

**E.C., "The Indian Question," *Friends' Intelligencer* (1853-1910); Oct 12, 1867: 24, 32: American Periodicals p. 508 .**

From *The Moravian*.

In the Moravian burying-grounds, those "acres of God" consecrated by the ordinances of religion and by the respect for the mortal remains of fellow human creatures, whom hope, and in many instances a conviction amounting to certainty, places now in the realms of the blessed, many a modest mound covers the dust of the aborigines of this country. Just as they are buried in Christian ground, and by Christian rites, so they lived Christian lives, and died Christian deaths. The records of our church abound with examples of Indian conversion, and Indian docility, industry, and virtue. The missionaries have found innumerable instances of the susceptibility of the Indian to religious teachings, and the civilizing processes. Under their tuition the fierce son of the forest has been content to lay aside his natural promptings to revenge and cruelty, and to become forbearing and peace-loving. They have seen him leave his nomad life, to become the tiller of the soil and the constructor of houses. His unlettered state has frequently by their ministrations become one of culture and education.

And this experience of our missionaries does not stand alone. There are some other experiences to support its teachings and warrant its conclusions. That there should not be more is to be deeply regretted, but the fault lies not with the Indian. It is his white brethren, who have failed in their duty, and by their conduct have throughout more deeply engraved into his nature, the lines of revenge and of barbarism, to which he is prone. The proposition that the Indian may be educated into Christianity and civilization, is also proved by the experience of the Roman Catholic missions. We cannot be accused of any partiality for that powerful but degenerate form of the Christian church. Least of all can we for a moment excuse animus of the Society of Jesus, which has made a concentered organism of all the gradually growing corruptions and heresies of that church. Yet under the worst systems, good men have lived. Despite false teachings, and sinister perversions of the intellect, God's mercy has often kept the heart open. Compassion, unselfishness, benevolence and a pure life must not be denied to exist, because they are found in company with false tenets. On the contrary, it is a source of joy that while the disastrous results of false doctrines, if carried to their logical effects, must be so wide-reaching and fatal, Heaven

still keeps open the heart of individuals to spiritual instincts, and saves good affections from corresponding ruin. But whether we view the efforts of the Jesuit missionaries as prompted by a Christian benevolence, or by inferior motives, --and there is probably an admixture of both elements,-- their results prove the falsity of the charge that the Indian has but one career, namely, to be destroyed by the effect of his own passions. The Romish missions, too, have presented the spectacle of quiet law-abiding Indians, whose natures have been changed from roving savages to industrious citizens.

Is not the inference plain? Approach the Indian in the spirit of love and of disinterestedness, that is, of Christianity, and you exercise [sic] the demons that hold him in possession, and develop seeds of culture lying dormant in his nature, but only waiting to be nurtured by consideration and benevolence,--to grow into blessed and fruitful results.

The Indian has been well called the child of the forest. The term is a happy one, as it not only illustrates his habits, but his characteristic. He is just what nature would make man, if man were left to nature, without exterior help and supernatural assistance. He might be called with even more propriety the *slave* of nature. The first mark of advance in man, is the conquest of nature, and the subjugation of the material world around him;--and in the degree that this superiority obtains, man fulfils his true destiny, and accomplishes his real happiness. But to the Indian, the divine message to subdue the earth, to earn his bread in the sweat of his brow, has not yet come. The sorrows and the joys, the defeats and the triumphs the civilized man feels in this contest, he knows nothing of. The community of interest, the dependence of man upon man, the pleasures of amicable strife, the blessing of labor, and the joys of society, are unknown to him.... He lives for himself alone, and satisfied if the necessities of the present are at hand; he knows no maxims of conduct which provided for the future. When nature gives, he takes; when nature withholds, he starves. He vegetates rather than lives. His heart is too cold to fear or to love. His condition would speedily plunge him into ruin, and his race into spontaneous extermination, were not even his passions, in their natural condition, comparatively inert and lifeless like his good affections. He knows of the existence of a God, and of the immortality of the soul, but he reflects not upon the divine attributes, or his own responsibilities.

What is the white man's duty, when he comes into contact with these sons of the forest? They have immortal souls, they are fellow men, and they have priority of possession in the land

to which he emigrates. The spirit of the present age recognizes the rights of the weak. Today we begin to measure ourselves by the figure we will make in the eyes of posterity. We begin to fear the criticism of the wise and good; the lifted finger of duty begins to be heeded, and national interest is seen to coincide with its monitions. The nature of the Indian requires to be supplemented by the superior experience, opportunities, and civilization of the white man. —We must come as superiors, and as teachers. Our superiority must be shown by our conduct to consist in what are its essential features and foundation, namely, absolute justice, intelligent consideration, and disinterested benevolence. The duty of the Indian to himself must be enforced by a practical exemplification of the influence of duty over ourselves in all our dealings with them. So only can our civilization find commendation in their eyes. The doctrines of Religion and the teachings of Education will then have a basis to act upon; the wedge will then enter their contracted callous natures,— the product of isolation and indifference —and open their hearts and lives to humanizing influences. The sentiment of honor, which in the Indian rises sometimes almost to the dignity of a virtue, although it is based on personal self satisfaction, rather than, as it ought to be, on devotion to right, enables him to esteem correctness of dealing, and resent injustice and deception. Without a consistent course of just dealing, he cannot be approached, and without an unselfish benevolence he never can improve. Both united will settle the question of the Indian troubles, in a way which will redound to the credit of the nation, will accord with the immutable principles by which nations and individuals can alone happily progress, and will heal a sore, now suppurating with moral and financial disgrace. It is high time that this government should perceive these truths and act up to them. In dealing with inferior races, the political maxims which inculcate a negative position on the part of government to the governed, which may be entirely correct for men supposed to be able to govern themselves, and blessed with privileges of civilization, do not obtain. A Christian policy must influence all our legislative and executive proceedings, one worthy the age and our opportunities. Government in its relations to the Indians must act on positive principles and become the dispenser of benefits and the guardian of strict justice.

The worst foe to our character as a nation in this respect, are the barbarous theories frequently advanced and held by many on the frontiers, which declare that the only possible solution of these troubles is the extermination of the Indian race. Their existence is declared incompatible with our civilization, and the notion of any reliable peace with them is scouted. It is

even declared that prominent senators, relying upon a partial observation of the present state of affairs on the frontiers, have given in their adhesion to this despicable and bloody policy. On the face of it, such an idea is too repulsive to be adopted by any being possessed of common humanity. That the theory is false we have already shown by the numerous entirely reliable instances of the civilization of individuals and communities adduced in the commencement of these remarks. It is entirely opposed to Christianity, philosophy, and experience to maintain that because the race is nomad and savage, there is no possibility of change. ... Let us instance a case taken from the history of the Indian himself in support of our assertions. The story of the Aztecs in Mexico, and their very considerable progress in civilization and tile arts, are now pretty well known, from the history of Prescott and the researches of Schoolcraft, Squier, Catherwood, and Tylor. In architecture they equalled the Egyptians and Chaldeans, if they did not surpass them. In metallurgy they had manipulated in profusion with gold, silver, lead, copper, tin and obsidian. They were indefatigable tillers of the soil, —ingenious floriculturists and gardeners; they invented hieroglyphical characters, and were adepts in astronomy. And who were these Aztecs? When first confronted by the Spaniards they had been seated in Mexico rather less than one hundred and fifty years. Towards the close of the twelfth century of our era, they had immigrated from a spot traditionally known as Atzlan, or the “country of water,” most likely the territory inclosed within the angle formed by the junction of the Rio Colorado and Gila at the head of the Gulf of California. By the year 1324 they had reached the table lands of Central America. “We have an indisputable instance, therefore,” remarks an Edinburgh Reviewer, “of a nomadic horde suddenly suppressing the instincts of their nature, relinquishing the habits of savage life, becoming a permanently settled people, developing a capacity for political organization, raising stupendous piles of brick and stone, continually embellishing innumerable cities, cultivating the arts and sciences, and making such advancement, in astronomy more particularly, as not only to rival but to surpass that which was made by the most enlightened nations of antiquity in Asia and Europe. And all these astounding results are crowded within the limited space of a century and a half!” This Mexican empire had been built upon the ruins of another, from whom they derived much of their civilization, —the Toltecas—who themselves had originally come from the North. When we reflect that all this knowledge and advancement was associated with one of the most abominable of religions, whose altars reeked from sunrise to sunset with the fumes of human gore, the question naturally arises, how incalculably greater would have been the result under the sway of

the Christian religion? To the desperadoes and scoundrels who infest the frontiers no answer need be given when they urge the necessity for Indian blood. The regular settler, who sees his hopes blasted and his well-earned acquisitions destroyed by the savage foray, deserves the greatest commiseration and adequate protection, but he is in fact more the victim of his own government, which has been guilty of a criminal negligence and disregard of Christian duty in its treatment of the native American, than of the inherent incapacity of the latter for the condition or a good neighbor.

Is the Indian not worthy of the interposition of some representative of the wisdom and benevolence of the nation between him and his oppressor? Or is it only when votes can be gained, and a party hue and cry raised, that we can be made to speak in the name of humanity and religion? Unless this Indian question be settled according to the dictates of high principle and philanthropy, such will be the verdict of history, and all the peans of self-glorification we may sing will not save us from being condemned in the minds of good and true men and in the eyes of Heaven. The extermination of the Indian by our instrumentality, should it happen by our faults of commission or omission, would be recorded as a lost opportunity, and a faithlessness to our trust, worthy to be stigmatized throughout all time. E. C.