

THE  
PRESBYTERIAN REVIEW.

---

No. 33.—January, 1888.

---

I.

THE FRENCH SYNODS OF THE DESERT.

THE Reformed Church of France found itself in a deplorable condition after the recall of the Edict of Nantes by Louis the Fourteenth, a little over two centuries ago. The majestic tree which was the product of the growth of about one hundred and seventy-five years was felled to the ground in an instant. By a single dash of the pen every privilege granted by the law of Henry the Fourth was forfeited. The Protestants not only lost what their ancestors had won as the reward of almost unexampled patience under adversity and heroic courage in the midst of wars, persecutions, and massacres, but were robbed of those inalienable rights which are the heritage of all mankind. The exercise of the Reformed worship was proscribed. Ministers and pastors, without exception, were ordered to leave the kingdom within fifteen days from the date of the publication of the law. Protestant schools were closed. On the other hand, it was expressly commanded that any Protestants that might have expatriated themselves should return to France, and it was forbidden that any Protestant, man or woman, should leave the realm. Thus, while the teachers of religion were expelled, the laity were compelled to remain in France, but were deprived of every means of instruction and of every opportunity of worshipping God according to the dictates of their conscience. There was nothing said in the revocatory edict of constraining the Protestants to embrace Roman Catholicism. On the contrary, the very last paragraph contained an assurance that, until such time as God might be pleased to enlighten their minds, they would be permitted to dwell in the kingdom, pursue their trades,

and enjoy their possessions without hindrance or molestation on account of their religion, upon the sole condition of abstaining from all religious assemblies. But the edict was dishonest from beginning to end ; and inasmuch as it started with a mendacious preamble, basing the revocation upon the alleged fact that " the better and greater part " of the Protestants had become Roman Catholics, it is not surprising that it concluded with a delusive promise of immunity, which the court of Louis the Fourteenth had not the slightest intention of keeping. The Dragonnades, which had for some years been industriously employed as a convenient instrument of conversion, were by no means abandoned. The Protestants were not left long in doubt respecting the fate that awaited them, and they took their measures accordingly.

Many fled from France ; how many it is impossible to say. Trustworthy statistics are at all times difficult to obtain ; particularly so, for some reason or other, in France and where Protestantism is concerned. If the estimates of the number of its adherents in the modern republic differ so widely that we cannot be sure of being right within a quarter of a million, much more is there uncertainty respecting the census of the Protestants in France before the Revocation, and the relative proportion of those who succeeded in making their way out, as compared with those who remained behind. The refugees may have numbered eight hundred thousand, as some have maintained, or only three hundred thousand, as others affirm with greater probability of approximate correctness. In any case, they constituted an astonishingly large body of men, women, and children, willing for conscience' sake to expose themselves to the perils of the journey and the danger of incurring the penalty of the galleys, or imprisonment in monasteries or in dungeons like the " Tour de Constance," at Aigues-Mortes, not to speak of the certain loss of home, friends, and property. But with the possible exception of the inhabitants of some districts affording better opportunities than the rest for their escape,\* much the greater part of the Protestants found themselves compelled to renounce all thought of escape, and to endure as best they might the tyranny to which they were subjected.

---

\* The French Government is printing, in its magnificent collection of " Documents inédits sur l'Histoire de France," the " Mémoires" of the Intendants on the state of the kingdom. In the first volume of this series, published in 1881, we have, on pages 151-54, the official answer to the questions respecting the Huguenots in the " généralité" of Paris. From this it would appear that of 1933 families which were there before the Revocation, 1202 had left, and only 731, or scarcely more than one third, remained.

It was otherwise with the ministers. A very few accepted the tempting offers held forth to induce them to apostatize, including a pension for life larger by a third than the salaries they had been enjoying as Protestant pastors ; a very few consented to avail themselves of the facilities promised to renegade ministers—facilities which consisted in a dispensation from the three years of study required of candidates for the bar or for the degree of doctor of laws, and from one half of the accustomed fees. All the others, between six and seven hundred in number,\* left the realm rather than renounce their faith. The propriety of their course in thus forsaking their flocks has, indeed, been called in question. Their adversaries, naturally taking advantage of every circumstance that might seem to impugn the sincerity of the convictions of the Protestants, and thus to palliate, if not justify, the severities employed in reference to them, did not fail to comment upon the retreat of the ministers as of unfaithful shepherds fleeing upon the approach of the wolf. But certainly any other course than that which they adopted can scarcely be conceived as having been practicable. Their further stay in France was at first prohibited on pain of the galleys. About eight months later, by his Declaration of July 1st, 1686, the king raised the penalty to death. It is evident that up to this date a considerable number of pastors had either continued to lurk in the neighborhood of their old parishes, giving such spiritual instruction and consolation as they were able, or, after leaving France, had secretly returned. This is proved by the circumstance that this same Declaration ordered that any man found guilty of harboring such ministers should be sent to the galleys for life, and any woman should for the same offence have her head shaven and be incarcerated for the residue of her days. Confiscation of property followed as a matter of course. Moreover, a reward of five thousand five hundred *livres*—a very considerable sum for the period—was offered for information that might lead to the capture of a Protestant minister within the dominions of the very Christian king. Under the circumstances to remain in France would seem to mean certain death, and that, too, without the opportunity of first doing such effective work as would justify the rash exposure. The ministers were marked men, whose long residence in the community had ren-

---

\* It has sometimes been said that two thousand Protestant ministers left France at the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. This is a mistake. The list drawn up for the twenty-sixth national synod (of Alençon) in 1637—the last list of the kind—gives the names of six hundred and forty-seven pastors and of eight hundred and seven churches. It is not likely that the number of either was ever greater. Aymon, *Tous les Synodes*, i. 291–306.

dered their features well known. The surveillance exercised over the Protestants—both those that had abjured and those that still remained constant—was unusually close. There were likely to be few retreats to which they could find occasionally resort. They would be, so they thought, of more practical utility in some neighboring land, whence they might write to their former parishioners letters of advice and exhortation to repentance or to renewed fidelity.

Thus it came to pass that for the last ten or fifteen years of the seventeenth century France was almost wholly destitute of Protestant pastors and teachers. Meanwhile, what had happened to their flocks? Evidently the most resolute of the Protestants had early made up their minds to forsake their country. Emigration had assumed formidable proportions even before the actual promulgation of the fatal decree of Louis the Fourteenth. It is a popular error very current, especially among the descendants of the Huguenots in foreign lands, that all who fled from France for religion's sake left at the time of the Revocation, and in immediate connection with it. The truth is, however, that there were a number of emigrations. Rulhière enumerates at least seven. Two of these were before the revocatory edict—the first in 1666, when the extreme severity of the provisions of the royal declaration of April 2d caused many to despair of the possibility of leading quiet lives in their native land,\* and the second in 1681, when the Dragonnades, authorized by the Intendant Marillac, in the province of Poitou, drove out many who up to this time had neglected the signs of coming disaster.† Those who remained in France after these emi-

---

\* The most convenient collection of the anti-Protestant legislation of the reigns of Louis the Fourteenth and Louis the Fifteenth is the volume entitled "Edits, Déclarations et Arrests concernans la Religion P. Réformée," reprinted on the occasion of the Bicentenary of the Revocation, in 1885. It does not, however, contain the Declaration of April 2d, 1666, for the reason that the court becoming alarmed at the magnitude of the losses to the kingdom flowing from the unprecedented emigration and the consequent depopulation of extensive districts of country, the king was induced to repeal it a little less than three years later, February 1st, 1669, and substitute a law in many respects less offensive to the Protestants. The text of the Declaration of 1666 may, however, be read in Drion, *Histoire chronologique de l'Eglise Protestante de France*, ii, 96-106.

† The other emigrations referred to above include the exodus that began at once after the revocatory edict in 1685, and four that were subsequent and that to some extent marked periods in the fortunes of the oppressed Huguenots. The first of these was in 1698, as a consequence of the disappointment caused by the law of that year. The second followed upon the atrocious law of 1715, almost the last paper to which Louis the Fourteenth affixed his signature, and probably the worst. The third was occasioned by the law of 1724, in which all the distinct edicts and declarations issued during a long course of years, even the most inconsistent and contradictory, were summed up and

grations and after the departure of those who succeeded in making their way beyond the frontiers at once after the Revocation, bowed before the tempest that swept over the land. Instead of being left unmolested, as the mendacious edict had assured them that they should be, they found themselves subjected to annoyances and persecutions, by means of the dragoons and otherwise, from which a single word—a promise to go to mass—was at any moment sufficient to relieve them. That word spoken, that promise given, all was simple enough. Not much religion was required of the “new converts”—“nouveaux convertis”—as they were called, if only they abstained from the practice of the Protestant religion. Some few persons—it will never be known exactly how many—persisted through all the trials to which they were subjected in maintaining their religious honor unsullied, and died, as they had lived, in the open profession of their faith, either conveniently ignored by the authorities or virtually given up as incorrigible. The greater number, however, reluctantly yielded. They regarded themselves as cowards, deplored their own pusillanimity, detested the act to which they were forced, felt an unconquerable aversion to the church of which they were henceforth ostensibly reckoned as members, but nevertheless they consented to go to the mass. In various ways they strove to reconcile their conduct with their consciences. Sometimes they affected to look at it as a mere form, or a display of allegiance, and appended to their consent a phrase purporting to show that they had so done simply “to obey the king.” Plainly theirs was an instance, if ever there was one, where, if the lips had taken an oath, the heart, to use the old dramatist’s thought, was yet unsworn.

This state of things was not calculated to produce inward peace. The more indifferent and worldly might treat with levity the whole affair, and content themselves with pointing to the constraint used as sufficient excuse for an act which was not hypocritical, because it neither deceived nor was intended to deceive any one, and was not uncandid, because nobody could imagine it sincere. Others, however, could not cheat their own moral natures respecting the immo-

---

re-enacted. The fourth resulted from the renewed severity in the execution of existing laws, without the enactment of any new law of importance, in 1744 and 1745. Rulhière, *Eclaircissements historiques sur les causes de la Révocation de l’Édit de Nantes, et sur l’État des Protestants en France*, ii., 342, 344. It was at this last date that the Protestants of Upper Languedoc sent to the king a formal petition, begging his permission to emigrate with their wives and children to some land “where,” said they, “we might be able to render to the Deity the worship which we believe indispensable, and upon which depends our misery or our happiness for all eternity.” Charles Coquerel, *Histoire des Églises du Désert*, i. 359, 360.

rality of the entire procedure, and forgave themselves as little as they forgave the authors of their misfortunes. Now that the voice of the living preacher was silenced, the main source of religious instruction was to be found in such stray copies of the Bible and other books of Protestant devotion as had escaped destruction at the hands of the clergy. In the hope of a speedy interference of Heaven in their behalf, the prophetic books of both Testaments, and the Revelation in particular, became favorite subjects of study and meditation. The deliverance of God's people from the heavy yoke of their oppressors was believed to be prefigured in the mysteries of the apocalyptic vision, and many minds beside that of the learned and penetrating Pierre Jurieu, surnamed "the Goliath of the Protestants," busied themselves with the endeavor to ascertain the date of the approaching downfall of the Papacy and its votaries by the aid of the numerical significance of letters and the obscure symbolism of prophecy. In the provinces of Dauphiny and Vivarais, the one on the east and the other on the west of the river Rhône, among the most illiterate of the peasantry that had embraced the doctrines of the Reformation, arose about this time a class of enthusiasts claiming to receive direct communications from Heaven—men, and especially women and children, who fell into a trance, and, while unconscious, pretended to utter words supplied to them by the Holy Spirit. It mattered not that the language which they uttered was rude and uncultivated, nor that the exhortations of which they were regarded as being only the medium of communication were at times only commonplace repetitions of Biblical phrases, at others little better than pure jargon. They deeply moved the people, and excited the apprehension of enemies as much as they raised the hopes of friends. Whether the "little prophets" were impostors or self-deceived is a question which it is not easy to answer. Most probably there was the usual admixture of sincerity and fraud, and a career which may have begun in honest but fanatical zeal was later pursued with ardor from the desire of notoriety and influence. At any rate, the French prophets of the Cévennes soon gained a world-wide celebrity. They were even made the actors in a show at one of the London fairs, where puppets were made to imitate their strange convulsions to the delight of the spectators.\* A full narrative of this delusion would form an instructive chapter in the history of modern enthusiasm.

---

\* So Anthony, third Earl of Shaftesbury, informs us in his "Letter Concerning Enthusiasm," pp. 26, 27: "I am told for certain that they are at this very time [1707] the subject of a choice Droll or Puppet-show at Bart'lemy Fair. There doubtless their strange voices and involuntary agitations are admirably well acted, by the emotion of wires and inspiration of pipes."

The war of the Camisards, which arose a little later, grew directly from the movement that has just been mentioned. Its scene was the mountainous region of the Cévennes in southern France, in close proximity to the region where "the fanatical prophets," as they were styled by their enemies, first made their appearance. The leaders in the conflict upon the Protestant side were either themselves "prophets," or persons who believed that they were commissioned of God to execute His vengeance upon the ungodly adversaries of the truth. Impatient under the continued tyranny of which they were made the victims, they renounced the popular doctrine of blind and implicit submission to constituted authority, and grasped the sword to avenge the insults offered to the Almighty and their own wrongs. The Abbé du Chaila, whom the Intendant Bâville had appointed Inspector of the Roman Catholic Missions in the Cévennes, an ecclesiastic who, if the accounts that have come down to us do not do him gross injustice, had shown himself, in his treatment of such Protestants as had fallen into his hands, to be a monster of cruelty, rare even in a century by no means wanting in specimens of inhumanity, was the first victim of Huguenot or Camisard revenge. His death, according to our best authority on the general history of this war, was not the signal of the revolt, but the occasion of the outbreak.\* There ensued such a conflict as the world has rarely seen—a conflict in which a handful of leaders, some of them scarcely older than boys, none of them officers trained in the military art, and mostly without any experience in actual warfare, held their own, at the head of bands of recruits drawn from the ranks of the peasants and the mountaineers, against the whole body of disciplined troops sent to reduce them to subjection. For two whole years—1702 to 1704—the war was waged with undiminished vigor. In desperation the royal general, Marshal Montrevel, resorted to the barbarous expedient of ordering a wholesale destruction of the towns, villages, and hamlets in the upper Cévennes, which might serve as a refuge for the Camisards, amounting in all, according to one Roman Catholic writer of the period, to four hundred and sixty-six places, with a population of nearly twenty thousand persons.† It was almost an internecine contest, in which if Camisard hamlets were ruthlessly destroyed by the Roman Catholic troops, the inhabitants being turned out to live or die as it might chance, the other side showed no greater compunction in burning churches and monasteries, while life was held equally cheap by Papist and by

---

\* Antoine Court, *Histoire des troubles des Cévennes ou de la guerre des Camisards*, ii. 3.

† See Court, ii. 36, who regards the population as much greater.

Protestant. Even after the war virtually ended, the principal leaders having either, like Cavalier, made terms with the royalists, or lost their lives in the vicissitudes of the conflict, a desultory struggle was continued for several years. It cannot be said that quiet was fully restored in the Cévennes until about 1710.

The story of the fanatical prophets of Dauphiny and Vivarais and of the war of the Camisards must be borne in mind by any one that would understand the condition of the Protestants—the New Converts, as the official language of the court still persisted in calling them—in the year 1715, when the Churches of the Desert first began to assume form and show faint indications of organic life. Just thirty years had elapsed since the publication of the Edict of Nantes—upon the whole the most dreary and discouraging years in all the checkered existence of French Protestantism, from the days of Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples to the present time. For almost an entire generation the systematic preaching of the Word of God had ceased, and the multitudes still Protestant at heart had been reduced to the necessity of entertaining their secret piety by the uncertain means of recollection and tradition. Fortunately, however, the people not only longed for something better, but had occasionally a taste of it. In the absence of settled pastors, a few fervent and adventurous men had sprung up who did not shrink from the perilous task of visiting the dispersed members of once flourishing churches, and administering to them such spiritual strength and nourishment as their circumstances would permit. The work called for great tact and great caution. It was not easy to escape the watchful eyes of government agents, ever on the alert to detect the first symptoms of defection on the part of the New Converts—agents who always found in the clergy of the established church both an active stimulus and substantial support. The minister, travelling from place to place, must throw about his movements an appearance of unconcern that should disarm suspicion, and be taken by turns for a peasant, for a teamster, a pedlar, or a shepherd. It was quite likely that the officials of the entire province, from the intendant down to the captain of the most petty detachment of troops, had been furnished with a description of his personal appearance, his height and gait, the color of his hair and beard, the shape of his nose and mouth, even to the style of the clothes he customarily wore. In fact, the spies of the French Government have furnished us, in a paper of which a copy is before us, the portraiture of over a score of obscure ministers circulating in their humble mission through southern France, which could scarcely have been more minute had the subjects been some great historical personages, whose features it was desirable to per-

petuate for the benefit of posterity.\* If the minister succeeded in baffling detection, he would meet in some secluded spot, far enough from the habitations of men to insure some degree of safety, a congregation which might vary in number from fifteen or twenty souls to many hundreds, and occasionally to thousands. To them he preached a sermon, then prayed, using the prayers of Calvin's liturgy, or others of his own composition, administered baptism to the children, and united in marriage couples that had come long distances or waited a long time for the privilege of being married according to the rites of the Reformed Church. It is not matter for surprise that many of these early preachers were ultimately taken, some after a shorter, others after a longer term of service; some caught in the very discharge of their ministerial functions, others betrayed by false brethren at a moment when they thought themselves in a safe retreat. The wonder is rather than any escaped, that all did not share the fate of Claude Brousson, put to death at Montpellier in 1697, or of Fulcran Rey, the promising licentiate barely twenty-four years of age, to whom belongs the honor of having been the first martyr after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, inasmuch he was put to the rack and hung outside of the Porte Beauregard, at Beaucaire, on July 7th, 1686.

The churches that arose as the consequence of the labors of these devoted men early assumed the designation of "the churches of the desert," or "wilderness"—"Les églises du désert." The name contained a manifest allusion to the preaching of John the Baptist—"The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord'" (Is. xl. 3; John i. 23)—as well as to the apocalyptic vision of the woman clothed with the sun, who was persecuted by the dragon, and "fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God" (Rev. xii. 6). Nor were the toils and sufferings endured by the children of Israel during the forty years in the wilderness forgotten. Gradually an appellation which had originally been metaphorical passed into current use, and became a permanent name. The very minutes of ecclesiastical bodies accepted the words as having a well-defined meaning, and, finding it danger-

---

\* Thus the great preacher of Nîmes figures on the list with this description: "Paul Rabaut, minister, about forty years old; height five feet less two inches or thereabouts; face even, long and thin, somewhat swarthy; hair black; wears a wig; nose long and pointed, slightly aquiline; eyes black, pretty well marked; body leaning a little to the right side; legs very thin, the right one turned inward; it is asserted that one tooth is wanting in the upper jaw." The list belongs, it is true, to a date about forty years subsequent to the period of which we are speaking (1755), but is apparently only one of a series of such papers, with which the emissaries of the court continually furnished the secretaries of state. See Coquerel, *Histoire des Églises du Désert*, ii. 568-70.

ous to specify too narrowly the place of meeting, lest falling into the hands of the enemy, they might be the occasion of annoyance, if not of persecution, to the community that had harbored Protestant synods, merely stated that they had met "in the Desert." This use of language is found as early as in the minutes of the Synod of Languedoc and the Cévennes, February 7th, 1718; and it survived the publication of the Edict of Toleration of Louis the Sixteenth, being employed so late as in the minutes of the provincial Synod of Vivarais and Velay, May 22d, 1788. It was at this last date, however, only a relic of the past, since with the ratification of the royal edict by the Parliament of Paris all real danger to Protestant ecclesiastical bodies disappeared. As a synonymous expression, the words "the churches under the cross"—"sous la croix"—were often employed; and occasionally the present was referred to as "the time of the captivity"—"le temps de la captivité." \*

Thus it was that while the embers of the fanaticism which had given rise to the "inspirations" and "visions" of the "prophets," male and female, of Vivarais and the Cévennes still glowed under the ashes, ready at any time to break out again into a devastating flame, the Gospel began to be preached by an increasing number of persons, especially in that region of country which had been the seat of the bloody struggle of the Camisards. The situation of things was not free of danger. On the one hand, the old delusion had not lost its hold. Many of the Protestants still believed in the genuineness of the pretended new revelations. There were still men and women who claimed to have received supernatural communications. If their visions did not serve as the vehicles for the inculcation of much erroneous doctrine, they were a disorganizing and distracting element in the public assemblies, which were liable at any moment to be interrupted by the confusion occasioned by a pretended seer falling into a trance, and in the midst of his or her convulsive throes uttering incoherent predictions or meaningless exhortations. On the other hand, the lack of concert and unity of action among the preachers themselves began to breed confusion and discord. The exercise of discipline was impossible where there was no central authority, and where each minister in the district which he had chosen for himself enjoyed a freedom from supervision and restraint never contemplated by the standards of the Reformed Church. Evidently to meet so critical a juncture in the history of French Protestantism a man of keen perceptions, of strong will and exceptional powers of organization was needed. Such a man God had

---

\* Minutes of the First National Synod, 1726.

been preparing in the person of Antoine Court, a native of Ville-neuve de Berg, in Vivarais, within the bounds of the modern department of Ardèche.

Providence not infrequently makes use of strange and unexpected instruments for the accomplishment of its high ends. It was so in this case. Born in 1696, Antoine Court was barely nineteen years of age at the date when he appeared upon the stage to do a work which won for him the proud and undisputed distinction of being the Restorer of French Protestantism. The precocious lad, who was destined to perform for the faith of his ancestors a service scarcely inferior to that of the great reformers of the sixteenth century, had been, he tells us, dedicated to the Christian ministry even before his birth. If his surroundings were apparently unpropitious to the fulfilment of the vow of his parents—his father died when Antoine was but four or five years old, his mother being left with three small children and scanty means in the midst of a community unfriendly to Protestantism—there was that in the boy himself which was worth more than many external advantages. He was quick and resolute to learn, his memory was retentive, his aspirations all ran parallel with the course to which his parents' hopes had destined him, and he was ready to endure any amount of contumely rather than swerve from a consistent Protestantism. His autobiographical memoirs do not tell us anything of his inner religious life; of the record of spiritual experiences there is an entire absence. Possibly he did not think that in the sketch, written with an apologetic purpose, there was any call for such a record. But he does inform us that he "detested the mass with all his heart," though, as he admits, prejudice had probably much more to do with his repugnance than had any intelligent convictions. And he tells us how that on one occasion four of his Roman Catholic fellow-scholars pursued him to his home, determined to force him to go to mass, and overtook him before he had time to climb the stairs to his mother's apartment. If they were resolute, so was he. As they drew him down, he clung desperately to each successive step, as if his life depended on the struggle. In the end his assailants had to admit their inability to compel him, and withdrew in shame; but Antoine had made himself an object of hatred to the Roman Catholics, and not only boys but full-grown men, as they passed him in the streets, would shout derisively, "There goes Calvin's eldest son!"—"Au fils aîné de Calvin!" It came at last to Antoine Court's being compelled to give up his attendance upon the schools and going into business. He would not conform to the practices of the Church of Rome, even for the sake of getting an education. But resolution supplied the

lack of opportunities ; with few books, even books of devotion, he accumulated a considerable store of erudition, and the fragmentary leaves of a tattered Bible enabled him to make himself mighty in the Scriptures. A few women used to meet, with great precautions, to worship God together. His mother was of the number, but fear had prevented her from speaking of the matter to her son. He discovered her secret, and insisted upon going with her. Presently he had the opportunity to attend the gatherings at which some women, who united the functions of prophecy to those of preaching, held forth. Finally, to his inexpressible joy, as he tells us, he enjoyed the privilege of hearing a minister. It was Jacques Bonbonnoux, a former Camisard captain, now turned preacher ; and his sermon was simply one of the celebrated Pierre Dumoulin's discourses, which he had committed to memory. " But hunger for the word made men relish even that kind of preaching." A few months later, and Antoine Court, at the age of seventeen, found himself preaching, not the productions of others, but sermons of his own composition, to the great edification of many hearers.

The boy-preacher had before him a more important work than even to speak to large assemblages of people famishing for the truth. His suspicions had, some time before, been aroused that the pretended revelations then current were not inspired by the Spirit of God, and " that, if they could not be attributed to fraud, it must at least be believed that the greater number of those who were called ' inspired ' were dupes of their own zeal and credulity." \* The extended examination into which he now entered persuaded him that his surmises were well grounded, and brought him to the settled conviction that the only hope for the rescue of French Protestantism from the double plague of fanaticism and confusion lay in prompt and perfect organization. To effect this work Antoine Court devoted all his energies.

First it was necessary to bring the principal laborers now at work pretty nearly to his way of thinking ; in the next place to gather them in one place for common action. Neither task was without its difficulties. The preachers had been too long breathing the atmosphere of fanaticism not to be somewhat affected thereby. They were too busy men to be brought together from distant parts of the region without an effort. At last, after the preparatory work had been done, the meeting took place. The time was early dawn on a summer's day in 1715 ; the spot a deserted quarry near the

---

\* *Mémoires d'Antoine Court* (1696-1729), published for the first time in 1885, by Edmond Hugues, page 43.

village of Monoblet, in Lower Languedoc. Nine persons in all constituted this first provincial synod. Of the occasion of its convocation and of its action an account can best be given in Antoine Court's own words :

" Whatever success attended my first endeavors, I perceived that, to extend them and make them more effectual, it was absolutely necessary that I should at once labor for the re-establishment of discipline. I found that the prevailing disorder and the unfortunate affair of the Camisards, in conjunction with fanaticism, had so alienated the minds of the Protestants themselves and brought religion into disrepute, that everybody and everything styled 'preacher' or 'assembly' was viewed with a sort of horror ; that, on the other hand, such was the liberty with which men made themselves preachers, that whoever formed the plan of becoming one could carry it out without hindrance ; that men, women—in short, everybody caught up the trade ; that such license must bring very bad people into the Church ; that it was, moreover, little calculated to remove the unfavorable opinions which the Protestants themselves had conceived of the preachers and the assemblies. What, then, I said to myself, is more necessary than to apply some remedy to these disorders, and stop the progress of such great evils ?

" To compass this end, I called together on the 21st of August, 1715, all the preachers that were to be found in the Cévennes and in Lower Languedoc. I invited to this gathering a few of the most enlightened laymen. . . .

" We began by conferring the office of elder upon the laymen who were present, and it was agreed that elders should be established in all the places where preaching and preachers were received ; that they should be charged, first, with watching over the flocks in the absence of the pastors, and over the conduct of the pastors themselves ; secondly, with selecting suitable places for the gathering of assemblies ; thirdly, with convening them with all possible prudence and secrecy ; fourthly, with making collections to help the poor and prisoners ; fifthly, with providing sure places of shelter for the preachers and with furnishing them guides to conduct them from one locality to another.

" I next submitted two resolutions : the first, that, according to St. Paul's command, women should hereafter be forbidden to preach ; the second, that it be ordained to hold to the Sacred Scriptures as the only rule of faith, and that consequently all the pretended revelations which were in vogue among us be rejected, not only because they had no foundation in the Scriptures, but also because of the great abuses which they had produced. These two articles were carried by a plurality of votes. . . .

" The laws enacted by this little assembly, of which I took great care to have copies made and scattered abroad, made a great noise and produced excellent effects. It was styled a *synod*, and was followed by many others that bore the same name." \*

There is often a strange significance in the comparison of dates. On the 8th of March, 1715, Louis the Fourteenth, being then in the seventy-seventh year of his age and the seventy-second year of his reign, published a Declaration which deserves to be regarded as a fitting capstone to the singular fabric of cruelty and proscription which he had been rearing during the latter half of his life. The

---

\* This extract is from a paper written by Antoine Court about thirty years later (1744), and is somewhat more graphic than the account which he has left us in his *Mémoires* already referred to. See Charles Coquerel, *Histoire des Églises du Désert*, i. 27-29.

purpose of the law was savage and inhuman : it made every Protestant who in his last illness should refuse the sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church, to be liable to the penalties pronounced upon persons relapsed into heresy—their bodies, that is to say, were to be dragged on a hurdle and thrown into the common sewer, and their property forfeited to the state.\* What were the reasons alleged for this treatment meted out to a class that had in point of fact never abjured and that had been promised secure and unmolested residence in France by the very paper that revoked the Edict of Nantes? First, that it was difficult, and in many cases impossible to obtain sufficient proof of abjuration ; second, to use the very words of Louis, “ That the sojourn which those who were of the so-called Reformed religion, or were born of Protestant parents (*parens religionnaires*), have made in our kingdom since we abolished all exercise of the said religion therein is a proof more than sufficient that they have embraced the Roman Catholic and Apostolic religion, without which they would not have been suffered or tolerated therein.” † It was the proud king’s last reiteration of the success of his persistent efforts to overthrow Protestantism—the sentiment expressed on one of the medals struck in honor of the Revocation, “ *Haeresis extincta*,” and the assertion on another medal, also struck in 1685, affirming that two millions of Calvinists had been brought back to the bosom of the Papal Church. ‡ A few months later, on the 1st of September, 1715, the “ grand monarque ” died in his palace at Versailles, nursing in his breast the same illusion. Just ten days before a synod of the despised and downtrodden Protestants had been held in an obscure corner of Languedoc, the first of a continuous series of bodies of the same kind that were to stretch on for more than eighty years, and until the full recognition of the Reformed Church on the part of the state, after the institution of the first Republic. Thus the date of the restoration of the Protestant religion in France coincides almost exactly with the date of the death of the king who had boasted of its annihilation ; and the restoration was effected by the humble exertions, unknown at the time, of a beardless youth who had not reached his twentieth birthday.

The acts of the Synods of the Desert have long been known in part. Some of them were made use of forty years ago by Charles

---

\* According to the provisions of the royal Declaration of April 26th, 1686. Edits, *Déclarations et Arrests*, p. 283.

† Edits, *Déclarations et Arrests*, pp. 482-84.

‡ See the beautiful reproduction, by heliogravure, of these and other medals, in a plate of E. Hugues, *Les Synodes du Désert*, vol. i.

Coquerel in his remarkable history, to which we have already had occasion to refer. Many more have since come to light, thanks to the indefatigable researches of students in various parts of France. It is not impossible that still others remain which will yet be rescued from neglect and oblivion. Those that have come down to us seem in many cases to owe their preservation to some happy accident. Written on a loose sheet, in a fine but legible hand, the minutes of some important synod, early in the eighteenth century, bear marks of the care taken to conceal them from the eyes of prying soldiers or government agents. The tell-tale scrap of paper, scarcely larger than a man's hand, which would have secured the incarceration, possibly the death of him upon whose person it was found, was folded carefully and hidden in the pocket or wallet of the preacher, who was particularly interested in the decisions which it recorded. It was a happy thought of M. Edmond Hugues to connect the Bicentenary of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes with a monumental edition of these minutes, few of which had ever been put in print. The first volume of his work appeared in 1885, covering the years from 1715 to 1750; the second volume in 1886, reaching from 1751 to 1770; the third in 1887, bringing the series down to the last synod in 1796. In these magnificent quartos, in which beauty of typography unites with all the most recent improvements of the art of engraving to give value and attractiveness to the text, we have an apparatus for the study of the growth of a church from its almost insignificant beginnings, through all the successive stages of its development. In intrinsic value the book is certainly quite the equal of the great works of Aymon and Quick on the synods of the Reformed Church of France prior to the Revocation; while in the wealth of illustration lavished upon the subject-matter, neither Aymon nor Quick can enter at all into comparison. Moreover, it is to be noticed that, whereas the two writers just named confine themselves to giving the proceedings of the twenty-nine *national* synods held between 1559 and 1659, M. Hugues's work reproduces, in addition to the eight national synods of the period of the Desert, all the *provincial* synods, so far as they have been preserved, and numbering some hundreds. Besides this, he places in the notes the minutes of all the *colloques*, or meetings of presbyteries, which are extant. The only possible matter of regret is that the work has been printed in a very small edition and in a sumptuous manner, which will preclude it from obtaining a wide circulation either in France or abroad.

A fact that strikes the reader of these documents at the very start as interesting, and impresses itself more and more upon his mind as

he proceeds, is that the Church of France in the period of the Desert was devoted to the idea of a well-ordered government. There was a dignity and decorum about all its proceedings not at all inferior to the dignity and decorum that had characterized the ecclesiastical convocations of the less troublous times under the Edict of Nantes. In this, as in many other respects, the church, Phenix-like, had sprung full fledged from its own ashes. The "synod" might consist of a little handful of ministers and elders gathered in some out-of-the-way place—a cave, a retired country-house, an open spot in the wood, or a bleak hill-side—but wherever it was, the rules of order were strictly observed. It had its moderator and assistant moderator, its secretary, and its assistant secretary. The rights of the chair were strictly enforced. The speakers were heard in turn, and no interruptions were allowed. Speakers were limited as to the number of times they might take the floor. The ministers who were absent or late, the churches that failed to send an elder or elders to the meeting, were expressly censured by name. Whatever might be the case in time of prosperity, the new founders or restorers of the Protestant Church of France recognized the truth that nothing will do so well in a time of persecution as a strong government. They magnified the office of the church judicatories, and they secured at once the respect which decision and firmness always command. Having started on their career of patient, persistent effort for the recovery of the ground formerly held by the Reformation, the synods never flinched or betrayed a sign of weakness or fear. It was a difficult work at all times; particularly difficult whenever persecution became, as it did periodically, more severe. Many pastors fell by the way, victims of the intolerance of their fellow-citizens; those who remained took no account of their losses, but pressed forward. In the minutes of the synods there is absolutely no bewailing of misfortunes, no lamenting over losses. The sufferings of the churches are rarely referred to save as the marks of the Divine displeasure justly burning against the people because of sin. Every now and then the name of a minister, perhaps a minister who has been frequently mentioned as moderator or secretary, drops out of the minutes and appears no more. From other sources we learn the cause. He was captured by troops at such a place, was hurriedly examined, perhaps put to the torture, sentenced, hung. His brethren in the synod never mention the execution, unless it be incidentally when making provision for a slender pension for his necessitous widow and small children, or when appointing some one to take up the work he was compelled to lay down. In this there was nothing of insensibility.

However much they might deplore the loss in private, the members of the synod felt they had quite another task before them. The blow had fallen upon their late comrade that might have fallen upon them. They were all men appointed to die. Their turn might come next ; whether it did or not, their time would be better employed in labor for the good cause, than in bemoaning the mishap of a Christian minister who, at the execution, had declared himself most blessed in the near prospect of his crown and reward.

When Court gathered the first provincial synod near Monoblet, there was scarcely an ordained minister in France, there was not one in Languedoc. The preachers were at most "proposants"—candidates licensed to preach the Gospel, but by whom licensed was not always so clear. According to the standards of the Reformed Church of France, they had no authority to administer either the sacrament of the Lord's Supper or the sacrament of Baptism, which, nevertheless, they sometimes undertook to do. The Church must have ordained pastors, but how should she obtain them? Two men stood forth pre-eminent, admitted on all sides to be fit for the sacred office. These were Pierre Corteiz, next to Antoine Court the most meritorious character in the history of the restoration of French Protestantism, and Court himself. Both could not be spared at once. Corteiz, being much the older man, was the first to be sent to obtain ordination in Switzerland. He went first to Geneva, thence to Zurich, where he was examined and received the imposition of hands. It had been agreed that Court should follow. But on Corteiz's return the synod interposed its authority. The season was too far advanced for Court to enter upon a long journey of the kind proposed ; one ordained minister had been secured, he could ordain another ; it was useless to go to a distance to get what one had at hand ; it would be to expose a preacher, upon whom the hopes of the churches seemed particularly to rest, to dangers which were great in themselves, and which might have the most alarming consequences, consequences so much the more to be avoided, as neither the good of the Church nor necessity required the risk. Such, as Court himself tells us, were the arguments employed. Reluctantly he yielded his consent. He was publicly examined by the synod, and then while he knelt before Corteiz, the latter, laying a Bible on his head, conferred upon him, in the name of Jesus Christ and by the authority of the synod, the power to exercise the full functions of the ministry. Court's fear was never realized "that his ministry might be rendered less fruitful by the difference which the people might draw between a call received in a foreign university

and that of a synod in which there was but a single pastor." \* The lawfulness of his ordination was never called in question.

The position of the Church in regard to the persons who could administer the sacraments was an interesting one. In the earliest stage, when there was a great scarcity of ordained ministers, the synods and colloquies were undoubtedly disposed to extend the privilege as far as possible. They did, indeed, deny altogether the right to the "proposant," or simple preacher, to baptize or administer the Lord's Supper of his own motion; but they recognized the power of a regularly constituted eldership to authorize him to do so. In full consistency with this action, the Colloquy of the Cévennes, December 13th, 1720, disciplined the licentiate Jean Vesson, basing its sentence partly upon the fact that he had "administered the sacrament of Holy Baptism to children, without having any right to do so, not having ordination or approbation of the elders elected and chosen by the faithful."

As the number of pastors increased, the synods grew even more strict, and it became the rule that under no circumstances should the "proposant" or licentiate undertake anything beyond preaching the Gospel.

In nothing do the minutes of the synods of the Desert show more strikingly the wisdom of the founders and leading spirits of the Church than in the scrupulous care taken to secure a ministry pious, exemplary in conduct, able, and learned. Not even the great pressure brought to bear upon them in the early years of the century could induce them to swerve from the line of prudence in this regard. Ministers found guilty of conduct immoral or scandalous were instantly deposed. No such persons could be restored until they had given long and convincing proof of penitence. Even then they must not return to the scene of their former labors, but must remove to some other and generally distant part of France † Incompetent men, however well-meaning, were stopped in the midst of their course of preparation or of service, thanked for their labors or their good intentions, and recommended to enter into some other calling. ‡ At every step the closest supervision was exercised, and even down to the time of the Revolution the appointment of a commission to report upon the morals and studies of the candidates for the ministry was one of the standing orders of the provincial synods. As a general thing, promising youths were brought to the notice of the synod by some pastor. On his recommendation the

\* Mémoires d'Antoine Court, pp. 149-153.

† See, for example the cases of Jean Bétrine and Étienne Defferre.

‡ So Grail, in 1730, Bornac, in 1744, Bénézet and Allud, in 1749.

young man was placed upon the list of students, and received an annual sum for his support (unless his family were able to provide for him) while receiving preparatory instruction at the hands of the pastor who had recommended him or some other.\* Next, upon examination, he was by vote of the synod admitted to the number of "proposants" or licentiates. He could now make proof of his abilities by helping the pastors in their general work, and particularly by preaching in places which the pastors were unable to visit. At first the licentiates were not expected to compose their own discourses. We have seen that the first sermon that Antoine Court ever heard was one written by the famous Dumoulin, and preached by Bonbonnoux. The Synod of Lower Languedoc, September 30th, 1719, prescribed that the "proposants" should use printed sermons, "or if they made them of their own capacity, they should have them examined by persons chosen by the synod, or else they should take no text." The Synod of Vivarais, June 21st, 1725, in like manner enacted: "It shall be left to the liberty of the preachers to preach sermons of good authors which they shall have learned by heart. If there be any who prefer to compose them for themselves, they shall not be permitted after composing them to deliver them in public until the discourses shall have first been examined by the commissioners named for this purpose." The minuteness of the care exercised over the candidates may be judged by the somewhat whimsical prohibition, intended apparently to check ostentation and conceit, to the effect that no licentiate should keep a horse of his own use (Synod of Vivarais, September 14th, 1726, and Synod of the Lower Cévennes, April 9th, 1747).

The "proposant" who proved acceptable to the churches, generally applied, after a few years, to the synod within whose bounds he labored for a leave of absence, that he might go to Lausanne and perfect his theological education under the care of the "illustrious friends" of the French Protestants in that city. If the synod approved and there was a vacancy in the seminary, leave was granted, and a sum of money was voted to defray the candidate's travelling expenses.

The idea of establishing on the friendly soil of Switzerland a sem-

---

\* A synodical meeting in which Languedoc and Vivarais were represented, October 25th, 1731, decided upon the establishment in each of the five synods then existing or projected of a school designated as an *école ambulante*, because it would seem to have been intended that it should shift its quarters from time to time, accompanying the pastor to whose care it was confided. Each school was to be limited to four pupils. The proposal seems to have originated with Antoine Court. How he himself had conducted a somewhat similar school may be seen in a graphic extract translated in an article in the first number of the PRESBYTERIAN REVIEW, p. 90.

inary for the express purpose of educating for the ministry such devoted young Frenchmen as might be willing to enter upon the perilous work of the regeneration of their native land, seems first to have occurred to Antoine Court, and it was he who carried it in operation. It is doubtful, indeed, whether Protestantism is more indebted to him for having planned and effected the restoration of its church organization and discipline than for his indefatigable labors, extending through about thirty years, to secure a proper theological education for its rising ministry. It was in the summer of 1729 that Court reached the conclusion that the time had come for him to begin his activity outside of France. To use his own words: "The number of pastors had greatly increased that year, and the number of candidates was daily becoming greater. Meantime the efforts to capture me were daily multiplying, so that, humanly speaking, it was impossible that I should be able to escape so many searches, however great the precautions I took, precautions which led me, from the time so high a price had been set upon my head, to avoid almost entirely sleeping in houses. I believed that the moment had come for me to retire from the field." \* Arriving in Switzerland, Court seems to have busied himself with writing to or visiting the persons most likely to further his project of endowing a seminary, and he was so successful that the necessary funds were obtained, and the seminary opened about 1730. Why the students were not sent to the theological school founded by Calvin at Geneva, and why, if a new school was needed, it was not founded in Geneva, will be clear enough to any one who will consider the proximity of that city to French soil, the irritation which the presence of French theological students in training for a course of life which French law made a capital crime would produce in the minds of the French resident and of the court of Versailles, and the timidity now characteristic of the little republic. Thus it was that the city of Geneva lost the opportunity of adding to its ancient glories the new distinction gained by the unpretending foreign seminary of Lausanne, of becoming the saviour of the Protestant churches of France in the eighteenth century. †

\* *Mémoire d'Antoine Court*, pp. 209, 210. This autobiographical sketch ends with the author's departure from France.

† "Ce fut en effet," truthfully observes Charles Coquerel, "l'académie étrangère de Lausanne qui sauva cette fois les églises protestantes du pays." *Histoire des Eglises du Désert*, i. 204. It may not be uninteresting to notice that the seminary founded by Antoine Court continued its useful career at Lausanne throughout the eighteenth century, and when suppressed by Napoleon, in 1809, it was only to be transferred, as it were, to Montauban, and to become in this way the most important theological institution for Protestants in France. *Ibid.*, i. 205.

The length of the term for which the synods permitted their candidates to study abroad was a variable one. The Synod of Lower Languedoc (February 21st, 1730, Art. VI.) was disposed to limit it to precisely eighteen months; but the national synod of the same year (Art. I.) preferred to leave the matter to the prudence of the friends in foreign parts. It would appear, however, that two years was generally the limit. By that time the churches were pretty sure to require the services of the preacher as a full pastor, and an imperative call was sent to him. At first, while the number of pastors in each province was very small, the synods favored the candidate's examination and ordination at Lausanne by the theological professors under whom he had studied. The first national synod, in 1726 (Art. XV.), indeed, ordered that all candidates be examined and receive the imposition of hands only by a *national* synod, until such time as the provincial synods should possess a sufficient number of regularly ordained pastors to take part in the service. But the third national synod, 1730, by its third article permitted all the provincial synods to receive [ordain] their ministers, provided there should be present not less than three pastors, and in case there should not be that number in the body, to invite one or two pastors from the nearest synods to come and help them. Its fourth article declared that the French Protestants "recognized, and would recognize as true ministers all those of our body who have been and shall be ordained in foreign countries." Later in the century, however, some of the larger synods, and particularly the Synod of Lower Languedoc, the largest of all, insisted that all students should come home to be ordained by the body by which and at whose expense they had been sent to Lausanne.

What the examinations were, whether at Lausanne or in France, which the candidates had to pass before ordination we know from the record in the case of four young men who were examined at Lausanne in the autumn of 1759. The circumstance that one of the four was François Rochette, who, after a brief but useful career, was taken and executed at Toulouse, February 19th, 1762—the last Protestant minister that died as a martyr—lends particular interest to this examination. The young men were first required to deliver a sermon composed and committed to memory by them upon a text assigned a week in advance. They were questioned orally on theology and on ethics. They prepared in writing, without recourse to any helps, three papers ("taches" or "analyses"): the first, "upon a question in positive theology," discussed "the motives which the death of Jesus Christ affords men to be virtuous;" the second, "upon a question of controversy," treated of the invocation of

saints ; and the third, " on a question of morals," expounded the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer. Finally they were subjected to " an oral examination on the Gospel, consisting in an explanation of the parable of the tares or a discourse of nearly a half an hour's length on this subject, made after the same amount of time to think it over." \*

If the examinations of those who purposed entering upon the pastoral office were careful and thorough, the pastors themselves did not shrink from a close investigation of their life from year to year. To this matter the veteran Corteiz refers in speaking of a colloquy that met in the Cévennes, January 26th, 1730: " After having remedied, so far as depends on us, the evil that afflicted these elders, and after having set forth in general terms the things that are necessary to remedy the evils which occur from time to time, we entered upon what is always customary in the colloquies which I call together—that is to say, the examination of the life and morals, first of the pastors and then of the elders. Mr. Court and I were the first to leave the room. We repeated to the elders, who were in number thirty-one, those words of Solomon, ' A man that flattereth his neighbor spreadeth a net for his feet,' and those of David, ' Let the righteous smite me ; it shall be a kindness ; and let him reprove me ; it shall be an excellent oil.' This method is a good one to induce offenders to receive censure with a good grace." †

So far as the laity were concerned, much of the legislation of the synods of the Desert grew directly out of the extraordinary conditions of Protestantism, arising from the persecution, more or less severe, that raged during the whole of this period. The Roman Catholic Church touched the Protestant population at many points. It was not so much that the people were compelled by a direct exertion of force to make a profession of Roman Catholicism. The Dragonnades could not be kept up everywhere and for all time. If parents were fined for neglecting to send their children to the schools taught by monks and nuns, where attendance involved of necessity an attendance upon the mass also, many Protestant parents in some way or another escaped notice, and the unfortunates who did not were often helped by the charitable contributions of their brethren in the faith. The great trouble was that Protestantism

---

\* See a letter of Court and his son, Court de Gébelin, October 9th, 1759, and the certificate of the examiners, October 25th, 1759, in E. Hugues, *Les Synodes du Désert*, ii. 199-201. The signatures appended to the latter document are those of " Court, ancien pasteur et représentant ;" " A. Polier de Bottens, grand pasteur ;" " Besson, pasteur ;" and " A. Court fils, lecteur en morale et logique."

† Letter of Pierre Corteiz, in E. Hugues, *Les Synodes du Désert*, i. 90.

being by a legal fiction supposed to be altogether extinct, its adherents had no standing in the sight of the law. One could neither be born as a Protestant, nor be baptized as a Protestant, nor be married as a Protestant, nor be buried as a Protestant. With every civil act a profession of Roman Catholicism was closely bound up. There could be no wedlock recognized by the State, unless the marriage was performed by a priest of the Roman Catholic Church, and to obtain his intervention it was necessary both to exhibit the evidence of baptism and to partake of the communion. Without such a ceremony the offspring of the union were branded as bastards, and were incapable of succeeding to the property of their parents. Certificates of baptism and of marriage "in the Desert"—that is, by Protestant pastors, went for nothing; in fact, they were to the parents, in the one case, and to the husband and wife, in the other, *primâ facie* evidence that they had rendered themselves amenable to the laws prohibiting all "assemblies" for Protestant worship.

A single glance will convince any one of the difficulty of the task of persuading the laity to renounce the easy-going policy of conformity into which the vast majority had fallen during the dark period of a quarter of a century following the Revocation. Yet to that task the synods unhesitatingly applied themselves, and by slow degrees, using firmness tempered with moderation and prudence, they made steady, if not rapid progress in checking the evil. Reason was appealed to, motives of Christian duty were set forth, the resources of the ecclesiastical discipline were drawn upon with due consideration of human frailty. And the result was that the lax practice which had been almost universal when Louis the Fourteenth died became less and less frequent, until, when Louis the Sixteenth, in 1787, published his edict of toleration, and provided therein for the registry of the marriages and baptisms celebrated "in the Desert," there were tens of thousands in different parts of the kingdom instantly to avail themselves of the privilege for which they had long been waiting.

The synods were equally firm in dealing with another vexatious matter—the draping of the houses of Protestants on the annual festival of *Corpus Christi*, or *La Fête Dieu*. The festival, it is well known, had been instituted in honor of the host, or wafer, in the Romish mass, and was intended to attest belief in the dogma that that wafer had really been transubstantiated and had become "very God." When in a town or village every house inhabited by Roman Catholics was gay with bright hangings, the absence of decorations on the front of the house of a Protestant became painfully conspicuous. On the other hand, how could a Protestant adorn his dwelling

for the festival without signifying to the world, by the very act, that he believed the doctrine against which, as much as against any other, the Reformation was a protest? Of course there were plenty of weak-kneed Protestants who promptly acquiesced in the custom, and some of these maintained that they were "compelled" to do so. But the synods made no account of such excuses. One of them (the Synod of the Upper Cévennes, in 1751) took the pains to show that no compulsion could justify an ungodly act, short of "a violence which it is not possible to resist" (Art. V.). The synods again and again protested against the "cowardice" of those "who, to avoid certain penalties, drape the front of their houses, sweep the streets, or strew them with branches on the Day of the Sacrament of the Romish Church; which is giving to the creature external and religious marks of homage which belong to the Creator alone" (Synod of Béarn, July 17th, 1758). The national synod of 1758, to show its aversion for the doctrine of transubstantiation, appointed a *fast* to be held on the day of the Romish feast (Art. IV.). This, however, was probably as far as any ecclesiastical body of the churches of the Desert ever went in the manifestation of hostility to the Roman Catholic Church. Of malevolence toward the hierarchy of that Church there is not a mark in the minutes of any colloquy or synod from the beginning to the end of the century. While it was notorious that all the vexations and persecutions which culminated in the recall of the Edict of Nantes were directly due to the periodical entreaties of the clergy of France in their "assemblies," held every five years—while it was equally notorious that the great obstacle in the way of the renewed recognition of the civil rights of the Protestants lay in the nearly unanimous opposition of the same clergy, and that the parish priests seemed to regard themselves as set apart, by virtue of their orders, to the congenial work of hunting out and bringing to the gallows all Protestant pastors in France, it was more than strange that in the synodical meetings of the latter there is not a word dropped to the disadvantage of the Romish priesthood. If the attitude of the synods of the Desert in regard to the ecclesiastics of the Established Church is a rare example of Christian charity and forbearance, their attitude in regard to the monarchs who were persecuting them is an equally signal illustration of loyalty. The most brutal severity never provoked them to retaliation, or even to harsh words respecting either the government at Versailles or its agents in the provinces. Indeed, it is difficult for a citizen of a republic, and for one who lives in the nineteenth century, to repress the feeling that the loyalty of the Protestants was too great, that their expressions of unconditional obedience came dangerously near to servility. We are amazed when we re-

member the countless atrocities, the galleys, the executions, the sufferings in the Tour de Constance and elsewhere, which characterized the period from 1715 to 1774—the reign of Louis the Fifteenth—to read not in a public utterance, but in a private letter from one pastor to another the words, “ We have lost a good king. . . . This good prince had his weaknesses, even his vices. What man has not? The hard and cruel man alone ought to be detested; and Louis the Fifteenth was mildness, humanity, beneficence itself.” \*

Of doctrinal discussions there are but scanty traces in the records of the synods of the Desert. The influence of the standards adopted during what the French Protestants loved to regard as the golden age of their history restrained them from any pronounced departures from the creed of their fathers. The national synod of 1756, after expressing its high opinion of the usefulness of the Lausanne seminary, added to the thanks it tendered to the directors a very pointed request, “ that they would more and more watch over the conduct of the students and *always give them orthodox professors.*” The last clause, at first sight unimportant, had its significance. Five years before the Synod of Lower Languedoc had declined to send any further licentiates to the seminary. The ministers were unwilling to have their students taught in a school where an assistant professor or tutor, the pastor Bournet, held what they believed to be erroneous views respecting the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ. Antoine Court, informed of the cause of the synod’s action, caused the offending instructor to be removed, and the temporary disaffection of the French pastors toward the seminary ceased.

The churches were, however, averse to the strict Calvinism of an earlier day. This was evidenced by the growing preference for the works of the well-known Swiss theologian, J. F. Osterwald, and particularly for his catechism for the use of the young. The national synod of 1744, by its eleventh article, decided that in all the provinces the abridgment of this catechism should be used, “ as the most clear and methodical;” while the twelfth article directed the churches to purchase Osterwald’s book of “ Reflections,” and to use it in their devotional exercises. The Synod of Lower Languedoc, in 1771 (Art. XIII.), enjoined upon the elders to see to it that no other catechism than that of Osterwald should be allowed to be introduced into the public instructions, and referred to the action of the national synod of 1744. Only a year or two before an interesting controversy arose within the bounds of the Synod of Saintonge, Angoumois, and Bordelais. Étienne Gibert, † pastor of Bordeaux,

---

\* Pomaret to Olivier Desmond, 1774; *Les Synodes du Désert*, iii. 83, 84.

† Étienne Gibert was a younger brother of Jean Louis Gibert, also a pastor of the

dissatisfied with the catechism of Osterwald, as well as with that of Saurin, which also enjoyed some currency among the French Protestants, had, without consulting the elders of his church, printed an edition of the *Heidelberg* catechism. This he attempted to use in the instruction of the young, but he was met by the determined opposition of the consistory, to whom, presumably, the strong Calvinism of the Palatine creed was displeasing. A warm discussion, with a good deal of hard feeling, was the consequence. The case was taken by appeal to the provincial synod. This body, at its meeting in September, 1770, condemned M. Gibert's course in thus introducing a new catechism without the knowledge of the elders, "although it is approved among the Protestant communions in general." The synod farther decided that

"the consistory was in the right, in view of the complaints of several of its members and of a large number of the faithful, when it directed the said Sieur Gibert, as it did by its different resolutions, and particularly by those of the 13th of August last, to express himself as well publicly as privately respecting the matters of grace, the spiritual inability of man, and the necessity of good works, in the terms set forth in the aforesaid resolutions which are in our hands; inasmuch as this manner of expressing one's views does not seem to the synod to impair orthodoxy in these matters, while it would have prevented the said complaints, and put an end to the unhappy divisions which have already ensued and which might yet arise."\*

The references that have been given must have led the reader to notice the remarkable fact that the history of the churches of the Desert is to be studied rather in the minutes of the *provincial*, than in those of the *national* synods. It was quite otherwise during the times previous to the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. Then the national synods alone were of prime importance. After the Revocation only eight national synods were held, the latest being that of 1763. Far from seeking, as had been at first proposed, to call a national synod every year, the churches of the Desert early laid down the principle, distinctly stated in the "Discipline" drawn up in 1739 by Barthélemy Claris, in pursuance of the instructions of the provincial synod of Lower Languedoc, that "the national synod shall assemble only in case of very great urgency." † The reasons for this were to be found in the fewness of the ministers, the long distances they and the elders must travel in order to meet, the poverty of the churches, which made it a burden to defray the expense

Desert, who, in 1764, brought over a colony of Huguenots to Charleston, S. C. Ramsay, *History of South Carolina*, i. 19, 20.

\* Not satisfied with this action, the synod having heard M. Gibert read a long treatise of fifty-six pages treating of the matters in dispute, expressed the greatest anxiety that it should not be published. *Les Synodes du Désert*, ii. 497-99.

† "Le synode national ne sera assemblé que dans une très-grande nécessité." *Ibid.*, i. 367.

of bringing them together, and, especially, the very considerable risk incurred by the delegates upon a journey which would almost certainly become known by the government. But if the national synods lost, the provincial synods gained in importance. This was true, above all, of the Synod of Lower Languedoc. In 1719 it had but two ordained ministers. In 1789 it had forty ordained ministers and sixty-eight churches, divided into the five colloquies of Nîmes, Uzès, Sommières, Massillargues, and Montpellier. It is not surprising that so large and well equipped a body should have exerted an almost controlling influence in many ecclesiastical matters. Meantime the missionary spirit had been strong. Districts but poorly provided with ministers of the Gospel robbed themselves in order that they might "lend" some one or more of them to other districts even less favored. Thus it was at the price of great self-denial and sacrifice that the Protestants of the Cévennes revived religion among the descendants of those who had once been Protestants in Upper Languedoc. Thence the movement advanced southward into Foix, and westward into Guyenne and Béarn. So were Saintonge and Angoumois, Aunis and the city of La Rochelle, Poitou, Normandy, Picardy, and other provinces reclaimed. The progress was steady. By the time of the national synod of 1756 the number of ecclesiastical provinces had increased to ten, with forty-eight pastors and seventeen licentiates, or simple preachers. In 1763 there were fourteen synods, with sixty-two pastors and thirty-five licentiates. When the Edict of Toleration was signed, in 1787, there were, if we may judge from the known increase in certain synods, about one hundred and twenty-five Protestant pastors in all France. The increase in the professedly Protestant laity was doubtless still greater in proportion. In some districts of southern France the Protestant families seemed to be about as numerous as before the Revocation. It was a glorious work of resuscitation, and, under God, it had been performed by devoted men, few in number but strong in their determination to win back the ground which the Reformation had lost, through no fault of its own, but as the result of merciless persecution. To men like Paul Rabaut, who took for the motto on his seal, "Né à patir et mourir"—"Born to suffer and die"—to men who like him could playfully and fearlessly write, "I am worth more than I was awhile ago; a sum of six thousand livres was the price set on my head, now it is ten thousand; and instead of the halter, I am now threatened with the wheel"—to such men was it chiefly owing that the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes proved so great a failure.

HENRY M. BAIRD.