

THE HON. C. C. BONNEY, THE INAUGURATOR OF THE PARLIAMENT OF RELIGIONS.

BY THE EDITOR.

THE Honorable Charles Carroll Bonney is best known to the world as the inaugurator and president of the World's Congresses held at Chicago, in 1893, in connexion with the World's Columbian Exposition. But this famous event, which was due to his initiative, and the success of which was the result of the tact with which he managed the large enterprise, is only the crowning consummation of many previous efforts in the pursuit of various noble ideals all tending in the same direction,—the elevation of mankind and the realisation of the new Jerusalem on earth. Mr. Bonney, like so many other reformers and prophets, was enchanted with the dearest dreams of human hopes, but his aspirations were distinguished by a deep and clear insight into practical realities. He saw the vision of things hoped for, but he knew at the same time what could be accomplished. Applying the jurist's sense of justice and an unusual business ability to the dream of the millennium, he avoided visionary methods, for he knew how things ought to be done, and if the millennium has not come about we can claim without exaggeration that Mr. Bonney has accomplished much that was deemed impossible before.

That representatives of all the religions should sit in brotherly unison on one and the same platform, each one presenting what he deemed the greatest and best in his faith, has never before been realised on the earth; and some of the Old World journals actually doubted whether the Religious Parliament of Chicago was a real fact or merely the invention of the fertile imagination of American journalists. Yet the event took place and is an historical fact which will continue to exercise a powerful influence upon the religious life of mankind. Indeed, we claim that it ushers in a new period in the history of religion which will raise missionarising to a higher

level and bring about a closer and more brotherly exchange of thoughts among the different faiths of the earth—the result of which will be that the truth will prevail in the end.¹

We came first in contact with Mr. Bonney during the World's Congresses in 1893, both in committee meetings and on the platform of the World's Parliament of Religions. A closer connexion was established when the Religious Parliament Extension was founded in 1895, of which Mr. Bonney was chosen president, and the editor of *The Open Court* secretary. Soon afterwards, with the beginning of 1897, *The Open Court*, following the advice of Mr. Bonney, adopted as its object the declaration of being devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the extension of the Religious Parliament Idea. Remaining faithful to an old ideal to establish religion on the safe basis of fact, we discovered not only the religious value of science, but saw also in the Religious Parliament Idea, such as it had been actually carried out under the wise management of Mr. Bonney, the best method of establishing the truth. There is no need of quarrelling about differences of faith; there is no use in ridiculing those who depart from our ways of belief; and worst of all is persecution. The method of the Parliament is presentation of the best everybody has to offer. The Parliament is not intended to make light of the differences of faith; on the contrary it emphasises them; it is not intended to bring all down to the same level, but on the contrary to leave to all the heights which the various religious leaders have attained and to measure by them the worth of each faith. Ridicule only was excluded and critique was admitted only if made in a brotherly spirit of kindness and with proper courtesy.

The managers of the Parliament of Religions exercised a strict impartiality and did not press their own views. They endeavored to be just to all, being confident that truth would take care of itself.

Mr. Bonney, who is a native of the State of New York, was born at Hamilton, September 4, 1831, was named for Charles Carroll of Carrollton, the last surviving signer of the Declaration of Independence, and was the son of a farmer. He was educated in public schools and in Hamilton Academy, but his chief source of instruction was private study. He had also many advantages in Madison,

¹We do not intend to underrate the famous religious conference of the Buddhist Emperor Ashoka, which is commonly quoted to prove the tolerance of Buddhist rulers. It was an enterprise carried out in the same spirit as the Religious Parliament of Chicago, but it was, after all, not an assemblage in which the priests of the various religions came voluntarily and out of their own hearts' desire; they came at the summons of the sovereign of the country who admonished them to settle their quarrels in an amicable spirit. Moreover, it was on a smaller scale, and apparently controversial in its nature.

now Colgate, University, though engaged in teaching instead of pursuing the regular course of instruction. From this University he received the degree of Doctor of Laws. He is a Counsellor of the Supreme Court of the United States, and has been President of the Illinois State Bar Association, and Vice-President of the American Bar Association.

In 1887 he was strongly recommended by leading legal, financial and other journals, for appointment as one of the judges of the Supreme Court of the United States, as a man who stands in the very front rank of Western lawyers and jurists, of high literary culture, of judicial temperament, undoubtedly worthy of that high position, and who would be an ornament to any judicial position in the country.

In the field of practical reform, Mr. Bonney's efforts have been important and largely successful. Among the leading reforms proposed and advocated by him are the following, with the dates when he began to write and speak in their favor, and, if carried into effect, the time of their adoption: Uniformity of State constitutions and general statutes, proposed in 1852; constitutional prohibition of special legislation proposed in 1854, and adopted in Illinois in 1870; a national banking system, proposed in 1858, and adopted by Congress in 1864; railroad supervision by State authority, proposed in 1861, and adopted in Illinois in 1871; a national civil service academy to educate selected men in government and diplomacy as the Military Academy does in the art of war, proposed in 1876; national regulation of Inter-State Commerce, proposed in 1878, and adopted by Congress in 1887; uniformity of commercial paper in Inter-State transactions, proposed in 1882, and since pending in Congress; a system of civil service pensions, proposed in 1884; State boards of labor and capital with plenary executive powers to prevent evils arising from labor strikes, proposed in 1886; the appointment of regular United States judges to hold the foreign Courts now held by consuls and ministers, proposed in 1888; and the establishment of a permanent International Court of Justice, proposed in 1889, and favored by eminent European as well as American jurists and statesmen and in all essential features now adopted by the peace commissioners at The Hague. Thus Mr. Bonney was exceedingly active as an author on reform and legal topics which prepared him excellently for the great work that was to bring him more prominently before the public.

In September 1889 Mr. Bonney brought forward the World's Congress scheme and proposed that "to make the Exposition com-

“plete and the celebration adequate, the wonderful achievements of the new age in science, literature, education, government, jurisprudence, morals, charity, religion, and other departments of human activity, should also be conspicuously displayed, as the most effective means of increasing the fraternity, progress, prosperity and peace of mankind.”

After setting forth the plan, he added that :

“Such congresses, convened under circumstances so auspicious, would doubtless surpass all previous efforts to bring about a real fraternity of nations, and unite the enlightened people of the whole earth in a general co-operation for the attainment of the great ends for which human society is organised.

Mr. Bonney devoted four years to the World's Congress work, and in his closing address on October 28, 1893, he said :

“That these congresses have been successful far beyond anticipation, that they have transformed into enduring realities the hopes of those who organised and conducted them, and that they will exercise a benign and potent influence on the welfare of mankind through the coming centuries, has been so often, so emphatically and so eloquently declared by eminent representatives of different countries and peoples, that these statements may be accepted as established facts.

“That the material exhibit of the World's Columbian Exposition in Jackson Park is the most complete and magnificent ever presented to human view, is generally agreed, but a multitude of eminent witnesses have declared, after attendance on both, that the Intellectual and Moral Exposition of the Progress of Mankind presented in the World's Congresses of 1893 is greater and more imposing still.

“Thus the work of the World's Congress Auxiliary of the World's Columbian Exposition takes its enduring place in human history, an imperishable part of the progress of mankind.”

Mr. Bonney's plan was adopted, and he was made president of the World's Congresses of 1893. The success of these meetings is well known, and there is but one opinion—that the Parliament of Religions, which is but the chief congress among more than 200 conventions, was the greatest glory of the Chicago Exhibition.

It is difficult to appreciate the magnitude of the World's Congress work. Nearly six thousand speakers and writers took part in it. These participants were selected from all the continents, and represented one hundred and forty-seven nations, states, or colonies. There were twenty departments and two hundred and twenty-four divisions in which congresses were held.

Mr. Bonney, himself a conservative man, recognised the necessity of giving the Parliament a conservative character. It could be made a success only if it was liberal in principles, only if it recognised the institutions that had developed in the storm and stress of the past, and embodied the experiences of large fractions of mankind. He accordingly deemed it indispensable to have a

conservative man as chairman of the Parliament of Religions, and he selected for the place the Reverend Dr. John Henry Barrows, a Presbyterian minister of repute, of Chicago. Dr. Barrows accepted, though reluctantly, for the spirit of the Religious Parliament was in those days frequently misunderstood, and the chairman had to suffer much animadversion and was exposed to censure and even to obloquy. In spite of all difficulties and annoyances, Dr. Barrows held out, and his tact and dignified bearing contributed not a little to make the Parliament a success.

The Parliament was unique in its way, and even if it shall never again be repeated, it will remain a landmark in the history of religion. It was an event which was typically American, and is still looked upon as all but impossible in conservative Europe, where the idea still prevails that a man can mount a platform only in company with those whose opinions he would indorse. Republican institutions and the spirit of coöperating with men of different opinions has taught us a lesson in fraternity; and even the representatives of the most conservative church did not hesitate to appear on one and the same platform with heretics, Buddhists and Pagans. Forty-six congresses were held in the Department of religion, and the justice and impartiality of Mr. Bonney's management were approved by all. He made no concealment of his own views, but avowed himself "an ultra and ardent Christian," without offending any one.

The Religious Parliament is an event of history, and the Religious Parliament idea is still living and marching along, leading mankind on the road of progress.

One of the most marvellous achievements of the Parliament of Religions was the readiness with which all the Religions of the world united in the devout recital of the Lord's Prayer, happily designated by President Bonney as "The Universal Prayer." When at the opening of the Parliament Cardinal Gibbons used it, the vast audience of about four thousand people joined in it; and having been repeated on each of the seventeen days of the great convocation, the Parliament of Religions was closed with it by Rabbi Hirsch. Thus it became a deliberate expression of the world's religious unity.

The Religious Parliament Extension of Chicago, the committee of which meets from time to time under the presidency of Mr. Bonney, is only one local exponent of the movement. The main thing is that the idea has struck deep into the souls of many fervent religious minds, and works as a leaven in the dough to bring about a change in the various religious conceptions of mankind.

Thus, Mr. Bonney started a movement which will prove to have an everlasting influence upon all the generations to come.