

THE PARLIAMENT OF RELIGIONS.

Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Malachi II, 10.

My Friends:—

It had been my desire to speak of the Parliament of Religions from the beginning of the month, but deemed it best to wait until it had closed, so that it might be viewed in its entirety, and all its activities commented upon. It closed on Wednesday last, the 27th of this month, having begun on the eleventh.

The idea of the parliament was, with but one exception, hailed with enthusiasm on all sides. Every earnest and open minded lover of his kind could not but rejoice that so grand and glorious a consummation was finally to be achieved, and now that it has been achieved so grandly and harmoniously, the questions arise uppermost in the mind, "what will be the result thereof," "what its influence" and "what its lessons."

The Parliament in its plan and method of operation, was exceedingly simple. From the 11th to the 27th inclusive, was the Parliament proper. Every religion, every creed, every shade of belief had been invited and almost unanimously they responded. The fundamental ideas of faith, of belief, of God, of man's relation to Deity and Deity's relation to man, the basis of morality, the guide of right and true life, all these subjects were put forward and a representation given to every faith to advance its claims and expound its teachings. In conjunction with the parliament proper were the denominational congresses, some previous to and some coincidental with it. These congresses, as their name implies were the gatherings of individual creeds at stated times and places, where they could at length, more fully than was permitted in the Parliament, assert and expound their doctrines to those who cared to hear.

Some idea of the extent of the ground covered by Parliament and its congresses, may be perhaps gained, when it is borne in mind that the program of them as printed makes a book of one hundred and fifty pages.

The center of interest was naturally the Parliament proper.

On the platform sat the chosen representatives of the creeds of the world, of Mohammedanism, Confucianism, Shintoism, Buddhism,

Protestant and Catholic Christianity, orthodox and reformed Judaism. Each faith spoke through its representatives, and to each was accorded a respectful and attentive hearing.

There was no incident that tended towards unpleasantness, save one, and that only in slight measure. Alexander Russell Webb, the American apostle of Mohammedanism, in one of his discourses began a defense of polygamy, as permitted by the Koran, and American womanhood rose up and royally rebuked him. There was no incident of a startling or sensational nature, unless that can be called startling, when a Buddhist priest hurled defiance at his audience, because, though in self-confessed ignorance of his teachings, yet that audience had judged Buddha and Buddhism, and judge them harshly. Otherwise there was unbroken harmony and undisturbed peace at all the meetings. It was a happy commingling of the old world and the new; the east and the west were brought together and clasped hands in fraternal greetings. It was the crowning glory of the grandeur of the exposition. It was the triumph of tolerance, the diadem set upon the head of the material magnificence there congregated. It was an inspiring and never to be forgotten scene, which was possibly only in the last decade of this century, and only in this home of liberty loving people.

Turn we now to our questions, it can be said that we are too near to judge of its results. You cannot correctly gauge a mountain, when you are standing at its base. You must stand some distance away. We are still too near to this stupendous event. Let a decade or a quarter of a century elapse and then its influence will have been felt, and its results become apparent. But one thing we can safely assert and that is that it must awaken in the breast of every intelligent being, the consciousness of the universality of the religious idea and the puny narrowness of the individual religion. It tells us first that while there are numberless religions, there is only one faith, that while the outward expressions and symbols of belief may be as numberless as the stars in heaven, yet as there is only one heaven from which these stars shine, so there is but one source from which spring all shades and manner of interpretation.

The lessons to be drawn from this Parliament of religions are many. But the first and greatest of these is the lesson of tolerance. By just so much as each individual creed sees that there are other creeds in existence, whose followers are just as earnest, just as deeply imbued with the teachings of their faith, by just so much shall each individual creed be modest in its claims.

I do not say that a believer shall lose faith in the truth of his creed, but let him not assert that *all truth* is bound therein and that there is none, save such as is found within the cover of *his* catechism. Every man shall have the right to full and faithful belief in his own particular form of truth, but that same right that he enjoys, let no one dare to deny unto another. There is a greater Arbiter than human judgment, and in the unrolling of time will the false be destroyed and the true be enthroned. But when millions of human lives are guarded and regulated by a system of belief, when the hopes and the hearts of those millions and their fathers and father's fathers before them, have been for thousands of years, fed and satisfied by this faith, let no one rise to such a height of presumptuous superiority, to say that these millions of lives, and all others, who do not follow in the pathway of a certain line of thought, are forever and irrevocably doomed to eternal despair. Such thought is blasphemy. God of the universe did not create His children to allow the vast majority of them to be destroyed in unconscious ignorance and to go down to everlasting darkness. There can be no greater irreligion than such assertion.

The one great lesson of the congress of religions must be that of an awakened world, consciousness. The recognition of the greatness of the human family, the vastness of human life, and yet the unity of thought that brings them all together at the throne of the One Creator, for, "Have we not all one Father; hath not one God created us?" Lessing's allegory of the three rings can be no more beautifully illustrated and exemplified. The possessor of the true ring was to show by his actions and those of his children after him that he possessed the true ring. Let us not quibble or quarrel as to who has the true faith. Let dispute and strife and hatred and persecution be done. Let there be generous em-