

CHURCH GROWTH IN ENGLAND.

A VERY observant writer in the *Mail*, Aug. 3rd, (Rev. A. W. Spragge, Newmarket, Ont.) supplies a few facts relative to the wonderful life, growth, and spirituality in the Church of England at the present time. Besides the *London Times*, a not too friendly critic, which, he says, joins in similar statements, Mr. Spragge writes: "Dr. Rigg, one of the leaders of the Wesleyans in England, at their annual conference three years ago, testified that while some of their chapels were being deserted some of the English churches were crowded; that, as a general rule their chapels were as scantily attended now as the Church of England churches were three generations ago. Rev. Dr. Osborn, who went on to speak in the same way, 'had no hesitation in saying that he did not believe there was ever such a revival of religion as that of which the Established Church has been the subject during the last half century.'

"The Bishop of Durham, a man of great intellect and scholarship, in a recent charge says:—'NEVER SINCE THE EARLIEST DAYS OF CHRISTIANITY HAS ANY CHURCH EXHIBITED greater signs of active, healthy, vigorous life. It is the manifoldness of the developments which arrests and compels our attention.' The Bishop of Tennessee in a recent speech declared there had not been in the Church such an awakening to spiritual life and progess since the Day of Pentecost, as was seen in the Church of England in our day.

"Now for a few facts to show that these witnesses within and without the Anglican communion are true. In England, within the last thirty years, over 2,000 new parishes have been created. The bishops and clergy have increased from less than 15,000 to nearly 21,000. Over \$250,000,000 have been expended in church buildings. About \$500,000,000 have been contributed for church endowments. In the last twelve years more than \$80,000,000 have been subscribed voluntarily for day schools under Church control, and the net increase of accommodation in these schools during the same period has exceeded one million and a half. Surely these figures are more eloquent than any words.

Then, again, the other day all Canterbury turned out to welcome and do honour to the new Archbishop. His entry was more like a royal progress, in the spontaneous enthusiasm of the people, than a bishop's visit to his cathedral city. About fifty years ago the Archbishop of Canterbury was hissed by the mob when proceeding to the ceremony of his enthronement. What a change for the better! Then, look at the city of London. Fourteen years ago there were 620 churches; now there are 928. Since 1869 an increase of fifty per cent., an average of twenty-two churches built every year in one city.

If time and your space did permit it, I could show an equal, if not greater growth of the Church in the United States. The above is sufficient to show that, under God's blessing, the growth and progress of the Church of England in the present day has been most wonderful.

The *National Church*, of May last, says that there has been an increase in the confirmees of the diocese of St. David's, Wales, from 4,000 to 7,000 in three years.

An American clergyman writes from Van Buren Ark., as follows:—"Church of England newspapers show that at least seventy additional churches are consecrated each year in England in

addition to the large number built, and which some Low Church bishop refuses to consecrate, but in which, nevertheless, divine service is held. As regards its being the Church of the minority, I think if you examine a little book, the last so-called 'Religious Census,' by P. S. King, your eyes will be opened somewhat. That it was so 300 years ago is true, that it is so to-day, no man after having examined the question candidly and without prejudice will affirm. She is making large accessions daily, and this is true not only of the Church of England, but also of the Church of Ireland, and the Episcopal Church of this country. It is true that a few leave her for Rome, but no account is taken whatever of the large number who return after a short stay, or come directly from Rome. I, in a short period of two years working in villages, have known no fewer than five, besides having many of the children of Roman Catholics attending church and Sunday-school. Neither is there any account taken of the more than double of those who go from other religious bodies to Rome. I have never personally known one Episcopalian to go to Rome, but of Dissenters a large number, but not near as large as the number of Dissenters who have for various reasons come into the Episcopal Church, and I think that this is the secret of the intense dislike shown by non-Episcopal bodies for the Anglican Communion."

DEGREES OF AUTHORITY.

ABSOLUTE truth must ever remain truth. Yet we must all be aware that where it comes to us on authority, the weight of its appeal may admit of almost infinite variation.

For example, we are suffering from some slight ailment. A friend looks in and assures us that such-and-such a newly discovered drug is a specific for the complaint. He has tried it and found it answer. Of course he may be in the right; but he is not a doctor, he cannot be a good judge of the similarity of our constitutions or the reverse. Presently, however, a distinguished physician happens to call. He also has formed a favorable opinion of the new remedy, and believes that we might safely give it a trial. The case has now assumed a new aspect. Our friend's advice was from the first just and true. It is not more true than it was; but it has now come to us with the stamp of authority.

It may seem paradoxical, but it will, we believe, be found a correct statement, if we venture to assert that in the realms of science, the sphere of authority is at the present moment in process of enlargement. The reason seems to be this, that each department of knowledge has of late years grown so vastly, that the most accomplished man of science can no longer hope to be well versed in more than a few subjects. It has been said, that few can understand an entire volume of the proceedings of the Royal Society of London. In many instances they are at a loss even to comprehend each other's language. Consequently, on the many branches of knowledge of which they are ignorant, they must be content to rest upon the authority of specialists.

Turning from physical science to religion and morals we observe from the Anglican point of view (which is we maintain a reasonable one) three grades of authority.

In the lowest grade must come, we conceive, all propositions on faith or morals which are distinctive and peculiar.

We do not mean that they are to be treated lightly. We derive vitality, it has been well said, from Apostolic sources, as the leaf derives it from the parent stem through the medium of the branch from which it springs. A certain national hue and form may be actually desirable; and would probably remain intact even if it should ever please God to restore to Christendom the great gift of outward unity. "In these our doings," say the compilers of the English Prayer Book, "we condemn no

other Nations nor prescribe anything but to our own people only; for we think it convenient that every country should use such ceremonies as they shall think best to the setting forth of God's honour and glory, and to the reducing of the people to a most perfect and godly living, without error or superstition." These words it is true, have a special reference to points of ritual, but they may surely be extended to portions of teaching as well. A Church which proclaims the error of other Churches, of all the great Patriarchal Sees, cannot have intended to claim infallibility for every word of our own on such themes as justification or original sin or the works of the unregenerate. Her utterances on these subjects must be open to re-consideration.

But there are other doctrines which are in no wise distinctive and peculiar, those which lie enshrined in the creeds of Christendom, or which have from the first formed part of Christian worship. The authority with which these are presented to us is surely far longer and deeper than that of any individual Church. The Nicene Creed is the language of the Church universal. "Such a judgment," says the ablest Anglican treatise of our day upon the Church of Christ, "is irrevocable, irreformable, never to be altered." We may be able on some other occasion to quote the language of the authorities, both Patristic and Anglican, on which the above-quoted dictum of Sir Wm. Palmer is based. At present it must suffice to say that these writers look down to something deeper yet, namely, to the language of our Lord Himself and of His Apostles, concerning that Church of the living God, which is the pillar and ground of the truth.

But the revelation made through Holy Scripture, and its witness and keeper, the Church, has not yet penetrated all the world. What it distinctly teaches is indeed truth absolute, and involves a deep responsibility on those who have received it. They are bound to keep it firmly and to impart it. Those who, from living in heathendom, or from being brought up in ignorance or prejudice, have never received it are in a very different position. There may indeed be those among us who have wilfully closed the mental eye, and ear, but numbers more, we may trust, are not, in this respect, souls which have rebelled against the light.

But there is a third class of truths, which revelation has indeed republished, but which are prior to the Holy Scriptures, and which form what we commonly call Natural Religion. These are especially the Being of God, the existence of a moral law, and the idea of retribution after death. Those who live and act upon such knowledge, if they have never enjoyed a full opportunity of learning more, may, we trust, be saved by the Sacrifice once for all consummated on Mount Calvary, although they have not known on earth the messages from God vouchsafed concerning it. But those who have rejected what creation itself should have taught them, are, the Apostle says, without excuse.

If these principles be sound, they lead to many important inferences. We can only point to one or two.

1. They shew the extreme and special gravity of all attempts to undermine men's faith in Natural Religion. We are not thinking so much of coarse assaults, such as those of a Bradlaugh, as of the refined ones of which Spinoza was the leader some 150 years ago, and of which (to our deep regret) Mr. Matthew Arnold is the abettor and instigator in our own day.

2. They tend to point out distinctions, which, in our judgment, are far too easily passed by, bearing upon the attack and the defence in relation to the *Westminster Confession*. Some of its assailants placed all its propositions on a level, and treat them all as the conclusions of some—not very great—men, who met in between 1643 and 1647. The defenders too often accept the battle on these terms, class all the truths of Natural Religion, all the dogmas taught by the undivided Church, and all the conclusions reached by the British Presbyterian divines of the seventeenth century, as equally valuable and important, and as resting on an equally stable basis. This may be an inevitable line of defence for those who make the Bible everything, and the Church nothing. But possibly some Pres-