

World Missionary Conference, 1910

(To consider Missionary Problems in relation to the Non-Christian World)

THE HISTORY AND RECORDS OF THE CONFERENCE

TOGETHER WITH
ADDRESSES DELIVERED AT THE
EVENING MEETINGS

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OPENING ADDRESS

BY

THE LORD BALFOUR OF BURLEIGH, K.T.

*Delivered in the Assembly Hall on Tuesday
Evening, 14th June*

MESSAGE FROM THE KING

YOUR GRACE, LADIES and GENTLEMEN,—I am charged with a message from His Majesty the King, which you will no doubt receive with due honour and respect. The message is :

“The King commands me to convey to you the expression of his deep interest in the World Missionary Conference being held in Edinburgh at this time.

“His Majesty views with gratification the fraternal co-operation of so many Churches and Societies in the United States, on the Continent of Europe, and in the British Empire, in the work of disseminating the knowledge and principles of Christianity by Christian methods throughout the world.

“The King appreciates the supreme importance of this work in its bearing upon the cementing of international friendship, the cause of peace, and the well-being of mankind.

“His Majesty welcomes the prospect of this great representative gathering being held in one of the capitals of the United Kingdom, and expresses his earnest hope that the deliberations of the Conference may be guided by Divine wisdom, and may be a means of promoting unity among Christians, and of furthering the high and beneficent ends which the Conference has in view.”

I think, ladies and gentlemen, that the Executive Committee should frame an appropriate answer to His Majesty's gracious message.

I am charged with the duty, in opening this Conference, of extending to all those who come from beyond the seas the most cordial welcome Scotland can offer to you. As a nation and an Empire we are under the shadow of a great loss in the death of our King, a loss in which every civilised country has sympathised with us. In the message which I have just read there are allusions to fraternal co-operation and to international peace which will find an echo in the hearts of every one who is present here to-night.

We are no small and unimportant gathering. We are constituting the first meeting of a Conference of which there are about 1200 members, representing 160 different Churches and organisations, all with their representatives in the mission field. There are representatives here to-night from many countries on the Continent of Europe, from the United States of America, and the British dominions beyond the seas. We have with us some hundreds of those actually engaged in mission work in Asia, Africa, and in the islands of the sea. When we look at the list of those who constitute this Conference there will be, I think, two feelings dominant in all our minds. There will be, first, profound sorrow that our differences should make necessary so many different organisations, but there will also be a feeling of joy and of thankfulness that if we are separated in some respects, we are drawing together now as perhaps we have never before been drawn together, in the prosecution of the great enterprise in which we are all interested. We are divided in some respects, but we are united under one great command, "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." We have the same marching orders—orders the validity of which are not only generally but universally accepted. No one denies, no one can deny, the obligation. Yet is it not a humiliating thought that, though that command was given nearly twenty centuries ago, it has not yet been adequately fulfilled?

It is probably true to say that not one-third of mankind

are even yet Christians even in name, and it is probably also true that the majority of the human race living to-day in this world of ours have not even heard the message. Yet it is a command which is distinct; it is of universal application, and it endures for all time. We may be divided, we may be independent, we may come from different lands, and we may pursue diverse methods, but we recognise the same duty and we acknowledge the same object. No divisions free us from the obligation, and the great lesson which we are learning is that none of us can discharge it alone. If we are to be successful a greater amount of unity must be attained than has ever been the case in the past. When we think of it we cannot deny, and we do believe that the meeting of this Conference will make us still less inclined to deny, that overlapping and its waste of energy, its waste of men and women, its waste of material resources, are nothing short of treason to Him whom we acknowledge as our common Master. Surely there is much more which should unite us than keep us apart.

It is not for me to make light of the importance of the things upon which we differ, but we are beginning, I hope, to feel that those on which we are united transcend in importance in every way those which keep us apart. It is not to be forgotten that as a Conference we express no opinion, we enter into no debate on any matter of doctrine or of Church government on which we differ. This has been deliberately arranged, and will, I am sure, be honourably adhered to. But yet we seek to call the human race into one fellowship, to teach the way of eternal life. The fatherhood of God, the love of the Son, the power of the Holy Ghost, the purity of Christian life, and the splendour of the Christian hope are common ground. We want to get into closer touch with one another. We want to become more familiar with each other's methods, with each other's work; we want to rejoice in each other's successes, we want to sympathise in each other's failures, and each other's disappointments, and, above all, we want to learn by the experience of both. In the concluding part of the Report of the eighth Commission, which deals with the question of unity, there are these comforting

words, "Missionary workers who have once been drawn together are not readily sundered, and the sphere of co-operation widens with experience. The testimony is very striking, that while there is sometimes difficulty in making agreements as to work before men know each other, there is seldom difficulty in carrying them out when once the workers have been brought into touch with one another."

If it were to do nothing else than bring home to the minds of Christian people how great is the variety of problems which have to be faced, this Conference would not be without its use. In that Commission with which I have had more especially to deal, this point is strikingly illustrated. There is the problem, of perennial difficulty, of the due relation of the civil and the spiritual power to be faced. You may have a civilised Government, with a civilised and yet not Christian people; you may have an ancient yet backward civilisation like that of China; or you may have a Christian Government ruling over a Mohammedan or Hindu population. There are European protectorates over regions as yet wholly uncivilised, and in the varying degrees of civilisation every class of varying problem is presented for consideration and for discussion. Cast your minds to Japan, to China, to India, to the Dutch East Indies, to the specially Mohammedan countries on the Continent of Asia, such, for example, as Persia and Turkey, Egypt and the Sudan, to North Africa, Central Africa, East Africa, West Africa, and to South Africa, and you will find that it is true to say that the difficulties with which you are confronted vary not so much with the political but with the religious differences. There are certain spheres of civil government which are practically the same everywhere. There are missions which have the same object, but the difficulties which arise, arise mainly from the fact that in so few of those cases which I have mentioned do the Government acknowledge in the abstract the principle of freedom of conscience. You cannot in this matter lay down even the most general principles which will carry you further than the threshold of questions of ever varying degrees of difficulty and complication with which you are confronted. The Government may be neutral, it may be hostile, it may

vary from the lowest to the highest civilisation, and it may perhaps have its own domestic difficulties with those under its sway, owing to the fanaticism with which they cling to their own beliefs.

Let me pass to another point. By common consent there is just now a great opportunity. Nations in the East are awakening. They are looking for two things: they are looking for enlightenment and for liberty. Christianity alone of all religions meets these demands in the highest degree. There cannot be Christianity without liberty, and liberty without at least the restraint of Christian ideals is full of danger. There is a power unique in Christianity of all religions to uplift and to ennoble, and for this reason, that it has its roots and its foundations in self-sacrifice and in love. We express the devout and earnest hope that God may use this Conference to increase in the minds of professing Christians their deep responsibility to the whole world.

Let me add one word in conclusion. The hope has sprung up in my mind that unity, if it begins in the mission field, will not find its ending there. It is a thought not without its grandeur that a unity begun in the mission field may extend its influence and react upon us at home and throughout the older civilisations; that it may bring to us increased hope of international peace among the nations of the world, and of at least fraternal co-operation and perhaps a greater measure of unity in ecclesiastical matters at home. God grant that by and by, as the direct outcome of the self-sacrifice of the men and women in the mission field, whose motto is expressed in the refrain of the well-known hymn—

Onward, Christian soldiers,
Marching as to war,
With the Cross of Jesus
Going on before!

we at home may be able to use the other lines with a force and with a truth to which at present we cannot attain—

Give the word; in every nation
Let the gospel trumpet sound,
Witnessing a world's salvation
To the earth's remotest bound.