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PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS ON INDIAN AFFAIRS.

by Mary C. Collins

TO THE HONORABLE COMMISSIONER OF INDIAN AFFAIRS :

I now endeavor to comply with your request to give you in writing some of my own ideas in regard to practical work among the Indians. I can speak only for the Dakotas, as my acquaintance with Indians does not extend beyond this tribe.

7.7. P. The Department has already heard so much concerning the inefficiency of our Indian Agents that I can say nothing new upon this subject. I will quote Fire Cloud, a Dakota man, in regard to this matter. In conversation he said to me: "As yet the Dakotas cannot see clearly what the customs of the white men are; the only way we can learn their way, is from the white men we see among us. If the agent gets drunk, lies and swears, and the men he employs to teach the wild men to be gentle and wise, do these things also, and we follow them as our teachers given us by the Great Father, what kind of civilized men shall we become?" Therefore, considering the responsible places occupied by these representatives of our civilization, I would say, always select good men to fill these positions; men thoroughly clean and honest, as well as men with clear heads, good business tact and executive ability. The salaries paid to agents are too small to command such men. An honest man of family, with children who must be educated in the East, cannot live on the salary at present paid. When good successful agents are found they should hold their positions without regard to political changes. In the ten years I have known the Cheyenne River Agency, we have had five agents, and but *one* was a success.

The Indian police is an admirable addition to the agent's forces: it helps to carry out agency rules, and, so far as I have observed, successfully.

The farmers in general have not been very successful. Many of them spend the greater part of the time at the agency proper,

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seldom going out among the people. The farmer should be an honest, practical, Christian man. After he has helped an Indian to break his field, taught him how to hold a plow and drive the team, he should go with him through the different steps, planting, cultivating, harvesting; and then show him how to care for his crops, and how to make a root-house where he may keep his vegetables from freezing in winter. He could employ some of our young Indian men who have been taught in the schools, to help in this matter. The farmer should have control of those laboring with him, in order that away from the agency he could use his authority in employing men to the best advantage.

The carpenter should be allowed this privilege also, and he should spend the most of his time out in the Indian villages, teaching men how to build log houses; how to saw out the places for doors and windows; how to make and hang doors. I have done this myself in many places, and therefore I know the Indian would not be so utterly helpless if he could be taught to be skillful in working with his hands. Men employed to teach the Indians should not do the work entirely, but should teach the Indians to do it. They should be men who aim at something higher than simply filling in **the time**, drawing the meagre wages, and waiting to see who their successors will be. Here, too, if we wish better men we must pay better wages.

The Indian's rations should not be cut down to starvation point simply to compel him to support himself. It is our own fault and his misfortune that he is in this condition. We have robbed him of his former means of subsistence, and as yet have given him no other. He has no opportunity of earning money, or helping himself to any great extent. It is well to say to him that in a certain length of time his rations will be cut off whether he has learned to work or not, but in the meantime teach him how to work, and give *more* to the industrious, progressive Indian, than to the lazy, idle one; for, if those who work hard and whose children are in school must have their rations cut down, while the unruly and idle ones continue to receive full rations, is not this putting a premium on laziness? Some of our agents have used the farming implements to buy the favor of the bad, disorderly Indian, for the sake of his influence. Wagons, harness, plows, etc., should be given as rewards for progress, industry and good behavior, to those needing them, and never to put a bad Indian into a good humor. One Indian man said, "I send my children to school, I plant and

raise a crop, I have built a house and I have never yet had a wagon." But some other man had had two or three. It is not right and ought to be avoided.

The Christian missionaries are the only permanent factors in this whole problem. They remain through all administrations. The Government owes to them its moral support and good will. Many of the Indians wearing civilized clothes to-day, are those taught in the mission schools and in the homes of the missionaries. The yearly report of the increase in the number of houses built, and acres of land broken, sounds well to the ears of the people, but the greater part of this work is done directly or indirectly by the missionaries. The possibility of successful Government schools, and training schools in the East, is due largely to the work of the missionary in the home of the Indian. The Government should not withdraw its support from these missionary enterprises. The churches and Government should work together, helping each other to solve this most intricate problem. S. R. Riggs and Thomas Williamson gave to the work of helping these Dakotas fifty years of their lives, and their names are known and loved by the whole Sioux Nation. They are dead, but their sons, born among the Indians, live, and to-day are carrying hopefully on this great work. A. L. Riggs of Santee Agency, and J. P. Williamson and Bishop Hare of Yankton Agency, are authority as regards educational endeavors, and good men to consult with. Messrs. Riggs and Williamson, both highly educated men, are also fine Dakota scholars.

Many attempts of the Government to deal fairly with the Indian have been thwarted by illiterate and dishonest interpreters. No interpreter should ever be selected to do Government work whose character and ability cannot be vouched for by some good man speaking both languages. Thos. L. Riggs at Oahe, D. T., also familiar with the Dakota language, has more absolute influence over the wild Indians than any other one I know. Bad white men or half-breeds speaking poor English do much harm in carrying back to the Dakotas from Washington wrong impressions and false reports; and by interpreting while in Washington, incorrectly.

The Indians are not willing to receive cattle in return for land simply because they have been promised cattle so often and have not received them; and also because the few received are given in such a way that they feel no interest in them. They say "they are not ours, they belong to the Government and we only take care of

them and are not paid for it." Could not the cattle be given in such a way as to encourage the Indian to care for and increase the numbers?

The Agency doctor, so far as I know, has not been successful. He is located at the agency. The Indians are obliged, in order to find wood and water, to live along the streams, a few in a place, from ten to sixty miles away. When ill they seldom go to the doctor. Sometimes they wait till ration day and then some one goes to ask for medicine. Here, often, a poor interpreter hinders the physician in prescribing correctly, even if he is inclined to do so. The doctor must treat in a wholesale manner all alike. His medicine is usually selected according to the popular idea of dealing with the Indians, *as tribes or nations and not as individuals*. We need hospitals or training schools. No one can feel this more than I, after so many years in trying to care for the sick. I have found many who would make fair nurses if they only knew how, but in severe illness they are helpless. I saw a poor old woman suffering with fever. She lay upon one old blanket on the ground, a large cup of strong, black coffee beside her, and a piece of black hard bread. She was now at the turning point, the fever going, and proper nourishment and care would save her life. As I entered, I heard the low moaning and the words "mini wacin," repeated over and over. I addressed the daughter, saying, "why do you not give her water?" She said "she can't take it." The girl filled a quart cup and held it towards the old woman whose feeble hand could not grasp it. I raised the feeble form and held the cup to her lips, and she drank like one famished; and the girl said, "white people know all things." They do not know how to care for the sick, and they are superstitious and afraid of the very sick. Hospitals presided over by first class men or women, would succeed with a good physician loving his profession. He must have efficient helpers, take the sick one with one member of his family, (choosing the best,) and while doing all that can be done for the sick one, at the same time teach this friend to nurse him and to use simple remedies. Here would be a good place to use the girls and boys graduating in our boarding schools. If those training schools are to be run wholly for the good of the Indian, when men are found who are reliable and efficient they should be made sure of their positions. Changes are a hindrance to the progress of the Indian. Christians alone should be employed in this work, men who can care for the soul as well as the

body. The Agency doctor is in a position to do more toward civilizing the Indian than any other one man, if he so desires.

Industrial training should be encouraged. Our Dakotas are not lacking in brain power; they are a wonderfully clear-thinking people. In many respects they are worse off than their ancestors. The Dakota of the past was independent, he could make his own living. In Minnesota, his former home, there was plenty of game, fish, wild honey, maple sugar groves, wild rice, wild fruit, nuts and roots for food, and the bark of many trees from which he made his drink. He could live well and easily in his old home. In Dakota there is no game, and but one root which he eats, no nuts nor rice, and but little fruit, literally nothing for him to live upon. If he makes a living in Dakota he must dig it from the soil. His ancestors never performed any hard physical labor. Examine a tall well-built Dakota's arm. It is as delicate as a woman's. He has no muscle and but little strength. He not only does not know how to labor hard with his hands, but he is not yet able to do the same amount of work as a man used to labor. If we would have the next generation develop more strength, more muscle, we must deal with the present generation wisely and carefully. Let every Indian be taught to work with his hands. Give to him Industrial schools, well equipped, and run by men fitted to be an example and an inspiration to their pupils. Such men should not be subject to political changes. Industrial departments should be attached to boarding schools, now in existence, under control of Government, churches or individuals. Several more are needed at once on or near the great Sioux Reservation. It would be well for those interested in the educational work among Indians to visit representative schools such as the Santee Normal Training School at Santee Agency, Neb., and the school at Hampton, Va.; not merely spending a day in those schools, but studying them thoroughly.

We need a large Industrial school now in reach of the Indian Agencies along the Missouri river. If Fort Sully can be secured by the Interior Department it would be a good point. There are good buildings and almost a sufficient number to run a large school; but little building would be necessary. It is a beautiful and healthful spot, in easy reach of all the Agencies along the river, and Government boats could ship all the material necessary here, bring pupils, and carry the products of their labor to the Agencies. It is said that shoes, harness, clothes, tinware, etc., would cost the Government more than the present system, but better material would be sup-

plied and the mills here could supply better flour and for less money than other parties could do it. Even if other supplies cost more it will cost less than it would to teach the people these trades and make no use of their products. Education is what we ask for. It costs less than war and will conquer the Indian more thoroughly. If Fort Sully cannot be obtained, a place below at the next landing called Peoria Bottom, would be the best place. Here is timber, a good boat landing, plenty of good farming land and hay land. The land now belongs to individuals but could be purchased reasonably and in a large tract. This place is the one where in the old days the representative men from all their tribes held their councils. Therefore it is a spot known and loved by all the people. It is easy of access by water and none too far from a railroad.

Such schools should not be located in crude, frontier towns. The influence of that class of white men who have lived with Indians, and who would claim relationship with the students, would have a demoralizing effect. Such towns full of saloons, gambling houses, and even viler dens than these, are no places to put boys and girls just coming into the light. These men called "squaw men" do all they can to antagonize the Indian and to induce him to resist progress.

At Peoria Bottom there are living witnesses to the fact that day school work is a success. Here we have several Indian farmers, all full Dakotas, living in good Christian homes built by themselves, an example which would be of great value to the boys and girls in school. There is at present a girl's school here but it would in no way interfere with a Government school. From here have gone out some of our best teachers, boys and girls educated wholly in the day school. Boys should be taught farming and cattle-raising as well as trades; girls, gardening and chicken-raising. This requires freedom and cannot be done in walls, therefore a town is no place for such a school. Schools should be run by permanent men, holding good men as long as possible.

The Government day schools can only be made successful by placing them in charge of Christian men or women with the missionary spirit who would also go into the homes of their pupils and teach home-building and home-keeping. The idea that nothing can be done with the older Indians is an erroneous one. They may not learn English, yet many of them learning to read and write in their native tongue have become exemplary Christians, building up civilized homes and urging their children to learn English. Our

dealings with the Indian tend to pauperize him. The dinner offered as a recompense to induce the child to come to school makes him feel that he is doing the school a favor by attending, and so when he is hungry he will go to school to eat and not to study, and when he has food at home the chance is that he will not go to school. Hence noonday meals in these schools, unless with a large force of teachers who can find employment at the noon hours for boys as well as girls, in teaching them to prepare a civilized meal and so introducing an industrial department, works more harm than good.

One short session each day without intermission I find to be better, or if two sessions, have one in the morning for children and one in the afternoon for adults. The teacher should spend a good part of his time in the homes when out of school. Every child should be compelled to go to school, and to rob a home of all the children to send them away to boarding schools, would not tend to civilize the homes. Therefore the day school should be encouraged. A few large Industrial schools would then be sufficient.

The young men ask titles to their homes. The older men see that this must come or that the history of the Black Hills will be repeated. They should be given so as to protect them in their lands at once ; and, in such a way, that if these lands are abandoned by the Indians, no white man could get a title, and any white man found living on or leasing such lands, should at once be sent to state-prison. The white men who are already the lawful husbands of Indian women should be allowed to continue to live with them, but should have no claim on these lands. If they want land they should take it as any other men take it and support their families entirely. Any white man hereafter marrying an Indian woman should receive no benefits from the Government for his wife or children. This would prevent bad men from taking Indian women merely for the sake of the Government rations. The Indians should be assured of Government aid for a certain length of time. They should be helped through the trying stages of going from the old life into the new. Old men and women should be provided aid during their lives, pensioned. The withdrawing help from those trying to help themselves, has been a great hindrance in our work.

— Indians have been afraid to take farms, lest, not being able to make a living, they starve to death. Christian work should be encouraged. When lands are thrown open for settlement the schools, churches, etc., should be permitted to buy enough adjoining land

to carry on their work ; Industrial schools having large tracts, and day schools and missionary's homes, small tracts.

Indians should be protected by our laws and responsible to the laws. If the Government wishes to redeem itself from the unenviable position it now occupies, in regard to the Indians, it should respect Christian efforts to solve this most intricate problem. It should avail itself of the benefit of the experience of those working simply for the good of the Indian. It should put straightforward, honest men, with pure hearts, clean hands and clear heads, in every position. Profanity, licentiousness and drunkenness should not be permitted even in the common laborer who comes in contact with the Indian. We must place before him as his teachers our best men and women if we would have a high type of manhood developed.

I have expressed my own ideas in regard to this matter. I speak from the standpoint of a woman who has been in daily contact with these people for ten years—the standpoint of a woman who speaks the language of the people for whom she pleads. She asks nothing for herself. She expects to spend the rest of her days among the Teton Indians on the Standing Rock Agency. She wishes no personal advancement, and therefore speaks honestly and freely. May the Lord who rules, whether men obey or not, be with you in all your plans, and give wisdom and mercy to those in power. May our Government be guided in this matter and deal wisely with these people now in these dark days. They now stand alone and helpless on a brink, looking to the Great Father for help. Will he fail them now ? or may I carry back to my people the assurance that all that can be done for their advancement will be done honestly, faithfully, and at once ?

Respectfully yours,

MARY C. COLLINS,

Dakota Mission.

AMERICAN MISSIONARY ASSOCIATION,

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