

Methodist Magazine and Review.

OCTOBER, 1897.

ACROSS SIBERIA.*



SIBERIAN EXILES.

From the port of Vladivostock, on the Pacific coast, across the vast Russian territory of Siberia, to the Ural Mountains, Dr. Wenyon, in the spring and summer of 1893, travelled on the great post-road which the Russian Government has constructed across Siberia. It is a wonderful achievement, says Dr. Wenyon. Even the Romans, renowned road-makers as they were, never attempted a task of the kind so formidable. It is a marvel to find any practical way at all across a country not only so unsettled, but so immense. "If 'Britannia rules the waves,'" said a Russian officer, "Russia rules the land."

Extending westward from the Pacific Ocean to the Ural Mountains, and northward from the

Chinese frontier to the Polar Seas. Siberia covers an area of six millions of square miles, is at least a hundred times as large as England, and forms, with European Russia, the widest continuous stretch of empire in the world.

Trackless forests, lonely mountain ranges, dreary wastes of barren steppes, as well as much fertile territory, make up these 6,000,000 of square miles, with here and there some mighty river rolling toward the Polar Sea.

The construction of such a length of road, and still more of the Siberian railway which succeeds it, was made more difficult and dangerous by the rigour of the climate. There is not a river or lake in Siberia which is not frozen for about six months in the year. Though it has in most parts a warm, bright summer, beautiful with flowers, and musical with birds, its winters are long and cold. In the northern districts the frost never disappears, and in some of the settlements on the Lena the people use ice instead of glass for their window panes.

In travelling on the great post-road, soldiers, poor emigrants, and criminal exiles have to walk, and they spend from six to nine months upon the journey from Russia to the penal settlements. Travellers who can afford it use horses and a springless, four-wheeled waggon, half covered by a hood, called a tarantass.

The Russian Government, for

* "Across Siberia on the Great Post-Road." By Charles Wenyon, D.D. London: Charles H. Kelly. Toronto: William Briggs. In the preparation of this article we employ, in large part, the graphic language of this intrepid traveller and explorer.—Ed.