

once thought to be an unfathomable mystery; and in every subsequent reference to others who had never heard it before the details were corroborated in precisely the same manner, a reproduction of which he has here endeavoured to give.

J. HARVEY

*(Late Inspector of Schools, Delhi Circle, North India).*



#### ART. VI.—THE SECESSION OF FRENCH PRIESTS.

THIS remarkable movement, which began about seven years since, is still making decided progress, and is watched with great interest from all sides, by both friends and foes. We often hear exaggerated statements of the number of perversions to Rome in England. The Italian mission is no doubt increasingly active, although its chief success is, unhappily, being achieved within the pale of our own Reformed Church by the spread of medieval doctrines and practices amongst ourselves. On the other hand, there is too little known about the secessions that are taking place from the ranks of the Roman clergy in France, not merely of obscure country priests, but in not a few cases of men of rank, high position, learning, and attainments, who have everything to lose and nothing earthly to gain by the change. The subject is so important, and so much has been advanced for and against, that it has seemed well to collect information from reliable French sources as to the origin and progress of this work, and especially to apply directly to Monsieur Bourrier, its principal director, for a statement of its present position and prospects. Thus, we hope to lay before the readers of the *CHURCHMAN* a fairly correct estimate of the facts of the case.

It was in August, 1895, that M. Bourrier, who had been for twenty years a distinguished priest in the Diocese of Marseilles, sent in his resignation to his Bishop and seceded from the Church of Rome. In his faithful, bold, and yet respectful letter to his diocesan, he stated that during the previous ten years of his ministry he had been struggling with his conscience on account of the errors and superstitions with which Rome has overlaid the simplicity of the Gospel. At last he felt that he could resist no longer. "I leave," he wrote, "the Church of Rome not by the gate of scepticism and infidelity, but because of my faith in Jesus Christ, my only Saviour and my unique Mediator." The Bishop's reply was worthy of his high office, and reflected credit on himself and M. Bourrier. Some time afterwards the latter was appointed pastor of the

French Reformed Church at Sèvres, near Paris, a position which he still holds. There he has been the wise counsellor and faithful friend of an increasing number of his clerical brethren in various parts of France, whose eyes are being opened, like his own, to the corruption of the system in which they have been educated, and who have been led to inquire after a purer and more scriptural faith. These earnest men were for a time received as guests into his presbytery. But as their number increased he opened at Sèvres a "Maison Hospitalière" as a quiet retreat, where they could lodge, study, and commune together, until they could find suitable employment, religious or secular, in which to serve God with liberty of conscience and for the good of their fellow-men. It must not, indeed, be assumed that all these seceders have already become enlightened Christians. Some, by a natural reaction, are feeling their way through doubts and difficulties about even the fundamentals of religion, and others still cling to some of the errors of Rome. It is with such very much as it was in their earlier days with our own and the Continental reformers. Like the blind man of Bethsaida, they see men as trees walking. But they are all, we are assured, honest inquirers, whose moral character is above suspicion. Stringent investigation is made into their antecedents before their admission to the Society, and if these should prove unsatisfactory the door is shut against them. No opportunity is given for making a gain of religious profession by those loose hangers-on that are to be found in every religious community. A certain proportion of them have held high positions as curés in town or country, or as professors in Roman Catholic colleges or seminaries, and their prospects would have been bright if they had stifled their convictions. Such was M. Janssens, once the Director of the Grand Seminary of Oran, who seceded in September, 1899. He had belonged to the congregation of the Lazarites, had studied at Dax, and had been made Professor of Logic and Philosophy in his college, as well as Central Procureur of the Roman Catholic Missions in China. Being asked, on his arrival at Sèvres, "Have you preserved something of your faith?" he replied: "My faith is Jesus Christ, my last, my unique, dogma—the Christ of the Gospel, my only support and my only consolation." "But," he was further asked, "what about the Mass and the Confessional?" "I believe," he said, "too much in the divinity of Christ to need to touch His Body on a consecrated stone. In my heart my soul is in contact with His Soul. That is a Mass." Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed. "As to confession, I have confessed—abbés, priests, even Bishops. Can you understand me?"

Let us say no more about it." To the question whether he would attach himself to Protestantism he replied: "We shall see later on; for the moment I desire to be a good and true Christian, and to earn my bread by the sweat of my brow." His subsequent history we have been unable to follow. This candid and original confession of faith augured well, though it may not be strictly orthodox and in accordance with our own standards. That he had laid hold of Christ as his Divine and all-sufficient Redeemer seems very evident, and that he had counted all else but loss for Him. We may regard him as a type of a class of men who deserve and claim our deepest sympathy and respect.

In October, 1897, appeared a very distinct and explicit declaration of faith, signed by twenty-six priests, or monks, protesting against the errors of Rome, and expressing their attachment to the Gospel. In it they did, indeed, decline to call themselves either Catholics or Protestants, but simply said: "Let us be Christians. Titles," they added, "are little worth, and prove nothing. Conversion is everything, and it is the heart which God requires." Again, in January, 1899, some of the members issued an appeal to the public, announcing the formation of a "Society for the Evangelization of France." Its aim and object were to raise funds for holding meetings and giving lectures through the country, in which Romish errors should be exposed and the opposite truths be set forth. In some quarters there has been a call for yet bolder steps in the same direction by forming Churches separate from Rome under liberated priests. This, however, does not appear to be M. Bourrier's own aim. He seems to rather hope against hope for reform in the Church; and in the meantime, before taking more decided steps in the work of evangelization, to wait until his brethren, or, at least, many of them, shall be better prepared for this difficult work by a careful theological training and by taking a Bachelor's degree.

Such are some of the chief features of the movement in the past. Before we pass on to inquire into its present aspects it may interest our readers if we briefly relate the history of one of these good men known to the writer. M. C——, having been trained in a Roman Catholic Seminary for priests and ordained, was for some years a Roman Missionary in the Ile Ste. Marie, near Madagascar. Whilst travelling between the islands he was shipwrecked. His health suffered in consequence, and eventually he was obliged to return to France, and became curé of a parish near Paris. During his residence there convictions of the falsehood of Romish doctrine, which had arisen in his mind during his earlier days, became so deep and strong that he felt that he could no longer retain

his position as a priest. He became acquainted with M. Bourrier, and with his help and that of other enlightened Christians, and through more careful study of God's Word and the teaching of His Holy Spirit, he was led to a clearer knowledge of the truth. Not satisfied with the orthodoxy of the French Reformed Church, and regarding the Church of England as more Scriptural in doctrine and more primitive in order, he came to this country. Here he resided in some of our parishes with the clergy, studying our language as well as theology, and observing our parochial system and its working. The Bishop of Salisbury took him by the hand, having received from him a public abjuration of his errors, and having ascertained the validity of his Orders. Through his influence he was sent back to Madagascar as a missionary clergyman of our Church, where he laboured for a while. Owing to circumstances not known to the writer, he has now given up his work there and embarked in business. This unsatisfactory change of plans may have been partly due to the pressure of family need, and partly to an unsettled state of mind induced by the unhappy divisions in our Church. However this may have been, those who knew him well could not but regard him as a sincere searcher after the truth, even if he had not fully grasped it. During his stay in England he wrote a series of letters to a secular journal of the district where he had formerly laboured, stating some of his personal reasons for the secession, to which the convictions of his conscience had compelled him. The most urgent of these he avowed to have been connected with the Confessional, which from the beginning had caused him the greatest distress. "In it," he wrote, "it has not been possible for me to see anything else but an institution simply human—tyrannical, profoundly immoral, contrary to private well-being and public order." These allegations he went on to justify in very clear, forcible, and yet judicious terms. "It is," he declared, "first of all simply human, and nowhere to be found in the Gospel, for the New Testament of Christ never requires from sinners a detailed avowal of their faults. The Apostles and their successors have received no authority to do so." He proceeded to expose the immorality of the Confessional, and dwelt in a very telling manner on the fearful harm to which candidates for the priesthood are exposed when, towards the end of their course, they are in a special manner prepared to administer the Sacrament of Penance. At an age when the passions are strong it is highly pernicious for young men, who are bound by a vow of celibacy, to have laid before them in detail the vile things which they will meet with in their after-life. "In most of the seminaries," he added, "the pupils

attend those lectures in a white surplice, as an emblem of purity. When they have entered on their office as confessors, their own personal virtue is continually imperilled, and the temptation to eat of the forbidden fruit is extremely subtle. The confessor is at the mercy of all, and an anonymous letter or an atrocious slander may bring down upon him the condemnation of the Bishop. Or it may be that the habit of hearing the histories of human falls and frailties completely enfeebles (*atrophie*) his conscience and deprives him of the power of distinguishing good from evil." Nor did he consider that the mischief is confined to the confessors. He pointed out in very clear, though delicate, terms the grievous harm it causes to the confessed, especially the young, whose downfall may be often traced to this practice. "It is also," he wrote, "the cause of discord in families. Its political influence is no less detestable, for it is the laboratory of the most unhealthy propaganda."

Other evil results he dealt with in a manly, true, and healthy tone we need not here refer to. He wrote throughout as a pure-minded, true-hearted servant of God, evidently untouched by the defilement which he so deeply deplored. At the same time, he drew his statements from a painful knowledge of the Confessional from within, as actually taught and practised in the Church of Rome. If its advocates amongst ourselves had seen as much and passed through the same perilous ordeal, they would hardly be so desirous of promoting it amongst the members of our Protestant Church, and of urging its habitual use. This young priest fully approved of the position of our Church respecting it, as forbidding it as a compulsory or habitual practice, and yet allowing it in exceptional cases for the relief and guidance of troubled consciences. Its systematic adoption he found to be an intolerable burden, and a subtle snare to both confessors and confessed. His own case has, indeed, proved of late a disappointing one; under more favourable circumstances it might have been very different. Still, it may serve as a type of the experience of many of those earnest, though often partially enlightened, men, and of the immense difficulties with which they have to contend.

This movement may not be always carried on upon lines of which we, as Evangelical Churchmen, can thoroughly approve. It is earnestly to be wished and prayed for that some bold, specially-gifted, spiritually-minded Reformer, possessed of a full and firm grasp of Gospel truth in all its proportions, and knowing how to present it effectively before the minds of his fellow-countrymen, may be raised up in God's Providence within the pale of the French Catholic Church, to direct and control all these discordant elements, and to guide unstable

though earnest souls into the paths of Scriptural teaching and primitive practice. Such a leader has not yet appeared, nor do we at present feel hopeful that he will be found. Meantime we are most thankful to learn from M. Bourrier that his good and great work is progressing more and more.

It is a significant fact that the Roman ecclesiastical authorities are awaking to the gravity of the position. For instance, the Bishop of Nancy, in a recent pamphlet, alluding to the large number of seceding clergy, wrote: "The situation remains absolutely alarming (*absolument effrayante*)." Amongst the most distinguished of the seceders is the well-known and much-respected Abbé Garnier, late Private Secretary to the Archbishop of Algiers.

The *Européen*, an international journal of mark, in April last interviewed M. Bourrier, and published a report of the facts and figures which he then supplied. On that occasion he stated that during the last six years about six hundred priests had joined his Society. Some had become doctors in law or medicine, many journalists, whilst others were employed in offices or the Civil Service. A few were even working as simple labourers, "finding it more honourable to wear a blouse than to hide their hypocrisy under a cassock." Twenty-five, after studying Theology in the Protestant Collège at Paris, have been admitted as Pastors into the "Église Réformée de France."

Attempts, we learn from M. Bourrier, have been made by the Roman authorities to deny the correctness of these figures, and to reduce the number of seceders to eighty-four; but it would appear that they have not taken into account very many priests who, having been absent on leave through illness or for family reasons, in order to avoid persecution or bringing reproach upon their relations, have withdrawn from their Church quietly, without any open declaration. This would seem a very probable and natural account of the matter, and M. Bourrier writes with perfect assurance of the correctness of his estimate.

At the same time, he and some of his associates are doing important work through their journal, the *Chrétien Français*, and promoting reform in the Church. "We believe," he says, "that the Church of Rome is capable of reform, and the new School, which we represent, rejects all extreme external authority. We think that God alone is infallible, and we proclaim liberty of inquiry." Opinions will differ as to the spirit and value of that journal. The Anglo-Continental Society, in their Report for 1901, go so far as to say that "it has become objectionable by its tone of violent abuse. Complaints were made, and we were compelled to say publicly that

we repudiated any connection with such literature." It is only fair to reproduce these strong words. They would certainly not have been applicable to the journal, as it was some two years ago. In any case, it is, we understand, widely circulated, and a great many priests who have not seceded are subscribers to it, directly or indirectly. Even Bishops condescend to read it, and M. Bourrier told his interviewer that, moved by the exposure of abuses in its pages, they are anxious to remove them. Some are making the curricula in the seminaries for priests more liberal, whilst others are even boldly attempting to purify the dogmas of their Church. So far as these things are so, they are indications of a healthy movement towards liberty and truth.

In the course of the interview M. Bourrier declared that he and his coadjutors wished to found a National Church, without any direct acts of schism; and he urged that if the Bishops and curés were appointed by the civil Government, if University degrees were required from all, and if the religious associations were abolished, before long a much higher class of clergy would be introduced into the French Church than those that conduct the "Croix" newspaper and advocate anti-semitism. These views are, we fear, far too Utopian. We should rejoice, indeed, in even their partial fulfilment; but Rome still boasts her infallibility, and is the determined enemy of liberty and progress. Very plausible are the occasional Papal allocutions to the contrary. Nevertheless, until her whole moral, doctrinal, and spiritual constitution be changed, we see very little prospect of such internal reforms. The best hopes for the future of France, under God, lie, we rather think, outside that corrupt system, in the wider diffusion of Gospel truth through such agencies as this work of the priests, the McAll Mission, as well as the orthodox Protestant Communions. "If our work," said M. Bourrier, "continues its propaganda for some years, the religious question will have made considerable way."

But we regret to have to notice another even more serious objection to M. Bourrier's movement raised in the report to which we have referred. It is that "his alliance with Unitarian Protestants has been so marked as to seriously compromise his movement." This statement has since been explained by the secretaries, in a letter to the *Times* of August 25 last, to mean that he had "accepted compromising patronage from Protestants who were known to hold Unitarian views." There is, we venture to think, an important difference between these two statements, and that letter called forth a satisfactory reply from M. Bourrier on September 4. He then wrote: "The *Chrétien Français* does not accept patronage

from anyone. The work has two objects. First, it gives aid to those unfortunate priests who, tired of eating the bread of falsehood and hypocrisy, want to clear their consciences and earn an honest living. For this philanthropic and eminently Christian cause I have welcomed aid from all the generous and disinterested hands that have been held out to us. They include Catholics and Protestants—men of all shades of religious belief except the Anglo-Continental Society. I will never deny these generous friends or be sectarian enough to refuse their help, for in the matter of charity I recognise but one orthodoxy—that of love and pity for the suffering and the sorrowful. As to our religious principles, I have explained them a hundred times and over in the press and on the platform. I have even explained them at length to the committee of the Anglo-Continental Society in a meeting of three hours' duration, at which three Bishops were present. . . . I am not disposed to begin over again."

We certainly fail to see any ground for complaint in his accepting gifts for such a purpose from those whose religious views differ *toto cælo* from his own, nor was he committed to their grievous errors by so doing. The same thing is done every day amongst us with regard to philanthropic and even religious work. No doubt it is most difficult in France to avoid all co-operation with "Liberal Protestants," though they are, in fact, Christian Rationalists—more advanced on down-grade lines than even many English Unitarians. It would seem that, whilst M. Bourrier receives contributions from such men, he in no way accepts their unchristian doctrine. We rejoice, therefore, that he has so far made clear his position, and it would be manifestly unfair to judge his proceedings by the far more favoured circumstances of us English Churchmen. It may be well to add that he has assisted financially fifty-six priests and found employment for a hundred. His Society is directed by a numerous and influential committee, including the head of the Faculty of Law at Nancy, the Dean of the Faculty of Theology at Paris, etc.

With respect to all these questions, it is most important to remember that many of these seceding priests have but lately emerged from the darkness and thralldom of Rome, and though convinced of its errors, have not yet thoroughly embraced the positive truths of the Gospel. We must put ourselves into their place, and allow for the many mistakes into which in their early inquiries they may fall. The fact that many have given up their sacred calling and entered secular life may be accounted for by their not feeling fully



qualified to pursue their ministry on entirely new lines or discovering that their original vocation was a mistake. Such men, we would repeat it, deserve our deepest sympathy, and often need actual and substantial help if they are to follow up their earnest inquiries into the truth and to earn an honest livelihood. To guide and assist such inquirers is surely a noble work, in which we heartily wish M. Bourrier and his associates God-speed. We may not approve of all that they write or say or do; but when we consider the godless condition of France and the increasing superstitions of Rome we must welcome every Scriptural effort to rescue those who are struggling with such tremendous difficulties, and to promote the evangelization of that unhappy country.

W. BURNET.

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ART. VII.—THE MONTH.

AS was apprehended when our last number was issued, the venerable Archbishop of Canterbury has passed to his rest. A singularly noble and strenuous life of devoted service to God and man has thus been brought to an honoured close. The work which Dr. Temple has done for the Church of England, and through the Church for the whole country, is of inestimable value. His actual labours in the cause of education, his work at Rugby, in the dioceses of Exeter, London, and Canterbury, his devoted services to the cause of temperance, were herculean; but they all fall short, perhaps, of the blessing he has conferred on us by his grand example. There are those who doubt whether he did not carry too far his appreciation of the unique value of self-sacrificing work, when he allowed himself to shut his eyes to lawlessness in the Clergy, provided he was satisfied that they were labouring devotedly in the cause of their Master. But, at all events, he has impressed upon us all by example, as well as by word, the obligation and the nobility of practical work. He followed, indeed, with appreciation and power the intellectual movements of his time. His contribution to "Essays and Reviews" was at least an evidence of that disposition; and his subsequent Bampton Lectures, delivered amidst all the pressure of episcopal duties, were perhaps a still more conspicuous illustration of it. But all else seemed subordinate in him to a passion for doing his Master's work, and making his Master's will better known and obeyed. "Why call ye