

RUSSIAN PERSECUTION.

THOMAS STEVENS in the *New York World* says: Horrifying to a person who has been brought up in an atmosphere of perfect religious liberty is the crude barbarity of the Russian government in its treatment of those of its subjects outside the pale of the orthodox state church. There are many things in Russia that carry one back down the centuries; but it is on its priestly side that the whitewash of civilization is laid on the thinnest, and the hide of the mediæval inquisitor is scarcely covered at all.

Religion is as dangerous a subject for a Russian to talk about in his own country as politics. He is as liable to be boxed off to Siberia for expressing himself incautiously about the former as the latter subject. Broach either of these subjects to the average Russian and, unless he is well acquainted with you, he immediately suspects you of being a secret agent of church or State, approaching him with sinister intent.

Seeking information on the subject of religious persecution, I was recommended by a friend to a certain Mr. B—, who was known to be well up on all such matters. Armed with an introduction I sought out Mr. B—, and explained to that gentleman who and what I was. Mr. B— was delighted, he declared, to make my acquaintance, and was ready there and then to give me any information in his power. Having delivered himself of this politeness, Mr. B—, whom I had been told was a Liberal of the most pronounced type, assumed the mental attitude of an extremely wary fencer, and replied to every question I put to him precisely as he would have done had the head of a government spy been visible behind every chair in the room.

Mr. B— was a foreigner who had lived in Russia a long time, had valuable business interests there, and simply could not afford the risk of being sent out of the country on twenty four hours' notice. This is about what would have happened to him had he told me the simple truth in reply to my questions, and the source of my information had been revealed in any way to the authorities.

Nothing could be learned from Mr. B—. Others were tried with no better results, for to ask a man to express himself on such a subject is equivalent to asking him to run great personal risks.

I eventually found a willing tongue, however, in the head of a Catholic priest in St. Petersburg. Now as ever, and in Russia no less than in all other parts of the world, the priests of the Roman church are the most fearless and aggressive of the clergy. In China, in Africa, in the most barbarous quarters of the earth the Roman Catholic missionary wins the admiration of all who have had the opportunity to observe his fearlessness and dogged perseverance in the face of difficulty and danger. Their audacity is splendid; and the writer was, therefore, not particularly surprised to find them risking Siberia and all manner of evil consequences in Russia, as fearlessly as fever in Africa and mobs in China.

After relating several racy stories about the performances of orthodox pops my informant plunged eloquently into the subject of religious persecution in Russia, treating chiefly of the Catholics. The audience chamber was the father's comfortable rooms in the college attached to a Catholic church on the Nevsky.

The Catholic religion, I was assured, was gaining ground in Russia, not only in spite of the persecution directed against it, but as a direct result of it. Religion thrives on persecution nowadays, as it has always done, and, while it gains strength with every blow that falls upon it, the arm that delivers the blows grows feeble in proportion. The absence of bitterness in his tones when telling of the manner in which the government applies the screws of persecution was striking. He talked like one sure of his ground and confident of ultimate victory.

A hundred Catholic priests, he said, had returned from Siberia during the present year, having served out their terms of exile. Ninety of them were disqualified by the government from hearing confessions and performing priestly functions, and they were only allowed to hold masses with locked doors. Yet there were a hundred others ready to follow where they had led, if necessary, for the triumph of religious liberty.

The reverend father puffed his American cigar with vigorous satisfaction as he related an incident that had occurred in St. Petersburg but a short time before my interview. Father W—, a brother Dominican, is religious instructor in eight schools in St. Petersburg. He speaks several languages, and, having to do with a cosmopolitan set of students, he used his polyglot accomplishments to the best advantage in their interests. With a French boy who knew little of any other tongue the teacher would, of course, get on better in French; with the German student, in German, etc. Father W—, having a keener eye to the advancement of his charges than to his own personal safety, did not even stop at using Polish in his intercourse with students who could understand him better in that language, though well aware that the use of Polish in the schools is forbidden under severe penalties.

Somehow the police got wind of what was going on, and at midnight, in the Marine school, on Vasili Ostroff, was heard the all too familiar command to open, "In the name of the Czar." A nocturnal

descent was made on the school by the secret police. The students were all tumbled out of their beds and questioned in regard to Father W—'s alleged use of Polish. Between midnight and morning each of the other seven schools were in turn visited in like manner.

"The boys were trumps," said Father T—. "Not a boy in any of the schools would confess that their tutor had made use of the interdicted language."

A sore thorn in the side of the ecclesiastical authorities of Russia is the question of confessing the Uniates. The Uniates are the offspring of the attempt made at the council of Florence to unite the long-estranged Eastern and Western churches. The orthodox Greeks claim that their representatives at the council sold them and have refused to recognize the right of the Uniates to go to confession to a Catholic priest.

Mr. Pobedonostzeff, the procureur of the Holy Synod of the orthodox Greek Church, and—some say not even excepting the Czar—the most powerful and influential person in Russia, is a sort of nineteenth century inquisitor. If the spirit of the age would permit him to do so he would probably be burning heretics at the stake on the Champs de Mars of St. Petersburg, or tying them in sacks and poking them down through the holes in the ice on the Neva. He is understood to be the prime moving spirit in the present reactionary movement that is going on in Russia and to wield a pernicious influence over the Czar, whose power he turns into an instrument of punishment against his adversaries. He is peculiarly determined on the question of the Uniates, whom he persists in treating as legally orthodox members of the State church whether they will or no.

At Catholic churches, where it is suspected that Uniates are in the habit of going to confession, policemen are stationed at the door, with authority to demand of all who would enter a passport proving that they are Catholics and not Uniates or Orthodox. The priests are also required to see the passports of those who come to them to confess, and if they confess a Uniate or an Orthodox the penalty is Siberia or the punishment monastery of Algonis.

Algonis is a monastery in a wretchedly poor, out-of-the-world district, a few hours from St. Petersburg, where the monks are in rags and tatters and barely manage to keep themselves from starving. Recalcitrant Catholic priests who are not sent to Siberia are compelled to take up their quarters in Algonis, where they lead a wretched existence, subjected to all manner of annoying inconveniences. Amongst the inmates at present is Father Leonard Zidjik of Lubin, Poland, who was sent there for the crime of confessing a Uniate. For some time he has been suffering with a dangerous throat disease and has begged permission to go to St. Petersburg for treatment. His requests have always been refused.

There are now in exile in the dreary northern province of Olonetz all the monks of the great Dominican monastery of Lubin, who several years ago were exiled *en masse* and their monastery disbanded for the deadly sin of confessing Uniates. Olonetz is a semi-wilderness of forest, swamp and lake, thinly inhabited, and without a single Catholic or Uniate to tempt the spiritual mettle of the exiled Dominicans. They are not allowed to say mass or hold services, even among themselves. The government allows them eight roubles (\$5) a month to keep them from starving.

In St. Petersburg the spirit of persecution is, of course, less brutally naked than in the provinces. St. Petersburg is only half Russian in outward and visible particulars, and there the authorities never forget that all Europe is looking on. Here the orthodox inquisition contents itself with sending spies to the Catholic and Protestant churches to listen to the sermons and to carefully watching the priests and parsons in the hope of catching them tripping within the letter of the law.

The pastor of the German Lutheran church, who had lived an irrefragable life in St. Petersburg for forty years and was highly respected by all who knew him, was ordered out of Russia on twenty-four (or forty-eight) hours' notice for baptizing a Russian who came and begged to be admitted into the Lutheran church. A vast crowd of Germans escorted the aged pastor to the station, and the whole German community, which is, next to the Russian, the largest in St. Petersburg, gave demonstrative expression to their disgust; but the unpardonable sin of receiving into the arms of a heretic religion one of the orthodox had been committed, and against this their pastor's forty years of hitherto blameless life was accounted as nothing.

For some time the Catholic Union of St. Petersburg has been petitioning for leave to found an orphan asylum. "No, no, I will grant you nothing!" was the last reply they had received from the late minister of interior, Tolstoi.

Americans can form no conception of the insufferable tyranny of the Russian provincial police, even when dealing with Russians. When having to do with heretics their overbearing insolence is hardly supportable. In the western provinces, where the people are largely Catholics or Lutheran Poles and Germans, the sextons of the Catholic churches are required to ring the bell when a Russian bishop passes by. In 1888 on the estate of Count Tijawitch, a Polish nobleman in the government of Wilna, the people had for some reason been forbidden to worship inside the chapel. They had been keeping up the services, however, outside. One day they received notice that a