

THE HAGUE CONFERENCE.

The representatives of the powers who met at Hague in conference that will be known to history as the first important attempt to bring about the arbitration of international disputes, have concluded their deliberations. They assembled some months ago amid the disparaging suggestions of sceptics, the plaudits of an indifferent multitude that vaguely pretends to desire peace, and the prayers of certain ingenuous individuals who fancied that the millenium was within sight. The sitting of the conference issued in achievements that provoke a similar remarkable divergence of opinion concerning their importance. The sceptic still mocks at the futility of such artificial attempts to abolish war. The many are glad that other conferences are to be held in the future and that balloons used in war are not to be allowed to belaud New York sky-scrapers. There are others who see in the achievements of the Conference certain indications that within another decade all friction between nations will be relieved in the council chamber at the Hague where Mr. Andrew Carnegie has undertaken to provide for the erection of a Palace of Peace. So heated, indeed, has the controversy over the results of the conference become and so reckless the recriminations indulged in that one may be pardoned for thinking that human nature, for a century or two at least, will keep the Hague Conference very busy. When objects of territorial aggrandisement, involving perhaps, a barren island or an uninhabitable strip of land, are in view and when national feeling has been aroused by alleged slander, nations become unreasonable. They tend to lose that pacific mood that sets them conferring about the abolition of war.

It may be doubted then that the Hague Conference marks the beginning of an era of peace. It is certain, moreover, that it will not be able to change human nature. In this matter there are other agencies of greater efficacy. On the other hand, those who mock at the idea of a conference for the promotion of peace and the mitigation of the bitterness attending international negotiation of difficult questions are underestimating the possibilities of small beginnings. The Hague Conference represents a body of opinion that favors less frequent resort to war and would rejoice in its total abolition. The Conference, too, has to its credit a list of achievements that cannot be robbed of importance. They indicate a determination to avoid wars that are due to hasty indignation or selfish purposes. They stand for a modern and humane sentiment against the barbarous practices that have marked wars in the past. What are the achievements of the Conference? 1. A declaration of a belief in the principle of obligatory arbitration. 2. Establishment of the inviolability of neutral territory. 3. A declaration against the establishments by belligerents of wireless telegraphy in neutral territory. 4. Agreement that belligerent ships cannot re- victual or take fuel in neutral ports. 5. Agreement that hostilities must be preceded by formal declaration of war. 6. Declaration against the use of mines to restrict commercial navigation. 7. The establishment of an international prize court in which unlimited right of appeal is given where neutrals are concerned. 9. An agreement that one nation shall not collect a debt claimed by its