



# Tales of Imperial Russia: The Life and Times of Sergei Witte, 1849-1915

*Francis W. Wcislo*

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History and biography meet in *Tales of Imperial Russia*, a study of the late-Romanov Russian Empire, told through the figure of Sergei Witte. Like Bismarck or Gorbachev, Witte was a European statesman serving an empire. He was the most important statesman of pre-revolutionary Russia. In the Georgia, Odessa, Kyiv, and St. Petersburg of the nineteenth century, he inhabited the worlds of the Victorian Age, as young boy, student, railway executive, lover of divorcees and Jews, monarchist, and technocrat.

His political career saw him construct the Tran-Siberian Railway, propel Russia towards Far Eastern war with Japan, visit America in 1905 to negotiate the Treaty of Portsmouth concluding that war, and return home to confront revolutionary disorder with the State Duma, the first Russian parliament. The book is based on two memoir manuscripts that Witte wrote between 1906 and 1912, and includes his account of Nicholas II, the Empress Alexandra, and the machinations of a Russian imperial court that he believed were leading the country to revolution. Telling the story both of a life and of the last days of the Tsarist empire, *Tales of Imperial Russia* will delight and inform all those interested in biography, literature, and history, as well as readers interested in the history of modern Russia.

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