

The Congress on Christian Work at Panama

Address at the Annual Meeting of the Conference of
Foreign Mission Boards of North America.

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Wednesday Evening, January 12th, 1916

I WOULD LIKE to read four verses from one of the great Pauline utterances illustrative of the spirit and principles in which he dealt with great occasions and emergencies:

"I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost. For a great door and effectual has been opened unto me and there are many adversaries. Watch ye. Stand fast in the faith. Quit you like men. Be strong. Let all that ye do be done in love."

Those who have been in contact with the plans for this Latin-American missionary gathering from the time of their first inception have the clear assurance that what they have watched and worked with has been in the will of God, and they have had from the beginning, and have now, with regard to the Congress the confidence which comes from that assurance. Perhaps there are a few here this evening who were present at the meeting on Princes Street, in Edinburgh, six years ago at which the representatives from the great evangelical churches in Latin-America, and a number of the members of our Missions in Latin-America, came together and considered what might be done in the interest of the work that lay nearest to their hearts and deepest in their sense of duty. If there are any of you who were there at that meeting, you will remember, as I remember very well, the depth and earnestness of feeling that characterized that little group of men who felt that the service that was nearest and dearest to them was in danger of being passed by.

There were four things upon their mind. They were greatly concerned with the apparent indifference of great masses of their fellows to what they felt themselves to be the deep spiritual rights of the Latin-American nations. They were anxious that these claims should be laid upon the hearts of the home constituency in a more effective way. Secondly, they were deeply impressed with the need of what Dr. Patton was speaking of today—that is, an adequate, popular and helpful literature for the Portuguese and Spanish evangelical churches. Thirdly, they were convinced that now is the time when those parts of these great lands, sparsely settled but some day to be densely settled, now comparatively unoccupied by the church, should be arranged for by such distribution of responsibility among the churches as would assure adequate provision and care. And, fourthly, they were convinced that these great needs could only be met as some gathering might be held which would do for the Latin-American peoples what the Edinburgh Conference was seeking to do for all the mission work among the great non-Christian peoples.

If any of you were there, you will remember that the promise was made at that meeting in behalf of the churches of Great Britain and North America that these interests should not be neglected, but that in due time provision should be made for such a gathering. The first step toward the fulfilling of that promise was taken three years ago, when a conference in the month of March was held in the City of New York. That conference was attended by the representatives of Canadian and American missionary organizations at work in Latin-America. For two days, those present discussed the needs of these fields with the missionaries who happened to be at home from those lands. Nobody had given any forethought whatever to what might follow that conference. With absolute spontaneity the conference itself in the closing fifteen minutes, when it was clear that it was to come to an end without any provision for the continuance of its work, appointed a little committee with the understanding that that committee might increase its numbers to represent the missionary agencies most interested in these fields.

The little committee of five growing out of the closing action of that conference for the rest of that year endeavored to promote the interests of missions in Latin-America, drawing together the American and Canadian agencies which were at work. Two years ago, at this annual conference of all our foreign mission boards, that committee called a meeting in this hotel of representatives of societies working in these American lands, with reference especially to the situation in Mexico due to the long insurrection there. That meeting instructed the committee of five to increase its numbers and add representatives of each agency doing work in Latin-America, with the result that there grew up the larger committee of eighteen members. As soon as it was known in Latin-America that that committee was in existence, it was addressed with requests by correspondence and by interviews with men who came home and by interviews of representatives on the field, recalling the assurance that had been given in Edinburgh.

The result of all these representations was the initiation of this plan for the coming Latin-American Congress on Christian Work to be held in Panama. A report was made here a year ago. It was made separately to each one of the missionary agencies at work in these fields. And every British missionary society at work in Latin-America and the Canadian societies with any work in Latin-America, and every missionary society represented in this conference which has any work in Latin-America responded favorably to the plan of holding the congress, and, in one way or another, every one indicated their desire to send delegates to the gathering. I need not survey what has been done during the past year. You have been kept familiar with it all by the bulletins sent out. I want to say only a few words at the beginning, before others will speak, partly to refresh your thought regarding things already spoken and partly to suggest some other angles from which we ought to view the proposal and arrangements for this conference.

It goes without saying that no plan of this kind can be made without encountering difficulties. When did men ever attempt to

do anything that was worth doing that they did not encounter difficulties? If we had not encountered any difficulties in connection with the plans for this congress, the appropriate thing would be for us to vote that the congress should not be held, for we would have had unanswerable evidence that it could not be the will of God that such a conference should assemble. Anything that is the will of God is bound to encounter impediments and hindrances in the world in which we do our work. I think we may go further than that. The very difficulties encountered in the plans for this conference, as we work towards its expected consummation, are the very reasons why this conference must be held. If anything could show that it is indispensable, it is these very difficulties with which we have met. For these difficulties are here precisely to test the faith with which we have entered on this undertaking, and to prove our courage as to whether it is really Christian, apostolic courage. When St. Paul faced his difficulties at Ephesus, what reaction did they produce upon his mind? "It is my purpose to tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost, for a great door and effectual is open unto me, **and**"—not **but**—"there are many adversaries." The presence of difficulties did not qualify his opportunity; they constituted it. At Ephesus he would stay precisely because that was where his work was to be done. There were the difficulties that needed to be overcome; there were the tasks that needed to be done. And the difficulties which we face in this work are here to prove the reality of our love for the Latin-American people and the genuineness of our convictions with regard to the work being done. For not a single difficulty has arisen in connection with this congress that our missionaries in Latin-America have not faced from the beginning. Everything we encounter is commonplace with them. If anybody expected that we could hold a conference like this without the difficulties, he must have been in ignorance of the conditions under which all work in Latin-America or North America or anywhere in the world is to be done.

Whether we really sympathize with the earnest men in Latin-America and with our own people there is going to be answered by the reality of the conviction and the intensity of the earnestness with which we enter upon this congress. I was impressed today by a phrase in the prayer in which we were led by Mr. John Wood at the close of the morning session when he asked God that we might be given the will to stand with those whom we have sent and to stand behind them. It is much easier to stand behind them than to stand with them, and what we are proposing to do in this conference is to go to the conditions under which men of Latin-America and the churches and the missionaries are doing their work and confer with them in the midst of those conditions.

And what are the questions that have arisen since this undertaking was first projected a year ago to cause any hesitation in any mind as to its practicability? Questions have arisen in some minds with regard to the location, as to whether Panama had been wisely chosen or whether it might not be best even now to move the conference to some other place. That question was considered with

the greatest care at the very outset. It was open to the committee at the beginning to hold the conference either in Latin-America or in the United States. There was no question whatever as to which of these two was the wiser choice to make. The unanimous sentiment of all the workers in Latin-America was that it should be held in Latin-America. The most injudicious thing that could have been done would have been to project that conference in the United States, to consider here, far away from the evangelical churches and their leaders in Latin-America, the problems that were their chief concern. The wise and judicious thing, the only judicious thing, was to mingle with them in their own air and study with them their problems in their own lands. Furthermore, it was chiefly desired by the Latin-American churches and missionaries themselves that one of the chief outcomes of this conference should be the sympathetic presentation to the mind of the church at home of the conditions in Latin-American fields such as could never be given unless a large body of men and women should have actual personal and sympathetic contact with these conditions. Therefore, they asked that the conference should not be here in the United States, bringing men and women from Latin-America here, but that men and women from the United States might go there and come back with first hand knowledge, as extensive and accurate as possible in a short time, of the conditions and problems. We have had our precedents set for us in the various Pan-American Scientific and Educational Conferences held in previous years. These have been held both in Latin-American lands and in the United States, and chiefly and properly in the Latin-American countries themselves.

Then the question was opened as to where in Latin-America the conference should be held. There were three immediate suggestions, Panama, Rio de Janeiro, and Buenos Aires. It was difficult to hold such a conference in Rio. Brazil is Portuguese, and the rest of the continent is Spanish. Buenos Aires was the most extreme possibility as regarded accessibility and convenience. It was out of the question to take as many people to Buenos Aires as ought to attend this conference. Furthermore, the sentiment of missionaries and native leaders was that just at this time, after the opening of the Panama Canal, we could much more easily gather these men and women there than in any other Latin-American center, and more easily than in any center in the United States. It was from Brazil that Panama was most earnestly urged. There has no question arisen with regard to the wisdom of the site of the conference that would not have arisen in a more aggravated form, more difficult to answer, in connection with any other place that might have been chosen.

The time has been questioned, as to whether in the midst of a great war we were choosing wisely to meet. Well—no time can ever be found that is absolutely propitious. There will always be difficulties. That man who postpones what ought to be done in the hope that a new day will be better than this day will find the new day to be beset with difficulties of which he did not dream.

As for the definition and declared purpose of such a gathering, set forth so as to make that definition suitable to everyone,—re-

garding what missionary problem on earth can such absolutely unanimous definition be made? You never can put in any one formula a statement of attitude and purpose that will satisfy all Christian men who are trying to carry the gospel anywhere or to deal with any great spiritual or moral problem in Europe or in South America or here in the United States. It cannot be done in regard to any of the great problems of North America or of Latin-America.

As a matter of fact, we go to Panama on precisely the same platform and basis on which our churches exist in the United States and on which our missions in Latin-America are planned, on the basis on which they are actually at work now. There are these churches and missions all over the Latin-American field. On what ground are they there? On that very ground we are to gather at Panama to discuss our work. All our mission boards that are interested in this congress have their missionary activities in both North and South America. The Board of Foreign and Domestic Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church has its bishops and missions in the Philippines, Panama, Mexico, Cuba, Porto Rico, and Brazil. The Anglican Church has its bishops and missions in Argentina and on the West coast of South America. The Home and Foreign Missionary Societies of the Methodist Episcopal Church have their missions established already in Cuba, in Mexico, in Brazil, in Chili, in Argentina, in Uruguay, in Paraguay, in Bolivia and in Peru. The Baptist churches, North and South, have their missions already in Mexico, Cuba and Brazil and Argentina and Costa Rica. Our Presbyterian churches, North and South, have their missions in Mexico, Guatemala, Porto Rico, Cuba, Colombia, Chili and Brazil. The missions are all there. What are we doing in and through these missions? Why, we go down in them to make the Latin-American peoples realize that we are their friends. We are going to them with sympathy and good will and the desire to be of help. We carry the Bible, the gospel of a living Christ and a free and open school. That is what our missions are for. On precisely the same basis do we intend to gather at Panama, and not a single question arises that has not already arisen and been faced and answered by all missions that are carrying on work in any of the Latin-American lands. Any question regarding the propriety of the Panama conference runs clear back of the Panama conference to the propriety of the existence of these missions, and whatever answer we have been able to give ourselves that is satisfactory with regard to the existence of these missions should satisfy us assuredly with regard to this conference in which we propose to meet simply to discuss work we have already established and are carrying on.

The Congress is based upon existing facts. Our missions in Latin-America are existing facts. They are not being created by the Panama congress. There they are, these little groups of men and women, often in isolated and lonely places. There they are now, and if any body of missionaries anywhere in the world have a right to ask of the agencies that sent them out that these agencies should do in their support everything they should do in support of

other missions in the United States, in China, in Japan, in India and other sections of the world, our missions in Latin-America have the right to ask that of us.

The Latin-America evangelical churches are an existing fact, and it was they who asked for this conference. This conference did not originate in New York, in America, in Canada, in Edinburgh. It originated in the mind of the Latin-American churches themselves. They exist, and if ever a World's Conference on Faith and Order is to be held on the basis on which it has been projected, if ever a conference should be held of all Christian churches, evangelical churches of Latin-America have their standing there. Indeed, I notice in the list of churches which have appointed their commissions to arrange for the Conference on Faith and Order the names of the representatives of the Anglican Church of Argentina. And some of the great independent churches—two of them in Brazil, are ecclesiastically related to no church in England or America. These churches have their own existence; they have their own rights. Is anybody to say that the Latin-American churches are not to be entitled to hold a conference on their own soil, that the churches of Brazil, Argentina, Panama, Chili, and Mexico, may not come together and confer about their own problems, in their own lands? These Latin-American churches exist, and they turn to us and ask us to aid them as we have been ready to aid existing churches in other great lands.

The men of Latin-America who are not connected with any church whatever exist,—hundreds, thousands, millions of them. Many of these men are men with a religious temper. They are men who have deeply on their heart the moral and spiritual needs of their own people. Some of these men are responsible for the existence of our missions in Latin-America. The Methodist Church of Argentina is not the work of that body alone.

President Sarmiento invited them to send out women to start the work of the first normal schools in Argentina. Our Presbyterian Church did not originate the thought of establishing our mission in Guatemala. That was established because President Barrios, of Guatemala, met Dr. Ellinwood when on a trip and begged him to establish a Protestant mission in that land, and offered to pay the expenses of the missionary. The work in Bolivia was not thrust in upon Bolivia by the will of any one from without. The educational work there was invited, and like Mr. Morris's schools in Argentina is subsidized by the Government and the Protestant Missions have been urged by leading Bolivians to extend their work. These men exist, these thousands of men who think earnestly about their problems, who bewail the prevalent irreligion, and the inadequacy of any great living, spiritual energies to fashion those lands. Republican in form of government, how can they be republican in spirit without those great principles of the Reformation which must underbase all democratic institutions? They bewail the want of these things. Have they no right to ask that agencies shall come and co-operate with them to help to supply these re-

deeming, creative, national, constructive forces which they wish to have operative among their people?

And also the relationships between North and South America exist. How are they to be dealt with? You do not escape from the necessity of putting religion into these relationships by abandoning the proposed conference at Panama. These relationships stand out as furnishing one of the most clear and exacting challenges to the Christian Church. What will the next generation say to us if we allow our relationships between North America and South America to become absolutely secularized, if we allow those bonds to be simply commercial and political, if we do not seal them with ties of friendship in faith and bonds of religious sympathy and conviction as well?

And the opportunities and needs are there in every one of these Latin-American fields. They are greater and more appealing today than they have ever been before. We spent six weeks this last summer traveling to and fro in the Philippine Islands, visiting all the main islands but one, and fourteen of the greatest and most important provinces. If any man wants to see the need and opportunity—well, let him go not to any Latin-American land, but let him go first of all out into the Philippine Islands. In all of these Asiatic fields today, as any man knows who has been there, the fields are white to the harvest, but nowhere whiter than in the Philippine Islands. There are six hundred thousand children in the public schools using the English language from the first moment they come in as little children in the primary schools. They speak English every day. Then there are the fifty thousand in the intermediate and higher schools alone. I never saw more responsiveness in audiences than that of those high school boys and girls in every provincial capital. In every provincial high school they have anywhere from two to eight hundred students gathered, boys and girls flocking up to get the highest education the province can offer. You cannot hold evangelistic meetings in the community without at once having to deal with a large number of these students. If you go in to the school and speak on any living moral question, on which it would be appropriate to speak in a public school, you have the whole audience before you, like dry soil thirsting for rain. Nowhere is there anything more appealing than to have those eager, anxious faces looking up at you. Religious questionings, religious inquiry, have been awakened in their minds. You cannot satisfy them by telling them that they must suppress all that. They are bound to find men and women who will answer these questions of theirs. If the Christian church that carries the open Bible with it cannot find its duty here among those eager, questioning spirits, where will it find its duty anywhere in the world? What is wanted in the Philippine Islands is wanted all through the length and breadth of Latin-America, and for that matter in North America as well. Any of you who know the conditions, know that every year this opportunity grows richer.

I have been in the churches in Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Chili, Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Mexico, and in every one of these fields, there are tens of thousands of men and women today who

have no church connection at all, who are like sheep scattered abroad, having no shepherd. And among nominal Christians there are millions without the Bible and multitudes just as right here at home to whom the religion of the New Testament is unknown. Who dare say that those who love Christ may not go to these, that they owe no debt to them? It is in their interest that we gather in this congress in Panama. The one great need of those lands, a need involving no warfare with anyone, who does not himself wage it, plunging us into no polemics, except as others wield them, involving only that which we are to do in love,—is to carry to all lands just the two things that they require, the Bible open to anyone to read and the living Christ who is adequate to all the needs of the world.

On the Luneta in the City of Manila, in the beautiful green park that runs along the water front, looking north westward across the waters of the bay to the far distant islands behind which the sun goes down, there are two striking monuments. One represents a soldier and a priest standing side by side, Legaspi and Urdeneta the Spanish soldier who was the first great conqueror of the Philippines and the friar who came with him and was the first representative of the church. Just a little below is the monument to Jose Rizal the mention of whose name sends a quiver through every young Filipino heart, because he stands to them for patriotism and loyalty and sacrifice for principle even unto death. Who put these two monuments there? Not the Spanish government. Not the Roman church. The monuments of Legaspi and Urdeneta had been sent out from Spain, and lay un-set-up in Manila until the Americans came. The American government put them both up, testifying fearlessly to its recognition of the past of the Philippine Islands, to what the Spanish government had done,—no small work, and to what the Roman Catholic Church had done,—a vastly greater work, to what Rizal had done in starting the movement that issued in the emancipation of the Philippine Islands. A new spirit and a new national ideal set these up fearlessly in tribute to what was great in the past. But what had they done,—these three and the influences which they symbolized? Had they done what one sees today in the Philippines? Not so. What is going on there today, the tingling of a new life that runs with a thrill of inspiration through the islands, the spirit of freedom, the hunger for truth, all the boundless hope,—something else brought that in. That came only when the doors opened and other forces began to work and when the open Bible was carried in through the gates of Manila and scattered to and fro across the islands, when men came with something better than the crucifix,—with the living Christ, who was hung upon it, and who was taken down from it, who is not there now, but alive and abroad in the world. With that message, as Dr. MacKenzie put it the other evening, our missions have gone to Latin-America. With that, who dare say them nay? We go down to Panama with that. Whosoever has that, how can he stay back from going to pray and plan with the churches of Brazil and Argentina and Chili and Mexico and the United States, of our own and these neighboring lands, upon what needs to be done not tomorrow, but today?