

THE
OPEN
COURT

SEPTEMBER

1933

Vol. 47

Number 925

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THE OPEN COURT

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

FOUNDED BY EDWARD C. HEGELER

Vol. 47

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SEPTem. 10. 1893.

Religious Congresses; Address
at Opening of Congregational
Church Congress, in afternoon.

Monday, SEPT. 11. 1893.

The world's First Parliament
of Religions. Made Opening
Address of Welcome. Scene
and proceedings majestic and
awe-inspiring beyond des-
cription.

Lutheran Synod Congress, P. M.
Made opening address.

Attended Russian Reception at
4 P. M.

Also Barrows-Bartlett Reception
at eve.

By Courtesy of the Chicago Public Library

FACSIMILE OF MR. BONNEY'S DIARY ON OPENING DAY OF THE
FIRST RELIGIOUS PARLIAMENT

Frontispiece to *The Open Court*

THE OPEN COURT

Volume XLVII (No. 6) September, 1933

Number 925

THE RELIGIOUS PARLIAMENT IDEA

BY GUSTAVE CARUS

Monday, September 11, 1893. The World's First Parliament of Religions. Made Opening Address of Welcome. Scene and proceedings majestic and awe-inspiring beyond words.

THIS is the notation in the diary of the Honorable Charles Carroll Bonney on that memorable eleventh day of September when men and women representing all the religions sat together in brotherly unison on the same platform, each one to present the greatest and best of his faith. The Parliament of Religions was the chief one among some two hundred congresses held that summer in Chicago in connection with the World's Columbian Exposition, and its tremendous success made it a landmark in the history of religion.

The plan of holding a series of congresses which would represent the spirit or soul of the material exhibits of the Exposition was originated by Mr. Bonney, one of the foremost western lawyers at that time. Mr. Bonney proposed the congresses to show the achievements of the human mind in science, literature, education, religion, and other departments of human activity. The plan was adopted, and he was made President of the World's Congress Auxiliary. The motto adopted by this committee was "Not matter, but mind; not things, but men." For two years the committee worked with endless patience and tact to realize their plans.

There was a congress devoted to social reform, to woman, to labor, to the various sciences, professions, and businesses. Religion was represented by forty-one denominational and inter-denominational conventions which were followed by what became the center of interest, the World's First Parliament of Religions. Great religious gatherings had taken place before, but none equaled this. The Council of Nicea included only Christians. The congress summoned at Pâtiputra (now Patna) was composed entirely of Buddhists. The Emperor Akbar attempted to bring together the leaders and teachers

of all the religions of his realm, but he was summoning them as ruler and prophet of his new religion. Now for the first time in history, the exponents of all religions came together in a spirit of brotherhood, not to argue and dispute, but to meet in friendly fellowship. The invitations stated that the purpose was "not to denounce but to announce, not to debate but to confer, not to decree but to consult." The rules provided that "the speakers will . . . state their own beliefs and reasons for them with the greatest frankness, without however employing unfriendly criticism of other faiths."

With a few exceptions the whole world accepted the invitation. The only important men who declined to participate or to be represented were the Archbishop of Canterbury, Primate of All England, and the Sultan of Turkey, in his capacity of Caliph or Moslem Primate.

The opposition of the Sultan caused little surprise, but it was regretted because a number of Islamic scholars who had hoped to participate, felt compelled to remain absent, and the Bishops of the Greek and Armenian churches in the Turkish Empire were much embarrassed by his attitude.

The opposition of the Archbishop, however, was unexpected, for he not only refused to accept the invitation, but even refused to write a letter expressing his approval of the Parliament. His chief reason was that, since he considered Christianity the one religion, taking part in the congress would be admitting the equality of others and the parity of their position and claims. The committee regretted this attitude, for they had no intention of committing the participants in the congress to admitting the equality of religions or the parity of claims; they merely wished to have all creeds meet in parliamentary equality.

Father Hyacinthe in the *Contemporary* (July, 1892) entered fully into the spirit of the invitation where he wrote, "It is not true that all religions are equally good but neither is it true that all religions except one are no good at all. . . ."

While the Parliament was in preparation, misgivings were felt even by those who were friendly to the idea, for it seemed that the difficulties in the way would prove too great. *The New York Tribune* said on July 8, that the coming Parliament "can hardly expect the success it deserves. . . . many Christians refuse to have anything to do with it, while many of these who will take part in it look

upon it as a tournament in which it is to be the duty of Christianity to prove that no other religion has in it any element of truth or usefulness. Such a spirit is unfortunate and must seriously interfere with the good result of the gathering. . . . But if the tangible results of the Parliament of Religions should not be as great as expected, the fact that it was held at all will mark an era in the religious history of the world. It will diffuse a truer knowledge of the religious problem and will tend to make the adherents of all religions more charitable in their judgments of other faiths."

The final, great success of the Parliament was perhaps due more than anything else to the fortunate combination of the two leaders, Mr. Charles Carroll Bonney, President of the World's Congress Auxiliary, and Dr. John Henry Barrows, the Chairman of the Parliament of Religions. Both were men of deeply religious character, with judicial minds, firmness, and tact. Then also, the time was right, and the occasion was auspicious.

The Parliament was held in the Columbus Hall of the Art Institute before an audience of four thousand people. The spirit of good-will and brotherhood in the exchange of religious thoughts predominated overwhelmingly over both delegates and listeners. There were only a few discordant notes but these were handled with such diplomacy and tact by the Chairman that no quarrels or hard feeling resulted. The liberal, tolerant, and gentle spirit of the Oriental religions did much to soften the aggressive religions, "breathing the brotherhood of man as well as the fatherhood of God." A platform was sought which would be broad enough to embrace all the religions. There were many present who, before the Parliament, knew very little about Brahma or the religion of Buddha, and this was their first introduction to a knowledge of comparative religions. To many, too, it was a shock to learn that the introduction of Christianity by the missions was often demoralizing, and that the spirit of the missionaries was not always one of meekness and unselfishness. Throughout the entire session there were evidences of a change in the attitude from dogmatic religions and iron-bound creeds towards unity of all nature and the brotherhood of man.

After the close of the Parliament, in order to keep the spirit it had fostered alive, the Religious Parliament Extension was organized. Mr. Bonney was President and Dr. Paul Carus, the late editor of the *Open Court*, was Secretary. Dr. Carus was in close sympathy

with the ideals of the Parliament. The *Open Court* stood for "Liberty of Thought, Freedom of Conscience, the earnest pursuit of the Truth, and loyalty to the Truth under all circumstances. In 1900, a closer bond was made, and the Open Court devoted its pages not only to The Science of Religion and the Religion of Science, but also to the "Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea."

A direct outcome of the Parliament of Religion was the founding of the John Henry Barrows Lectures and the Haskell Lectures at the University of Chicago, and also the establishing of a center at Greenacre, Eliot, Maine by Miss Farmer where for many years a group of men and women carried on the work begun in Chicago.

The Religious Parliament idea is still active after forty years. This past July the Haskell Institute on Modern Trends in World Religions met in the Assembly Room of the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago and scholars representing the six great world religions, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Confucianism and Hinduism, under the able leadership of Professor A. Eustace Haydon, presented the tendencies in these religions today toward modern scientific thinking, and in adapting themselves to changing social and economic conditions. It was generally conceded that the liberal religions of the Orient had less adjustment to make in meeting the requirements of scientific thought and social change.

With the same spirit but with a different approach, the World's Fellowship of Faiths is seeking to "unite the inspiration of all faiths upon the solution of Man's Present Problems," in a "Second Parliament of Religions." From August 27 to September 17, at an afternoon and evening session eminent leaders of thought from all over the world are speaking on these problems. Great credit must be given to the two chief executives of this organization, Mr. Charles Weller and Mr. Kedernath Das Gupta, for making possible these meetings in spite of almost unsurmountable difficulties. The proceedings, if collected and published, would give a unique picture of conditions today from widely varied points of view.

Perhaps, however, the greatest and most important result of the First Parliament of Religions is that intangible, unorganized spirit of toleration and mutual understanding which has spread so widely and gained so many adherents since that memorable event forty years ago.