

# F. MAX MÜLLER AND THE RELIGIOUS PARLIAMENT.

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IN the year 1893, an event took place which made a deep impression on Prof. F. Max Müller's mind. It was the Religious Parliament in Chicago.

Max Müller had always preserved his good humor, and when he saw, at the end of the year 1894, the answers to the questions which the Vienna *Fremdenblatt* had proposed to its German readers, he enjoyed the fun immensely.

People were requested to state what event had given them the greatest satisfaction during the twelve months preceding, and what desire they would most like to see realised in the near future. The greater part of the answers, sometimes signed by famous names, had reference to the domain of politics. Among other things desired was the limitation of the consumption of alcohol; another, a definite measurement of the skulls in the museums, where the slips indicating the measurements had been frequently changed; a third, from a poet, showed anxiety for the success of his drama.

Prof. Max Müller had received a report of the Chicago Religious Congress only at the end of the year 1894 (*Transactions of the World's Parliament of Religions*, 2 vols., 800 pages each, 1895), and he mentioned the Religious Parliament to the editors of the Vienna paper as the event which seemed to him the most important one; and they deemed it indispensable to remind their readers in a footnote of the event, and to explain to them what really had taken place in Chicago.

Prof. F. Max Müller had been invited to take part, but he was under the impression that it would result merely in a great show,

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and thus abstained from making the journey. He afterwards regretted it. For the first time in the history of the world the adherents of the three Aryan religions (the Vedic, the Avestic, and the Buddhistic), the adherents of the three Semitic religions (the Jewish, the Christian, and the Mohammedan), and the adherents of the two Chinese religions, the followers of Confucius and Lao-Tze, had met at Chicago.

Max Müller thought that one could not compare this assemblage with the meeting of the Buddhist Congress at Pâtaliputra, or with the Council at Nicæa, or with Emperor Akbar's religious congress at Delhi, at the time when the Council of Trent met in Europe. At Pâtaliputra there were exclusively Buddhists, so at Nicæa there were exclusively Christians. At Delhi, Akbar's desire was realised only in a limited degree, viz., that he might make himself acquainted with the main religions of the world: he failed to obtain a knowledge of the sacred books of the Veda and an insight into the significance of Buddhism. Whenever he, the Mohammedan emperor, wanted to have a discussion with Christian missionaries or with Brahmins, they had to be hauled up in the dead of night by a rope, to the balcony of his palace; and his conviction that it was possible to show that all the religions in the world had one and the same foundation remained a pious dream.

How different were the conditions in Chicago! There Buddhists and Shintoists from Japan, the disciples of Confucius and Fo and Lao-Tze from China, Parsees from Bombay, Brahmins from Calcutta and Benares, Buddhist reformers from Ceylon, other Buddhists from Siam, rabbis, emissaries of Islam, Christians of all denominations, bishops and a Roman cardinal met for the first time on one platform. Prof. F. Max Müller's "silent witnesses," viz., the fifty volumes of the *Sacred Books of the East*, prepared by the ablest and most learned scholars of all countries, and published after encountering an enormous number of difficulties, had become accessible to the world. They made it possible to understand "that God had not left himself without a witness in distant China as well as in Palestine, in India as well as in Persia and Arabia. In this series of volumes lay the result of long struggles, of deep research, of a great zeal, the product of the labors of men in whom the spirit of truth, the spirit of God, had been stirring."

Prof. F. Max Müller did not undervalue the shortcomings nor the difficulties and conflicts which made themselves felt at Chicago; but he had always remained an optimist; and when he read that this peaceful assemblage of delegates of all religions had joined in

the Lord's Prayer kneeling,<sup>1</sup> once recited by a Jewish rabbi and on another occasion by a Buddhist monk, and that on another day they had received a blessing from a Roman Catholic archbishop, he thought of the apostle's sermon at Athens, where it is said: "God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being."

<sup>1</sup> The word *kneeling* is probably a mistake. To the knowledge of the translator, who was present during the sessions of the Parliament, the meeting always rose respectfully whenever the Lord's Prayer was spoken, but there was no kneeling at the meetings of the Parliament.