

RUSSIA

UNDER THE

TZARS

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R U S S I A
U N D E R T H E T Z A R S

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

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PREFACE.

RUSSIA is passing through a crisis of great importance in her social and political life. Within a brief space of time the revolutionary movement has attained a marvellous growth, and is spreading more and more among the classes which have heretofore been the chief supporters of the established order. The very ferocity of a reaction bewildered by personal fear is dragging it to its inevitable doom, and, like the French usurper of December 2nd, the morally ruined Government of the Tzar is meditating that most desperate of all expedients for the restoration of vanished prestige—a bloody and useless war.

The growing disquietude of the masses, manifested in wild outbursts against the Jews, and in less irrational, though hardly less frequent, riots and disturbances, as well in agricultural districts as in manufacturing centres—whether as protests against

exacting landlords, tyrannical masters, or oppressive laws for the regulation of factory labour, are facts that cannot be gainsaid, and the significance of which it is impossible to overlook. They show what everybody feels in his heart, if he does not speak it aloud—that momentous changes are pending, and that Russia is on the eve of great events.

None would be so rash as to attempt to forecast the nature of these events or guess what the fates may have in store for the empire of the Tzar. But of one thing there can be no question: revolutionary changes cannot take place in a country so vast, and whose population is a third of that of all Europe, without affecting, directly or indirectly, every other country of the civilized world.

^oThis fact is the justification and explanation of the growing interest that is everywhere felt in Russia and her people, and in the hidden forces which are working out her destinies and shaping her future.

Many valuable contributions have been made on the subject to the literature of the day by foreign writers—French, English, and German. But hitherto the European public have seldom, if ever, heard the views of those who, being the most interested in the question, are naturally the most competent to give an opinion—the Russians themselves.

Russian writers, among whom are many able men

of honourable name and great erudition, remain silent; they do not raise their voices to tell the truth about their oppressed country. The cause of this strange silence is easy of explanation. It were as perilous an undertaking for a subject of the Tzar to reveal to the outside world the iniquities of his Government as openly to attack him in the presence of his police. Except a few anonymous articles of slight importance; our best writers have, as yet, said nothing on the politics of Russia in the languages of Europe. The Government party alone and their allies have been able to turn to account the publicity of the Press; but their contributions to the question, it is hardly necessary to say, do not tend to the enlightenment of public opinion.

In these circumstances the task of speaking for the opposite party—that is to say, for the whole of educated Russia—falls naturally to the extreme fraction of the opposition—revolutionists, Socialists, and refugees of every class—who from time to time have tried to win the ear of Europe. And now this duty falls on me—a “Nihilist writer,” a “practical Nihilist,” as some English newspapers have been good enough to call me—a man whose sole claim to the indulgence of the English public is the authorship of a book having for its object the explanation and defence of Nihilism—a claim which is far from being the most efficient for

such a work as mine. I would willingly have left the task to the member of a less advanced school, who might be less open than myself to the charge of a too great pessimism in his appreciation of the existing system. But there being no such writer at hand, I have no alternative. The work must be done by me; and whatever other merits or demerits my book may possess, it has at least been done impartially.

Knowing beforehand the points as to which my readers are likely to be most distrustful, I resolved above all things to avoid exaggeration, and I have aimed throughout at saying too little rather than too much. In this there is no difficulty, for the wrongs done by the Russian Government are so immeasurable that they may be attenuated with no more seeming effect than is made on the fathomless ocean by taking from it a glass of water; whilst, on the other hand, a slight overstatement on a comparatively immaterial point might impair the value, if not render abortive, months of careful and conscientious labour. Yet I neither intend nor desire to put the existing *régime* in any better light than it deserves. Not at all. Though I “nothing set down in malice,” I “nothing extenuate.” I tell only the plain, unvarnished truth, but it is the full truth. In the selection of my facts I have taken the greatest care,

rejecting everything that seemed without warrant or not altogether trustworthy.

I have not swollen the dimensions of my book with unnecessary references and notes. The things I have told may be new to foreigners, but to Russians and to all who know Russian literature they are matters of common knowledge.

In my historical sketches I have availed myself of the works of our best historical writers (Kostomaroff, Solovieff, Serguevitch, and Belaeff), works which are to be found in every Russian library. The matters set forth in the second volume are taken from official sources, and from statements which have been allowed to appear in the censored Press at times when it has enjoyed brief snatches of unwonted freedom.

The six chapters of the second volume have appeared at various times in the most influential of English papers, and I have to thank the *Times* for its eloquent and appreciative comments on my communications, and the proprietors for the kind permission to include them in the book. All the rest of the two volumes is original.

It is evident that, as touching the first part of the book, I could not avail myself to any great extent of official publications or newspaper statements. The cruelties inflicted on prisoners and the iniquities of the administration can seldom be openly mentioned

in the censured Press, and then only in guarded and evasive language. The excellent publications of the *Narodnia Volia* printing-office at Geneva, which are as carefully compiled and as trustworthy as they are rich in material have been my chief sources of information. Many of my statements are drawn either from my own personal experience or from the experience of friends who have been good enough to place them at my disposal. I have merely put their narratives into literary shape.

A word as to the form of my book. It is irregular and not strictly didactic, for I have tried not alone to narrate events but to describe men. Critics will perhaps say that this double aim derogates from the dignity of a serious work. They may be right. I will only observe that on this point moderation and sobriety have been my rule.

These explanations rendered, there remains for me only one more duty to perform—the agreeable duty of thanking those who have given me their aid in the writing of my book.

Being as yet new in the country, and unable to write the English language with ease, I am indebted to Mr. William Westall, who has long been a warm sympathizer with the Russian revolutionary cause, and my literary fellow-worker, for giving the work its English shape; and I heartily thank him for his careful and idiomatic translation.

As for the matter of the book, I owe many thanks to some of my countrymen. Mr. Peter Lavroff, to whom I am indebted for the very kind Introduction to my "Underground Russia," which so greatly contributed to the success of my first work, has been good enough to place his rich library at my disposal for the preparation of "Russia Under the Tzars," my second work. To Mr. Isidor Goldsmith, formerly editor of *Znanie* and *Slovo*, Mr. Nicolas Tsakny, and Mr. L. N., all of whom have spent years in exile, I am obliged for much of the interesting information which I have utilized in the chapters on that subject.

But most of all I have to thank Mr. Michel Dragomanoff, formerly one of the professors at Kieff University, who, from the very beginning of my campaign against the Russian despotism—first in the pages of the *Contemporary Review*, and afterwards in the columns of the *Times*—has given me, without stint of time or trouble, much valuable assistance, and in connection with the present work has supplied me with many original and authentic documents relating to police persecution in the three satrapies of the South.

S. STEPNIAK.

LONDON,

April 7, 1885.

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