

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

THE PROTESTANT CHURCH IN FRANCE.

MR. EDITOR,—I am sure there are many amongst the readers of THE PRESBYTERIAN in Canada who would like to know what is being done by the Protestant Churches of France for the evangelization of the masses of their fellow-countrymen. With your permission, therefore, Mr. Editor, I shall give, in a series of letters, as clear an idea as possible of the actual work which is being effected by the different sections of that Church. Before, however, referring to the missionary operations of the different societies, it may be well to condense in one or two letters the more prominent incidents which have marked the past history of the Reformed Church of France, and which have tended to make it the divided and therefore comparatively weak force which it at present is in this country. Those who desire to study more fully the intensely interesting history of the Church of the Huguenots, can consult the "Histoire des Protestants de France," by M. G. de Felice; the "Histoire des Pasteurs du Désert," by M. N. Peyrat; the "Histoire de la Guerre des Camisards," by Antoine Court; and for recent facts, two admirable papers which appeared in the "Catholic Presbyterian" for October 1879 and April 1880, written by Pastor Babut, of Nismes, and Pastor Wheatcroft, of Orleans.

In 1521, four years after Luther had affixed his celebrated theses to the door of Wittenburg Cathedral, the doctrines of the Reformation began to be taught in France. From that time until the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, in 1685, the Huguenots represented both a political and a religious party, many of its chiefs being the highest nobles in the land, and some of its adherents were princes of royal blood. The Protestant party being then deprived of the measure of toleration which it had enjoyed from the time of Henry IV. (1598), the wealthy, the noble and the more intelligent left France, and took up their abode in England, Holland, Prussia, etc., leaving only the peasants scattered over the plains of Languedoc, or hidden in the valleys of the Cevennes, or isolated in Poitou and Normandy, as representatives of the faith of Calvin, Coligny, and Conde.

It is easy to understand, therefore, how severe was the trial which the moral strength of this remnant had to endure. The result proved how nobly they did endure. For a hundred years, at least, notwithstanding the horrible treatment which they received, the poor peasants kept the light of the Gospel burning in the midst of thick darkness, faithfully adhering all this time to the form of Church government bequeathed to them by Calvin. In this courage and perseverance they were aided by the untiring efforts of Antoine Court (1696-1760), who revived the Synodical system with the view of forming a bond of connection between the scattered churches, so as to create union and strength. He succeeded in bringing together, in the fastnesses of the Vivarais, delegates from most of the suffering Churches, and forming the first "Synode National du Désert," which met on the 21st August, 1715. Similar meetings took place almost yearly, being held in caverns or in isolated huts amongst the mountains. Provincial Synods consolidated and carried out through France the resolutions adopted by the supreme ecclesiastical body—in all cases insisting on the strict application of the old "Discipline des Eglises Reformées," as well as the teaching of the "Confession de foi de la Rochelle." Right loyally did these peasants adhere to the instructions of their teachers, though imprisonment and even death was the almost invariable result of their fidelity. Retiring to Lausanne in 1729, M. Court established a school for the education of the pastors of the Désert, to replace those of Saumur and Sedan, which had been destroyed. This school continued in operation until the creation by Napoleon of the Faculty of Theology at Montauban in 1808-10.

As the eighteenth century was drawing to a close, a more tolerant spirit began to pervade those in authority in France, and found expression in the edict issued by Louis XVI. in 1787, which at least gave a legal standing to Protestantism, permitting its adherents to live in the country and prosecute their professions and trades, to be married in the presence of the officers of justice, to record births before the judges, and to be buried, even though the ritual of the Roman Catholic Church was not repeated over their graves.

The time of comparative rest from persecution which followed was unfortunately not as favourable to Presbyterianism as the dark days which had preceded. "The spiritual descendants of Calvin," we are told, "felt the blighting influence of the sceptical and sensualistic schools of thought, whose chiefs were Voltaire, Diderot, and the Encyclopædists. As the practice of the Synodal system became more easy, attachment to it gradually weakened." It was owing to this religious laxity, no doubt, that the sons of the Pastors of the Désert so readily accepted that system of laws which, to serve his own purposes, Napoleon issued on the "18^e Germinal An. X." (7th April, 1802) under the name of the Concordat, and which brought the Church into a condition of bondage to the State, under which, to the present hour, it is suffering evils the magnitude of which can hardly be exaggerated. By this law the Reformed Church of France lost two of its most characteristic features—the local "Kirk Session" and its "National Synod" or General Assembly, "its hand and its head." In the place of these the Concordat substituted "Eglises Consistoriales," formed of groups of six thousand souls each, the lay members of which were elected by a small number of Protestants whose names stood highest on the rating lists. Against the manifest evils of this system the Reformed Church had to contend until 1852, when Napoleon III., in quest of popularity, restored the Kirk Session under the name of "Conseil Presbyteral," and grouped together, according to geographical affinity, a certain number of these under the name of "Consistoires," giving to the Church a degree of cohesion to which it had long been a stranger.

Turning now to the internal history of the Church, whose external condition was so thoroughly disorganized, we find that shortly after the Restoration (1815) two currents became visible which were destined to flow farther and farther apart. Two men, both largely endowed by intellectual gifts, were regarded as the representatives of these diverging tendencies. Samuel Vincent, pastor of a church at Nismes, where he was born in 1787, had adopted the subjective theory of Schleiermacher, which places the "basis of religion in the innate feeling of the human soul." He was the representative of one portion of the Church; while the other followed Daniel Encoutre, also a native of Nismes, where he was born in 1762, and the son of a Pastor of the Désert. He was as distinguished for his fervent piety as for his great attainments in science and dogmatic theology. His health compelling him to resign the work of evangelization, he was first made Dean of the Faculty of Science at Montpellier, and afterwards called to a Professor's chair at Montauban; and here, by the affirmative character of his theological teaching and his decided piety, he made a marked impression on a large number of pastors. This religious earnestness was still further deepened when the revival which had passed over Britain and Switzerland at length reached France, originating the religious societies, such as the Bible Society (1819), the Religious Tract Society (1821), and the Missionary Society (1822), which aided so largely in promoting the spirit of unity and self-government among the Churches.

It soon became clear that, in the belief of one party in the Church, Christianity was regarded merely as a well-contrived system of ethics, while in the case of the other party, belief in Christ as the living Saviour was the alone object of faith. This vital difference in the belief of the two parties constituting the Reformed Church of France was strikingly illustrated by the well-known incident which occurred in the church at Lyons. This church had for its pastor the eminently gifted, pious and eloquent Adolphe Monod (1807-56), conscientiously opposed to the practice then prevalent of admitting to the communion all who presented themselves, without restriction or examination. M. Monod preached a sermon against the system which roused the ire of the Moderates, who held that the doctrines advocated by M. Monod tended to curtail their liberties as Protestants. A petition was presented to the Consistory, stating these complaints, and accusing the young pastor of having attacked "the most admirable, the most difficult, the most holy of all religions, that of good works dictated by the conscience, and thus to have wounded the human reason, that emanation from the Deity." The Consistory having strong leanings to latitudinarianism, asked him to resign, and on his refusing to do so dismissed him, the Government confirming the sentence. This event necessarily attracted a large

share of public attention, and helped to bring into prominence the distinctive doctrines of the two opposing parties in the Church.

The subject of separation of Church and State, which had been made familiar in Switzerland by the admirable writings of Vinet, began to attract attention in France after the revolution of 1848. At a meeting of delegates from different Consistories, which took place shortly after at Paris, it was proposed to draw up a Confession of Faith, with the hope of counteracting the rationalistic doctrines taught by so many of the pastors. It was not deemed advisable, however, to carry out this proposal, lest an inopportune agitation should arise in the Church. Two distinguished members of the Synod—M. Frederick Monod and Count de Gasparin—dissatisfied with this decision, withdrew from the State Church and formed the "Eglise Libre," or Free Church, which includes at present between forty and fifty pastors, with a membership of about three thousand, to which may be added eight thousand adherents. Before separating, however, this meeting drew up a scheme for the reorganization of the Church, which bore fruit in 1852, when Louis Napoleon modified the law of 1802, and restored the Kirk Session, Provincial Synod, etc., as stated above. While the first Napoleon, as we saw, restricted the nominating power to the ecclesiastical boards to the highest rated citizens on the roll, his successor erred, on the other hand, by the introduction of all but universal suffrage. Further, instead of making the General Assembly the governing body of the Church, Napoleon III. constituted a "Central Council," composed of men selected by the Government, whose duty it was to advise the Minister of Public Worship on matters connected with the Reformed Church.

It is scarcely necessary to refer further to the evidences of the ever-widening chasm which has so completely dissociated, both as regards dogma and government, the two sections of the Church. Eighteenth century rationalism and the teachings of the Tübingen school have done their work. The only true solution of these ecclesiastical difficulties will be found in the separation between the Church and the State, when, as many members stated at the Synod of 1872, the evangelical portion of the Church, which happily composes the majority, will be free to pursue their legitimate work amongst the unevangelized Protestants of France, and to make aggression upon those multitudes of so-called Romanists who are now so willing to listen to the preaching of the Gospel. But this letter is already too long, so I close for the present.

T. H.

Paris, Nov. 22nd, 1881.

A TWISTED DOCTRINE.

BY REV. R. C. MOFFAT, WALKERTON.

TWISTED PARAPHRASES.

Attending the funeral of a young man recently, the Christadelphian speaker who conducted the services made some rather strange assertions.

Before specially noticing one he made, let me give a brief summary of some of the opinions held by the followers of Dr. Thomas, of England. There is no Holy Spirit to convince, enlighten, renew or comfort; there is no angel, good or bad; there is no sin before God in working on the Sabbath; there is no resurrection for any dear child dying in infancy, and there is no salvation possible unless through this new Church which coolly unchurches all other Churches. Without discussing any of these positions, we come to the assertion made, that "when the Christian dies, body and soul remain insensible in the grave until the resurrection," and that this doctrine is plainly taught in the Presbyterian Paraphrases.

Let us then examine the fourth, keeping the third chapter of Job before us, and we find no insensible soul in either, but a most graphic picture of the silence of the grave, where rest the wicked and the weary, the small and the great. This striking expression gives the key-note to the whole:

"And there, in peace, the ashes mix
Of those who once were foes."

The mortal ashes of the body must lie sleeping, but the soul of the Christian sleepeth never.

Turn now to the fifteenth, placing beside it the ninth chapter of Ecclesiastes, and we search in vain for an insensible soul. But we do find everlasting silence—yea, a most urgent summons to settle at once