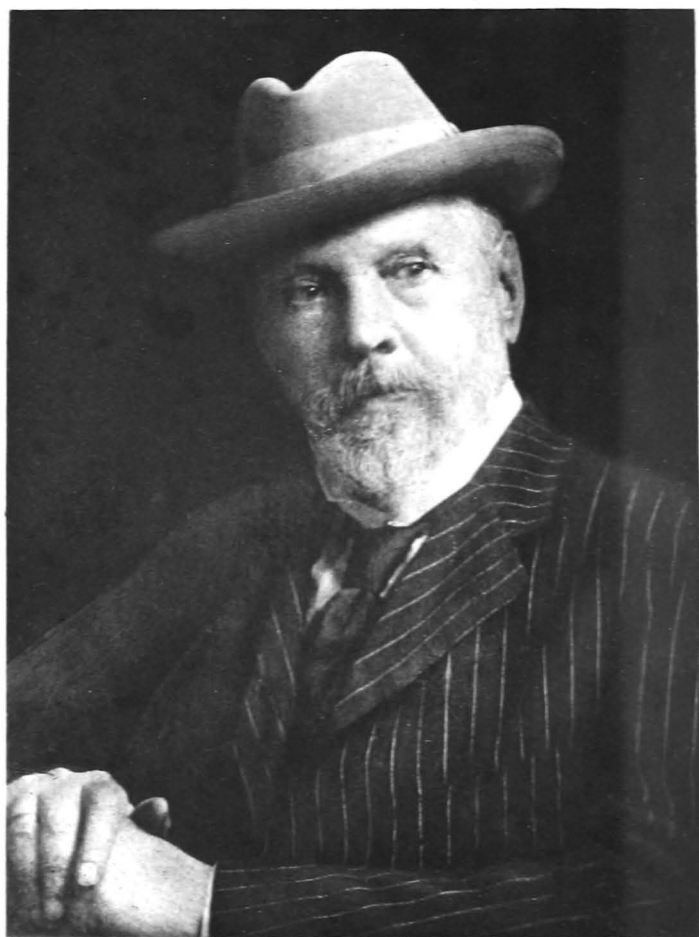


THE MEMOIRS OF COUNT WITTE



The Memoirs of
COUNT WITTE

TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL RUSSIAN
MANUSCRIPT AND EDITED BY
ABRAHAM YARMOLINSKY



WILLIAM HEINEMANN, LONDON
ANNO DOMINI : ONE THOUSAND
NINE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-ONE

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Unless otherwise indicated, the dates in the text are according to the Russian, or "old style" calendar. In some cases the corresponding Western, or "new style" date is given in parentheses. To convert a Russian (Julian) to a Western (Gregorian) date add twelve days to the former, for dates preceding the year 1900, and thirteen days for later dates.

In spelling the Russian names an attempt is made to follow a consistent system of transliteration, in keeping with the best modern practice, due allowance being made for forms consecrated by usage.

PREFACE

Not without hesitancy have I resolved to write a few lines as a foreword to the memoirs of my late husband. I cannot be impartial in my estimate of this work, to which Count Witte attributed so much importance; and the biased judgment of his wife can hardly be of any interest to the reader. I confess, however, that I have not been able to resist the temptation to take advantage of this occasion to convey to the American public the gratitude which the late Count Witte felt toward the Government, press, and people of the United States for the sympathy they had shown him at the time of the Portsmouth Conference. America's recent declaration of its resolve to defend Russia's incontestable interests at the critical period of its temporary weakness has shown that this sympathetic attitude toward him at that time was not an accident.

I should like to explain to the reader the significance which my husband attributed to his work. I also wish to say a word about the motives which urged him to present his thoughts and reminiscences in the form of a book not destined to be published while he and his contemporaries were alive. Count Witte was neither a courtier flattering the monarch, nor a demagogue flattering the mob. Although a nobleman, he did not defend the privileges of the nobility; and while aiming in his political activities mainly at improving the condition of the peasantry in accordance with the dictates of justice, as a statesman he remained alien to that theoretical "populism" with which the majority of the Russian intellectuals was infatuated. He was not a Liberal, for he did not sympathize with the striving of the Liberals to reorganize the

political system all at once, with a single stroke. Nor was he a Conservative, for he despised the coarseness and backwardness of the political thinking which was characteristic of Russia's ruling bureaucracy. My husband repeatedly said to those intimate with him: "I am neither a Liberal nor a Conservative. I am simply a man of culture. I cannot exile a man to Siberia merely because he does not think as I do, and I cannot deprive him of civil rights because he does not pray in the same church as I do. . . ."

For this reason Witte had many enemies in all camps. At the Court, among Conservatives, among Liberals, in the democratic circles,—everywhere Count Witte was considered "an alien." He sought to serve his country in a way all his own, and that is why he had but few constant companions. Justice compels one to acknowledge that my husband's gifts in the field of statesmanship were not contested. As a matter of fact, they were valued in all the circles of Great Russia. Nevertheless, for the reason just mentioned, no other statesman has ever been the object of so many varied and contradictory, yet persistent and passionate, attacks. At the Court he was accused of republicanism, while the Radicals attributed to him the desire to curtail the rights of the people to the Monarch's advantage. The landowners ascribed to him a desire to ruin them for the benefit of the peasants, while the radical parties upbraided him for a fancied desire to deceive the peasants for the benefit of the landowners. The author of the Constitution of October 17th, which forms the opening of new Russian history, was too inviting a target for intrigues and slanders; on the other hand, the many-sided and complex personality of a great statesman could not easily be forced into a simplified formula and, therefore, it gave rise to misunderstandings, which were at times entertained in good faith.

To engage in controversies with his opponents, to refute

slanders, to clear away misunderstandings through the press, my husband did not desire. He would not demean himself by taking a hand in an undignified wrangle. Besides, the censorship conditions of the old régime, which were more stringent for the Czar's Prime Minister than for an ordinary citizen, as well as a desire to spare the feelings of his contemporaries, prevented Count Witte from expressing his thoughts fully and openly. Hence his decision to let the next generation judge his activity; hence these Memoirs.

My husband wrote his Memoirs only abroad, during the months of his summer or winter rests at the foreign health resorts. He was not quite confident that his study on the Kamenny-Ostrov Prospect in Petrograd was sufficiently secure from the eye and arm of the Secret Service. At any moment, by searching the house, they could deprive him of his manuscripts. He knew that too many persons of power were interested in his work. All the time the manuscripts were kept in a foreign bank in my name. My husband feared that in the event of his death the Court and the Government would seek to take possession of his archives, and he begged me to insure the safety of the Memoirs in time. I did so by transferring the manuscripts from Paris to Bayonne and depositing them there in another person's name. The precautions were not in vain. Immediately upon the death of my husband, in February, 1915, his study was sealed and all his papers examined and taken away by the authorities. Shortly afterwards the Chief of the General Staff, a General-Adjutant, came to me in the Emperor's name and said that His Majesty, having perused the table of contents of my husband's Memoirs, had become interested in them and wished to read them. I replied that to my regret I was unable to present them to His Majesty, because they were kept abroad. The Emperor's messenger did not insist, but some time afterwards an attaché of the

Russian Embassy in Paris appeared in our villa at Biarritz, and in the absence of the owners made a very careful search. He was looking for the Memoirs, which at that time, as I said before, were quietly lying in a safe of a bank at Bayonne.

The Memoirs do not touch upon the events of the great war, for they were completed in 1912. For this reason I shall say a few words about the popular legend which attributes to Count Witte a particular Germanophilism. The legend is entirely without foundation. Generally speaking, my husband had no sentimental biases in politics. He was guided by reason alone. He had no particular love or hatred for any country or nation. He was only a Russophil, in the sense that he placed above all else the interests of his country and people. It is true that he was a most resolute opponent of wars in general and of this war in particular. He said that it would end with a catastrophe for Russia, and that it would ruin Europe for a century. Long before the war he stood for a rapprochement between Germany and France with the energetic assistance of Russia. When the war began, he was deeply worried by it, and he expressed himself in favour of the immediate convocation of a peace conference. "Let the armies fight, since they have already started that madness, but let the diplomats immediately begin their work of making peace," he would say to his friends. This circumstance must have given rise to the legend of my husband's Germanophil tendencies. Whether or not he was right in his views of the great war, I do not know, but I do know that all his thoughts and feelings were instinct with love for Russia, and that he wished well-being and order to the whole world.

COUNTESS WITTE.

Bruxelles, October 1st, 1920.

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