

# THE WEEK.

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## THE INDIAN QUESTION.

WE are indebted to the *Mail* for an exhaustive report upon the Indians in the South-Western portion of our Territories; and Mr. Ham, of Winnipeg, who has been entrusted with the commission of inquiring into the condition of the Blackfeet and other tribes there, for the information of the public, has performed his task with ability and wisdom. He has not brought to light any important points beyond the fact that the Indians themselves are not labouring under any serious grievances. Their missionaries have made complaints from a moral standpoint, which cannot fail to shock the sensibilities of our people; but we may fairly hope that even they have been exaggerated in order to stir up a greater interest in the moral well-being of our savage wards. It must not be forgotten that that distant region has only in the last three or four years been opened up to the civilizing influence of the world, and in the process of development thousands of railway labourers have doubtless contributed to magnify the evil complained of.

Heretofore, this district has been so locked up from the eyes of the country that it is a wonder that greater complaints have not before this attracted the public ear, which may be taken as an evidence that the evil has not been so great in the past. The knowledge, however, that the physical power of the Indians is being sapped by the immoral influences of the advancing tide of civilization should be sufficient to cause the Government to institute measures for their protection. Canadians cannot allow the doctrine of "the survival of the fittest" to prevail. As a Christian nation our duty is to throw around our weak brethren our protecting arm, and preserve them for a higher plane of civilization, which they are quite capable of.

From Mr. Ham's account the Indians show no disposition to give trouble, but appear desirous to pursue the even tenor of their way; and it may be safely assumed that the outbreak of last year was the result of the machinations of Riel alone, who for some time had been sapping their loyalty and appealing to their cupidity; and unless some other evil-disposed person sows the seeds of sedition among them, we, apparently, need fear no further organized trouble. That the best mode of dealing with these Indians in the future is a problem, there can be no question; but we have a duty to perform towards them, and cannot shirk the responsibility. A more intimate knowledge of their character on the part of those who are dealing with them will no doubt result beneficially in time, but in order to produce practical results there should be a settled policy in our management of them.

First, we must recognize that the labour of the Indian is of value to the country, and the greatest value that can be obtained from his labour lies in his ability to trap and hunt. The most valuable fur is obtained in the northern part of the territory, and therefore the more Indians that can be located in the north the better, where fish, wild fowl, and fur are plentiful. To encourage them to go north, give them the materials to put up comfortable houses on land that they can consider their own, and give them stock to breed from, that they may become pastoral in their habits and ambitions. Those who prefer to remain on the plains should be settled together on their reserves, on their own land; and a combined

church and school-house erected for their benefit, and the principles of self-government taught them; and through the efflux of time the country will be rewarded by a grateful Indian population, instead of a stain being allowed to rest upon our national character for allowing them to be jostled from off the face of the earth by the more vigorous and ambitious white man. Towards the education of the Indians, according to the blue-book, forty-two schools are already maintained in addition to three industrial schools, but there is no evidence of any practical result having yet been obtained by these schools. Towards the attainment of this most deserving object of education a man of suitable ability should be appointed as a School Inspector, who would devote his abilities to the care of the Indians in this respect. We are wasting precious years in any neglect of the young, through whom alone we can hope to effect a radical change in Indian life and character. A material part of their education should be the learning of trades, the economical preparing of their food, and caring for their health,—matters of far more importance in their future welfare than a smattering of literary attainments. Towards this end the establishment of an institution in the East where fifty or a hundred Indian children, removed from their home influences, could be annually educated, would be a speedy mode of leavening the Indian population.

The Indian Agents should be instructed that they are there to protect the Indians under their charge. Indians are like children, with all the human instincts of a child in realizing the difference between right and wrong, and in placing implicit faith in the promises of their protectors. There is a recognized principle in dealing with children—never to break a promise to them, however trivial: a similar simplicity and cunning exists in the Indian character. They will press for their simple wants, and, once having yielded, don't neglect to fulfil the promise because in our mind it is of trivial importance. Indian Agents should protect the Indians,—not as some nurses do their children, to hide their faults and shield them from punishment,—but protect them in their dealings with the white man, that they may not be wronged morally or commercially.

The Hudson Bay Company, under the old system, had an established plan upon which they acted. Every post had a list of the Indians who traded at the post; their characters were fully set forth in this list, as to their trapping ability, the honesty of their intentions, etc. When a new officer came to the post he was guided entirely by this report, and if any Indian left this post in debt, his name was placed upon every post in the district as a warning to other officers in dealing with him. On the other hand, if there was a sixpence coming to any Indian he might come back ten years after and still find that sixpence standing to his credit. It was by this honesty in minute details that the Hudson Bay Company won the respect and allegiance of the Indians of the Territory: a similar policy on the part of our agents would probably have the same beneficial result. Those who are brought into contact with the Indians should be selected for their character, and they should be married: retired British officers would make good agents and instructors. By their long service they have acquired habits of discipline and training which are essential to the effective working of any system that depends upon the character of its officials far removed from authority.

Last year the Indians received a severe lesson for their attempt to kick over the traces, and for their wanton taking of life, and will not soon forget it; and while there is still a modicum of excitement resulting from last year's campaign, a display of power would have a most beneficial effect, and would be a precaution that cannot be overestimated. It is questionable, however, if it would be wise to march troops through the Indian districts, the object of which the Indians themselves would not understand; and they might be frightened into hostilities which they never contemplated. It would be wiser to assemble a force at Regina or Fort Qu'Appelle, as a guarantee for the protection of the country, and assemble there a number of the Indian chiefs and braves for a pow-wow with General Middleton, as representing the power of the country—to hear a little plain talk from him. It would produce a most beneficial effect upon the peacefulness of the tribes, and upon the country generally. With one hundred and thirty thousand Indians scattered throughout the Dominion, the question of their management and their welfare is of great public interest, and the *Mail* has shown a most commendable spirit in instituting these inquiries among the South-Western tribes, the result of which cannot fail to be of practical service.

C. A. BOULTON.