

HISTORY

OF THE

Huguenot Emigration

TO

America

BY

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All the facts that have come down to us regarding this Huguenot pastor, go to prove that he was a worthy representative of the race and the order to which he belonged, and that he enjoyed the esteem and confidence of good men in his day. A characteristic sentence in one of his private letters, gives us some insight into a nature that fully deserved that confidence and esteem: "I have always determined to injure no one by my words or otherwise, but on the contrary to serve whomsoever I might be able to serve."

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1715.

The vacant pulpit of the French Church was filled with little delay. Before the end of the year, André Le Mercier, a young man lately graduated from the Academy of Geneva, came to the people at their invitation. Le Mercier was a native of Caen, in Normandy. The call from Boston reached him in London. A salary of one hundred pounds was promised him by the congregation, which had grown richer, if not more numerous. Thirty years had now elapsed

Daille's
Successor.

"Item I give devise and bequeath unto my loving Brother Paul Dailé (Vaugelade in Amsfort) in Holland and to his heirs and assigns forever all the residue of my Estate both real and personal wheresoever the same is lying or may be found.

"Ult^o I do hereby nominate and appoint my (good friend M^r James Baudoin the sole) Executor of this my last Will and Testament. In Witness whereof I have hereunto put my hand and seal the day and year first within written.

"Dailé" (Seal).

The witnesses were, Benjamin Wadsworth, Phebe Manley, and Martha Willis.

Offered for probate, May 31, 1715.

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since the founding of the Church ; and the representative names of the original immigration were still connected with it. Andrew Faneuil, James Bowdoin, Daniel Johonnot, Andrew Sigourney, were leaders in the congregation, and each at his death left a generous bequest to the pastor. The "meeting-house" for which they had waited so long, was built soon after Le Mercier's arrival. It was a small brick edifice, on School street, erected upon the land which had been purchased with King William's gift, ten years before.

The
first
Sermon.

The young preacher did not disappoint the expectations of the flock that gathered to hear his first sermon. With earnestness, yet with a modesty becoming his youth and inexperience, he set forth the aims of the Christian ministry, and avowed his purpose to reach after them ; asking the prayers and the coöperation of his people, and their forbearance in view of the deficiencies of which he was conscious. A feeling reference to their "late pastor of blessed memory," whose example it would be his ambition to follow, was accompanied by a fervent appeal to his hearers, that they would prove faithful to their religious profession.¹

¹ I find the peroration of this sermon among the manuscript discourses of Le Mercier in the possession of the Massachusetts Historical Society. The text is taken from the first Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians, Chapter II., v. 2. "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." * * * Vous pouvez conter que nos vœux les plus ardents seront votre prospérité et votre bonheur pour ce monde et dans l'autre, et que ce sera là la matière de nos prières à notre Dieu père et créateur de toutes choses et à J. C. son fils bien aimé.

In the course of Le Mercier's long ministry of thirty-four years, the number of worshipers in the French Church dwindled perceptibly. The rising generation naturally inclined to frequent the American churches. The middle of the eighteenth century was at hand ; a period which

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Qu'enfin nous tacherons de remplir la vocation sainte à laquelle Dieu nous a lui-même apellés de si loin, en faisant valoir les talens et la mesure de grace qu' il nous a départie soit dans nos discours publics soit dans les particuliers, soit par nos exemples en suivant celui de votre dernier Pasteur de bénite memoire, et dont sans doute vous vous souvenés avec plaisir suivant l'exhortation de l'Apôtre aux Hebreux en considérant quelle a été l'issue de la conversation de ce conducteur du troupeau à qui je parle. Voila, mes très chers frères en notre S. J. C., quelles sont nos intentions qui sont pures et justes, mais en meme tems si difficiles à remplir que nous aurons sans doute besoin que vous excusiés souvent nos foiblesses et que vous vous souveniés que nous avons notre thrésor dans des vaisseaux de terre, afin que l'excellence de cette force soit de Dieu et non point de nous. Nous vous demandons la communion de vos prières pour parvenir à nos fins, et pour nous acquiter dignement d'une charge aussi au pénible qu'elle est glorieuse. Encouragés-nous vous mêmes par votre conversation sainte à soutenir avec joye ce grand fardeau ; ce sera par là que nous deviendrons de plus en plus diligens à semer dans une terre où nous verrons produire des fruits et rapporter trente, soixante, et cent grains pour un seul. Ce plaisir sera suffisant pour nous delasser de toutes nos fatigues. Si vous en usés ainsi, comme je l'espère de la piété que vous avés déjà fait paroître, et comme je vous en conjure au nom de n. Sauveur J. C. qui a été crucifié pour vous—si disje vous faites la volonté de notre père commun, et si vous écoutés comme vous devés la parole de son fils, vous serés veritablement mes pères et mes mères, mes frères et mes soeurs. Vous serés notre consolation dans cette vie, et dans le siecle à venir notre joye et notre couronne. Nous nous trouverons tous ensemble par la grace de Dieu devant son throne, et vous présentant à lui nous dirons, me voicy Seigneur et les enfans que tu m'as donné. Accorde-le nous, o Dieu, et à toi Pere et au Fils et au Saint Esprit soit gloire, force, et magnificence aux siècles des siècles. Amen."

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may be called the dead-line of the refugee congregations in this land. Few of them lived to cross it, and fewer still retained the French language beyond it. Daillé's successor was not his equal, probably, as a preacher; his writings are characterized by the diffuseness and verbosity of the *réfugié* style; yet it may be questioned whether Daillé himself could have retained in the "temple" on School street the "young people" whom Le Mercier was charged with having "driven to other churches."¹ We have no reason to doubt his own statement, that during the greater part of his pastorate, "an uninterrupted Peace and Union" reigned in the congregation.

Huguenot
versatility.

If he was not a brilliant preacher, Le Mercier showed himself, like so many of his fellow-exiles, an industrious worker in various fields of research and of practical enterprise. Two books from his pen are extant: the one a history of the Church and Republic of Geneva;² the other a Treatise against Detrac-

¹ Memorial History of Boston, vol. II., p. 257.

² The Church History of Geneva, in Five Books. As also a Political and Geographical Account of that Republick. By the Reverend Mr. Andrew Le Mercier Pastor of the French Church in Boston. Boston, New England; Sold by S. Gerrish and other Booksellers. 1732.

This little volume (4½x7 inches) contains two distinct publications, with separate title-pages:—

(1.) The Church History of Geneva, in Five Books. Wherein the State of Religion in that Place before Christianity is described; and also how the Gospel was first preached there, and by whom. A Catalogue of all the Bishops of Geneva, to the Time of the Reformation. The State of that Church in Times of Popery. An exact Account

tion.¹ Other interests also, beside those of religion, engaged his attention. He busied himself in the improvement of agriculture in Massachusetts, and was very zealous in humane endeavors to preserve the lives of seamen ship-

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of the Blessed Reformation. The History of that Church from that Time to this. And lastly, Several Things, concerning the Church-Government, the Discipline, the Ministers and the Manners of that Church. Boston, New England: Printed by B. Green, and Sold at the Booksellers Shops. 1732.—Pp. 1-220.

(2.) A Geographical and Political Account of the Republick of Geneva. Containing an exact Description of it's Scituation, publick Buildings, the Lake and the River Rhone, its Trade, Academy, Territorys, Fortifications, Interest, &c. Wherein the Mistakes of a great many English & French Authors are rectified. By the Author of the Church History of Geneva. Boston in New-England: Printed by B. Green, and Sold by the Booksellers. 1732.—Pp. i-vi., 1-76.

History
of
Geneva.

¹ A Treatise against Detraction, in Ten Sections. By the Reverend Mr. Andrew Le Mercier, Pastor of the French Church at Boston in New England. Printed at Boston in New England, and Sold by Daniel Henchman. 1733.—Pp. i-iv., i-viii., 1-303. (5¼x8 inches.)

The "Treatise against Detraction" is sensible, interesting, and—making allowance for the defective translation, for which the author apologizes as "kept very close to the French," and hence perhaps marred by "impropriety or obscurity,—" very well written. It is not wanting in vivacity and shrewdness, and though largely interspersed with anecdotes and quotations, classic, patristic, and modern, is not the work of a mere pedant. The characteristic moderation of the Huguenot appears in what is said of detraction as applied to the civil power. "To speak Evil of Sovereigns is one of the Highest Degrees of Sin that Detraction can rise to. . . . With regard to foreign Princes, whose Subjects we are not, indeed it is not so great an Evil to speak evil of them as of our own. But yet it is not an inconsiderable Sin,

Treatise
against
Detrac-
tion.

1. Because," etc.* * * "If Subjects are oppressed, Satyrs (satires) against their oppressors are not like to relieve them very much."

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Sable
Island.

wrecked upon the dangerous coast of Nova Scotia. In 1738, he petitioned the governor and council of Nova Scotia for a grant of Sable Island, off that coast, that he might erect buildings thereon, and stock the island with such domestic animals as might be useful in preserving the lives of escaped mariners. The grant was made, and the colonial governments of Nova Scotia and Massachusetts issued proclamations, warning all persons against removing or destroying the improvements that might be made by the proprietor of the island.¹ It is said that many lives were saved in consequence of this benevolent action; although much was done to frustrate it, by the killing of the stock, and by depredations upon the property. Sable Island has continued to be the scene of frequent shipwrecks; and at the present

¹ The History and Antiquities of Boston : by Samuel G. Drake. P. 488.—Haliburton, however, states that the grant was withheld by the lieutenant-governor of Nova Scotia, inasmuch as M. Le Mercier declined to accept it on the terms proposed, of paying a quit-rent to the king.—(An Historical and Statistical Account of Nova Scotia. Vol. II., p. 269.)

In February, 1753, M. Le Mercier offered "the Island Sables" for sale. "Said Island is situated at the Distance of about forty Leagues from Halifax, thirty from Cape Breton, and fifty from Newfoundland : a good Market for the Produce of the Island, Cattle, and Roots of all sorts. It is about 28 Miles long, one Mile over, and contains about ten thousand Acres of Land, 500 of which are quite barren, all the rest produces or may bear something.* * * The Advantages which do accrue or may accrue from the Improvement of the Place are so great that I would not easily part with it if I was so skilful in Navigation and Shipping as it is necessary."—(The Boston Weekly News-Letter. No. 2640. Thursday, February 8, 1753.)

day, the good work attempted by the Huguenot pastor is carried on by the government at an expense of four thousand dollars annually, maintaining a force of men, furnished with provisions and appliances for the relief of shipwrecked sailors.

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At length, in 1748, the membership of the French Church of Boston had become reduced to a mere handful, and the dissolution of the society was inevitable. Its house of worship passed into the possession of a new Congregational society, with the proviso that the building was to be preserved for the sole use of a Protestant sanctuary forever. Notwithstanding this restricting clause, the Huguenot "temple," forty years later, was sold to the Roman Catholics, and mass was said within its walls, by a Romish priest, on the second of November, 1788. Le Mercier lived for sixteen years after the dispersion of his flock. His last days were spent in Dorchester, where he had purchased an estate in 1722. He died after a long illness, on the last day of March, 1764.¹

Le
Mercier's
death.

¹ The will of Andrew Le Mercier, clerk, of the town of Dorchester, dated November 7, 1761, is on record in the Probate Office of Suffolk County, Boston. (No. 13,459.) He orders the payment of all his just debts, "in the number of which I reckon the money due by my son Bartholomew to Thomas Hancock, Esq., for goods he had of him, for which I was answerable, and of which I have paid already the greatest part." "Secondly and lastly, I order that my estate shall be equally divided among my loving children Andrew, Margaret, Jane, and my son Bartholomew if alive, and I do appoint my two daughters Margaret and Jane to execute this my last will and testament, in witness

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Peter
Faneuil.

No longer represented in Boston by a distinct religious corporation, the Huguenot element in that town continued to be illustrated by some conspicuous names. Foremost among these was the name of Faneuil. Upon the death of Andrew, in 1738, his fortune, "the greatest of any" in the place, went by will to his nephew Peter, the eldest son of Benjamin, of New York. Peter Faneuil was a sagacious and an energetic merchant, intent upon gain, yet lavish in expenditure. His letter-books, which have been preserved, give a graphic picture of the man of business and the high-liver, keenly looking after his pecuniary interests, and at the same time thoughtful of his wine-cellar and of his kitchen. His "handsome chariot," with the family arms, must have been the admiration of the town. Peter's exterior was not impressive. Of low stature and dropsical habit, his complexion was swarthy, and he had been lame from childhood.¹ The hot temper, which effervesces in his correspondence, must have found expression in speech and gesture as well, with little regard to personal dignity. But he was also a man of

whereof I have hereunto set my hand and seal. Andrew Le Mercier."

A codicil added February 3, 1764, substitutes Zechariah Johonnot, as executor, for his daughter Margaret, who is of disordered mind.

¹ "A fat corpulent brown squat man hip short lame from childhood," in the inelegant language of a cotemporary. (Notes on a copy of Dr. Wm. Douglass's Almanack for 1743, &c. By Samuel Abbott Green, M. D.—Reprinted from the Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society, February, 1884.)