

THE MOTIVE FORCE OF MISSIONS.

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Gregory the Great, summing up the doctrine of St. Augustine, writes as follows : "The holy universal Church is one body, constituted under Christ Jesus its Head. Therefore Christ, with His whole body, both that which is now on earth and that which reigns with Him in heaven, is one Person ; and as the soul is one which quickens the various members of the body, so the one Holy Spirit quickens and illuminates the whole Church. Therefore the apostle says, 'From whom the whole body, being compacted and fitly joined together, maketh increase of the body.' " It is here that we shall find the perennial motive force of missions. Not in cogent reasoning, nor in eloquent appeals, nor in the exposition of the results which have been attained during the wonderful century now drawing to a close, but in the intelligent appreciation and accentuation of the union between Christ and His Church by the Holy Ghost, in virtue of which each member is subject to direct impulses and impressions from the exalted Saviour.

I. PRAYER FOR MISSIONS.—The missionary enterprise of modern times was conceived and cradled in prayer. As certainly as the sources of the Nile have been discovered in the great lakes of Central Africa can the rivers of modern missions be traced to the prayer-meetings of the early Methodists and the call for prayer issued by Jonathan Edwards. All along the line of history the progress of the Gospel has been in exact proportion to the strength and volume of the prayers of the Church. It may be truly said that prayer has been the Nilometer which has measured the extent and wealth of the harvests of which the desert places have been made to rejoice and blossom as the rose.

What a wealth of prayer has ascended to God on the behalf of missions from lonely souls isolated in sick chambers or foreign lands, which could do nothing else than pray ; as well as from the Church, gathered in twos and threes, or in multitudes, but exercising her prerogative to bind and loose. Still it becomes a serious question how the prayerfulness of the Church is to be maintained and increased ; a demand which can only be adequately met by considering the true nature of prayer.

In its essence, prayer is the return tide, from the heart of the believer, of the purposes of God, as they are revealed by the Holy Ghost. The moisture of the ocean is drawn up by the sun, transported in the floating cloud-cisterns to the summits of the hills, there it is deposited as rain or snow, and begins to descend again to the ocean from which it was originally extracted. Similarly the prayer which prevails with God is that which emanated originally in the thought of the Father, passed through the heart of the Mediator, and was communicated to us through the Holy Spirit.