

ial, as well as inward and spiritual, of righteousness."

"Increase" in true religion is shown in ready obedience to its external and public as well as less prominent demands. To be nourished in goodness, a careful use must be made of the means of grace provided in the Church, *e.g.*, Holy Scripture, the Sacraments, and ordinances, which are the sources and channels of the "new life." They, the Sacraments, have their "power and might" from Him who alone is the source of all potency and potentiality; ordained by Christ Himself, *i.e.*, "Baptism and the Supper of the Lord,"—they are "the good things" by which the Christian is grafted (implanted) nourished, and kept, in all goodness to the end.

THE AGNOSTIC.*

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Agnosticism, in a wrong, unbelieving sense, is verily the height of human folly. The reasoning is all false; it only blots out *what light there is*! There is, no doubt, a good deal that seems like reasoning on the part of so-called agnosticism, but it is all one-sided. I remember, a year or so ago, a few kindly words about the bounty of God in the seasons, spoken to an intelligent working-man in London, led him to tell me he had been so perplexed by the many things going wrong, the suffering, and the injustice which he daily witnessed, that he had thrown off belief in God. I asked him if his unbelief mended matters at all? I admitted the mystery and darkness of much that we see around us; but I told him his plan appeared only to extinguish what light there is. In losing God we lose the only promise or presence of good. The key that might in due time open the lock and reveal the love was taken out of our hands. Agnosticism could only help him to say—(Oh, miserable creed of unbelief!—

"The sun that sets again will rise,
And paint the heavens and gild the skies:
But when we lose our little light,
We sink in everlasting night!"

Yet, I added, *was* the light we possess, after all, so "little"? Did not the religion of Christ show "a bright light" even "in the cloud"? I had, I told him, just left a great sufferer, who had been in the furnace of trial for months; one who had served God devotedly, and whom many had learned to call, and still call blessed—I refer to Catherine Ponefather—yet her faith sustained her! "Ah!" said my friend, "but does not that prove my point? If I were God Almighty I would have ended the suffering at once!"

We see the plausible folly of agnosticism. "Wiser than God" was the man's starting-point, and of course it led him astray. I reminded him of the mission of suffering as God's angel in a world of discipline, to say nothing of a world of sin. In this case the sufferer herself craved no "annihilation"—all that agnosticism can imagine—but "rejoiced in tribulation," submitting to God's will, and growing in the grace of patience and meekness for heaven's exaltation. Others, too, around her were learning from the "living sermon," which was to them verily "an epistle of Christ."

He admitted there was something in this. And I went on to ask him, as a father, whether he had not sometimes seen the blessed mission of

affliction in the home—the crippled child a fountain, as it were, of deeper love in the parental heart, and also a source of binding affection to all the members of the family. With affliction and trial we love only *too little*! Without affliction and without trial we should be far less happy than we are. He thanked me for my words, as working men will thank us if we try to help them in their difficulties of all kinds.

I might have pressed on him still further—and I would press this on all who are troubled by God's mysteries—the mission of service, self-denying service to the suffering, the opportunity for which sorrow always brings. Without these dark pages in life there would be no mission of service—all might be self-pleasers, and then how far more miserable the world would be! Go thou, then, and be thy poor suffering brother's keeper! Go thou to those who are in heathen darkness, whether at home or abroad. Be thou the "good Samaritan" to some neighbour, some Lazarus "at thy gate." Be thou, as God helps thee, a Christian indeed, like thy Master "going about doing good;" and the mystery of suffering—perhaps the greatest mystery of all—will not then hinder your seeing, nay will help you to see the wonderful working God whose "knowledge is perfect"—too wise to err, too good to be unkind—making all things "work together for His children's good."

VOCATION.

(From the *Irish Ecclesiastical Gazette*.)

It is an interesting and important inquiry to ascertain, if possible, wherein Vocation lies. In one case there is no doubt concerning it, *viz.*, that of the man who has an overmastering call to the Ministerial office, and who chooses it solely for its own sake. It is this feeling in its highest form which we suppose leads in the Roman Church to the adoption of the "Religious" life; we use the adjective in its special sense. Among ourselves we hope there is a large percentage who take Orders for the work's sake. Respecting this class there can be no doubt about Vocation. But there are others on lower planes whose motives, though not the best and highest, yet are sufficiently good and conscientious to justify those who hold them in entering on clerical life—*e.g.*, a man may have literary tastes and studious habits, and hopes to become in consequence a useful preacher or writer or he may have powers of organising work and influencing others which are not less valuable and useful; another may have a power of sympathy that will take him far in certain lines of his future professional work—underlying all these we assume there will be the real desire to serve and please God. We should not hesitate, therefore, to advise any young men who contemplate seeking Orders, to do so who are qualified as we now describe; for once the work is entered on with right motives, the very exercise of it deepens and strengthens what there is of good in the worker. The clergyman who realises his position knows this, that it is his work "to speak for God to men, and to speak to God for men; it is a great and difficult and responsible work truly. Sometimes a good test of a candidate's sincerity of motive is offered in this way; he has, for example, already a certain position in life which carries with it a provision, more of a provision than he can ever reasonably hope to acquire as a clergyman; this he decides to give up. We have known several instances of men doing this, who although they made very little profession of religion yet showed by such sacrifices that they were in earnest. A desire to undergo the necessary professional training is also a good test; some young men in the ardour of their feelings desire at once to enter

on directly spiritual work; they cannot, or will not, wait to prepare to qualify for it. This is a great mistake; feelings alone are no sufficient test. We know a good case in point. A young friend of our own attracted the notice of one of the New Zealand bishops, in which colony he was then residing. He was quite a gentleman, and had been to a good public school. The Bishop offered to ordain him; he respectfully declined. Why? Was it because he disliked the idea? By no means. A little later on he returned to Ireland, re-entered T. C. D., in which he had already left a year or so, took up his work where he had left it off, went through his Divinity course with credit, and armed with his degree and testimonium, sought and received Orders from an English Bishop. Now, here we should say was a man with a sense of Vocation, who would not seek the priest's office until he felt he had prepared himself for it. It is a melancholy and miserable thing to be in any calling and not to know how to do your work; a melancholy and miserable thing for the man himself and for those among whom he labours. Incompetent lawyers, incompetent physicians and surgeons, are a curse rather than a blessing, and no less so are incompetent clergymen. The disposition, therefore, to submit patiently to proper preliminary training and the diligent use of the opportunities such training affords to qualify for future professional work, are great tests of due Vocation. An earnest man will say with King David—"I will not offer to God that which costs me nothing." I will not offer Him an empty, uneducated mind any more than I would presume to offer Him a cold and cheerless heart.

We have a word more to say before we conclude. Some people tell us that a poor Church must be a pure Church. It would be much nearer the truth to say that a persecuted Church must be a pure Church, for such penalties as prison, loss, and death, must purge away much dross. But poverty is a relative thing. Make a Church as poor as you please, and yet its posts will still be prizes for some who will be drawn from lower strata. The idea of becoming a gentleman by Ordination attracts some; we cannot include this as one of the component parts of a true Vocation. We have no desire to exclude humble men from the Ministry, if they are in earnest; but men of this type who seek the Priesthood merely for social reasons are no gain to it. We must remember that the Irish Church largely numbers among her members persons of cultivation, rank, &c., &c. We do not mean for a moment to say that their souls are one whit more valuable in the sight of God than the souls of the poor; but educated congregations require educated clergy; and as a rule they require the ministry of persons whose accent, manner, and general tone bear some stamp of gentle birth and cultivation. This is one of the great practical difficulties of the Roman Church; to have a Priest in the family is a great social ambition with poor R. C. farmers and shopkeepers; we do not say they have not higher and better motives, but practically R. C. gentry do not associate with their own clergy at all; why so? apparently because they feel they are socially so inferior they cannot have much social intercourse with them. It is an unfortunate state of affairs in any Church. The Irish Church is steadily making progress in various ways; she is beginning to know herself better; she is dwelling more on her ancient origin and long history; she is realizing her supernatural powers. The blow which fell upon her in 1869 has not wrecked or destroyed her; she is renewing her strength; and it will be part of her highest wisdom to get the best men to serve at her altars; men who will guide and strengthen those committed to their charge; men like St. Paul who will not shun to declare the whole counsel of God, men who will not fear to state unpopular facts; who

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