

MISSIONS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

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At this season of "May Meeting," when the results of missionary labour at home and abroad during the past year are reported by all our great English societies, and when missionaries from every part of the globe, and of "every kindred and tongue" tell "what things the Lord hath wrought," it may be both interesting and profitable to our readers to glance at the revival of the Protestant Church, and its missions during the present century.

The beginning of the nineteenth century marks an epoch of revival in the Protestant Church. It would be going beyond the limits prescribed by our subject to consider the causes of that remarkable reaction into indifference of life, or of positive error in doctrine, which followed more or less rapidly the stirring period of the Reformation. Such tides, indeed, in the affairs of men—now rushing with irresistible waves to the utmost limit of the land; then receding and leaving behind but a few pools to mark where the waters once had been; and again, after a longer or a shorter interval, advancing with a deep flood over the old ground,—are among the most striking phenomena in history.

The last century witnessed the Protestant Church at its lowest ebb. We thankfully acknowledge that God did not leave himself without holy men as living witnesses in every branch of that Church. And we record, with deepest gratitude, how, more than in any other country, he preserved in our own country both individual and congregational life, with orthodox standards of faith. Still, taken as a whole, the Protestant Church was in a dead state throughout the world; while, during the same period, infidelity was never more rampant, never more allied with philosophy, politics, science, and literature. It was the age of the acute Hume and learned Gibbon; of the ribald Paine, and of the master of Europe, Voltaire; with a host of *litterati* who were beginning to make merry, in the hope that God's prophets were at last to be destroyed from the earth. Rationalism triumphed in all the Continental churches.

Puritanism in England became deeply tainted with Unitarianism. The descendants of the Pilgrim Fathers had, to a large extent, embraced the same creed in America. The Established Churches in England and Scotland, though preserving their confessions, and having very many living men in the ministry, suffered, nevertheless, from that wintry cold which had frozen the waves of the great Reformation sea, and which was adding chill to chill. The French Revolution marked the darkest hour of this time; yet it was the hour which preceded the dawn. It was the culminating point of the infidelity of kings, priests, and people;—the visible expression and embodiment of the mind of France, long tutored by falsehood and impiety,—it was Satan let loose on earth, that all might see and wonder at the Beast! That Revolution inscribed lessons in letters of blood for the Church and for the nations of the world to learn. Christians accordingly clung nearer to their Saviour amidst the dreadful storm which shook and destroyed every other resting-place, and were drawn to the throne of mercy and grace, thereby becoming stronger in faith and more zealous in life. The indifferent were roused to earnest thought by the solemn events which were taking place around them. Speculative infidels even, became alarmed at the practical results of their theories. Mere worldly politicians trembled at the spectacle of unprincipled millions wielding power that affected the destinies of Europe, and recognised the necessity of religion to save the State at least, if not to save the soul. Men of property, from the owner of a few acres to the merchant prince, and from no higher motive than the love of their possessions, acknowledged that religion was the best guarantee for their preservation. In countless ways did this upheaving of society operate in the same direction with those deeper forces which were beginning to stir the churches of Britain, and to quicken them into new life.

The history of Europe during the first part of the present century, is a history