

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 SUFFICIENCY OF GOD

I.

BY THE RIGHT REV. BISHOP BRENT, D.D.

*Address delivered in the Assembly Hall on Wednesday
Evening, 22nd June*

WERE it not that I believe most profoundly that God is our sufficiency, I would not dare to stand in your presence to speak to-night on this theme. He can take my defective life and my stammering words and so use them as to point our lives to Himself and bring refreshment to His children. No one can deny, no one would care to deny, that God has given man prodigious tasks, and in so doing that He has dignified and honoured His creature. We are so constituted that we need the challenge and the constant challenge of difficulty. No young life can grow unless it has before it a hard task, not daunting it, but luring it on. We are sons of God, and being sons of God, it is not fitting that we should have anything less than a task that will bring out all the capacity of God's children. During these past days a new vision has been unfolded to us. But whenever God gives a vision He also points to some new responsibility, and you and I, when we leave this assembly, will go away with some fresh duties to perform, and perhaps as we have thought of the new responsibilities that this Conference has suggested to us, we have been somewhat troubled, because already our load is heavy. While we have been sitting and sharing in all that has been undertaken here, the hearts of many, if not all of us, have at the same time been filled with

thoughts of those for whom we are immediately responsible in a spiritual way, who live in the far-off parts of the earth. We have been, many of us, as mothers separated from their children, filled with solicitude, perhaps over-anxious because we have been separated from those whom we love. That fixed responsibility has been constantly with us, sometimes to make us over-anxious, sometimes to inspire us. Then in addition to the things that we have been called upon by God to do, in addition to the fresh tasks which are now confronting us, there rises that ultimate ideal, an ideal the realisation of which none of us shall live to see, but which somehow we feel to be part of our responsibility. We must make our contribution towards the realisation of that ideal before we die, and in the face of it all the human heart cries out to God, "Who is sufficient for these things?" and the response comes from God, "I am your sufficiency, you, My children, are sufficient for these things."

God works in us and through us, and were we not assured of that fact it would be impossible for us to undertake our common responsibilities. But God does not work merely in us and through us; He also works beyond us, and that which God does without us is much greater than that which God does in us and through us. What a restful thing it is in the midst of our great activities to think of God working with an effectiveness that we can only dream about and imagine, an effectiveness far beyond anything that as yet we have seen through merely human lives! It is not belief in God that is the great regenerating force in the world; it is God. There is nothing short of God sufficient for men. A stanza of a poem which I learned long years since has been ringing the bells of my memory ever since I knew that I would have to stand before you to-night and speak on this most profound theme, the Sufficiency of God.

"Not Thy gifts I seek, O God,
Not Thy gifts, but Thee,
What were all Thy boundless store
Without Thyself? what less, what more?
Not Thy gifts, but Thee."

And those words of Augustine so oft quoted may well be quoted again as summing up the whole truth, "The human heart was made for Thee, O God, and it cannot find rest until it find rest in Thee." God's gifts are insufficient for man, and in this practical age it is a good thing for us to be reminded of this once and again. What an insult to God to think of Him merely as one from whom we may receive benefits, to think of Him merely as a treasure-house from which we may draw riches to gratify ourselves with. There is the danger of that new modern philosophy known as Pragmatism. It may have its value as a philosophy, but if it is pushed to an extreme it puts us in a relation to God that is an indignity to our Creator, our Father, our Lover.

"Not Thy gifts I seek, O God,
Not Thy gifts, but Thee."

No, not even righteousness can come before God. We cannot get righteousness until we have received God Himself. Righteousness is not the goal of man. "This is Life Eternal, to know Thee and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." It is impossible to express Christianity in terms of the virtues. Men have striven to do so, but they have failed whenever they have tried. To-day all morality that makes righteousness the end of life is an anxious morality, and more than that, a self-conscious morality. A self-conscious righteousness is an imperfect righteousness. Self-consciousness is one of the things from which we can be delivered only by realising that God is our sufficiency and losing ourselves in friendship with Him; and having lost ourselves in friendship with God, then there comes to us that proper kind of righteousness which is the fruit of love, which has as its motive love. God is first of all not the Thrice Holy One; He is a Father and then He is the Thrice Holy. God is not first of all Judge and Critic; He is Father. And we must interpret God as Judge in the light of God as Father, Friend, and Lover.

Our theme is the sufficiency of God, but if we are to be accurate to the teaching of Jesus Christ, must we not say that it is only God's *abundance* that is man's sufficiency?

"I came," said the Master, "that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." God does not give to His children a dole for paupers, but a dower for princes. So it is that we must take God at His word, and we must seek to bind our lives to Him so that our relationship will be indeed that of children of their Loving Father. We worship Him not primarily that we may be good, but that we may know Him. When we look to God merely as a Giver of gifts, merely as a storehouse of treasure, and do not look to Him in the filial light that we are His sons, we prevent God from giving us His best. But if we do accept God as our sufficiency, if we think of God's abundance as being man's sufficiency, then there is a far-reaching result.

In the first place, it releases us from that most gnawing and most serious disease which has been called the disease of the age, namely, anxiety. Nothing else can cure us of anxiety. We may be distracted at times by various diversions from our anxious thoughts, but it is only the profound belief that God is our sufficiency that will cure us of the disease. Again, as soon as we feel and act upon our conviction that God is our sufficiency, our whole mode of thinking is changed. There is a dismissal of trifles, trifles are regarded as trifles and not taken as serious things. If we believe God to be our sufficiency, our lips will never dare to utter an unworthy or a weak argument on behalf of Christianity; our preaching will be stronger and purer and simpler; we shall not insult God, Who is our sufficiency, by attempting to prop Him up; we shall put only good stones into God's temple. We shall be saved from rash charges against those with whom we disagree; we shall be afraid to attempt conversion by negation. We shall have courage to dare, because our God is daring,—and what tremendous things you and I are called upon to dare!

Think of some of the ideals that are in the minds of men in our day and generation, the ideal, for instance, to bind all the nations of the world together, the East to the West, in spite of its strange and seemingly at times insuperable difficulties, in the face of the fact that national life has been in these past years acutely individualised. Think of the desire

and the effort on the part of right-minded men and of right-minded nations to banish war; think of our purpose not merely to evangelise the world, but to Christianise the world, to make all men realise their sonship of God in Jesus Christ. Or, again, our ideal as it is in our minds to achieve a perfect unity, not merely the unity of those various portions of Christendom here represented, but the whole of Christendom. It is for us to shame Rome out of her proud loneliness; it is for us to startle the Greek Church out of her starved orthodoxy. That is the task before us. Let us be satisfied with nothing less, and we cannot be satisfied with anything less, because God is our sufficiency.

Courage to dare will be the result of this conviction, and also courage to bear. Our God is a daring God, and He is also a bearing God. The Cross is a witness to that, and there is no woe of the human heart, there is no suffering, be it ever so small, that God does not take into His own life and feel as mere human life cannot feel it. We shall have courage to bear the discipline of waiting, which I think for an eager, impetuous generation is perhaps the hardest discipline of all, to wait for God's time. We want results, results: but God tells us that results come only when they are due. So we have to wait, to wait His bidding for our results. It takes a great deal of courage sometimes to do, but there are occasions when it takes a great deal more courage not to do, but to stand and wait and see the Salvation of God. Then in addition to these things that we have to bear, and with God as our sufficiency we are ready to bear, there are all the sufferings of this present time, which are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed hereafter.

Am I wrong in thinking that there are in this great gathering some whose minds at this present moment are turned toward their far-off mission stations with a mixture of hope and apprehension? It is a very easy thing—and I speak from experience—for a missionary to go to the mission field for the first time. He is carried on the wings of emotion, he has not yet experienced all the difficulties and the commonplaces and the hardships which are in store

for him; but when he goes back the second time and the third time with the consciousness of all his past failures, all his grave difficulties before him, then, unless he was sure that God's abundance was man's sufficiency, he could not go. And there are those of you to-night—oh, how I honour you!—who are going back to your fields, some of you never to return, but there is no self-pity, there is no desire for commiseration, because God is your sufficiency. You know that you are always going to be obscure, you, the silent multitude in this assembly. There have been many speakers, but there have been multitudes of the silent ones who will always play the modest part and do the unseen work and die in the obscurity in which they have lived, who leave a monument behind for which future generations will bless their names. And it is to you who are rejoicing in your obscurity, who are ready to go back in the face of your perils and hardships, it is to you I speak when I say that God proves His sufficiency for man when He enables you to return to your task in the spirit in which you are returning. God's sufficiency! It is a theme that declares itself, and if I were not sure of that I should feel depressed at the very imperfect way in which I have tried to present it to you, but I am not depressed. I have said but little; God has said an infinite deal to your hearts, and my last words will be in the shape of a prayer—

“Lord of the mountain peaks piercing the sky,
Quicken our faith to reach Thy Life on high;
Above our feebleness let Thy Best tower
Till we, weak sons of men, rise sons of power.”