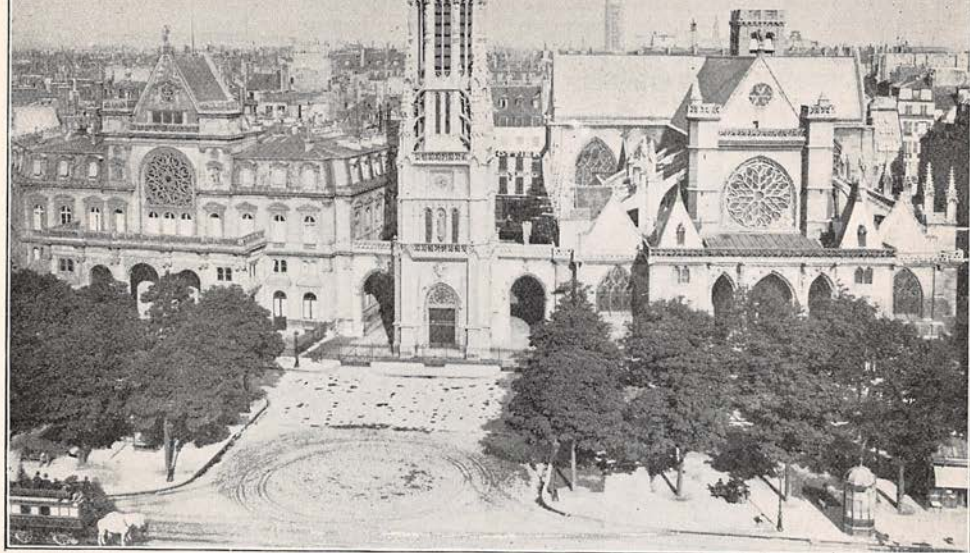


# THE FRENCH PROTESTANTS ✠



BY ADA CONE.



OUT of a population of thirty-eight millions the French Protestants number only 700,000 souls, and being thus few in the midst of a community vowed to another cult, their life passes almost unperceived outside of France. But this little group, with a past so renowned, which spread over the world as the result of persecution one of the most remarkable types of the Reformation, is by no means a cipher in modern French life.

The French Protestants are one of the main supports of modern French social institutions. Because of the oppression they suffered under the old administration their sentiments have been enlisted for political liberty, and because of the long combat they have waged against dogmatism they have been led to place higher than dogma the moral development of the individual. And these two tendencies, which seem to form the character mark of modern French Protestantism, explain, I think, the particular situation of its adherents to-day, in the social aggregation of which they form a numerically insignificant part.

How should they have done otherwise than elevate the rights of liberty to prime importance? They have struggled for these rights from the beginning down to very near

the middle of the nineteenth century. The Roman Catholic Church, having been always in the majority, has seen itself ranged on the side of tyranny; but the French Protestants have never seen a time when they were not in the minority, and from first to last of the old administration they were oppressed. Turn over rapidly the history. When Henry IV. threw a sop to his conscience by proclaiming the Edict of Nantes, he may have made another St. Bartholomew impossible, but he could not disarm the enemy. The papacy considered this "the most cursed of edicts, permitting to each one liberty of conscience, which is the worst of all things in the world," and implacably pursued its revocation.

The Bishop of Valencia marked out the programme in the General Assembly of the clergy of France. "The destruction of heresy," he said, "is our unique business," and "to their annual free gift to the king, the clergy adds one or two millions for each new law against the Protestants, so that if the clergy aid the State it is on condition that the State become an executioner. And during all the eighteenth century the Church takes care that this operation continues" (Taine). In the ear of Louis XIV. a Church functionary whispers, "Liberty of conscience is regarded by all Catholics as a precipice beneath the feet. Take it away, Sire, take away this fatal liberty, and put your people in the happy

necessity of being always faithful"; and to Louis XVI., on the very eve of the nineteenth century, Lomenie de Brienne, in whom the Church and State coalesced, for he was both bishop and Minister of Finance, insinuated still—"Finish up the work of your ancestors. It is reserved for you to give the final stroke to Calvinism in your estates."

This programme, interrupted by the Revolution, was taken up again by the Restoration, and was continued under the monarchy of July. The restored royalists, in concert with the ruling Church, tried a counter-revolution in the Midi, taking for word of order the speech of the agent of the Count d'Artois: "Religious zeal alone can snuff out the Republican delirium." Countless processes condemned the Protestants to prison and amend, and induced a new emigration. It is hard to believe what is nevertheless true, that in the century which has just closed the president of the Consistory of Nimes could write of the Protestants of France: "Our poor people are weighed down with miseries. More than two thousand have been ransomed; more than two hundred have been slain, more than ninety villages have been devastated and burned."

Thus the Protestants were hounded by the clergy till the powers of the clergy were abased, and by the royalty till the royalty was abolished. They saw the end of their vexations only with the advent of the Third Republic. Necessarily, then, while the attitude of the Roman Church towards the Republic is that of an antagonist, the Protestants are the natural allies of this government which is the political expression to-day of French liberties.

Moreover, the religious liberty of the

French Protestants is not the result of a gradual progress towards tolerance of religious thought in the community; it has coincided with the dominance of Republican ideas. The year before the Bastille fell, Rabaud St. Etienne dared to mount the tribune of the Assembly, to take the defence of the persecuted. "It is not tolerance, I demand," he cried, "it is liberty," and carried away by his

eloquence the States-General condemned the Edict of Revocation, and proclaimed that "no man could be disturbed for his religious opinion, or troubled in the exercise of his cult." Bonaparte signed the Concordat, limiting the power of the Roman Church, and officially recognised the Protestant Church. Later, Napoleon took the Protestants definitively under the protection of the State, apportioning to each Church an annual subsidy, and the sorely tried Protestants were free to reorganise themselves. Moreover, though covered with vexations

between times, they have had their liberties renewed with the advent of each Republic. Logically, then, they support Republican institutions.

On June 7th, 1788, a long-suffering little group met in Paris, in a wine shop, to celebrate for the first time in two centuries the Protestant worship of God. For not even under the Edict had Protestant service been permitted in Paris. A year later there was turned over to their use the church of St. Louis-du-Louvre, near where, as was fitting, against what is to-day the church of the Oratory, the faithful raised the monument to Coligny, gloriously dead in the massacre of St. Bartholomew, object of pilgrimage to every pious Protestant visiting Paris.

On the day when liberty was rendered to



AN INCIDENT IN THE MASSACRE OF ST. BARTHOLOMEW, REPRESENTING THE RESCUE OF THE YOUTH DE CAUMONT.

After the painting by Paul Delaroche.

them the Protestants could cast up their losses. A flourishing church in the 17th century, the Revocation had condemned them to disappear; the temples had been torn down, the funds confiscated, the theological schools closed, the pastors condemned to abjure or be exiled. The flocks had followed their pastors to exile and 500,000 souls were lost to the Church and to France. At the beginning of the 18th century there remained in all France not a single Protestant pastor, temple or seminary; the Church as a Church was destroyed.

But the principle of religious liberty lived on, and all through the 18th century the Protestant Church struggled so as not to die. Little groups met in caverns, a student here and there conning his Bible made himself into a teacher of his fellows, and the "churches of the Desert" were formed. Persecution had flamed up again and sent numberless martyrs to torture and the scaffold. And so they had come down to the sill of the 19th century, sorely tried but valiant. And after the Revolution they set to work to build up again the edifice so long destroyed.

In the first days of the 19th century the Bible was a great rarity in Paris, and no library could furnish a copy. For more than 130 years the Protestant Bible had not been printed in France. Everybody was ready to make sacrifices to possess a copy. In 1819, with the aid of English missionaries, the Bible Society was founded. In the rooms of this society, under the presidency of the Marquis de Jaucourt, Protestant society met to listen to the word of Guizot, already celebrated. It was here that the pastor, Samuel Vincent, an important figure in the annals of the Church, recommenced

the building up of theologic thought by instructing Protestant France in the works of German science.

Having passed through the "White Terror" which came with the Restoration, there awaited them one more blow. In the war of 1870, the flourishing churches of Alsace were wrested from them, and they lost the important theological school of Strasbourg, where modern French Protestant theology was born. In verity, the French Church has proved that to live is to suffer; in the words of M. Frank Puaux, whom I have followed in these details, she has been the Mater Dolorosa of the Churches of the Reformation.<sup>1</sup>

Since 1870 the pathway has been clear. The Reformed Church held its thirtieth synod in 1872. Its twenty-ninth had been held

in 1659, more than two centuries before. These assemblies now sit at regular intervals. The largest division of French Protestants is the Reformed Church, with 560,000 members. The Lutherans number 80,000; the Free Church, a branch of the Reformed Church which has separated itself from the tutelage of the State, 7,000; the Methodists, about 4,000; and the Baptists a little less than the last. The Protestants have augmented 21 per cent. during the century. In sum, it is a good showing, and when, in 1885, in all their churches they recalled with emo-

tion the two hundredth anniversary of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, they could affirm that it was not in vain their noble ancestors had died for their conscience's sake.

A burnt child fears the fire, and it is not

<sup>1</sup> Les Oeuvres de Protestantisme au XIX<sup>e</sup> Siècle. F. Puaux. Paris, 1893.



MONUMENT ERECTED AGAINST THE CHURCH OF THE ORATORY TO GASPARD DE COLIGNY, KILLED IN THE MASSACRE OF ST. BARTHOLOMEW.

*From a photograph.*

strange if the French Protestants are teachers of morals rather than of dogma. They have kept to a simple ritual, they have relegated polemic struggles with the Roman Catholic Church into the second place, and they have turned their whole strength into missions of evangelisation. During the first part of the century they organised foreign missions, like that which in Basutoland has done such good service.<sup>1</sup> These missions are spread to-day over Tahiti, Zambesi, Senegal, Congo, and Madagascar. In 1872, feeling themselves



M. GUIZOT, FRENCH PROTESTANT STATESMAN AND AUTHOR.  
Born at Nîmes 1787.

free to work at home, they organised the evangelic missions of the interior. In this work they were aided by a devoted Englishman, Mr. MacCall, and the work spread over France and Algeria. All branches of the Church concurred; the Free Church, under the impulsion of Frederic Monod and of his friends, have consecrated to evangelisation their best forces; the Wesleyans, after being up to 1852 a mission dependent on the English Conference, constituted themselves a special Church, and also began to evangelise. The Baptists have directed their propaganda among the Catholic labouring class, and have formed important communities, particularly in the *Nord*. As the result of all this activity, French Protestantism has gained 175,000 members under the Republic.

Their minority situation has been to them a challenge to prove themselves honourable and useful citizens. They are first in generous initiatives and in devotion to public

<sup>1</sup> See *Sunday Strand*, vol. i., p. 467.

causes. In less than twenty years they had founded innumerable societies of charity, ten orphan asylums, and asylums for the sick, for the deaf, for the blind. They occupy themselves with the question of working men's habitations and with that of co-operation. Under the authoritative leadership of Léon Say they have pleaded the cause of Sunday rest; through the competent voice of Richard Waddington they have defended the cause of women in the factories. Benjamin

Delessert created the savings banks; Oberkampf raised French industry. They have adhered in a body to the League of Public Morality. To the combat against the literary corruption of these times is for ever attached the name of Edmond de Pressensé, a pastor who defended the Gospel with powerful eloquence, and whose noble life was spent for the victory of great causes.



M. LE PASTEUR EDMOND DE PRESSENSÉ, D.D.  
Founder of the *Revue Chrétienne* and the *Bulletin Théologique*.  
From a photo.

In the war with Prussia they were at the height of their duty. It is their glory to have given to France such officers as Admiral Jauréguiberry, as Colonel Denfert-Rochereau, the hero of Belfort, as Dorian, who was the soul of the resistance at Paris, as the brave Mayor of Strasbourg, who died of chagrin after the annexation of Alsace.

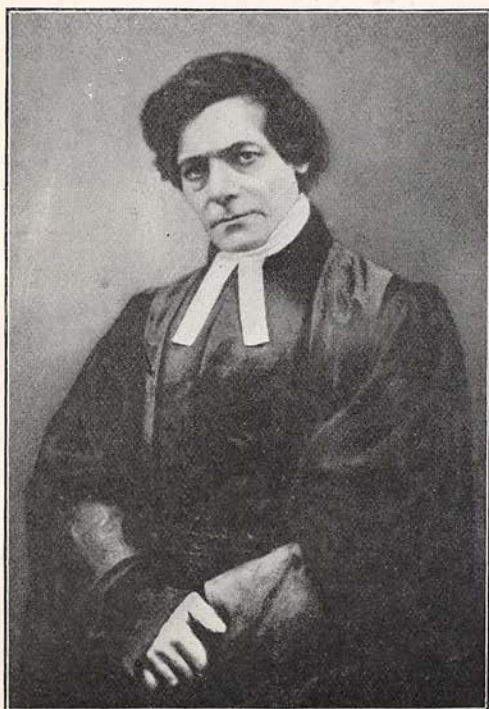
Their women are tireless in good works. One of the first among them by reason of date was Mdlle. Cuvier, daughter of the great naturalist, who founded the first Protestant Orphan Asylum. With her were associated her cousins, Madame André-Walther and the Baroness Bartholdi-Walter, daughters of one of Napoleon's

generals. Both families were of Alsatian origin. These last have been extremely active. Having met the Gurneys and Elizabeth Fry, who visited Paris in the thirties, they became interested in prison work, and were among those who founded the prison work of St. Lazare. Madame André's life across the century, from 1807 to 1886, has left flowers of charity and of love wherever her footsteps fell. She was the god-child of the Empress Josephine. Her son has written her biography, and it is at once a record of the principal events of the century, and the story of a noble life. Madame André's daughter is the Baroness de Neuflize; her son has founded the Young Men's Christian Union of Paris. Another woman whose life has left its trace in Protestant society is the Baroness de Staël. She and her daughter, Madame Jules Mallet, spent their lives in succouring the unhappy. It was they who developed the children's mission of St. Marcel, which the devoted pastor, Louis Meyer, had founded. Madame Henri Mallet sustains to-day the weight of the succession left by these noble women.

Other women well known in the Protestant circle are Madame François Delessert, Madame Thuret, Mdlle. Sarah Monod, head



MADAME ANDRÉ-WALTHER, 1807-86.  
A famous Protestant and philanthropist, god-child of the  
Empress Josephine.



of the House of Deaconesses, and Guizot's daughter, Madame Guizot de Witt.

Several families remarkable for the pastors they have produced have long been rallying points for Protestant work; one of these, the Monods, Danish of origin, has given to the Church no less than six pastors, the best known being Adolphe Monod, whose ministrations cover the first half of the century, and Dr. Gustave Monod, who was an eminent surgeon. This family has to-day several members well known in the scientific and literary world. Edmond de Pressensé has been one of the ablest and most eloquent pastors in the French Church. He was also a life senator, and a man of letters. He was English on his mother's side. His wife, of Swiss origin, was well known in the world of letters. His son is to-day a socialist writer, and one of the editors of *L'Aurore*.

In the domain of literature the Church is not idle, as more than sixty Protestant publications attest. The *Revue Chrétienne*, founded by Messrs. Hollard and Pressensé a half century ago, and edited to-day by M. Frank Piaux, carries still the significant device—"The Gospel and Liberty." The "Bulletin" of the Society of Protestant History has become a precious source for the history of France. Among the well-known names in



DR. GUSTAVE MONOD, 1803-1890.  
An eminent French Protestant surgeon.

the literary movement are those of the late Count Delaborde, of the French Academy; Weiss, director of the Protestant Library; Madame de Pressensé, Madame Bersier, Madame Guizot de Witt. In the pulpit Adolphe Monod and Athanasius Coquerel, by their eloquence and their literary talents, have honoured at the same time French Protestantism and French letters; while at the head, perhaps, of Protestant religious literature in France stands the late Eugène Bersier, whose sermons place him in the first rank of orators of these times.

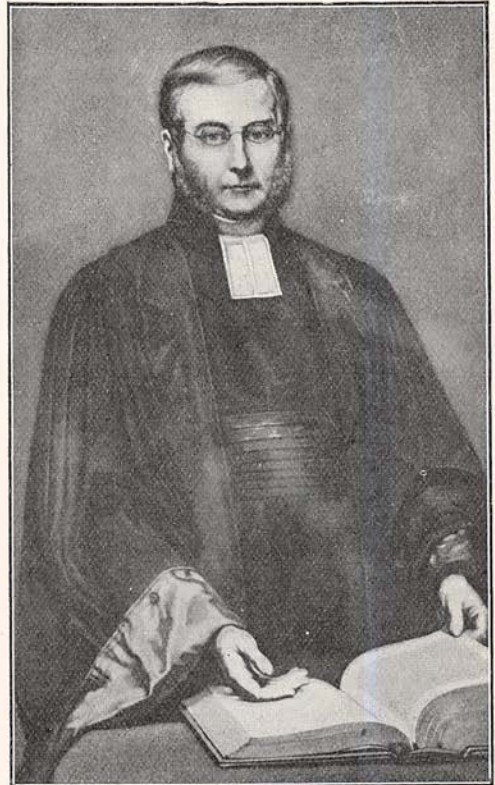
The scientific literary movement is, in particular, significant. French Protestantism is more disposed to examine than to deny. And, understanding that in this direction lay the grandeur of its mission, it has adopted science as a handmaid to its use. The centre of this movement was the school of Strasbourg, now lost to France. Thence came the scientific work of Reuss on the Bible, and the works of Leichtenberger, Matter, Wilm, Baum, and others, which determined the direction of French theology, and procured for the French Protestants, so long tributary to the stranger, the joy of seeing their own learned doctors discussed and appreciated in Germany and England. The schools of Montauban and Paris have followed the same road, and added science to faith.

Its annals, indeed, in this century are

covered with illustrious names. It has had Benjamin Constant at the Tribune, Cuvier at the Museum, Guizot at the Sorbonne. Chateaubriand, Madame de Staël, Sismondi, are on its rolls. Henri Martin, Jules Fabre, Taine, these and others have been defenders of the Church.

The French Protestants render an important public service by linking France to the Protestant nations. This is so true that its enemies in France pretend that "Protestant" is a synonym for foreigner, and that "Roman Catholic" signifies Frenchman, and they accuse the French Protestants of working for the benefit of England. It is inevitable that in much they should be in harmony with us, and they should be a factor in maintaining the peace.

Thus the French Protestants by keeping dogma in the background rouse the minimum of antagonism, and by taking as their sufficient formula the programme enjoined by Micah, "to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God," attract the sympathy of the religiously indifferent. They and public



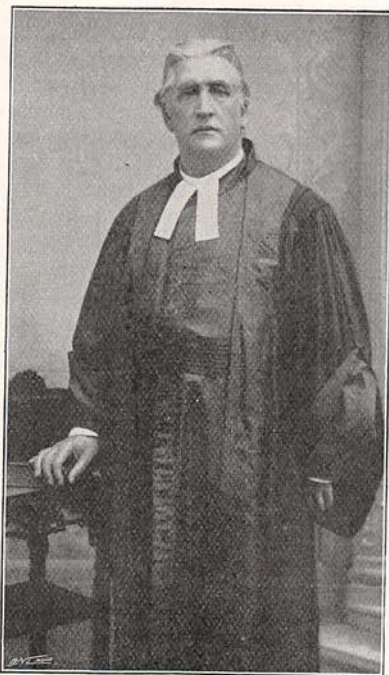
PASTOR ATHANASIOUS COQUEREL, OF THE ORATORY, FROM 1817.  
One of the names best known to French Protestants.

opinion are, in much, at one ; France has rejected the political theories sustained by Bossuet, and has adopted those of the exiled Huguenot Jurieu. Where Lomenie de Brienne stood a hundred years ago and counselled the Government to "give the final stroke to Calvinism, stands now a Cabinet whose members reject for themselves the Roman Church, and the Minister of War, General André, is a Protestant. It does not follow from this that France will become Protestant. What might have happened but for the emigration is another matter ; it is calculated but for this exodus there would now be in France, from the natural increase of the population, six million Protestants ; but the little band to-day are not makers of proselytes so much as teachers of morals ; their influence has not so much developed Protestantism as it has built up character which prevails in secular affairs.

One remark in justice is left to be made ; if they are to-day at one with public secular opinion, it is not because they have followed the current, it is because the current has

followed them. The French Protestants, long before the Revolution, carried high the banner of French liberties. Hounded and tracked to massacre and to the stake, those that survived snatched the symbol up from those that died, so that continuously in the Cimmerian darkness of superstition there floated always somewhere in the land the

device : the Gospel and Liberty. When through the last century the "churches of the Desert" met in caverns to pray, they looked up at the patient stars, and they listened to the breezes and the trickling rills, and they said to themselves that somewhere, some time, man also would put himself in harmony with his destiny, and they persevered. The Heavenly Father looked down with pity ; He alone knew with what certainty the prize awaits patient faith. It has been so ; and in memory of what they have suffered, and in gratitude for the gain of to-day, the French Protestants have painted in gold over the door of their beautiful library — POST TENEBRAS LUX.



THE LATE M. EUGÈNE BERSIER, PASTOR OF  
THE ORATORY.

*Photo by Ch. Barenne, Paris.*