

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

II.

BY THE REV. R. F. HORTON, D.D.

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

As during these days the Conference has deployed before our imagination the vastness of the missionary task—220 millions of souls in lands which are not occupied, imperfect covering of the ground which we call the occupied fields, the difficulty of obtaining the men and women who are qualified by the gifts of grace, and the difficulty of training them and giving to them the gifts of knowledge and experience which are also needed, the difficulty of raising the money, the difficulty of working together and removing the obvious waste of our divided actions,—I say that as this Conference has deployed before our imagination the vastness of this task, not only every one who is in the Conference, but the Conference itself, has been asking with a much deeper meaning, with a much more trembling sense of its reality, the question, “Who is sufficient for these things?” But, at the same time, the Conference has been answering with a voice ever clearer, carrying it home with a conviction ever deeper, day after day,—the Conference has been answering its own question in one word, “God.” Therefore, naturally, as the end of the Conference approaches, we all turn from the vastness of the task to the vastness of our God. Before I came to the Conference I had a partial vision of the ways of God. It was a strange and unexpected

preparation for a Missionary Conference, but somehow my mind turned to the thought of the world as it is seen, not by the eye of the Church but by the eye of modern science. I happened to read those curious lines of Morrison's expressing the scientific faith. They sound strange in this audience, but I wonder whether any of you will feel how they came as an inspiration:—

“ We were amphibians scaled and tailed,
 And drab as a dead man's hand,
 And we coiled at ease 'neath the dripping trees
 Or sprawled through the mud and sand,
 Croaking and blind with our five clawed feet
 Writing a language dumb,
 With never a spark in the empty dark
 To hint at a life to come.”

And then, later on—

“ There came a time in the last of life,
 When over the nursing sod
 The shadows broke and the soul awoke
 In the strange sweet dream of God.”

It seemed to me, for a moment, as if I could see the long slow purpose of God in the world, and see how He was sufficient to lead life upward to the life of man, how He was sufficient to lead man upward to the life of Christ, and how He is sufficient and obviously intends to lead the life of mankind—all of it—upwards into the fulness of the measure of the stature of Christ. And I hesitate to-night to say that the process is too slow. I question whether He has lost a moment. I believe He has been moving as rapidly as it is possible to move. This Conference was never possible until the year 1910. Directly it was possible it was called. This combination of missionaries would have been inconceivable a century ago, and it has only become gradually conceivable during the century that has passed, and directly it is conceivable it is accomplished. I do not, brethren, believe that God has lost a moment in His mighty plan, beginning in those æons that are past, ending in those æons that are to come, but controlled from the first to the last by

the hand that is all-sufficient, the hand that has given us our Gospel and our Christ.

Now I am going to tell you that while that was a great encouragement in prospect of this Conference, this Conference of nine days has been to me a great transformation. It has brought to me—and I believe it has brought to you, and it will bring to the wide Christian world in the course of the coming weeks—such a vision, such an uplifting, such a revelation of our God and His ways, that the things we knew ten days ago seem small, and the truth we held when we came seems dim compared with the truth we see to-day, a certainty that has settled down upon our hearts. First, this Conference has shown me what a wonderful truth we have to teach the world, what an incomparable truth, what a Book we have in the Bible, and especially in the New Testament. I wonder if you happen to remember a letter which was written towards the end of his life by Professor Max Müller, who may be regarded as the founder of the science of Comparative Religion. He says, "How shall I describe to you what I found in the New Testament? I had not read it for many years, and was prejudiced against it before I took it in hand. The light which struck Paul with blindness on his way to Damascus was not more strange than that which fell on me when I suddenly discovered the fulfilment of all hopes, the highest perfection of philosophy, the key to all the seeming contradictions of the physical and moral world. The whole world seemed to me to be ordered for the sole purpose of furthering the religion of the Redeemer, and if this religion is not divine, I understand nothing at all. In all my studies of the ancient times I have always felt the want of something, and it was not until I knew our Lord that all was clear to me. With Him there is nothing I am unable to solve, and yet there are some people who push the New Testament aside as if it had no message for them." And Max Müller, a German Christian, an English Christian by adoption, had himself pushed the New Testament aside as if it had no meaning for him until he had studied all the sacred books of the world, and then came back to find that this was the only

book, the one thing needful. Brethren, it has been forced upon me this week that we may say what the Apostles said at the beginning, "We are not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ." With all our increased knowledge of the religions of the world, with all our deepest sympathy, with all our longing to do them justice and to find in them whatever is true, and to welcome those who profess them as on the way to the light we know and love, with all this added knowledge and deeper experience, we need not be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ. It is the power of God—it is proved to be the power of God—unto salvation, and there is nothing like it. It is what the world needs, and it is the only thing that meets the need of the world. What has passed in this room is a clear enunciation of the positive demonstration that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the great saving power in the whole world.

But now may I tell you of the other thing that has been borne in upon me with irresistible conviction? We have been declaring to-night the sufficiency of God and confessing the insufficiency of man. The Church is not sufficient. So far from being sufficient to meet the emergency, it has not proved itself sufficient to meet the present situation. Then the question comes, Why is the Church insufficient, why does not the power of God work through the Church, why does not the power of God elicit the missionaries and the money, and bring us together in one and make us act together as one for the work that is obviously needed? It has been borne in upon me all through this week that the real answer to that question is this: that the Church, speaking broadly, does not realise that the sufficiency of God for man is mediated by Jesus Christ alone, that in Jesus Christ it has pleased the Father that all the fulness should dwell, that in Jesus Christ are the treasures of wisdom and knowledge and power. The reason why the sufficiency of God does not come to the help of the chariots whose wheels are off, and the Churches that are dead or dying, is that we do not keep our eyes concentrated on Jesus, Jesus only. He is the only channel of that power; He is the only storehouse

of that sufficiency. It is vain to expect the operative power of the sufficiency of God except through Jesus Christ. And it is because the Church in our days has, to a large extent, obscured or lost the supremacy of our Lord that the sufficiency of God is withheld from us.

The sufficiency of our Lord! Yes, that is the point of practical application, the sufficiency of Jesus Christ. It is not necessary to formulate a doctrine of the person of Jesus. We may well hesitate to press that upon men. But you can in the light of facts form the doctrine of the sufficiency of Jesus, and you can bring them to Jesus with the clear conviction that there is none other name given among men whereby they can be saved but this, and there is none other power outside for God to use for the salvation of the world except the power that He has stored in His dear Son, and in His Cross and Resurrection and Intercession. Without Him we are powerless, and all our power is in precise proportion to the concentration and exclusiveness of our belief in Him, the perfect, all-sufficient Saviour, the Head of the Church, the Captain of the embannered host that ought to be marching to victory, but is in barracks worshipping its idols instead of following its Captain.

There is one other word that I venture to say to you before I close. There has been given to this Conference from the first a most extraordinary vision of the world. The whole world has been held before us in this room day by day, and there has been given to this Conference a most extraordinary conviction that it is the duty and the power of the Church to give the Gospel to that whole world; there has been given to this Conference, I believe, a quiet, growing resolution that it must be done, that it can be done, yes, and though we speak it with unutterable humility, that even we can do it. Whence has come this penetrating vision of the whole world, whence this profound conviction of the meaning of our duty to the whole world, whence did it come? There can be no doubt who did this. We give all credit to our secretaries and organisers, but we know well that they have only succeeded because they have been agents and obedient agents. It was God who did it. They have never dared to

take a step without referring it to Him again. They have hardly ventured to write a letter unless they realised Him. It has been His doing. He drew us together from the ends of the earth, He made us of one mind, He has given this perfect order to the proceedings, He has given this unity and direction, so that now as we approach the close we know by Whom we were led. Is it likely that He Who has given the vision, He Who has drawn us together, He Who has marked His presence by unmistakable signs, will disappoint us?

“Therefore to Whom turn I but to Thee, the ineffable Name?
Builder and maker, Thou, of houses not made with hands!
What! have fear of change from Thee Who art ever the same?
Doubt that Thy power can fill the heart that Thy power expands?”

Who can doubt it? If God has given the vision, if God has breathed upon us the thought of the whole wide world for Jesus, if He has wrought it upon us,—not a number of children in the nursery singing children’s hymns at their mother’s knee, but a number of bronzed, weather-beaten men who have fought the fight and borne the brunt of the world, hardened sceptics some of us, hardened rebels many of us, guilty, unworthy—if He has fixed it in our mind that we were called together in Edinburgh to take steps to move on the Army of Christ for the Conquest of the World: can we doubt that He will fulfil the thought and the purpose that He has in-breathed? Shall we question? No, we will not question. We will come to Him as the day is closing, as the Conference passes into a blessed memory—we will come to Him, and on our knees with all our hearts bowed, with all our souls surrendered, with all our brains offered and our bodies laid upon the altar—we will come to Him and ask Him to do it, and tell Him that though our lips are so unclean, yet if He will touch them with the coal from the altar, we will say “Here am I, send even me.”