

THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF CHINA.

BY THE EDITOR.

THERE seems to be very little probability of a repetition of the Religious Parliament which took place at Chicago in the memorable year 1893. Nevertheless the idea is not dead. On the contrary the seeds sown there are scattered throughout the world and take root in different countries and in different minds. It will remain forever the glory of Christianity that it convened the Religious Parliament and gave opportunity for the deepest problems to be discussed openly and frankly, and, what is most essential, in a brotherly spirit.

We must remind our readers that the inaugurator of the Religious Parliament, the Hon. Charles Carroll Bonney, was a Christian, an orthodox believer in the divinity of Christ and in the great mission of Christianity on earth. He was a jurist by profession, and so he understood the necessity of recognizing the right of every one to have and to cherish his own conviction. He believed in Christian missions, but he considered it wrong to denounce pagans as ill-willed or immoral, and insisted that in the spirit of mutual respect a friendly discussion of religious problems was possible. So he chose as his motto the passage from Isaiah (i. 18) which reads, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord," and laid down the principle as a rule of the Religious Parliament that every one who had a faith dear to him should come and explain it without making any reflections on other faiths. We are anxious to become acquainted with others who follow other religions, and after we have listened respectfully to them, it stands to reason that they too will be glad to learn what we believe. Such a mutual exchange of views can do no harm, for all of us, Christians and pagans, are willing to hear the truth and let the truth prevail.

Mr. Bonney was careful to proclaim that there was no intention to judge between the different faiths, to pronounce the superiority

of one over another, or to found a new religion by a mixture of all. The Religious Parliament was to be strictly impartial; controversies were to be rigorously excluded; every one was to expound his own belief and abstain from discussing or criticizing others, with the sole purpose in view of pointing out the tenets or maxims or ideals in which all religions agree.

This principle worked well. The spirit of harmony was never seriously disturbed, and for the first time in history we saw bishops, and even a cardinal who brought the blessing of His Holiness the Pope, seated on the same platform together with Shinto polytheists, with Brahman monks and Buddhist abbots in a brotherly exchange of thought. This grand spectacle will perhaps not soon be seen again, but the event took place, and the ideal is not lost. Some of the seeds that were sown have fallen on the wayside and some lie on stony places, but a few are taking root in good fertile soil.

One of the seeds is sprouting in distant China in the heart of a Christian who has succeeded in founding an institute devoted to the purpose of continuing in Shanghai the work of the Religious Parliament by adapting it to the local needs of Chinese conditions. It bears the name of "The International Institute of China."

Since the autumn of 1912 there have been held in this International Institute of China weekly conferences of representatives of the great religions. Prior to these weekly meetings, and ever since the beginning of 1910, it was planned to hold only one meeting a month. Different Protestant denominations, now and then a Roman Catholic layman or a Jew, and adherents of Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and Mohammedanism, with one cultured Hindu gentleman, have all been associated in these friendly conferences, to consider the prominent features of their different faiths. When a learned Sikh was passing through Shanghai some months since, he brought to the Institute a large company of Sikhs living in the city, and gave an address in English on the tenets of the Sikh faith.

These religious conferences aim at increased friendliness, since harmony is a fundamental object of the Institute, as announced in its charter. From the beginning there have been no discordant notes in the proceedings. This is due in part to a rule adopted at the outset, that whenever any question seemed likely to result in ill-feeling, it would be laid on the table. The followers of the different religions are allowed to explain the truths of their respective religions, but are barred from ridiculing or condemning any other religion. Most of the speakers seem inclined to dwell more on teachings common to all. The underlying basis of all creeds is

emphasized more than the differences. All aim more for concord than for discord.

An institute which carries on such conferences, and regards the mingling of Christians and non-Christians as a legitimate part of its work, is quite different from the usual missionary propaganda. Its founder and present director is a Presbyterian clergyman, the Rev. Gilbert Reid, D.D., who graduated from Union Theological Seminary in 1882. Missionary propaganda is conducted for the purpose of making converts. In its relation to other religions, it is a proselyting agency. In so far as any religion becomes enlivened and active, it naturally magnifies its own, and becomes jealous of others. There is thus always a danger in a country like China that competition among the religions will become so intense as to clash. Each will try to destroy the other and make its own supreme. This International Institute however regards the exaltation of truth as greater than the exaltation of a particular faith. It glories more in the spirit of truthfulness than in the spirit of the zealot. It regards the universal as better than the particular. In doing its work it leaves the outcome to providence.

Is it not possible or even probable that no one faith, not even the Christian one, can become the universal religion, and do we still believe that dissenters will unfailingly go to hell?

Dr. Reid, in his last report, quotes from a Japanese preacher the following: "For my part it is inconceivable that any one who has impartially studied the history of religion can fail to admit the universality of the activity of the Spirit of God, and the consequent embodiment of a degree of truth in all faiths."

In so far as this Institute continues to hold these conferences and preach a message of toleration not only, but of a new form of what may be termed universalism, in so far must it seek for support from those in China, in America, in any country, who are sympathetic to the idea, and are biassed by no limitations of creed or ecclesiasticism.

This Institute stands not only for that which is universal in religion, but also for internationalism. It is hence called International Institute, and appeals to another class of people from those who are concerned with religious questions alone. Here is an effort to break down the barriers and remove the prejudices which exist between one nation and another, one race and another. Prominent persons, both men and women, of nearly a dozen countries, living in Shanghai, are found on the Board of Management or in the list of members of the Institute. It is a standing protest to international

misunderstanding, and is an appeal to universal brotherhood and peace. It is a practical Peace Society.

To give force to one phase of the Institute's work, the lady members have organized themselves into a Ladies' International Club, consisting of half who are Chinese and half who are from Europe and America. They have a separate club room in the Institute, and act in unison with all its work.

It may be asked what are the methods adopted for bringing together East and West, and making them friends to each other? They are summed up in conferences, receptions, luncheons, interchange of visits, the cultivation of the cosmopolitan spirit—more possible in a city like Shanghai than in most parts of the world—and in the dissemination of suitable literature.

Another factor of great importance, not only for promoting good-will, but for helping forward the cause of general enlightenment and sound learning, is the establishment of an International Museum of Peaceful Arts. Already some ten rooms of the Institute buildings are filled with attractive exhibits from different parts of China, and these are viewed with much interest by the many travelers who visit Shanghai. The last regular semi-annual meeting of the Institute members decided to solicit funds for a new building to contain exhibits of "the art, skill, culture and progress" of all nations, as a means of informing and educating the Chinese who are unable to travel abroad. Dr. Reid says he needs at the beginning only \$20,000 for such a building, and he believes that the total cost will be no more than twice that amount. With the building erected, exhibits will then be collected from all the world as an up-to-date school-house for Chinese, both old and young, male and female. The ground is already secured, being purchased by the Chinese several years ago for all the needs of the Institute. The Institute is centrally located and is in direct contact with all classes, all countries and all creeds. Such a museum, complementary to what already exists, may well be viewed as worthy of support by all who believe in the principle of the Religious Parliament, in international ideals, in the progress of civilization and in the promotion of peace and good-will on earth.

The story of the way this unique idea has been carried out is a most fascinating one. It is largely the result of one man's thought and energy, but it is apparent that friends have come forward to show their confidence and give their help, or it could never have been established. Dr. Gilbert Reid, a Presbyterian missionary, withdrew in 1894 from his society, and ventured forth on an independent

effort to reach the higher classes of China, with only a little over \$1000 as his asset. He succeeded in winning his way into the homes and the friendship of many of the most influential in the old regime, and in less than two years got the formal sanction of the Chinese Government. Many of his ideas as to political reform were adopted, and everything was promising till the setback of the Boxer movement in 1900.

Until that time Peking had been the center of Dr. Reid's activities, but afterwards he was persuaded to transfer the enterprise to Shanghai, where there was more of the spirit of progress, and where he was able to secure a wider constituency and larger financial backing. All donations are voluntary and without guarantee of continuance. Though not guaranteed, there is no fear of collapse even with the present limited support, and there are plans in the formation for getting at least one representative from each country, supported by a few of his countrymen, to help cement the bonds between his country and China. During the last three years American contributors like Mrs. D. Willis James and her son of New York have supported five persons, and this help has been much appreciated, all the more since China has been in such a state of confusion that large gifts could not be expected.

The leading American contributor has been Mr. William G. Low of New York City, whose father was one of the early American merchants trading in China. Mr. Low has put up two buildings in memory of his father. Mr. Andrew Carnegie gave one year \$3000, but could not be induced to do more, though certainly this organization is as near to his ideas as any that we know in any continent.

The senior Consul-General in Shanghai, the one from Belgium, is president of the Advisory Council, while one of the oldest British merchants is chairman of the Executive Committee, a German merchant chairman of the Board of Trustees, and Madame Wu Ting Fang honorary president of the Ladies' International Club. The Taoist Pope, a Buddhist missionary from Japan, a Brahman scholar from India, as well as many others, are found as office holders in this most interesting attempt to make "all within the four seas to be brothers."

All who care for the cause of education, of universal peace, of international concord, of the universality of the spiritual concept, cannot help taking an interest in this enterprise in the distant Orient started by an American, the International Institute of China, and so we deem it our duty to make it better known, to have the signifi-

cance of its work appreciated and among those who feel the call of lending a helping hand, to solicit assistance.

REPORT OF A MEETING.

The Sunday afternoon on which the Taoist pope was expected to speak witnessed one of the largest gatherings that ever took place at the International Institute at Shanghai.

The personal name of the eminent visitor of the Chinese International Institute is Chang Yuan Hsü, but he is commonly addressed with his title, The Celestial Master of the Chang Clan, or Chang T'ien She.

The Taoist pope has his headquarters in the southern part of the province of Kian Sia. The honored guest of the institute arrived in Shanghai the Friday before the meeting, and long before the appointed hour crowds began to come, some out of mere curiosity but many from their interest in this particular religion and with a desire to honor its religious head. When the Taoist pope arrived he was first served with tea in the club room, and then escorted to the lecture hall accompanied by several Taoist priests among them three from a Shanghai Taoist temple.

Dr. Reid, as the director of the Institute, introduced the distinguished visitor who delivered a brief address in clear tones and forcible language, in which he pointed out that Taoism was the teaching of Lao-tze who lived at the time of Confucius under the Cheu dynasty about 600 B. C., that the religion flourished under the Tang and Sun dynasties, and continued its peaceful development unmolested down to the present age, that the essential teachings were laid down in the Classic on Virtue and Truth, and that the Chang family had been established at the head of the Taoist church under the Han dynasty.

Chang T'ien She's speech was supplemented by another address delivered by a member of the same family from the province of Szechwan, who declared that Taoism was rather monotheistic than polytheistic (obviously referring to the worship of the genii), and it emphasized the inner life and training of the heart. Conduct should be in harmony with virtue, and is to be produced by meditation and self-restraint, sanctified by impressions from the heavenly spirit.

In the report of the meeting kindly forwarded to the editor of *The Open Court* by Dr. Reid, we notice that among the people who attended the International Institute was the late ambassador to the United States, Dr. Wu Ting-Fang, well known over North America on account of his popularity and congenial spirit. Among the speakers who commented upon the lecture of Chang T'ien She was Dr. Timothy Richard, who incidentally mentioned that twenty years ago he had written to ask him to send an explanation of Taoism to the Parliament of Religions, then about to be held at Chicago, and Chang T'ien She had graciously complied with the request.