

## OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

### EVANGELIZATION IN FRANCE.

In previous letters I gave a brief account of Mission work in France, by the "Evangelical Society of France" and by the "Central Protestant Society." I shall now try to describe the leading features of the "Evangelical Home Mission," or "Mission Intérieure," as it is called. The

#### HOME MISSION,

so far as it can be said to be a distinct society, had its origin, eleven years ago, in the south of France. The condition of the country, morally and spiritually, at the close of the Franco-German war, was such as to excite the sympathy of Christian people of all denominations, and an effort was made to engage all laymen as well as pastors, according to their gifts, in some Christian work, with the view of directing the minds of the people, now occupied with their calamities, to higher and nobler thoughts and purposes. Groups of Christians met to study the Word of God, and to encourage each other in their season of darkness, and this naturally led to efforts to draw others into their meetings, to share in the comfort and consolation these unions were found to yield. Mothers' meetings were organized, Sunday schools for the young were opened, and "Conferences" were held, when some topic deemed suitable to the occasion was discussed in terms adapted to the capacity of the audience, and in a spirit fitted to gain attention and win confidence. In order to serve as a bond of union amongst these various groups, a "Central Committee" was formed at Nizmes, Mons. Babut, one of the most active as well as one of the most able and evangelical pastors of the Reformed Church, taking the leading part in this fresh evangelistic movement—a position which he continues to occupy. The success of the scheme attracting attention in other parts of the country, prominent men, such as pastor Theodore Monod, so well known in America and Britain, aided the work with characteristic zeal and energy. Agents—some temporary, others permanent—were engaged to visit different districts, to arouse an interest in the objects of the "Central Committee," and to organize branch associations. At length, in 1879, a

#### PARIS COMMITTEE

was formed to aid the Southern Committee, and to extend the influence of the mission to those northern and central portions of the country which it was found impossible for the "Central Committee" to overtake. This branch of the Mission—also composed of Christians of all denominations—occupies itself chiefly with the evangelization of Roman Catholics, by means of public lectures and conferences in districts where no Protestant service is held. It also aids the other Missionary Societies in forming stations, and where churches have been established, it seeks to add to their membership by its work amongst the Catholic portion of the population. In this way the Paris Committee has entered thirty-three departments; and judging from the reports which appear from time to time, the success which has attended the labours of its agents has far exceeded their expectations. M. M. Fournau, Reveilland and Hirsch—names familiar to all acquainted with evangelization in France—are always at work in some part of the country, and almost invariably meet with a hearty reception from all classes of the people. But in addition to these permanent agents, many Paris pastors, such as M. Monod, M. Prèssense, M. Meyer and others, pay occasional visits to different localities, and hold meetings—"popular reunions" they are called in France—and aid in every way the progress of the work aimed at by the committee. The "reunions" of Mr. McAll, which are extending so rapidly to all parts of the country, act in harmony with those of the "Home Mission," the two mutually helping each other, the agents of the one acting as the agents of the other, both having the same object in view.

The most friendly relations exist also between this and the other missionary societies, to which it acts as an auxiliary, serving as a bond of union between the different stations, and having on its committee representatives of the general societies. Colporteurs visit country fairs and dispose of Bibles, Testaments, religious books, etc. Sewing classes are held in which the young are taught to work, and religious instruction imparted at the same time, hospitals and prisons are

visited, and the consolatory truths of the Gospel spoken.

How are the services of evangelists received, and what fruit do they bear? With regard to fruit, it would be premature to say much. It is still the sowing time in France, and right glad all friends of the truth are that they have leave to sow, knowing that the seed possesses a vitality which will one day manifest itself. Of the reception of the agents of the Mission, both by Roman Catholics and Freethinkers, it can be truly said that but little opposition is shown in any part of the country, even in those districts most subject to the power of the priests. A respectful hearing is given to the speakers, and in most cases a warm, even an enthusiastic reception is accorded. Very generally an invitation is extended to them to repeat their visit. Of course much depends on the judgment of the agent who understands his audience, and has tact to put the truth in a form least offensive to the prejudices of the people. In several Roman Catholic towns where conferences have been held, places of worship have been opened, and a fair attendance secured. Country journals tell of towns where fifty, one hundred and more families, disgusted with the intolerance of Romanism, and with the hostile attitude of the priests to the republic, with the absurdity of reported miracles, and the scandals which the law courts reveal, have left that Church and embraced Protestantism. There may be exaggeration in this, but still the fact of political journals in France noticing religious meetings of this sort, shows that there is substantial progress being made. The *Monde*, a Catholic paper, referring to certain addresses by M. Réveilland at Dijon, says: "M. Réveilland, formerly on the staff of a Republican journal at Troyes, and calling himself a delegate of a Committee of Instruction, held three meetings, where, on pretext of exposing the tendencies of modern thought and the dangers of clericalism, he attacked with fury the Jesuits, the Inquisition, the Dragonnades, Louis XIV. and Popish superstitions. He treated his subject with a vehement declamatory eloquence which seemed greatly to please his audience. He was applauded. After all, however, his eloquence was only a trick," etc. Still there was applause, on the showing of the *Monde*. M. Theodore Monod having delivered a lecture on *Jesus Laïque* at Boulogne-sur-mer, the *France du Nord* published a very sympathetic report of it, in which, while taking exception to the ideas expressed, it rendered homage to the talent and liberalism of the speaker. Another paper, after speaking of two lectures by M. Bertrand at Viré, says that he "caused to vibrate the chord patriotic and the chord religious of the Virois," etc. In Canada these matters may seem small and insignificant, but in France they are not so—they are full of significance and meaning.

Agents of the Mission report being warmly received by the authorities of the towns they visit, public rooms being often put at their disposal, and an attendance of four hundred, sixty at least being women, being far from uncommon. On visiting privately some of those present at the "Conference," the agents often hear remarks such as these: "It is the first time that we have heard the Gospel announced in that manner, there is nothing to be said against it; it is the truth." A Catholic teacher who had been present at one of these Conferences, with a large number of his scholars, said, "We should like to have Conferences like that every fortnight." M. Fournau says that on Christmas Day last he had at Amiens at least fifty Catholics in an audience of two hundred and fifty, at morning worship a remarkable fact when it is remembered how sacred that day is held to be by Romanists, and when the modest room and cold service of the Reformed Church is compared with the joyous cathedral and its sensuous service. In the evening, again, Catholics formed three-fourths of his audience, the attendance of Protestants being small. Again he relates that during a recent visit to the Department of the Nièvre, the Mayor of a Catholic commune gave him a Catholic church to speak in—a church ornamented by pictures of saints and fresh flowers. Here he held his conference with men on one side and women on the other. In the middle of the meeting, a wedding party entered to the music of a violin. M. Fournau, taking advantage of the occasion, suitably addressed the company, speaking of the family institution. On leaving, the father of the bridegroom said to his son, "There is a gentleman who, for nothing, has spoken more and better things than the priest to whom you

paid seventy francs." But I must close. Enough has been said to prove that liberty to meet and speak exists at present in France, and that France is willing, nay, is demanding that the Gospel be preached. In these circumstances, what an obligation is laid upon the sons of the martyrs and heroes of Reformation times to proclaim the Gospel! How should all Christians pray that the Protestants of France should not remain mute in the presence of crowds who are dissatisfied with a religion they no longer desire, and who are ready to receive at their hands the message of peace. Those who are responding to the call deserve the sympathies and aid of all Christian people.

The receipts of the "Central Committee" during 1881 were 18,875 francs, and the expenses 16,331. The receipts of the Paris Committee were 19,500 francs, and its disbursements 14,896. Both Committees shared in the generous contributions which came from the United States, as a result of the visit of Messrs. Réveilland and Dodds, who also paid a brief visit to Canada.

Having now given the readers of THE PRESBYTERIAN some idea, however imperfect, of the present position of the Reformed Church of France, and of the work which French Christians are doing for the evangelization of their fellow-countrymen, I shall, on future occasions, give a *resumé* of the operations of other Missions, such as those of Mr. McAll, Miss De Broen, etc.

T. H.  
Paris, 3rd March, 1882

### "ECCLESIASTICAL AMUSEMENTS."

MR. EDITOR.—The practice of ecclesiastical money-making by means of fairs, festivals, "socials," "entertainments," concerts and tableaux, is growing to such undesirable proportions in connection with the support of religious ordinances, that it is giving serious concern to the earnest Christians among ourselves and in the United States. One of the most vigorous protests this growing evil has called forth is a small brochure on "Ecclesiastical Amusements," by the Rev. E. P. Marvin, Presbyterian minister of Lockport, N.Y., who brings together warnings recently uttered from various quarters in regard to this injurious custom, which in many places is sapping and weakening the very life of the Church. Even secular moralists see it and its fruits. In a recent number of the "Century Magazine," Mr. Howells, in describing the life of an American village, says: "Religion in E— had ceased to be a fact of spiritual experience, and the visible Church prospered in proportion as it ministered to the social needs of the community." In too many places in Canada is this true, and the Church, stepping down from her high position and office, spends its energies and depends for support on "ministering to the social needs of the community," and even providing their amusements. Nor is this the whole evil done, though it is no light evil to turn the highest instruments to lower uses, for "if the salt has lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted?" But besides this, the Christian Church faithlessly deserts its first principles in resorting to such means of support. Christianity is to be the great counteractive of innate and obstinate human selfishness. Its central force is to be "the expulsive power of a new affection." But when the Church, instead of relying on its Divine Master for power from on high to "cast out devils," and lead men to act from heavenly principles, stoops, on the contrary, to minister to the selfish principle, by offering her people an equivalent in pleasure or amusement of some sort for what should be given out of love to Christ, she is simply deserting her colours and giving up the battle, with the sure penalty of ultimate defeat that must inevitably follow faithless cowardice.

But Mr. Marvin puts the matter so forcibly that I give some extracts from his pamphlet. His first position is that "these methods of raising money for the Lord are all contrary to the precepts and example of His Word, and therefore they cannot please Him. The simple method of free-will offerings alone is approved, and all other methods are virtually condemned (study Ex. xxxv. 5, 21, 29; 2 Cor. viii. and ix.; Luke vi. 35, and Matthew x. 8). What if Moses had instituted a grand carnival or bazaar to draw the surrounding heathen into his camp, and get means to build the Tabernacle? How would it comport with the character of the early Christians to read in one of Paul's epistles suggestions that the saints at Corinth got up some amateur theatricals or Isthmian games, to raise money for the poor saints at Jerusalem,