

CHURCH AND RELIGION

From the first the Icelanders have been an almost homogeneous people as regards church and religion, and religious controversies may be said to be unknown in the country. Most of the colonists were heathens who brought with them the ancient Scandinavian faith, the *Ásatrú*, as it was called, while a few of those who came from the western islands were Christians. But even as early as the colonization, doubt in the old northern deities had begun to reveal itself, and in the year 1000 Christianity was established as the official religion in Iceland and accepted by the general public without the least bloodshed. Lutheranism, when introduced in the 16th century, was not submitted to quite so peacefully; neither was it universally accepted by the people until the last catholic bishop in Iceland, Jón Arason, had, with two of his sons, been beheaded (1550). But the new faith, though forced upon the Icelanders, gradually took deep root.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church is the Established Church of Iceland. There has, however, during the last fifty years been full religious liberty. Sectarian bodies are few and inconsiderable, the total number of dissenters at the census of 1920 being 463, or $\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. of the population. Of these, 204 did not belong to any religious denominations. Only the Roman Catholics and the Adventists have formed congregations; their ministers have received recognition by the government, and thus acquired the right to solemnize marriages and perform other clerical offices which are valid according to Icelandic law. Besides these there were in 1920 three free (Lutheran) congregations in the country, with a total of 7243 members, or some 8 per cent. of the whole population. Though holding the same doctrines as the Established Church, they have separated themselves from it; they are entirely self-governing bodies, having their own churches and paying