

For the Torch of Reason.

Nearing the End.

BY CHARLES KENT TENNEY.

That the Christian religion is slowly, but surely, approaching its end, is well illustrated by the following extract from an article in Rev. Lyman Abbott's "Outlook" for March 17th, under the head of "Decline of Methodism", and an article in the same issue by Rollin Lynde Hartt, entitled "Regeneration of New England":

"Some time since, we pointed out the fact that the great Presbyterian communion was showing a decline in membership and in financial sustenance. Even greater astonishment comes in the discovery that the Methodist church is now losing in numbers. Bishops Fowler, Ninde and Joyce have issued an address to the church calling for a week of prayer, during which daily services are to be held in all Methodist churches throughout America. The address states that statistics for the last year show a decrease in the number of members in the church, and urges every Methodist to take himself to prayer and to 'call mightily on God for help.' We venture to suggest that the decline in numbers in both the Presbyterian and Methodist communions is not altogether due to lack of prayer, but also and even more to a lack of 'works.'

"Several months ago Governor Collins, of New Hampshire, issued a Fast Day proclamation which became immediately and very widely notorious. It was criticised in newspapers, rebuked in sermons, excitedly discussed on street corners, and attacked in 'poems.' Its offense was direct. It intimated that the Christian religion was dying out in New Hampshire.

"To all appearances the alarmist governor has merely stated in hyperbole what is lamentably true in fact. What he says applies with more or less pertinence to nearly all the farming districts of New England. Maine, for instance, has two hundred and eight-two pastorless churches. Not a few of those once sacred edifices now serve as cheese-factories, dance-halls and road-houses. Other states show somewhat analogous conditions. Through large sections of the agricultural regions—regions formerly renowned for their piety and godliness—the common attitude towards religion is one of stolid indifference. The people are lapsing towards heathenism."

What is here said of the Presbyterian and Methodist churches, and of pastorless and deserted churches in New England is true, to a more or less extent, of all other sections of the country. The causes leading to this degeneracy in New England are now being discussed by Mr. Hartt in a series of articles

in the Outlook. All manner of excuses and reasons are assigned for this "alarming condition," but singularly enough the writer overlooks the prime and only principle cause, namely, that the people are getting tired of being humbugged, and whale and kindred stories have no longer the charm to compel their attendance, or force dollars from their pockets.

The support given the Liberal University is a sure indication that the public is rapidly dropping away from the "God of their fathers," and turning its attention to the certain realities of life. Not many years ago the originators of such an institution would not only have been ostracised by society, but our good friends Geer, Hosmer and Wakeman would have been burned at the stake, and the stockholders added to the flames to keep them company.

Now that our good friends, the Methodists, are going into the wholesale prayer business, as a cure for diminishing membership and depleted treasury, all Infidels will be interested in discovering the effect of prayer when applied to God's own organization. Such frantic efforts will undoubtedly frighten some weak-minded sinners, and who would not be sinners if they were not weak minded, into the fold, but their stay will only be temporary, and their acquisition will be more than offset by the loss of those who insist upon some slight evidence and reason for their faith.

People do not now absent themselves from church, as a rule, because they have lost all interest in the welfare of the race, but because they have become better educated than formerly, and are doing their own thinking and see the utter folly and absurdity of Christian claims. It is not because they are becoming worse, but because they are becoming better men and women; because they are broadening in their ideas and conceptions of what life is and their duty to themselves and fellows. In this city, as well as in every other, a lecture on almost any subject except religion will pack our largest halls to overflowing with men and women who could not be coaxed into a church, showing that the people are eager for any kind of rational discussion. These people are the vital force of our community, and shape our destinies. Our Christian friends say we are lapsing into heathenism. If so, it is a heathenism which tends to the uplifting and betterment of the human race. It is a heathenism that will not retard our onward progress, or relegate us to the dark ages brought about by strictly Christian rule.

The recent sermon of the Rev. Dr. Hillis, Lyman Abbott's successor at Plymouth Church, New York, is a striking illustration of the rapid disintegration of the Christian

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