

*From the London Tablet.*

## PERSECUTION OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN RUSSIA.

A few weeks ago we laid before the readers of the *Tablet* a general view of the constitution of the "national church" of Russia, the most glaring, the most lamentable system of imposture which, with the exception of the Mahometan and the Anglican forms of worship, has been inflicted upon any country since the commencement of the Christian era. Some centuries have passed since the establishments founded by the Turkish and the English despots have entered into conflict with the Church planted on the rock by the MESSIAH. Need we ask what now appears to be the results? It has been given to us to behold, in the very seat of Mussulman authority, the total decadence of that enthusiasm which alone sustained, for a season, in full vigour the doctrines of the Alcoran. Apathy of all sense of religion pervades at this moment the turbaned population of Stamboul; the mosques, formerly so crowded in obedience to the summons from the minarets, are now very generally deserted; indolence, vice, imbecility, cowardice, and ignorance are the prevailing characteristics of the descendants of those fanatics, who, it was once feared, were destined to substitute the Crescent for the Cross in the proudest capitals of Europe. The temporal domination which they acquired has been in these latter days rapidly receding on all sides from the boundaries that little beyond half a century ago were looked upon as much more likely to be extended and strengthened than narrowed and overthrown. Even in the very heart of its empire, the banner of the Redeemer now waves triumphant. There is every reason to hope that before many years elapse, the SANCTUS DOMINUS DEUS SABAOOTH shall again resound through the domes of St. Sophia. A contest still rages, indeed, in Lebanon, along the banks of the Jordan, and in the holy cities, between the old Mahometan bigotry and the Christian faith. But it is not difficult to foresee how that warfare is to terminate; and it is not a circumstance unworthy of notice, that a functionary of the Anglican Church happens to be stationed at this moment in Jerusalem, in order to witness there the utter downfall of the religion of the Prophet, as the precursor to the ruin which awaits his own.

So it will unquestionably be with the "national Church" of Russia. She has been for some years concentrating all her forces, and endeavouring to bring within her ranks auxiliaries from all sides—or rather conscripts gathered together by fraud and violence unexampled in the history of despotism—in order to prepare for the contest which she has resolved to carry on against the Catholic religion.—She has already sounded the signal of war. Such is the rigid discipline which she has established in her camp, that instances have occurred in which, for some slight transgressions, her ministers have been degraded to the rank of soldiers, and even to that of servants to officers in the army! No great inconsistency certainly

can be alleged between these occupations—for they all emanate from the same authority. Nor is this liability to punishment limited to the order of the clergy.—There is no "prelate" or "archimandrite," no member even of the "sacred" synod" itself, whom a line from the Autocrat may not only discharge from his functions, but divest of his ecclesiastical character, turn into a layman, and condemn to work in the mines of Siberia, or to serve in the military colonies of Tartary. A very extraordinary revolution, indeed, this must be considered in the organization of a church whose patriarch, in the early part of the reign of Peter I., was wont to ride into Moscow upon Palm Sunday on an ass magnificently caparisoned, the Emperor walking by his side holding the bridle, and followed by a long procession of the clergy and people.

We cannot charge the Autocrat with actually shedding the blood of our Catholic brethren within his dominions. It is true that he is not a Dioclesian or a Maximian in that respect; he fears too much the voice of public opinion to resuscitate the fires, the wheels, the pincers, that made so many martyrs during the primitive ages of our Church. He prefers the less public modes of persecution,—those that might be expected from a Greek of the Lower empire,—the dungeon, the secret transportation to places far remote from the home of his victims,—the torture of the mind by every ingenious mode of oppression and mortification,—condemnation to the most severe species of labour, famine, and privation, and misery of every imaginable kind.

Julian openly proclaimed, and carried into effect, as far as he could, his determination to prevent the rising Christian generations within the precincts of his empire from receiving any sort of intellectual improvement. It is the policy of the Autocrat to take entirely into his own hands the education of the Catholic youth, especially of those intended for the ministry of the church, in order that he may betimes render them pliable to his purposes, and subservient to the precepts of his schismatic religion. That religion alone is taught in all the Russian schools. No person can obtain any public employment, whether of a lay or ecclesiastical nature, who cannot produce a certificate to show that he has been brought up in the schools and colleges within the immediate control of the government.

In those provinces where the Roman Catholic religion has yet been preserved, every kind of obstacle to its increase has been recently created. No new chapel can be erected in a locality in the "immediate neighbourhood" of which there are not from one hundred to one hundred and fifty families; and in any such locality there can be no more than one priest. If there be two hundred and fifty families in that locality, two clergymen are allowed, and three where the number of families amount to three hundred. It is very well known that the population of most of the provinces in question is so much depressed, that although a chapel properly situated might be easily attended by the members of 150 families, still those families

cannot be often said to be, according to the strict terms of the ukase upon this subject, within the immediate neighbourhood of the house of worship. The words "immediate neighbourhood" are liable to the most capricious modes of construction. The officers appointed to report upon all cases of demands for new Catholic chapels may, and, in fact, do give those terms just such a meaning as they think proper; and as they are generally schismatics themselves, they take good care to frame their report in a sense as hostile as possible to the Roman Catholic people. The result of this species of legislation is, not only to erect a most effectual barrier against the progress of our holy faith, but to establish the means of silently extirpating it in the course of time. A family is estimated, according to the law, to consist of four individuals; so that, if a chapel be called for in a district, in the immediate neighbourhood of which there are no 400 Roman Catholics, permission is not given for the erecting of a new Catholic house of worship in any such place. Supposing therefore, that the number of Catholics in any given neighbourhood amounts only to three hundred and ninety-nine, it follows that they must remain without a chapel; thus presenting a scale of decimation which no natural increase of population can withstand! Such are the results of a ukase of the Russian senate, confirmed by the emperor, and issued in 1819.

In October, 1841, further measures were taken for the suppression of the Catholic faith in Russia. Catholic landed proprietors, within whose "immediate neighbourhood" there was no public Catholic houses of worship, were allowed, even during the reign of Catherine II., the privilege of having a chapel in their own houses. The ukase just mentioned expressly forbids the prelates of the Catholic dioceses from appointing chaplains to any chapels erected by private individuals. But it might occur that without receiving any regular appointment for the purpose, clergy unattached to any particular mission might, of their own accord, act in the capacity of chaplain in such chapels, with the connivance of the prelate of the diocese. The ukase takes good care that nothing of this kind shall occur; for it ordains that no unlicensed Catholic clergyman shall celebrate divine service in any such chapel. The chapel may, indeed, be built by a private individual; but the law requires that it should be annexed to the nearest parish Catholic church, and that only the curate of the parish, or, in case of his illness, his coadjutor, shall attend in any such house of worship from time to time, to celebrate mass. The "ecclesiastical college," that is, in other words, an authority appointed by the government—or, in default of such appointment, the civil prefect of the district—fixes the days of the year upon which the curate is to give his attendance at private chapels, such as we have mentioned! But the power to make regulations of this nature may not be exercised at all; or the days may be limited to one or two in a year, if the authorities should think fit. Even on the days so arranged, the curate may possibly be prevented

from giving his attendance, by the immediate duties of his own mission. Distance, snow, rain, or other obstacles may interpose to render it impossible for him to perform divine service in the chapels so "annexed." The uncertainty of his presence keep away the congregation; and, sooner or later, it becomes apparent, and the authorities do all they can to bring it about, that the "annexed" chapel might as well never have been built. By other regulations the movement of the clergy, secular and regular, are placed under the most rigid surveillance, with a view to confine them strictly within their own parishes and convents, and to prevent anything like a missionary system from being established amongst them. The curates are, moreover, compelled to make frequent returns of the number of their parishioners. The objects of this order is to inform the authorities of any conversion which might take place; for the lists are most vigilantly examined; and should any name be found in them of persons who had previously belonged to the "national church," the clergyman inserting such name in his list renders himself liable to a penalty, and the convert is forthwith imprisoned, or visited with some other punishment, as if he had committed a crime of the most ignominious nature. Roman Catholics residing in one parish are not allowed to confess to priests of their own religion in another, unless under very particular circumstances. In this rule there appears to be no mischievous effect; but it shows the despotic minuteness with which the religious liberty of the Roman Catholic in Russia is hemmed in on every side. The clergy are particularly enjoined to keep lists of their penitents, which they are bound to produce, when called upon so to do, by the official inspectors; in these lists are to be noted, not only the names of the penitents, but also the number of confessions which each of them makes in the course of a year. Nothing can be much more intolerable than this species of inquisition. The real object of it would seem to be, to furnish the civil power with a knowledge of the parties who attend piously to their religious duties, and of those amongst whom a laxity in this respect prevails; the former are thus marked out for severity of treatment whenever they come within the reach of the government, while the latter are courted, in order to seduce them away from their religion altogether. The requisition of such lists is, with reference to females especially, most indelicate; for who would like to have it reported to the government how often they have been to confession in the course of a year? The regular bent on multiplying the difficulties to which a Roman Catholic is subject in Russia, and to make him feel most painfully, at every step he takes in the ordinary course of his religious duties, how different is his lot from that of his schismatic neighbour, to whom none of these restrictions are applicable. He endures, in fact, a religious serfage, which is intended to bow down his mind, and to terrify him from making the slightest effort to propagate his faith.

We have stated enough for the present to show the determined hatred against our holy religion by which the Russian