

# RELIGIOUS AND ETHICAL TALKS BY CERGY AND LAY

## Is Christianity Declining? Decrease in Church Membership.

This article is by Rev. William Elliott Griffith, D. D., pastor of the First Congregational Church, of Ithaca, N. Y., and well-known historical and religious writer.

**M**R. FREDERICK HARRISON, the great Comstock, declares that Christianity in this 20th century is "discredited." His remark illustrates the absence of that sense of humor so often noted in earnest men, showing a defeat where we should look for balance and complete sanity. In all ages Christianity has been thoroughly "discredited" by those who did not accept it. A Latinized word need not confuse, when a plain Anglo-Saxon term makes the situation plain.

American churches tell the same story. Analyzing the material furnished by the United States census, we find that though the statistics of church membership look very cheerful, the actual gain as compared with the population is very small—not a per cent. The rolls swell, but the rate decreases. The number of names given in individual church reports is never the minimum, nor do these on the average show close accuracy. If the names of those dead, absent or non-attendant, or of the myriads whose letters of dismission still lie in their trunks, were erased, there would be a veritable Black Friday in shrinkage. If anything seems certain, it is that net gain in church membership is small, while decrease in its rate is certain. Whether ritualistic or plain service, "orthodox" or "liberal," of Divines with social prestige, or of Lazarus ever in constant need of help, the churches tell the same story.

Without a doubt, also, theology is too much the product of monastic meditation and scholastic ages. Instead of the real message of the living Christ, men of today cannot live upon "cut straw five hundred years old." They long for the juicy pasturage which blooms perennially, with every new Springtide, in the gospel records. There is certainly a hiatus between the life of Jesus, the outdoor teacher, and his commandments, direct, forceful, human, divine and the ecclesiastical verbiage with which men are asked to feed their souls. It cannot be denied that most of our preaching satisfies women more than men. The church seems to be a place for bonnets and fine dress, rather than for thinkers and devout worshippers. Often from the pulpit there is almost a morbidly feminine outlook upon life. Revivalism, which roots its success in emotion, has been the bane of popular religion. The vast majority of converts thus made are women and girls. The crop of "burnt out" or hardened fathers, who talk before their children in a way that does not breed respect for the churches, is large. The clerical standard of conduct is measured more by what a girl will not, than what a boy may do. Hence the male goes where he is respected and invited—to the lodges, saloons, clubs and athletic games. The Sunday school works hand in hand with the church, and the ideal of religious life is rather a sweet

young girl who will not do anything rough. In general it is the mother and not the father who is ever lovely and of good report. We may not wonder that where the German and Dutch are spoken in our American churches the men crowd them, for here no such morbid idea prevails. That wealth and social ambition dominate many churches, keeping out the wage-earners, cannot be denied. The workingman has a notion that the chief supporters of Protestant churches are those prominent in the corporations, which are soulless to a proverb. Perhaps all will agree that the rapid and almost unexampled multiplication of amusements, the multifarious attractions and luxuries which come in the wake of National prosperity, and the phenomenal revival of outdoor sports and recreations have much to do with the decline of the churches.

Yet, granting all the facts, there is as yet no sign of decay of the influence of Jesus, nor of any real lessening of the inexhaustible fertility of Christianity. What we see is merely the transit of activities, a change of emphasis. Our age makes it appeal to life. It is not the less therefore religious. Faith is not credulity. It is vision of the eternal reality. Never was the power of the Founder more manifest than in our age. We see this in the spread of popular education and in the noble standards of public service set forth in our colleges and universities, and their "settlements" and "extensions," in the humanitarian of law, in the increased sensitiveness to suffering, in the multiplication of hospitals, in the growth of an army of nurses, in prison reform, in social amelioration and in the clarification of the ideas which lie at the basis of human progress. Our true advance has been not in mechanical inventions, or in methods of communication and transit, but in the leaving of a larger mass by the forces inherent in Christianity. Ours is the era of spiritual expansion. Never was the army of faith larger, or missionary activity both at home or abroad, greater. Many who boast profess to be actuated by the commandments of Jesus are really doing his work. It is not for the Master's disciples to rebuke those who imitate the Christ, though they are not in the civility of the twelve, or even in the corporation.

In reality this is a religious age. Though labels may be rewritten or transferred, the trend of things is nearness to the divine Founder, and this is increasingly manifest—whether those to whom tradition is hallowed like it or not—by the removal of many courses of intermediaries between the man of today and the Son of Man. To those who see the reality of things, there is transformation, indeed, but it is of the tree, not of the cloud, that is normal and beautiful evolution. Those who realize that all true progress in Christianity consists in a deeper insight

and closer apprehension of the original ideas of the Master will not be cast down, but cheered. This much is certain, that when the church lives more like her Master and goes forth seeking to save, when she more clearly apprehends the truth which he lived before he taught it; when she substitutes the simplicity of his teaching for the vast accumulations which have been deposited upon it, when she stands for righteousness and for righteousness only, there will be nothing to mourn over, either in the phenomenon or of the leavers. There are not two gospels, but one. Between those who seek worldly culture and selfish gain on the one hand and those who are on fire for God in self-denial there will always be contention. Yet either renunciation and sacrifice will ever form part of true religion, yet self-culture and the wholeness of life are equal factors in the one undivided scheme of eternal evolution. The church that has the widest outlook, and which most fully ministers to the needs and service of the human soul will never lack for members. There are good news of God is made convincingly clear and the church becomes more like her seeking, healing and saving Founder, can the decline in church membership, both as to quality and quantity, be arrested. There is no other patent medicine or prescription of the faculty that can heal her disease.

### CHRIST'S GOLDEN RULE

By Rev. Percy Stickney Grant, D. D.

New York Herald.  
Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets.—Matthew vii:12.

state the sum of all his teachings. In reply the sage formed a letter which in the Chinese language is "the golden rule." In the Vedas, too, we find this old command revealed to the introspective rames of India. Rabbi Hillel said to his disciples, "What is hateful to thyself do not do to thy neighbor. This is the whole law; all the rest is but comment and fringe." Gibbon found in Isocrates a precept equivalent to the Golden Rule.

code of morals is to be judged by the standard by which its maxims are interpreted; not by the maxims alone. What is the standard by which we judge the Golden Rule? The Golden Rule is very commonly misinterpreted. Most outrageous actions are justified by the excuse: "Why, he would have done the same to me. I have only done as I would have been done by." In this reading the Golden Rule becomes merely shrewd advice to forestall your adversary and to injure him before he can injure you. Grammar and ethics alike are outraged by such interpretations.

Personal feeling cannot adequately interpret the Golden Rule. "Whatever ye would have others do unto you, do ye even so to them." You act as you think you desire others to act. But your feelings change. Sickness, sorrow, disaster, make a man ask a great deal of the world; strength, happiness, prosperity, too often make him believe he can

despise human sympathy and help. Which feeling is to describe what you shall ask of men? After all, what would you have men do to you? Do you rate yourself fair or cheap? In 1863, when the Proclamation of Emancipation was published, many slaves refused to leave their old homes and embrace the wider world of liberty; for them freedom had no definition, they did not appreciate it or want it. Many men grovel and do not seem to know their rights, as men. They ask their fellows not to restrain their appetites or passions. They beseege legislatures for the privilege of bestiality. They desire free range given them for sin. May they do to others what they would be willing to have done to them? Because they love evil may they inflict evil? May the drinking man intimidate your son, may the sensualist entice him, may the gambler lead him to ruin? There is too much of the sorry maxim

in some quarters, "What is good enough for me is good enough for you." Not unless your good be indeed good—no, unless it is the best—is it good enough for me or for anybody else. If a man has degraded his nature, has contracted it, has dulled the edge of his spiritual appreciation, has come to think cynically of human nature, let him take care that he does not talk to others as he likes to have them talk to him, for his foul meat to them is poison.

lated and then put in the place of Christianity itself. We are constantly attempting the simplification of our religion. The Sermon on the Mount, the Lord's Prayer, the baptismal formula, each has friends who see in it the whole force and meaning of the Gospel. No utterance, however noble, is the prayer, however divine in its sincere waiting upon God; no formula, however much an evidence of faith, can be put in place of him who in himself was the way, the truth and the life. Because truth is personal.

### IS RELIGION DECLINING?

By Rev. G. C. Morgan, Successor to Dwight L. Moody's Work

This article is by Rev. George Campbell Morgan, the famous English preacher and evangelist, who has succeeded Dwight L. Moody in the Northfield extension work.

been incessantly at work, having delivered in this time no less than 130 sermons. The consequence is, I have not seen the churches in their normal condition at all, and can say nothing about them, in this line, from actual observation.

It is somewhat alarming to read some of the statements, for which, of course, I cannot vouch, regarding the frequency of conversions. If I am correctly informed there are in the Presbyterian, Congregational and Baptist denominations thousands of churches every year which do not report a single conversion, and as many more, perhaps, which report only one or two conversions. This led Mr. Moody on occasions to query whether the Congregationalists really believed in conversion at all or not.

needs and that the comparatively uneducated lay preacher feeds their souls. I have no complaint to make of the change. But the prevailing indifference to the claims of religion is not confined to the Protestant denominations. The Catholic church, if I mistake not, feels the pressure of the movement fully as much as we do. I think I read, not many months ago, a statement that Archbishop Ireland, in a sermon he preached in New York, said that there was then going on in the world, including the Catholic church, a rapidly increasing declension in religion.

in evidence is called Ritschlianism. This baleful perversion of Christian doctrine is traceable to the learned German theologian, Albrecht Ritschl, who has thoroughly inoculated Christian theology in Great Britain and America.

I should do the Christian church in America the greatest injustice if I should represent it as having embraced Ritschlianism to any great extent. I have outlined the heresy simply to indicate the direction which the doctrinal defection in this country, as in Great Britain, has taken. Many preachers, however, show the taint of Ritschlianism in their preaching, who have imbibed it, they know not how, and have never even heard of Ritschl.

has been temporarily crowded out of its mind. It is a far more agreeable thing for me to state what I regard as the certain outcome of the depression of the last few years. The tide has unquestionably turned. In fact, it turned several years ago in my country. But in America, also, there is certainly visible now the beginning of the inevitable reaction. As for me, I have nothing to complain of, for wherever I have been the deep interest manifested in the Word of God and in the doctrines of the Gospel has been most admirable and encouraging.

### WHAT CONSTITUTES REAL GREATNESS?

By Rev. T. D. Gregory, of New York

The great man I have in view is a conductor on the elevated railroad. He is a little man about 45 years old, intelligent, well-informed on current events, but not conversant in the technical side of the word.

The eight children, ranging in age from three to eleven, are all favorites with the father, all of them being equally beautiful and precious in his sight.

I did it advisedly. I did it because I had the right to. The man who in this city can support a family of 10 on a salary of \$100 a day, and support them in a way that is respectable, a way of which he need not be ashamed, is beyond question a great man.

The fact, then, that our friend the conductor is able to make his small wage do so much for him to be a great man—a very great man.

the real secret of his greatness. Because it was, and is, a pleasure to him to work for those he loves. The pleasure is born of love. He loves his family, and, because he loves it, it is a joy to him to make personal sacrifice, to clean forget self and its promptings, and to find his own supreme felicity in the consciousness that he is making his loved ones happy.

day by day with me as a disgrace to this planet. But it is great to have a high ideal, and to remain true to that ideal in the face of continuous toil and privation; to believe in duty and to be willing to sacrifice upon the altar of that duty all private predilections; to live, in a word, not to make yourself happy, but to be the means of happiness to others.

And so I have told my story—told it simply—told it just as it is; and my reward shall be the hope that it may possibly give some one a brighter view of human nature and a stronger generation for the heroism of common life.

### Man's Struggle Against Evil

By Frederick Passy, of Paris

EVIL has a thousand forms and envelops us on all sides. Every hour we have to defend ourselves from it. In order to trace a complete plan against it would make it necessary for us to dictate for our private as well as public conduct, for our intellectual and moral interests, and for our economic and material interests.

state he must always do it by individual effort—individual personal effort at first, collective personal effort afterward; is the only talisman for good that may be depended upon. Each man must look first to his work, and after his work to the proper employment of its product, economy, and provision for the future.

administering and of controlling. It breeds men who are apt in intrigue, in investive, in threatening and in overturning ministries as if they were card houses. It does not bring forth serious men, men of resolution and action. You cannot make a chain of gold with links of lead.

constraining him. Religion goes farther. It leads him into eternity for his own sake; for those who belong to him; for the living, for the dead; for those who have not yet been born.

THE day which we make our National festival is not a very happy one, except in theory, to the greater number of American women. In spite of all their patriotism, they are obliged to dread it before it arrives, and to be glad when it has become yesterday.

nolay and savage methods of the present—methods of the same nature as those of the ghost dance of the Indian tribes, or as the mad, rude way in which the Dahomey chiefs rejoice.

starry folds women have a larger outlook, a higher reach, a surer grasp, a greater surety, a nobler honor, a firmer future, than the genius of the country has taught the boy to respect his mother as the boy of old—love her though he might with all his heart—never dreamed of doing; to regard his sister as on a plane of equality; to despise no woman because she is a woman. And she knows that she owes all this to the independence of this country from the Old World influence and greed, which has opened to every one all the avenues of freedom, enlarging the borders of thought and feeling and consequent action and all the possibilities of growth.