

them. What, however, is true of them is equally true of idiots. The Confession of Faith classes them together.

In conclusion, I would say—what the foregoing remarks would naturally lead one to suppose—that I see nothing in Chapter X., section iii. of the Westminster Confession of Faith with which anyone can reasonably find fault.

T. F.

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THE AUTHORITY OF MERELY RULING ELDERS.

MR. EDITOR,—It is more than time for some one to contradict the doctrine so often enunciated by men who should know better, namely, that the elders in Scripture are all of equal authority. Some put the matter in this form, viz.: "The elders in Scripture are all of equal authority, hence the Presbyterian assertion of the parity in the eldership. This, however, is not inconsistent with the existence of two classes: (1) Those who rule, and (2) those who rule and also labour in word and doctrine. The first may be able to rule efficiently while giving their time to some honest calling for a livelihood; whereas, the whole time and attention of one who labours in word and doctrine is required for the work. Hence the distinction between the ruling and teaching elder, both presbyter-bishops, but called and set apart to different work in the Church of God." The above statement refutes itself. As there is an inequality in the calling, the ordination, the competency and the work, so there is an inequality in the authority. The measure of authority is greater and less, as the measure of grace is.

J. W.

JOTTINGS ON RELIGIOUS WORK IN BELGIUM.

BY THE REV. JOHN KERR, D.D., MINISTER, IN THE "L. P. MISSIONARY RECORD."

A few weeks ago, in a journey with some friends, we spent a Sabbath in Brussels, and a notice of the prospects of mission work in Belgium may be interesting. As is well known, Belgium, and more particularly the northern or Flemish part of it, had its full share in the struggle for religious liberty and for a purer Christianity in the sixteenth century, and, even before the Reformation it had its *Lollards*, or "Sweet Singers," who felt the breath of the coming day. In the chief cities of the Flemish or Teutonic part, such as Ghent, Mechlin, and Antwerp, the Reformed were numerous, influential, and zealous. The Belgian Confession was the expression of their religious faith, ranging them among the churches that held the views of Calvin. They adopted in their struggles the name of *Gueux*, or "Beggars," which was given to them by their enemies in reproach, but which they turned into a title of honour, as was indeed the case with the name Christian itself. The terrible sieges and battles, martyrdoms and massacres that followed, form one of the lurid, and at the same time heroic, pages in history, and may be read in Prescott and Motley. At length, through the relentless tyranny of Philip II., the savage cruelty of Alva, and the cold-blooded persistency of the Inquisition, the Reformation was extinguished in blood and fire, and the remnant of its adherents fled to Holland, Germany, and England, to intensify the spirit of liberty there. It would require some time to shew how Holland secured its independence, while Belgium was reduced again to the yoke of Spain and of despotism. Briefly, it may be said, that Holland was a country more defensible, and had a friendly people behind it in Germany, while Belgium lay in a more exposed position, and had to contend, not only with all the power of Spain, at that time the greatest in Europe, but with the hostile influence of France, which was being turned against the Reformation. For centuries the Reformed religion seemed crushed out of existence, and the Jesuits had succeeded in perverting the history of the country, had taught the people to hate its noblest names and memories, and had made them the most bigoted and priest-ridden Romanists in Europe. In the end of last century, under Joseph II. of Austria, to whose dominion Belgium had passed, and later under the spirit of the French Revolution, toleration found an entrance, so that it may be said, "Out of the eater came forth meat." One or two small congregations sprang up, chiefly composed of foreigners who had settled in the country, and it was not until much later that any con-

siderable religious movement took place among native Belgians.

Before referring to this, however, it may be well to notice another question which has come to divide the people, and from which, in the end, important consequences may follow, affecting religious effort. The political situation of Belgium, as at present in France, runs in a line between two parties, the Liberals and Clericals, and it has swayed to and fro according as men value constitutional liberty or religion, as it is commonly understood in Belgium. Thoughtful liberals feel increasingly that free institutions cannot exist beside the claims of Ultramontanism; but unhappily most of them are indifferent, if not hostile, to religion in any form. They have come to confound Romanism and Christianity. Still there are a number who have studied history and human nature, and who are convinced that there can be no permanent settlement while two such forces as liberty and religion are at war. It was this that led men like Lamennais and Lacordaire to seek a reconciliation from the side of the Roman Catholic Church; but it failed, and now the chasm has become wider through the infallibility decree of the late Vatican Council. The attempt at reconciliation is passing to the other side, and there are signs that the friends of liberty are seeking a permanent basis for it in a positive religion. If this is earnest and continued, it must lead them away from Rome and to the Bible. The movement of Revelland in France began with this, and has brought him and others to a personal conviction of the truth of the Gospel, and to join the efforts that are being made by Mr. McAll and his fellow-labourers. They began to pierce the mountain at opposite sides, and they have met. If, with God's blessing, the evangelistic efforts that are being made in Paris, in other leading cities of France, and throughout the country, should be accompanied with continued success, and should raise up, as they promise to do, a race of French evangelists, we may hope that it will force many who have been indifferent to religion to think of it, first perhaps for its political and social value, and then for its personal. The Christian cause welcomes streams from all sides, if they find the way at last into the true channel.

To return, however, to Belgium, we may shew briefly that these two things are to be found a turning of the friends of constitutional freedom towards Protestantism, with the hope of help—and also earnest evangelistic work from religious conviction. For the first we may quote M. de Laveleye, professor in the University of Liege, whose name, as a political economist, has a European reputation. He is referring to the case of the late M. Littré, which has caused such an explosion in the camp of the Comtists, inasmuch as he, the acknowledged head of the party, and the successor of Comte, was, through the influence of his wife and daughter, received into the bosom of the Romish Church before he died, and was interred with its solemn rites. M. de Laveleye takes occasion to rebuke the inconsistency of many of the freethinkers of the liberal party, who assume the name of the old heroic *Gueux*, and yet remain with their families in the Romish Church. "I have often said," he writes, "to those who wish to revive the name of the *Gueux*, our reforming ancestors of the sixteenth century, that to be worthy of that name you should have their logic and their courage. You pursue the Catholic Church with your attacks, and you have not the energy to separate from it. You bark at a priest as a malefactor, and on the great occasions of life you kneel before him. If the *Gueux* of the sixteenth century had been as weak as you, all Europe would now be bending under the hand of an omnipotent Pope. There would have been no emancipation in Germany or Holland, in England or the United States. Either hold your tongue or come out. How many of these proud apostles of freethought do we not see leaving the world confessed, and blessed, and buried by the priest! Who would have thought that Littré, the high priest of Positivism, would have been among the number! Haughty disciples of freethought, see how your master and your model has died; and which of you can be sure that he will not do the same?" M. de Laveleye and others with him, have had the courage of their convictions, have had their children under Protestant training. The present keen conflict about education, between the Liberal Government, which is in power, and the Romish clergy, who have excommunicated most of the teachers of the public schools, promises to add to their number. The claim of the clergy is for a power over the schools, which is

not granted in any country in Europe, and which would be fatal to civil as well as religious liberty.

We may now refer briefly to evangelistic effort. Apart from several smaller agencies, among which we may mention with honour the Wesleyans, the two principal in Belgium are the Union of the Belgian Evangelical Churches, known in this country through M. Rochedieu, and the Belgian Evangelical Missionary Society represented by M. Anet. Both of them have an evangelical creed and a Presbyterian constitution; but the first has national acknowledgment and support, while the second is dependent entirely on its own resources, and the aid of Christian friends. One part of our Sabbath was given to the service of M. Rochedieu, which is held in the chapel of the Museum, a handsome building in a central part of the city, granted by the Government. The form of worship, like that of all the Reformed Churches on the Continent, differs little from our own, and the audience might number about 300, composed of all classes, including a goodly number of what is called the middle class. The sermon by M. Rochedieu, on the "Pearl of great price," was pointedly evangelical, with warm appeals to the heart and conscience, and was listened to with marked attention. In conversation with him afterwards, I obtained a report of the mission work of the Union, which is carried on by voluntary effort. The report of this year is in the hands of the printer, and is growingly favourable in character, but the facts I have to give refer to more than a year past. The Synodical Committee of Evangelization has seven chief centres, each of these doing work in smaller localities around. Another agency employed is Evangelical Schools, both on week days and Sabbath, and these are attended by about 600 children. A number of people prefer sending their children to them rather than to the public school, for the sake of the Bible instruction. The income of the Society is about £600, drawn partly from foreign help in Holland and Scotland. On the other part of the day we attended the chapel of the Evangelical Society in the Rue Belliard. M. Anet was at work elsewhere, but an able sermon was preached by his colleague, M. Biza, on "One is your Master, even Christ." It had special reference to the questions of the time. The audience was not so large as at the Museum Chapel, but there was a look of resolution and intelligence about it beyond what is seen in ordinary churches. On speaking at the close to a young man who sat near me, and telling him I was from Scotland, he seemed much interested, and said their Scottish friends were very dear to them, and had done them great service by their help. I found that he and his family were converts from the Church of Rome, and that with other members of the church he was about to give the rest of the day to evangelistic work in out-stations. I shall state what I learned from him and from other sources, of the mode of operation of the Belgian Evangelical Society or Church, as it may now be called. It has twenty-five communities, united by the Presbyterian tie, with an annual Synod. There are fourteen pastors, a number of whom take charge of more than one community, four evangelists, eleven colporteurs and Bible readers, three week schools, and thirty Sabbath schools. They have 10,000 adherents, of whom 3,000 are communicants. They are composed chiefly of converted Roman Catholics. Thus, for example, at Charleroi, out of 13,000 adherents, including children, there are only two adults who were born Protestants; at Nessonvaux, out of 600 there is only one, and this work still goes on; at Charleroi there were sixty-six adults added to the Church last year by conversion. There are two classes of members: first, adherents or disciples, who have just left the Church of Rome, and have put their name on the Protestant register; they are thereby freed from any claim the priest may have on them, and they and their children are under Protestant care. And second, there are the regular communicants, who are admitted after careful teaching, and through a personal profession of their faith. There is a peculiar kind of meeting among them, which was commenced for the sake of the new adherents, and which differs from the old Scottish diets of examination in this, that instead of the minister examining the people, the people examine the minister. They put questions to him as to difficulties they may have found in his sermon, or in reading the Bible, or in the conduct of life. It there is any special difficulty, the answer is delayed till next meeting. I recollect seeing a similar plan pursued by