



## Russia's Church.

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### IX.—AT CHURCH WITH RUSSIANS.

**M**AGNIFICENT or fascinatingly quaint as the city churches may be their truest grandeur lies in their vast congregations principally of men, and the bare country sanctuaries are beautified by the crowds that come to worship there. Church going in Russia demands self-discipline, it is not the easy comfortable thing that it is in England. There is no lolling on a cushioned seat with one's feet on a stool, no sitting at ease on a chair while the choir sing anthems of praise. There are no seats of any kind in Russian churches. Russians realize that they go to church to worship God, and feel in His presence sinful man must stand or kneel, and so one sees men, women and even little children, standing motionless, except at the prostrations, throughout a long service.

### The Four Fasts.

The Russian ecclesiastical year is divided into sections by four Fasts: the Great Fast (Lent), another in May, the third in August and the last in Advent. They are all well kept, but Lent is most rigorously observed. Meat cannot be eaten after Sexagesima Sunday, nor butter after Quinquagesima; fish is allowable, but many people will not touch it, except during the first, fourth and Holy weeks. The Russian Church uses two offices of the Holy Communion that of St. John Chrysostom on ordinary days, and St. Basil's on certain Holy Days, but in Lent the Liturgy of the Pre-Consecrated Elements is said. The peculiarity of this Liturgy is that the Sacred Elements are brought from the Altar, through the side gates of the screen, and back by the Holy Doors, or King's Gate, in perfect silence, the congregation remaining prostrate on the floor unworthy as it were to gaze on the vessels containing the Holy Eucharist. Other features of the Lenten Liturgy are the daily repetition of St. Ephraim's well-known prayer of humility and penitence—"O Lord and Master of my life," and the singing of Psalm 141 on their knees by choir and congregation.

### The Easter Communion.

Lent is of course, as with us, the preparation for the Easter Communion which is received by every Russian after Confession. There are three daily services appointed and used in all the churches: Matins at 6; Celebration at 9; Evensong at 4. As a rule Russians communicate on Wednesdays or Saturdays, and the special preparation begins on the preceding Monday or Thursday by getting up at 5.30 and attending Matins, fasting. After breakfast they return to Church for the Celebration, and again for Evensong. This is repeated the next day when, after Evensong, a class of Preparation for Communion is held by the pope or deacon consisting of an address, special prayers and psalms and resolutions. After this the intending communicants make their confession, one by one, behind a screen placed in a corner of the church. The vested priest stands by a table on which is a cross and a copy of the Holy Gospels, and after a prayer he says to the penitent, "Behold, my child, Christ stands here invisibly to receive thy confession. Be not ashamed or afraid, and conceal nothing from me, tell me what thou hast done and receive absolution from Jesus Christ, I am only a witness . . . leave not this ghostly hospital without receiving the healing that thou requirest." After confession the absolution is given:—"Our Lord and God Jesus Christ by the grace and bounty of His love to mankind, pardon thee, child, all thy sins: and I, unworthy priest that I am, by the power given to me, do forgive and absolve thee from all thy sins in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." The absolved penitents, who must now keep an absolute fast until after they have received the Holy Communion, return home, take a bath and go to bed early. After Matins next morning they dress in their best in honour of the Blessed Sacrament, and after kissing every one, servants included, in token of Christian charity, go to the Celebration.

### The Celebration.

At the administration of the elements the deacon bearing the chalice comes out through the Holy Doors, saying, "In the fear of God, in faith and in charity, draw near." The Communicants then come to the step of the Iconostase, and the priest taking the chalice repeats with the people, "I believe, Lord, and confess that Thou indeed art Christ, the Son of the Living God, who camest into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. I also believe that this is Thy most pure Body and this Thy Holy Blood. I therefore pray Thee to have mercy on me, and to forgive me all my sins, voluntary and involuntary, by word, by deed, by knowledge or ignorance, and grant me worthily and blamelessly to partake for life everlasting.