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II—THE FOLLY OF THE OFFICIALS

MARY AUSTIN

A DISTINGUISHED author who has devoted years of study to the Indian claims that our Indian Bureau is a shameful record of bureaucratic inefficiency. The whole tendency of Indian Education as now practiced is to destroy the essential quality of the Indian and to make him of rather less social and economic account than what we are getting in shoals at Ellis Island. The Indian culture that gave us corn and an original architectural type must not be destroyed.

THE Indian problem is of world dimensions. It is the problem of Canada and of every South American State, it is the chief internal problem of Mexico, it is the problem of Turkey in Armenia, of Japan in Korea, of England in Egypt and Palestine, of all European powers in Africa. Why should not our country, rich and at peace and crammed full of executive talent, work out a solution of that problem, which we can hold up to the perplexed other nations as a model? It is the growing disposition to turn inward and attack our own problem before we project ourselves into European affairs, much more than it is a disposition to criticise the Indian Bureau that is behind this movement.

To any one at all familiar with the Indian Problem, Mrs. Seymour's discussion of it is of itself a clear exposition of the reason why it has finally become a problem of national importance engaging the acute attention of the more intelligent citizens, and particularly of the three or four million women making up the Federated Women's Clubs. For the first thing that appears in Mrs. Seymour's statement is that she is totally uninformed as to the relation of the thinking citizen to the Indian question, and only shallowly acquainted with the Indian himself.

She begins by assuming that the average citizen derives his information and his accusing attitude toward the Indian Bureau from the reading of *Ramona* written forty years ago by Helen Hunt Jackson. Miss Jackson's publishers could also have told her of another book by the same author, called *A Century of Dishonor*, one of the most shameful records of Bureaucratic inefficiency ever made in this country or any other, and so authoritative that Mrs. Seymour does not even attempt to deny it, being

satisfied merely to say that things are different now. It is even possible that she may never have heard it; as she seems not to be familiar with anything more recent than *Ramona*, not even with the hundreds of books and magazine articles on which the determination of the American people to reform their Indian policy has been founded.

At any rate, without other reference to the voluminous literature on the subject, she proceeds to suggest a picture of the Indian as formerly existing in a wild state, roaming about in search of berries and wild game, when as every school-boy knows, the whole economic system of the American Colonies was founded on a corn and potato culture which we took over from the Indians and have improved very little since. Also that before the American Colonists could destroy the Five Nations, they had to destroy their walled towns and their granaries, and finally, that the very group of Indians, the New Mexico Puebloños, whose distress precipitated the present crisis, are town builders, having developed a type of architecture which has given its character to one of the two original architectural types originating within the United States.

She is also leaving out of the picture the significant item that the cousins of our native tribes, a few hundred miles to the south had invented the art of writing, one of the two times in the world when this has happened, and had at the time Europe discovered them, devised a calendar for measuring lapsed time by the movements of the stars, superior to the one in use in Europe. This puts the capacity of their racial stock, though delayed in point of evolution, on a par with the stocks developing around the Mediterranean. Having thus omitted everything of real importance in describing the Indian as he was, Mrs. Seymour next attempts to present the Indian as he is, "the favored child of the Nation" the product of "forty years of protecting care" and with the bland inaccuracy of all apologists for the Indian Bureau, suggests that though "you and I have to work for our share of America's riches," the Indian has his handed to him by a too generous paternalism. But again I have to remind Mrs. Seymour that the Pueblo Indians about whom the recent trouble began, have *never at any time in their history received economic assistance from the government*, until last winter, when their lands

and waters had been diminished by unlawful encroachments, until it is no longer possible in two or three pueblos to make a living on them. And even then the relief furnished was not all furnished by the Indian Bureau, but raised by an appeal made by the Indians themselves to the general public.

The Pueblos are, and always have been, self-supporting, self-respecting, self-organized communities, having representative government and producing arts and crafts comparable to any of the peasant arts of Europe. In thus attempting to bring them within the description of wild, seed and game hunting savages, now feeding happily out of the governmental hand, she is probably not trying to falsify the situation. She probably, though she is an Indian Commissioner, doesn't know any better; and that is the first count on which the Bureau of Indian Affairs has recently been publicly arraigned. Its members and apologists show themselves sloppily inaccurate on all points touching the history, the psychology, the racial capacity, and cultural condition of the tribes with whose welfare they have been entrusted, and for which they have been paid.

Having laid down these generally misleading lines of what the Indian is and what we do for him, Mrs. Seymour devotes several paragraphs to a policy of land allotment of which the best she can say is that it is known to have failed, and attempts to perpetuate the legend about the rich Indian who owns a Packard, and farmer Indians living comfortably on rented lands which the government manages for him.

There lies on my desk while I write, a book prepared by G. E. Lindquist under the aegis of the Committee of Social and Religious Surveys, called *The Red Man in the United States*, having a commendatory foreword written and signed by Charles H. Burke, Commissioner of Indian Affairs. The book is not written primarily as a study of Indians, but as a study of the progress of Christian Missions among Indians; the idea not being to discover whether we have made the most of our Indians for our own welfare and for theirs, but to what extent we have made Presbyterians and Baptists and Methodists of them. The primary assumption of this book is that to become a member of one of these sects is the most important thing that could happen to any Indian. Criticism of our Indian policy is therefore con-

fined to those things which would interfere with the missionary objective. And even on this meagre ground of health and food and housing, the book utterly overthrows the rosy picture of present Indian prospects as drawn by Mrs. Seymour.

Concerning the rich Indians with Packards, Mr. Lindquist says: "the recent legend of the rich Indian is a gross exaggeration . . . a former Superintendent of the Union Agency is responsible for the statement that no more than one hundred adults . . . are receiving an income from royalties exceeding \$3,000 a year. Possibly not more than a score of these can rightly be termed 'rich Indians.'"

Of the policy of land leasing he says: "unscrupulous white men after an initial payment have refused . . . to make further remittances and continue to live indefinitely rent free on the lands of the Indians." Of the Mississippi Choctaws Lindquist says: "The system is one of peonage!" Of the Omahas one of the outstanding examples of the allotment system he says: "the situation is likely to become serious . . . venereal disease affects 80 to 85 per cent, tuberculosis 25 per cent, trachoma 65 per cent. Of the Mexcalero Apache, 70 per cent have trachoma and 25 per cent are tubercular. Of the tribes that are wholly self-supporting many are mentioned but even they are visited by the white man's dread diseases. When you recall that untended trachoma ends in blindness and that Indian villages with 70 per cent of tuberculosis and 25 per cent of venereal disease are nothing but plague spots to the neighboring white communities, you will begin to see that the revolt of the American people against the inefficiency of our Indian Bureau has more of common sense and less of hysteria in it than Mrs. Seymour supposes. Again, in this book to which the Indian Commissioner has written the preface, occur such statements as this about the Blackfeet: "poverty is almost universal . . . an unfortunate feature is the exploitation to which Indians are subject."

Of the stupidities and absurdities of Indian Education (with the waste of the Indian's time and our money) I would be disposed to say little because the more intelligent Indian officials are themselves beginning to suspect that to bring up an Indian child far from his parents in a steam-heated and electrically

equipped boarding school, teaching him, or her to set type or make Irish crochet, is not a very good preparation for living a happy useful life in a Navaho Hogan or a log hut in a Minnesota woods. But Mrs. Seymour seems to make such a point of the happy fortune of the Indian child, that it seems necessary to explain that of the trades taught him, nineteen out of every twenty necessitate his leaving his own home, his kin and kind, and living as a social outcast and an economic drifter on the fringes of white life. The whole tendency of Indian Education as now practiced is to destroy the essential quality of the Indian and to make something out of him of rather less social and economic account than we get in shoals at Ellis Island every day in the year.

Mrs. Seymour admits the hopeless legal tangles of Indian affairs, the dreary and discreditable muddle of them in the hands of the Bureau which has undertaken to manage them. She outlines slightly the muddle of Pueblo affairs which brought on the recent severe criticism of the Indian Bureau. It is true that a part of this muddle is inherited from the Spanish-Mexican regime, and was never cleared up as it should have been; but she fails to state clearly that a good half of the difficulty was initiated *after* the Pueblos fell into our hands, and *while officials of the Indian Bureau were drawing* salaries for the ostensible purpose of correcting such errors and preventing their recurrence.

Lack of space makes it impossible to go into the detailed explanation of the problem of the Pueblo lands which precipitated the wide-spread criticism of the Indian Bureau last winter. A new bill dealing with that difficulty will come up when Congress opens and full information will be supplied as the occasion demands. What I am concerned with here is to establish the general grounds of the demand for a more enlightened policy, since Mrs. Seymour's notion of what the present Indian policy has come up against, is no less hazy than her notion of Indian conditions past and present. There is no doubt that she is honestly describing what she thinks she sees, a hysterical attack "vague and vociferous" in the hands of people whose sanity as well as whose honesty she doubts. I say no doubt, because last winter the severest criticisms and the most embarrassing exposures were brought to the surface continually by the total

incapacity of the Indian Office to take the measure of what had occurred.

The movement for a better Indian policy had been a long time preparing. It came to a head two years ago under the leadership of Mrs. Stella Atwood of the Board of Indian Welfare of the Federated Women's Clubs.

This organization is known to be composed of the better educated half of such American women as have been accustomed to use their leisure for purposes of public and personal improvement. Their sanity and the extent and accuracy of their information on public questions has never before been questioned. These are the women who are responsible for the improved tone of community life in the United States, and yet these are the women whom Mrs. Seymour finds "so mistaken as to be laughable." The Women's Clubs are leading in this movement, but they are ably seconded by other organizations among which the American Indian Defense Association is prominent, among the Directors and Executive Committees of which we find such names, George Foster Peabody, General Nelson A. Miles, Henry W. Taft, Luther Burbank, Fred M. Stein, J. P. Warbasse, Mrs. Willard Straight, Harold Ickes, Carter Harrison, Irving Bachellor, Hamlin Garland, George Haven Putnam, surely not people with whom we have been accustomed to associate either vociferousness or the emotional inaccuracy with which they are charged in Mrs. Seymour's article.

Another organization, since the war easily the most influential and largest body of learned men in the world, is the American Association for the Advancement of Science, for the first time in its history departing from pure science to lend its name and its knowledge to the movement for a more intelligent Indian policy, not only because it holds the present policy to be a violation of American ideals but because it realizes that the present policy is destroying the *inestimable treasure of Indian culture*.

And it is these people that an Indian Commissioner finds "so mistaken as to be laughable." Well then, if our Women's Clubs, our specialists in policies and economics, and our organized scientists are in that case in which Mrs. Seymour seems to find them, it is not only the Indians who are in danger, it is the whole country and the inhabitants thereof.

Actually, what lies behind the differences of these two groups, the defenders of the Indian Bureau as it is at present organized, and the groups who are demanding a new Indian policy, is a fundamental difference of point of view. Mrs. Seymour concludes her article with saying that if we would help the Indian we must have less sentimentality and more intelligent inquiry, and careful diagnosis. What she evidently believes is that the present Bureau is exercising all the care and intelligence needed. And what the attacking organizations believe is that the kind of care and intelligence required lies almost wholly without the Bureau as organized.

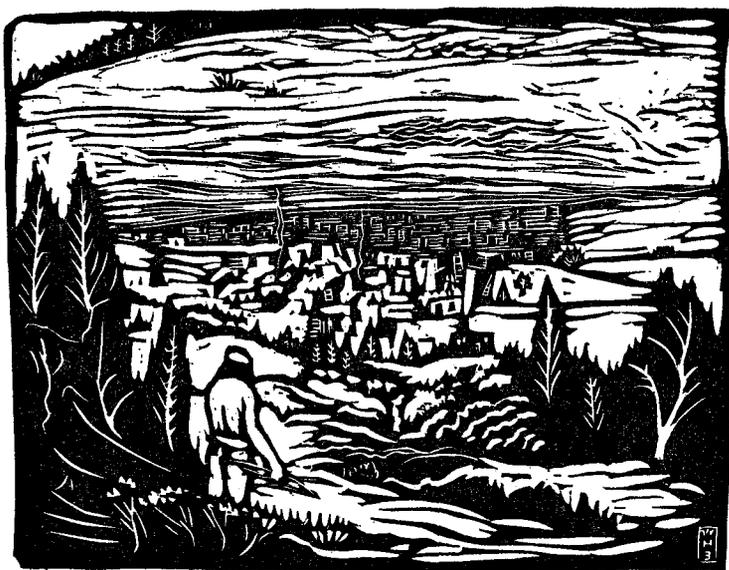
The problem of the Indian is not for political appointees and civil service clerks, it is for specialists; specialists in public health, in tribal economics, in education. Above everything else it calls for specialists in the subtle and intricate relations that may arise between great forward moving nations and the small backward people incorporated in their midst.

Another factor that the Indian Bureau has utterly failed to reckon with, is the rapidly growing appreciation of such Indian culture as remains to us, as a National Asset, having something the same valuation as the big trees of California and the geysers and buffaloes of Yellowstone. The war, which set hundreds of thousands of Americans to touring their native land, went far toward teaching them that in Indian life we have a precious heritage of enjoyment, and of access to forms of culture rapidly disappearing from the earth, superior to anything the rest of the world has to offer. And in the same breath we learned that the present policy of the Indian Bureau is wiping all this out in a dull smear of ugly and ineffectual imitation of white life. That the Bureau has remained utterly obtuse to this alteration of public sentiment is proved by the order issued while the Bureau was under fire about the Pueblo problem, recommending and threatening to do more than recommend the elimination of Indian dances, which met such a storm of public disapproval that by the time it reached them from Washington, a good many Indian agents had to discount the order as they communicated it to the Indians.

This, in fine, is what the Women's Clubs and associated organizations want; an Indian policy which can at least serve as a

starter for a world policy toward backward, dependent peoples. A policy which will insure to us the best that the Indian has to give, in place of a policy which forces upon him the worst that we have. A policy of public health which will reasonably secure us against contamination from disease in our contact with our Indian neighbors. A policy of education which will give the Indian reasonable use of himself and his native faculties in the pursuit of life and happiness. And we want this policy in the hands of a group of properly qualified people who will remember that the Indians do not belong to them, but to us, and will hold themselves reasonably sensitive to public opinion on the subject. In so far as the program and personnel of the present Indian Bureau conforms to this general outline, it has nothing to fear. Secretary Work has already shown himself amenable to such specialized information and opinion as the friends of the Indian have furnished him, notably in the case of the Palm Springs Indians of California. That something equally just can be worked out in New Mexico seems more than likely, but this much at least is certain, it will take its initiation where all movements of this kind should originate—in the public consciousness.





MESA VERDE—A. D. 1000

LILIAN WHITE SPENCER

With a Woodcut by Wharton Esherick

*Niagaras, arrested in full flight,
Cliffs, panic pale, plunge over the abyss,
O patient hand of God, that chiseled this
When time was young and earth, a neophyte,
Stark in baptismal waters! Tawny white
Stone tidal waves curve out, whose shadows kiss
A multitudinous pearl edifice,
Now turning amber in the sunset light.*

*Women nurse babes and fires. Down the wall,
From mesa fields, men toil as children call
And laugh through canyon cedars. "It is he!"
Whisper upgazing girls; a lad pipes where
His captive eagle frets and solemnly,
In kiva depths, priests chant an ancient prayer.*