

**OUR COUNTRY: ITS
POSSIBLE FUTURE AND
ITS PRESENT CRISIS**

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Our Country: Its Possible Future and Its Present Crisis by Josiah Strong & Austin Phelps

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JOSIAH STRONG & AUSTIN PHELPS

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BY
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With an Introduction, by
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"We live in a new and exceptional age. America is another name for Opportunity. Our whole history appears like a last effort of the Divine Providence in behalf of the human race."—*Emerson*.

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INTRODUCTION.

THIS is a powerful book. It needs no introduction from other sources than its own. Its great strength lies in its facts. These are collated with rare skill, and verified by the testimony of men and of documents whose witness is authority. The book will speak for itself to every man who cares enough for the welfare of our country to read it, and who has intelligence enough to take in its portentous story.

It is worthy of note that almost all the thinking which thinking men have given to the subject for the last fifty years has been in the line of the leading idea which this volume enforces—the idea of *crisis* in the destiny of this country, and through it in the destiny of the world. The common sense of men puts into homely phrase the great principles which underlie great enterprises. One such phrase lies under the Christian civilization of our land. It is “the nick of time.” The present hour is, and always has been, “the nick of time” in our history. The principle which underlies all probationary experience comes to view in organized society with more stupendous import than in individual destiny. This book puts the evidence of that in a form of cumulative force which is overwhelming.

Fifty years ago our watchful fathers discerned it in their forecast of the future of the Republic. The wisest among them even then began to doubt how long the original stock of American society could bear the interfusion of elements alien to our history and to the faith of our ancestry. The conviction was then often expressed that the case was hopeless on any

theory of our national growth which did not take into account the eternal decrees of God. Good men were hopeful, only because they had faith in the *reserves* of might, which God held secret from human view.

Those now living who were in their boyhood then, remember well how such men as Dr. Lyman Beecher, of Ohio, and Dr. Wm. Blackburn, of Missouri, used to return from their conflicts with the multiform varieties of Western infidelity, to thrill the hearts of Christian assemblies at the East with their pictures of Western greatness, and Western perils. Those were the palmy days of "May Anniversaries." The ideas which the veterans of the platform set on fire and left to burn in our souls were three. The magnitude of the West in geographical area; the rapidity with which it was filling up with social elements, many of them hostile to each other, but nearly all conspiring against Christian institutions; and the certainty that Christianity must go down in the struggle, if Eastern enterprise was not prompt in seizing upon the then present opportunity, and resolute in preoccupying the land for Christ. Again and again Dr. Beecher said in substance on Eastern platforms: "Now is the nick of time. In matters which reach into eternity, now is always the nick of time. One man now is worth a hundred fifty years hence. One dollar now is worth a thousand then. Let us be up and doing before it is too late."

From that time to this the strain of appeal has been the same, but with accumulating volume and solemnity of warning. The fate of our country has been in what Edmund Burke describes as "a perilous and dancing balance." Human wisdom could at no time foresee which way the scales would turn. Every day has been a day of crisis. Every hour has been an hour of splendid destiny. Every minute has been "the nick of time." And this is the lesson which this volume emphasizes by an accumulated array of facts and testimonies and corollaries from them, the force of which can scarcely

be overstated. Fifty years of most eventful history have been piling up the proofs of our national peril, till now they come down upon us with the weight of an avalanche. Such is the impression which the argument here elaborated will make upon one who comes to it as a novelty, or in whose mind the facts have become dim.

One is reminded by it of the judgment which has been expressed by almost all the great generals of the world, from Julius Cæsar to General Grant, that in every decisive battle there is a moment of crisis on which the fortunes of the day turn. The commander who seizes and holds that *ridge* of destiny wins the victory. The conflict for the world's salvation partakes of the same character. And the facts and their corollaries massed together in this book show that nowhere is it more portentously true than in this country. Our whole history is a succession of crises. Our national salvation demands in supreme exercise certain military virtues. Vigilance in watching opportunity; tact and daring in seizing upon opportunity; force and persistence in crowding opportunity to its utmost of possible achievement—these are the martial virtues which must command success.

This volume presents, also, with a power which can scarcely be exceeded—for it is the power of the simple facts—the truth that Christian enterprise for the moral conquest of this land needs to be conducted with the *self-abandonment* which determined men would throw into the critical moment in the critical battle of the critical campaign for a nation's endangered life. What the campaign in Pennsylvania was to the Civil War, what the battle of Gettysburg was to that campaign, what the fight for Cemetery Hill was to that battle, such is the present opportunity to the Christian civilization of this country.

Turn whichever way we will—South, West, North, East—we are confronted by the same element of crisis in the outlook upon the future. Everything seems, to human view, to de-

pend on present and dissolving chances. Whatever can be done at all must be done with speed. The building of great States depends on one decade. The nationalizing of alien races must be the work of a period which, in a nation's life, is but an hour. The elements we work upon and the elements we must work with are fast precipitating themselves in fixed institutions and consolidated character. Nothing will await our convenience. Nothing is indulgent to a dilatory policy. Nothing is tolerant of a somnolent enterprise.

The climax of the argument appears in the view taken of the auxiliary relation of this country's evangelizing to the evangelizing of the world. One who studies even cursorily, the beginnings of Christianity will not fail to detect a masterly *strategy* in apostolic policy. Christian enterprise at the outset took possession first of strategic localities, to be used as the centers of church-extension. The first successes of Christian preachers were in the great cities of the East. The attractive spots, to the divine eye, were those which were crowded with the densest masses of human being. Not a trace do we find of labor thrown off at random in the apostolic tactics. As little do we discover of the spirit of romance. The early missions were not crusades for the conquest of holy places. They were not pilgrimages to sacred shrines. Martial ardor in the work was held well in hand by martial skill in the choice of methods and localities.

The same military forecast has ruled Christian missions from that day to this, so far as they have been crowned with great successes. How little of work and expenditure at haphazard has entered into the splendid structure of English and American missions to the heathen! How little has the spirit of romance or of æsthetic taste ever accomplished in evangelizing the nations! The two localities to which the romance of Christian enterprise would naturally turn are Palestine and Greece; the one as the home of our Lord, the other as the birthplace of art and culture. Yet how little, comparatively

speaking, have Christian missions achieved in either land! Labor has been as faithful and self-sacrifice as generous there as elsewhere; but in the comparison with other missions, where are the fruits?

Success in the work of the world's conversion has, with rare exceptions, followed the lines of human growth and prospective greatness. But a single exception occurs to one's memory—that of the Hawaiian Islands. Seldom has a nation been converted to Christ, only to die. The general law has been that Christianity should seat itself in the great metropolitan centers of population and of civilized progress. It has allied itself with the most virile races. It has taken possession of the most vigorous and enterprising nations. The colonizing races and nations have been its favorites. It has abandoned the dying for the nascent languages. Its affinities have always been for the youthful, the forceful, the progressive, the aspiring in human character, and for that stock of mind from which such character springs. By natural sequence, the *localities* where those elements of powerful manhood are, or are to be, in most vigorous development, have been the strategic points of which our religion has taken possession as by a masterly military genius.

The principles of such a strategic wisdom should lead us to look on these United States as first and foremost the chosen seat of enterprise for the world's conversion. Forecasting the future of Christianity, as statesmen forecast the destiny of nations, we must believe that it will be what the future of this country is to be. As goes America, so goes the world, in all that is vital to its moral welfare. In this view, this volume finds the superlative corollary of its argument.

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