

It will, perhaps, secure him in office till the resources of persecution have been exhausted. And then he will probably get 'fired' like any other tool that has passed the days or the occasion of its use. But for the moment he struts with absurd pomposity upon the stage—a pigmy politician aping the Man of Blood and Iron, a Tom Thumb in the buskins of the giant Blunderbore.

M. Combes and the Radical-Socialist-Republican coalition on whom he depends for office make no secret of the fact that they aim, in effect, not merely at terminating the development of the Catholic religion in France, but its very existence. 'La Lanterne,' the Socialist organ, recently announced the programme in the following terms:

'The religious Orders have received a preliminary blow. Others must be dealt. After the religious Orders of males come the religious Orders of females, by no means the least pernicious. After the religious Orders the Church. After the friar, the priest. After the fulfilment of the law against the religious Orders, the termination of the Concordat and separation.'

The pace is usually fast and furious when the devil drives. And both M. Waldeck-Rousseau and M. Combes have found themselves constantly rushed from position to position, from lesser to greater instalments of persecution, to satisfy the insatiable demands of the rabid fanatics by whom they have been dressed in a little brief authority. Some weeks ago the viceroy of a Chinese province sent instructions to one of the mandarins under his jurisdiction to 'carefully try' a batch of political prisoners that were under arrest and 'then have them all beheaded.' A course analogous to this was the first political crime into which M. Combes allowed himself to be dragged by the wire-pullers. When the infamous Law of Associations was under discussion, the most solemn engagements were made that the case of each religious Order would be separately inquired into and decided on its own merits. But M. Combes' masters were not satisfied with this arrangement. The Orders were first suppressed wholesale and exiled. The farce of inquiry (if any) came afterwards. This secured him a short lease of office. He has just now contracted for a further extension of his shaky tenure of power by breaking another of his pie-crust promises. 'He started,' says the 'Revue des Deux Mondes,' 'by saying that he bore no ill-will save to the religious congregations, and that he would respect the position of the secular clergy as created by the Concordat, of which he was a partisan.' He has now been swept past that position. We are within easy view of the complete realisation of the penal code that was set forth with such brutal candor by 'La Lanterne.' And the words and actions of M. Combes clearly show that the ruling party and the puppet-Premier are both alike bent on what may be termed a war of extermination against the Church. A long-winded Bill of 98 clauses has been introduced by M. de Pressense—a tyrannical measure, worthy of the days of Queen Anne or the Second George. While nominally intended to separate Church and State, its real object is to bind the clergy hand and foot, to make the Church the wretched bond-slave of the Government, and to cripple its power for good among the people.

One Result

Meantime the work of proscription, spoliation, and banishment goes furiously on. In Paris, at the Grande Chartreuse, and many other places—especially in Brittany—the expulsion of the religious has been marked by strong, sometimes dangerous, manifestations of popular resentment. There is a more than ever rigid application of the long-established policy of penalising or dismissing from the public service those who dare to practice the duties of the Catholic religion or send their children to convent schools. As things stand, outside the army and navy, the practice or profession of the Catholic faith is almost as insuperable a bar to public employment as it was under the Irish penal code or as it is to this day in the Orange Corporation of Belfast. One result of this form of persecution has been to enormously increase the proportion of Protestant officials in the employment of the State. Numerically and socially, Protestants form an insignificant section of the population of France. They have for generations exercised the fullest and most absolute freedom of religious worship, and their clergy are to this hour salaried by the State. But 'they form a little world apart,' says the English Protestant writer Hamerton in his 'French and English,' 'which (except,

perhaps, in the most Protestant districts, and they are of small extent) appears to be outside the current of the national life.' A little over twelve months ago the 'Contemporary Review' pointed out what it termed 'the singular paradox' that 'while Protestantism as a form of Church life is declining' in France, its power in the State has been of late years steadily rising. 'On the one hand,' says the 'Contemporary' article, 'its influence so increases that Protestants are to be found in all sorts of positions of authority and power, far out of proportion to their estimated numerical strength; on the other hand, its temples are empty of worshippers, and the number of members, in both its confessions, diminishes with ominous rapidity.' It is estimated that the Protestants of France have dwindled to 600,000 in a population of over 38,000,000. And yet their political influence 'is,' says the 'Contemporary,' 'nearly seven and a half times as great as might be expected from the actual number of its professed adherents.'

We have no objection to the State securing the best service it can, irrespective of creed. But our readers will recall the hysterical fits into which a section of the non-Catholic press and pulpit in Australasia fell when the Orange lodges raised the false alarm that Catholics occupy a stronger relative position in the service of the various States than is warranted by their proportion to total population. One should have thought that, on similar grounds, our quill-drivers and pulpiteers would have stormed and thundered at the Lutherans and Calvinists of France for the manner in which they have been swarming, out of all proportion to their relative strength in the population, into posts of honor and emolument under the State from which practising Catholics are excluded almost as rigorously as if they were felons. But no voice of protest is raised. In Australasia a lying Orange rumor that Catholics have too great a share of the Government loaves and fishes almost led to an order to our co-religionists to step off the earth. And now forth steps one of our New Zealand papers and in its issue of last Saturday glories in the thought that the preponderance of Lutherans and Calvinists in the public service of France is merely an evidence of the 'dominating qualities' of Protestantism! It serenely omits to state that these 'dominating qualities' did not appear in French public life until the 'Protestantism' had so far evaporated as to be a negligible quantity in the moral development of the nation, and until the profession and practice of the Catholic religion had become a bar to public appointments.

A Sign of Hope

O'Connell, in a memorable utterance, says of bigotry that it 'has no head and cannot think, no heart and cannot feel. When she moves, it is in wrath; when she pauses, it is amidst ruin.' The description is a skin-fit on the rabid fanaticism that stands in the high places of France to-day. The fury against the Church is all along the line. In addition to the direct campaign for the plunder and expulsion of the religious Orders, M. Combes has issued a ukase of perpetual proscription and disability against every person that is or has been a member of a religious association. All over the country he is closing churches that were erected and frequented by the people—even the beautiful shrine of Lourdes is threatened. Priestly ministrations are forbidden to the sick and dying in hospitals, etc.; many of the bishops and the parochial clergy are harried and their meagre incomes—a small return from the confiscated property of the Church—withdrawn: 'the meanest of all the forms of controversy,' as Lecky calls it in his 'Democracy and Liberty' (vol. II, p. 84), and the stupefied head of a tyrannical regime has even gone so far as to invade the episcopal domain by determining who shall and who shall not be allowed to divide the Word of God to the people from the pulpit. This has led to a defiant protest by the Bishop of Orleans, the Bishop of Nancy, and others, which constitutes the most hopeful feature in this campaign against religion. The Bishop of Orleans (Dr. Touchet) defied the edict, placed a preacher interdicted by M. Combes in his Cathedral pulpit, and at the close of the sermon declared to the assembled multitude: 'We hold our mission of preaching, not from any man, chief of State, or minister of Public Worship, but from Jesus Christ, and so far as the diocese is concerned, no one but the bishop has the right to inhibit any preacher.' The sturdy prelate's brave words were received with