

A CONTRAST, 1680-1890.

HERE could not be a greater contrast than that which is presented by the state of the Catholic Church of Scotland in 1679, and the condition of the same church in 1890. At the former period the number of Catholics, the members of a once flourishing church, was reduced to 14,000 Communicants. Of these 12,060 inhabited the Highlands, leaving 2,000* as the whole Catholic population of the most extensive, most fertile and most populous portion of the country. This statement is according to a report made by an official visitor appointed by the College of Propaganda, who, having had ten years' experience in the missions of Scotland, was well calculated to surmount the difficulty of making such a report.

There were but few priests, some ten in all, scattered as the Catholics were over the whole country, it was impossible for these few, however zealous, to bestow either frequently or regularly the benefit of their ministrations. In consequence of this, scarcely any Catholic could hear Mass oftener than thrice a year. As the priests were obliged to move about from place to place, disguised and concealed, their people seldom knew where to find them, so that many died without the aids and consolations of religion. With the exception of a few chaplains, none of the clergy had fixed abodes, and this homeless condition was not only inconvenient as regarded attending to the spiritual wants of the people, but also rendered it impossible to apply to the necessary studies. It was found to be impracticable at the time to assign to each priest a particular district. Opinion was much divided on the subject, so that without the authority of a Bishop, who could not, as yet, be appointed, this salutary discipline could not be introduced. The Presbyterian people were beginning to be somewhat reconciled to Presbyters; but bishops were still an abomination in their eyes, chiefly in consequence of the violent efforts of the

Government to place over them Anglican prelates. Extreme poverty was an additional hindrance to the efficiency of the clergy; and that church which, in the days of its abundance, could supply, on occasion, the wants of the State,* and often did so to such an extent as to cause its members, from excess of liberality, to suffer the privations and inconveniences of poverty,† was under the necessity of having recourse to foreign aid. The Congregation of Propaganda, although itself not largely endowed, made an annual grant of five hundred crowns. This fact alone shows how much the suffering Church of Scotland stood in need of assistance after it had been robbed of its endowments and before the few Catholics that remained became accustomed to contribute towards the support of their pastors.

Turning over a few leaves we come to a more prosperous epoch, and yet not so prosperous as to appear extraordinary in a time of greater enlightenment when men have so far cast off the dark prejudices of a bygone age.

The Catholics of Scotland, instead of being a mere handful, unnoticed by the mass of their fellow-countrymen, are now an important compact body, numbering, as is estimated, four hundred thousand. Clergy are not wanting who minister to the spiritual requirements of this numerous people. Circumstances have been so favorable and public opinion so much improved, that it has been considered opportune to restore the ancient hierarchy. There are now six bishops, with the same titles as were held before the "Reformation," it not being thought necessary, as in England, to invent new names for the episcopal sees of Scotland.

*James V., the last Catholic king of Scotland, when urged by his rapacious uncle Henry VIII., to take possession of the properties of the Abbeys and the church, replied that he would be guilty of no such robbery, especially as his faithful clergy were always ready to afford him the aid of their funds.

†We have a petition to the King from the monks of Arbroath, the richest Abbey in Scotland, praying His Majesty to lay no further charges on them as the brethren were already on "short commons."

* See "Catholics of Scotland," by Rev. Aen. McD. Dawson, L.L.D., etc. Page 85.