

Christ in Russia.

Gott-Erleben in Ssowet-Russland. Erinnerungen aus der Freiheit und dem Gefangnis von W. Ph. Marzinkowskij. Aus dem Russischen übertragen von W. L. Jack. Missionsverlag "Licht im Osten." 1927. 310 pp. 6RM.

THIS is a remarkable book of reminiscences of experiences in Russia during the last ten years. Dr. Hermelink, the Church History Professor of Marburg University, recently recommended it to one of his classes as the best book on religious conditions under the Soviet so far written. It was completed early in 1927, and was translated almost at once from the Russian into German. In reading it one is reminded often of *The Christ of the Indian Road*, for it is the story of the power and appeal of Jesus of Nazareth, in spite of the bitter attack upon much that has been associated with Him in the past. More frequently the simplicity and directness of the narrative recall the *Acts of the Apostles*.

The book is of special interest to Baptists. The author was for years an active member of the Greek Church, but became gradually convinced that one of the things most necessary, if there is to be revival in the fortunes of that sorely persecuted body, is the adoption of adult baptism on confession of belief. Conflict with the authorities has followed, and we get many pictures of the comings and goings within the Orthodox Church during these last years. We also hear much of the Baptists themselves, and of the Evangelical Christians, who are in full agreement with them in doctrine and polity. Marzinkowski never became actually identified with them, but was always in close touch, and gives most valuable pictures of their position and activities.

It is an amazing story, vividly told by a cultured and sensitive man, with a very simple Christian faith and very great courage. The author admits that much of the book is written from memory, and it is not always easy to follow chronologically, but no one can doubt the general truthfulness of the account, nor that it is worth dozens of the ill-informed partisan writings that have appeared in this country. Marzinkowski was born in S.W. Russia in 1884. Both before and after a course at Petrograd University, he lived in Grodno, now a part of Poland.

In 1904, while a student, he came under the influence of Baron Nicholai, of the newly-formed Russian Student Christian Movement, and was converted. He was for some years engaged as a teacher, and spent his spare time as evangelist and colporteur, visiting and lecturing in factories and prisons. His marked success in all these spheres led to his appointment in 1913 as organiser of the Russian S.C.M. All through the war years, in spite of great difficulties, the work was kept together, and Marzinkowski's reputation grew. Owing to a weak heart and short sight he had been exempted from military service. Then came the Revolution. His activities, so far from ceasing, were intensified, for interest in all kinds of religious issues increased. There was great demand in town and country for his lectures on such subjects as "The Meaning of Life," "Why must a man believe in God?," "Can we live without Christ?," "The Meaning of Beauty," "Are the Gospels reliable?," and so on. He was invited in 1919 to be lecturer in Ethics at the Samara University, with special charge of a hostel. Though his health had improved, he was exempted from military service by the Bolsheviks because of his religious convictions. Long exercised over the position of the Orthodox Church, he came in 1920 to believe in adult baptism. What he describes as the spring of the Revolution, its romantic period, was by then over. Anti-religious propaganda and the persecution of the Orthodox increased. There were public debates about religion in Moscow. In March 1921 Marzinkowski was arrested, and spent seven months in prison. The most vivid pages of the book describe his experiences there, the ecclesiastical dignitaries and the criminals who were his companions, the dread in which they lived, all that they suffered, and all that he achieved in the way of evangelism. No real charge could be established against him; outside bodies, including the Baptists, agitated for his release; the man's personality compelled respect even from his opponents. So he was at length set free, and for a time continued his former work, journeying as far as Odessa. Early in 1923, however, he was again in the hands of the Moscow authorities, and was banished to Germany. He had difficulty in getting there, and only escaped being sent to Turkestan through the intervention of the Czech consul, who gave him a pass to Prague. There he arrived in April, 1923. These last years have been spent in Western Europe, partly in work among Russian refugees.

After experiences like that, it is surprising and significant to find that he left Russia with great reluctance, and shows no bitterness towards the Bolsheviks. His stay in Western Europe has inclined him to agree with Spengler that our civilization is doomed; in Russia he seems already to see new and hopeful lines

of development. It is the parodies and perversions of Christianity which have there been attacked. To genuine Christlikeness men have ever responded. The words of Merejkowski are quoted with approval: "The Church is not dead because it has been trodden under foot by the State. On the contrary, the State has been able to tread it under foot, because the Church is dead." No watered-down Christianity, no other religious faith, no merely philosophical idealism has been able to survive the testing of these last years. But through the horrors and terror, Christ has been present, and is being turned to by increasing numbers. The Mennonites, the Baptists, the Evangelical Christians, and those other free religious groups persecuted under Czardom, have at last come into their own. Reforming movements have shown themselves even within the Orthodox Church. Marzinkowski, and his German translator, Herr Jack, believe that Russia will yet give birth to a new kind of Christianity, a third form unlike that of either Rome or Byzantium, dependent neither on Wittenberg nor Geneva, a Johannine type going back directly to Jerusalem.

The question of a return to the practice of adult baptism was raised as early as 1917 at the Church Council which followed the Revolution, when Tychon was elected Patriarch of a dis-established church. There was discussion of the subject in the daily press, but it was in the end shelved. It continued to excite Marzinkowski, however, and in 1919 he prepared a memorandum on the subject, the substance of which was: "We must return to the practice of the baptism of adults on profession of faith. Conscious faith, conversion, re-birth must precede this holy ordinance, for it represents the union of a good conscience with God. So says the New Testament, so did the Apostles. Even in the fourth century, Church Fathers like Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, and John Chrysostom, although they had Christian parents, were only baptised after their twentieth year. This is confirmed by the service of baptism in the Orthodox Church, though it is not carried out consistently. The priest asks the candidate: Do you renounce the Devil? Are you one with Christ? Instead of the candidate the godparent answers, although frequently he has no idea what it is all about, and may even be himself without faith. Hence come the numerous merely formal and dead members of the Church, which itself accounts for the tremendous turning from the Church during the Revolution." The full statement was discussed with representatives of the Baptists, the Salvation Army, and other Christian bodies. It was read in an Orthodox Church in Moscow. Finally it was laid before Tychon, who was at the time a prisoner in his own house. When Marzinkowski visited him,

he found him in a purple gown, with a picture of the Virgin on his breast, and his patriarch's cap on his head. "Hallo, Reformer," he said, "I have read through your memorandum. Even if I were in agreement with you, what could I do by myself? The question is one for a Council." Marzinkowski was finally told that if he felt strongly on the matter he had better join the Baptists, and was then handed over to the Patriarch's secretary, who urged that the question of the time of baptism is no dogmatic one but a canonical, capable of change if the situation demands it. But only a Council could take such a decision, and no satisfactory council could meet till more peaceable days; which, comments Marzinkowski, was like saying that "the fire brigade will certainly come, but only when the fire is over." It was not till 1920, however, after a stay in a Mennonite colony, that he agreed to be baptised by the local pastor, and even then he continued to regard himself as a member of the Orthodox Church. When he was in prison there was some question as to whether he should be admitted to Holy Communion. His memorandum was submitted to the Metropolitan Cyril and other bishops, who were his fellow-prisoners. The scene is unforgettable, when the time and place are remembered. "The cell looked clean and attractive, the sun shining upon the flowers on the window-sill, which friends had brought. The bishops often received presents, which they naturally shared with many of their fellow-prisoners. The Metropolitan Cyril sat on his bed at the back of the cell, with the window opposite. On his left Bishop Theodor had found a place, and on his right Guri. He spoke to me in a kindly and fatherly way, while his younger colleagues examined my position more from the standpoint of theology." After hours of argument they agreed to allow him to receive the sacrament on the ground that, as a prisoner, he was in danger of losing his life, and that in such circumstances differences of belief on ecclesiastical questions become of less importance.

One of the most interesting figures who appear in these pages is Lunatscharski, the Soviet Commissioner for Education, who was one of the delegates at the Geneva Disarmament Conference, and who has recently been reported to be translating all the works of Anatole France into Russian. When controversy over religion became keen, he was one of the best known of the champions of Atheism. There is a description of a lecture on "Why we Ought not to Believe in God," which Lunatscharski delivered in Moscow, at the close of which Marzinkowski was allowed to express dissent, and to challenge the speaker to public debate. When the time came the Commissioner found his official duties prevented his appearing!

There are also vivid sketches of Archbishop Antonia, at first a supporter of the "Living Church" group of reforming priests, and later the leader of the "Regeneration" party; of old Father Georgi, who assisted with the few prison medicines, a splendid type of the "Russian orthodoxy of the heart," an acquaintance of Tolstoi, arrested because of his widespread and passionate preaching, but now released since everyone is convinced that he is harmless politically; of Sytin, the man who through ability and character rose from colporteur to be a millionaire publisher, and then, when his press had been seized and declared public property, was appointed its salaried manager, and rejoiced in the change; of the man whom Marzinkowski visited shortly before his execution, who had committed twenty-three murders, and had a large cross tattooed on his breast. ("It was a custom," he said, when asked the reason, "others had it, so I was done as well."); and of many others.

At intervals in the story there are glimpses of the author's mother, a simple, courageous woman, from whom he had evidently learned much, and whose death, since he was banished, has been a sad blow. Three pieces of advice which she gave, Marzinkowski especially treasures. "Be good, and you will everywhere receive good in return." "You use the words 'probably,' 'in my opinion,' 'as I think,' too often. Should one so speak about God?" "It is better to go to prison, than to be unfaithful to the preaching of the gospel."

Of Baptists we meet the aged W. G. Pawlow, the story of whose amazing early years has been made familiar by Mr. Byford in his *Peasants and Prophets*. We hear, also, of his son, Paul Pawlow, who after the Bolsheviki had been some time in power, was one of a committee which assisted in the drawing up of new laws for conscientious objectors to military service. I. S. Prochanow, the gifted leader of the Evangelical Christians, who was for a time at Bristol Baptist College (see Byford, *op. cit.*), appears, active in conferences with new reforming groups within and without the Orthodox Church. It is made clear that those belonging to these formerly persecuted sects have been able under the new regime to obtain positions of considerable influence, and that it is now recognised by many within the Greek Church that they have proved able to develop Christian character of a stronger and finer kind than that common among the Orthodox. It is this fact which seems to have been largely influential in bringing Marzinkowski to the Baptist position.

Almost every page lives and might be quoted. One does not easily forget the incidental allusions to the hunger and need in Moscow, nor the way in which, if summoned before the authorities, men took a bundle of necessaries with them in expectation

of prison. When Marzinkowski called on a friend he was unable to take off his wet rubber goloshes because his shoes were almost in pieces; "I sat and drank tea with him, after he had thoughtfully put an old newspaper under my feet. Such things caused no astonishment, in those days." In 1922, after his release from prison, he visited Petrograd again, and saw the famous library with the Codex Sinaiticus, unchanged save that it is now looked down upon by pictures of the revolutionary leaders.

There is much that is grim and tragic in this book, but the author is full of hope for the future. He sees "light in the East."

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