

# **THE FIRST HAGUE CONFERENCE**

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The First Hague Conference by Andrew D. White

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**ANDREW D. WHITE**

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## PREFACE

The meeting of the first Peace Conference at The Hague, on the 18th of May, 1899, marked the opening of a new era in human history. In the world's great peace movement it was an event of such cardinal significance that the peace workers in all nations have come by common consent to make the anniversary their chief day for the annual celebration and public presentation of their cause. The first Hague Conference was in germ the true Parliament of Man. The dream of the prophets and the song of the poets here found their first partial realization in plain prose. Only twenty-six of the fifty-nine governments claiming independent sovereignty in 1899 were represented at the Conference; but so profound was the influence of the Conference, and so clearly was it recognized that it represented the world's vitality and commanded its future, that at the second Conference, in 1907, forty-four governments sent delegates, representing practically the whole world. The second Conference made definite provision in its final act for the meeting of a third Conference after substantially the same interval as that between the first and second Conferences; and this means a fourth and a fifth — it means that the Conferences will be regular; and that in the lifetime of men now upon the stage the International Congress, composed of the official representatives of all nations, will assemble at stated times

to confer upon the mutual interests of the nations, as the Congress of the United States meets regularly to confer upon the mutual interests of the states in the Union. This is what was involved in the memorable meeting of the First Hague Conference in 1899.

To the history of this unique event the journal of Andrew D. White, which, by the kind consent of The Century Company, is reprinted in the present volume from his Autobiography, bears a unique relation. Mr. White was the head of our American delegation; and his careful journal, covering the whole period of the Conference, is the only similar record which has been published by any of the participants. It thus has a value as an original historical document not unlike in some respects that of Madison's journal in relation to our Constitutional Convention of 1787; and it has the additional value and charm of communicating the impression of the general social atmosphere and environment of the Conference. It will thus have a high and abiding interest in international history, and its publication in the present form will certainly find a wide and warm welcome.

Mr. White's own distinguished services at the First Hague Conference are so well known as to require no notice here. His part in the effort for the establishment of the Permanent Court of Arbitration, the greatest achievement of the Conference, was preëminent, second only to that of Sir Julian Pauncefote; he made the most important speech in the Conference in behalf of the immunity of private property from capture in maritime warfare; and he stood staunchly and influentially for every great constructive measure of the Conference. He

worked no less earnestly in behalf of the measures aiming to mitigate the inhumanities of war. The United States has been reproached by humane international men for its opposition in the Hague Conferences to the prohibition of asphyxiating bombs in war, an opposition in which at the Second Hague Conference it stood alone. It must not be forgotten that the action of the United States delegation at the first Conference was against the protest of Mr. White, the leader of the delegation. In no way, perhaps, did Mr. White render a greater service at The Hague than in the part he took in securing the adherence of Germany to the plan for the Permanent Court of Arbitration; and the pages of his journal devoted to this matter, including the full text of his letter to Baron von Bülow, will always possess a peculiar interest.

The history of the First Peace Conference at The Hague has been written by Frederick W. Holls, the secretary of the American delegation. This work was published in 1900, the year following the Conference. Soon after the second Conference Dr. James Brown Scott, technical delegate of the United States to the second Conference and therefore standing in a similar relation to the American delegation at that Conference to that in which Mr. Holls stood to the American delegation at the first Conference, published his exhaustive and valuable work, "The Hague Peace Conferences of 1899 and 1907." The American addresses at the Second Hague Conference have been gathered into a special volume by Dr. Scott, with prefatory surveys of the work of the second Conference by himself and by Hon. Joseph H. Choate and General Horace Porter of the

American delegation at the second Conference. There is also an admirable volume upon "The Two Hague Conferences" by Professor William I. Hull, who was present at The Hague in a journalistic capacity during the time of the second Conference in 1907, and whose book appeared the following year. In all of these volumes will be found the record of Mr. White's part in the first Conference, with reports especially of his address upon the exemption of private property from capture at sea in time of war, the report in Mr. Holls's history being complete. Mr. Holls also gives the full text of the address by Mr. White in honor of Hugo Grotius, in the Great Church of Delft, on July 4, 1899, when, in the presence of all the members of the Peace Conference, the Dutch Government and the diplomatic corps accredited to The Hague, and other distinguished visitors, he laid upon the tomb of Grotius a silver wreath in behalf of the government and people of the United States.

There are of course various valuable European works upon the Hague Conferences, but reference is made here simply to the American works which are easily available, and which together furnish our people with a complete record of the great work in which Mr. White was so conspicuous a figure. But among all the works relating to the first Conference, no other can ever possess the peculiar interest or make the strong personal appeal of Mr. White's journal, the careful preparation of which during the very course of the Conference was one of the most fortunate incidents of modern international history.

E. D. M.



## THE FIRST HAGUE CONFERENCE

### I

ON the 24th of August, 1898, the Russian Government proposed, in the name of the Emperor Nicholas II, a conference which should seek to arrest the constantly increasing development of armaments and thus contribute to a durable peace; and on the 11th of January, 1899, his minister of foreign affairs, Count Muravieff, having received favorable answers to this proposal, sent forth a circular indicating the Russian view as to subjects of discussion. As to the place of meeting, there were obvious reasons why it should not be the capital of one of the greater powers. As to Switzerland, the number of anarchists and nihilists who had taken refuge there, and the murder of the Empress of Austria by one of them shortly before, at Geneva, in broad daylight, had thrown discredit over the ability of the Swiss Government to guarantee safety to the conference; the Russian Government therefore proposed that its sessions be held at The Hague, and, this being agreed to, the opening was fixed for the 18th of May.

From the first there was a misunderstanding throughout the world as to what the Emperor Nicholas really proposed. Far and near it was taken for granted that he desired a general disarmament, and this legend spread

rapidly. As a matter of fact, this was neither his proposal nor his purpose; the measures he suggested being designed "to put an end to the constantly increasing development of armaments."

At the outset I was skeptical as to the whole matter. What I had seen of the Emperor Nicholas during my stay in Russia had not encouraged me to expect that he would have the breadth of view or the strength of purpose to carry out the vast reforms which thinking men hoped for. I recalled our conversation at my reception as minister, when, to my amazement, he showed himself entirely ignorant of the starving condition of the peasantry throughout large districts in the very heart of the empire. That he was a kindly man, wishing in a languid way the good of his country, could not be doubted; but the indifference to everything about him evident in all his actions, his lack of force even in the simplest efforts for the improvement of his people, and, above all, his yielding to the worst elements in his treatment of the Baltic provinces and Finland, did not encourage me to believe that he would lead a movement against the enormous power of the military party in his vast empire. On this account, when the American newspapers prophesied that I was to be one of the delegates, my feelings were strongly against accepting any such post. But in due time the tender of it came in a way very different from anything I had anticipated: President McKinley cabled a personal request that I accept a position on the delegation, and private letters from very dear friends, in whose good judgment I had confidence, gave excellent reasons for my doing so. At the same time came the names of my colleagues, and this led me to feel that the delegation

was to be placed on a higher plane than I had expected. In the order named by the President, they were as follows: Andrew D. White; Seth Low, President of Columbia University; Stanford Newel, Minister at The Hague; Captain Mahan, of the United States navy; Captain Crozier, of the army; and the Hon. Frederick W. Holls as secretary. In view of all this, I accepted.

Soon came evidences of an interest in the conference more earnest and widespread than anything I had dreamed. Books, documents, letters, wise and unwise, thoughtful and crankish, shrewd and childish, poured in upon me; in all classes of society there seemed fermenting a mixture of hope and doubt; even the German Emperor apparently felt it, for shortly there came an invitation to the palace, and on my arrival I found that the subject uppermost in his mind was the approaching conference. Of our conversation, as well as of some other interviews at this period, I speak elsewhere.<sup>1</sup>

On the 16th of May I left Berlin, and arrived late in the evening at The Hague. As every day's doings were entered in my diary, it seems best to give an account of this part of my life in the shape of extracts from it.

*May 17, 1899.*

This morning, on going out of our hotel, the Oude Doelen, I found that since my former visit, thirty-five years ago, there had been little apparent change. It is the same old town, quiet, picturesque, full of historical monuments and art treasures. This hotel and the neighboring streets had been decorated with the flags of various nations, including our own, and crowds were

<sup>1</sup> See June 12, pp. 56-57, below.