

The Month.

THE Church Congress at Northampton was a very interesting one, and some of its debates were well worth careful attention. One of its conspicuous features was a most striking address to the working men by the Bishop of London. He seemed to feel at home in addressing a body of men who reminded him of his old friends in Bethnal Green, and he urged some cardinal Christian truths on their attention with a force, a directness, and a transparent conviction all his own. There was sufficient humour and good humour in the address to lighten and sweeten it, but it was quite free from any of that strain of mere familiarity which too often mars the tone of speakers on such occasions. The charm of it is that the Bishop himself is so distinctly visible behind it, and it is a conspicuous instance of the impressiveness of a true and earnest Christian man, speaking out of the genuineness of deep conviction and in entire sympathy with his audience. Addresses like this from a man in the position of the Bishop ought to strengthen greatly the influence of Christianity and of the Church among others than the class to whom it was more particularly directed.

The discussion of miracles will, on the whole, contribute to strengthen belief in the supernatural narratives of the Gospels, but on the other hand it revealed a very mischievous tendency in the latest school of Oxford speculation. That tendency amounts to nothing less, as its chief spokesman avowed, than a disposition to reduce the miraculous in the Gospels to its lowest possible point, until it is distinctly suggested that even the Incarnation itself may be explained without involving a miracle. It ought to be more plainly recognised than it seems to be by some of the leading theological authorities at Oxford that such a view must prove in practice, whether it may be in the personal convictions of those who represent it, absolutely incompatible with the Creeds and with a natural interpretation of the Epistles. It is vain to attempt to minimize the supernatural character of our Lord's person, life, and ministry in this way. As was shown in one of the papers, the supernatural powers of our Lord are essential to His revelation and to His real power as a Saviour, and though it may seem easier at first to accept a Christ who is but half the sacred and Divine reality, the belief in the whole Christ, both God and man, will really be found easier, both to faith and to reason, in the long-run. The discussion on the Old Testament showed signs that the real bearings of the prevalent school of criticism are beginning to be appreciated, and in consequence to be distrusted. If

criticism were simply an analysis of the various sources from which the books of the Old Testament were compiled, it would be interesting, and would not gravely affect practical issues. But when it requires, as was plainly avowed at the Congress, that the conception of the course of Jewish history entertained, not merely by the Christian Church, but by the Apostles themselves, must be revolutionized, practical clergymen realize that the gravest difficulties are placed in the way of ordinary readers of the Scriptures. If St. Paul was mistaken about the whole course of Jewish history, his authority as an interpreter of the revelation of God to the Jews is fatally undermined; and if the impression which the historical books of the Bible naturally convey of the course of that history is erroneous, it will be idle to speak of their inspiration. But if we are deprived of the inspiration of the Old Testament and of Apostolic authority in the New, the position of the Christian faith will become very difficult to defend. When a clergyman of distinction compares the historic value of Scriptural narratives to the historic value of the play of "Macbeth," we may well seem to have reached a sort of *reductio ad absurdum*, and may feel very confident that there is some latent error in the professorial methods. In another field of thought and action a similar *reductio ad absurdum* was presented in Mr. Athelstan Riley's confident argument that, on the principles he represented, image worship was as harmless as the intellectual apprehension of Divine things, and was practically indispensable to the maintenance of the Catholic faith. The social discussions of the Congress were also of much interest and instructiveness.

Parliament is now engaged in considering the Education Bill, and the bitter controversy which the Nonconformists have maintained during the recess is being brought to its practical issue. Mr. Balfour, in a strong speech at Manchester, has declared his resolution to pass the Bill in substance as it stands, and Mr. Chamberlain has distinctly announced that its defeat would mean the resignation of the Ministry. On the other hand, the Nonconformist opposition has reached the irrational length of declaring, through Dr. Clifford, that if the Bill passes he will take—or attempt to take—the unconstitutional, if not impossible, course of calling on the King to veto it. When a party have worked themselves into this degree of irrational excitement they are likely to lose the respectful attention of the mass of the English people, and the Archbishop of Canterbury is probably right in the quiet confidence he has exhibited in his Charge that the Bill will pass into law. But it must be owned that it will raise very anxious questions, and questions for the Church as well as for Nonconformists.
