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ART. I.—THE REVOCATION OF THE EDICT OF NANTES.

ALTHOUGH much has been written in recent years upon the history of French Protestantism, thanks to the unceasing labours of the *Société de l'Histoire du Protestantisme français*, one important period has hitherto remained comparatively neglected. While the origins of French Protestantism have received masterly treatment at the hands of Professor Baird and others; while the stormy period of the first Civil Wars and St. Bartholomew's Day, as also the subsequent times of Richelieu and Mazarin, have repeatedly found adequate survey and analysis; and while the exile and persecutions of the Revocation are familiar to most students in outline if not in detail—the remarkable generation which preceded the Revocation as yet lacks any history but that contained in the formidable volumes of Élie Benoist.

The reason is not far to seek. It is not a picturesque or a romantic period. There is no civil war, no conspiracy; no monumental characters like Coligny or Sully, or Duplessis Mornay; no tragedy like the night of St. Bartholomew. It is a time of transition and of preparation. But there are not wanting here—as indeed in every epoch—the subject of fruitful study and legitimate interest. At no other time can the strength and weakness of the Huguenots be so clearly estimated as when placed in juxtaposition with the Gallican Church, then in the plenitude of glory, with Antoine Arnauld, Pétau, Launoy, Bossuet, Fénelon, and Bourdaloue, either in maturity or in early promise. And the result of such investigation may lead to the conviction that, in respect of scholarship, solid learning, the graver eloquence, and that mastery which Goethe tells us can only be the offspring of restriction and hindrance, the period in question was fruitful

in good men, worthy successors of their great forerunners, and prepared, like them, to be confessors and martyrs of Christ's Gospel.

So far was Protestantism in France from being extinguished by the massacre of 1572, that within four years it reconquered the position gained in 1570 at the Peace of St. Germain. And not even the Holy League, founded by the Guises in conjunction with Philip of Spain, formidable as it was, could avail to break down the position of active resistance. The miserable King Henri III., despised by both parties, gave negative help in his destruction of the Guise faction. It was from his Protestant successor, Henri of Navarre, the hope of Evangelical Christendom, that a serious blow was impending, when, with hardly the affectation of gravity, he decided upon an abjuration in the light of a political necessity. It has been rightly urged by M. Charles Read and others that the political expedience of this step was as doubtful as its moral aspect was terrible. To argue with Stähelin[1] that the land, but for this step, would have been plunged into further civil war, is simply to beg a very complicated question. Still less can we endorse the suggestion of the same writer, that Henri might have proclaimed the old Gallican independence of Rome, and might then, from within a Catholic, but non-Roman Church, have effected all the needful reforms. All the possibilities of devious diplomacy passed under the view of the acutest statesman in Europe; and so little was he able to frame a justification for his perversion that to the earnest reproaches of Queen Elizabeth and others he could only utter the jesting excuse, "*Paris vaut bien une messe.*"

A great ruler, singularly endowed in body and mind for the highest functions, and having enjoyed the inestimable privilege of being tried by persecution, he failed in the time of prosperity; was morally enervated, lost faith, and laid himself the foundation of all the later misery of his former colleagues. For the nation was now on the path of centralization, in which all minorities—however safe-guarded by privilege—were finally doomed; and the keen eye of a Sully could not but foresee, in the political horizon, the sure foreshadowing of future disaster.

For the time, however, a sufficient bulwark seemed to be raised by the Edict of Nantes. Its preamble recognised that God is adored by all the subjects of France, if by different rites and ceremonies, and therefore the kingdom retains its old title, "Très-Chrétien." The following enactments were declared to be perpetual and irrevocable:

(*a*) Full liberty of private conscience.

[1] "Der Uebertritt K. Heinrichs IV.," Basel, 1856.

(*b*) Right of public worship in all places where it had been permitted in 1597, and in the suburbs of towns; in castles of great nobles (*hauts-justiciers*), and in the chapels of private mansions.
(*c*) All public offices to be open to the Huguenots.
(*d*) Their children were to share in the schools, their sick in the hospitals, their poor the alms of the parish.
(*e*) The right of printing was conceded in certain towns.
(*f*) For the purpose of securing equal justice, the so-called "*Chambres Mi-parties*" were to be established in the provincial parliaments, as well as a *Chambre de l'Édit*, at Paris.
(*g*) The right to found academies and convoke synods.
(*h*) Possession of certain cities and fortresses.

Perhaps the best proof of the immediate merit of the Edict is to be found in the bitter opposition it elicited on both sides. The old Leaguers, who had one and all sold their loyalty at a high price to Henri IV., professed horror at this legal permission of heresy. On the other hand, the Huguenots[1] were indignant at the clauses which enjoined the restitution of possessions taken from the Catholics, and the undisturbed celebration of the mass even in their own districts. But the real weakness of the Edict, considered as a final settlement, lay in its principles rather than in its details. The Huguenots were regarded as a separated body, and all their safeguards tended to make them still more an *imperium in imperio*, an ever-present danger in the eyes of an absolute ruler. The real need was for the fusion of the two parties: the Edict only gave protection; and it was the misfortune, and not the fault, of the Huguenots that they were soon forced to look solely to their separate resources, and never enabled to make any appeal to patriotic feeling or human sympathy.

The proof of this was experienced as soon as the dagger of Ravaillac had ended the reign of Henri IV. A series of gradual but ever-increasing encroachments on their privileges began: in 1617 a decree, confiscating some lands in Béarn, provoked resistance. The royal troops were sent to Pau, but hardly had they enforced the decree when the southern provinces were in revolt. La Rochelle summoned a synod, and in a few months the two parties were again in armed conflict; but the Huguenots had no longer the resources

[1] It is curious that the exploded derivation of this word, from "eidgenossen," is still repeated in some recent publications. The reader may be referred to Gieseler's *Kirchengeschichte* (III. i. 535) for an interesting and conclusive statement on the subject. The name arose in Touraine, where the Protestants were supposed to be the followers of a mythical "Roi Huguet," the leader of some outlaws.

needful for a combat against superior force. The old martyr spirit had been modified into political passion; the struggle for religious liberty into one for the conservation of privileges. The old leaders were either past activity, or had been gained over to the Court. Not even the hopes of English help, as little trustworthy as in Elizabeth's time, could prolong the contest. After a gallant resistance La Rochelle surrendered in 1625; and Richelieu's political wisdom re-enacted the Edict of Nantes, save only that the hostage-fortresses were razed, and all future means of defence removed.

In the peaceful generation which followed there is not much to attract the Church historian, except the declaration of union with the Lutheran churches, drawn up at the National Synod of Charenton in 1631, under the auspices of Mestrézat and Blondel. But during the troubles of the Fronde the Huguenots were given opportunity of proving themselves patriotic citizens, and of meriting sympathy from their fellow-subjects and affection from the throne. From 1652 to 1656 the condition of the Huguenots was greatly improved. Cromwell's influence was paramount in Europe, and a word in a despatch had saved Nîmes from the intended penalty for a riot; but on his death the hostile influence of the Queen-mother became paramount. The Huguenots determined on a great appeal: they secured the appointment of a commission to investigate their grievances. Its report was published in April, 1659, and brought dismay to the petitioners. All that was granted to them was the sending of certain official arbitrators. The Catholic clergy triumphed, knowing their influence upon these officers; the Huguenots felt that their cause was lost.

After the last National Synod, held at Loudun in 1659-60, began a time of gradual but unceasing encroachment upon the privileges of the Edict. But active persecution did not begin until Turenne, the *Maréchal-général* of France, the greatest of her citizens and soldiers, had followed the disastrous example of Henri IV. in abandoning the religion of his fathers. Many and various had been the influences brought to bear upon him. The vulgar temptations of military and court rank, even the title of "*Connétable de France*," were held forth in vain. It is probable that the ultimate success lay in an appeal to his fidelity to the policy of Louis XIV., based on false or exaggerated statements of Huguenot disaffection.

Once deprived of their great leader, the Huguenots were soon made to feel a change of policy. In 1669 a royal declaration suppressed the *Chambres de l'Édit* at Paris and Rome. This was rapidly followed by a "Règlement," or set of practical rules, intended to hamper as far as possible the

independence of social life. This first policy of Louis XIV. is simply and cordially stated in his own memoirs, the authenticity of which is unquestionable:

> I believed, my son, that the best way of proceeding with the Huguenots in my kingdom was, in the first place, not to employ any new severity with them, to observe faithfully all the concessions they had obtained from my predecessors, but to go no further in the way of indulgences, and even to restrict them as far as justice and decency would permit. . . . But as to the favours which depended on my own will, I determined from the first to grant none to the Huguenots. I also decided to attract by favours and recompense those who showed signs of yielding; and I neglected no opportunity of stirring up our bishops to labour for their instruction and conversion, and to remove the scandals which tended to keep them apart.[1]

The Chancellor of this Exchequer of perversion was Péllisson, himself a pervert from Protestantism, who had attained a rapid literary reputation by his "History of the Academy." A large annual revenue derived from the *Régale* was devoted to this purpose, and regular financial statements prepared, showing the cost per head in each district. It is noteworthy that the price gradually lessened as force was more frequently used to supplement bribery. In the month of June, 1677, we find him writing to a correspondent on the subject of economy, suggesting 100 francs as the maximum in the case of the poorer classes, proving very clearly that his successes were among the residuum without religion, to whom his function gave an unhoped-for opportunity of gain. This is the more to be emphasized, since later, when persecution was seriously practised, there is no question as to the numbers which, under pressure, abandoned their faith.

Together with this method, discreditable alike to those who gave and received, another system was employed. Historians of Louis's reign have sometimes marked as an epoch of particular glory the abandonment of the profligate life which had stained the Court of Versailles, and all who condoned it by their presence. There would have been more reason for congratulation had not that period of reformation been delayed till middle life, and conterminous with the commencement of persecution. Perhaps the two motives were combined: the fixed desire to get rid of the jarring political independence conferred by the Edict, and the conviction that he might atone for the profligacy of early life by the zealous extirpation of heresy. It may, indeed, be conceded that he was kept in ignorance of the *means* adopted by his subordinates; but it is the most terrible responsibility of absolute power that every act of a subordinate is the act of the superior, both in law

[1] "Mém. Historiques de Louis XIV.," i., 87.

and equity; and every deed of injustice and cruelty, wherever committed, is the act of the Sovereign himself.

Michel de Marillac, intendant of Poitou, had the questionable merit of discovering and suggesting a new method of pressure. Of all civic burthens, "billeting" was one of the most disagreeable. Hard work had to be done for nominal pay, which often did not cover the actual cost. Favour also decided as to distribution, and arranged exemptions. Marillac was the type of the inferior statesman in these times. Popular, trying to raise the credit of a decayed family rather than to amass a fortune—like others, he saw in persecution and forced "conversions" a way of gaining favour at Court. He suggested to Louvois that detachments of troops might be billeted on Huguenot households, with permission (explicit or implicit) to relax even the slender discipline on such occasions.

At first no extraordinary excesses were practised, but soon the soldiers learnt the half-prompted lesson. The terror spread. Those whom the fear of personal suffering would not have daunted trembled for their families, the honour of their wives and daughters. The very sight of a dragoon sometimes caused all the inhabitants of a village to abjure. The well-known narrative of Jean Migault gives a pathetic record of these incursions. "They demanded," he relates, "fifteen francs for each of the superior officers, nine for a lieutenant, three for each soldier, and thirty sols even for each subordinate person attached to the regiment." On the slightest hesitation furniture and goods were sold. But the loss by plunder was the least evil suffered. Jurien records that, at the village of Ville-Dieu in Poitou, a sick man was persecuted for days, and left at last without food. "At last, seeing that he could not be persuaded, they left him. He died of starvation, and those who found his corpse saw that he had devoured part of his own hands."[1] Élie Benoist's fourth volume is full of similar records. An officer of dragoons, called to account for his cruelty, naïvely declared that he had never heard of any severity, "*except burning the feet of the householders where his men were billeted.*" And at last the veil of seeming ignorance at Court was dismissed, and the worst excesses endorsed and enjoined by the direct command of the monarch:

Le Roy a appris de votre lettre du 17 de ce mois la continuation de l'opiniâtreté des habitants de la R.P.R. de Dieppe; comme ces gens-là sont les seuls dans tout le royaulme qui se sont distingués à ne se vouloir pas soumettre à ce que le Roy désire d'eux, *vous ne devez garder à leur égard aucune des mesures qui vous ont été prescrites, et vous ne sauriez rendre trop rude et trop onéreuse la subsistence des troupes chez eux.*[2]

[1] "Les derniers efforts de l'innocence affligée." La Haye, 1682.

[2] Louvois to Beaupré, quoted by Waddington, "Normandie," 2 *n.* 1.

Ribaldry, plunder, actual violence, ended in the ruin of the household visited by these *missions bottées;* and when a family was "converted" the soldiers moved elsewhere to repeat the process. At times one wonders that the descendants of the warriors of Moncontour and Jarnac had learnt so much passive submission. But it must be remembered that the Huguenots had now no leaders, no organization, and no practice in the use of arms. And we may also believe that the strong teachings of obedience to constituted authorities, in which the great Protestant theologians rivalled the Court preachers themselves, had sunk deep into the hearts of their hearers.

In one quarter alone was resistance shown, and an excuse furnished for completing the work of persecution. Claude Brousson, a citizen of Nîmes, had pleaded in vain before the Parliament of Toulouse for the retention of fourteen Protestant churches threatened with demolition. At last he planned open manifestation. An informal synod was summoned, and representatives attended from Dauphiné, the Vivarais, the Cevennes, and Languedoc. A letter was drawn up, addressed to the king, pleading their loyal purpose, but asserting their determination to obey God rather than man, and that if their temples were destroyed they would hold their meetings still on the desecrated spots. Twenty years earlier this firm but respectful language would have produced a great effect. *Now* it was too late. Moreover, there was division even in the ranks of the persecuted: on the one side the terrified majority, the so-called "*modérés,*" led by Ruvigni; on the other the small band of "*zélateurs,*" who were determined not to suffer without protest. It is sad to find Ruvigni angrily disavowing Brousson; and actually declaring that the king would be justified in destroying the temples for thirty leagues around, in case of resistance!

In spite of this protest, the appointed meeting was held. It took place at St. Hippolyte, in the Cevennes, and was marked by order and solemnity. Many others followed. But now the Catholic population began to arm, and the Huguenots followed the example. This gave the wished-for excuse at Versailles. The original petition, in all probability, had never reached the monarch; no answer, in any case, was vouchsafed. Saint-Ruth, a famous soldier of fortune, destined to contend more illustriously in Ireland afterwards, was sent in command of the royal troops. They came upon a Huguenot congregation in the act of worship. It resisted the onslaught, and defended themselves bravely against the charge of three regiments. Massacred, the remainder were burnt in a farm whither they had taken refuge, singing psalms to the last.

Prisoners taken elsewhere were tortured and executed. Isaac Homel, the proto-martyr of the Revocation period, was broken on the wheel. This ended the first and last attempt at resistance for many years.

And now the toils were closing round the victims, and the bishops felt confident that their long-continued importunities were at last to be granted. In vain do the more adroit apologists of the Gallican Church endeavour to prove that it had no responsibility in the Revocation. As far back as the year 1636, the clergy of France had petitioned for an interference and literary censorship upon Huguenot writings and utterances, which would have amounted to virtual suppression.[1] In 1651 Gilbert de Choiseul, Bishop of Comminges, addressed the king in these words: "We do not ask of your majesty *at present* to banish from his kingdom this unhappy liberty of conscience which destroys the true liberty of the children of God, *because the execution of such a step would be difficult.*"[2] From 1660 onwards, the demands of the Assemblies increase in vigour and distinctness. Step by step, their demands prompt and anticipate the successive inroads made into the few remaining privileges of the Edict. The severe laws against the *relaps*, the exclusion of the Huguenots from all public and municipal offices, the limitation and destruction of temples, the nullity of mixed marriages, the restriction of private education, all these were explicitly and specifically demanded by the Gallican clergy, and granted at their request. The Assembly of 1680 could hardly think of a new petition. Its successors of 1682 and 1685 addressed the Huguenots in honeyed words that barely concealed the sense of imminent triumph.[3] They prayed the Protestant brethren lovingly to consider whether the cruel separation should not end, and the "tenderness" which the Church had manifested meet with its reward. But the conclusion of the document left no room for doubt. In case of prolonged resistance, "you must await evils incomparably more terrible than all those which already have been incurred by your rebellion and your schism."[4] This was the announcement of the Revocation.

JOHN DE SOYRES.

(To be continued.)

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[1] See "Recueil des Actes, titres et mémoires concernant les affaires du clergé de France, mis en nouvel ordre suivant la délibération générale du clergé, du 29 août 1705." Paris, 1716.

[2] "Remontrances du Clergé," in "Bulletin de l'Hist. du Prot.," xiv. 71 *et seq.*

[3] "Lettre circulaire du Clergé de France," 1682, p. 30.

[4] "Avertissement pastoral de l'Égl. Gall. à ceux de la R.P.R." 1685.