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 DUTY OF CHRISTIAN NATIONS

II.

By the Hon. SETH LOW, LL.D.

Address delivered in the Assembly Hall on Sunday Evening, 19th June

The Report of Commission VII., of which I am a member, will be presented to the Conference to-morrow. It deals with the relations of Missions and Governments, and it necessarily deals with the practical issues growing out of the contact of Missions with the Government either of the country in which the Mission is conducted or of the country from which the missionaries go forth. This evening I should like to discuss some of the larger aspects of that relationship between Missions and Governments. The missionary goes to non-Christian peoples primarily, of course, to carry the message of the Christian Gospel; but when he goes he understands perfectly that, in order to commend that Gospel to his non-Christian hearers, he must illustrate its ideals in his own life. How faithfully, how patiently, how nobly many missionaries in many fields have done that, and are doing that, God knows, and we only partially know. It is of much less consequence to the missionary to enjoy the political support of his Government at home than it is that he should have the moral support of that Government. And by that moral support I mean that whenever the Government of a country whose public opinion is predominantly Christian illustrates in its dealings with non-Christian races, and generally in its international relation-

ships, high ideals of justice, of fair dealing, and of respect for the rights of others, even when they are weak, the cause of the missionary is powerfully reinforced. On the other hand, when the Government of a country whose public opinion is predominantly Christian fails to illustrate such ideals, the work of a missionary is made infinitely more difficult. The missionary can face with equanimity risks to his own life, because he knows that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church; but not the best missionary of them all can avert the disaster to his cause which comes when such a nation fails to live up to its own ideals.

His Grace the Archbishop of York has referred to some of the particular questions of a public character as to which the missionary testimony received by our Commission exhibits an impressive unanimity. I should like to point out, for our own encouragement, that the missionary protest against opium, so long continued and so eloquently voiced, has not been in vain, because within a month or two from now there is to meet at the Hague an International Conference upon that subject, which will be presided over by a member of this Conference, Bishop Brent of the Philippine Islands, and we may be reasonably sure that whatever wise and good men can suggest will be suggested by that Conference. It is our opportunity, and the opportunity of all the Christian nations represented here, to see to it that when a practicable programme has been presented to the nations, the public opinion of the nations shall demand that it be put in force. Public opinion has not moved so far yet as to the liquor traffic or the problem of enforced labour, but it is certainly legitimate for the missionary to encourage himself with the reflection that even in the moral world things move.

There is, however, one matter where the nations of the world can powerfully aid the missionary cause, as to which, fortunately, the stars in their courses are fighting for us. Lord Balfour, in his opening address, stated that wherever a Christian Mission went the question of freedom of conscience was raised. Happily, all the enlightened nations of the world now concede to their own people freedom of

conscience. Have we not the right, we who belong to nations whose public opinion is predominantly Christian, to ask our Governments to do everything that they can to make freedom of conscience the birthright of every human being? It is the peculiar glory of Japan that she is the first non-Christian nation to ensure to her own people by law that priceless privilege; and it is highly significant that in the Report which our Commission will submit to this Conference to-morrow, not a complaint, certainly no substantial complaint, comes from Japan as to friction between missionaries and the civil authorities. May we not hope that the far-spreading influence of Japan throughout the Orient will carry with it, wherever it penetrates, that great boon to mankind? Japan has assimilated Western education, and much of Western political thought; but I venture to believe that she has gathered from the West no boon for her people to be compared for one moment with the boon of freedom of conscience, because when you set the human spirit free, you have laid the foundation for endless progress. But freedom of consience is not altogether a matter of public law; it is perhaps even more a matter of public opinion. In India, for example, under British rule, freedom of conscience is well established by law; and yet, I suppose, there is no place on the face of the globe where the social obstacles to becoming a Christian are so great as they are in that country, where caste is at the very heart of it. How is that to be broken down? Missionaries have done something, and they will continue to do even more; but I venture to think that from the enlightened Christian nations of the world there can go forth a public opinion which, as India comes more and more into contact with the Western life, will one day break down even caste, and will secure to every Indian native, from the lowest to the highest, that freedom of conscience which is born, I think, essentially of the Christian religion, because it is of the very essence of Christianity that it shall be the choice of a man's heart. Not a missionary would leave his home to preach a Christianity that was enforced. What they want are willing converts to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now let me ask you to consider another aspect of this question. We have all read of the conquests of Alexander the Great, and we remember that he sighed because he thought that there were no more worlds to conquer. I wonder if we ever realise how immense are the consequences to those of us who are living at this day of these conquests of Alexander the Great. Broadly speaking, I think it is true to fact to say that all the countries on this side of the line where Alexander's march stopped have developed with the civilisation of the Mediterranean. Our political life, our social life, our religious life spring from that basin; but all the countries lying beyond the line of Alexander's march—India, China, and Japan—for these two thousand years have developed a civilisation of their own, different socially, different politically, different religiously; and now, all of a sudden, almost with the suddenness with which aviation has come upon us, the East and West find themselves, I will not say looking into each other's eyes, but actually obliged to commingle. For two thousand years, one may say, they have lived apart as if there were two worlds. For all the future, so far as man can see, they have got to live together in the same world.

Let me try very briefly to suggest some of the questions involved in that statement. Shortly before I left home I met an officer of the United States Steel Corporation. He told me he had recently seen at Hangkow a rolling mill worked by Chinamen. He said that, judged by the amount of output, the efficiency was 90 per cent. of that of the best American mills at home, and the wages paid were one-fifth of what were paid in America. What does that mean for every industrial nation, when the Chinese with their capacity, and their great industry, and their overwhelming numbers, have learned to manufacture not pig-iron only, but everything that the rest of us manufacture? I think it means at the very least new problems, the magnitude of which we cannot easily foresee. You see the first instinctive answer of the West in the attitude of the white race all along the Pacific, not in the United States only, but in Canada, Mexico, South America, South Africa, and in Australia.

They do not want Asiatic labour to be introduced. That is not because the men of our race despise the Asiatics, it is rather the instinctive action of men who feel that the standard of life developed in the West is suddenly put in peril. There again you can see new opportunities for friction between the nations of the East and the nations of the West. If those questions, and questions like them, are going to be met in the light of natural law, so that it is to be a question of the struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest, I do not wonder that men speak of the Yellow Peril. But if we can place side by side with that struggle for existence, as an effective and working force, what Henry Drummond called "the struggle for the existence of the other man,"—in other words, if Christian Missions can carry into those Oriental countries a really deep and abiding sense that at the heart of a Christian civilisation, no matter what mistakes it may make, there is profound respect for man just because he is man, and that the Christian nations will unite with the non-Christian nations as they are to-day in developing, or in trying to develop, out of this new contact, something finer than the world has ever known—then we may escape what otherwise would be assuredly a battle of Armageddon, and see a future ushered in wherein the Yellow Peril shall be converted into a golden opportunity for the cause of Truth and the everlasting brotherhood of man.