CONFERENCE OF LADIES ON HYGIENE.

ADDRESS.

By MRS. J. A. GODWIN,
PRESIDENT OF THE CONFERENCE.

WHEN the Local Committee asked me to be your President, I accepted with much fear but more pleasure, and asked myself Why should this honour fall to me? However, as my conspicuous lack of qualifications to fill this chair is too large a subject for this morning, I will at once proceed to offer you a most hearty welcome to our city on behalf of those who, like myself, are deeply interested in all work for the amelioration of suffering and the advancement of science, which is surely the aim and object of this Sanitary Congress. We hope your twenty-first meeting may be at least as pleasant as all its predecessors, for even if our skies are grey and our streets dull, we claim to have lovely excursions close at hand, and in our very midst the throbbing pulses of the mills where the great wool trade is carried on. The mills should well repay you for a visit, where many hygienic inventions have been applied, such as ventilating shafts, fans, smoke consumers (more or less successful), cleansing and disinfecting of fleeces, etc.

About three years ago we woke up to the fact that we needed a lady sanitary inspector, and had the good fortune to secure the services of Miss Stephens. She found a deplorable state of affairs, but has already done much by her visits, advice, and sympathy with the people, and her most lucid and able reports to the City Council, one result of which is that an assistant lady inspector has recently been appointed. Time forbids more, or a sketch of her work alone would form interesting and improving matter for hours.

This is the age of the novel and the play ; could we not through these mediums reach the careless heart of the general public to the great work of sanitation ? Even as Charles Dickens made us weep useful tears over *Oliver Twist*, as Kingsley did for tiny chimney sweeps and Jeffrey for the agricultural labourer in his picturesque and crowded cottage, and later still, Halliwell Sutcliffe's retrospective picture of the woes of little mill lasses, now long since dead.

What would make more sombre reading, or a greater tragedy than an account of the havoc wrought amongst those who work in dangerous trades, some of which bring us our most everyday necessities ? Do we think of the potter's danger when we drink our morning tea from porcelain or from mug ? Or at what price the lucifer is made ? Can we hear the laboured breath of the choked up lungs of the mason, and those who work to make our furs rich and smooth ? We love our homes to be bright with paint and paper and blazing fires, without a thought of lead and arsenic, of choke damp and gas. When our dainty woollen fabrics please our fancy and our touch, can we realise how many hearts have stopped their beating when the whisper goes of anthrax to the bread winner ? Who heeds the plumber's danger when we send for him to find the cause of the smell we fear may prove so deadly to those we love ? From any of these most simple pictures such tragedies could be woven that we should cry aloud for comfort. But the brighter side is surely there when our trades may be less harmful and our insanitary areas swept away—never to return—for if each one in his or her small way would honestly strive to understand the objects of work, such as this Congress represents, they would feel compelled to grant their aid of time, of sympathy and money, to all those waging war against these dangers. Let us adapt an old saying "Where war has slain its thousands, insanitary conditions have slain their tens of thousands."

I could wax garrulous on the difference between the days of my youth and now. How chimerical would the need of an institute like the Sanitary one have appeared to our grandmothers who nursed fevers and colds in rooms from which all light and fresh air were excluded, who drank water from wells and milk from the farms, who vaccinated us from each other, let in Sarah Gamp with her box of old clothes, bought flowers from the consumptive girl and fish and vegetables from the hawker, allowed spittoons as one of the necessities of life, scouted the idea of danger in a sausage, saw no harm in the plumber who ran short of material and left a little gap, and would have deemed anyone mad who hinted at the connection between malaria and mosquitos ! And yet if we

look through the list of dangers attacked by sanitarians, we find we have not mentioned a tithe of them.

Interest has awakened in all these matters, and the voice of science calls loudly that we should take heed to the evils of crowding, bad housing, poisoned water supplies, dangerous trades, insanitary conditions under which some of our food and clothing are prepared, and to urge us to use all existing means for purifying this state of things, and give help and sympathy to those struggling to increase those means.

Our grandmothers erred through ignorance, let us not do so wilfully, for as woman's sphere of usefulness is now so much enlarged, and her education so much more liberal, so has her responsibility increased.

Women are now honoured and peculiarly suitable members of Boards of Guardians, Schools, Hospitals, Prison and Housing Committees, from which councils they must resist all efforts to displace them.

We have before us a list of most interesting papers, on which I hope there may be a full and free discussion. I must say no more, except to crave your pardon for any inefficiency with which I may conduct this meeting. The work in which you are all interested and many actively engaged, is an unselfish one, inasmuch as it must affect posterity more than our own day and generation, but let us struggle on to the end, fearing nothing, but hoping much. Ages since One said "Let there be Light, and there was Light." In another sense let us repeat "Let there be Light," and so endeavour, each in our tiny circle, to aid the work before us—that a purer atmosphere, physically, and therefore morally, may obtain—and those who succeed us may add "And there was Light."