

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

WALDENSIAN EVANGELIZATION IN ITALY.

In a previous letter I gave the statistical results of the Missionary work of the Waldensian Church in Italy for the past year, as shown by the report presented to the meeting of Synod at La Tour, in September. Having recently received a copy of the report as prepared by Signor Prochet, which contains a general survey of the whole Mission field, and the work accomplished during the year, I condense such portions of it as I deem of general interest. It contains nothing sensational. Those who control the Mission are too honest to have recourse to sensational views to create or keep alive sympathy. The tidings it brings are, nevertheless, good, and may be expressed by one word, *progress*—comparatively slow, it may be, but still sufficiently marked to prevent any of those who have put their hand to the plough to look back.

THE MISSIONARY CHURCHES

are grouped into five districts, and they are governed, so far as interior discipline is concerned, by their own Presbyteries, composed of pastors, of evangelists, and of deputies from the congregations. These Presbyteries meet once a year. The committee of evangelization has a right, and it is its duty, to keep a strict oversight of its workers, and it has full liberty to dispose of them as it thinks best. This arrangement has the advantage of accustoming the brethren who have come out of Roman Catholicism to ecclesiastical life, without allowing them to fall into serious mistakes. When a Church can support a minister, it acquires the right to choose one. Every three years, the ministers and deputies of the five districts assemble in a "General Conference." The annual Synod of the Churches of the Valleys acts like a General Assembly, till the development of the mission churches permit the organization of a general Synod, which will represent all the Waldensian churches of Italy.

GAINS AND LOSSES.

During the past year there were 492 admissions to the Church, but these were to some extent counterbalanced by 296 losses. While, however, the departure of members to other places, and those who have died, are described as "lost," such members can hardly, strictly speaking, be said to be *lost* to the Church. Those who emigrate, carry with them the faith they have embraced, and often become the centre of a new religious movement, while those who are called away to join the great assembly on high "are not lost but only gone before." It is only those whom the Churches have shut out from their communion that are, humanly speaking, *lost*, and these counted twenty-seven—a proof that the evangelists and missionaries are exercising that discipline which the Gospel commands, and without which no missionary work can long endure.

AGGRESSIVE WORK.

Under this designation is included what is done outside of Churches and places of worship, some of the means employed are: (1.) *Conversations* on railroads, in public conveyances, and wherever contact can be had with the population. In this way seed is sown, and instances prove that it does not remain wholly unproductive. (2.) *Meetings* held in the houses of evangelical families, who invite their relatives and friends who are still superstitious or sceptical. At Genoa, for instance, in the handsome saloon of a palazzo, a large audience has been gathered each Sunday evening for the last two years. There, upwards of eighty Catholics have occasionally been counted, who never entered the regular Church in the Via Assarotti. (3.) *Itinerant evangelization*, including preaching, conferences, etc., where no regular agent resides. In addition to the seventy-seven churches and stations provided with regular services, the evangelists have visited more or less frequently, 152 towns and villages; sometimes invited by individuals moved by curiosity or by more serious feeling to be informed regarding the Gospel; and at other times arriving unexpectedly, when they call an audience together by means of placards or private invitation. For example, the evangelist on arriving without previous notice at Chiomonte and Bardonecchia, hired for a couple of hours the largest room in the hotel, and ran through the streets pressing all to come and hear good tidings. And the results were an audience of 150 in the for-

mer town, and 200 in the latter. At one place a considerable number of the people seized the hand of the evangelist, and thanked him; at the other the Syndic pressed the hand of the speaker, and thanked him, adding, "Why did you not tell me you proposed addressing us as you have done? I should then have procured a larger room." In Sicily, through missionary tours many places of importance have been evangelized—at Girgenti, a non-commissioned officer gravely asked the evangelist if it were right to repeat (as he had done from his fifteenth year) the *Pater, Ave Maria*, and *Gloria Patri*, every night, and to say each prayer seven times. Another accosted him to say farewell, adding in a voice tremulous from emotion, "Sir, I thank you. I was a brute, and you have begun to make me a man." (4.) *Public discussions with the Priests*. Unhappily, of late years the Pope has prohibited all public controversies. Occasionally a village curate or town priest provokes or accepts an argument with the evangelist, the time is fixed, but the debate is prevented by a superior and cannot take place. It may be asked why the

WORK OF REFORMATION

resumed in Italy within the last thirty five years, advances so slowly when compared with its rapid progress in the sixteenth century? The chief reason M. Prochet says, is that the need of a faith is not felt so strongly as at that time. In the sixteenth century men felt the need of religion. When a misgiving arose in reference to the Romish Creed, distrustful hearts sought another to satisfy their yearnings. In the present day, with no confidence in the priests, there is no idea of a search for religious truth elsewhere being worth an effort. Still religious sentiment is not altogether extinct, but those who are its subjects are the least accessible, owing to the prejudices instilled by the priesthood. A second reason may, therefore, be named. In the sixteenth century the Roman Catholic party had the courage of their convictions. They had no hesitation in provoking, or in accepting the challenge of the Reformers. The audience was at liberty to hear both sides—to judge and choose for itself. If this were the case now the work of evangelization would, doubtless, advance by gigantic strides in Italy.

PROGRESS IN PUBLIC OPINION.

A great change has gradually come over the conduct of the people towards the evangelists, since the earlier years of missionary work, when, in many places the lives of the agents were in danger from fanaticism. True, the law has been on the side of the missionary since Italy was united under the sceptre of a constitutional king; but it took time fully to apprehend and to act on the law. Now there remains only some village syndic or underfunctionary in some town, who pretends to ignore that *the law is equal for all*. The evangelists are respected everywhere, and generally well received by the authorities and the educated classes. Here is a case which deserves to be known—the case of a monk enquiring for a Waldensian pastor. "I was visiting a lady," writes Signor M., of Nice, "when the servant introduced a monk who came to seek the address of an evangelical minister. 'Here is one,' said the lady, pointing to me. The monk explained that in the hospital, managed by himself and his colleagues, a Belgian Protestant lay dying, who was most desirous of seeing an evangelical pastor. He added that it was a real happiness for him to be able to conduct me to the bed of the sick man. I followed him immediately. The monks received me well, offered to prepare everything for the Holy Communion should I desire to give it to the sick man, and begged me to return, refusing my thanks, saying they had only done their duty."

Great difficulties used to be encountered at the burial of an evangelical. Fanatical crowds have insulted the mourners, and have gone so far as to disinter the body and throw it on the highway. The change which has come over the people is illustrated by the following fact related by the evangelist at Lucca. On the 9th October last brother Gaspari died at Barga in Tuscany. His faith shed glory over his deathbed, and deeply impressed the bystanders. Being the first case of the burial of an evangelist in the district, Signor D. went to the municipality to ascertain what the authorities intended to do. He was well received and informed that orders would be given that the deceased be interred in the best part of the communal cemetery. Nor was that all; the band offered to play, and the company of the

"Misericordia" asked if they might carry the body of the deceased to its last resting place. The "Misericordia" is an institution found in all Italian towns, is entirely Catholic, and is generally under the direction of the priests. The arch priest of Barga was in despair when he heard of the offer of the "Misericordia," and used all his influence to prevent their proposal from being carried out. The members composing it, however, held their own. Then he entreated that at least the bell notifying the members of the confraternity should not toll. The bell was tolled, however, and the funeral cortege took place as if Gaspari had been an influential member of the Romish Church. "At the head of the procession" writes Signor D., "marched the 'Misericordia' in great numbers, carrying the bier. The band came after, followed by the pastor, relatives and brethren. The widow of the deceased was accompanied by two ladies in deep mourning. One of whom carried a funeral wreath. The people lined both sides of the road and looked on respectfully, as the procession passed between their ranks, then following it, they filled the cemetery. The devotional service was conducted amid profound silence, and taught hundreds of listeners how sweet and comforting is the hope of the Bible Christian, who *knows* that 'there is now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus.'"

RELIGIOUS LIFE.

Some of the fruits of the work in Italy will illustrate the condition of religious life better than general statements. Take the case of *contributions*, though of course this is not always a sure indication of change of heart. The church members contributed, on an average, last year, *sixteen francs a piece*. This is not bad, considering that a large majority of them are but day labourers with families, and that labour is poorly remunerated in Italy. The friends of the mission will be pleased to learn that those whom they aid are making efforts to obtain independence by and by. Out of several incidents, illustrative of the faith of the converts, let me select the following bearing the heading: "God or my mother." Giovanni Besso is thirty-three years of age. Four years ago he embraced the evangelical faith. His parents, who were farmers at Lessolo, did all in their power to make him renounce his new religious convictions, and failing this, they ended by driving him from their home. Giovanni betook himself to Bantoncello, at the foot of the Valley of Brosso. There he gained a livelihood, married, and ere long his wife and her relatives gave up their Romish superstitions. His influence was felt in the neighbouring villages. In the beginning of 1882, Besso learned that his mother was very ill. His resolution was quickly taken; he left the same evening, travelled all night, and arrived at his father's house fatigued, but above all, full of anxiety as to his reception. To his great joy, the invalid welcomed him affectionately, without referring to the past. Several days elapsed, during which Giovanni tenderly nursed his mother. One evening when conversing alone in her room, she took his hand in hers and said, "You love your mother, do you not?" "More than I can tell you," was the reply. "Well, I am dying promise to grant me the last request I make—the last prayer of your dying mother." "Mother I will do all that it is possible for me to do for you, but what is it?" "No," she replied, "I will have no conditional promises, assure me that you will do exactly what I ask of you." "I can only repeat again, I will do whatever it is possible for me to do." "Very well, I shall tell you to-morrow morning what I expect." Next morning the mother resumed the conversation thus: "In an hour the priest will arrive to give me the communion. I ask of you, as a last favour, to recite the prayers with me." "Oh, my mother," replied poor Besso, "you know that is what I cannot do." "Begone then," was her answer, "and appear no more here," and the invalid turned her face towards the wall. With anguish of heart, while his voice choked with emotion, Besso placed himself at the foot of the bed. "Mother, mother," he said, "ask of me all I have, ask my blood even, and you shall have it; but do not ask me to deny my Saviour by offering to created beings, prayers which should be addressed to Him alone." Without moving her head, she repeated the terrible words: "Begone! you are no longer my son." Besso staggered out of the house, wandered all day in the neighbourhood, a prey to indescribable anguish, and only found some solace in prayer to Him who could deliver him from this trial. Towards