

In connection with the translation of the Malagasy Bible, there is one fact that has always seemed to me a very instructive one. With your permission, my lord, I will lay before this meeting a contrast. I have shewn you how within fifteen years the Protestant missionaries gave to the people a complete version of the Scriptures. It may be known to some of you that the earliest attempts to Christianize Madagascar were made by missionaries of the Roman Catholic Church. The first mission was sent out by the Portuguese soon after the discovery of the island by Lawrence Almeida, in the year 1506. The mission was soon abandoned, and left scarcely a trace of its existence. The next attempt was made more than a century later by missionaries sent out from France. These men continued at their work under great difficulties, and amid many hardships, for about eighteen years. We read something of their doings, and find from old reports that they prepared catechisms, prayers, confessions to the Virgin Mary, to St. Michael, and John the Baptist, with the command of the Church to abstain from flesh on Fridays; but we read not one word about Bible translation. Now, the Protestant missionaries were in Madagascar only fifteen years; but they considered Bible translation a primary duty, and with God's help they were able to accomplish what they desired. That shews most clearly the different conceptions of missionary work entertained by missionaries of these different churches. * * *

We rejoiced a few years ago to notice in the "Annals of the Propagation of the Faith" the following statement of the Roman Catholic missionaries;—"We have not as yet had the consolation to find a single village unaffected by the bite of the serpent of heresy." We know what these gentlemen call the bite of the serpent of heresy. We have heard sounds of this kind before. We know that the heresy lies in our Protestantism, and, above all, in our Protestant Bible. Well, it is something to get the testimony of an adversary to the fact that there is scarcely a village in Madagascar where these men do not find the bite of the serpent of heresy. We rejoice that this glorious Book, this so called book of heresy, has been so generally diffused; we rejoice to hear that this so-called poison has affected so many of the Malagasy people; and herein lies the ground of our hope that Madagascar, as a nation, will never yield to the attacks of Popery. Before sitting down, allow me to say a few words about our revision work. We have now been engaged for a little more than two years in the task of attempting to render more perfect the translation prepared by our honoured predecessors. We have a Revision Committee. That Committee consists of a principal reviser, and of delegates from the various bodies of Christian missionaries working in Madagascar. The London Missionary Society sends three delegates; the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel sends one delegate; the Norwegian Missionary Society sends two delegates; and the Society of Friends sends another. Coming as we do from different sections of Christ's Church, we are glad to find that there is no practical difficulty in the way of our co-operating in this glorious work. We further believe that, as we are thus brought nearer together, a spirit of brotherly love and harmony will be promoted; and then we look upon our various congregations and remember how again and again the Jesuit missionaries point the finger of scorn at the divisions of the Protestants. They say to the people, "Look at these Protestants, they cannot agree among themselves." Well, it is sad that it should be possible for the enemy to point at us in this way; but, on the other hand, our union in the blessed work of revising the translation of God's Word will shew to the natives at least one thing—that though we may be divided upon some minor points, we are all one in our loyalty to God's blessed Word. I am happy to be able to tell you that Queen Ranavalona reads the Bible in private, she hears it read and preached from in public, and, more than this, I have seen her act as a distributor of God's Word. About three or four years ago, I was present at a large school examination in the capital of Betsileo, about 200 miles from Antananarivo. At the close of the examination the Queen made presents to some of the more diligent scholars, and those presents chiefly