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A Lecture on the Railroad to the Pacific [1850]

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Abstract

Colton delivered this lecture in support of a proposal by New York merchant **Asa Whitney** (1797–1872) to build a railway from Lake Michigan to the Pacific. Whitney's proposal called for Congress to sell him a strip of land sixty miles wide and 2,000 miles long through the public domain—a total of about 78 million acres at a price of 10 cents per acre. Whitney had spent time in Europe and in China, and was convinced that a rail link across North America would become the principal commercial route between Europe and Asia and be the means of bringing the nation's and the world's population into closer relations and harmony.

Whitney's plan was introduced in Congress in 1845 by Senator Zadock Pratt, and was debated for six years before it was finally defeated in 1851. Disagreements over the potential route and over the slave-holding status of the lands to be allotted contributed to its ultimate failure. Nonetheless, Whitney's aggressive publicity campaign helped popularize the idea and helped prepare the way for Congress's eventual passage of legislation in 1862 and the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad in 1869.

Colton's lecture recommends Whitney's plan on two major accounts: 1) that it would require no borrowing or government expenditure; and 2) that it would become the means for the conversion to Christianity of vast portions of the Asian peoples. He also notes that the western lands to be sold to Whitney were good for nothing else.

A
LECTURE

ON THE
RAILROAD TO THE PACIFIC.

DELIVERED, AUGUST 12, 1850, AT THE
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTE, WASHINGTON.

AT THE REQUEST OF NUMEROUS MEMBERS OF BOTH

HOUSES OF CONGRESS.

BY REV. CALVIN COLTON.

New York :

A. S. BARNES & Co., 51 JOHN STREET.

1850.

LECTURE.

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WHO HATH HEARD SUCH A THING? SHALL A NATION BE BORN AT ONCE?—Is. lxvi: 8.

WE live in a period of the world, when events of great interest and moment crowd rapidly upon each other's heels. Science, and art, and invention, allied to the provisions of nature, and coming to the aid of human enterprise, have multiplied and are multiplying the power of man for the accomplishment of his objects, in such amazing and amazingly increasing degrees, that science, and art, and invention themselves, in the utmost stretch of their combined force, would together halt, in any attempt to estimate the progress embodied in the results of their own agency in the hands of man. And what is the reason? I will tell you;—and I will explain it on principles of Christian philosophy: It is because the powers of God's providence, in the government of the world, employing men as instruments, are *cumulative*—cumulative from the beginning, from age to age, from one cycle of ages to another cycle, *precipitating* events, and precipitating greater and more important events, as time advances, till men are surprised by their quick and rapid succession. But a profound consideration of this great theme will show us, that we ought not to be surprised, and that these grand results, so suddenly bursting upon the world, are nothing more nor less than the legitimate effects of that vast, comprehensive, and mighty machinery of Providence, composed of man's faculties, intellectual, moral, and physical, in their connection with the provisions and agencies of nature; a machinery which has been in the progress of construction from the earliest period of man's history, which has been armed with new powers and new agencies, and endowed with higher capabilities, in every successive period of the world, and which, consequently, might be expected to display, in the progress of time, more impressive developments of its energy.

I come, then, directly to the main purpose of this discourse, which is to call your attention to one of the grand developments of this vast machinery of Providence, which, I think, is about to produce the most important results—results destined, as would seem likely, to change the current of human affairs, and gravely to affect the condition of nations. I mean the purpose now entertained of effecting a railroad connection from the Atlantic to the Pacific, across this continent. It

is, however, and chiefly, the religious and Christian aspects of the subject to which I desire to direct your attention. "Who hath heard such a thing? Shall a nation be born at once?"

This last question may be taken both in a political and spiritual sense, and both are pertinent to our subject; and it may be regarded either as affirmatively prophetic, or negatively didactic. It suits my present purpose to regard it as prophetic. Behold, for example, the Sandwich Islands, born to political and spiritual life in a single age. Behold Oregon, all grown up in a few short years, and now organized and in operation as a political and civil commonwealth. Behold California, which, five years ago, was almost unknown to the civilized world, now marching onward in the gigantic strides of an independent and powerful State, and attracting the attention of all nations. See Utah, a name not spoken among us till within a few weeks, and her place on the map of the world not yet defined, knocking at the door of the American Congress for recognition as a candidate for the high destiny of political life. Behold the entire field of the vast declivity of our western domain, extending from the summit ridge of the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific, and from the British dominions on the north, to Mexico, on the south; a field, but lately, for the most part, an unknown and untravelled wilderness, but now swarming with a population from every quarter of the world, and about to rival the old States of the Union. Europe, as we all know, no longer ago than 1848, seemed to be on the eve of a thorough political regeneration, and it is not, perhaps, very far from that now. "Is not a nation born at once?" All feel, the people of the Atlantic States feel, the world feels that a great highway must be made between our new and great western world, so suddenly born, and the parent States, on the eastern declivity of the continent. Providence has called and planted the people there. Providence has pointed out the way of access, of communication, and what is remarkable, Providence has furnished the means. The numerous and populous Islands of the Pacific, too, and the vast and populous regions of eastern Asia, hitherto so far off, and so inaccessible, except at great expense, too great for any considerable trade—yes, all those remote parts of the world, so full of people and of human industry, have lifted up their voice, and demanded the rights of neighborhood to us, and to Europe across our bosom. For economical reasons, sufficiently obvious, a passage to those quarters of the world, across the Isthmus, between North and South America, whatever facilities may be there created by railroad, or by ship canal, or by both, is, nevertheless, too formidable, and will prove altogether unsatisfactory, as a permanent reliance, inasmuch as distance, and time, and cost, are now, and in all future time, will be the controlling laws of human intercourse; and a railway directly across the continent will be a great saving of distance, still greater of time, and an

essential saving of cost, and is, therefore, necessarily destined to control the whole subject.

Again, it is to be remarked, as a Providential event, that this railway to the Pacific was conceived and matured before these great events on the western declivity of North America had transpired. It was fully conceived, as long ago as 1842; in 1844, a memorial, declaratory of the whole plan, as it now stands before the American people, was prepared, and in January, 1845, was presented to the Congress of the United States, and is now on record in the journals of that body, bearing this date. From that time to the present it has constantly been agitated throughout the Union, till it has become a theme of universal interest. It will be seen, therefore, that the plan of this road was Providentially matured previous to, and entirely independent of, those subsequent and pregnant events, which were developed in the sudden birth of those western communities; and which, in such a brief period, have rendered this great highway necessary to that new born world, in its relations to us on this side of the continent. Do we not observe, in this, the hand of Him who seeth the end from the beginning?

Moreover, every nation and every tongue are being represented on our great Pacific border, drawing with them an ever augmenting train of followers, to be incorporated with our free institutions, and in that way to give to all nations a taste of them. As the human family, at a very remote period of antiquity, was scattered abroad over the face of the earth, from the base of the Tower of Babel, by the confusion of tongues, so the people of all those languages, thus created, are now coming together again, to erect another and a perpetual monument not of human pride against heaven, but of freedom against despotism; and to perfect this work, they require to be chained to us by a band of iron across this continent. Is not the hand of Him who ruleth over all visible in this? And shall we, poor erring mortals, think it a resignation of the dignity of our nature to take our place at his feet for instruction,

We see, then, that God in his providence, by the operation of the stupendous machinery of man's collective power, as organized by himself in the succession of ages, has *precipitated* these great and startling events, at the same moment that we find a pathway marked out by the same divine superintendence, to connect not only the great east with the great west of this continent, but also to connect America with Asia, and Europe with Asia across this continent by most intimate and neighborhood ties. There, too, is our public domain, a legacy of Providence, and of little value but for this object; and there is the path, almost as straight as a bird can fly through the air, and in the shortest possible line over this terrestrial sphere, for Eastern America and Western Europe, to establish intercourse, commercial, social, political, and religious, with the islands of the vast Pacific, and with all Asia.

Events have pointed out, events demand, and events will sustain the enterprise with the strong hand of interest; and that interest is nothing less than the united interest of all nations, and therefore powerful. Was there ever such a coincidence of Providential events on so large a scale, all tending directly to the accomplishment of such stupendous results? Nations—yes, nations born in a day to political existence for the higher and sublimer purpose, as we shall see, that many more nations, that the vast domain of paganism should be born, in scarcely less time, to a spiritual and Christian life; and the great highway on which the tide of these mighty influences is to roll from Christian altars for the demolition of pagan temples and pagan rites, by the substitution of Christian temples and Christian worship—that way, I say, is no other than this thing of the world, this instrument of commerce, this great iron road from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

It is now more than eighteen hundred years since the command was given to the Apostles, to “go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature;” and it is allowed that this mandate was imposed on the Church. Why has it taken so long time to fulfil it? “One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” The machinery of Providence, in the hands of men, has not yet been made ready; but all the while it has been accumulating its forces, and is being prepared for the accomplishment of these great results.

I need not say, that the success of Christian missions of modern times, on pagan ground, has been slender as compared with the means employed, and the hopes entertained. What is the reason? We observe, as a fact, that Christian missionaries have gone ahead of commerce. Though their success has been worth the pains and the cost, under a due estimate of the importance of the object, nevertheless the results have not equalled expectation. When would the pagan world be Christianized at such a rate? “An effectual door among the heathen,” one that would be most satisfactory and cheering, seems never yet to have been opened since the first promulgation of Christianity. Let us see what are the prospects of this new and great highway across the American continent, as a door for Christian missions. I do not hesitate to say, that since the day when Christ commissioned his twelve Apostles to go forth and teach all nations, there has no such door as this been opened. You observe, by the map of the world, that it will connect the darkest regions of paganism with the brightest lights of Christianity—that it will put all Asia, where the great masses of the human family, and of the pagan world, reside, in immediate connection with Christian Europe and Christian America; and that it will bring these great parts of the world into the most intimate commercial contact—into constant and free intercourse, the one with the other. Even now the Chinese, and emigrants from other pagan nations, are swarming into California and the western coasts of America. Think you that Christianity will not travel where

the trade of Christian nations goes? It travels even where trade does not go; much more will it follow in the track of commerce.

Both Europe and America teem with Christian people, who are earnestly desirous of evangelizing the world, and who are waiting only for the opportunity. Their perseverance hitherto in this great work, under the greatest disadvantages, where they could only reckon a convert here and a convert there, sufficiently demonstrates how quickly and how eagerly they would embrace the facilities of this great highway from the heart of Christendom to the heart of paganism. Their messengers would fly in clouds to “publish the glad tidings of great joy to all people.” It is only the way, only the door which they want. Open the way, open the door, and they will be there; there with the Bible; there with the Gospel; there with the sacraments of Christianity; and there with an offered Saviour. Establish commerce between Christian and pagan nations—a commerce, I mean, which is not forced by arms and conquest, but which springs up in the course of a peaceful trade, leaving pagan nations in the possession and enjoyment of their original political rights—do *this*, I say, and the pagans will be Christianized. This is the natural, the predestined result. Then, instead of a few converts, as now reported from year to year, on pagan ground, “a nation would be born at once.”

A people invaded and subjugated by arms, and held in subjection by arms, as in the British and Dutch East Indies, and as in Hindostan, will never love their subduers; nor can it be expected that they will readily entertain the gospel in that way. And this, undoubtedly, is the reason why the gospel has produced no greater effect in those quarters. But the way in which we expect Christianity will go to the heathen on the railroad across this continent, is, not by the sword, not by force of arms, but in the path of a peaceful and voluntary commercial traffic. The weapons of this warfare will be those of “peace on earth and good will towards man,” “mighty through God,” to the pulling down of the strongholds of paganism, and *not* by the hostile array of man’s power.

Great as are the political and commercial objects to be attained by this great highway across the American continent—and they will certainly be great and momentous to that nation that shall make it, for it will give to it the command of the commerce of the world—great, I say, as these objects are, yet the Christianizing of the world is an infinitely greater, an infinitely more momentous object. And we here pause to contemplate with the profoundest admiration that mighty machinery of Providence, composed of men as instruments, in connection with the provisions of nature; a machinery which has been in the progress of construction for so many ages, and which, under the influence of its accumulated energies, is now making, in such quick and rapid succession, these new and grand developments, as well in the political and commercial affairs of mankind, as in the history and prog-

ness, of Christianity, the latter being brought about by the instrumentality of the former. And in our admiration of these results we cannot lose sight of the immediate cause. We see that this grand, this sublime facility for the propagation of the gospel, over the wide domain of paganism, is to come out of a great event in the affairs of this world.

There is our public domain unoccupied, and there are the means of accomplishing this great work, apparently locked up by Providence for this specific destination. It is good for little or nothing else; it is sufficient for this. So employed, it will be for the greatest good of the nation, and of the world, and so employed, it will open the whole pagan world to the introduction and final triumphs of Christianity.

With the honor of making this great highway of Christianity to the heathen world, seems to be associated that of standing first, most prominent, most powerful among the nations of the earth; for all must see that the great bulk of the commerce of the world, around its entire circle, and between its most densely populated portions, must for ever pass on the line of this road, as it will be economy of distance, or time, and of actual cost.

All this, however, if I may be allowed to say a word here on this subject, as it involves a question of public economy, as the best and only mode of accomplishing the end; all this, on the assumption that the road be built by capital, evoked from the land through which it passes, and then bestowed a positive and perpetual gratuity on trade and commerce; for it is proved that it cannot be sustained, if built by capital borrowed from foreign sources, and subject to the payment of interest by tax on transport. Here we see the wisdom of Providence in having furnished this domain, and in having left it for this very purpose. God works by means, by human agency, in connection with the provisions of nature, for the accomplishment of his great designs; and this *specific* provision is, apparently, I might say, evidently, the only means by which this road can be made, and by which this great end can be attained. It is a legacy of Providence; a legacy handed down to us by ages of preparation; a legacy which cannot be violated without sacrificing the end. There is, evidently, no other way, and that way is clear of all obstacles.

Is it not wonderful, does it not strike us with awe as well as with admiration, that God, in his providence, and by long ages of preparation, should have made such a provision for so stupendous a work, for the accomplishment of such stupendous results, temporal and spiritual, for this nation, as a political fabric, and for the cause of Christianity, without requiring of the people a single penny of contribution or tax, and that he should thus offer to bestow upon us and upon the world so great a benefit! Should not this provision be regarded as a special deposit, in the hands of this nation, consecrated to this high purpose, and to that alone? And would not any appropriation thereof be sacrilege? There it is; God has placed it there without our care or

cost. *But* for this great purpose, the public domain, in that direction, is of little value; *for* this great purpose, the world itself is scarcely rich enough to pay its price. If it should be devoted to this end, this nation will be the first and richest of nations; we shall be the envy of the world, and the heralds of the Gospel to the dark places of the earth; the traffic of all nations will cross our bosom; and the Christian hosts of Europe will ally themselves to the Christian hosts of America, to move forward on this line, for the subjugation of the world to the banner of the Cross.

Think not, then, that this is a dream. It is not a dream. It is sober calculation. Take a terrestrial globe—for I do not know of any common map that will answer this purpose—take, then, the globe in your hands, and find thereon, our relative position to Europe and Asia, and to the great masses of mankind; see how near and how easy of access all the great industrial and producing nations will be to us, with a great highway across this continent, on the line proposed; and there you will find the *great future bond* of nations, commercial, social, political, and religious; there you will see that the intercourse of nations is inevitably destined to follow this route, if the road be made, and, consequently, on the same condition, that Christianity must go that way to every part of the pagan world.

“Who hath heard such a thing! Shall a nation be born at once?” And why not? We have already seen that coming to pass which, if not tantamount, is at least an approximation; and the machinery of God’s providence, in the hands of men, has been treasuring up its forces for all time. Great events accomplished by these accumulated and combined agencies, should not surprise us, however stupendous their character. Here, for example, is a stupendous work of man, but recently thought of, which, if executed, bids fair to change the face of the world, and the current of human affairs. It is connected, contingently, with the most stupendous results the world has ever witnessed, and yet the *mode* of its accomplishment is as simple as that of the smallest work of the kind—as simple as any railroad of twenty or a hundred miles; and we have already built in the United States four times the distance of railway that is required in this case. The plan proposed, (Mr. Whitney’s,) and most in public favor—the only one sanctioned by the action of Congress in its committees hitherto—is different from all others in that it finds its means in itself. It is a self-moving and self-creating machinery, and will do its own work without any aid foreign to itself. There is nothing incredible in it or about it, when judged of by the practical principles of human conduct, and of human affairs in their ordinary course, simply because it depends on practical principles.

God works not by miracles for the accomplishment of the great designs of his providence, but by the voluntary agency of man: and often of man in the pursuit of his own worldly ends. Did he not name,

yes, *name* Cyrus of old, as his “anointed,” for the restoration of his people, though Cyrus, for aught that appears, was a pagan, neither knowing nor fearing the true God:—“Thus saith the Lord to his *anointed*, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden. I have called thee by thy name, *though thou hast not known me.*”

Shall there be a pause, then, whether we, a *Christian* nation, will do this work! God, in his providence, has indicated our duty, and given us the means, without cost to us, ample means—means good for little else. Nature herself has pointed out the way. It is our mission, if we accept it—a mission bearing the stamp of the mandate of heaven—a mission such as no other nation was ever yet honored with—a mission not less rich in temporal blessings on those who shall fulfill it, than in spiritual blessings on the world—a mission worthy of a higher and purer zeal than man can boast of; worthy, I had almost said—and why not say it?—worthy of the ministry of the hosts of heaven, which, undoubtedly, it will have. And do we pause?—And will this nation pause?

How often do we see apparent *alternatives* in the instruments of Providence, for the accomplishment of great as well as of small events. A thing must be done by this or by that means. It must be done. And so we may say, this great highway must be made by one nation or another. It is not more certain, in my belief, that the sun will rise tomorrow. Now it happens, and I am authorized to say it by information that lies under my hand—it happens, I say, that it can be made on British ground, close to our northern border, from Halifax to the Pacific; it happens, too, and I am equally well informed on this point, that Great Britain already thinks of it, desires it.—It needs but the signal of our decline, and she will accept the mission with alacrity, and fulfill it with promptitude and energy, knowing it is the greatest prize that could possibly fall into a nation’s hands. With that advantage, it is not too much to say, that the empire which claims to be mistress of the seas, would, thenceforward, be mistress of all lands; for the island of Great Britain, and the island of Vancouver, on the Pacific, which belongs to Great Britain, would, in that case, from the position they occupy in relation to the rest of the world, command the traffic of all nations; and in that case the United States would become second, both in political and commercial importance, to the Canadas: and Halifax would be the first and greatest city or the American continent. Such, I firmly believe, is the true aspect or the question, and it is with us, as a nation, to solve it. God has made our duty, our privilege; our mission, our benefit; but He has attached a fearful sacrifice to our neglect. By obeying his behest, as announced in his providence, we shall take the first rank among the nations of the earth, forever to maintain it, in honor, in power, in importance, and ours will be the glory of leading in the way for the conversion of the world to Christianity.

Singular posture, this, of the affairs of men and of nations. God, from his throne in heaven, now seems to ask, “*who—who* will build me an highway to the heathen?” And He seems to add, “I will make of that nation the greatest of nations.” That honor and that benefit are now proffered unto us, and the means are provided—all provided without cost to us. I ask again: Will this nation pause? Thus standeth the momentous question, and the world looks on, heaven looks on, to see how it will be solved. It is, indeed, a momentous question. Nothing, in my esteem, has ever occurred in history, of a character more momentous.

## NOTE.

*Mr. Whitney's Plan of Railroad to the Pacific, as Reported to both Houses of Congress.*



THE preceding lecture is based on the assumption that Mr. Whitney's plan of road to the Pacific will be adopted and executed. The author of the lecture has not been able to see how that work can be accomplished in any other way. This plan has been favorably reported on by committees of four successive Congresses, including the present, (the 31st;) the Legislatures of twenty States of the Union have recommended it; the people of the United States, in various forms, have very extensively expressed their views and feelings in its favor; and the voice of the public press has been almost unanimous in the same opinion. It is thought it may be pertinent, in this *Note* to the foregoing lecture, to give a succinct view of the argument in favor of this plan, as contained in the two reports lately presented to both Houses of Congress by the committees of each on roads and canals.

Mr. Whitney's plan is peculiar, but nevertheless simple, and can easily be understood. It proposes to set apart a belt of the public domain sixty miles, wide, or thirty miles on each side of the road, from its eastern terminus, on Lake Michigan, to its western terminus, on the Pacific, comprehending an area of about 78,000,000 acres, for which ten cents per acre of the avails of the land, including the good, bad, and indifferent, is to be paid into the public treasury, amounting to nearly \$8,000,000. As only about 800 miles of the 2,030 in length is good land, or adapted to agriculture, and as our public policy is now rapidly tending to give away the public domain instead of selling it, as heretofore, it is sufficiently evident that this sum of \$8,000,000, to be paid into the national treasury, is more than would ever be realized by the government for the people in any other way. It is estimated that the land-warrants bestowed on the soldiers of the Mexican War, and the bounty-land bills for soldiers of the war of 1812, and of our Indian Wars, which has now become a law, will together cover as much territory as is required to build this road. The Whitney plan, therefore, is the only way to save any land for this great purpose, and probably the only way by which any more lands can be saved for any national object whatever.

Mr. Whitney engages, and is required by the bill reported for the purpose, to build the road out of the lands set apart for the object, besides the \$8,000,000 to be paid into the public treasury. It is shown by the reports of the committees that the road, running through these lands, will impart a value to them adequate to the accomplishment of these ends. In this manner a capital is to be *created out* of the land to build the road by the effect of the road on its value, without one dollar of cost to the people, or to the public treasury. The bill also provides that, when the road shall be completed, no tolls shall ever be imposed except to keep the road and its machinery in working order. As the lands are to build the road, there will be no stock, and of course no dividends. It is this great principle of cheap transport, thus brought into force, that will draw and accumulate trade on this line to an indefinite and immense amount, forever augmenting, between the Atlantic and Pacific portions of the United States, between the United States and Asia, and between Europe and Asia. It will be seen by an examination and measurement of the globe, that this connection will bring into the most intimate commercial contact the great industrial and producing masses of mankind; and the cheap transport to be effected by this scheme, and which can only be done by this, will turn this immense commercial intercourse in this direction. All other plans, instead of *creating* the capital to build the road with, must *borrow* it, and consequently will be subject to tolls to satisfy the interest of such capital, preventing trade by the tax imposed, instead of inviting it by cheap transport; or else they will be doomed to a stupendous failure—in any case a failure. The cost of the road on the Whitney plan is estimated at \$60,000,000, all to be raised out of the lands; the cost, if built by the government, is estimated at \$200,000,000, all to be *borrowed* instead of being *created*.

The bill reported by the committees of Congress carefully and minutely guards the interests of the public, and a perfect control over the road and its interests is forever retained in the hands of Congress. The road is forced to be built, if there is capital enough in the land, of which there is no doubt; and it will be done with all the energy of private enterprise, which the committees of Congress think is of the greatest importance. The history of the Cumberland Road, and its failure by falling into the strife of parties, is cited as evidence of the danger of having this work undertaken by the government, besides the immense door it would open for corruption by executive patronage, for prodigal expenditures, and for the creation of a public debt. It is believed that the work in that way would be wrecked in the vortex of party politics. On the Whitney plan there is no cost and no risk to the public; and if authorized by law, it would be instantly commenced, and put forward with energy and rapidity. Mr. Whitney expects to be able to complete it in fifteen years. The proposed law gives him twenty-five.

All the capital required to go on with lies in abeyance to the passage of the bill, as the security of a lien on the rights to be conferred by the law would be abundant. There is no other way in which the road can be soon begun and completed.

The whole people of the United States, at first sight, feel the importance of this undertaking. This way across the continent once made, a net work of railroads would run into it from all important points, multiplying as time advances. It happens, fortunately, that the only route where the lands lie that will build the road, is directly on that line which is most fair for all parts of the Union in its broad extent, as is shown in the reports of the committees of Congress. That, too, is the most direct route across this continent, lying within our jurisdiction, between Europe and Asia. All the rivers and streams on that line, from our Atlantic ports to the Pacific terminus, can be bridged, which is not the case on any other route, and which is of indispensable importance. A break of water on the line would be fatal to that economy which the trade would require. It is also the line which is most free from the impediments of winter, and in all respects most feasible. Providence has placed and left the lands, necessary as capital to build the road with, precisely where the road should be, and the committees of Congress have undertaken to show, that, if the opportunity is neglected, the road can never be made for want of *means*. They consider it out of the question that it should be done by the government, as party strife would, to a moral certainty, defeat such a policy. In the future history of the world, therefore, those lands being once lost to this object, as they soon will be, if the bill now before Congress should not pass, the opportunity will never occur again. It will be lost for ever.

The prospective influence of this work, if executed, on the cause of civilization throughout the world, deserves consideration. In the first place, it would provide for the surplus, destitute, and miserable population of Europe and of other countries, in affording them a hospitable refuge, with a comfortable independence. It would relieve the nations where they now are, of an intolerable burden of poverty and crime, and make them useful members of a new and flourishing state of society. This enterprise combines the two objects of providing for the poor of all nations, and of promoting public wealth on an immense scale. Providence has made this specific and bounteous provision, for these specific ends, for this specific and stupendous work, in that specific direction, and nowhere else. In the execution of this plan, one wave of immigration would succeed another, each in turn to be first workers on the road, and next workers on the soil, or as producers in any other form required. The commencement of this work will be the commencement of a never ending and ever increasing tide of population, rolling onward in the western track of empire, wafting civilization on its bosom, to be stayed only by the waters of the Pacific; for

in no other part of the world will the motives for immigration be so powerful, either to the poor, or to the bold and enterprising. *There* is an inexhaustible world of dormant wealth, which needs but the wand of this great scheme to wake it into activity and ceaseless energy. No sooner will it be known—and all the world will see it—that a poor man can find employment on this road to provide himself with a farm, than the rush of immigration on that line will swell into a mighty volume, every wave pushed on by every succeeding wave, to increase the rapidity and force of the movement.

It is, however, chiefly the results which will naturally flow from the opening of this road, in bringing all nations into the most intimate commercial contact, the civilized with the barbarous, the Christian with the pagan, the more refined with the less refined nations, and the natural and direct tendency of this contact, first to make it the interest of all nations to be in amicable relations with each other, and thus prevent wars; and next, by the same causes, to raise the lower conditions of human society, wherever found, to a level with the higher, and to impart a general impulse to the entire circle of humanity, to rise yet higher than the highest, and to move onward in the path of universal improvement, with more rapid strides, and with a more effective march; it is *these* great ends which impart to this undertaking its most sublime and most beneficent character, as a means of civilization.

“War,” said Napoleon, “is the trade of barbarians;” a notable authority for such a saying, and “pity ’tis, ’tis true.” Bring all nations together into the same neighborhood, as will be seen must be the effect of this great highway across the American continent, and they cannot afford war. It would be their interest to cultivate peace. War, in such a case, would be universal devastation. That instrument, therefore, that means, which shall bring about such a millennium of peace among nations, will be the most effective civilizer of nations.

Christian civilization is, doubtless, at the head of all forms of civilized society, and it is shown, in the foregoing lecture, how Christianity must necessarily move forward on this new and great highway to every part of the pagan world. The history of the world, since the commencement of the Christian era, demonstrates the fact that civilization is always at the highest stage of improvement where Christianity shines in its purest light. Christianity, we believe, is destined to triumph, and in the train of its victories comes “peace on earth and good will towards men.” In exact harmony with the precepts of Christianity comes this great harmonizer of nations, a railway to the Pacific. The great and comprehensive precept of Christianity for man, in all his relations to his fellow-man, is LOVE—KINDNESS.

Bind together the East and West of the continent by this railway; bind America to Asia, and Europe to Asia across our bosom, by the same strong tie; bring all these great and dominant parts of the

world so near together as would be the effect of this great highway, and would they not find it convenient, and most convenient *to be kind*? Could they afford to quarrel and destroy each other, as in that way they would? Nations, though they may allege other pretexts, will never go to war but for some hoped for advantage. Make it the advantage of all nations to be at peace, and you will have peace—and peace in perpetuity so long as the same reasons exist. Make this road across the American continent, and you will have a millennium of peace on earth; for in that case all nations will be neighbors; and it is the interest of neighbors to live in peace; and the natural consequence of a general and lasting peace of the world, with all nations in intimate contact with each other in the pursuits of commerce, will be the progress of civilization, ever rising higher throughout the entire circle of this intercourse.

We might speak of our own country as the great centre of this mighty movement, and as the country of all others to be the most benefitted by it. See, by the map, how all nations, in their intercourse, if this road be built, must meet and pass each other at our very heart; and consequently how we shall have the greatest benefit of this intercourse. The Pacific Ocean, which has hitherto been almost a vacant waste of waters, would become the great and most active field of commerce, chiefly carried on under the flag of our country. As a consequence, the heart of North America would be the centre of the world's civilization, to which all civilization would tend, and from which its best influences would go out.



#### *About the Author*

**Calvin Colton** (1789–1857), a graduate of Yale College and Andover Seminary, had been a Presbyterian missionary in western New York and a pastor at LeRoy and Batavia. He left the ministry in 1826 and was the British correspondent for the *New York Observer* 1831–1835. He returned to New York in 1836, took Episcopal orders, and served as rector of the Church of the Messiah in New York City, 1837–1838. He emerged as a leading spokesman for the Whig party, authored “The Junius Tracts” on political and economic issues, and became the editor for the papers and speeches of Henry Clay. His later years were spent on the faculty of Trinity College, Hartford.

#### *About the Text*

The text of this electronic edition is based on the first edition published in New York in 1850; it is taken from a copy in the library of Columbia University. Pagination follows that of the original pamphlet edition, and page breaks occur within a few words of where they fell in the 1850 text. The following typographical errors have been corrected:

| <i>Page:line</i> | <i>1850 text</i> | <i>emended to</i> |
|------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| 5:33             | collective       | collective        |
| 9:11             | terrestrial      | terrestrial       |
| 12:2             | <i>Railrond</i>  | <i>Railroad</i>   |
| 12:2             | <i>Prcific</i>   | <i>Pacific</i>    |
| 13:19            | massess          | masses            |
| 14:29            | civilizaton      | civilization      |
| 15:43            | ths continent    | the continent     |

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