

The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the
Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

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THE RELIGIOUS PARLIAMENT IDEA.

A TRUE STORY OF AN ORTHODOX EXAMPLE.

BY THE HON. CHARLES CARROLL BONNEY.

BORDERED by picturesque hills and beautified by groves and gardens the Village of the Vale lies as fair as a dream in the bosom of one of the brightest valleys of the Empire State. The Eastern hills hold the sun in their hands at its rising, and the summits of the Western highlands receive its caresses as the day deepens into the evening twilight.

A brief inspection will suffice to show that this village is a seat of learning, not a center of industry in the common acceptance of that term.

On a southerly hill rise large buildings whose form and arrangement sufficiently proclaim the high educational uses for which they are maintained. It is the site of a University.

The surrounding country is divided into small farms which present ever-varying scenes of a pleasing character. Reigning like a queen on her chosen site the University seems to have put the impress of her genius on all the neighboring country. Farm-folks as well as village residents cherish with a pleasing pride the institutions of learning which give the locality its only claim to distinction aside from the charms it has received from the hand of nature.

The population of the village has always been largely Baptist. The locality is known as a Baptist stronghold. Several other denominations maintain places of worship in the village but the Baptists hold an easy pre-eminence in numbers and influence.

Of all the inhabitants of the locality ten or fifteen per cent.

who acknowledged the Roman Catholic Church as their spiritual Mother, seemed the least important from every point of view. They had no priest to instruct them and keep them in order, and seemed entirely beyond the reach of the Protestant churches. The result was more or less disorder among them, manifesting itself in intemperance and other vices, to the disturbance of the community.

Finally a change came. A Catholic Priest made his appearance in the village, obtained a location and set himself to work. He was a young man, modest in demeanor and agreeable in manner, and soon made a favorable impression on those among whom he had come to live and work.

The inhabitants of the village soon saw that where disorder had so long prevailed new conditions were speedily being established. Intemperance was greatly diminished; industry largely increased; Sunday services took the place of Sabbath-breaking; and peace and happiness began to display their charms around the homes of Catholic families.

The ministers and members of the Protestant Churches soon found that they had a new and powerful ally in the young Catholic Priest and the Church he had established; and to their honor it should be added that they were not slow to acknowledge his good work and bid him Godspeed in its continuance.

This Priest had raised the necessary funds and erected an unpretentious house of worship; which it is not too much to say, was regarded with respect and affection by nearly the whole community.

But one unfortunate night a fire occurred and the little Catholic church was consumed. Its congregation was homeless again. Its membership had been heavily burdened in the work they had done, and the prospect of regaining what had been lost seemed gloomy enough. But this gloom proved only the darkness which precedes the dawn. Better things were in store.

The priest and his people went to work to rebuild their church, and soon something happened which deserves to be told throughout Christendom, as an exemplification of the Golden Rule in the relations of churches of different creeds. Connected with the University was and is a Theological Seminary, sturdy and orthodox, justly regarded with pride by the Baptist denomination. Indeed the University was built for the sake of the Seminary instead of the Seminary for the sake of the University.

The President of the University was also the President of the Seminary and was a man of noble and commanding character, and

high standing among the authorities of the Baptist Church. Conferences began to be held among the Protestants of the village on the subject of rebuilding the Catholic church, and these conferences soon bore fruit.

It is told that the President and all the members of the Theological Faculty and the Pastors and leading members of all the Protestant churches of the village gladly joined in the contribution of funds for rebuilding the little Catholic church. These contributions were made, not because the faith of those Protestants was weak but because it was so strong and tenacious, so vigorous and enduring. The Baptists naturally took the lead in this noble and generous work. In explaining their action they justified it by the saying, that a tree is known by its fruits; and by the obvious truth that a continuation of the work established by the Catholic priest was essential to the peace and good order of the community.

These zealous Protestants felt that the hand of Divine Providence had shown them an effective way of dealing with the Catholic part of the village population; and that it would be wise to continue that way.

So the Catholic church was rebuilt and has ever since been maintained in the heart of a Protestant community, a living monument of true Christian charity; an inspiring example of the application of the Golden Rule to the things of Religion.

It is told in exemplification of the Church fraternity that followed that the President of the Baptist Theological Seminary attended the Catholic picnic as an honored guest; and it is hardly necessary to add that neither the Catholics nor the Protestants were in any degree compromised by their fraternal relations. The Baptist was, if anything, a sturdier Baptist than before; and the Catholic more faithful than before to his Mother Church: and both more obedient to the Divine Master because of their neighborly relations with each other.

Free indeed from the bitter breath of bigotry must be the theological atmosphere in which such roses of tolerance shed their sweet perfume; pleasant indeed must be the voice of instruction which in such a place calls the learner to the fountains of knowledge.

This story may well serve as an illustration of the essential principle on which was organised the World's Parliament of Religions held at Chicago in 1893 as one of the great series of World's Congresses that distinguished the World's Fair of that year.

The invitation which asked the attendance at that Parliament

of representatives of all the Religions of the World bore upon its face the declaration that the object of the Convocation was :

“ To unite all Religion against all irreligion ; to present to the world in the Religious Congresses to be held in connexion with the Columbian Exposition of 1893, the substantial unity of many religions in the good deeds of the Religious Life ; to provide for a World's Parliament of Religions, in which their common aims and common grounds of union may be set forth, and the marvellous Religious Progress of the Nineteenth Century be reviewed ; and to facilitate separate and independent Congresses of different Religious Denominations and Organisations, under their own officers, in which their business may be transacted, their achievement presented, and their work for the future considered.”

When this declaration was adopted, an eminent Bishop, seeing the mighty sweep of the undertaking, reverently exclaimed : “ It is almost Divine ! It is almost Divine ! ”

The relation of the Parliament of Religions to the other World's Congresses may be seen from the proclamation of the object of the whole series as set forth on the general invitation sent throughout the world, and which was as follows :

“ To establish fraternal relations among the leaders of mankind ; to review the progress already achieved ; to state the living problems now awaiting solution ; to suggest the means of further progress ; to bring all the departments of human progress into harmonious relations with each other in the Exposition of 1893 ; to crown the whole glorious work by the formation and adoption of better and more comprehensive plans than have hitherto been made ; to promote the progress, prosperity, unity, peace, and happiness of the world, and to secure the effectual prosecution of such plans by the organisation of a series of world-wide fraternities, through whose efforts and influence the moral and intellectual forces of mankind may be made dominant throughout the world.”