

The Church Guardian.

Upholds the Doctrines and Rubrics of the Prayer Book.

"Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity."—Eph. vi., 24.
"Earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."—Jude: 3.

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IS UNBELIEF INCREASING?

IV.

WE have not yet by any means exhausted our subject. Indeed, the more it is examined, the more we perceive how much can be written upon it. Hitherto, in these articles, we have but skimmed the surface of this great question, and we begin to perceive how difficult it is to give any adequate idea of it in all its bearings in an abbreviated and popular form.

What are the chief proofs and unmistakeable signs that scepticism is waning and the Church extending? No doubt the proofs we have already advanced from the writings of thoughtful and intelligent men are strong evidences in favor of Christianity. But the great mass of the people require something more tangible. They want the unmistakeable evidence of facts and figures to bear out such assertions. They want living proofs of the deep and wide-spread growth of the kingdom of peace. To such persons as these, like the inscription on the monument erected to Sir Christopher Wren we would say, "If you want to see these proofs, look about you."

No intelligent person can fail to see the hold the Gospel has upon the great bulk of the people everywhere.

Never before have the Scriptures been so eagerly read, and never have they been so clearly illuminated by copious comments. The zeal and enterprize of scholars in discovering, collating and translating manuscripts of the Bible, is only equalled by the desire of the masses, who demand millions of the New Testament revision in a single day.

Men may loudly assert that it is a critical time for creeds and all ancient institutions. But never in any age have people flocked so readily to hear the Gospel of the Grace of God, when it has been fairly, plainly and forcibly presented. Who can command for such a lengthened period, and in the same degree, the close attention of interested multitudes, as the eloquent and popular evangelists of the day?

We shall not attempt to describe the innumerable benevolent institutions fostered everywhere by the charities of the Church, nor try to pourtray the growth of goodness in this regard within the last half century. To speak of this would indeed fill many volumes, but the unwritten story is one of the strongest evidences that the Church is rapidly growing, while it is at the same time one of the brightest jewels in her crown. Who ever heard of unostentatious liberality towards the poor and suffering on the part of atheist *et hoc genus omne*? Where has the first infidel hospital or charity school been erected? And who are the unpaid volunteer workers in the slums and vile purlieus of every great city? Not agnostics most certainly; not unbelievers. If we want to find aggressive activity exhibited in combating all forms of evil, we shall not find it among the disciples of Paine or Voltaire or Bob Ingersoll. Wherever the eye falls all over our country to-day, and we perceive noble laborers endeavoring, with great self-sacrifice, to cope in all sorts of ways with human sin and suffering and misery, cheering with their sympathy and help the sorrowing and distressed,

the bereaved and poverty-stricken, and raising men to purer, holier, nobler lives, it is not due to atheists. When we ask the motive power that moves it all, the answer comes, the Cross of Christ.

And now, we turn to the irresistible logic of numbers, which, for many, have even a higher charm. "Tell us, do figures show that the Church is growing?" is the first enquiry made on all sides. To this we answer emphatically, yes!

To accomplish our purpose, and give an answer correctly, we shall contrast the growth of the Church under the most favorable conditions in the purest primitive days, with its extension under somewhat serious circumstances of difficulty on our own continent within the present century.

It has been computed that at the end of the century of the Christian era, there were about 500,000 adherents of the Christian faith. At the end of the fourth century this number had increased to ten millions, and at the lapse of an additional four hundred years, *i. e.*, at the end of the eighth century, these had grown to thirty millions.

How has it been in the United States? Statistics, which have been gathered with the utmost care, prove that in 1800, in all the evangelical denominations in that country there were 364,872 members, and in 1880 there were 10,065,963. That is, within eighty years there had been a positive increase of over nine millions. Again, in 1800 there was but one communicant to every fifteen of population; in 1880 one for every five. In other words, while the population increased during eighty years about ten fold, the number of communicants increased almost twenty-eight fold, and all this during a period of intense opposition from every phase of free thought and unbelief. So these facts prove that in the United States the number of enrolled communicants had increased 9,700,000 in 80 years, being nearly as many as the aggregate number of adherents to Christianity at the end of the 4th century. While, if we take the calculation on the basis of "adherents," the United States actually presents an increase during the 80 years of thirty-five millions—more than the entire Christian body at the end of eight centuries.

There is still another feature which deserves attention in the consideration of our subject, the growth of missions, but the work of the Church in this direction has been so extensive, and furnishes such valuable proof in behalf of our contention, that we shall reserve it for another and concluding article. Nothing, we believe, has so contributed to the welfare and prosperity of the Church at home; by nothing else has her high aims and projects been so greatly advanced, both there and abroad, and in no other sphere of labor has she so effectually closed the mouths of her numerous enemies, as in her obedience to the Master's command, "Go teach all nations."

Before producing this additional proof in favor of the advance Christianity is making all along the line, let our readers carefully reflect upon and digest the evidence we have already produced. If they but do so earnestly, impartially, and without prejudice, they must, we believe, be convinced by our reasoning, and by the stern logic of facts, that they have nothing to fear from infidelity, and that the Church is surely and steadily advancing in growth and numbers and holy work. All this, we venture to offer to our readers with gladness and gratitude to Him who is

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PROBLEMS OF RELIGION.

RELIGION is not only a matter of texts, of scientific criticisms, of historical investigations, of a consistent theology. It is not merely a procession of facts and events, a spectacle to be looked at from the outside. It is, if it is anything, the most considerable and most universal interest in the complex aggregate of human interests. It grows out of the deepest moral roots, out of the most characteristic and most indestructible spiritual elements, out of wants and needs and aspirations and hopes, without which man, as we know him, would not be man. When a man, in asking whether Christianity is true, leaves out all this side of the matter, when he shows that it has not come before him as a serious and importunate reality, when he shows that he is unaffected by those deep movements and misgivings and anxieties of the soul to which religion corresponds, and treats the whole matter as a question only of erudition and criticism, we may acknowledge him to be an original and acute critic, a brilliant master of historical representation; but he has never yet come face to face with the problems of religion. His love of truth may be unimpeachable; but he does not know what he is talking about.

HAVE we not reason to bless God for the "form of sound words" which has come down to us from a distant antiquity? May we not say of the Church "her clothing is of wrought gold?" Our ritual contains *not* the sentiments or thoughts of any one man, or even any one generation of men, but embodies the spirit and the devotion of universal, Catholic Christendom in its earliest, purest days. It is tinged with no party views; it is not intended to speak the language of any one small section of believers; but it seeks to bring us before the throne of God in the same spirit in which her children were accustomed to approach Him when warring sects were unknown, and but one united Church was spread everywhere over the world. Oh, are there not then solemn recollections and glorious memories connected with the Liturgy by which we worship? Is it not something to realize that in our devotions we are not dependent on the feelings of a mortal like ourselves for the direction which our thoughts shall take; but that the prayers we utter bear the stamp and breathe the spirit of Apostolic Days.

If some of the great Popes of the Middle Ages could return to the world they would be astonished and shocked at the position of their successors. Power—especially illegitimate power—when it once begins to go soon vanishes; and so it has been with the Papacy. First civil authority in Europe was lost, then supremacy in Italy, and now the Pope, in the eye of the law, has no higher standing than his fellow-countrymen. Lately, if accounts are true, the Pope had a novel reminder of the fact. He had omitted to pay his taxes, and was served with a notice drawn in the usual form—"To citizen Joachim Pecci; by trade or profession, Pope; conducting business at the Vatican Palace, Rome." The Pope paid his taxes like a good citizen, we are glad to learn, and no doubt was as highly amused at the incident as any of ourselves. But the fact has in it far more than amusement. It marks the progress of the world towards spiritual freedom for millions of the children of God.—*Sunday Magazine.*