The Ecumenical Conference.

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It is within conservative limits to say that during the ten days session of this great Conference 200,000 people have been present at the various gatherings. Doubtless, the same people, delegates, and those specially interested, have contributed unremittingly to such outpouring; but, even so, the multitudes of all denominations and all phases of doctrinal belief have flocked to the places where meetings were held. Making due allowances for mere curiosity-seekers, convention-loungers, and the good folk who always go where the crowd goes, the attendance means vast popular interest in the cause of missions. I question whether any other topic, not excepting politics, prolonged for such a period in early spring could attract so many auditors. Missions are evidently entrenched deep in religious sentiment as statutes of Christian endeavor, and they show how far the thought of yesterday and today has travelled. They are everywhere regarded, and reasonably, as Providential signs of the perseverance of divine ideas bound up with divine forces which undergird the extension of the kingdom of righteousness on the earth. And a marked feature of this continuous deliberative body is the great good-will evinced towards it by all sorts and conditions of men outside the dissentiug fold. Of captious and spiteful criticism there has been almost none. This is rather remarkable in view of the fact that the target of foreign missions has probably received more arrows from the bow of unbelief than any other form of Christian work. The only thrumming upon the harp of discord that I have noted comes strangely enough, from a religious weekly. This paper editorially declares, "we are truly sorry that churchmen have identified themselves with the Conference!" I would like to have seen the faces of Bishop Potter, Dr. Huntington, and other broad-minded Episcopalians when reading this deliverance. Methods of missions may sometimes be open to question. But the spirit of missions strikes the chord of our common humanity with full-toned resonance. To what extent the enthusiasm displayed will deplete pocket-books is a pretty knotty problem. One speaker declared that missionary societies are cutting down expenses every year and sending out fewer workers. I suspect he is right. But if church-members will applaud vigorously and give grudgingly, nothing will stir their sluggish beneficence if this Conference does not.

The place of women in this work has never been more completely disclosed than during the conduct of sessions devoted to a review of their labors. In looking over a recent book attacking Christianity, I hit upon six pages devoted to "Women in Christian and heathen Countries." The author argues, with amazing effrontery, that women owe little to Christianity and much to paganism! One of his arguments quotes an observer in India as saying that all Englishmen in India beat their wives! Inferentially, pagan devotees are presumably free from such grim pleasantries. The quotation is worthless except to prove the absolute dearth of weapons with which to assail the labors of women missionaries. What matters it that the cause of woman's rights was championed in Greece five centuries before Christ? The fact remains that nearly all the rights belonging to women in heathen lands to-day under the bondage of superstition were secured by missionary improvement of their status. I do not say all Christian dogmas are free from superstition. But the light on a thousand hills far distant is mostly Christian light, and the gentler sex, through the power of Christian consecration, set many of these tapers aflame. An intelligent Hindu acknowledged this. Dr. Chalmers once said that in benevolent labor one woman is worth seven and a half men! How he managed to figure out such exact mathematics is a "puzzler." But I believe this notable Conference will have a very indirect result in establishing in the minds of not a few doubters the fact of the growing executive capacity of women. Their management of missionary affairs has been conspicuously intelligent. Nobody with half an eye and a fragment of an ear can dispute the far-reaching significance of what was seen and heard at these gatherings of women. And the best of it is that all suggestion of lachrymose was absent. We listened to plain common-sense business talks all the way through, and the traditional prayer-meeting exordium, "O, my sisters," gave place to direct presentation of vital factors in missionary problems. I do not believe one press man in attendance had occasion to draw upon his "tear-dimmed eyes" *repertoire* of sentimental descriptive phrases.

It cannot be doubted that the Conference, now closed with such distinguished success, emphasized unmistakably the indirect benefit of missions. In talking with intelligent men, not overburdened with exact information on mission lines, I have observed that almost invariably they will debate theological phases of the subject to the exclusion of commercial and humanitarian phases. They resent the proposition that under Orient suns "millions a month are going down to eternal death in Christless despair." Indeed, most of us relegate that proposition to the cave of Adullam, or to the centre of the earth, where it belongs. The spirit of the Gospel contains no such absurdity. But what right has any man to ignore the story of civilization in missions and the tremendous impulse given to sound ethics by Christly teaching. And the indirect benefit lies in the opening up of countless channels for the emergence of manhood and womanhood to enjoy the fruits of toil and the uplift of education. Throughout the meetings of the Conference this note of progress recurred at frequent intervals. It created a sort of atmosphere, even when occasional speeches put the entire stress upon dogma. Nearly 13,000 Protestant missionaries, to say nothing of the devoted work of our Roman Catholic brethren, and nearly 2,000,000 native communicants attest the drawing together of forces that make for good government, diminution of abuses, extension of education, and the development of the practical arts of civilization. The collating of such tremendous results in concrete form of demonstration conferred peculiar impressiveness upon certain sessions of this Ecumenical body. Of course, the darker side could not be ignored. One billion of pagans, Hindus, Buddhists, Mohammedans, etc., many of them sunk, heaven knows how deeply, in the mire of unspeakable vice. The picture is not roseate. Neither is the picture of Hester and Allen Streets in Christian New York. But, frankly, bad as the situation is in its world-wide aspects, I am inclined to think the tendency of a good deal of missionary portrayal errs on the score of occasionally overlooking the really good features of alien faiths. God revealed himself in great minds and pure souls, ages before Jesus appeared. It is incredible that only profanations of his image have occurred. We all know of pagans that are such only in name, and, in the aggregate, they have done much for righteousness.

It is worthy of mention that in a series of meetings covering a full week and more, where "many men of many minds" participate in frequent discussion, scarcely a jarring note of discord has been heard. The inference is obvious. Essential unity of religious opinion obtained, and after somewhat careful survey of proceedings, the writer is confirmed in his original belief that the Conference, as a whole, was an extremely orthodox gathering. Not offensively so, for courtesy and moderation in statement abounded, but orthodox to the extent of bed-rock conviction of the eternal death of those "out of Christ." There is, however, a vast difference between what one individually holds and the attempt to force that personal dogma upon others. And it is to the lasting credit of the Ecumenical body that not even the slender wedge of denunciation of liberal opinions was permitted to mar the record of amicable sessions. The "small breeze" referred to in a previous article dies out in the general summing up. Peace reigned, and results were deemed of greater importance than theories of eschatology. The acrimonious and in every way unfortunate disputes between new and old-school men at certain board meetings some years ago taught a useful lesson. The hatchet was buried. And I hope forever! If any distinction can be made, one might say the younger element attached far less importance to questions concerning the fate of the heathen than the older element, but to young and old alike—whatever the doctrinal viewpoint—eschatological, problems were swiftly merged in the one importunate cry for men and means to carry on the holy and beneficent work of foreign missions. And to that cry candid men of every school will heartily respond, "Amen and amen!"

One feature in the proceedings of the Conference impressed me greatly. And that was the increasing attendance of young folk as the meetings deepened in interest and power. The "fringe" of men and women under thirty-five, noted in a proceding contribution, grew into a substantial portion of the garment of humanity which overspread every nook and corner of Carnegie Hall. The assemblage on Saturday night seemed to be a culminating demonstration of the place held by missions in the heart of the rising Christian generation. There is no reason to doubt the statement of one speaker that, if the churches will supply the wherewithal, a largely augumented company of the young will answer "here" to the roll-call of workers. The addresses of Mr. Eddy, Mr. Speer, and Mr. John R. Mott, revealed a calibre of youth ready for service of a very high order. The pale students with stooping shoulders, hectic flush on consumptive cheeks, and sunken eyes, popularly predicated missionary timber fifty years ago, gave way to stalwart embodiment of Christian ideals. This moment, I think of two young fellows whom I last met under rather demoralizing physical conditions. One, a mighty football tackle, I saw led off the field, bleeding and exhausted, after crushing defeat for his team. The other, whose bull-like rushes tore up opposing forwards like paper, I beheld across the line for a touchdown, with a mass of men on his back seeking vainly to hold him from the coveted goal. The first, I am told, is now a missionary at a far-distant station; and the second, when last heard from, gallantly fought the battle for righteousness in a lonely home-mission field. The athletic type was by no means inconspicuous at the Conference meetings. And the interest of the young in the cause is also manifestly retroactive in tendency. Every college settlement, home field, slum undertaking, and even leagues for municipal reform in New York and elsewhere, will feel the tonic influence of this demonstration. Enthusiasm is an atmosphere. You cannot shut up the atmosphere of self-surrender within the four walls of a particular form of effort. There is not a humanitarian enterprise throughout the world that is not stronger because of the quickening pulses of people in mission work.

While the Conference was in progress much was said on various occasions in regard to comity, coöperation in missions. But, to our mind, nothing vital was suggested by way of recommendation. The whole subject was left, perhaps inevitably, "in the air." Probably the wisest utterance came from the lips of one quoted by the Rev. Dr. King, and to the effect that organic unity, on lines accepted by any one of the existing Christian bodies, is clearly for the present out of reach. That gulf will not be bridged—and this appeared to be the prevailing sentiment—until men cease to elevate opinion into dogma. Comity, on a basis of surrender of religious tenets, even on minor points, is impracticable in the present state of religious thought. The most that can reasonably be expected is that denominations will not crowd into one another's fields merely for the sake of exploiting the missionary glory of a particular branch of the church universal. But the problem abroad is no greater than the problem at home. I question whether the congestion is as pronounced. And the infelicity of the situation should not be set down to the discredit of missions. Comity is a lesson to be learned in the school of hard experience—and always takes big wages. The spirit of the Conference certainly evinced fraternity. The next Ecumenical may witness a closer approach to comity.

In commending these six essential features in the Convention I have exhausted my space, and had it been twice as generous, room would be wanting. The Ecumenical assemblage of 1900 will go down into history as profoundly expressive of the vitality of an idea—the idea of the conquest of souls by the alchemy of love. Mahomet said: "Paradise is found in the shadow of crossing swords." But the Christian says, Paradise is found on earth, by living in the sunshine of altruistic endeavor. And the perpetual cry of missions will be that of Francis Xavier who, as he stood before China and saw its vastness looming like a huge mountain, exclaimed, "O, rock, rock, when wilt thou open to my Master?"—New York Post.

Reginald Heber, 1783—1826

The hymns of the eighteenth century and of the early years of the nineteenth, were for the most part nonconformist in origin or in association, but from the time of Heber onwards by far the greater number emanated from the Church of England, and chiefly from her clergy. The hymns of Horatius Bonar form the outstanding exception. This period is also noteworthy for the contributions made to hymnody by women—contributions increasing in number as the nineteenth century advances, and ever remarkable for sweetness, tenderness and insight.

Heber did much to encourage the free use of hymns in the Church of England, and was one of the first to arrange them in a series to suit the services of the Christian year, Henry Hart Milman helping him. Before his time the Methodists and Independents had almost a monopoly of hymn-singing.

His hymns are graceful and melodious, though often richer in imagery and more rhetorical than a severe taste approves. Many of his hymns were originally set to Scottish airs. "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty," is the statelist of them all. It is based on the great rythm of the Apocalypse Rev. iv: 8, and has the symplicity and dignity of the best ancient examples. It has nothing of the subjective element in it, but is pure adoration. It is said that Tennyson considered this hymn one of the finest ever written. Its hold on the affections has been greatly strengthened by its having been wedded to Dyke's noble tune Nicea, so named because of the dogmatic note by which the hymn is marked, especially in the last lines of vs. 1 and 4.

The first great missionary hymn was "Jesus Shall Reign," by Isaac Watts. From Greenland's Icy Mountains, ranks second, and was written exactly 100 years later, and first sung on Whit Sunday, 1819. It was composed at Wresham, at the request of Heber's father-in-law, Dr. Shipley, Dean at St. Asaph's. Heber was to give a lecture on the Sunday evening, but the Dean was to preach at the missionary service in the morning. On the Saturday, being asked by his father-in-law to "write something for them to sing in the morning," he went to another part of the room and set to work. In a short time when the Dean inquired, "What have you written?" he read over the first three verses. "That will do," said the Dean. "No, no, the sense is not complete," replied Heber, and sitting down again he added the fourth verse, "Waft, waft ye winds." The touching funeral hymn, "He is gone to the grave," was composed after the death of his first child—a loss which he keenly felt. After his own death, one who loved him took up the same strain, and wrote these stanzas.

Thou art gone to the grave and while nations bemoan thee,
Who drank from thy lips the glad tidings of peace.
Yet grateful, they still in their heart shall enthrone thee,
And n'er shalt thy name from their memory cease.

Thou art gone to the grave, but thy work shall not perish,
That work which the spirit of wisdom has blest,
His might shall support it, his mercy shall cherish,
His love make it prosper tho' thou art at rest."

In addition to these already mentioned, notable hymns from Heber's pen are,—"Brightest and Best of the Sons of the Morning," "By Cool Siloam's Shady Rill," "The Son of God Goes Forth to War." Heber had fine literary gifts. In 1815 he was appointed Bampton lecturer, and in 1823 Bishop of Calcutta, with all India, Ceylon, and Australia for diocese. His episcopate was brief, for he died after three years' work, but it was brilliant, and lasted long enough to show that he possessed great judgment and administrative capacity, as well as enthusiasm and boundless energy. He was gay, witty, yet of deep, unaffected piety, one of the most lovable of men, making friends easily, losing them only by death.