

fire, sword, and the most horrible cruelties, succeeded in extirpating the Reform from Belgium. More than a hundred thousand citizens perished, and Romanism was restored over heaps of corpses. Since then, the Belgians remained servilely subject to the pontifical yoke. Even the name of Protestant became a despised and proscribed title.

In 1789, of a population of from four to five million inhabitants, there remained but one obscure Reformed congregation, and consisted of only from 100 to 150 persons. A venerable pastor, Mr. Devissies, had the courage to go and preach to them the Word of God. He was seized, cast into prison, and threatened with death, when political events changed the aspect of affairs. Belgium was annexed to France, and the first consul, Bonaparte, introduced religious liberty. Under the reign of Napoleon I., however, Protestants were few in number, and no attempts were made at evangelising, for the general attention was turned entirely in another direction.

In 1815, after the battle of Waterloo, Belgium was re-unioned to Holland. It would have seemed natural that, under the government of William of Nassau, a Protestant prince, the Reformation would be called upon to make great progress. But the king, especially, feared to irritate the priests and the Popish laymen of his new territory. He expressly recommended to the Protestant pastors to perform no act of proselytism. The distinguished Dr. Merlo D'Aubigné was at that time pastor at Brussels, and chaplain of the king. He could not act with full liberty; but his preaching was blessed, and Protestantism began to be more respected.

In 1830, a revolution broke out in this country, under the double influence of the liberal party, which claimed national independence, and the Romish clergy, who detested the authority of the Protestant monarch. Belgium violently separated herself from Holland, and the European powers sanctioned this change. The Dutch pastors were expelled. Five or six feeble congregations, of which the majority were foreigners, were the only representatives of Protestantism in Belgium. Mr. Merlo D'Aubigné left Brussels, and accepted the place of professor in the theological school of Geneva.

The cause of the Reformation then appeared compromised and almost lost among the Belgians. But there is an English proverb, "Man's extremity is God's opportunity," and these words were here fulfilled. As the revolutionary movement had succeeded with the aid of the liberal party, the new constitution proclaimed liberty of conscience, liberty of the press, liberty of association, and, consequently, liberty of worship. This was a precious means of action for the friends of the gospel. The British and Foreign Bible Society stationed at Brussels a zealous agent, Mr. Tiddy, who, aided by a few pious auxiliaries, employed himself in spreading the Holy Scriptures through the country. About 10,000 copies of the Bible have been distributed in Belgium during the last twenty years,—divine seed which has fallen here and there upon good and fertile ground.

In 1837, a small number of devoted Christians resolved to establish a "Belgian Evangelical Society." They had but little credit or money, and all human appearances were unfavourable. Was there even a possibility that a handful of unknown men would succeed in propagating the knowledge of the gospel in a country where Popery exercised such tyrannical dominion?—Must they not meet with formidable obstacles at every step? They were not, however, discouraged; and, placing their confidence in God, who employs the most feeble instruments for the advancement of his kingdom, they courageously went forward. Religious tracts were distributed. Colporteurs, teachers, evangelists, pastors, every one put his hand to the work in his special sphere; and although the progress of the truth

may not have been very rapid in Belgium, the harvest has been greater than could have been hoped for in the beginning.

This country now possesses two general Protestant churches, the one salaried by the state, the other sustained by voluntary subscriptions. The Protestant National Church numbers fourteen pastors, at the head of flourishing congregations. The Free Church supports thirty agents, and has fifteen stations dispersed through the most populous districts in Belgium. Every year some new station is founded. It is worthy of remark, that the pastors salaried by the public treasury and the Independents live in perfect harmony. Far from exhausting resources in barren disputations, as is often the case in other countries, they walk hand in hand, understanding that their fraternal union is for them one of the best guarantees of success.

The principal cities in Belgium,—Brussels, Liege, Louvain, Antwerp, &c.,—have at the present day evangelical chapels. At Brussels, the Independent congregation was first formed by the Rev. Philip Boucher. This congregation is, at present, entrusted to the pastor Panchaud, who exhibits as much capacity as fidelity in his ministry. The majority of the Belgian Protestants are new converts. Among them figured, until recently, the Marquis of Aoust.—Roman Catholic by birth, he had served in the navy, and obtained the rank of captain. Having retired from service, he devoted himself to his religion, and was eighty years old when he received the knowledge of the Christian truth.—Conversions are very rare at so advanced an age, and it is still more rare that an aged man has energy enough to acknowledge boldly his opposition to the faith of his family and friends.—The Marquis of Aoust was, in this respect, an honourable exception. Vainly did the priests importune him, and use all possible means to retain him under the tyranny of the Papal church. He frankly followed the way which his God and his conscience pointed out. The Marquis built a chapel at his own expense, beside his chateau. He called a pastor, and expended annually £120 for the maintenance of regular public worship. His efforts were not in vain. Many inhabitants of the neighbourhood followed his example in ranging themselves under the banner of Jesus Christ. This venerable old man died recently, aged 94 years, and his last moments were highly edifying.

Thus the gospel advances in Belgium, and we should rejoice the more in it, as the majority of the inhabitants are so grossly superstitious. Nowhere except, perhaps, in Spain and the more retired districts of Italy, have the priests taught more extravagant fables. You shall judge of it by a few examples.

There is, near Brussels, a place much renowned for its pilgrimages. At certain appointed seasons, thousands of poor people, go thither from all the provinces of Belgium. They walk upon their knees around the altar, and so numerous that the marble pavement is worn hollow. What has been placed in this much frequented chapel? Enter, and you see upon the altar an iron coffin. And what is in this coffin? A distaff with a few bits of thread wound around it. Well! this distaff and thread belonged, according to the declaration of the priests, to the Virgin Mary! The Virgin spun with this distaff, while the infant Jesus slept in her arms! These sacred relics, therefore, work wonderful miracles! What imposture and profanation!

In the city of Liege there is a black virgin who also works astonishing miracles. This black virgin, who seems to belong to the African race, rather than to a European people, in her turn draws innumerable pilgrims. The priests relate that this virgin miraculously protected the city of Liege during a bloody siege, and that she received all the enemy's bombs into her apron!

There is also a saint who cures all horse dis-

eases. Sick horses by hundreds and thousands, are annually led thither from all parts of Belgium. A solemn mass is first celebrated; then the relics of the saints are successively placed on the head of each horse, and their cure is effected. The only truth in this shameful farce is that the Popish ecclesiastics receive much money. Nothing in the world is more lucrative than popular superstitions, to those who possess the art of taking advantage of them.

It is evident that these absurd legends, in cherishing, on the one hand, the credulity of the ignorant, must provoke, on the other, the disdain and scepticism of thinking men who know not the inspired Word. This is precisely what takes place in Belgium. The members of the middle classes are generally unbelievers. They despise the impostures announced by the priests; and as they confound religion with the clergy, they live without God in the world. Unhappy people, who fall into the extreme of superstition, or that of infidelity!

How necessary, therefore, it is to kindle the torch of the gospel in Belgium, and to bear it from place to place, in order to enlighten those who sit in the shadow of death! Thanks to God this work is begun and carried on with persevering zeal! The converted laymen, especially, improve all their leisure moments in exhorting their friends to embrace the Christian faith. Mr. Panchaud has repeated some touching examples of this. Thus, poor labourers, who work in the coal mines, carry with them religious tracts or the Bible, and at the hour of repast call together their companions. There, two or three thousand feet beneath the light of the sun, by a small swinging lamp, they read religious books, and announce the Sun of Righteousness who brings healing on his wings! There is also a merchant who, on Sabbath, performing the benevolent office of colporteur, and provided with a collection of Bibles and religious books, travels along the high roads, visiting villages and striving to benefit souls. This excellent man was ill-treated at the instigation of the priests. Some misguided peasants assaulted him; but scarcely were his wounds healed before he resumed his missionary labours.

I shall close my letter with the account of a conversion. An old soldier, Roman Catholic by birth, fell dangerously ill. His parents called the parish priest, who at his entrance asked the soldier to make his confession. "But why must I confess to you?" asked the sick man. "It is the ordinance of the church," replied the priest. "That may be, but tell me the reasons of this ordinance." "How! you dare to dispute with me. Not so many words; confess immediately." "But I desire to know what I must confess to you," said the soldier. "Ah?" cried the irritated priest, "you raise objections because you have too many disgraceful sins to confess. Well! if you do not confess you shall be eternally damned that is all!" The old soldier was offended by his arrogant tone, and his refusal to explain the rules of the Romish Church. He ordered the priest to leave his room immediately. Soon after, a pastor arrived, who had himself carried arms in a French regiment. Their interview was affecting. The pastor spoke the language of sincerity and faith. The soldier understood that the truth was there. Without needing to confess to a man, he humbly confessed his sins to God and received the grace which is in Christ and him crucified. From that moment he has faithfully walked in the way of salvation.—*Cor. of N. Y. Observer.*

FAMILY READING.

In these long winter evenings, what stores of useful and entertaining knowledge may be laid up in the home circle! The many hours which elapse between night-fall and the period for rest, may be turned to most important account for the mental improvement of the household. Gossip