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THE PROTECTION OF NATIVE RACES

**A STATEMENT SUBMITTED BY REV. DR. R. P. MACKAY, SECRETARY
FOR FOREIGN MISSIONS OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
IN CANADA, TO A JOINT MEETING OF THE COMMIT-
TEE OF REFERENCE AND COUNSEL AND
ADVISORY COUNCIL OF THE FOREIGN
MISSIONS CONFERENCE OF NORTH
AMERICA AT NEW YORK ON
23rd DECEMBER, 1913.**

In September and October, 1909, articles appeared in "TRUTH" making grave charges against the Peruvian Amazon Company as to their treatment of Indians in the Putumayo District. These charges were so serious, that their publication led immediately to three separate investigations, the first by Sir Roger Casement, sent out by the British Foreign Office in July, 1910; the second by a Commission of Inquiry sent out by the Peruvian Amazon Company itself, in the same year, 1910; and the third by Dr. Romolo Paredes, sent out by the Peruvian Government in 1911. All three reports confirmed and established the charges made in "Truth," that outrageous atrocities were being committed against the Indians. The crimes charged included murder, torture, violation, constant floggings of a barbarous nature, and other acts of unspeakable cruelty. These charges were not cited as isolated instances of barbarities, but were, it was stated, parts of a regular system of administration.

It appears that the Peruvian Amazon Company was registered as a British Company in 1907, and that its Board consisted of eight members—three of them British, the others being Peruvian and French—and that the Peruvian Directors—Senor Arana and his friends, controlled 83% of the voting power.

The report states that "Insatiable desire to obtain the greatest production of rubber in the least time and with the least possible expense was the chief cause of crime. The Indians who did not comply with the requirements imposed, were tortured or killed outright, while stubborn ones were compelled with machete and bullet to fulfil the mandate of their masters. The greater the number of assassinations, the greater the production, which meant that the greater production was obtained over blood and dead bodies."

It appears that the territory of the Company in the Putumayo region, lying among the affluents of the Upper Amazon, comprises an area of from 10,000 to 12,000 square miles, and the defence of the British Directors was that they were ignorant of what was transpiring, that they had never visited

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the district, and that the management was in the hands of Arana and his friends. The affairs of the Company were administered by agents, of whom they knew nothing, and had taken no pains to inquire—men who in reality were, as the report says, “a gang of ruffians and murderers, who shot apparently from sheer wantonness and lust for blood—who burnt and tortured and violated in a spirit of wanton deviltry.” The Directors were severely censured for criminal neglect of duty and culpable ignorance—the more culpable because there had been warnings sufficient to excite suspicion and induce investigation if they had been as eager for humanity and justice as for the profits of the rubber trade.

That is in brief the story of the Putumayo atrocities as brought out by the commissions of inquiry, but as the investigation proceeded, the commissioners were impressed with the fact that ill-treatment of the Indians is not confined to the Putumayo, but rather that the Putumayo case is simply a shockingly bad instance of conditions that may be found over wide areas in South America. There is, the report states, “an increasing tendency to develop tropical regions by absentee and international capital, through the use of native labor, and when away from the influences of civilized opinion, men revert to methods that are indefensible and inhuman.”

Action of the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society. Upon the publication of these terrible revelations, the British Aborigines Protection Society took measures to induce the British Government to secure joint Anglo-American action with the object of bringing the criminals to justice and obtaining adequate reforms in Putumayo. They also appealed to the Governments of Brazil, Columbia and Argentine to co-operate in securing the arrest of escaping criminals, and they particularly agreed to seek to maintain a continuous pressure of organized public opinion throughout Great Britain and the United States.

On 1st August, 1912, in the debate on the Appropriation Bill, Sir Edward Grey devoted a considerable portion of his speech to the Putumayo Blue Book. He said it was the most horrible reading that had ever come before him—that of all the things that had ever faced him, in office or out of it, the accounts of the brutalities in Putumayo are the most appalling. But, said he, the question of responsibility for the past is a smaller issue than how to prevent a recurrence in the future. We have not been content simply to publish the Blue Book—we have taken all diplomatic means to urge the Peruvian Government to act, who alone have the right to act, and we have kept in closest touch with the United States, because we believe that public opinion in the United States must be as shocked and as sensitive as our own, and perhaps more so, because they are nearer the scene. I am very glad, he said, that the Government of the United States has appointed a Consul, as we have done, and the two Consuls are to visit the district together and report things as they actually are. Sir Edward added: “We know not what is going on at this moment; but the hope is that the presence of two Consuls will prevent a return to things as they were.”

Whilst two Consuls, if of the right type, can do much, what are they in areas so extensive, in which the temptations to such abuses are so strong, and laws so easily evaded? Enough has been proved to justify and demand more vigorous action than any that has yet been taken. Over four years have passed since the articles in "Truth" appeared, and three years have passed since the report of Sir Roger Casement thrilled with horror the hearts of men on both sides of the Atlantic—and yet nothing decisive has been accomplished, whilst in the meantime the helpless Indian perishes under the remorseless heel of the oppressor.

What has been done? There have been expressions of sympathy and indignation and calls to action, but action has not been forthcoming. That body has not yet been found that is willing to take up the burden of the Putumayo Indian and press the matter to a conclusion. The following is the process of events so far.—

1. In September, 1912, the British Aborigines Protection Society impressed with the importance of securing joint Anglo-American action, in dealing with a matter of such international delicacy, appealed to all friends of the native races in the United States to co-operate with them in bringing pressure to bear upon their respective Governments, and in arousing public opinion on the subject in these two countries.

2. "The Lake Mohonk Conference of Friends of the Indians and Other Dependent Peoples" met in October, 1912. They considered the resolution of the Aborigines Protection Society, and passed a sympathetic resolution in reply. They expressed appreciation of the action taken by the British and Peruvian Governments, and the hope that in response to the appeal of Sir Edward Grey, and of the Aborigines Protection Society, the people of the United States would co-operate in securing the abatement of the evil and the prevention of its recurrence. They also recommended that the co-operation of the Governments of Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Brazil, Colombia and Venezuela be sought, in order to secure an investigation of the entire rubber producing region of South America, with a view to such action as will conserve the rights of rubber companies and at the same time protect the rights of the Indians who labor for them. The Lake Mohonk Conference, let it be noted, is simply a deliberative body, which meets only for conference. It has no Executive, and takes no executive action. Nevertheless, a number of members of the Conference, including both Americans and Canadians, were so impressed with the importance and urgency of this matter that they formed a Provisional Organization of Friends of Native Races, in order, if possible, to give practical effect to the resolution of the Conference.

3. This Provisional Organization in turn passed a resolution, stating that this question involved international elements; that in Great Britain, the United States, France, Canada, Australia and other countries organizations already existed for the protection of the rights and interests of native races, and, therefore, recommended that an International Conference be called, consisting of representatives of all these existing organizations, and that the Aborigines Protection Society of Great Britain, as the oldest exist-

ing society, be invited to take the necessary steps to convene such Conference, and pledging their own co-operation as far as might be practicable.

4. In January, 1913, the Foreign Missions Conference of North America adopted a resolution, presented by the Committee of Reference and Counsel, embodying sentiments similar to those contained in the Lake Mohonk resolution, and giving assurances of hearty co-operation with the British Society in arranging for such an International Conference as was recommended.

5. In May, 1913, the British Society, having before it the resolutions of the Lake Mohonk Conference and of the Foreign Missions Conference, with the further suggestion that an initial International Conference be held at New York in October, 1913, decided that if satisfactory arrangements could be made in New York for such initial International Conference, they would gladly be represented. They did not, however, express willingness to assume the responsibility of calling and arranging for such a meeting in New York, which they probably thought could be much more satisfactorily done by friends on this side of the Atlantic.

6. This decision of the British Association having been reported to the Committee of Reference and Counsel, at a meeting held on the 19th June, 1913, it was deemed impracticable to hold such an International Conference in New York in the month of October, inasmuch as the Annual Meeting of the Continuation Committee of the Edinburgh Conference was to be held at The Hague on the 13th November, and members of the Committee of Reference and Counsel, who would desire and would naturally be expected to take part in any such International Conference when held, would be absent from New York at that time. It was accordingly agreed to refer the whole subject of "Native Races" to the Continuation Committee for their consideration at The Hague meeting in November.

7. The Continuation Committee met, and the matter was submitted, and a resolution adopted expressing sympathy with every effort to ameliorate the condition of depressed and subject races, but regretting their inability to regard the proposal as a responsibility which it would be practicable for the Continuation Committee to undertake under present conditions. They, however, recognizing the intimate bearing this question has on the progress of Christianity in all lands, recommended the holding of an informal Conference between representatives of the British Aborigines Protection Society and the Committee on Missions and Governments in Great Britain, to consider whether there are any matters in which helpful co-operation between the two Committees may be possible and desirable, and that the results of this conference be communicated to the Committee of Reference and Counsel of North America, to the Ausschuss in Germany, and to the individual members of the Continuation Committee in other countries.

Thus all attempts at securing such initiative as all agree to be necessary for adequate treatment of a grave situation have so far failed. As one has put it, "We are playing football with the question, and in the meantime the Indians are being killed."

The following remarks are offered in conclusion:—

1. Whilst the British Association is so far disappointed in not securing that measure of co-operation they seek in America, they are not idle. On the 25th November, 1913, they presented a memorial to the British Government, asking for the following legislation and action:—

(1) Such consolidation and extension of the Slave Trade Act as will make it more difficult for any company claiming British protection to evade the law, and will also throw upon directors the responsibility of knowing the law and studying more closely the conditions under which their employees labor.

(2) That there be a revision of British Anti-Slavery Treaties with foreign powers so as to insure their application to modern forms of slavery. At different periods in the past, the British Foreign Office has taken such action on its own initiative, which materially improved the conditions of native labor, and it is insisted that the time has come for further advance in the same direction.

(3) That specially instructed Consuls be appointed, whose duty it will be to visit the more inaccessible parts of the world, which would be in the interests of commerce, science and humanity.

As appears from Sir Edward Grey's speech, already referred to, the third recommendation has already been acted upon, so far as Putumayo is concerned, which will no doubt be fruitful in good results.

2. The British Society is also dealing vigorously with Portuguese slavery in West Africa. It appears that conditions are found in Angola and the Islands of San Thome and Principe, as atrocious as exist in South America, and the Society insists either that Portugal put an end to the slave trade, in every form, or that the British Government renounce the Treaty of 1661, which is still in force, and binds the British nation to defend and protect all conquests or colonies belonging to Portugal against all her enemies.

Whilst it is admitted that provisions respecting slavery are not in the treaty, yet they are in other engagements, and the Society contends that unless slavery is discontinued, Great Britain may find herself obliged, in obedience to the terms of the treaty, to put forth her strength in defense of slavery.

3. The British Society is still looking hopefully for such co-operation as the United States alone can give. Mr. Travers Buxton, Secretary of the Society, in a letter addressed to Rev. A. E. O'Meara, dated 12th December, uses the following words: "The disclosures in the report of Sir Roger Casement on conditions in the Putumayo, with subsequent Consular reports and other reports of an unofficial character, which have reached this country, have shown the need for common action by the British and United States Governments to bring pressure to bear upon the South American Governments to put a stop to the abuses attendant upon the exploitation of labor

in the Amazon Valley. Great Britain is interested in this question because of the British companies which are operating in different parts of South America, and the large amount of British capital which is invested in Southern and Central America. * * * The relation of the United States to these conditions is governed by the Monroe doctrine, and you will have noted that from the time when Sir Roger Casement was sent out, the British Government has always been careful to consult the United States Government in regard to the reports received. We know that Sir Edward Grey does not feel it possible to take action alone, but that it is on every ground desirable that our Government should act with that of the United States for the removal of the abuses.”

It thus appears that if co-operation is declined on this side of the Atlantic, it is not only a refusal to come to the aid of the down-trodden, but it places a handicap on others who wish to act, but feel unable to do so without such co-operation.

4. It is recognized that there is a special difficulty in taking the needed action on the part of the United States, inasmuch as it is said that there exist amongst South American republics jealousy and suspicion of United States intrusion—that in spite of all assertions to the contrary, they feel that Pan-Americanism really means, not “America for the Americans,” but “America for the North Americans.” If such a feeling exists, it is no doubt a reason for carefulness, but not for inaction. “We have not received the spirit of fear, but of power and of love, and of a sound mind.”

5. One can scarcely conceive a claim of greater urgency than this. If we are really animated by His Spirit, who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, there seems to be no option but to do something, and do it quickly, to put an end forever to the intolerable situation in the Putumayo and other South American districts.

6. Finally, let it be remembered that the work to be done is not confined to South America and West Africa. In Liberia, in Morocco, in Queensland, in the New Hebrides Islands, and in almost any place where native races are found, are also found wicked men ready to exploit them to their destruction. Efforts are being put forth to protect them, but the way is hard and discouraging because of political complications.

7. The American and British nations by joint action can hasten the advent of that day when the slave trade will be a thing of the past, and thus another step be taken towards the glad day when “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain—when the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.”

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**RESOLUTION OF FOREIGN MISSIONS CONFERENCE OF NORTH
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At its meeting held in January, 1914, the Foreign Missions Conference, upon recommendation of the Committee of Reference and Counsel, dealt with the subject of Dr. Mackay's statement by passing the following resolution:—

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“That this Conference confirms the resolution adopted in January, 1913, regarding the Putumayo Indians, and instructs the Committee of Reference and Counsel to take such steps as may be deemed advisable to promote such co-operation between the Governments of Great Britain, the United States and the South American Republics as will bring to an end as speedily as possible the painful conditions that exist in the rubber producing areas of South America.”

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