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Government Education of the Indians

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GOVERNMENT EDUCATION OF THE INDIANS.

Every country which attains an important position among the nations finds that it has before it the solution of complex problems. The United States is no exception to this rule, and a subject of great interest to us at the present time, one which has been very widely discussed, is the education of the Indians.

When America was discovered by Christopher Columbus in 1492, the inhabitants were a roving, uncivilized people, having no settled form of government, and divided into tribes, which were almost constantly at war with one another. They supported them selves mainly by hunting and fishing, paying little or no attention to agriculture, and manufacturing only their rude pottery and weapons of defense. At that time they had no common language, but numerous dialects. They knew nothing of the art of writing, but communicated with one another by means of pictures drawn on the bark of trees and skins of animals. One can readily see that the literature of that period could not have been of a very high order.

After several colonies had been planted in America by

the English, some of the settlers became interested in the Indians, not merely from a commercial point of view, but with a sincere desire to improve their condition, and attempts were made to educate them. Prominent among those who worked in our own New England were John Elliot, known as "The Apostle to the Indians", and Roger Williams, the "Apostle of Soul Liberty". Dartmouth College was founded largely for the benefit of the Indians, as was William and Mary's College, in Virginia. However, owing to the rapid disappearance of the red men, these early efforts to educate them produced no permanent result. Excluding the work of the mission priests in California, no further attempts were made to educate the Indians until they were confined on reservations many years later, when various religious denominations established mission schools for their benefit. Nearly all of these were aided by Government appropriations. They are now being replaced by schools supported entirely by the Government.

The first appropriation for the establishment of Government schools among the Indians was made in 1877, and amounted to \$20,000. Eight years earlier, President Grant

had organized the so-called "Peace Commission", which consisted of nine citizens, who were authorized to look over the records at the Indian Bureau in Washington, to acquaint themselves with the business methods employed by the agents who superintended the purchasing of supplies for the Indians, and to "advise agents concerning their duties".

The Commissioners, on submitting their first report, recommended the following reforms:-

I. "A better method of purchasing supplies to prevent fraud and to secure economy.

II. "The allotment of land in severalty and the settlement of Indians in permanent homes.

III. "The abolition of the treaty system.

IV. "The establishment of schools, and especially industrial training of all Indian youth.

V. "Appointments in the Indian service on the ground of merit alone, aside from political considerations, and permanence in office."

These reforms were afterwards provided for by acts of Congress.

The fifth reform regarding appointments in the Indian

service is very important. The fact that no salary is paid the Commissioners is, perhaps, a safeguard against the election of so-called "political wire-pullers".

The principle of civil service reform is embodied in the fact that the appointive offices of the United States are, with few exceptions, for the carrying forward of work which is not along any party line, and the holders of these offices should not, therefore, be changed each time the government passes into the hands of a different political party. One can readily see the injurious effects of the "spoils system" on our Indian service. Those who are doing most commendable work may be compelled to resign, and the result cannot fail to be detrimental to the cause of Indian education.

It has been said with a great deal of truth that if we can educate the Indian children, and fit them for life by actual contact with the outside world, the Indian problem is practically solved. This is what the industrial and the common schools are trying to accomplish, with, generally speaking, encouraging results. That the Indians appreciate what is being done for them is shown by the fact that there are more applicants for admission to the

schools than can be accommodated. One teacher tells of seven young men who came to her crowded department, when she could find no place for them but on her sitting-room floor.

In 1896, 23,036 Indian children were enrolled in the public schools, or 1417 more than in 1895, while the Government appropriation was \$2,056,000.02, two per cent less than in 1895, or eleven per cent less than in 1893. An effort is being made to centralize the reservation schools, and compel more children to attend one school, thus lessening the expense.

The work in the industrial schools is attended with excellent success. At Haskell Institute, Lawrence, Kansas, thirty-five tribes are represented. Many trades are taught, and about six hundred and forty acres of land are cultivated.

At Rosebud Agency, North Dakota, fifteen years ago, only about one person in two hundred did not wear a blanket. They had no educational advantages whatever. There are now twenty-one government, and three mission schools, which provide for about five hundred pupils.

A training school for the Chiloccos is situated at Oklahoma. Two hundred and seventy pupils are registered. A Y. M. C. A. and Y. W. C. A. have been organized. "Work and Progress" is their motto.

The Carlisle school needs no introduction to the public, especially to that portion interested in athletics. Under the management of Captain Pratt it has done a remarkable work. Since it was opened in 1879 over 2500 persons have been received, the largest number at any one time being about eight hundred. The grade is that of a grammar school. Various trades are taught, with a view to fitting the students for an honorable and useful life. Several of the graduates are now trained nurses.

It is by means of the outing system that the school has become so widely known. During the summer the students work wherever they can find employment, giving satisfaction in almost every case. There is a savings-bank connected with the institution, and in it they deposit the money they earn, keeping their own accounts, and thus learning business methods.

A brass band of about thirty pieces has for its leader a full-blooded Indian, Dennison Wheelock, who is a tal-

ented musical composer. Frederick Douglass, having heard the band, said: "It is impossible to relegate to permanent barbarism a people endowed with the musical abilities shown by these young Indians".

Many of the graduates who return home need aid in starting on their chosen profession. Their position is a very trying one; either they must sink to the level of those surrounding them, or they must bring their neighbors up to a higher plane. Their influence is usually for good, and makes itself felt in the community. Indelibly impressed on their minds is Carlisle's inspiring cry: "From barbarism into civilization and citizenship".

About thirty years ago, in a battle between the Indians and United States troops, an Indian baby was captured. A travelling photographer purchased him for the sum of twenty dollars, took him to Chicago, and placed him, after a few years in the public schools. On leaving the grammar school, he found employment in a pharmacy, and becoming interested in medicine, entered the Chicago Medical College, from which he was graduated a few years since.

He is now resident physician at Carlisle, and Carlos Montezuma is a name familiar to many. He stands a living example of what civilization can do for the Indians. Is it just to confine them on reservations when we welcome among us those of almost every other nation, granting to them, with perhaps one exception, the full rights of citizenship? To such a question there can be only one answer.

At last the nation realizes that it cannot shirk the responsibility of providing for these, its wards, not merely feeding and clothing them but attending to the wants of their minds and souls. It must and will be faithful to the trust thus imposed upon it, and lead the red men onward and upward to the completion of the noble work already begun. Then, and not until then, will it stand justified before Him who judgeth the nations.

E. Alice Feght