrial population, the rise of a labour movement, and the reflection of the war on all these various elements and on public opinion generally. Here and there I have dealt with certain special aspects of Russian life, which, although not directly connected with the war, are yet interesting in themselves, and not very widely known to the ordinary reader.

Unless all the auguries should prove false, all the signs of the times deceptive, the war in the Far East should mark the transition of Russia from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century, from the Eastern to the Western world, from barbarism to civilisation. All this is due to the general awakening of large classes of Russians, not to the work of mysterious secret

societies, about whose organization, funds, and plans, sensational writers on Russian affairs wax so eloquent. The task commenced by Peter the Great, and continued by Catherine II. and Alexander II., is about to be completed, and we now see this vast mass of people, uneducated and elemental as yet, seething in the melting-pot of political and social change, about to develop into something new and unknown. It is a profoundly interesting moment in the nation's history, in which new forces, new ideas, and new movements are beginning to take shape. But we must not expect to see the results immediately, and to find Russia settling down under a liberal constitution within six months. The English Revolution lasted from 1640 to 1689; that of France from 1789 to 1815—almost to 1871; that of Italy from 1821 to 1870. Russia, too, will probably have to go through a long period of turmoil and unrest before she can find lasting peace.

I take this opportunity of expressing my thanks to the many friends, both Russian and foreign, whose assistance was most invaluable to me in my attempt to gain some knowledge of Russia and Russian conditions.

I wish also to thank the editor of *The Times* for allowing me to reproduce certain parts of the articles on Russian affairs which I contributed to the columns of that paper.

L. VILLARI.

May, 1905.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE	5
CHAPTER I	
SIGHTS AND SOUNDS IN ST. PETERSBURG	15
CHAPTER II	
MOSCOW	42
CHAPTER III	
ALL THE RUSSIAS AT NIJNI NOVGOROD	62
CHAPTER IV	
THE GREATEST RIVER IN EUROPE	81
CHAPTER V	
PROVINCIAL RUSSIA—KHARKOFF, EKATERINOSLAV, YUZOVO	94
CHAPTER VI	
THE BLACK SEA PORTS	116

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	<i>Frontispiece</i>
"THE LATEST FROM THE FRONT." READING THE WAR TELEGRAMS IN THE BAZAR	Facing p. 15
MOSCOW. THE KREMLIN (see page 42).	15
THE DEPARTMENT OF POLICE, ST. PETERSBURG. RESIDENCE OF THE MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR	16
ST. PETERSBURG, IN THE "THIEVES' MARKET"	21
RUSSIAN WAR CARTOON. A NAVAL BATTLE IN THE FAR EAST	22
KRASNOIE SELO. A MILITARY BAND	26
" SOLDIERS AND SCHOOLBOY	29
" CAVALRY SOLDIERS	32
" MILITARY PRISON	32
" SHORING HORSES	34
" SOLDIERS' AMUSEMENTS—"GIANT STRIDES"	34
RUSSIAN WAR CARTOON. THE GHOST OF NAPOLEON WARNING THE JAPANESE STRATEGISTS OF THE FATE OF THOSE WHO INVADE RUSSIAN TERRITORY	36
RUSSIAN WAR CARTOON. THE JAPANESE GETTING MONEY FOR THE WAR OUT OF JOHN BULL.	38
RUSSIAN WAR CARTOON. THE JAPANESE GETTING MONEY FOR THE WAR OUT OF UNCLE SAM	40
MOSCOW. WALLS OF THE KITAI GOROD	42
" THE MOISHSKAYA FLOSHTCHAD	44
VOLGA TARTARS IN MOSCOW	47
MOSCOW. LACE-MERCHANT IN THE BAZAR	49
INTERIOR OF THE GOSTINNY DVOR, MOSCOW	50
THE VARVARKA GATE, MOSCOW	50
SHRINE OUTSIDE THE OLD WALLS, MOSCOW	53
RUSSIAN GENDARME	53
THE LINIEIKA, A SORT OF OMNIBUS	57
A SLEEPING CAB-DRIVER	57
BOYS SELLING FRUIT, MOSCOW	59
MOSCOW. IBERIAN MADONNA ON TOUR	61
THE FAIR AT NIJNI NOVGOROD. THE SHIPPING	63
NIJNI NOVGOROD. THE MOSQUE	64
THE NIJNI FAIR. A RELIGIOUS PROCESSION	66
A STREET IN THE FAIR	68
THE SIBERIAN QUAY.	70
AMONG THE WAREHOUSES	70
WINE BARRELS	72
BALKS OF COTTON	72
WINE FROM THE CRIMEA	75
THE NIJNI FAIR. A CART-LOAD OF IKONS	76
IRON AND STEEL	78
PERSIAN CARPET-MERCHANT	79

	<i>Facing p.</i>	80
THE NIJNI FAIR. IN THE PERSIAN SHOPS	"	82
RED CROSS STEAMER WITH WOUNDED SOLDIERS	"	82
BARGES ON THE VOLGA	"	85
TARTARS AT KAZAN	"	87
A STREET IN KAZAN	"	90
PERSIAN TYPES FROM BAKU	"	90
PERSIAN JEWEL MERCHANT	"	92
THE ALEXANDER II. VIADUCT AT BATRAKI ON THE VOLGA .	"	98
KHARKOFF	"	104
LITTLE RUSSIAN PEASANTS	"	104
EKATERINOSLAV	"	110
THE FRUIT BAZAR AT SARATOFF	"	115
THE NEW RUSSIAN COMPANY'S IRON AND STEEL WORKS, YUZOVO	"	119
RUSSIAN SOLDIERS IN WINTER ATTIRE	"	119
TRYING TO SELL A MODEL STEAMER	"	128
RUSSIAN SOLDIERS ON THEIR WAY TO MANCHURIA	"	131
ROSTOFF ON THE DON	"	132
THE CRIMEA. IMPERIAL VILLA AT ALUPKA	"	135
IN THE CRIMEA. TARTAR CART	"	137
TARTAR BOYS	"	140
BAKHITCHI SARAI. THE PALACE OF THE KHANS	"	143
TCHUFUT KALÉ. THE SYNAGOGUE OF THE KARAITES	"	144
RUINS OF TCHUFUT KALÉ. THE SOLITARY INHABITANT	"	146
YALTA. ON THE QUAY	"	148
THE CRIMEA. GURZUFF	"	149
THE LAVRA, CATHEDRAL OF THE ASSUMPTION, KIEV	"	150
TROITZA. AN ECCLESIASTIC	"	152
A MONK, TROITZA	"	156
KIEV. CATHEDRAL OF SANTA SOFIA	"	156
TROITZA. PILGRIMS	"	158
KIEV. A FUNERAL	"	160
KIEV. PILGRIMS	"	163
KIEV. PILGRIMS	"	166
TROITZA. THE CATHEDRAL OF THE ASSUMPTION	"	168
" A GROUP OF PILGRIMS	"	172
" THE ENTRANCE TO THE MONASTERY	"	180
A RUSSIAN PEASANT FAMILY AND COTTAGE	"	183
A CAPTIVE WOLF	"	186
PEASANTS COLLECTING BEETROOTS FOR THE SUGAR-MILLS .	"	221
TYPES OF RUSSIAN WORKMEN	"	225
ST. PETERSBURG FACTORY CHILDREN	"	227
WORKMEN'S COTTAGES AT YUZOVO, GOVERNMENT OF	"	240
EKATERINOSLAV.	"	264
IRON AND STEEL WORKERS	"	293
YUZOVO. RUSSIAN IRONWORKERS ON A BLAST-FURNACE .	"	293
IN THE CRIMEA. TARTAR TYPES	"	314
"GENTLEMEN IN KHAKI ORDERED EAST." RUSSIAN RE-	"	314
SERVISTS BIDDING FAREWELL TO THEIR FAMILIES .	"	314

INDEX

- ALEXANDER I., 303
 Alexander II., 305
 Alexander III., 305
- BAKHTCHI-SARAI, the capital of
 Tartars in the Crimea, 140-44,
 159
- CENSOR, the, 21, 96, 97, 287
- Chersonnese, the Russian Pompeii,
 139-40
- Church of Russia, the, 149-61 ;
 the clergy, 151-52 ; monasteries,
 152-59 ; attitude against Liberal
 ideas, 160-61 ; Synodial schools,
 187 ; in Poland, 282
- Commerce and industry of Mos-
 cow, 48 ; Nijni Novgorod, 71-73,
 77-80 ; Kharkoff, 99-100 ; Eka-
 terinoslav, 103-10 ; iron works
 at Yuzovo, 111-13 ; Southern
 Russia, 118-19 ; Odessa, 122-26 ;
 Rostoff, 131-32 ; the Azoff and
 Black Sea ports, 132-34 ; agri-
 culture, 174 ; the chief indus-
 trial districts, 197-99 ; the chief
 markets, 199-201 ; textiles and
 metallurgy, 201-8 ; promoters
 and speculators, 208-9 ; the
 crisis, 210-12 ; foreigners, 214-
 19 ; foreign capital in Russia,
 217-18 ; the Russian as business
 man, 219 ; effects of the war on
 the economic situation, 247-70 ;
 Poland, 277-81
- Constitutional question, the, 191,
 324-25
- Country population, the, 162 ; forms
 of cultivation, 163 ; the serfs, 164 ;
 abolishment of serfdom and dis-
 tribution of the land, 164-67 ;
 condition of the peasant, 167-75 ;
 taxation, 169-70, 172-73 ; renting
 of the land, 170-71 ; export of
 corn, 174 ; a country estate,
 175-88 ; Socialist propaganda,
 189-90 ; the economic question,
 190-91 ; the constitutional ques-
 tion, 191 ; the Mir system, 164,
 169-73, 175 ; the mujik, 115-223
- Crimea, the, 135-48 ; its beauties,
 135 ; Sevastopol, 136-39 ; Cher-
 sonnese, 139-40 ; Bakhtchi-Sarai,
 140-44 ; Ouspensky Monastir,
 144 ; Tschufut-Kalé, 144-45 ;
 Yalta, 145-46 ; Livadia, 146 ;
 Aluska, 146 ; Dere-Koi, 147 ;
 Gurzuff, 147 ; Feodosia (Kaffa),
 158 ; Kertch, 148
- ECONOMIC situation, the, 246-70 ;
 finances of the State, 247-49 ;

- the gold reserve, 249-50; the resources, 249-53; private economy, 253-70; restriction of credit, 254-55; reduction of public works, 255-56; interruption of the goods traffic, 256; effects of the mobilisation, 257-58; cutting off the Siberian markets, 259-61; the trade of St. Petersburg, 262-63; of Moscow, 265-64; of Southern Russia, 264-265; of Poland, 265-67; orders for war material, 267-68; unemployment, 268-69; economic future, 270
- Education, 227, 280; factory schools, 114; country schools, 168, 187; schools in Poland, 280, 282; University questions, 57-58, 100-1
- Ekaterinoslav, 103-11; as a business town, 104-5; its industries during the crisis, 106; factory management and foreign shareholders, 106-9; the population, 105, 109; wages, 109; effects of the war, 110-11
- Entering Russia, 17-21; gendarmes, 18; passports, 19; Custom officers, 21; the censor, 21
- FAIRS in Russia, 62-65, 68-80, 100
- Foreigners in Russia, 106, 108-9, 202, 214-19; in Moscow, 47-48; in St. Petersburg, 24; in Poland, 279-80
- GRUZOFF, Crimean watering place, 147-48
- INDUSTRIAL Development, 192-219, *see* Commerce and Industry
- JEWS, the, 100, 101, 110, 122, 126-30, 277, 279; in Poland, 288; league of Jewish workmen, 239
- KAZAN, 85-87
- Kharkoff, 98-103; its important situation, 99; its industries, 99-100; population, 100; university troubles, 100-1; its zemstvo, 101-2; effects of the war, 102-3
- Khilkoff, Prince, 89, 90
- Kiev, the monastery, 153; the city, 155; ecclesiastical festivals, 156; the Cathedral, 157; the grottoes, 157-59; the Liberal movement, 160-61
- Knoop, Ludwig, 202
- Kronstadt, 17
- LABOUR movements, 237-45, 290-92
- Lamsdorff, Count, 300
- MAKARIOFF, 84-85
- Mendeleieff, Professor, 309
- Mirsky, Prince Sviatopolk, 308
- Monasteries, 150, 152-59
- Moscow, 42-61; its topography, 44; architecture, 45; international life, 47; commercial position, 48; Historical Museum, 50; street scenes, 51; religious life, 52; conveyances, 54; the press, 56; the University, 57; effects of the war, 59-61, 263
- Muravieff, Count, 300
- NICHOLAS I., 303, 304
- Nicolas II., 323
- Nijni Novgorod, 62-80; its fair, 62-66, 68-80; situation, 66; history, 67; Kremlin, 68; effects of the war on business, 78-80

- Non-Russian peoples of the Empire, the, 292-95
 Novorossisk, 132-33
- ODESSA, 121-30; commercial situation, 121-26; political situation, 127-30
- PASSPORT system in Russia, 19-21
 von Plehve, 300, 308
- Poland, 271-92; some historical, social, and political facts, 271-75; cities and people, 276; industries, 277-79; foreigners, 279-80; education, 280; financial position, 280-81; political situation, 281; religious question, 282; the press, 282; Russifying Poland, 282-83; Polish patriotism, 283-84; the Poles in Russian provinces, 284-85; Nationalist movement, 285; the middle class, 285-86; Social Democrats, 287-88; the Jews, 288-89; the war, 289-90; strike riots, 290-92
- Police and Custom officers, 18-21
- Press, the, 56, 96, 97, 309-11, 282
- Provincial Governors, 97
- Public opinion in Russia, 296-325; the war, 296-303; feeling against England, 298; as viewed by Chauvinists, 298-301; by business men, 301-2; by reformers, 302-3; the present situation compared with similar periods, 303-7; the awakening of Liberalism, 308-10; the press, 310-11; revolutionary agitation, 312-15; mobilisation troubles, 314; lack of organised reform, 315; the emancipation alliance, 316-18; the Zemstvos, 319-22; the prospects of a constitution, 324-25
- REFORM movements: professors and students, 57-59, 100-101, 240; at Kiev, 160-61; Socialism, 111, 189-90, 237-45, 287-88, 312; Liberal revival, 308-10; revolutionary agitation, 312-15; co-operation, 315-18; the Zemstvos, 319-22; spread of the revolutionary spirit, 322-23
- Religious life of the people, 52, 149, 160; the Catholic and Orthodox Churches in Poland, 282
- Rostoff-on-Don and the Azoff ports, 131-32
- ST. PETERSBURG, 18, 21-41; first impressions, 21; the city, 22; population, 23, 24; churches, 23; the "Thieves' Bazaar," 25-30; Narodny Dom, 30; a military camp, 31-35; the war, 35-41
- Samara, 88
- Saratoff, 92
- Sevastopol, 130; military relics, monuments, &c., 137-39; excursions from Sevastopol, 139-48; its picturesque situation, 136
- Shipoff, M., 324
- Siberian railway, 89-90
- Socialist propaganda among the industrial population, 111, 237-45, 313; among the peasants, 189-90, 312; in Poland, 287-88
- Student disturbances, 57-58, 100-101
- Syzran, 90
- TREPOFF, General, 241-43
- Trubetzky, Prince, 309, 324

VISHNIEGRADSKY, late Minister of Finance, 207, 306
Volga, the, 81-93

WAR, the, impressions at St. Petersburg, 35-41; at Moscow, 59; effects on the trade of Nijni Novgorod, 78-80; of Kharkoff, 102; of Ekaterinoslav, 110; reservists at Syzran, 90; opinions of the people, 91; effects on the peasantry, 188-89; on the factory working classes, 243; on the economy of the State and the nation, 246-53, 253-70; Poland, 289, 292; public opinion, 296-303

Warsaw, 276, 277

Witte, Minister of Finance, 200, 207, 280, 306, 324

Working classes, the, 220-45;

winter work for the peasants in the factories, 222-24; factory housing, 225-29; schools, 227; meals, 229-31; wages, 109, 113, 231-32; hours of labour, child and female labour, factory inspectors, 232-33; employers' liability, 233-34; peculiarities of the Russian workman, 234-35; economic and political movements, 236-45; the war, 243; number of factory hands, 245; unemployment, 268-69

YALTA, Crimean watering place, 145-46

Yuzovo, the New Russia Company's Iron Works, 111-15

ZEMSTVOS, the, 101-2, 168, 175, 319, 321, 322

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