CHAPTER SIX

MASCU LINISING MISSIONS—CONSEQUENCES
AND DEPARTURES

Woe to the man who pities the worker, not woe to the worker; I am not sorry for him; I am sorry for the man who pities him. Life means more, infinitely more, than idleness, and the most certain way of failing to have any pleasure, of failing to gain any pleasure worth gaining, is to set yourself down to pursue pleasure as your occupation in life. The life worth living is the life of the man who works; of the man who does; of the man who strives; of the man who, at the end, can look back and say, “I know I have faltered, I know I have stumbled, I have left things undone things that should have been done, and much that I have done had better been left undone, but as the strength was given to me I strove to use it; I strove to leave the world a little better and not a little worse, because I had lived in it.”

New York, April 1900. Carnegie Hall was filled to the last seat. The doors had been closed already an hour before the assembled delegates of what was to be the largest missionary conference yet were to listen to the welcoming addresses of the President of the United States and the Governor of New York. According to a report in The New York Times: “at the doors outside there yet remained a multitude large enough for an overflow meeting as strong in numbers as this one”. The representatives of the US political establishment were given an enthusiastic welcome by the delegates assembled to address the problems and the opportunities of the missionary movement.

Punctually at eight o’clock an outburst of cheering at the rear of the stage betokened the approach of President McKinley [...] making his way to the platform, the whole audience rose, cheering him vociferously, and saluted him with the waving of handkerchiefs and hats.

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2 New York Times, 22 April 1900. The Christian World, 26 April 1900 claimed that no less than 16,500 attended the first day’s meetings.
But it was not the president’s address that was to make a lasting impression on the missionary supporters present. After the ‘Star spangled banner’ had been sung, the chairman of the evening introduced Theodore Roosevelt who were to preach, with all his rhetorical might, to the conference on the solace that could be found in the strenuous life—the only “life worth living”.\(^4\) The impact Roosevelt made on the audience was immense. Of all the eloquent speeches and papers given at this meeting, all of which addressed issues more central to the missionary endeavour at large, few were to be so frequently mentioned in the organs of the missionary movement during the coming months. Not only in the US, but across the Atlantic as well, extracts of his speech were reprinted.\(^5\) Within a year, Roosevelt was to take up office in the White House, but according to one of his biographers, he was already at this stage ‘the most famous man in America’.\(^6\) For more than a decade, Roosevelt had struggled to establish a solid reputation, not only as a skilled political leader, but also as a ‘man’s man’ by reinventing himself as a frontiersman; his celebrated leadership of the Rough Riders in the Spanish-American war only serving to reinforce that image. Returning *in persona* to the political arena in 1898, he stepped forward as a prophet of an activist and self-conscious masculinity. As Gail Bederman convincingly has demonstrated, the message Roosevelt conveyed to the American audience was about the nature of manhood, but also about the agency of white American men in the progress of ‘civilisation’. It was a heavy stew of imperialism, racism and crude Darwinism.\(^7\) Even though muted in this speech, it was not completely devoid of such references. Roosevelt’s willingness to assign a role to missionaries in his—often violent—conception of the victory of ‘civilisation’ over barbarism was not only driven by a desire to flatter his audience. A year later, in one of his most celebrated political addresses, Roosevelt pointed out that: “The missionary, the merchant,