

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE IN AUSTRIA.

FEEBLE CONDITION OF THE OLD HISTORIC CHURCHES.

We recently concluded a visit to Austria, after passing through several of the provinces, and during our stay heard and read much in regard to the present condition of religious matters in that Empire. I shall, therefore, try to condense, in a few letters, the substance of the information thus acquired, which may prove acceptable to the readers of THE PRESBYTERIAN. And, at the beginning, let me say, generally, that Popery still overshadows that land and from the influence which it exerts politically, more even than by its moral and spiritual power, succeeds in crushing every attempt at intellectual as well as spiritual enlightenment made by other agencies amongst the subjects of Francis Joseph I. In theory nothing could be fairer than the Austrian Constitution. The fundamental law of December 21, 1867 "grants to everyone full freedom of religion and conscience," qualified, however, by another section of the law, which "allows adherents of a religious confession not legally recognized, to hold domestic religious exercises, in so far as they are not against the law or injurious to morals." It will be seen by what follows how the spirit, if not the letter, of this law is everywhere systematically violated. And this notwithstanding the visits of international deputations from the Evangelical Alliance to the Emperor, and his gracious reception of them and fair speeches in reply.

On leaving Saxony, where we had passed the winter, we entered

BOHEMIA,

a country inhabited by a stern, laborious race, who are engaged in agriculture, commerce, and industries of all kinds. The fields are fertile and well cultivated, and the people are honest, intelligent, and prosperous. In this country, rude in aspect, the inhabitants have always been distinguished by the possession of strong characters, both political and religious. Politically, the power of Bohemia is now paralyzed by the German and Hungarian elements of the Austrian monarchy, so that the Czech Deputies have refused to take their seats in the Chamber at Vienna. Christianity was first introduced amongst the Bohemians—a people of Slavonic origin—in the ninth century, and in the fourteenth it was one of the most advanced countries in literature and the arts. In the fifteenth century began the movement of John Huss, in sympathy with that of Wycliffe in England, and these two movements proved to be the harbingers of the Reformation. As the Reformation developed the Bohemian Christians inclined to the views of Calvin rather than to those of Luther—in fact, adopted Presbyterianism. The Jesuits soon entered the country, however, and trouble began; and the defeat of Frederic by Ferdinand of Tyrol was not only the beginning of the Thirty Years' War, but the death-blow to the flourishing Protestant Church of Bohemia. The nobles were executed, the pastors banished, Bibles and all Protestant books were burnt, and whoever hid a Protestant lost his life and property. And yet all these measures proved but partially successful, so that edict after edict followed to complete the work. Thus matters continued up to 1781, when Joseph II., who had banished the Jesuits in 1773, published his

TOLERATION EDICT.

The Protestants both Lutherans and those who had adopted the Reformed faith once more began to meet congregationally. But in many places the edict was neutralized by the Bishops. There were as many as seventy congregations in Bohemia and Moravia, but no pastors. Lutheran pastors did come, but, with their surplices and crucifixes, the people took them for priests in disguise. It was a feeble life the Church now enjoyed. It was ruled by a consistory, appointed by the Government, with a Roman Catholic president; schools were organized, but after a Popish system. In cases of mixed marriages the children were to be brought up as Roman Catholics. In 1859 the war with France and Italy brought absolutism to an end, and the condition of the churches was somewhat improved. In 1864 a General Synod was called at Vienna to arrange a Church Constitution. But the Constitution proved to be only an attempt to assimilate the Reformed Church to the Lutheran, and did little good. A General Synod still

meets once in six years, but its resolutions have to be submitted to the Kirchenrath, and may or may not be sanctioned. In 1871 the Reformed Synod asked a purely

PRESBYTERIAN CONSTITUTION,

but the German Lutherans raised such an outcry that the Government refused the request. Altogether, the Church is in a very depressed condition. No evangelistic work is allowed, the preachers being strictly confined to the precincts of the church walls. Several schools were built, but the new school laws of Austria rendered these ineffective. All schools were made undenominational, which in Austria simply means Roman Catholic. The school books were saturated with Popish doctrines. Being unable to support both their own and the public schools, most of their own had to be given up, and the few that remained had a hard struggle to maintain life. Help does come to some extent from German and other sources, but not sufficient to enable the poor Church to make much progress in such distressing circumstances. This is scarcely to be wondered at when it is remembered that there are some nine thousand Roman Catholic pulpits, with all the influence of the Government at their back, in opposition to some seventy Protestant pastors, poorly supported and with little to cheer or to sustain. Still

THE BIBLE.

continues to be circulated, though since 1876, when colportage was suppressed, the number of copies sold has considerably diminished, last year as many as 12,703 copies of the Scriptures, in whole or in part, found their way into the homes of the people. Part of this is said to be due to emigration. "That is the Bible, is it?" said a man about to join his children, to the agent. "I hear it is a good book. My children wrote to me from America, that before they left Prague, they each got a copy at the station, read it at sea, and now they say that it is all their delight, I must have a copy." In 1881 the Protestants celebrated

THE CENTENARY

of the Edict of Toleration, by holding great meetings throughout the Austrian Empire. There may have been cause for rejoicing by comparing the present with the past; but when one considers the demoralizing influences to which the Bohemian Church was subjected, not only prior to 1861, but those to which it continues to be subjected, the wonder is that any spiritual life remains. The Constitution of the Church is most unfavourable to the vitality of its members; and yet, according to the report of the Evangelical Continental Society for last year, in several parts of the country, revivals have taken place, and in certain country districts an awakening is said to be going on at present among the people. A pastor writes that he has been overwhelmed with work; that he has been obliged to hold meetings every day in two or three places, and, what is more wonderful, he was invited to them by leading Roman Catholics. A pastor from eastern Bohemia, not far from the battlefield of Königgratz, writes that he and all who love the Lord have been gladdened, and have good cause to be gladdened, because not only has the Word been proclaimed, but it has borne fruit both amongst Protestants and Romanists—meetings are numerous attended, and Bible classes are held three times a week. But again, it is added, such meetings have excited the ire of the priests, and one of the evangelists was fined 100 florins for holding public meetings for worship, as it was erroneously alleged. It is to be remembered that all who attend meetings of this kind, to keep within the law, must receive personal invitations. At a place near Prague, the capital of Bohemia, a few people, calling themselves the "Old Reformed Church," were forbidden to admit to their family worship any individual who is not strictly a member of the family. The police force their way into the houses and order even the servants out of the room while family prayers are being held. The Attorney-General at Prague, in connection with cases of this sort, publicly said that it is not even lawful to say grace at meals if any stranger is present. I might continue to repeat instances of the interference of the police in the houses of the people, and of fines being imposed for the reading of the Bible and holding meetings in private residences. But I shall mention only the following, where a man and his wife with a man servant were singing a hymn in the woman's sick chamber, when a gendarme entered, and compelled

them to desist by holding a bayonet to the husband's breast: "Not until the servant, who had served his time as a soldier, called on the gendarme to unfix his bayonet, and asked him whether he knew when and where he was permitted to use his weapon, did he desist and leave, though declaring that he would run the host through at the next opportunity should he offer resistance." The truth is that throughout the Austrian dominions, all who are what is called "confessionless" have practically no religious rights whatever. They must make a confession of faith, and this must be accepted and recognized by the authorities; or they are liable to the inquisitorial interference of the police. And even this will not always suffice, for the magistrates often refuse to receive the documents the people offer, and when the Minister at Vienna is applied to, no answer in the great majority of cases, is ever received to the complaints thus made. So much for the state of matters in Bohemia. In my next letter I shall have something to say respecting Moravia.

T. H.

Florence, Italy, 14 May, 1883.

THE SALVATION ARMY IN KINGSTON.

RELIGION AND DOCTRINE.

He stood before the Sanhedrim,
The scowling rabbis gazed at him,
He recked not of their praise nor blame;
There was no fear, there was no shame,
For one upon whose dazzled eyes
The whole world poured its vast surprise;
The open heaven was far too near,
His first day's light too sweet and clear.
To let him waste his new-gained ken,
On the hate-clouded face of men.

But still they questioned: Who art thou?
What hast thou been? What art thou now?
Thou art not he who, yesterday,
Sat here and begged beside the way,
For he was blind:

And I am he
For I was blind, but now I see;

He told the story o'er and o'er,
It was his full heart's only lore.
A prophet on the Sabbath day
Had touched his sightless eyes with clay,
And made him see who had been blind.
Their words passed by him like the wind,
Which raves and howls, but cannot shock
The hundred fathom-footed rock.

Their threats and fury all went wide,
They could not touch his Hebrew pride.
Their sneers at Jesus and His band,
Nameless and homeless in the land,
Their boasts of Moses and his Lord,
All could not change him by one word.

I know not what this man may be,
Sinner or saint, but as for me,
One thing I know, that I am he
Who once was blind and now I see!

They were all doctors of renown,
The great men of a famous town,
With deep brows, wrinkled, broad and wise,
Beneath their wide phylacteries;
The wisdom of the East was theirs,
And honour crowned their silver hairs,
The man they jeered and laughed to scorn
Was unlearned, poor, and lowly born;
But he knew better far than they
What came to him that Sabbath day,
And what the Christ had done for him,
He knew, and not the Sanhedrim;

—John Hay.

MR. EDITOR,—The Salvation Army has now been working for considerably more than three months in Kingston—long enough for a pretty fair testing of its immediate results. Kingston, though not a large place was undeniably gaining an unenviable reputation as a "wicked" one. That is, outside the large, respectable, church-going community, there was a rapidly increasing mass of carelessness, irreligion, intemperance and "rowdiness," between which and the churches there was a chasm which no existing organization seemed able to bridge. Various expedients have been tried by the pastors and people of several of the evangelical churches. Union evangelistic services have been held and popular evangelists have been invited to come for the purpose of specially appealing to the careless classes. Yet, though some good was done, the great mass of evil remained still untouched. But the Salvation Army "has come, has seen and has conquered." More than eight hundred converts have been won, mainly from the careless, non-church-going class, and among them some of the most notorious leaders in evil, who now hold prayer-meetings among their comrades. The spirit-