

The Religious World

The Free Church Congress at Leeds

One of the events in the religious world of Great Britain most worthy of study is the Free Church Congress, which has just held its second session at Leeds. The Congress is composed of representatives of all the evangelical dissenting denominations—at least all of those may send delegates. It was started soon after the meeting of the International Congregational Council in London, and, we believe, may be regarded as an outgrowth of that. Exactly who first suggested the idea might be difficult to determine. At that Council, Dr. John Clifford, the pre-eminent Baptist of London, asked why Baptists were not included in that Council, saying that they were Congregationalists as well as those who bore the name. He was followed by Dr. J. Monroe Gibson, who suggested a Council of all the denominations, but his thought included, if we remember, the evangelical churches of the world. Very soon after the close of the Council, Dr. Mackennal took up the thought, and led the way for the first Free Church Congress, which was held last year in Manchester. We presume that the project had long been in his mind. The special object of the Congress is the uniting of all Nonconformist denominations for purposes of practical Christian work and for mutual co-operation in that which belongs alike to all, especially the promotion of Disestablishment. Last year's meetings were a great success. We have not yet the full reports of the meeting at Leeds, but will complete our notice in our next issue. The sermon was preached by the Principal of Mansfield College, Dr. A. M. Fairbairn, who took for his text Matt. xvi., 18, and John xviii., 36—the words of Christ to Peter and Pilate. The sermon was on the high plane of thought to which Dr. Fairbairn always seeks to lift his hearers. Among other things, he said that the Free Churches had gained the negative liberty of the right to exist; now they had to live such a life as would justify the liberty they had gained. The churches must be serious in all their spiritual purposes. They are not here to amuse, but to teach. The real intellect and true spirit of the times demand the virile testimony of the Free Churches. So far as our reports now go, there were four discussions: one opened by Dr. John Hunter, of Glasgow, on "Worship;" one a conference on "Labor," presided over by Mr. Albert Spicer, M.P.; one on "Denominational Overlapping;" and one on "Woman's Work in Towns."

What was Said at These Conferences

Dr. John Hunter is one of the most striking figures in the British pulpit. He is a great preacher, a thorough Independent, and yet a man who puts much emphasis upon the element of worship in church services. He says "the problem of the Free Churches is how to unite reasonableness and devoutness." The reaction against form and symbolism has gone too far. "The average Presbyterian, Congregational, Baptist, or Methodist place of worship is about the last place in the world for a man to go who desires to cultivate his spiritual life." "We must provide aids to devotion. The monopoly of helpful symbolism ought not to be given over to error." "For true congregational worship there must be a liturgical element." "It is better to have a large part of the service fixed, but there should be room for free prayer." Dr. Hunter cannot be accused of seeking a liturgy because of his inability to draw the people by his preaching. He has long emphasized the need in our modern life of the cultivation of the devotional spirit in the services of the Church. Some of the speakers who followed agreed with him, and some disagreed. In the Conference on the Labor Question three addresses seem to have attracted especial attention. The Rev. and Alderman Flemming Williams said that the land question was at the base of the labor problem. The demand of the working classes for a living wage is not simply a material but a moral demand. "Education and the franchise have rendered it impossible for them to put up with the old brutal standard of wages." "If the labor problem is merely financial, let it be kept outside the churches; but if the monetary elements are the symbols of great spiritual aspirations, we put

them out at our peril." The Rev. Hugh Price Hughes said that one of the curses of the past was "the economic man." He said that the capitalist should have only so much for his labor as he would be willing to pay another man to do the same work; only so much interest as accrues to dead capital, and no insurance on his risk. If the working classes are not led by the churches, they will be led by atheists and Socialists. Dr. Glover, an eminent Baptist of Bristol, took exactly the opposite view, and strongly condemned the treatment of the labor question in the pulpit, and had no sympathy with any tendency toward Socialism. In the discussion on Denominational Overlapping a resolution was passed asking the various Nonconformist bodies to appoint representatives to a conference to be held on the subject, with a view to substituting co-operation for competitive action among the churches. Dr. Mackennal said: "It is no use to try to fight overlapping in individual cases." The time has come for all denominations to unite in one great evangelistic service of England. The Rev. Hugh Price Hughes spoke with telling effect of the stupidity of wasting preachers on villages by sending them to do work which other men are doing, while there are three million people in London who go to no place of worship. In the discussion of Woman's Work in Towns many interesting facts were brought out, of which we can mention but one or two. Mrs. Hugh Price Hughes gave an account of the Sisterhood of the West London Mission. At present there are thirty-eight sisters. The Sisterhood recognizes two broad principles: first, they are to be true sisters of the common people; and, second, their Sisterhood is to be wide enough to give scope to women of original power and culture. Dr. Mackennal told of a wealthy man and his wife in Manchester who gave up their beautiful suburban home, purchased a music-hall in the city, pulled it down and built a mission-house, with a dwelling-house attached in which they lived. That act had a wonderful influence in Manchester. In the course of the discussion it came out that Lady Henry Somerset gives to the West End Mission in London £400 a year for its work. Mr. Hughes declared his opinion that the pulpit is the chief means of reaching the educated classes. He also said that the idle rich are the most dangerous class of the community. To do nothing for the public good is quite as disgraceful in a rich man as in a poor man.

A Reunion at Carr's Lane Church, Birmingham

The pastor of this church is the Rev. R. W. Dale, D.D., who is known wherever the English language is spoken. A reunion of the members of his church who were there in the early years of his pastorate, a part of which time he was co-pastor with John Angell James, has just been held. The object was to revive memories of the other days, and to enable those who still remain in Carr's Lane, as well as those now associated with other churches, to meet and renew old associations. The attendance was large, and a most touching and eloquent address was presented to Dr. Dale; we wish we had space to insert it in these columns. For more than forty years Dr. Dale has now ministered to this church. He went to it as a young man to be the assistant of John Angell James. For six or eight years they worked together, and then the ministry was left in the hands of Dr. Dale alone. Few churches have had such a history, and few such pastors. We quote one passage from the address: "Many of us recall especially the early years of your ministry with profound thankfulness to Almighty God for the stimulating influence of your noble thought and enlightened interpretation of Scripture; and if any regret attaches to our remembrance of those years, it lies in the fact of our not having attained to the lofty ideals always set forth by your preaching and in your writing." Dr. Dale in his response referred somewhat at length to the wonderful influence and power which his predecessor had had in that church. We in this country know of John Angell James only as the author of "The Anxious Inquirer," but in England he was known for many years as "the Angel James." He was a man of wonderful spiritual power as well as of the loftiest ability and character. At the meeting Dr. Dale told an incident which we have also heard from his own lips. While Mr. James was yet living, and Mr. Dale was a very young man, the latter gave a series of sermons on the Epistle to the Romans, in one of which he, as he said, had

the audacity to attack the Calvinistic doctrine of "original sin." Some of the people were very much troubled over the heresy of the young preacher, and went to Mr. James about it. He replied: "You leave the young man alone; he has the root of the matter in him, and will come out all right yet." The prophecy has been abundantly fulfilled, for, great as was the influence of John Angell James, it was never greater than is that of the young man of whom he spoke, and who for many years has been one of the great spiritual leaders of the Church in England and throughout the world.

The Free Church Conference

The Free Church Conference at the Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church of New York, on March 27, was attended by about forty ministers from city and country. The day sessions were devoted to reports of Free and Institutional Church Work, several addresses on particular phases of it, and the organization of an Open or Institutional Club League for the advancement of the principles for which it stands. The Rev. C. A. Dickinson, D.D., of Boston, was made President; the Rev. Charles L. Thompson, D.D., of New York, Vice-President; and the Rev. F. M. North, D.D., also of New York, Secretary and Treasurer. These, with the Rev. J. L. Scudder, of Jersey City, and the Rev. Dr. Mills, of Cleveland, constitute an Executive Committee. At the public meeting in the evening addresses were made by the Rev. Drs. Dickinson, E. Anderson, Day, and Paden. Dr. Thompson read the following as the platform of the League:

The Open or Institutional Church depends upon the development of a certain spirit rather than upon the aggregation of special appliances and methods. It is an organism evolved from a germinal principle rather than an organization. It believes that only as this spirit is developed in the Church universal will the purpose of the kingdom of God among men be realized, and it confidently looks forward to the time when the Church will be understood to stand for the larger view here presented.

As the body of the Christ, the Open or Institutional Church aims to provide the material environment through which the spirit may be practically expressed. As his representative it seeks to re-present him, physically, socially, intellectually, and spiritually, to the age in which it exists.

Inasmuch as the Christ came not to be ministered unto but to minister, the Open or Institutional Church, filled and moved by his spirit of ministering love, seeks to become the center and source of all beneficent and philanthropic effort and to take the leading part in every movement which has for its end the alleviation of human suffering, the elevation of man, and the betterment of the world.

Thus the Open or Institutional Church aims to save all men, and all of the man, by all means, abolishing so far as possible the distinction between the religious and the secular, and sanctifying all days and means to the great end of saving the world for Christ.

While the Open or Institutional Church is known by the spirit of ministration rather than by any specific methods of expressing that spirit, it stands for open church doors every day and all day, free seats, a plurality of Christian workers, the personal activity of all church members, a ministry to all the community through educational, reformatory, and philanthropic channels, to the end that men may be won to Christ and his service, that the Church may be brought back to the simplicity and comprehensiveness of its primitive life, until it can be said of every community, The kingdom of heaven is within you, and Christ is all and in all.

Any person subscribing to these principles may become a member of the League by sending one dollar to the Rev. F. M. North, D.D., 150 Fifth Avenue, New York City. The meeting was perfectly harmonious, and gave, it is believed, a great impetus to the new movement.

Education in the Northwest

We have received from the Rev. L. H. Hallock, D.D., of Tacoma, an interesting letter about our recent paragraph entitled "The Educational Age of the Pacific Slope." With much force Dr. Hallock brings out the need of institutions of learning on that coast, asking if one college is too many for Congregationalists to support in Washington, and one in Oregon, when the nearest denominational institution is in Fargo, North Dakota, and the nearest in the South is Pomona in southern California. He says: "Let these institutions fail, and there is no alternative but to send our lads East, or forbid their education altogether. The long and costly journey cannot be made." Dr. Hallock closes his letter with these words: "Allow me to suggest that men and women in favored Eastern cities shall sit down with a map of the United States and a tape-line, and measure and compute the distances in this Northwest-ern empire, and remember with what earnestness and determination these bright boys and girls are reaching for the best things—and say if it is too much to ask that they endow and help maintain two Christian colleges in these mighty and growing States?" Dr.

Hallock misses the point of our comment in the paragraph to which he refers. The *denominational* appeal is no longer as strong as formerly. We do not believe that there are too many institutions of learning on the Pacific coast, but we do believe that there are in many parts of our country; that some were founded for the simple purpose of increasing the denominational spirit, and that if it were not for denominationalism there would be fewer colleges and much better ones than now. The givers in the East are beginning to realize that they are often asked to help the endowment of useless institutions, and we think it very important that those who represent worthy institutions should be careful to make it exceedingly plain that their colleges are called for by the exigencies of the country rather than by the denomination. We are somewhat familiar with the great Northwest, and have firm faith in its future. The institutions to which Dr. Hallock refers ought to be well endowed, and young men and women ought not to have to come east of the mountains for intellectual training. But those who are laying foundations and appealing for money ought to make it very clear that the cause of Christ and the welfare of the State, rather than sectarianism, are behind their appeals. In the cases to which Dr. Hallock refers we are well assured, from personal knowledge, that there is no denominational overlapping.

The Massachusetts Reformatory

The Rev. William J. Batt, moral instructor at the Massachusetts Reformatory, is one who believes that there is no higher service for a Christian minister than that which is offered in our prisons. His report of the work for 1893 is valuable reading. It has been the writer's privilege to examine this work in person, and we know that nothing is exaggerated in Mr. Batt's report. The place is a reformatory indeed. Its managers recognize that the chief privilege of society is to reclaim those who have fallen, and consequently violated laws. In that institution there are about one thousand inmates. The report reads more like that of an educational than of a penal institution. The list of meetings and classes is quite extended. Devotional meetings are held between supper and the evening schools, open to such as have given evidence of genuine interest in them. Other times are set apart for social talks on the special evils to which men are subject. The Christian Endeavor subject is brought before the men, and prayer-meetings are held on Saturday afternoons. Some are attended by few, and others by as many as two hundred. The officers are not present at these meetings, although the Chaplain is. The Sabbath services are held in the chapel, and are largely attended. They have been addressed by many prominent persons. Among the speakers of last year we notice the Revs. W. R. Alger, D.D., A. P. Putnam, D.D., G. R. W. Scott, D.D., W. E. Griffis, D.D., Irving Meredith, J. B. Thrall, and others equally well known. The men are organized into various societies. There are a Young Men's Christian Association, a Reform Club, a Scientific and Literary Club, a Young Men's Catholic Debating Society, a Chautauqua Class, and a Singing-School. There are also classes in various branches of instruction. The importance of these classes will be manifest when it is remembered that of all the inmates thus far about forty per cent. have been less than twenty years of age, and less than one-fifth have been over thirty. They are not so thoroughly steeped in wickedness that their reform may not be confidently expected. Society itself is often quite as criminal as those who do the specific acts of wrong. It owes to the individual offenders in its penal institutions a debt which can only be imperfectly discharged by the most earnest and self-sacrificing endeavors for their reformation. We make no excuse for the individual wrong-doer, and in no way palliate his crime, when we affirm that society itself is a partner in almost all guilt, and that, therefore, the object of such institutions should be, not simply to inflict punishment, but still more to reform the criminal.

We have before called attention to the Grand Army Mission for the veterans of the late war. It was organized two years ago by the following gentlemen: A. S. Webb, Kiliaen Van Rensselaer, James Talcott, General O. O. Howard, General Wager Swayne, Ira M. Hedges, Frank C.