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PROPOSAL

OF

MR. HARRISON

FOR THE

APPLICATION OF PART OF THE FUNDS

OF THE

New England Company

WITHIN THE TERRITORIES OF THE

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HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY.

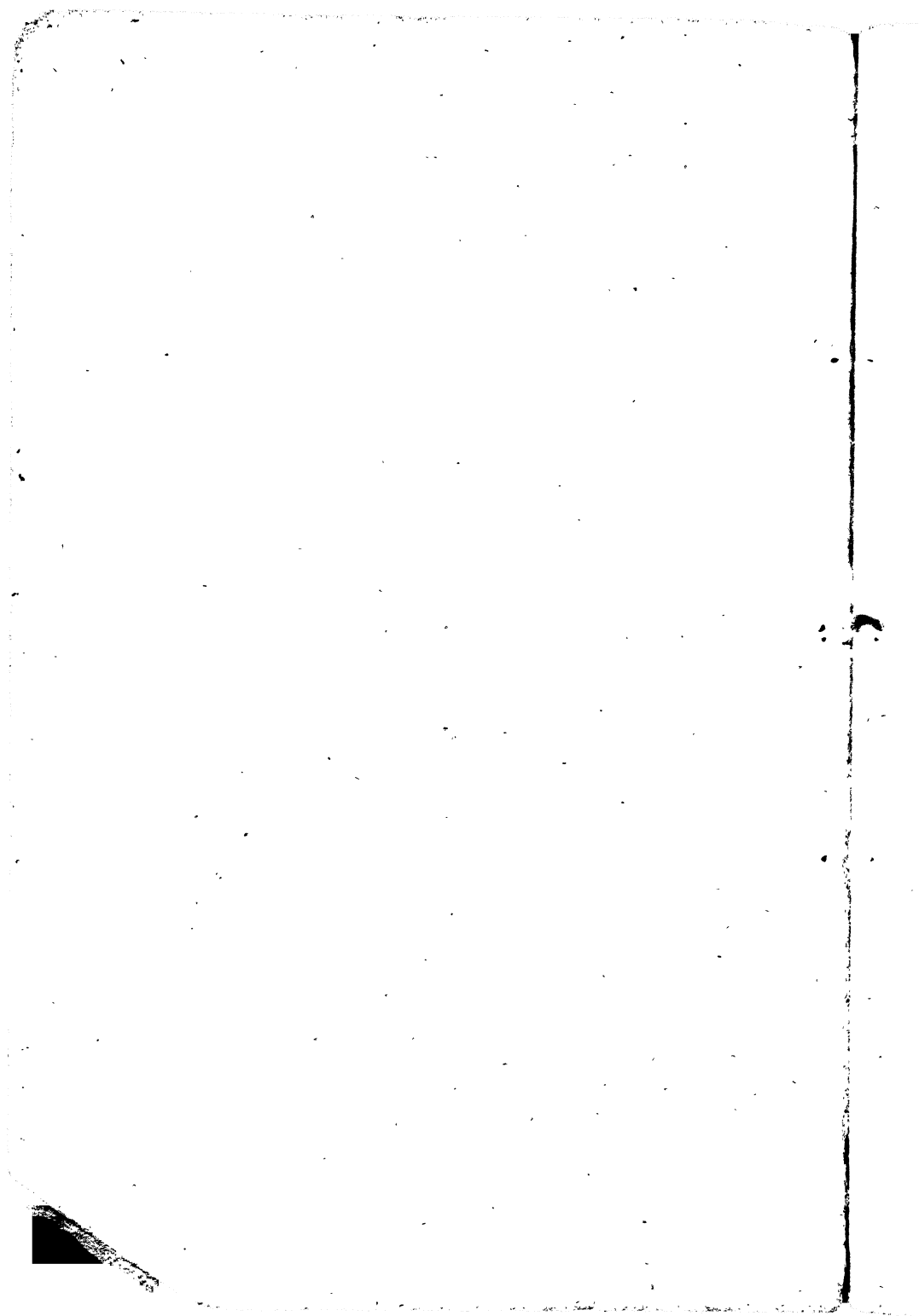


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LONDON:

PRINTED BY S. GOSNELL, LITTLE QUEEN STREET, HOLBORN.

1815.



PROPOSAL,

&c.

IN the territories of the Hudson's Bay Company an establishment for the instruction of the Indians might be formed with a prospect of more extensive success than in any other part of the British dominions in North America. In Canada there are already missionaries maintained at the expense of Government, for the religious and moral instruction of the Indians within that province. In Nova Scotia and New Brunswick the Indian tribes are almost extinct; and nothing remains of the Aborigines but some scattered families of vagrants, among whom there is no opportunity for any extensive improvement. But in the territories of the Hudson's Bay Company there are numerous and extensive tribes, increasing in population, and in many respects possessed of those qualifications which fit them for advancing in the career of civilization.

The Hudson's Bay Company have always been disposed to promote education among the natives ; but their attention has been chiefly directed to the children of half-blood, reared about their factories, in consequence of the connexion of their European servants with Indian women. Though the Company have been liberal in affording opportunities of instruction to these children, it has been left in a great degree to the discretion of their chief officers, and the object has not always been equally attended to. More might certainly have been accomplished, if there had been a separate fund specifically set apart for the purposes of education. Of the many attempts which have been made by benevolent individuals and associations for the civilization and instruction of savages in various parts of the world, a very few only have succeeded ; but by an attentive comparison of the methods which have proved successful, and of those which have failed, we may arrive at principles which will serve as a sure guide in future undertakings.

One very common cause of failure has been, the attempt to inculcate religious and moral instruction, without a sufficient basis of the habits of civilization. The Jesuits and other missionaries, by great address and uncommon perseverance, have sometimes succeeded in persuading sa-

vage tribes to adopt the Christian religion ; but in all cases where they have confined their attention solely to this object, their instructions have proved to be completely superficial, and their proselytes have relapsed into their original ignorance and idolatry the moment that the care of the missionaries has been withdrawn or relaxed.

In those cases where attention has been paid to introduce the improvements of civilized life as well as the light of religion, many failures have arisen from an attempt to do too much at once, to convert a set of complete savages immediately into a civilized society. The children of Indians have in some instances been taken from their parents at an early age, and have received a complete European education ; but these lads, upon arriving at manhood, and returning among their countrymen, have generally relapsed into all the habits of savage life. In a few instances the result has been different, but not more satisfactory. An individual Indian, educated at great expense and trouble, has remained among the European settlers, associating with them only, and in no degree contributing to the progress of improvement among the natives in general.

From these facts it appears clear, that no effectual progress can be made in the civilization of

the Indians, unless it be made by a whole tribe together, or at least by such a number as may form a society among themselves, and, by the effect of mutual example, preserve the improvements which they have acquired.

In a nation of wandering hunters, it would serve little purpose to convert one of them into a complete farmer, while the rest remain with their habits unchanged. But if any considerable number can be induced to make an attempt at cultivation, even on the smallest scale, an important point will be gained.

The natural progress of civilization has always been very slow ; and if we look back to the early history of the most distinguished nations of Europe, we find that they have advanced from barbarism to civilization by steps so minute, as to be almost imperceptible at the time, and that these have succeeded each other so gradually, as to occupy centuries. This progress may be accelerated in some degree, but there is no probability of any solid benefit, unless we follow the order of nature. A very small improvement, generally diffused among a whole tribe of Indians, and firmly established by custom, will facilitate the introduction of farther improvements ; and thus a great change may be ultimately effected, though an attempt to

accomplish the whole at once could lead to nothing but disappointment and disgust.

Of all the Protestants who have attempted the introduction of Christianity among savage tribes, the Moravians have been among the most successful; and their practice has approached more nearly to these principles than that of any other missionaries. Another very remarkable instance of the success of these principles is to be met with in the benevolent exertions of the Quakers of Philadelphia, not many years ago, among the Indians of the Ohio.

The Indians that inhabit the territories of the Hudson's Bay Company are almost all wandering tribes, or scattered families, that subsist entirely by hunting and fishing, and have no fixed habitations. From the precarious nature of their subsistence, families are frequently reduced to the greatest extremity of distress, and the irregularity of their vagabond life is extremely unfavourable to the formation of any good habits among the rising generation. To a set of people in this state, the most important of all improvements would be, to make them apply to the cultivation of the ground, so that they might obtain a less precarious supply of provisions. This improvement naturally leads to the establishment of fixed habit-

ations; and though the men must be expected to remain attached to their accustomed pursuits of hunting and fishing, their families will not only be relieved from many immediate hardships, but the greater regularity in their mode of life will afford an opportunity for forming their children to habits of industry and steady application, which are utterly unattainable by those who are brought up in a completely vagabond life. The probable effects of this change upon the moral improvement of the Indians are too evident to require illustration.

With a view to the practical accomplishment of these objects, two different plans may be proposed. One is, to employ missionaries to live among the wandering Indians, to gain their confidence, and to take every opportunity of persuading them to adopt the practices which are of most importance to their welfare. The other method is, to establish a school, in which young Indians may be instructed, and then sent back among their parents and friends, to practise the arts which they have been taught.

In the comparison of these two methods much argument might be used; but the most effectual plan would undoubtedly be, a combination of the two. In some central situation, where provisions may be most easily procured, a school should

be established for the instruction of the youth, and at the same time opportunities may be found to impress on the tribes at large a sense of the importance of the objects recommended to them.

The number of the Indians that can be received in the school must of course depend on the amount of the fund that can be appropriated to the object. Even though the number should be small, effects of great consequence may be accomplished if a judicious selection be made; for the young men who obtain the benefit of instruction will probably become leading men in their respective tribes, and their example may therefore have a very extensive effect.

In the education of these Indians the course of instruction must be very different from that of an ordinary school, and should approach more to the system of a school of industry, in which agriculture and the mechanic arts must be among the principal objects. In guiding the Indians towards the habit of civilized life, one of the most essential requisites is, to excite among them a general desire for improvement: with this view, the instruction of those who are placed in the proposed establishment must be directed to objects of which the utility may be evident to the rudest savage. It is of great importance that these young men,

when they return to their parents and friends, should be conspicuously superior to those who have not had the benefit of instruction. They must not, therefore, be allowed to forget those accomplishments of savage life, without which they would be despised. They must be sent back possessed of as much dexterity in hunting and fishing as their companions; and their additional acquirements should be such as are most likely to be valued. Reading or writing alone will gain but little credit to one of these young men; but if he has learned to mend a gun, he will be highly respected in his tribe, and others will become ambitious of obtaining the same opportunities of improvement. The point of most essential importance is to inure them, as far as possible, to habits of foresight and persevering industry; and to give them practical experience of the facility of cultivating the ground, as well as the great advantages of the practice.

The English language should be a primary object; both as it will serve as a vehicle for farther instruction, and as it will furnish a common medium of communication between the Indians of different nations, and thereby tend, in a great degree, to obviate their dissensions: nothing indeed could have so much effect in softening their animosities, as the institution of a school, in which

Indian boys, of every different language, will be led to associate as companions. With this view, it is a fortunate circumstance, that the various nations of Indians in the territories of the Hudson's Bay Company are, at present, generally in a state of peace; and though they entertain strong prejudices against each other, no violent hostilities prevail, except among some of the remotest of the tribes.

To the acquisition of the English language, may be added reading, writing, with the first elements of arithmetic; but it may be a question, whether it would be prudent to press too much this course of instruction. It must be kept in mind, that among these Indians the youth are scarcely accustomed to the smallest degree of restraint from their parents, and it would hardly be possible to make them submit to that sort of controul which is exercised over children in our schools.—Much address must, therefore, be used to induce them to give a willing attention to the objects of primary importance; and it would be dangerous to make too severe a demand upon their patience. Their exertions must be kept alive by the attraction of novelty, and by great variety in their occupations. Of sedentary study, a very small portion only, can be ventured. No object of exertion should be pursued so far at one time, as to

disgust them, and weary their half-formed habits of attention; and it will be necessary to indulge them with large intervals of recreation, to be employed in their accustomed pursuits of hunting and fishing. On the other hand, as it is desirable to extend the benefits of instruction to as great a number of the Indian youth as possible, no long period can be allowed to each individual—and that period ought not to be dissipated, by attempting too many objects at once. Upon the points of most essential consequence, all the progress that can be expected, may perhaps be gained in the course of one year, or two at the utmost, if the efforts of the teachers be concentrated upon the primary objects only. With a view to more complete instruction to qualify them as missionaries or teachers, a few lads of promising abilities may, at the discretion of the master, be kept at school for a longer time: the number of this description must be very limited, or it would interfere with the extensive benefits proposed by the institution.

It must be evident that the management of such an institution will require talents of a very different class from those of an ordinary schoolmaster. Much of the success of the plan will depend on its being intrusted to a man fully qualified for the task, and the salary ought, therefore, to be liberal. A knowledge of the languages spoken by

the Indians in these territories would be a desirable qualification ; but it is not to be expected that this should be found combined with the other more essential requisites. A man who is zealous in the undertaking, may soon acquire a sufficient acquaintance with these dialects ; and in the mean time, he must have the assistance of subordinate teachers, who are familiar with the Indian languages. Fit persons for this purpose may be found among the more elderly of the servants of the Hudson's Bay Company, who have long resided among these Indians : such men may be employed, not only as assistant teachers in the school, but also to visit the wandering tribes, and to call their attention to the utility of the improvements recommended to them. In process of time, it may perhaps be advisable to employ missionaries to reside constantly among the natives ; but in the outset, occasional visits may be sufficient ; especially as the officers at the Company's trading posts would have some influence in persuading them to commence the cultivation of the ground.

The children of the Company's European servants cannot be received as free scholars on the proposed establishment ; but considerable advantages may arise, if a school for their instruction be connected with the Indian establishment. Most of the children of half blood are acquainted

both with the English language, and with the dialect of some native tribe ; so that they may save a great part of the expense of interpreters, and may be employed, according to the new systems of education, in the office of monitors. The parents of these children will pay for their board and education, and the annual premium may be fixed at such a rate, as will, in some degree, exceed the expense. The profit which will thus accrue to the master, will render it the more easy to find a person of adequate abilities to undertake that important charge.

Taking into consideration this additional source of emolument, and other facilities, which the Hudson's Bay Company have the means of procuring to the establishment, it is probable, that if a regular fund of five or six hundred pounds a year can be appropriated to the object, this may be sufficient both to afford adequate salaries to the master and assistants ; and also to defray the charge of maintaining constantly from twenty to thirty Indian boys and girls on the establishment. But as the expenses cannot as yet be ascertained with minute exactness, it will be most prudent to begin with a smaller number of scholars, and extend the scale by degrees.

If the Company for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England, and parts adjacent, will allot

a proportion of their funds to such an institution, the Hudson's Bay Company will become responsible that the sum allowed (whether it be more or less) shall be laid out in the most economical manner, and that the expenses to be incurred, shall not exceed the limits which may be assigned. Their confidential officers shall be charged to give all the assistance in their power, both in forwarding the object in general, and in superintending the application of the money which may be allowed, without making any charge against the fund for their trouble in this management.

The Hudson's Bay Company will also appropriate a piece of land for the use of the establishment, and will undertake to provide the buildings that are necessary for its accommodation. And whenever any disposition is evinced by the Indians to settle in a fixed habitation, or even in part to support themselves by cultivating the ground, allotments of land, well adapted for the purpose, will be made to them by the Hudson's Bay Company, and every facility afforded.

THE END.

*S. Gaskell, Printer,
Little Queen Street, London.*