

ed to all the principal towns of France. In the provinces, throughout France, the Roman Catholic population are very eager to hear the word of God. And although, in several quarters, the municipal authorities have given opposition to the preaching of the Gospel, yet this opposition has rather increased than lessened the interest awakened among the people. In one commune, until lately Roman Catholic, the inhabitants, despairing of obtaining an evangelist, resolved to meet regularly and edify each other, and applied for a book of prayers, and some collection of sermons, to assist them in carrying out their design. The free circulation of the Scriptures by colportage has been greatly hindered by some new regulations issued in reference to this itinerant mode of merchandise.

In Belgium, where, until recently, the Roman Catholic religion had undisturbed sway, conversions from it to evangelical religion are constantly occurring. And although, with few exceptions, it is the poor and despised of this world, as usual, who have embraced the light, yet exceptions do occur, and will increase. Some priests have renounced the Church of Rome; and after due probation, have been consecrated to the evangelical ministry. In this country, as in France, popery is, on the whole, decidedly losing ground. Indeed it would be difficult to find there one who is a Roman Catholic from conviction; nominally professors of this religion, it is indifference as to everything religious, and actual infidelity, that occupy the minds and hearts of the population. But, then, to cast off the name of the prevalent religion would be to forfeit their position in society, and incur more or less of stigma and reproach, if not of personal danger. However, the condition of Protestants in Belgium differs in one respect materially from that of their brethren in France; in that they enjoy, without hindrance, all the rights guaranteed to them by their constitution; and have only to maintain the conflict of the Bible and truth with the Romish clergy,—a body more powerful, it is true, than the clergy of France would be, if left to stand by themselves; but wielding, on the whole, a far less formidable influence, because they occupy a less ambiguous position than do the clergy of France, who are backed by their government.

In Switzerland, no instance of persecution on account of religion has occurred during the past twelve months. The brethren of the Free Churches of the Canton of Vaud, have had no fresh difficulties cast in their way. These young churches appear to have acquired stability, and are likely to increase in strength. The Evangelical Society of Geneva continues its labours in Switzerland, France, and Italy. It employs twenty-six labourers, including ministers, evangelists, and schoolmasters. Its Theological College had last year thirty students. Of the students who have been educated in this seminary, there are in Switzerland eighteen who are pastors, nine of them in the National Church, and nine of them in the Free Church, in France thirty, of whom twelve are in the National Church; in Belgium there are nine; and in Italy there are seven. These are hopeful results; and an extensive amount of good may be expected to flow from this valuable institution. The numerous annual religious meetings were, this past year, all held in their customary localities; and in Geneva and elsewhere, were extremely well attended, and most edifying.

### IRELAND'S MISSION FIELD.

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#### THE OPENED FIELD OF PROVIDENCE.

Ireland is a field of intense interest now, on account of the wonderful preparation for missionary work lately made in it by the mysterious providence of God. In 1811, there was in Ireland a population of 8,175,124, and, according to the usual rate of increase, it should have been, in 1851, about 9,000,000; perhaps it had reached this in 1846. But the late census make the population 6,515,734. Ireland has likely lost 2,000,000 of her population; and about 270,000 of the houses of her poor have been swept away. Three years since I saw the black ruins of very many; grass and weeds grow now where once they were.

According to the Report of the Commissioners of Public Instruction, in 1834, Ireland contained 1,517,228 Protestants, and 6,427,712 Roman Catholics. Here were fearful odds against Protestantism; here a fearful host at the nod of Rome; here a region of darkness and despotism fearfully large. But famine, emigration, and other causes, have effected an incalculable change. As to numbers, the vast proportion of 2,000,000, dead or gone, were Romanists; and hence the proportion of Protestants and Romanists in Ireland has so thoroughly changed, that some authorities state, that Romanists do not exceed Protestants by more than 500,000, while by others the statement made is this:—Such is the decrease of Romanists by disease, emigration, and conversions, that, laying out of account 500,000 shut up in workhouses, the Roman Catholic and Protestant population of Ireland are nearly equal.

However inaccurate both these statements may be, and whatever be the exact relation of numbers, one thing is certain, that Romish Ireland has become a much more manageable field than formerly; and the means and agencies in the hands of Protestants are, with divine blessing, quite adequate to her regeneration. Other considerations, also, show that the Spirit of the Lord is lifting up a standard against her great enemy. Political agitation, monster meetings, exciting speeches, roused the Romish mind, and taught it to think; temperance gave it sober leisure;

hope deferred on Repeal made it sick; and when the sweeping famine came, many causes combined to shake it from its ancient trust. The priest, in his usual pretensions to miraculous power, sprinkled holy water on the potato stalks, yet there settled down upon them, in thicker gloom, the blackness of death. Government gave £10,000,000 to feed the dying; but, whenever the priest aided in its distribution, he showed injustice and cruelty. Hundreds of thousands, in charity, were sent from all parts, and all denominations, and committed to the charge of Quakers, Episcopallians, Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, but scarcely anything to the Romish priest; and what little he did receive he too often gave to those who could repay him in fees, or made it subservient to his own selfish ends. In the meantime, death was doing a wholesale work, multitudes were gone to their long home, and no priest had been near their bed. Here was a corpse on the roadside; another there thrust into the bog; and, near at hand, a whole family, dead in their hut, over whom "the hunger" had crept with a cold and deadly torpor; but all of them had gone unanointed, unshrived; the wife was too weak to rise from the side of her dying husband to go for the priest; or, when the little child did totter forth to bring him to the home of the dying, he confessed that there was no money to pay for last rites, and he was driven, with curses, away thousands were dead, and no holy clay had been put on their coffins; thousands were dead, and no ceremonies, deemed essential to salvation, had been performed over the cold remains; but their widows and orphans lived, and they could not believe that their husbands and fathers must for the covetousness of selfish priests, be eternally lost. No, no; natural affection rose high over all the teachings of priestcraft; and those who had tried the man of the whip and altar's curse, and found him, in the hour of trial, heartless and harsh, and who, in the hour of sickness and sorrow, were visited, and fed, and comforted, by those whom he called the agents of hell, could not but see and feel the contrast, could not but feel, in their inmost hearts, that Protestantism cannot be bad when its fruits are so generous and good.

Another agency in the preparation of a portion of the present Irish missionary field is worthy of regard. The Rev. Alexander Dallas, with some Christian friends, having despatched eight trusty messengers to different parts of Ireland, to obtain information, and hold Christian conversation with the people, afterwards directed, through the post, to an immense multitude of respectable Roman Catholics, 90,000 copies of three very suitable religious tracts, which there is reason to believe told powerfully on many minds, and were the means of awakening a spirit of inquiry, which has been productive of extensive good.

#### THE LABOURERS IN THE HARVEST FIELD.

Ireland is a field of delightful missionary interest now, because so many missionary agencies occupy it, with great zeal, and large success. One of these, which may be viewed as pioneer to others, has been long worked successfully by Episcopallians, Presbyterians, Baptists, and others, and has for its object the religious education of the native Irish, through the medium of their own language.

A single extract from the last Report of the Irish Society will convey satisfactory information as to the sphere occupied, and the good done, by this species of missionary agency. "The committee report 667 schools, 29,119 scholars, 32 inspectors, 60 clerical superintendents, 20 missionaries, 3 lay agents, 166 Scripture readers, several new places of worship, to meet the demands for church accommodation of vast numbers of converts for Romanism; and all this effected and maintained against violent intimidation, with threatened loss of property and life, and endured with martyr's courage and faith."

The Mission Society for the Islands and Coast of Ireland, the Achill Mission, the Dingle and Ventry Mission, have so long enjoyed public confidence, and been upheld by public generosity, that they need only be mentioned as patriarchal institutions, which have lived to see, in the fruit of their own labours, and in the increasing prosperity of many young Societies around them, the results of Heaven's rich blessing on many an anxious day of toil and fervent prayer. The Irish Evangelical Society, supported by Congregationalists, has twenty ministerial agents and thirty Scripture readers, whose labours have been greatly blessed, and who have provoked to love and good works many more of other creeds and names.

The itinerant system of Methodism qualifies it for such a field as Ireland; and in Ireland, since the days of Wesley, Methodists have laboured with their accustomed zeal, and with much success. The Primitive Wesleyans have twenty missions in Ireland, comprising not less than 400 mission stations or congregations, which are so widely scattered, that their missionaries have not travelled less than 42,000 miles during the past year, and have paid 42,000 family visits for reading Scripture and prayer. The other chief Methodist body have eighteen missionary stations, and twenty-five missionaries in Ireland; and in their last report they say, that such an amount of success has been realised as to afford cheering hopes for the future.

No missionary society has, of late years, engaged more of public attention than the Society for Irish Church Missions. It employs 13 ordained missionaries, 1 lay superintendent, 3 lay agents, 83 readers, 41 teachers; making in all 141 agents employed, besides 274 teachers, who instruct 3,520 Romanists in reading the Irish Scriptures. These missionaries officiate in 21 congregations, having an average attendance of 3,892; all of these being either settled converts from Romanism, or inquiring Romanists sufficiently emboldened to defy the vengeance of the priests. In the appeal which the Bishop of Tuam has made for the building of eight new churches, and the enlargement of two others, on