

THE GOSPEL IN RUSSIA.

The writer, in conversation with a highly placed Russian official, inquired what he thought was the greatest obstacle to the progress of true religion in the great empire of the Czar, and the remarkable answer was immediately given: "There are no obstacles; the people are ready, even the Church is ready. Let the movement but have life, and be in harmony with our Russian sympathies and character, and nothing can oppose or retard it. Before all else, we are a religious people."

From his peculiar point of view there is much of truth in this dictum of the Russian official. The people are unquestionably prepared for a great religious revival, and in many ways the Orthodox Greek Church shows a liberality and a receptivity which is quite remarkable. Nevertheless, in spite of the official's opinion, there are obstacles to the spread of evangelical religion in Russia, so formidable and so numerous that one almost despairs of seeing them altogether removed in our day. Let us look for a moment at the position of affairs. Of the one hundred million Russians inhabiting Russia in Europe and Siberia, about eighty millions are orthodox Greek Churchmen, and some twenty millions are heretics of one school or another—Old Believers, Old Ritualists, Molokans, Stundists, etc. The policy of the Church and State toward dissent has been almost invariably one of severe repression, appalling sometimes in its severity. The result is that persecutor and persecuted view one another with an hostility difficult for people to judge who enjoy perfect religious freedom. Besides, the conduct of the "heretics" themselves has been often so indecorous, so fanatical and intolerant, and the excrescences which they have put forth have been frequently so offensive, that almost all the sympathy felt for them by the warm-hearted and more liberal of the orthodox has been chilled. In Russia, therefore, dissenter and Churchman are face to face, hating one another bitterly, the former excluded from every privilege, from every office in the State, hunted down by those two steady allies, priests and police, prohibited in most cases from worshipping in his own way, his children often taken from him and forcibly brought up in the orthodox faith. The position of the Russian dissenter is an intolerable one, and only the most steadfast belief in the infallibility of his doctrines, and the ever-present hope that his fidelity to principle will have its glorious reward hereafter, could compensate him for his life of toil and trouble, for the ignominy and contempt poured upon him.

There can be no doubt that among the different dissenting bodies in Russia there are, on the whole, far greater evidences of energetic religious life than among the orthodox. The very multiplicity of sects among them, however harmful and disastrous it may be in many ways, is still proof that they are thinking, that religion is a reality to them, that it is a tremendous force playing a controlling part in their lives. Hardly a sect