

THE RELIGIONS OF SYRIA.

A circular issued by the Committee of the British Syrian Schools gives the following information as to the various races and religions in Syria:—

In some respects it is the great misfortune of Syria that its inhabitants are of so many creeds, living side by side, never coalescing, always in open or concealed jealousy and enmity—Druses, Jews, Mohammedans, and all the different sects of so-called Christians. These latter we may divide as follows:—Maronites, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Armenian Jacobites, &c. They have much in common—truth overladen with superstition, a common origin and a common corruption.

THE MARONITES.—These, in fact, are Roman Catholics, but take their name from Maron, a hermit of the fifth century. They acknowledge the Pope, and keep their feasts according to the Latin Calendar. They baptize by sprinkling and anointing with oil; give the Sacrament to the laity in one kind only. They practise Mariolatry, image-worship, intercession of the saints, of extreme unction, and believe in purgatory and in prayers for the dead. They are a branch of the old Syriac Church. Their convents abound all over the Lebanon, and they have amassed property. They are exceedingly superstitious, believing in the wildest legends; and the power of their priests is so great that the entrance of light into their dark fastnesses is most difficult. They are much disliked by other Christian sects, and are accounted also as the hereditary enemies of the Druses; the feuds between them and the Druses being, in a great measure, the cause of the massacres in 1860.

THE GREEK CATHOLICS.—These consist largely of proselytes gained over by Jesuits and Romish priests in the last 200 years. Many are of the wealthier classes. They acknowledge the Pope, and are Roman Catholics in most of their rites. They baptize by immersion with anointing; give the bread and wine mixed to the laity; hold their service partly in Greek and partly in Arabic, and worship saints, images, and pictures.

THE GREEK ORTHODOX.—(or Greek Schismatics as they are called by the other party), from which the above have split away, are called Greek from the connection with the Greek Oriental Church. They are strongly in sympathy with Russia, being one with her in creed though they agree with the Romish faith in most respects, but differ in several important points. They do not acknowledge the pope, but consider the Patriarch the spiritual head of their Church. They believe in the Procession of the Holy Ghost from the Father alone. They reject purgatory, baptize only by immersion, hold the intercession of the saints, prayers for the dead, worship pictures, and observe the old style in their Calendar. The great central superstition of the Greek Church is the so-called miraculous fire on Easter Eve from the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem, which is a scene of the wildest fanaticism.

All the above Churches allow the marriages of the parish priest once before ordination, but forbid it to monks, bishops, and patriarchs.

THE ARMENIANS.—These are divided into two classes; the one approximating closely to the Romish, the other to the Greek Church. The distinguishing feature in their religious creed is that they deny the human nature of Christ. They are great worshippers of relics, and are ornate in their vestments and ritual. Amongst these various creeds and superstitious Protestant truths is manfully struggling for a footing, and begins at last to be recognised as "one of the Churches." But side by side with the Evangelical Missionary Agency arise many a Jesuit institution, with energy and effort, increasing year by year, and ever since their expulsion from Europe, the Jesuits have established themselves more firmly in Syria, having large funds at their control, and many adherents among the Churches in alliance with Rome. They are the great opponents of our schools, opening new ones in their immediate vicinity. In the remoter schools at Tyre and the Lebanon their persecution was more decided, such was waylaying the children, beating, if they ran away, following them into the schools, dragging them out; and