

INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL WORK

Looking over the work done by this and similar institutions, the question must arise in any thoughtful mind, What shall the end of this work be?

We take the children from their homes and keep them at school, say three or four years, and then, following the policy of the Department, send them back again to assist in bettering the general condition of Indian tribal life. It may be a matter of question as to whether this result is likely to follow in the majority of cases. Where one person possessing unusual advantages finds himself surrounded by ninety-nine not similarly blessed, it will not always follow that the one will lift up the ninety-nine. One hardly ever rises above the average standing of his associates, unless he is a specially strong character, and the tendency to go backward is very marked with Indian people, when helpful influences have been withdrawn.

In view of these facts, it has seemed to me to be the duty of our government to retain their hold upon Indian children graduates of the Industrial schools until they had reduced knowledge gained in the schools to practical use in active life. To make this more clear, would it not be advisable for the Department to set aside a township or two of land adapted to mixed farming, such land as might be found about the sources of Fisher River on Lake Winnipeg; then, when children leave the institution, give them a few acres each. Some could do the farming, some might follow their trades. A colony might in this way be settled under the direction and superintendence of some duly qualified government officer. In some cases boys and girls might perhaps marry at the schools and proceed to take up their abode on such a reserve and translate their abilities developed at the schools into successful lives.

There are many reasons why I have entertained these convictions. The hills, caves and swamps of Keewatin can never do much more than to supply its inhabitants with venison and fish. It is not, and never will be, an excellent farming

country. We take the children away from their homes, when they might be gathering skill as hunters or fishermen. We give them a commercial education and acquaint them with the methods of civilization, after this sending them back to where neither commercial life nor modern civilization are to be found.

To some of us it is a well-known fact that the sources of food are growing yearly less valuable. The deer and the moose are very much less in number now than formerly. The fish supply has failed quite considerably in the last ten years. To some of us the time does not seem distant when the people of Keewatin must be taught to earn their living from the ground, or be fed at the expense of the Dominion. The former course, for reasons given, seems to be doubtful in the extreme; the latter course could only be deplored by all who wish the Indian well. He is a better man when he works out the conditions of his own well-being. He who begs loses all that is of value in true manhood.

Many of the children returning from the schools will be ill-content with the circumstances of a life in the interior. The charms of solitude will not be so attractive as when in earlier days they roamed the forest, seeking game. The advantages enjoyed here will always inspire a restlessness and a discontent with the more limited privileges of a solitary existence far from the haunts and homes, the villages and cities of the white man.

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