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SRI RAMAKRISHNA CENTENARY

PARLIAMENT OF RELIGIONS
TOWN HALL, CALCUTTA

ADDRESS OF

SIR MANMATHANATH MUKERJI, Kt.,
CHAIRMAN, RECEPTION COMMITTEE

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1st MARCH, 1937



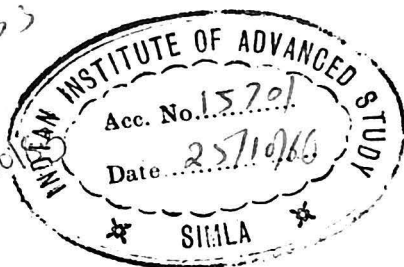
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LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

More than two years ago when the scheme for celebrating the Birth Centenary of Paramahansa Sri Sri Ramakrishna Deva was first drawn up, it was considered the most essential part of the programme to convene a Parliament of the Religions of the World. This, as you all know, is quite in consonance with the spirit of the message of the great saint who was the "consummation of two thousand years of spiritual life of three hundred million people"—a great symphony "composed of the thousand voices and thousand faiths of mankind."

When in 1893 a Parliament of Religions was convened at the World's Fair in Chicago, its objects among other things were: (1) to promote and deepen the spirit of human brotherhood among religious men of diverse faiths, through friendly conference and mutual good understanding, while not seeking to foster the temper of indifferentism, and not striving to achieve any formal and outward unity, (2) to inquire what light each religion has afforded, or may afford, to the other religions of the world, and (3) to bring the nations of the earth into a more friendly fellowship, in the hope of securing permanent international peace.

The purpose of the Parliament of Religions which was intended to be called in connection with the Centenary Celebrations, though much humbler, nevertheless embraced within its scope most of the aforesaid objects. Beneath the seeming diversities of different faiths there is a common plan and purpose,—an underlying unity in search of which the whole of humanity, consciously or unconsciously, has been moving from time immemorial. The necessity for providing a forum where exponents of all religious faiths of the world would be able to expound their own ideas and ideals without any spirit of intolerance, where they would be able to exchange their views on man's

life and its goal and on problems furthering national amity, international fellowship and universal peace, can hardly be overestimated. Though each religion is great in its own way, a comparison among religions with a view to establishing the superiority of one over the others, is unprofitable. There are many important truths that various religions teach in common, many that one has given to another, many again which in different religions have assumed different forms, sometimes apparently incongruous but not really so. Mutual exchange of views broadens the entire religious outlook and fosters a spirit of tolerance, the need for which is so often keenly felt. What is wanted in a true votary of any particular religion is intensity of belief together with a catholicity of outlook and non-aggressiveness. Sri Ramakrishna has said:

“Religion, however, is one. It has been so from all times, it shall be so for ever.”

“The Lord is one, though He hath many names.”

And—

“Yea, every belief, every religion, every system of faith and worship is but a path that leadeth unto Him.”

It was thought that a Parliament of Religions was a necessary concomitant of the Celebrations, a *sine qua non*, without which no celebration of the Centenary would be perfect or complete. And there could be no more suitable place for the celebration of the Centenary than this where have assembled the representatives of the different religions of the world. Rightly has Swami Vivekananda said: “Aye, long before ideas of universal religion and brotherly feeling between different sects had been mooted and discussed in any country in the world, here, in sight of this city, was living a man whose whole life was a Parliament of Religions, as it should be.”

The great Saint of Dakshineswar made himself conspicuous in the world's history of religious endeavour by actually practising different religions such as Hinduism, Islam and Christianity and realizing the grand truths embedded in them all. He was

the first spiritual seer in the world who, standing on the bedrock of his own realizations, declared emphatically and unequivocally the great truth that the different religions are like so many paths leading to the same goal of God-realization. This was what Sri Ramakrishna lived to realize and proclaim to the sect-ridden world. It is, therefore, only meet that, on the occasion of the Birth Centenary of this glorious apostle of 'Harmony of Religions,' worthy representatives of various religions should have assembled here with the noble object of establishing a closer relationship of amity and goodwill among the different faiths and churches of the world.

The idea of this Parliament was formed, but we did not know how it would materialize. Our resources were limited and some of the difficulties that we saw seemed at the moment insurmountable. But there is a much higher and mightier power than that of man. We issued invitations to the most eminent persons all over the world—scholars, philosophers, indologists and religious heads. The world responded. From the response that we received, we found that we were to proceed. We did proceed, always anticipating with eager expectation the day when the Parliament of Religions would meet in this great City. And as time rolled on and the day came nearer and nearer, our eagerness was ever on the increase. That much longed-for day, that 'golden hour' has arrived: you have come, and on behalf of the Sri Ramakrishna Centenary Committee I bid you a most cordial welcome.

While rejoicing in the fact that our labours have ended in success, I must not forget to refer to those who were with us in our endeavours and whom we miss here to-night. The great Leveller has weakened our rank by taking a ruthless toll. Only a few days ago, just on the eve of the concluding part of the celebrations in Calcutta, Swami Akhandananda, a direct disciple of the Master, who was President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission and of the Sri Ramakrishna Centenary Celebrations Committee, passed away. The presence of our veteran leader

was a source of inspiration to us. The world heard last year about this time his inspiring message of peace and goodwill that was broadcast through the radio to the farthest corners of the globe. Prof. Dr. Winternitz, the celebrated scholar and indologist of Czechoslovakia, who was our co-worker and whose learned paper on "Race and Religion" will shortly be read at this Parliament, is also no more in this land of the living. We also express our deep sense of sorrow at the deaths of Prof. Sylvain Levi (France), Sir Deva Prasad Sarvadhikari, Kt., (Calcutta), Mr. S. W. Dassenaike, C.I.E. (Ceylon), Mr. A. C. Chatterjee (Geneva), Prince Andrea Boncompagni Ludovici (Italy), Mr. Dhan Gopal Mukerjee (U.S.A.), Dr. J. T. Sunderland (U.S.A.), Sir Lalubhai Samaldas (Bombay) and Swami Dhirananda (Calcutta), all of whom were actively associated with this Centenary.

On behalf of the Centenary Committee, I welcome you all who have made immense personal sacrifice to come over here and give us the benefit of your wisdom. I also thank those who have warmly responded to our invitation but could not accept it on account of their preoccupations.

May I take this opportunity to tell you that the Centenary was observed not only in the different provinces of India, in Burma, Ceylon, Federated Malay States, Straits Settlements, Japan and China, but also in many parts of England and the Continent, North and South America, Africa and Australia. Since the inauguration of the Centenary at the Belur Math on the 24th February, 1936, celebrations have been held in the hundreds of cities and villages all over India, Burma and Ceylon. The high and the low, the rich and the poor, one and all, without any distinction of caste, creed or colour, participated in these celebrations, the most prominent features of which were public meetings, students' gatherings, ladies' conferences, distribution of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literatures, organization of literary and athletic competitions and feeding of the poor. Religious Conventions also formed another important feature of those celebrations in many cities and towns.

Leaders of thought from all parts of the world, such as Japan, China, Philippines, Straits Settlements, Afghanistan, Iraq, Turkey, Yugoslavia, Rumania, Austria, Hungary, Germany, Russia, Poland, Switzerland, Belgium, Holland, France, Italy, Great Britain, Norway, Egypt, South Africa and U. S. A. have sent us greetings and congratulations.

In India we have received messages of good wishes from prominent persons representing all walks of life belonging to Assam, Bengal, Bihar, U.P., Delhi, Punjab, Bombay, C. P., Nizam's Dominions, Madras, Mysore, Ceylon, Orissa, and Burma. We take this opportunity of conveying our grateful thanks to each and all for their cordial felicitations.

We are painfully conscious of our shortcomings in not being able to look adequately to your needs and comforts as we should. But we have every reason to hope that through your kind co-operation this Parliament of Religions will be a complete success. May God bless our endeavour and grant us the necessary strength and vision to realize through this meeting of the world's representatives of religions. The lofty ideal of the federation of faiths for which this Parliament has been convened.

Ladies and gentlemen, before I conclude I once more bid you a most hearty welcome on behalf of the Sri Ramakrishna Centenary Committee.

