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Coming conflicts for liberty : a  
Thanksgiving sermon, preached  
November 30th, 1899, at a Union  
service in the First Baptist Church  
of Fall River, Mass.

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*Boston University*

COMING CONFLICTS

...FOR...

LIBERTY

**A Thanksgiving Sermon**

Preached November 30th, 1899, at a Union  
Service in the First Baptist Church  
of Fall River, Mass.

BY

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# SERMON

When these things begin to come to pass, look up, and lift up your heads ; because your redemption draweth nigh. Luke 21 : 28.

The “things” are the distress of nations previously mentioned. the wars and rumors of wars, nation rising against nation and kingdom against kingdom, men fainting for fear and for expectation of the things which are coming, for the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. Our Lord was speaking primarily of the destruction of Jerusalem, and of revolutions which were included in the same course of events. Though, according to Matthew’s record, he was referring both to the destruction of Jerusalem, and to the ultimate consummation of history. He would thus be in accord with the method of Old Testament prophets and with the laws of history. Lord Bacon truly said that “prophecy hath a springing and germinant fulfilment.” The great movements of history are essentially one in principle in all periods of time ; at least in so far as they are movements of progress and evolution.

In a world of mingled good and evil, progress comes through conflict, and can come in no other way. Truth has its seers, its discoverers and early proclaimers. Sooner or later it meets opposition ; for preexistent stupidity and ignorance are to be put out of the way, the error that was latent in men’s minds is to be discovered and removed and the already existing error, which pre-occupied the ground, is to be overcome. In like manner righteousness has its seers, and the establishment of righteousness requires various revolutions and reforma-

tions; for in greater or less extent unrighteousness occupies the ground. It does not yield willingly; it is often entrenched and sometimes powerful; and then the conflict is seldom limited to one of discussion. Unrighteousness puts forth its power, and can be removed only by an overcoming power. Such has been the fact for ages, and such it is likely to be until the power of evil in the world is broken. There are periods when the existence of evil is not clearly understood; there are later periods of discussion when a crisis is preparing, and still later there are periods when a crisis has come, and decisive results are reached, sometimes in one way sometimes in another.

In the passage from which my text is taken our Lord referred to a period of crisis: I believe the world is now entering upon another period of crisis in which the conflict will have wider range than it has ever had before. The 19th century has been one of marvelous mental activity, in all departments of thought old beliefs have been revised, well or ill, with great advance on the whole. Many new fields of investigation have been entered for the first time, far reaching and important results have been attained. In practical life there have been numerous discoveries, inventions and applications of science, in consequence of which there are instrumentalities for human use more and mightier than ever before. All practical life is taking on new forms; enterprises both of good and evil are becoming more gigantic and are reaching out over a wider field than hitherto. The railway, the steamship and the telegraph have brought all parts of the earth into closer relations, into practical contact. In its inter-actions the world is becoming one as never before. But it is world of good and evil still. There are many and violent antagonisms, in thought, usages, institutions. To bring

them into contact is to bring them into conflict, and many such conflicts confront the man of the 20th century. The 19th century has been one of preparation, the 20th will be one of crisis. As civilization has gone every where, making explorations, seeking and finding new regions for activity, new materials for its use, new products and new markets, and frequently finding men benighted, in stagnation of life, incompetent to use the resources of the territory they occupy, a new and mighty impulse has developed among the nations of civilization—the impulse to take possession of territory hitherto unoccupied by civilization, to develop and use its resources, and to bring its inhabitants under the agencies of civilized and progressive life. Much is to be said in favor of the impulse in itself considered. The empty or partially occupied spaces of the world were made for occupation, not for desolation, for life, and development, not for stagnation and waste. There is a sense in which barbarians have no right to that which they cannot use, and they certainly have no right to be left in barbarism. So sane a man as Mr. James Bryce has written of the law of nature which everywhere over the world has tempted or forced a strong civilized power to go on conquering the savage or half civilized peoples on its borders. For myself I do not like some of the implications of that word conquer. There is much to be said in favor of the impulse and there is much to be said against the spirit and the manner in which it has been manifested. To discuss that, however, would take me away from my present course of thought. The impulse exists, and is now widely active. For several generations it has been moving some of the nations of Christendom. One of the earliest and mightiest of the movements was that by which the central regions of North America were occupied by those who became the founders of

these United States. The whole world is now rapidly coming under the more or less definite control of the nations of Christendom. What nations shall dominate? What spirit shall have the ascendancy? What institutions shall prevail? These questions will be practically answered during the 20th century, possibly during the first half of it. It has not improperly been said that in the answer given will be found the supreme significance of this age.

There are about fifty million square miles of land upon the surface of the globe. Of these Great Britain occupies twelve millions, or nearly one quarter, and may in time increase the amount to sixteen millions. Russia occupies eight and a half millions and may increase the amount to thirteen millions. For the last three hundred and eighteen years Russia has been increasing her territory at the rate of twenty-one thousand square miles every year. No other such increase was ever made in the world's history before. It is all contiguous territory, in one solid block, like the continental territory of the United States; and it already includes a large part of two continents. The Ural mountains are no barrier, shutting off one part from another. In their highest peaks they are no higher than Mount Washington. Many openings among them are not more than three thousand feet above sea level, and the upward gradual slope of the continent towards them is like the slope of our continent from the Mississippi to Colorado. Much of Russian territory has hitherto been practically inaccessible for lack of means of intercommunication. It is rapidly becoming less so. The Trans-Siberian railroad from St. Petersburg to Port Arthur, now half built, will be six thousand miles long, and will be completed in two or three years. It is a trunk line crossing great rivers which are the avenues of commerce, and important

branch lines are also projected. Of late this railroad has attracted considerable attention but another railroad which is perhaps more important to Russia is the Trans-Caspian, which runs along the borders of Persia, Afghanistan and India, with probable branches southward to the Persian Gulf and northward to connect with the Trans-Siberian. It is already completed to the Chinese frontier and may eventually extend through the very heart of the Chinese empire. Both of these lines were built primarily for military purposes.

It has been mistakenly supposed that a great part of Siberia is a waste and worthless region, but the fact is quite the contrary. There is nothing in Russia like the American alkaline plains, the steppes are like our prairies on either side of the Mississippi and are exceedingly fertile. Northern Siberia is covered with invaluable forests, hidden beneath the earth are vast mineral treasures of all kinds, in the region of Baku two billion gallons of crude petroleum were brought to the surface last year. In Europe southwestern Russia is congested with population. To Russian citizens who may emigrate, but to no others, the government gives eighty acres of land and, if need be, loans without interest, fifty dollars. Emigrant trains on the Trans-Siberian are numerous and crowded, there are stations established every few miles, and many villages are springing up. Half way between the Ural mountains and Lake Baikal is the town of Obb. Three years ago not a house was there; there are now many fine buildings and a population of fourteen thousand. Petropavlovsk has twenty thousand inhabitants; four hundred miles to the east, Omsk has forty thousand; three hundred and fifty miles further east, on a branch railroad, Tomsk has a university with three hundred students, has electric light and a telephone system.

The government efficiently promotes the material welfare of the people, but does not favor a high spiritual development. It is despotic; no government on the earth is more so. It was hoped the young Czar would be a liberal but he has taken pains to say in a public utterance that he would with all his strength protect the principle of autocracy. He is not the real ruler, however. No one man can administer the government over so large a territory, or over one hundred and thirty millions of a most prolific people, who increase at the rate of two millions yearly. The Czar is dependent upon his ministers and the real government is bureaucratic, rigorous, relentless and all controlling. Any liberal temper of the Czar is repressed by telling him that it will imperil his autocracy. Liberal movements of the people are fiercely suppressed and for the most part prevented. In internal administration one of the main purposes of the government to-day is the consolidation of the empire by the thorough unification of the people. There are various races in the empire, but the peasantry are already uniform in social ideas because of their identity of occupation, social and civil institutions, language and religion. The German population of the Baltic provinces is denied religious liberty, the use of the German language, and education, except in conformity with governmental ideas. In violation of the solemn pledge of the Czar, Finland is now denied self government under Russian suzerainty, and is being thoroughly Russianized. Jews, Stundists and other dissenters are subjected to limitations so severe that they often prefer exile. There is no personal liberty. Every native Russian must have a passport which must be renewed annually for a price. He cannot go from home for twenty-four hours without showing his passport, and if he would cross the Russian frontier he must have a

special passport giving him permission. There is no freedom of the press or of speech. Everything to be printed must be submitted to the government censor, and an imprudent remark may suddenly put the speaker in prison. There is no public opinion for there is no possibility of forming or organizing it. Education is under rigid control. For the peasantry a maximum limit of education is prescribed beyond which education may not extend. It includes reading, writing and the simple rules of arithmetic and a certain training in religion according to the tenets of the Greek church. In secondary schools general geography and history are disfavored. Public libraries are allowed only under government supervision. The religion of the empire is that of the Greek church. Its doctrines, forms, services and its officials are all absolutely under the control of a bureau called the Holy Synod. In the sphere of religion are found the highest ideals of a people. The God of the Greek church is a being whose rule is represented by the Czar, who rules by divine right. The chief duties of piety are the duties of formal worship, of obedience to existing powers and of submissive content with their lot. The Greek church has never known a renaissance or a reformation. None would be permitted. In their way, the people are very devout; but their condition is one of utter mental stagnation. Elaborate and magnificent ceremonies take the place of rational discernment and spiritual activities. The Russian peasant regards the Czar with religious devotion and holds with the utmost tenacity that it is the God-given mission of Russia to take possession of the rest of the world. In this he does but express the purpose of the government which is pursued with persistent determination from generation to generation. In a recent number of the North

American Review a Russian official expressed the conviction that the culture of the western world tends to anarchy and that the introduction of it into China would be harmful to the Chinese people.

The Russian officials are not subject to removal through the triumph of any party in an election; there are no elections, or political parties in Russia, The bureaucracy is permanent: like the king it never dies. Therefore, in part, the relentless persistency of national aims and purposes. No other diplomacy is so subtle, so astute, so unscrupulous and so far reaching as the Russian; making preparations, securing concessions often apparently unimportant but never really so, concealing its designs and biding its time. Much is accomplished by successive concessions secured by diplomacy. Beyond that the government is opportunist in its policy. In aggressive movements the army is massed in the background, then when a coveted territory is unguarded, because the defenders are occupied elsewhere, the Russian comes in force and the territory changes owners. When once the Russian is in full possession there are no open doors. Russian institutions are established, Russian spirit is dominant, Russian power holds everything in subjection. This is the power which, today, is one of the most aggressive in the world. It has a standing army on a peace footing of more than eight hundred and thirty-five thousand men, the largest in the world; and upon a war footing the army numbers two and one-half millions, with the countless peasantry to draw on for more. Up to a certain limit Russia develops material welfare, but it holds all the conditions of welfare absolutely under imperial control. It knows nothing of civil liberty for the people, still less of political liberty. Intellectual, spiritual and religious liberty are rigorously denied. The people are subjects; the

government holds them as its own. And the mission of this government is to take possession of the world!

It has one chief antagonist, England. The methods by which England has acquired its vast territory should often be condemned. It makes early resort to force where with tact and time the same end might be reached without force, But once in possession, English administration has always been uplifting. It promotes public welfare; it educates and inspires; it trains for liberty, increasingly gives it and maintains it. Under home administration no people have larger liberty than the English. In form many of the institutions are aristocratic, in form the government is a monarchy, but in spirit it is popular, a government of the people. In the world's arena to-day Russia and England represent the antagonistic forces. The outlook for world-supremacy is Slav or Saxon. Other nations group themselves about one or the other of these two. In the Greco-Turkish war this grouping was manifest. In spite of national jealousies and ambitions, the logic of events is likely to make this grouping more positive and significant hereafter.

Through the conflicts of many centuries a few nations of Western Christendom have secured a comprehensive liberty and the beginnings of a multiform development. The question at issue for the next century is a similar liberty for the world, with an enlightened Christianity as the spring of it; or a world-wide despotism using a degenerate Christianity as one of its most effective tools. The conflict will be no mimic make-believe. It will be most earnest, intense, fateful. To work out liberty will take more than one century. But the decision whether in the governmental institutions of the world there shall be liberty or not may be reached in the lifetime of some of the children of today.

In an entirely different realm of life another contest is coming for the liberty of the many against the despotism of the few. The same primal causes which have led to the extension of national territory have also led to the extension of business enterprises. The railroad, the steamship, the telegraph, bringing distant regions into contact and making the world one, have required a great deal wider range of business enterprise than was possible in the old times. The manufacturing and commercial peoples of the world are still few. The world is increasingly open to them and dependent upon them. For the time at least there must be a great extension of operations. A century ago corporations began to take the place of individuals, factories took the place of home manufacture. There have been evils under these conditions, which were sometimes serious evils. The interests of the small stockholder were not always regarded by those holding a controlling number of shares. The interests of capital and labor, theoretically identical, were often in specific cases and for definite times, positively but needlessly antagonistic. This was one stage in an increasing transformation. By accident sometimes, by exceptional opportunities sometimes, by exceptional ability or by shrewdness and unscrupulousness some corporations became very powerful and simultaneously very ambitious. They first distanced their competitors, then crushed them. In the wider range of enterprise competition of the old type failed, combination came instead. Under the circumstances a certain amount of combination must come, and come to stay. It was but an adaptation of enterprise to the needs and possibilities of the times.

The rapid increase of what were first called trusts has been one of the most astounding phenomena of recent years. It has been called, without exagger-

ation, I believe, the most stupendous revolution ever made in the world's industry. As yet it is appreciated by but very few: as yet the results have hardly begun to be manifest. Six months ago it was said that only eleven commodities were free from the control of the trusts. A certain amount of combination is warranted. Something depends on the compass of combination: more depends on the nature of it. No one man can exercise civil control over a hundred and thirty millions of people, nor can he properly superintend the work of his ministers. As little can any manager or board of direction properly administer the gigantic corporation upon which many millions of people depend for their supply of some single need. As regards the nature of combinations, there are some in which promotion of the welfare of the people is included, and there are others organized for private interest, for power and control. The one may be demanded by the condition of the times and be a public benefaction, a long stride in human progress. The other is a monopoly, a despotism, a crime against humanity.

Many facts go to show that the combinations of recent years have not been made in the interest of public welfare. There are some States of the Union whose provisions for incorporation and whose laws respecting corporations carefully protect public welfare. Few if any of the great combinations have sought incorporation under the laws of those States. They have gone to the States where laws give little or no protection to the public. In combination of previously existing corporations there has commonly been a capitalization shockingly excessive. Trusts capitalized at eight billions of dollars represent three billions of actual value. The other five billions represent the amount of public robbery which the trusts propose to



commit. Combinations are made for the sake of reducing the cost of manufacture with a corresponding reduction of the cost to the consumer, it has been said. It is well known, on the contrary, that many of the combinations have raised prices as soon as organized. One competent investigator has examined the facts in the cases of four hundred combinations and found that only two had reduced the price to the consumer. The increased profit does not go to the wage earners, who are sometimes fewer in number under the new arrangement. It does not go to the consumer as most of it should. It goes to swell the treasury of the combinations. Some large manufacturers are authority for the statement that, in their respective lines, the consumer often pays one hundred per cent. in excess of the cost, including a fair profit for the manufacturer. One of the largest and richest corporations, having practically a monopoly of its product, is said to have paid ninety-four per cent. in three years. Increasingly the new combinations are absorbing related industries and driving out of business those previously engaged in them. To employ their rapidly accumulating capital they are similarly entering the field of industries in no way related to their own, and take possession there. They use their power to prevent others from entering upon any business in which the corporation is engaged and to prevent them from using resources already in their possession. Thus they destroy liberty of industry. Instances are not few where they evade or defy the law. It is even their habit to do so, with contemptuous insolence. This is their loyalty to the government which gives them their opportunities, and gives them protection. They have spent large sums in corrupting legislatures and other departments of the government. This is

their good citizenship and their patriotism, their infamy rather. They have repeatedly evaded and are in the habit of evading taxation. The town of Pullman is owned by a rich corporation having but few members. It has paid taxes merely upon the farm value of the land. "One assessor in Chicago paid twenty thousand dollars to be elected. His remuneration from the city, county and state was five dollars a day for less than four months. The deficit and a large additional sum was made up by contributions from large tax payers."

The control of these great combinations is in few hands and the profits go into the same hands. One manufacturer recently sold out his interest in a great corporation for one hundred million dollars and retired on an income of nearly one hundred thousand dollars a week, having large wealth besides in other directions. What right has any man to an income even remotely approaching such a sum? The world is not for the few; with all its resources it is for its entire population. It is God's gift to all his children. What right have the captains of industry to take for their own whatever they can lay their hands on? Are they not stewards? not in the sense that they are to deal out to others such portion of their unrighteous income as may seem good to themselves; but in the sense that in their administration of industry they are primarily to serve God and man, to promote public welfare and secure their own only as partaking with others. Is not their ability to be captains of industry given them as a trust for mankind? Did Gen. Grant claim as his own the territory which his military genius conquered? Not without reason has it been said by a prominent writer upon sociology that many of the wealthiest members of society are the greatest criminals, that those who pose as the greatest philanthropists are public plunderers. They are wielding a power greater

than any king has wielded, and are rapidly bringing industry into a state of feudalism. Carroll Wright has well said that the organization of industry contains in itself the moral, intellectual, psychological and physiological elements which are the essential factors of human life.

The feudal condition of industry cannot long continue. It has been made possible by a stage in the development of mankind and a stage in the development of the resources of the world which are both necessarily transitional. The various peoples of the world are not perpetually to be dependent on a few nations of Christendom. The earth's resources are not to be perpetually under the control of those few nations; and the first stage in the development of those resources will pass away. But long before the transition to a fuller life of mankind has been completed, the feudal conditions of the present will have been brought to an end by far-reaching social and industrial reformations. Not without conflict. Even now a conflict is impending, for industrial liberty, for deliverance from a plutocratic despotism such as the world has never before seen. It will be, in its inner meaning, a conflict for human brotherhood in the industrial sphere, as the contest for civil liberty is a contest for brotherhood in the civil sphere. The principles of the kingdom of Christ are at the heart of all these conflicts. We need not regret when the conflict grows severe, when the crisis approaches. It is an occasion of thanksgiving rather. The world will not permanently go backward; the kingdom of Christ will not go down in any conflict. It is through the conflicts of righteousness that the kingdom comes. When they do come, when the crisis approaches, "look up and lift up your heads because your redemption draweth nigh."