

THE WASHINGTON CONFERENCE ON THE HISTORY OF SCIENCE

THE conference upon the History of Science, initiated by the American Historical Association at its annual meeting a year ago in Cleveland, proved such a success that the program committee devoted another session to the subject this December at Washington. Simultaneously the History of Science Section, which has recently been formed under the auspices of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, was meeting in Chicago, thus demonstrating the widespread interest in this promising field. This widespread interest was further evidenced at Washington by the variety of learned occupations represented by the speakers who included, in addition to professors of science and history, a librarian, a college president, and the head of an institution for research.

Robert S. Woodward, president of the Carnegie Institution of Washington, presided as almost his last official act before retiring from his long tenure of that office. In his introductory remarks he welcomed the attitude of the American Historical Association towards the history of science, emphasized the need of breaking down the artificial barriers which divide learning into different departments, and recalled a scheme dating back to 1907 but never executed for a general history of the inductive sciences by a number of collaborators under the direction of the Carnegie Institution.

In a paper on "Recent Realignment in the History of Medieval Medicine and Science," Dr. Fielding H. Garrison, librarian, Surgeon General's Office, warned against past exaggeration of medieval ecclesiastical hostility towards science, and against deriding the science of that period. In British libraries alone Mrs. Singer has found 30,000 scientific manuscripts from the medieval period, of which some 15,000 are medical. Dr. Garrison went on to compare the general character of medieval science and medicine with that of other periods including our own, and to appraise its relations to them. The rapid progress of scientific dis-

covery in more recent times was convincingly illustrated by a paper on "Developments in Electro-Magnetism during the Past Hundred Years," by Professor Arthur E. Kennelly, of Harvard University, who traced the achievements of Ampère, Faraday, and others, and showed the far-reaching influence and enormous importance of developments in electromagnetics in well-nigh every other field whether of scientific theory or of applied science and practical invention: as, for example, the effect of the theory of electrons upon chemistry and the earlier atomic theory.

Professor James Harvey Robinson, of the New School for Social Research, discussed with characteristic satirical wit and literary force to the delight of the large audience "Free Thought, Yesterday and To-day," from the standpoint of the student of intellectual history, comparing more especially the ways of thinking of the Deists and other eighteenth century philosophers with our own, and bringing out how the rules and methods of "the intellectual game" had profited by the scientific advance of the last century.

Because of the lateness of the hour Lyon G. Tyler, president emeritus of the College of William and Mary, did not read his paper upon "Science in Virginia." It is to be hoped that not only it but also the other papers which were read may be speedily published and rendered available for a larger audience.

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