

Missionary Conference in India.

THE second General Decennial Conference of Missionaries in India was held in the Methodist Episcopal Church, Calcutta, commencing on the 28th of December. The meetings continued for six days; the total number of registered members of the Conference being four hundred and sixty—nearly four times as many as attended the famous Allahabad Conference ten years ago. Major General Sir H. Ramsay occupied the chair, and gave the assembled delegates a hearty welcome. He remarked that the real President was He in whose name they had met together. He asked the delegates to forget their denominational distinctions and consider the all-important work of saving souls, the work which God had sent them to accomplish in that wide field.

"Preaching to the heathen" was the subject of the first paper read by Dr. Forman, a missionary of the American Presbyterian Church at Lahore. He thought that many missionaries erred in failing to use methods that will attract larger crowds of hearers. Much as Europeans objected to the methods of the Salvation Army, he had never heard a native of India condemn them. Others spoke in the same line, advocating the accompaniments of singing and praying in connection with bazaar and street preaching. The preaching should be followed by house to house visitation. Every thing calculated to excite prejudice should be avoided, when we can with far better results dwell upon the love and the patience of Christ. Thousands had gone away from bazaar wrangles believing that the advocate of Christianity had been worsted in the controversy. It was remarked that in many workers who came to India zeal seemed to evaporate as time went on. At the same time it was admitted to be difficult for those who continually preach to unresponsive, unimpressible Hindu audiences to maintain the freshness of their zeal. It was thought good that missionaries should have as many private interviews as possible with the people. Dr. Murray Mitchell said that the general feeling of missionaries in Western India was that there ought to be less controversy and more direct preaching of the Gospel. "Sunday-School work" came in for a large share of attention. The young are the hope of the Church in India; therefore they ought never to be placed under heathen teachers; but owing to the want of Christian teachers in many of the day-schools there is the more need for the systematic teaching of the Sabbath-School, and the testimony of the missionaries goes to show that progress in this direction has been most satisfactory.

Another question of growing importance was

that of the "Higher Education" in relation to its religious or missionary aspect. Dr. Murray Mitchell expressed the opinion that too much, relatively, had been spent on Higher Education, and maintained that the great subject of mass education should be taken up with more energy than heretofore. Mr. Wilson, one of the missionary teachers at Calcutta, referring to the work of Dr. Duff, and the changes that had come to pass in the educated Hindu community, said it was apparent that those changes were largely intellectual, political, social, economic; where they had been religious at all, they had been destructive rather than constructive. This, indeed, is acknowledged by all who have studied the history of missions in India. Circumstances at first led nearly all the Churches to seek the moral elevation of the upper classes. But circumstances have changed in India immensely in the last fifty years, and the conviction is gaining ground that the conversion of India is to be looked for from below upward; in other words that while Higher Education is not to be abandoned, far greater efforts should be put forth for the evangelization of the low castes, and the aboriginal races who own no caste at all.

• Women, for the first time in India, took part in the proceedings of such a Conference. Their theme was their own work in schools, in hospitals, and in families. Twelve ladies read papers on appropriate subjects. A society was formed,—“The Indian Woman's Home Missionary Association,” the object of which is not to collect funds, but to enlist Christian women of all races and grades of society in direct personal effort to win souls to Christ. Each member is pledged to at least three hours of personal effort every week. Three native Christian ladies represented the Baptist Churches at Maulmain, Burmah. In this connection it may be stated that the Conference determined to attack the practice, which is almost universal among families of high caste, of marrying Indian children in early infancy. The missionaries will endeavour to procure the passage of a law which shall make such a marriage null unless approved by the girl when she comes to years of discretion. They would thus in all cases interpret the marriage ceremony, as it is called, as a mere betrothal, and leave the parties free either to ratify it by a later marriage or to rescind the contract.

“Native Agency” was also discussed very thoroughly. The consensus of opinion was, that after introducing Christianity in a heathen country, the first duty of a foreign missionary was to start a native Christian agency. A large number of native women were Christians and should be trained for service. Hundreds of these women are sitting idle in India who ought to be engaged in work. The method of