

Let us suppose that it could be arranged that a PAN PRESBYTERIAN CONFERENCE should be held in Edinburgh, the city of Knox and of Chalmers. I verily believe that it would be the most imposing council that has met for ages; and it would exhibit a unity in doctrine and worship, in spirit and in action, such as could be displayed by no other branch of Christ's Church in the world.

JAMES McCOSH.

MR. MONCREIFF, M. P., ON SCIENTIFIC SCEPTICISM.

Mr. Moncreiff, M. P., delivered an address to the members of the Working Men's Institute of Stockbridge. He said—My own impression, derived from some tolerable acquaintance with their writings, is, that up to the present point, or any point which they are at all likely to reach these scientific speculations may be safely left to take care of themselves. They are but scratchings of the surface—but the first few feet of excavation in the formation of the great tunnel through the centre of the earth. I entirely decline to come to any conclusion at all on any religious question from such data as they have furnished, or probably ever will furnish. "Read my book," says the excited philosopher, "and say if you can for a moment believe such old world legends." "Well," I reply, "I have read your book with more or less pleasure, and my belief remains exactly where it was. Whatever may be the evidences of the truth of revealed religion, they are not likely to be diminished or increased by your book." I have read Colenso—(Laughter)—and retain my opinion, not weakened, but largely confirmed, by his criticisms, that St Paul knew much more about the matter than he does. (Applause.) I have read Darwin, and am satisfied that man was created, not developed. I have read Lyell, and continue in my conviction that for aught that there appears man is not older than the Mosaic chronology. I do not say that these works are demonstrations of my views; but there is quite as much to be found in them, so far as real facts are concerned, as tend one way as the other; and very little, indeed, which tends either way. The truth is, that the more intense disciples of these schools forget that they are still on the outer verge of the vaguest speculation, and are never likely to be anything else. Take Bishop Colenso, for instance. One can easily conceive the temptation to an ingenious mind, sitting down to criticise history at the distance of 3000 years, brimful of ideas of public and social life derived from the foggy climes of Britain, and trying to reconcile—and trying in vain—what he finds in the warm brilliancy—the nomadic life—the utterly dissimilar conditions of existence under an eastern sun, with the modern routine in vogue in the university, the metropolis, or the parsonage. No mere training could more unfit a man for such a task. An Englishman—especially an English University man—has little adaptability; and it is not without long and extensive experience of Orientals that he ceases to see their manners and customs through spectacles bought in Regent Street. Perhaps a Scotchman is a little more impressive in that respect. I remember a friend of mine telling me that when crossing the Isthmus of Suez, be-

fore the days of railways or steam, under the convoy of an Arab Shik, he was surprised, while encamped under the moonlight in the desert, to overhear his friend the Sheik venting his discontent to himself in good Aberdonian vernacular—(Laughter)—and he avowed afterwards that he was a countryman of his own, whose lot in life had terminated in that singular though doubtless dignified position. It struck me forcibly, in reading the Bishop's book, that a very large proportion of the minute difficulties on which he painfully dwells might entirely disappear if regarded through the medium of Oriental experience. He cannot understand how the children of Israel obtained their arms—why, if they had them, they did not rebel against Pharaoh—how the signal was given for the Pass-over; and a variety of similar circumstances of the narrative of the Exodus. But if we could accurately ascertain the precise position held by the Jews in Egypt, a very simple explanation might resolve all these doubts. It is certainly not difficult to conceive that they were treated, not as slaves, but as feudal dependents, bound, it is true, to render service, as many tribes in that position have been in other countries, but still retaining a national organisation of their own, and armed against depredators and predatory bands. But this we do not know—and I much prefer adhering to the history which has been so marvellously preserved and transmitted to us, to accepting from such quarters minute criticism on topics which, if well founded, must have attracted the attention of much more competent critics in a much more favourable period of the world's history. But all these speculations have little of novelty, although, I admit, a good deal of learning to recommend them. The philosophical works of Bolingbroke—which I hope none of you will read, for they are both sceptical and dull—contain the germs of all the more modern cavils on this head. There was also a work—I do not know whether Colenso has ever referred to it or not—by a Scotch Roman Catholic clergyman of the name of Geddes, published at the beginning of this century, which foreshadows, and indeed proclaims, the more important and substantial part of his lucubrations. It is true that Bishop Colenso has become more historical than the not less learned but more obscure priest ever did—I venture, however, to think, however unpleasant the prospect may be, that the octave of the latter will become as rare, and therefore as valuable, as the quarto of the former, before another half century has elapsed. (Applause) But the researches themselves of such critics I regard far from condemning. They are full of interest. It is the foregone conclusion which I repudiate. All inquiry into the history of such times, whether derived from comparative philology, from history, or from modern travel, are well worthy of your attentive study. But they are by no means all in the direction of our philosophers. The history of Joseph, the residence and oppression of the children of Israel in Egypt, the exodus, the wandering in the wilderness, the theocracy then established, the setting aside of the peculiar people, even to this day, the conquest of Palestine, the wars and the poetry of David, and the glories of Solomon, are facts more certainly true, apart altogether from the