

## IS THE POWER OF CHRISTIANITY WANING?—NO.

MR. CHARLES A. DANA recently said that "religion is the strongest, the most enduring, the most vivacious of all the powers in our world," and that there is "far more religious activity" in our times than in any previous age since Christianity was established. Mr. Dana speaks, of course, as a trained observer of the world's doings,—independent, impartial, and candid,—and not as an advocate of any particular form of Christianity. This deliberate statement, therefore, carries much weight. Certainly, in an impartial study of the events of the world, religion appears to have an important, if not the predominating, influence in the shaping of them; and, among the leading faiths of mankind, Christianity is unquestionably foremost. It has lost none of the missionary spirit which made it so aggressive in the first two or three centuries of the Christian era. The zeal of the myriads of modern Christian apostles has carried it, in the nineteenth century, into well-nigh every inhabitable corner of the globe: its doctrines are heard in every language, nation after nation opening its doors to its missionaries. Mission stations and missionaries have accompanied—in some cases, preceded—the explorer and trader to regions almost entirely unknown a quarter of a century ago. Savages of the South Seas have been Christianized, and cannibal tribes of but yesterday are Christian preachers and teachers of to-day. It is also true that the governing forces of the world are the Christian Powers, which practically divide the earth between them, either in the form of colonies, "spheres of influence," or suzerainties.

The dominance of Christianity is, moreover, much more than a political or missionary dominance. Notwithstanding the unfavorable presentation of certain forms of Christianity in Christian countries like England and the United States, which are interpreted by its foes, and a few of its pessimistic friends, as indicating a waning of its power, religious activity is in no wise diminished. More churches are being built, more ministers trained, more congregations gathered, more members added, more money raised for current needs and for a multiplicity of Christian benevolences than ever before. But whether

the doctrines of Christianity are held as sincerely, as firmly, as widely as they used to be; whether faith in the Bible as the word of God, divinely given, divinely sufficient, and divinely authoritative is still undiminished; whether belief in the supernatural elements of Christianity is wholly genuine; whether what is called the spiritual life of the Church is as vigorous as it was half a century ago—these are questions that can be authoritatively answered only after a most diligent observation and investigation of well-ascertained facts. Some of these facts are furnished by statistics which are indubitable evidence of the state of religious activity, whether they are conclusive as to the reason or motive for such activity or not.

The last Government census included, as is generally known, a comprehensive and thorough inquiry as to the number of religious organizations or churches, their seating capacity, value of church buildings, and the number of ministers and communicants or members enrolled in religious work. It was discovered that, excluding the religion or religions of the pagan Indians, the number of denominations was one hundred and forty-three, of which all but six were Christian. Since then one denomination, which was somehow overlooked by the government authorities, has been brought to light, and two more have come into existence by the process of division. One small communistic society of only 21 members has, however, dissolved, so that the net increase is really only one, the total now standing at one hundred and forty-five. Of these denominations, the majority are small and insignificant, multiplying the divisions far more than the results. The great mass of Christians in the United States are found in twenty-seven bodies. This list includes all having 100,000 or more members. It will be seen from this that Christianity presents a more divided front in appearance than in reality.

If, in the five years since the census was taken, there has been a net increase of one denomination, showing that divisional influence has not entirely exhausted itself, it is a fact, nevertheless, that the movement toward consolidation has made not a little progress. The line of demarcation between Christian churches in the South is each year becoming less widely divergent; the northern and southern Baptists are approaching each other closely, and negotiations which promise to be successful are in progress for union between several other denominations. The disaffection and sectional differences which arose out of slavery and were so potent a cause of division before the close of the civil war are diminishing in force every year and will soon dis-

appear. Doctrinal barriers have been so weakened and overcome that in many cases their force is historical rather than actual. Differences of polity are still effective causes of continued separation; while language and racial peculiarities are responsible for many schisms. The fact that various branches of the same denominational group are drawn together at intervals in family council,—as in the Pan-Presbyterian Council, and the Ecumenical Methodist Conference,—is one of significance. When the twelve branches of Presbyterianism meet with the three branches of the Reformed faith, they find many points on which they are at one; when the seventeen branches of Methodism are gathered by representatives into one great meeting, they emphasize the questions on which they agree. The twelve bodies of Mennonites are earnestly trying to find a basis on which they can reduce their divisions by half or more; and the divisions of Lutheran bodies, many differing only on minor points, are planning for a more or less general system of coöperation in mission work, and for closer relations looking to ultimate union. This is an age of consolidation and centralization, and this tendency is manifest among religious denominations, whose work involves enormous expenditures of money, and teaches the necessity of economy. Experiments in rivalry show that it is extremely wasteful, and there is less and less of it.

According to the census of 1890, there were, in all, 20,618,307 communicants or members in the United States, and, from the statistics for 1895, that aggregate has, in five years, been increased to 24,646,584, a gain of 4,028,277. In the same period there has been a gain of 23,075 churches and 21,646 ministers. These gains are not wholly net gains, because the Waldenstromians, included in the returns of 1895, were not included in the census. Nothing was reported in the ministerial column for the Salvation Army in 1890. With these omissions taken into account, the net gains for the five years would be 17,609 ministers, 22,935 churches, and 4,008,277 communicants. The table on the next page will be most convenient for those who want to study the figures.

The increase for the five years, as can be seen, is a large one. It must be remembered that it is a net increase. Death is constantly at work among ministers and members, and the losses by discipline, withdrawal, and other causes are considerable. According to the returns given by the Methodist Episcopal Church there is 1 death annually in every 80 members of that large body. In the Congregational denomination there is 1 in every 74, and in the United Presbyterian

1 in every 70. On the average it is probably 1 in 75, at least, for all denominations, so that in an aggregate of 22,500,000, say, there would

	MINISTERS		CHURCHES		COMMUNICANTS	
	1890	1895	1890	1895	1890	1895
Adventists, all branches.....	1,364	1,362	1,757	1,993	60,491	73,312
Baptists, all branches <sup>1</sup> .....	25,646	33,291	43,029	46,871	3,717,969	4,068,539
Brethren, River, all branches.	155	155	111	111	3,427	3,427
Brethren, Plymouth, all branches.....	.....	.....	314	314	6,661	6,661
Catholics, all branches.....	9,196	10,382	10,276	14,931	6,257,871	8,014,911
Christians, all branches.....	1,435	1,485	1,424	1,480	103,722	110,250
Communitic Societies, all branches.....	.....	.....	32	31	4,049	3,950
Congregationalists.....	5,058	5,400	4,868	5,500	512,771	600,000
Disciples of Christ.....	3,773	5,260	7,246	9,471	641,051	923,663
Dunkards.....	2,088	2,115	989	1,016	73,795	81,394
Evangelical bodies (two)....	1,235	1,234	2,310	2,817	133,313	145,904
Friends, all branches.....	1,277	1,314	1,056	1,087	107,208	114,711
German Ev. Synod.....	680	838	870	1,075	187,432	185,203
Jews, all branches.....	200	290	533	548	130,496	139,500
Latter Day Saints, all branches	2,043	2,075	856	1,011	166,125	234,000
Lutherans, all branches.....	4,591	5,685	8,595	9,493	1,231,072	1,390,775
Mennonites, all branches....	905	950	550	600	41,541	47,669
Methodists, all branches.....	30,000	34,141	46,138	52,550	4,589,284	5,452,654
Presbyterians, all branches..	10,448	11,097	13,476	14,530	1,278,332	1,458,999
Protestant Episcopal, all branches.....	4,224	4,580	5,102	5,979	540,509	626,290
Reformed, all branches.....	1,506	1,662	2,181	2,355	309,458	343,981
Salvation Army.....	.....	2,037	329	682	8,742	33,500
Unitarians.....	515	519	421	455	67,749	68,500
United Brethren, all branches	2,798	2,746	4,526	5,026	225,281	262,950
Universalists.....	708	800	956	802	49,194	47,986
Various bodies <sup>2</sup> .....	1,191	1,264	2,001	2,293	170,764	207,855
	111,036	130,682	159,946	183,021	20,618,307	24,646,584

be an annual loss by death alone of 300,000. There is not sufficient data on which to calculate the losses by discipline. In some churches they are very small; in others an item of no little importance. The net loss from this source to the Regular Baptist bodies, having an aggregate of about 3,800,000 members, is in the neighborhood of 40,000 a year. In the Congregational body it is about 10,000. Now before any net increase can appear the losses by death and other causes must be made good. The denominations must, therefore, in

<sup>1</sup> Returns of the Regular Baptists are estimated for 1895, on the basis of the gains in 1894.

<sup>2</sup> Including Moravians, Swedenborgians, Chinese temples, Spiritualists, Theosophists, Christadelphians, and others.

order to prevent an actual decrease, add 300,000 new members annually to make good the mortality loss. The number of new members actually received by all religious bodies since 1890 is, therefore, an aggregate of, possibly, 5,900,000, indicating an annual addition of 1,180,000. The same series of facts applies to the increase of ministers. Hence it is apparent that the religious activity of the denominations must be very vigorously maintained to produce such striking results.

Comparing the ratio of increase of communicants with that of the population of the country, we find that the advantage is with the churches. The percentage of increase in population for the decade ending in 1890 was 24.86. Supposing it to be half of this for the past five years, we have a population of 70,400,000, which is manifestly an exaggeration. It is hardly possible that, with the decreased immigration of the first three or four years of the present decade, the percentage of increase of the previous decade has been maintained; but, conceding that it has, and that the rate is 12.43, we find this is far below that of the churches. Their growth since 1890 has been at the rate of between 19 and 20 per cent. This corresponds to the rate of increase which the leading denominations reported for the decade ending in 1890. The rate for that period was 42 per cent, against the 24.86 per cent representing the net increase of the population. It is clear from this that the churches are gaining on the population rapidly and steadily.

It is a well-known fact that women outnumber men in the membership of the churches. At least this is true of all denominations excepting the Society of Friends. Among the Friends the sexes are pretty evenly balanced. Few of the denominations give statistics of membership by sex, but, according to the returns of those which do, the proportion is about two female members to every male member. If this proportion holds good in Roman Catholic, as well as in most Protestant, churches, more than sixteen and a half millions of the total membership of the churches are women. From this it follows that the mass of the unchurched are men. Women constitute a very large and active force in most of the churches, outnumbering the men in attendance at public worship and particularly at the prayer-meeting; faithful in various kinds of church work, creating enthusiasm and raising money for missions, and conducting the business of their own societies with such zeal and success that some of the men have become ashamed of the less satisfactory record which the sterner sex is making, and have expressed their feeling in a paraphrase of a well-known hymn:—

“Shall women bear the cross alone  
And all the men go free?”

The New Woman, of whom so much is said, will appear in the church, as well as in other fields of usefulness, more prominently in the future. In several denominations, notably the Congregational, the Unitarian, the Universalist, the Free Baptist, the United Brethren, the Christian Connection, she receives ordination to the ministry and serves as preacher and pastor. In the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church she is eligible to any office or position in the church, and may aspire even to the Episcopate, and among the Friends there are no discriminations against her sex. A discussion has been going on in the Methodist Episcopal Church for several years concerning her admission to the general conference of that body as lay delegate. A majority are willing to admit her; but a three fourths vote of the ministers is necessary to make the constitutional change involved, and there is some doubt whether women will be allowed to sit in the general conference which meets this month. There is no doubt whatever that the change will be made sooner or later. Admission to ministerial orders is not likely, however, to be conceded to the weaker sex in this large and conservative church for many years. In foreign missions women are taking a much larger part than formerly.

It will be noticed that among the denominational families, or groups, (by which is meant those branches of the same name which are given in the table under one title, for example,—the Adventists, who constitute six divisions; the Baptists, thirteen; the Catholics, seven,) the Catholic leads in point of numbers. The growth of that denomination has been enormous. This has been due chiefly to immigration which has been largest from countries where Catholics are numerous or predominant. The eight millions ascribed to that group are all Roman Catholic except a few thousand Greek, Armenian, Old and Reformed Catholics. The last-named are really Protestant. The increase of Catholic communicants in five years has been about 1,757,000, which is twice as large as that reported for any other group, although less in percentage than that of the Disciples of Christ. It should be stated that statistics of Catholic communicants are not usually reported. The official denominational returns are for population, that is, for all baptized persons, or communicants *and* adherents. These returns are not made by actual count, as in the case of most other denominations, but as estimates, based upon the number of baptisms and deaths. As the vital statistics are by no means perfect, the estimates



for some of the dioceses are simply more or less shrewd guesses. It is reckoned that 85 per cent of the Catholic population are communicants, the remaining 15 per cent being held to represent children not yet admitted to their first communion, and those debarred from communion. The census returns for Catholic communicants were obtained by a different method, and are believed to be substantially correct. The increase in the number of priests since 1890 has been quite moderate—1,186—or a little more than 12 per cent, the increase in communicants being 28 per cent. The increase in churches and mission stations was 4,655, or more than 45 per cent. No other church has so small a proportion of priests and churches to its number of communicants. The Methodist group, with 5,452,654 communicants, or little more than two thirds as many as the Catholic group, has nearly three times as many churches, and more than three times as many ministers. The difference is in large part due to the fact that many more services are held in Catholic than in Protestant churches.

The Methodist group stands at the head of the Protestant division in number of ministers, churches, and communicants. Next to it is the Baptist, which has fewer communicants by some fourteen hundred thousand, but nearly as many ministers. The net increase of Methodist communicants since 1890 is 863,370, or somewhat under 19 per cent. The Baptist increase figures only 9 per cent, which is much below the actual rate. This is explained by the imperfect denominational reports. The census agent found hundreds of associations of which the regular denominational statistician gave no returns. Complete returns for 1895 would show a much larger percentage of gain.

Perhaps the gains can be studied with greater advantage if put in tabular form in the order of numerical importance:—

1. Catholic.....	1,757,040	5. Presbyterian.....	180,667
2. Methodist.....	863,370	6. Lutheran.....	159,703
3. Baptist.....	350,570	7. Congregational.....	87,229
4. Disciples of Christ.....	282,612	8. Protestant Episcopal.....	85,781

These six denominational groups and two single denominations absorb, it will be noticed, all the gains for the five years, except about 248,305, which is distributed among the other smaller groups, including Menonites, Friends, Reformed (Dutch and German), Mormons, Jews, etc. The foregoing table, therefore, affords a pretty accurate indication as to the churches which are having the most vigorous growth. All of these, except the Catholic, belong to the division known in Protestantism as Evangelical. The Catholic and Evangelical divisions of Christianity

are clearly the dominant Christian forces of the United States, and they are outrunning the nation itself in rate of increase.

The following table is interesting, showing how the denominations stand singly in numerical order :—

1. Roman Catholic.....	7,999,172	8. Presbyterian, North.....	902,757
2. Methodist Episcopal.....	2,629,985	9. Protestant Episcopal.....	616,843
3. Regular Baptist, South....	1,448,570	10. Congregational.....	600,000
4. Methodist Episcopal, South.	1,379,928	11. African Methodist Episco-	
5. Regular Baptist, Colored...	1,343,530	pal.....	594,476
6. Regular Baptist, North.....	985,752	12. Lutheran Synodical Con-	
7. Disciples of Christ.....	923,663	ference.....	479,221

This dozen is the same dozen that constituted the leading denominations in 1890, but they do not occupy quite the same positions. The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, has advanced from fifth to fourth place, the Southern Baptists from fourth to third, and the Disciples of Christ from eighth to seventh. The Colored Baptists drop back two places and the northern Presbyterians one place.

The most remarkable instance of growth in the five years is that of the Disciples of Christ. This denomination, which is particularly strong in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Kentucky, Tennessee, Missouri, and Texas, was so little known to the rest of the country when Mr. Garfield became President that it was for years thereafter spoken of as the denomination to which President Garfield belonged. It is in spirit, doctrine, and practice not unlike the regular Baptists, from which denomination the Campbells and many others withdrew when the Disciples of Christ came into existence in the early part of the present century. It was organized as a movement "to restore the lost unity of believers and so of the Church of Christ by a return in doctrine, ordinance, and life to the religion definitely outlined" in the New Testament. It has no human creed, taking the Bible as its rule of faith and practice. Like the Baptists, the Disciples hold to immersion as the proper mode of baptism, and to the baptism of believers only. Unlike the Baptists, they baptize for the remission of sins, and celebrate the Lord's Supper every Sunday. It is not easy to arrive definitely at the secret of its growth, although the fact of the growth is clear enough. In 1880 it reported 350,000 members; in fifteen years, therefore, it has considerably more than doubled itself. The increase is at the rate of nearly 164 per cent. Their own idea of the secret of their success is because their plea is for Christian unity, their basis a Scriptural, union basis, their zeal in evangelization, and their plain, direct preaching.



The church affects human life and human affairs in many ways. It is not simply a religious, moral, and educational force, or a well-organized and effective system for the reformation of the vicious and refractory elements of society, or a ready instrument for the solution of certain sociological problems; but it has important business and financial aspects. The net increase of 23,000 church societies means a corresponding increase in church edifices. Before church buildings are erected lots must be purchased and paid for. Only the best lots on the streets will do for church sites. The church must therefore pay a good price and hence becomes an important factor in the real estate market. The building itself requires many different materials, thus giving occasion for the working of mines and stone-quarries; for the preparation of various kinds of wood, both foreign and domestic; for the manufacture of tapestry, carpets, furniture, furnaces, etc.; for the employment of architects, masons, carpenters, painters, artists, organ-builders, and others. They need in current operation a great variety of supplies besides fuel and light. They furnish employment and income to sexton, organist, and singers as well as to pastor. Both as a purchaser of materials and supplies, and as an employer, the church has important relations to business. It is manifest, therefore, that the financial affairs of the church must be on a large scale, when all its interests are considered. Its expenditures foot up to an aggregate which is truly enormous. It takes \$10,355,000 annually to pay the bills of the Protestant Episcopal Church; \$23,863,000 to pay those of the Methodist Episcopal Church; nearly \$14,000,000 for the expenses and contributions of the Presbyterian Church (northern); \$11,673,000 for those of the Regular Baptists, and \$10,355,000 for those of the Congregational denomination, making an aggregate of \$88,000,000 every year contributed by 10,768,000 members,—an average of \$8.16 per member. The grand total for all denominations could hardly be less than \$150,000,000, and it might be many millions larger. Most of this is made up of voluntary contributions. No tax is imposed, unless the amount of rental received for pews is so considered; nor is any very large part of the total amount received as income from vested funds. There are few endowments, although bequests are many and considerable. The value of church buildings, lots, and furniture, in 1890, was about \$680,000,000. It is quite probable that it is now fully \$800,000,000.

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