

HOPTON CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH.

ORDINATION SERVICE.

The Rev. J. H. Best, B.Sc., was yesterday ordained the pastor of the Congregational Church of Hopton, Mirfield. This is one of the oldest Congregational Churches in Yorkshire, having been established more than two hundred years ago. It now consists of 150 members, while, besides a Sunday school attended by 500 or 600 young people, there are connected with it other auxiliaries of Christian work. The rev. gentleman named was accepted as pastor by a church-meeting held in April, having received from the Rev. Dr. Simon, the Principal of the Spring Hill College, Birmingham, his tutor, the Rev. Dr. Conder, of Leeds, and other prominent members of the connexion, high recommendation. That the choice of pastor in this instance is regarded with satisfaction was abundantly demonstrated yesterday by the gathering of a congregation which filled the large and handsome edifice in which the ordination service was held, and by the heartiness with which the interesting proceedings were characterised. The Rev. Dr. CONDER, of Leeds, presided, and he was accompanied on the platform by the newly appointed pastor, the Rev. Dr. Simon (Spring Hill College), the Rev. Dr. Bruce (Huddersfield), the Rev. H. Sturt, chairman-elect of the Yorkshire Congregational Union (Dowsbury); the Rev. F. Hall (Heckmondwike), the Rev. W. J. Davies (Cleckheaton), and Mr. J. A. Clapham (Hopton). There were also present the Revs. H. J. Boyd (Paddock), J. T. Stannard, Edgar Todd (Marsden), W. L. Parker (Ravensthorpe), E. H. Dugdale (Huddersfield), R. Crookall (Cleckheaton), M. Howard (Heckmondwike), A. Claven (Wyke), W. T. Morton (Earlsheaton), A. Lee (Gomersal), and J. P. Perkins (Ossett), and the Revs. W. Gillis (Methodist New Connexion), the Rev. Mr. Hewittson (Wesleyan), the Rev. J. W. Scaddrett (Moravian), and the Rev. Mr. Evans (Baptist), Mirfield; Mr. F. Baines, Mr. E. M. Baines, Mr. Talbot Baines, Leeds; Mr. J. B. Best, London; Ald. Woodhead, Huddersfield; Mr. J. S. Briggs, Wakefield; Mr. James Walker, Mr. J. E. Walker, Mirfield; and other friends from Leeds, Huddersfield, Batley, Mirfield, Ravensthorpe, Dowsbury, and Birstal.

The service was commenced by the singing of "Hail to the Lord's Anointed," after which the Rev. H. STURT offered prayer, and read suitable portions of Scripture from the Revised Version of the New Testament.

The Rev. Dr. BRUCE, in giving an exposition of Congregational principles, said that they believed that the congregational or independent polity of church government was the original Scriptural form in the days of the Apostles. English Congregationalism was the result of an earnest desire to restore the Church of Christ to the simplicity, purity, and freedom of the first century, by insisting on the necessity of personal faith in Christ and regeneration by the Holy Ghost for membership, giving to each member equal rights and responsibilities in the election of church members and officers, and in the discharge of Christian work. English Congregationalism was like the English race, a mixture; and like the English Constitution, a growth—a mixture, but not an adulteration; a growth, but not an excrescence or a deformity. It had small and feeble beginnings, and their fathers placed not trust in princes, but in principles; not in the sword of the State, but the sword of the Spirit; not in Sovereigns and statesmen, but in the loving God and in the faith and love of Godfearing men and women. Its origin was purely religious, and neither a symptom nor an outlet of political discontent. They had never been so much political Dissenters as Christian politicians, their work, vote, and money being given as a matter of conscience and duty to God and man. Congregationalism began in deep religious convictions, and not in shallow schemes of expediency; it was the fullest outcome of the Reformation—Puritanism purified, and the Church brought back to the purity and simplicity of the Christian model. Every honest revival of religion and of earnest evangelical preaching had brought strength to Congregationalism; and if they were not spiritually minded, and evangelical, they were less than nothing, and the degenerate children of a pious ancestry. Having spoken of the purity of communion and the necessity of conversion in order to the church-fellowship which characterised early Congregationalism, he expressed a fear that in the present day the competition of the sects had quickened their zeal, but lowered the tone of their religious life. The statistics of year-books and the numerical success of pastors and denominations strongly tempted church officers to throw wide open the doors of the church to all and sundry. If this were done, however, the Church would be reduced to a condition answering to the description once applied to the Conservative party by a master of sentences, "an organised hypocrisy," the hypocrisy being apparent than the organisation. He was glad that they had such men as Dr. Dale, who dared to hold up the old Scriptural standard of the necessity of a man's full surrender to Christ. Unfortunately the difference between so-called Christians and men of the world was often, so far from being infinite, infinitesimal. A purer, higher church life was the first step towards national regeneration. Abounding iniquity in all stations of life could only be arrested and exorcised by a special and manifest purity in all their churches. The patronage and control of the world became subtle, insinuating, and intangible; was a more dangerous foe to the Church than State patronage and control. The exaction of a religious tax would arouse resistance; but let the world suggest a partnership, offer patronage, and even assume control, and the Church was seldom virtuous enough to refuse the wrong that resulted in such an unholy alliance. There was too much worship of worldly success and too great a readiness to seek church success by worldly means than by trusting to the beauty of holiness and the power of the Spirit. The amount of work a church did was a matter of secondary importance if it consisted of pure-minded Christian people. It was after all men more than measures, and if they had a church consisting of men and women pervaded with the spirit of Christ, they would be sure in the main to have a polity in conformity with the spirit of Christ, and to do Christian work in a Christian spirit.

Mr. J. A. CLAPHAM (Church Secretary) having made a statement as to the call made by the Hopton Church to the Rev. J. H. Best, and his acceptance of the sacred office,

The newly-appointed PASTOR then delivered an address, in which he gave a recital of the principles of his belief, and in so doing departed from the customary form of replying to interrogations from one of the divines of the Church. He prefaced his address by observations as to his early life, and a reference to the religious thoughts by which he had been impressed, especially mentioning that he owed his present position, in a great measure, to the inestimable privileges of a Christian home. In accordance with a wish to enter the Christian ministry, he entered upon his studies at the Spring-hill College, Birmingham, in 1879, and remained there until last Christmas, under the training of the Reverend Dr. Simon, to whom his warmest thanks would be ever due. In the public recognition of his call to the Hopton church he felt that the longings and hopes of some years had been fulfilled. He believed that, not the correct creed, but a personal surrender to the Saviour in love, was the one thing which laid in the heart a basis for true religion. That act was the starting-point for the gradual apprehension of Divine truth. He believed in one God, infinite and self-existent—no mere Force or unconsciously working Intelligence, but a Person; and as such possessed of thought, feeling, and volition. God was set forth as a perfectly ethical Being, and he recognised the Divine justice, mercy, truth, and love, as different phases of that ethical Being. In conformity with the historical Church of all ages, he believed in God as the Triune, and regarded the terms Father, Son, and Holy Ghost as real and eternal distinctions within the Godhead himself, and the doctrine of the Trinity as no mere mystery, but bright rather with excess of light. He believed that the world had its continual source in the Divine Will, and that under His direct control the life-history of our planet at last broke forth into glorious blossom in man, who was created in God's image. He believed in the incarnation and atonement, death and resurrection of Christ, and that He now lives to make intercession for His people. God had eternally elected all men to himself, and he believed that He drew them by His Spirit; but that while He began the work of salvation, He nevertheless sought through His love to elicit answering love from them. This act of co-operation corresponded with the Scriptural idea of the faith by which all obtained justification through Christ. With respect to the Ministry, he believed that Christ set apart a special order of men, who should minister in spiritual things in His Church; but that he had not, however, committed to them priestly powers over and beyond those possessed by all Christian men. He agreed in the self-government of the Church, so long as it was not opposed to the other powers that be: and was a Congregationalist mainly because, alone almost of all other ecclesiastical systems, their Church had refrained from handing down the formalised beliefs of one age as of binding force upon succeeding ages. In conclusion, the rev. gentleman held that the life of every individual and of humanity as a whole was pressing on to some far-off goal, when judgment should be revealed, evil destroyed, the good should triumph, and when God should be all in all.

The Rev. Dr. CONDER then offered the ordination prayer; and after the hymn, "We bid thee welcome, in the name of Jesus, our exalted Head," had been sung,

The Rev. Dr. SIMON gave the charge to the new pastor, speaking from the text, "Watch for your souls, as they that must give account," Hebrews xiii. 17. Having referred to the personal responsibility to the Lord Jesus of all in the winning of souls for Christ, Dr. Simon pointed out that the cure of souls, as it was termed, was specially the pastor's vocation. Being now a co-worker with Christ, he must continually warn men to flee from the wrath to come. It was a difficult task, because of man's indifference; delicate because one's best efforts were regarded as intrusion; but important because it affected eternal issues; and noble because it was a work which the Son of God counted it an honour to prosecute. The necessity of personal example and continuous self-denial for the Master, of preaching as a living man to dying men, of presenting Christ as the saviour of life unto life, of pastoral visitation, and, above all, of private prayer, was inculcated.

The service was then concluded in the usual way. A public tea was afterwards held, at which about 500 persons sat down; and in the evening the Rev. Dr. Simon, in the absence of the Rev. H. Simon, of Westminster, who was unable to attend, preached to a large congregation. The devotional portion of the service was conducted by the Rev. F. Hall, Heckmondwike.