

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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THE CENTRAL PLACE OF MISSIONS IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

BY THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY

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

FELLOW-WORKERS in the Church Militant, the Society of Christ on earth, Lord Balfour has reminded you, and few men could do it with more lucidity, effectiveness, and simple weight, what it is that brings to this hall to-day an assemblage which, if men be weighed rather than counted, has, I suppose, no parallel in the history either of this or of other lands. Yes, gentlemen, this Conference is in some respects unique, not merely in missionary annals, but in all annals. Where and when have 1200 thoughtful men and women met who could contribute a like amount of knowledge acquired at first hand, for that is the real point, from literally every region of the round world, about the forces, past and present, seen and unseen, which are moulding the lives of the peoples, civilised and savage? And you come, not to talk casually and irresponsibly, not to tell us at haphazard what you know, but to bring from a hundred work-fields, the thought-out, argued-out conclusions to which you have been led. The written reasons, the ripe experiences, which have led you to those conclusions and resolves have already been sifted and pondered and compared. That, my Lord Balfour, makes our gathering unique in character. God grant it be unique in fruit. The Lord God grant it, for it is to Him that we bring it all to-night.

Gentlemen — I say it in all earnestness — it is with

reverence and holy fear that I obey the call to be the first speaker in these debates. I can contribute nothing that is new; very little that is my own. But if I interpret rightly the privilege which you have offered me, I stand here for a special purpose. It is to say, from the standpoint of one who holds of necessity a position of central responsibility in our country's religious life, that we whose actual work lies prosaically at home, feel, with an intensity beyond all words, that, among the duties and privileges which are ours in the Church of Christ, the place which belongs of right to missionary work is the central place of all. As regards opportunity of knowledge I have, I suppose, some qualification to speak. Four times, at intervals of ten years, I have in one capacity or another taken part in the great gatherings of bishops at Lambeth, men who bring from near and far afield the knowledge which leaders gain about the work of one great section of Christ's Church on earth. In our last gathering in 1908, 240 bishops took part, and it is perhaps not presumptuous to say that probably to the desk of no other man in the British Isles does there flow in weekly, daily, almost hourly, so varied a stream of communications about the Church's activities and problems, its mistakes and its failures, and its victories, as flows in steady volume from the whole circumference of the earth to my room, not, of course, as to a place of authority or governance—pray understand that—but as to a central pivot or exchange. And happily it is not letters only that flow in; it is also men and women.

Brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ, I tell you deliberately that with that increasing knowledge—and even the dullest man must in such a position gain some increase of knowledge—there comes a deepening conviction that what matters most, what ought to loom largest in it all, is the directly missionary work, such work as we are gauging and planning in this eventful fortnight. Many a time, after quiet talks with some simple-hearted worker who is spending himself ungrudgingly in the Master's service—be it under an African sun, or in the Arctic circle, or in the islands of a stormy sea—I have found myself literally tingling with a

mingled sense of humiliation and of eager enthusiasm as I have set the value and the glory of his persistent self-sacrificing devotion to our Lord against the value of our own poor commonplace work at home; and I have fallen on my knees and asked that He who seeth in secret will show us how to co-operate in some more fruitful way, and to link the two tasks, that man's and mine, more wisely, more effectively than we seem to link them now. Well, it is for that sort of endeavour that we are here this week. We meet, as has been well said, for the most serious attempt which the Church has yet made to look steadily at the whole fact of the non-Christian world, and to understand its meaning and its challenge. We look at it from standpoints not by any means the same, geographical, racial, or denominational. Not one of us bates a jot of the distinctive convictions which he deliberately holds. Therein lies in part the value of the several contributions which will be made to our debates. But we are absolutely one in our allegiance to our living Lord. To Him we bring it all. When the disciples returned from their first missionary work they told the Master both what they had done and what they had taught. They must also have told one another. And the outcome we know.

Your deliberations this week will deal mainly with the special opportunities and the special difficulties of our own day. About the opportunities, I venture upon a single word of caution—not exactly of warning, but of caution. It is dangerous, it is perhaps presumptuous, to dogmatise too decisively about the particular opportunities of one generation or epoch as contrasted with another. We believe in the continuous guidance of Him who knows, and weighs, and understands. To some of us—to me personally—it is frankly incomprehensible why the Christian leaders and teachers of former generations in the last few hundred years gave so comparatively small a place to direct missionary endeavour. The Lord God Omnipotent reigneth. He has guided our fathers, as we believe He is guiding us. It may be that by spoken word or busy pen the men whom we reverence for what they did served their generation best, and used the opportunities which were theirs, not ours.

"It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath set within His own authority. But ye shall receive power"—that is quite certain—"ye shall receive power when the Holy Ghost is come upon you"—power to see the present opportunity and to use it—"and ye shall be witnesses unto Me . . . unto the ends of the earth." Whatever the facts of other days, there can be no manner of doubt about the facts of our own. The opportunity is almost limitless. It is urgent and even clamorous. It is perhaps temporary and passing. And it is ours. And for its use—"ye shall receive power." The work of this coming fortnight, and of the eighteen preparatory months which have led up to it, is capable, I verily believe, of indirectly doing more for the right manner of "telling out among the heathen that the Lord is King," than any fortnight of Christian history since the days of the Apostles. I need not re-paint the picture, familiar to everybody here, of what to-day's opportunity is and means. The whole world in closest, speediest touch. The millions of the farthest East awakening like some giant from the stupor of ages, and deliberately, even eagerly, calling for the very knowledge and intercourse which they had hitherto barred out. Nationalism, with all its powers and perils, feeling its way to life among Asiatic races, with a call to us to show what is Christ's definite message for nations, and what the claim He makes upon each several race for its separate contribution to the common good. And then the great new nation bounding into strenuous manhood on the Canadian plains, in touch at once with the Eastern and the Western worlds, and capable of bringing strength to each. I could easily run on. But you are familiar with it all. The when and the how are His. The work is ours. "Ye shall receive power." He will show us when and how.

And with the opportunities, the special difficulties to us: European knowledge, European science taken eastwards and assimilated there without the sanctions and the history and the long discipline which gave it birth, and nurture, and virility for ourselves; material wealth and comfort made the apparent deity or goal among the "Christian" nations from whom

the message goes ; the un-Christian lives of the representatives of Christian lands ; and perhaps, above all—if you doubt it, read the gathered testimony from a hundred mission fields—the apathy and lukewarmness of the home Church, that is to say, of religious, God-fearing, Christian people, in the face of all these possibilities and perils. There, at least, we have a clear-cut task, an open road to tread. If the work is to be done, we must make men know and feel—yes, and make them live as men who know and feel, not in abstract theory, but in living, burning fact—that there is none other name under heaven, given to man, in whom and through whom, we or any other folk, can receive health and salvation, but only the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is the sense, strong and eager and aglow, of what we owe to God in Christ which can alone quicken the pulse and nerve the arm for the battle which is not ours, it is the Lord's. But, brothers and sisters, that means effort, that means the sort of sacrifice which Christ looks for and demands when He bids men count the cost of discipleship, and that means a courage that ten thousands of our shy, reticent people wholly lack. Be it ours to hearten them. Once more, God will show us how. But be quite sure—it is my single thought to-night—that the place of missions in the life of the Church must be the central place, and none other. That is what matters. Let people get hold of that, and it will tell—it is the merest commonplace to say it—it will tell for us at home as it will tell for those afield. Secure for that thought its true place, in our plans, our policy, our prayers, and then—why then, the issue is His, not ours. But it may well be that if that come true, “there be some standing here to-night who shall not taste of death till they see,”—here on earth, in a way we know not now,—“the Kingdom of God come with power.”