

Baptist Churches in France.

IN the small village of Nomain, in northern France, near the Belgian border, a farmer by the name of Ferdinand Caulier once discovered an old Bible somewhere in his home. This was in 1810. He read it with his wife and handed it to his neighbours. These plain people, who were Catholics, noticed that the teachings of this book were quite different from what had been taught them and wished somebody might explain it to them.

In 1815, immediately after the battle of Waterloo—which is 80 km. from Nomain—some British soldiers were billeted near the village. One of these was a pious Christian who spoke French. He often met with these Bible readers and opened up the Scriptures to them. A small meeting-place was built. A few years later, in 1819, a Swiss evangelist by the name of Henry Pyt, who was working for the "Continental Society"—a newly organised society in England for the evangelisation of the Continent—came to this part of France and visited the group in Nomain. For the first meeting, 140 people were present to listen to what he had to say. Pyt received so much response that he and his young wife stayed there almost a year.

It so happened that during the year 1820 a few revived Christians of Nomain read once in an evangelical paper that Pyt had given to them a translation from the English of an article on William Carey, a "Baptist" missionary in India. As Mr. Pyt was away, they asked his wife what the Baptists were. She explained to them that the Baptists did not baptise infants, but only believers upon profession of faith. She told them that her husband and herself had been baptised in this way. These men began to study the matter in their New Testaments and finally expressed the desire to be baptised.

Fearing some doctrinal controversy might arise with the Reformed Churches, Mr. Pyt was rather opposed to this. A few men decided to take him by surprise. So one day, as they were coming back from a meeting and walking near a river, they said like the Ethiopian eunuch: "See here is water; what does hinder us to be baptised?" Pyt could only comply with their desire. They decided to form a church, separating from the rest of the congregation which afterwards became a Reformed Church.

Among them was Louis Caulier, who was over sixty years old and was chosen as spiritual leader. He baptised others in the small chapel which he built in a nearby hamlet. Among those were Joseph Tieffry who became the first consecrated pastor, and Jean Baptiste Crétin who became the first pioneer of the Baptist churches in northern France, the Oise Valley, Lyon and Montbéliard.

Around 1831 an American Baptist pastor from Boston, Dr. Howard Malcolm (afterwards President of Bucknell University), came to France. He was travelling for his health and heard about the Baptist movement that had started in northern France. He enquired about it and asked the Baptists of America to extend a fraternal hand to this new movement. Some time before, Dr. Adoniram Judson, the famous Burma missionary who at the time of his first trials had spent six months in jail in France, had written a letter to the American Missionary Committee, in which he said: "An evangelised France would stimulate all intelligent classes in Europe." The Triennial Baptist Convention of U.S.A. decided to investigate the matter and asked Dr. Irah Chase, one of the founders of the Newton Baptist Seminary and Professor of Theology in this school, to go to France for this purpose. The Newton Seminary took to heart the work in France and Europe.

In 1834, a former student of Newton, Isaac Willmarth, came to France for a few years, and a little later came Dr. Erastus Willard, who devoted twenty-one years of his life to France. They settled at Douai, a centrally located town in northern France not far from Nomain, duly organised the first Baptist church in France with six members (1835), and opened a school for the training of pastors and evangelists. This school was of great service to the Baptist cause in France. Several first grade men had their theological preparation there especially—in addition to J. B. Crétin mentioned above—V. Lepoids, Fr. Lemaire, H. Boileau, Fr. Vincent, Aimé Cadot, who all did a wonderful piece of work. In 1856 the theological school was transferred to Paris and had as professor for several years a former student from Newton, Dr. Edward C. Mitchell.

In 1838 there were seven churches with 142 members. More than once the pastors were sentenced to fines or imprisonment, the church buildings were closed and the evangelistic work was hindered by the police. Several Baptist families emigrated to North or South America to escape persecution.

In June 1849 the first conference of pastors and delegates from Baptist churches met at Verberie, near Compiègne. In 1850, the first Baptist church was definitely founded in Paris, with only four members. Twelve years later its membership was eighty-four. In 1872, on the Rue de Lille, in Paris, a nice

building with a big chapel was erected with generous help from the United States and England. New churches were opened in various parts of France, especially in cities like Lyon, Marseille, St. Etienne, Nimes, Toulon, Nice, Rouen. In Brittany, a mission launched by Welsh Baptists was very active. In northern France, the Church at Denain whose leader was Pastor François Vincent, a man of great courage and missionary zeal, extended its activity in the whole mining district and even into Belgium. About ten churches were founded there. From eastern France and Montbéliard, the Baptists extended their work as far as French Switzerland.

The first twenty years of the Third Republic from 1871 to 1890 were those of the most promising Baptist effort. In England, the great Baptist preacher, C. H. Spurgeon had gained a world-wide reputation and his evangelistic activity had its counterpart in France. Many thoughtful men were attracted by the Baptist ideal of faith, life and church organization. Baptist papers, *La Pioche et la Trulle*, *L'Echo de la Vérité*, *La Cloche d'Alarme*, were diffused in the whole country. At this time, an evangelist of great value, who had until then worked with the McAll mission, Ruben Saillens, came to us. He was a powerful Christian speaker of Huguenot origin. He became one of the best evangelists and the most fruitful author of hymns in France at that time. Another addition of great value to our churches was Pastor Paul Besson, who came from the Swiss National Reformed Church. After having done evangelist work in Northern France, he was called to South America, where he had a considerable influence in Argentina. Mention should also be made of the fine missionary activity among the Mohammedans of North Africa of Mr. Emile Rolland, a Baptist layman of eastern France.

During the previous twenty years of Baptist work in France, the church membership had increased almost threefold. There were forty-five organised churches, thirty-five consecrated pastors, as many lay preachers and more than 2,000 church members. But in these times of theological contention in Europe, the French Baptists lacked spiritual unity. This was emphasised by an extreme individualism. However it may be, for reasons that were partly administrative, partly doctrinal and partly personal, after the regrettable contestations of the last decade of the past century two main groups were formed among the French Baptists. One gathered mainly the churches of northern France and was called "Association Franco-Belge"—Franco-Belgian Association. Its leaders were Pastor François Vincent and especially his son Philémon, a learned and distinguished man who founded the Avenue du Maine Church in Paris. The other group was mainly made up of churches located in south-eastern France and in

Switzerland. It was called "Association Franco-Suisse" (Franco-Swiss Association). Its leaders were Messrs. Ruben Saillens, Arthur Blocher, Robert Dubarry. Pastor and Mrs. Blocher-Saillens were led in 1923 to start a new church in the northern part of Paris, "The Tabernacle," which is independent and is doing a good missionary work in France and far-away.

Today there are seventeen churches in our Federation with 1,000 baptised and 3,000 non-baptised members. The rather precarious situation of our churches is explained by the fact that they have almost all been started in small localities or secondary towns. Their development has been rather disappointing because the best elements, the most educated, have gone elsewhere to cities where they had more opportunities and where they belong to other Protestant churches of which they are often the best members. Except in Paris, our churches have always been small in membership and of a rather plain social level. It was also impossible for them to become independent. It is only now that most of them have become self-supporting, but all evangelistic activities still need help from the outside to keep up.

On account of this, we thought that in order to avoid being in fifty years similar to what we are now, it was necessary to modify our strategy and make efforts to start churches in the big centres. We have already begun work in Lyon, the third city in France, where a church has been founded. Thanks to the help of our American brethren a church building is being constructed. In Niort, chief-town of a French Department, a church has been constituted a few months ago and the work is very promising. One of our immediate projects is to start work in Metz, a city in eastern France, where we have a few Baptists and Baptist groups in the industrial vicinity. We also have in Anzin-Valenciennes, in northern France, a small church which offers at present great possibilities of development and which may have a very promising future if the evangelistic work can be intensified in this very populous industrial region. Moreover our visions grow wider on new prospects for which we trust God will open some new doors: Le Havre, big French port on the Channel where there used to be a Baptist Church which the War has scattered; but some elements might be brought together again as a basis for a new evangelistic effort; Toulouse, a city of south-western France in full development, has some Baptist groups of Spanish origin which would be the nucleus of a new work; Bordeaux, the big port on the Atlantic where several American Baptist missionaries are already at work; Marseille, second city of France, where we have to investigate the possibility of re-gathering some Baptist elements and establish a conquering work; Lille, the capital of the North. This is the part of France where

we have the greatest number of churches though we have none in this city. We have already sent an evangelist to work there relying on the nearby church at Roubaix. There are already a few solid members in Lille.

Besides the evangelistic work accomplished in these important centres, we think that an effort of itinerant evangelisation would offer an opportunity to preach the gospel to the multitudes. An evangelistic car with a tent and some literature, driven by a capable and active evangelist could settle in new spots near places where there is already a church, for example, and begin evangelistic work. This car would enable us to reach many who have never heard of the gospel. To realise all this, we ask God to send us the necessary equipment and men. We pray Him to give us means, men, wisdom, prudence, audacity and love.

France can be evangelised, and it is necessary to do so because she occupies an important place in Western Europe. We believe that our Baptist churches have a message for our countrymen and that our opportunity is especially great at present. Our prayers and efforts should make this evangelisation effective. In spite of the two last world wars that went on for the most part on French territory and the fact that until now the various attempts to reunite French Baptists have failed, all churches bearing the name "Baptist" in France are fully aware of their responsibilities. They know that they are weak but they also know that "the power of the Lord is made perfect in weakness." And they stick fully to this truth: "There is one Lord, one faith and one baptism." Therefore we can face the future with confidence.

(From a correspondent.)

The First Fifty Years, an attractive brochure compiled by Mr. Kenneth Palmer, J.P., outlines the rise and progress from its foundation in 1901 of the Stanmore Baptist Church, Sydney, Australia, where for forty-four years an outstanding ministry was exercised by Dr. C. J. Tinsley, whom Baptists the world over hold in high honour. The original membership of fifteen has grown to the vigorous forward-looking church of today, with its more than 300 members and variety of lively activities, while twenty-six of its members have entered the ministry and another fifteen have become missionaries. A former assistant-pastor, Rev. A. H. Orr, was organiser of the Baptist New Guinea Mission, formed in 1949. Under the ministry of Rev. N. F. Reeve, the church continues to progress. As one of the Jubilee objectives, Stanmore Baptists propose to build in New Guinea what is to be known as "The C.J. and Mildred Tinsley Hospital." The good wishes of British Baptists will accompany the Stanmore church as it marches toward its centenary.