

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

PROTESTANT ITALIAN CHURCH IN SWITZERLAND.

PECULIAR CONNECTION BETWEEN CHURCH AND STATE.

" Besides her seventy-seven mission stations in the Italian peninsula, Elba, and Sicily, the Waldensian Church has now two representatives in South America; one is far hence among the heathen in South Africa; and now Switzerland invites help from the Waldenses for her children in the cantons of Ticino and the Grisons, who are Italian in speech if not in nationality. —CANADA PRESBYTERIAN, 13th Feb.

The facts in the paragraph above deserve to be stated more fully. This letter, therefore, is intended to explain the circumstances out of which arose the necessity for the Swiss Church to ask the Waldenses to send pastors to some of those Italian-speaking parishes which were without incumbents. It will, at the same time, bring into view certain novel features of Presbyterianism as they are exhibited in the church of the Grisons. But first, a few words regarding the position of the

CANTON OF THE GRISONS

Amongst its fellow states. This Canton, once inhabited by the ancient Rætians, forms the south-east corner of Switzerland, and includes one-sixth of the entire Swiss territory. On many maps it is called Graubunden, or "Gray Leagues," from its inhabitants having, at the beginning of the fifteenth century, banded together and formed three leagues for the purpose of freeing themselves from the tyranny of their ecclesiastical and civil rulers. These leagues were subsequently united into one republic, and joined the Swiss Confederacy in 1803, on the fall of the Helvetic republic. The position of this Canton has recently become well known to tourists and invalids from both sides of the Atlantic, because one of its districts—the Engadine—from its elevation and the purity of its air, is now a great health resort in the hot months of summer. The population of the Canton is about 100,000, two-thirds of whom belong to the Romansch race the other third being Germans and Italians. In some portions of the country the people are mostly Protestant, in others Catholic; while in certain parts, they are about equally divided. The Protestants, however, number three-fifths of the whole population. The languages spoken are German and Italian, and the Romansch and Ladin, which are two dialects of the Rætian. The Church of the Canton, which comprises about 100 parishes, may be called the

ESTABLISHED PRESBYTERIAN.

At present there are only seventy-five clergy doing duty, and five without charges. The government of the Church is exercised jointly by a Synod, which meets yearly, and is composed of ministers only with three assessors, and the Protestant members of the civic council of the Canton who appoint the assessors and sanction the decisions of the Synod. There are eight *Colloquies*, or Presbyteries, and here also the lay element is wanting.

Formerly there was a college at Coire, the capital town of the Canton, in which theological students received their education, but it was abolished by the Grand Council, and the funds converted into bursaries to enable students to attend some Swiss or German university. German is the language in which instruction is given, and too frequently the theology is of an advanced German type. Twenty years ago subscription to the Helvetic Confession ceased to be necessary, and now the utmost latitude of doctrine is allowed. At ordination, ministers undertake (1) To preach the Word of God as contained in the Scriptures, in harmony with the fundamental principles of the Reformed Evangelical Church, and according to their light and conscience; and (2) to observe the ecclesiastical constitution of the Canton, and all regulations and decrees of the Synod. As happens occasionally in France, so in the Grisons, an orthodox pastor may teach one doctrine in the morning, and a liberal pastor, addressing the same congregation in the afternoon, may teach the very opposite. The orthodox pastors are now few in number, and there is even a third, or middle class, who are ready to teach orthodox or advanced (liberal) doctrines according to the tastes of the people whom they happen to address.

Each congregation is free to choose its own minister, but the engagement is only for a year; after that the

connection may cease by either party giving six months' notice. The salaries of the pastors vary from 200 to 400 dollars a year, a few only reaching 600. Each parish has a manse which is supplied with fuel by the people. The stipend comes from funds set apart at the Reformation by the government for the Protestants; and, when necessary, a tax is imposed and like other taxes is collected by the civic authorities. Voluntary giving is not understood, and even collections at the church doors are rare. Admission to the Lord's table is largely a matter of form here, as in many continental churches. By the constitution of the Church all permanent residents in the Canton belonging to the Reformed faith are regarded as members, and at the age of seventeen have the right to vote.

Generally speaking, the attendance at church is not large, the congregation varying from 100 to 400, according as they are German, Romansch, or Italian, the last being the most particular in observing forms at all events. I have been present at Romansch services, and although understanding scarcely a word of what was said, there seemed to be life and vigour in the preacher, and the people were attentive and reverent in their manner.

VISITS FROM ITALIAN DEPUTIES.

In 1856, just eight years after the Waldenses had permission to enter on the work of evangelization in Italy, the Synod of the church sent two of its members to visit the Protestant Italian churches of the Grisons, and to invite them to assist in the missionary work in which they were engaged. The deputies were warmly received, but up to the summer of last year (1883) no further intercourse took place. Subsequently Signor Gavazzi visited the same churches, hoping they might join the Free Italian Church, of which he was the representative. They stated, however, that if they formed relations with any religious body outside the country, it would be that of the Waldenses. Last summer when I was in Genoa, my friend, the Rev. Donald Miller, told me that he and Prof. Comba, of Florence, were about to spend a few weeks amongst these Swiss churches, and I agreed to accompany them, which circumstances afterward prevented me from doing. On their return, however, Mr. Miller wrote me the result of their conferences—a full report being made to the Waldensian Synod, and afterwards published in the December number of the *Catholic Presbyterian*. At first they had to proceed very cautiously, so as not to alarm the liberal pastors, but several events had prepared the way for them, so that their work was lighter than they had anticipated. The Italian Protestant churches are found chiefly in the valleys of this Canton—Val Poschiavo and Val Bregaglia—both well known to summer tourists.

VAL POSCHIAVO

runs like a wedge down into Italy, and through it is the highway from the Engadine by Pontresina, over the Bernina Pass into the Valtellina. The majority of the people in this valley are Roman Catholic. But those who are Protestant here, as well as in the other valley, are strongly attached to their faith, and seldom intermarry with those of a different creed. When they do so it is stipulated that the children shall be brought up in the Protestant faith. Mr. Miller says that the people of Brusio, one of the Protestant parishes, had wanted to sell their land in order to offer a better stipend to their minister, but learning that the Roman Catholics were ready to purchase, they decided not to sell. The second parish is that of Poschiavo, a large town—in which the doctrines of the reformation were first preached in 1544 by Giulio de Milario, who had escaped from a Venetian prison, and a church was organized in 1549. Protestantism in the valley was threatened with extinction at the time of the Valtellina massacre in 1623, when a band of Roman Catholics, headed by their priests, attacked the Protestants, but with the exception of 26 who were killed, all the rest escaped into the Engadine. On their return to their homes the Protestants increased in numbers, and in 1627 their former worship was resumed.

It is interesting to know that the first printing press in the Grisons was set up in Poschiavo, where in 1560 the New Testament was printed in the Ladin dialect. The books printed here helped greatly to extend the reformed doctrines. Unfortunately the zeal of the people has cooled down since those early days, for Mr. Miller says that at present religious books are neither printed nor sold in their large towns.

The pastor of Poschiavo—Parroco Job. Michael—is a German Swiss. While at Florence studying the Italian, he had heard of Prof. Comba, of the Waldensian College, and to him he wrote regarding a pastor for the neighbouring parish of Brusio, and this prepared the way for the visit of the deputation. The Waldensian Synod at its meeting in September last appointed to this charge a brother of Prof. Comba, who had returned from the Free Church College, of Edinburgh, where he had spent a year after completing his studies at Florence. I met him last summer at Torre Pellice, and found him a young man of culture and refined manners, who could, in addition to French, Italian and German, speak English well. It is to be hoped that he may be the means of awakening greater religious zeal, not only amongst his own parishioners, but throughout the valley, and that in time additional Waldensian pastors may be called into the Grisons, and that the college at Florence may be attended by more Swiss students. It appears that a formal resolution of Synod, sanctioned by the great Evangelical Council, will be needed to render a course of study at the Waldensian College equivalent to that of a Swiss or German university, but no great difficulty is anticipated in getting such a resolution passed. In that case great benefit to the Swiss portion of the Italian church will undoubtedly be the result.

VAL BREGAGLIA

begins near Chiavenna, at the head of Lake Como, and runs east to the Maloja Pass, when the Engadine begins. All the Swiss inhabitants of the valley are Protestant. Almost all of them are in good circumstances, own land, and are industrious and independent. The valley is narrow, and full of fine scenery. High mountains enclose it on the south, shutting out the sunlight from some of the villages for nearly three months in the year. The reformed doctrines first reached this valley in 1530, when Bartolomeo Maturo, prior of the Dominican Convent of Cremona, was received as minister of Vicosoprano, where he remained eighteen years. His successor—Pietro Paolo Vergerio—a learned man, gave such an impetus to the new faith that to this day the Roman Catholics have failed to gain a footing in this valley, which has seven parishes, with a membership of some 1,506.

THE REFORMED DOCTRINES

were introduced first into the German districts of the Grisons, shortly after Zwingle began his work of reformation at Zurich. In the southern part of the Canton light came from Italy. Many reformers being obliged to fly from that country found refuge in the valleys of the Grisons, as well as in the Valtellina. Here they presented the new doctrines, and founded some twenty churches. In 1620 a second St. Bartholomew almost extinguished the churches in blood, and now all that remains here of the Italian reformation work of the sixteenth century, are these nine little churches. Of the peculiar order and

FORMS OF WORSHIP

in these churches, Mr. Miller says: "The service began by the singing of a psalm or hymn by a choir of young people. The congregation do not sing, and having no books in their hands, they do not even know the words that are being sung. When a young woman of the church marries, she ceases to sing in church, and takes her seat among the matrons, who sit together, apart from the men. When the hymn is sung, the minister mounts the pulpit and reads a prayer, the congregation standing. The text is then given out, and after that the people sit down to hear the sermon. A second prayer is read, and the benediction pronounced, and when the minister has descended from the pulpit and taken his seat at the foot of the steps, the choir sing another hymn. The service ended, the women rise and go out first, the men stand in their places while the minister passes out, then they follow." When preaching to congregations in both of the valleys, the deputies found the audiences most attentive, and in evident sympathy with evangelical preaching. Regarding the

MORAL AND SPIRITUAL

condition of the Protestants of both the valleys, Mr. Miller writes: "The moral condition of the people is said to be exceedingly good. They are sober and industrious. What they need is spiritual quickening. If a judgment may be hazarded regarding the religious state of these Italian Protestants, I should say that there is much room for improvement. There is among them a cold orthodoxy, and a strong attach-