

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

EVANGELIZATION IN FRANCE.

In my last letter I gave a sketch of the work which the "Société Evangelique" is doing in France. In my present letter I shall give an equally brief account of the work of the "Société Centrale Protestante."

THE CENTRAL SOCIETY OF EVANGELIZATION dates its origin from 1835, having commenced in Bordeaux. It soon opened eight stations, which were attended to by three agents. In 1850 the number of its agents had doubled, and its annual expenses had increased to 35,876 francs. At present the "Central Society" supports 145 agents, 340 stations, sixty schools and two preparatory theological schools, to which I shall refer more particularly in a subsequent letter. Its missions are distributed over seventy Departments of France, as well as in Algeria and the Colonies. Fifteen new stations were opened in the course of the past year.

The Society keeps two distinct objects in view. First, to gather into churches scattered Protestants in different districts, and to provide religious instruction for them and their children. Its second object is to leaven the minds of Roman Catholics with Gospel truth, and induce them to become members of some Protestant Church. Many of the congregations, originally composed of twenty or thirty families, have now doubled that number by additions from the Roman Catholic communion. Let me give an instance or two of how the stations originate: Pastor Lorriaux, the general agent of the Society, says that twenty years ago a Protestant tailor settled in Maubeuge, in the north of France. He found there four or five co-religionists, and invited them to meet and read a portion of the Word of God every Sunday. Soon others joined them, out of curiosity, perhaps, and at last they became so numerous as to require a larger meeting place, and they built a chapel. Although its members did not escape persecution, and even imprisonment, for holding Protestant meetings, they have outlived this state of things, and Maubeuge is now one of the most flourishing stations the Society has. Take another case—that of the Church of Villefagnan, in the Department of the Charente, about 300 miles from Paris. When the present pastor arrived, fifteen years ago, a few scattered Protestant families only were in the neighbourhood, where half the population had at one time been Huguenots, and where a Huguenot church had been pulled down, along with hundreds of others, by the dragoons of Louis XIV. The pastor collected a few persons in a barn, who received additions from week to week, until they had a sufficient number to erect a temple, as churches are called in France. Here, now, when a lecture is announced on the Gospel, a congregation of at least 350 persons collects, of whom a hundred perhaps are regular members, the others being Roman Catholics attracted by the conference, and the singing, of which the French are particularly fond.

One-third of the stations of this Society originated, the Secretary tells us, amongst exclusively Roman Catholic populations. An example will show how this is done: At Troissy, Department of the Marne, in the east of France, twenty-five years ago, the name of Protestant was unknown. A Roman Catholic woman came to Paris, and entered a pastor's family as a servant, where she became converted by attending family worship. Twelve years after leaving her native town, she returned, and by conversing with her neighbours on the happiness she now possessed, and by reading the Scriptures with them, she succeeded in inducing them to ask a minister to visit them. A pastor from Rheims went to the village, spoke to the people, aroused a strong Protestant feeling, and now the Society has a school and a church at Troissy, with forty-two communicants; and in many families the Bible is read daily, with prayer. From Troissy the movement spread around, and at Epernay, an important champagne district, a hundred Protestants built a church and have regular service.

At Noyon, in the Oise, Calvin's birthplace, a preaching station was opened last year—the first time the Gospel has been heard in that town, perhaps, since Calvin left it. The following account of the origin of the Protestant movement at Limanton, in the Nièvre, will interest Canadians. Dr. Fisch told the story the last time I heard him speak, and M. Lorriaux relates the same facts in one of his reports.

In 1874 Mr. B. left France to settle in Canada. There he made the acquaintance of Father Chiniquy, and by him was brought to a knowledge of the truth. Four years after, he returned to France and settled at Moulins, in the Department of Allier, and joined the Protestant Church. A brother who resided at Limanton, having visited him and accompanied him to church, became so interested in what he heard as to ask M. Carnus, the pastor, for Protestant books, and on his return home related his impressions to his friends and neighbours. Some time after, M. Carnus received the following note: "Sir, I have read and given to others to read, the books you lent me. Now, we want you to come to us and preach the good message. We want a *messe pieuse*—a 'pious mass.'" Pastor C. gladly accepted the invitation, and was received by the people of Limanton with great cordiality and eagerness. The pastor was also invited to visit Moulins-en-Gilbert, a neighbouring village, and found there an equally sympathetic people. One man walked twenty kilometres—more than twelve miles—to be present at an evangelical conference here. "Fifteen years ago," he said, "in one of my journeys, a New Testament was given to me, and since then my five children and I have had no other religious teaching." The movement thus commenced in the Department of the Nièvre in 1869, has spread to different towns, where churches have been built and schools erected, and in 1881 Pastor Castel has settled at Nevers, the capital of the district, and has established religious services in several localities in the neighbourhood. Money has been contributed by a Christian friend to erect a temple at Nevers, and two brothers, merchants in New York, have engaged to pay 3,000 francs a year for the support of the work.

In the Department of the Ain, in 1859, there was but one Protestant parish containing 1,000 to 1,200 Protestants, out of a population of about 360,000, the pastor residing at Ferney. There are now four pastors and four evangelists who conduct regularly public worship in twenty-four localities, and hold meetings in forty-seven hamlets. There are eight Sunday schools attended by 240 children, and eleven elementary schools attended by 390 children, of whom 165 were Protestant by birth, 109 Catholic by birth, but brought up as Protestants, leaving 116 only who remain Catholic for the time being.

The Central Society received for the past year the sum of 230,000 francs, 160,000 of which were contributed by the Churches in France. At least 240,000 will be needed for the expenses of the current year.

I close by quoting a letter addressed by an enlightened Roman Catholic to Pastor Dhornbres of Paris, after he had preached at one of the oldest stations of the Society: "I would not dare to affirm that what you said was understood by the crowd, but I can say that it moved the hearts of those who, Catholics by birth, suffer deeply because they cannot find in the Romish Church the satisfaction of their religious longings. If, as you have well said, religion is the necessary foundation of all society, and if a rational and spiritual worship is the only one which suits intelligent and free minds, your Church alone is capable of giving us this worship, and of uniting authority with liberty in a harmony so often and so vainly sought after. Continue then, sir, your work; it is holy, generous, and of rich promise. The seed which your apostolic word scatters cannot be lost, even where it appears to fall upon an ungrateful soil; hidden in men's hearts, it will spring up for a future harvest. When will the day of reaping dawn? I know not. Shall we see it dawn? I do not think so, but it will come. The future is yours."

T. H.

Paris, 8th February, 1882.

THE SUSTENTATION SCHEME.

MR. EDITOR,—In the first two letters which I addressed to you, I endeavoured to explain the nature and probable effects of the modifications which it is proposed to introduce into the Supplemental Fund Scheme, and in those which followed I have endeavoured to meet the objections which have been raised by Mr. McLeod and others to this plan for securing what is sought—a more adequate support of the ministry than unhappily obtains at present. With your permission, I would state in this letter some objections to the Sustentation Scheme as formulated by the Committee, which in my opinion forbid its adoption by the Church.

1. It makes no provision for meeting the cases of

a large number of congregations, and these the most necessitous, except by such grants in aid as the Fund might admit after paying the equal dividend. The conditions of admission (I., 1) to what is termed the Minimum Stipend platform, are a contribution by the congregation of the sum of not less than \$500 to the Fund, and a rate of giving per member and per family, now required for participation in the Supplemental Fund; it is added, indeed, "or such other standard as may be agreed upon by the Assembly." This last provision being quite indefinite, no calculation can be made on its basis. But taking the two definite conditions, I find that more than 130 congregations, according to their present amount and rate of giving, would be excluded from the Equal Dividend platform. A few of these might be brought up so as to meet the conditions; a very large number could not, at least for many years. What the Scheme proposes (I., 7) is to meet the cases of these congregations by "direct grants on a given basis." It may be said, that at least they are not worse off than under the Supplemental Scheme. But they are, and in three respects. First, in being denied admission to the platform on which the other congregations stand, they are relatively degraded. Second, in the event of the Supplemental Scheme being set aside by the Church, and the Sustentation Scheme adopted on the ground, so often and so publicly urged by the promoters of the latter, that assistance given to a weak congregation in the form of Supplement is nothing better than a "charity," and that the minister benefiting by it is treated as a "pauper," no minister could accept for his congregation such assistance without loss of self-respect, and none should be asked to accept it. It is difficult, indeed, to repress a feeling of surprise, if not a feeling of a stronger kind, in view of the fact that the advocates of the Sustentation Scheme do not hesitate to relegate for an indefinite period a large number of the ministers of the Church to a position which they term "most humiliating," and which they have certainly done their best to render humiliating. Third, even if this difficulty could be overcome—and to me it seems insuperable—there is no security for the same amount of aid being given to this class of congregations as they are at present receiving, and still less for the amount which some of them would be entitled to receive under the modified Scheme now before the Church: no prospect even of this. As the Equal Dividend congregations would naturally have the first claim, those not on the platform could only have divided among them such an amount as was left after the claims of the privileged congregations were fully met. Under the Supplemental Scheme, admission to the benefits of which is on easier terms, provision is fully made (2, c) for exceptional cases.

II. The provisions of the Scheme as applicable to aid-receiving and aid-giving congregations respectively contain invidious distinctions, and when put in force could scarcely fail to be irritating, and might be even oppressive and unjust to the former class of congregations. An aid-receiving congregation must contribute at a certain rate per member and per family (I., 1); must send into the Fund its whole revenue, after paying certain necessary congregational expenses (I., 2); must, on becoming vacant, come to an arrangement satisfactory to the Committee as to what it will contribute to the Fund, before it can take any step towards calling another minister (I., 5); may be brought before the Assembly in the event of its failing to fulfil the terms of this arrangement, and be by the Assembly removed from the Minimum Stipend platform; and it must send to the Committee an annual statement of its accounts. Now, not one of these provisions is imposed on aid-giving congregations. A congregation of this class may contribute to the Fund at any rate per member; it is not required to send into the Fund its whole revenue after deducting the usual congregational expenses, but only the equal dividend or the minister's receipt for the amount, and any further sum it may choose to contribute. Mention is made, indeed, of an amount which each such congregation "will be expected to contribute," but the Scheme contains no provision for enforcing the expectation of the Committee, in the event of the congregation failing to come up to it. Again, a congregation of this class becoming vacant, may proceed to call another minister when it chooses, and without being required to come to any understanding with the Committee as to its contribution to the Fund; it is not required to present its accounts to