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## PROTESTANTISM IN FRANCE.

The Contemporary Review for November, 1901, contains a striking article on this subject; it brings out this singular paradox, that while the Protestant spirit has taken possession of France, Protestantism as a form of Church life is declining. Mr. Richard Heath illustrates and explains at length this remarkable statement. Recently a book has been published in France entitled "Le peril Protestant." According to the writer of this book, an opponent of Protestantism, "The Protestants in France have got hold of the sources of power, and are very influential, not only in the political world, but in centres where power is more real and less subject to the fitful changes of public opinion: the Magistracy, High Finance and the Educational World." Protestants are said to be masters of three-fourths of the Paris banks, and are accused by Mr. Renauld of having helped to bring about the fall of the great Catholic bank, the Union Generale.

In the old days of persecution, Protestant children were torn from their parents and compelled to receive Roman Catholic education. "To day the character and organisation of public instruction in France has come into the hands of men who are for the most part Protestant of Protestants and who appear to be accomplishing a work which will some day be recognised even by modern evangelicals as a proof that "there is a God that judgeth the earth." This we are told does not mean the ejection of religion from the schools but rather an effort to deliver them from all clericalism and every kind of denominational teaching. "Under Mr. Jules Ferry and those who have carried on his policy, three men originally Protestant pastors, Felix Pécant, Ferdinand Buisson, and Jules Stey, have largely influenced the reorganisation of the

education of the coming generation in this sense."

Felix Pécant, Director of the Normal High School for girls at Fontenoy, seems to have had a remarkable influence. One critic declares that the school is "a nursery of democratic vestals and zealots, a laic Port Royal." "Yes," said M. Labatier, "Pécant did introduce into Fontenoy something of the Jansenist spirit—independence in matters of conscience, inward religion, sweet and serious morality, enlightened and solid reason." Mr. Heath tells us that to this spirit he added a new element, and one which transfigured all others, a spirit of philosophic and religious tolerance. Lay education, he asserted, only put positive religion in peril when that religion instead of being truly religious was petrified in ecclesiastical formulas, rites, practices and supernatural history.

A writer in the Revue des Deux Mondes, June 15th, 1898, speaking of the part played by liberal Protestantism in the laicization of public instruction, says it has contrived in the French Primary Schools "to avenge God." "Writing over its doors 'laical' the school is surrounded by an ensemble of ideas and sentiments, inspirations and aspirations, which may be described as a sort of legacy of Protestantism, and especially of Liberal Protestantism." That is, that while no theological teaching is allowed the spirit of the teaching has been made more truly godly than it was and tends to become more and more so. But we come again to the paradox in the language of Mr. Heath. "What makes 'La Conquete Protestante' (as he calls it) of such profound interest is that while the Protestant spirit is thus becoming a leading influence in Republican France and the France of the future, Protestantism as a form of Church life and as a religious denomination is dying out. Surely this contemporary phenomenon, intimately related to the history of France and of Protestantism generally, is worthy of thought, and especially worthy of the attention of all interested in the future of the Christian Church." For the full explanation of this we must refer our readers to this very suggestive article. It appears that narrow individualism, dry routine and dead respectability have tended to kill the Protestant Church of France. There are, however, reasons for the decline of Protestantism as an ecclesiastical organisation which are well worthy of investigation. There seem to be signs of a revival and the good work of the McCaul Mission and the Salvation Army is acknowledged. But even an outsider can see plainly that if real, living Protestant churches are to be built up, it must be by Frenchmen themselves who apply to their modern life the power of true faith in and loyalty to Jesus Christ, so that they can not only avenge the wrongs done to their fathers and resist priestly aggressions but also show that Christianity meets their deepest religious and social needs.

## MINISTERIAL LIBERTY.

We hear sometimes of ministers resigning their charges and retiring from the ministry of the Presbyterian church because they deem their liberty is infringed by subscription to the articles of our Confession of Faith. Perhaps a wrong impression is created as to what such subscription implies. If it implied a subscription to the "ipsissima verba" of the confession it would be a hardship; but when we remember that the subscription is to a "system of doctrine" it puts a different face on the question. The system of doctrine contained in the Confession of Faith is the same system that is embodied in the thirty-nine articles of the Church of England and in all the Reformed Confessions. We are of those who think that the framers of our Confession tried to define too much, and that all that is necessary might be put in fewer words; but we do not think that a revised and shortened Confession will depart seriously from "the system of doctrine" contained in that grand old, much-abused, much misunderstood, Confession.

For our own part we do not want a revised edition of the Confession of Faith. We prefer to leave this great historic document un mutilated as a book for Students of Theology and Church History to ponder over; and have a Confession prepared in modern terms of thought to suit our own age. When our forefathers prepared the Confession it was an embodiment of the theological thinking of their time; and a wonderful time it was! Our theologians are surely able to prepare a Confession equally suitable to our own age.

But in the matter of liberty it seems strange to us that a minister should leave the Presbyterian church and enter a Unitarian pulpit. It surely must be a constraint to be compelled to preach a small, contracted, humanized church—one altogether inadequate to the work of redeeming a lost world. And it surely must be a loss of personal liberty to leave a church where every protection is thrown about a minister to secure him independence in preaching what he thinks is God's truth and to enter a church where he must preach the views held by the particular congregation he serves, or leave. One can understand a minister leaving the Presbyterian church because no longer in harmony with her government or her doctrine; but let no minister doing so and becoming subject to a narrower creed and a closer form of government, presume to tell us he is entering into a larger liberty. There are blemishes in the Confession and defects in the carrying out of our church polity; but there is no denomination in which a minister's rights are so well safeguarded as in the Presbyterian church; and none in which he has a wider area of truth open to him, or greater freedom in proclaiming the message given to him from the Word of God.

This age is certainly a trying one for the Christian minister. Many old and long cherished theories are being thrown into the crucible; but the work of criticism is about done. The time for re-construction has come. Let our ministers possess their souls in patience; and while proving all things, hold fast that which is good.