

THE AUTUMNAL SESSION OF THE CON-
GREGATIONAL UNION OF ENGLAND
AND WALES.

Leeds, the real capital of the great county of Yorkshire, was honoured for the third time by the presence of the representative men of the English Congregational Churches in their autumn conference. The number of members and visiting delegates was about 950.

The *Christian World*, ablest and most influential of all religious newspapers, writes its editorial comment on the gathering under the caption, "An Epoch in Congregationalism." To some extent that descriptive phrase is strictly accurate, though probably the first flush of delight of our liberal contemporary at the trend of the principal speeches and addresses prompted a heading with, at the least, a touch of exaggeration. Still the splendid address from the chair, the important paper read by Professor Wilkins, and the speeches thereon of Drs. Fairbairn and Stevenson, and, above all, the reception these met from the general audiences revealed a theological spirit and doctrinal position which means a virtual revolution. In the space at our command to deal with all or even a moiety of the vital questions introduced during the three days' deliberations would be impossible. Our ambition must be the humbler one of stating personal impressions and helping our readers, through a knowledge of the chief men who spoke, to a fuller appreciation of the reports which they can get in the English papers.

As never before were the two branches of Congregationalism so lovingly allied, nothing could have been happier than the selection of Dr. Clifford, an eminent London Baptist minister, to be the preacher of the year. Dr. Clifford is not only one of the most influential and popular preachers of the day, but he holds the honour of being chairman-elect of the Baptist Union for the coming year. A man in the prime of life, a thorough student, fluent and rhetorical in speech, and sometimes rising to real eloquence, with an undefinable personal magnetism. We give full credit to the report that the Doctor's sermon on Monday evening was a genuine success. The thought elaborated was the science, the culture and the philosophy of the day knew much, but did not know God, and the danger attaching to their teaching was that they might take away all that was gracious and redeeming in the theistic idea; while on the other hand Jesus, as the revealer of God, was the solution of all problems.

By his service as chairman for the year, Dr. MacKinnell has laid the Congregational Church under deep obligation. First of all, we feel proud to be represented before great England in a manner so digni-

fied, so rich in culture, so purely spiritual. Then to have two such addresses as those he delivered, is to have our inheritance of instructive teaching on the essence of our church life and faith splendidly enriched. The later production possibly is the more valuable, though, remembering the unfolding in the former of the sublime nature and mission of a Christian Church, we venture the judgment with some hesitancy. "The Life of the Spirit" was a selection of topic as natural to the man as song to the nightingale. His gifts and acquirements drew him to the theme and fitted him to handle it. The pure eye to which the vision of light is granted, the heart full of tremulous sympathies, yet reverently brave in its search for the true, the nature at once conservative in its best sense and in touch with every proclamation of liberty to the captive mind, a scientist with a mixture of the mystic, a worker as well as a thinker,—these, embodied in the individual, explain the product we possess in this brief tractate.

Forsaking chronological order, we take the order of importance of subject. This unquestionably runs to the front Professor Wilkins' paper on "The importance of making systematic arrangements for the scientific study of theology." In the present condition of religious thought in England, and in the midst of cultured men to whom the right and usages of individual judgment were as vital breath, to open up such a subject demanded exceptional competency. It was found in Mr. Wilkins. Let us speak for a moment about the man. He was nurtured in boy life amid the fine surroundings of a high type of a Puritan home. His father was a deacon in our church in Clapham. After a grammar school training in Bishop Stratford, in Berks, he went up to Cambridge as a scholar in St. John's College. His taste lay in classical study, and it is worth mention that his most intimate university friend was the senior wrangler of his year, Mr. Moulton, now occupying a high position at the Chancery Bar. If Moulton was supreme in mathematics, Wilkins was nearly so in classics, and, we believe, he was only beaten in the tripos by young Kennedy, from Shrewsbury, son of the celebrated headmaster. Mr. Wilkins is now professor of Latin in Owens College, Manchester, evidence enough of the possession of more than classical scholarship. Though still young, so thorough and wide in reach has been his student life, he stands today one of England's most thoughtful and best cultured sons. It is this fact which gives such emphasis to a statement made in his paper: "I have not the shadow of right to speak with authority on the question of evolution. But mixing as I do very much with the younger leaders of science, I do not fear to assert that it is accepted by them with practical unanimity as an unquestionable solution of the *physical*