

THE INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF THE HISTORY OF RELIGIONS,

PARIS, SEPTEMBER 3—9, 1900.

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THE Universal Exposition at Paris is to be accompanied by a large number of congresses devoted to the interests of all the various sciences and industries which modern civilisation has produced. From milling to philosophy every branch of human endeavor will here be passed in review. Just as the exhibition of the products of industry is to be so arranged that the visitor shall be able to follow the actual development of each species of production or manufacture from its crudest beginnings to its most recent stage of perfection, so provisions have also been made for the installation of a series of scientific and technical reunions for enabling the specialists of these branches of human activity to exhibit to the world in epitomised form the sum-total of the knowledge and skill which has been accumulated in their particular domains. Side by side with the mechanical arts and industries of the nineteenth century now just drawing to a close, will be exhibited also the progress that has been accomplished by the mind in the various spheres of intellectual and spiritual endeavor proper, at the moment when humanity is entering upon the twentieth century.

Now it was indispensable that the studies concerned with the subject of religion should also be represented in this encyclopædic exhibit. Religion has played too momentous a rôle in the life of humanity and has always exerted too powerful an influence upon human society to be passed over in silence. But on the one hand religion is not an affair readily admitting of exhibition, and on the other hand the rules of the Exposition formally excluded everything that savored in the slightest of politics or creed. A number

of notable representatives of French theology and religious philosophy had long contemplated the convening at Paris in 1900 of a parliament of religions similar to that which was held with such great success and *éclat* at the World's Exposition at Chicago; and since the year 1896, when the Rev. John Henry Barrows was passing through Paris, several meetings have been held with this purpose in view. But no such convention made up of representatives of all the churches and religious confessions was ever admitted among the official congresses of the Exposition.

Doubtless the promoters of this project would enthusiastically have accepted the alternative plan of dispensing altogether with the official sanction of the Exposition and of organising their religious congresses upon an entirely independent footing; but a second and far more formidable obstacle definitively frustrated their good intentions on this point. It was the formal refusal of the Catholic church to take any part whatever in a conference of such a character. This was the really deciding factor. In a country like France where the great majority of the people are, at least in name, professing Roman Catholics, a parliament of religions in which no authorised representatives of Catholicism took part would be doomed to failure from the start. It is a remarkable fact that the same Catholic church which, in America, consented to take a leading part in the Parliament of Religions at Chicago, should obstinately refuse to do so in Europe, where it is in no wise constrained to make the same concessions to the spirit of democracy.

Seeing that a second Parliament of Religions was altogether out of the question at Paris in 1900, the scholars who were occupied more particularly with the scientific investigation of religion believed that it was incumbent upon them to assure to religious studies their rightful place in the great concert of congresses of the Universal Exposition, by providing for the meeting of an International Congress of the History of Religions, in which the problem of the historical values of the different past and present religions should be attacked from its scientific side, and in which a special effort should be made to make them thoroughly understood, to clear up their origins, to elucidate the obscure points of their history, and to review their internal evolution as well as the development of their relations with civilisation in general. And after all, is not this the characteristically modern method (that is to say, the scientific method) of reaching an adequate appreciation of the different religions, namely, to study them by the same method of critical observation which we employ for reaching an objective knowledge of

any of the other manifestations of the spiritual activity of humanity? Is not the science of *religions* the real modern theology, and that destined to take the place of the ancient theology, which was limited to Judaism and Christianity and founded upon the supernatural? Has it not been its good fortune to make more and more important contributions every day to our knowledge of past humanity, and to throw a light of steadily increasing brilliancy upon moral and social problems?

These forcible considerations did not fail to carry weight with the General Committee empowered to institute the congresses of the Universal Exposition; and the professors of the Department of Religious Sciences in the *École des Hautes Études* at the Sorbonne were accordingly authorised to form a committee of organisation for an International Congress of the History of Religions under the presidency of M. Albert Réville, professor of the history of religions in the *Collège de France*. They soon obtained the concurrence of a large number of prominent persons of the Parisian scientific world, without distinction of religious creed. We confine ourselves to mentioning the names of M. Maspero, the celebrated Egyptologist; M. Oppert, the authority on Assyriology; M. Philippe Berger, the successor of Renan at the *Collège de France*; M. Sabatier, Dean of the Faculty of Protestant Theology in Paris; M. Carra de Vaux, professor in the Catholic Institute of Paris; M. Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu, member of the Institute; M. Guimet, founder of the Museum of Religion in Paris; M. Senart, the celebrated Indianist; M. Michel Bréal, etc., etc.

To bring order into the labors of the Congress, the committee has established eight sections for the carrying out of its work: (1) Religions of non-civilised peoples and of pre-Columbian America; (2) Religions of the extreme Orient (China, Japan, Indo-China, the Mongols and the Finns); (3) Religions of Egypt; (4) Semitic religions (Assyro-Chaldæan, Judaism, Islamism); (5) Religions of India and of Persia; (6) Religions of Greece and Rome; (7) Religions of the Germans, the Celts and the Slavs, and the Pre-historical Archæology of Europe; (8) History of Christianity. Which last section, by reason of its importance, is to be divided into three sub-sections, viz., (a) The Early Centuries, (b) The Middle Ages, and (c) Modern Times.

It has been decided that the Congress shall meet at Paris from the third to the ninth of September, 1900. The membership fee has been fixed at ten francs. Applications should be sent to the secretaries, M. Jean Réville and M. Léon Marillier, at the Sorbonne,

Paris; and drafts should be made payable to M. Philippe Berger, treasurer, 3 Quai Voltaire, Paris.

According to the rules of the Exposition, the committee of organisation could be composed only of French citizens; but inasmuch as the question was of an *international* congress to which interested persons in all countries had been courteously invited, and where the English, German, Italian and Latin languages were admitted on the same footing with the French, the committee took pains to appeal to the co-operation of foreign scholars by requesting them to accept the honorary title of "Correspondents of the Congress." MM. Tiele, Chantepie de la Saussaye, Krumbacher, Oldenberg, Max Müller, Guidi, Goblet d'Alviella, Cust, etc., etc., have graciously promised their co-operation and also commended the step taken by their colleagues in Paris. In the United States the committee were fortunate in procuring the support of the Hon. C. C. Bonney and Dr. John Henry Barrows, Dr. Goodspeed and Dr. Paul Carus, that is to say, of the organisers and continuers of the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago. In addition, Drs. Toy, Haupt, Harris (Commissioner of the Bureau of Education of the United States), Harper, Lanman, Jackson, Jastrow, and Gottheil have responded favorably to the appeal, promising either to take part personally in its meetings, or to promote the interests of the Congress among their compatriots.

Nearly two hundred scholars or students of religious history have already become members, but this number will certainly be more than doubled before the month of September. The facilities of transportation, the reduction of the price of tickets, which has been especially arranged for by the Exposition, will doubtless encourage many persons to make the voyage to Paris to see the Exposition and to take part in the Congresses. Some seem to fear that, in view of the enormous influx of visitors, difficulty will be experienced in finding accommodations for a stay in Paris. But that danger is to be less feared in Paris than in any other place. In a city which with its immediate suburbs numbers three millions of inhabitants, and which normally receives more visiting strangers than any other city in the world, there exist resources which are almost unlimited for the quartering of transitory guests. Besides, if notified in advance, the committee of organisation of the Congress obligates itself to procure accommodations for those who cannot find them themselves.

The desire of the organisers of the Congress is that the initiative taken by them in connexion with the present Exposition of

1900 shall be the point of departure of a regular series of congresses of the same character to meet every three, four, or five years for the purpose of giving to the general history of religions the stimulus necessary to assure to it for all time the place which it should rightfully occupy in our modern instruction ; of aiding in some way to disseminate the results of its researches over wider and wider spheres of influence, and to give to scholars of all nationalities who have devoted their time and powers to labors in this field an opportunity of becoming acquainted with one another and of consolidating their common studies. This will be the principal service of the Congress.

In the United States, where the history of religions has taken in late years so happy a development, the committee of the Congress hopes to meet with favorable recognition. It appeals to the co-operation of all those who appreciate the utility, not only the scientific but also the moral utility, of the diffusion of the science of religions, and asks that they accord to their friends in Europe the support of their activity and their sympathy. We hope that many of them will be able to take an active part in the Congress, and that those even who are prevented from visiting Europe at this time will at least be able to offer their moral collaboration by inscribing their names as members.