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# Address at the Annual Meeting of the Maine Branch of the Women's National Indian Association: Portland, Maine, January 24, 1887

Dr. George D.B. Pepper

Women's National Indian Association

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Publication of the Maine Branch of the Women's National Indian Association.

# ADDRESS

AT THE

ANNUAL MEETING OF THE MAINE BRANCH

OF THE

# Women's National Indian Association

Portland, Me., Jan. 24, 1887

BY

REV. DR. GEORGE D. B. PEPPER

President of Colby University

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## ADDRESS.

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LADIES OF THE ASSOCIATION, AND FRIENDS:—This meeting is at once the result and the evidence of a deep and abiding interest in the American Indians. Of these, there are now, within the limits of the United States, exclusive of Alaska, about 260,000, a quarter of a million, enough to make seven or eight cities of the size of Portland. They are mainly in our western interior, driven very far back from the Atlantic coast, and being also pressed back from the Pacific coast. Almost infinitesimal are the living fragments that have been broken off from the tribes, and have a place among the whites. Asked to speak of these people, this evening, I consented gladly, but timidly,—gladly because of my sympathy with the cause,—timidly, because of my lack of any special and intimate knowledge of Indian affairs, and of the Indian question. And when I considered what to say, my mind at once put to me this question, Why, with your merely general knowledge of this matter, do you feel such keen interest, and such readiness to assert it? I began to look around for the reasons and seemed to myself to have found some of them. I have written them out, and decided to bring them here this evening, as my contribution to this feast. They are old reasons, but they have in them a perpetual power and life. It is well to keep them in mind, and so you will bear with me in the rehearsal of that which is utterly familiar.

I find, among the reasons for my care for our Indians, these four:

- I The Indians are men, human.
- II They are *such* men.
- III Their past history.
- IV Their present condition.

Let us glance at these reasons in their order.

I ~~The~~ Indian is a man. He is our brother, bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, soul of our soul, life of our life. Not a faculty is ours, which is not also his. Not a possibility of good is in us, or in our children, which is not also in him and in his children. Not a possibility of evil is in him and in his children which is not also in us and in our children. To the gospel, to the Bible, belongs the distinguishing hon-

or of emphasizing the common origin, the common nature, the common character and the common destiny, of the whole human family. God has made of one blood all the nations of the earth. This great truth is laid into the narrative of the creation, of the flood, of the confusion of tongues, of the call of Abraham, of the work, the purpose and the promise of Christ. The unity of the race, the oneness of humanity, the community of human life,—this great thought, this great truth, pervades the Bible. The heathen nations all lost sight of it, or if not utterly lost to view, it was only seen in occasional glimpses. As Christianity has wrought itself into human history, into the thoughts, the faith, the business, the institutions, the laws of society, as civilization has gained way and sway, this great grand doctrine, with all its richness of meaning, has been coming into the view and consciousness of mankind. Walls of separation between nations and races have disappeared, and now, as never before, the whole world of men are the associates and the recognized kin of every man. On all sides of the the globe and in all languages, the same books are read, the same news day by day arrests attention and excites remark. The same hopes, fears, ambitions, have place in the hearts of all. The push and progress of the present century have contributed mightily to the common recognition of this truth and to the realization of its fruits.

We have little difficulty in recognizing as our brothers those who, as powerful nations, command the general attention and enter into commercial or social relations with our own nation. Where exists the stately fabric of a powerful government, the accumulated fruits of well directed industry, the national literature, embodying the intellectual products of the past, there, we quickly see and own our kind. It is not so easy to do this, where others are separated from us by a wider and deeper chasm. The negro slaves of this country, while they were slaves, held and used as chattels, as things, bought and sold, given and bartered and battered, as cattle or as horses, were not easily accounted by their masters as truly and fully possessed of all and the same attributes of humanity with themselves. Their degradation of life was taken as a symbol of a degradation of essential being, of inherent nature. The North found it scarcely more easy, than did the South, to emancipate itself from this miserable and enormous error of estimate and consequent feeling, of feeling and consequent estimate. And in the case of the American Indians, have we not found, do we not now find, the same causes working the same effects? What, to the mass of our people, have the Indians been but beasts? if tame, dogs; if wild, wolves? So widely



unlike us in mode of life, we cannot so easily think of them as identical with us in attributes. They only can do this perfectly who, with true sympathy, join them in life, to instruct them, to help them, to bless them. We approximate to this as we enter appreciatively into their history, and especially into the expression of their thoughts and life scantily embodied and preserved for us in literature. We want a Christian wideness of sympathy and clearness of insight. We prove ourselves something less than Christian men until the Indian is recognized by us spontaneously and thoroughly as not less a brother than is any member of our own household.

II A second reason for interest in the Indian is that they are *such* men. If mankind are one, they are also many: if there is unity, there is also diversity. There is in the race no dead level monotony. Our interest in men is affected alike by that in which they agree and that in which they differ. Toward an individual or a community, dull, stupid, brutal, destitute of even the germs of refinement and nobility, we do not, cannot, and ought not to feel as toward one having the opposite qualities. Worth belongs to our common nature and should be recognized, but worth also belongs to that in which man is distinguished from man, family from family, nation from nation, and race from race. And if we take and apply to the Indian this criterion, we find in him a claim to our interest, and a justification of our special effort in his behalf.

We are not to judge the whole by the worst, nor by the best. We ask for those characteristics of a people which can fairly be accounted general.

In natural intelligence we cannot assign to the Indian a low place, quite the reverse. Their intelligence does not indeed appear in forms most familiar to us, but none the less it appears. Who more keen and quick of vision? more swift and sure of perception? Their senses, partly by inheritance, partly by training, are remarkably acute and trusty. Shall we say that this is even more true of many of the brutes, and hence is no mark of superior human intelligence? Thanks to mental science, it is well known at present that, with man, perception is not, as with beast, a merely spontaneous, natural and necessary act. Consciousness reveals in it elements of free self-determined attention, with comparison and judgment. It is not physical but mental. A sluggish, stupid soul, therefore, will never become eminent in sense-perception, or if ever, only in rare or abnormal cases. That people which, as a whole, has this excellence, thereby shows the characteristic of an active intellect.

But this superiority in sense-perception has been gained only in self-training for higher ends, as a means to the execution of purposes, sometimes far reaching, always well defined and clear. Their mode of life has been such, that on the infallible perception and interpretation of signs of any and every kind depended their safety, their attainment of desired ends.

And those ends, though primarily physical, since physical life is the condition of all else, were not all physical. They have the sense of honor and dishonor, of right and wrong, keenly and strongly developed. Judgment is swift and strong, if not always broad and sure. They remember with tenacity, they love and hate intensely, and know how to plan and execute in order to gratify, both the one and the other. Their history shows in them the power, whenever they see and feel the motive, to combine in comprehensive and far reaching plans, whether for vengeance on their common foes, or for the defence of interests, their own or others.

And who does not own in them the foundation of magnanimity, true greatness of soul. The power of hate and love, of hate and love at white heat and perpetual, in itself constitutes an evidence. But when to this is added that heroism, which stops at no peril, that self-control which cannot be broken by tortures the most extreme, that fidelity to friends which yields to nothing but treachery, the evidence accumulates. Nor should we forget the religious development of the Indian races, the sense of one invisible, personal, omnipresent, righteous God, giving to all law, exercising over all providential control, holding in reserve for all a final righteous reward of good or ill—evidence of unusual elevation whether found in uncultivated and barbarous tribes, or in the writings of philosophers ancient and modern. And to all the rest we bring the testimony of their languages and dialects. On the authority of the philologists we may believe and assert that their languages exhibit in their formation and use powers of a high order, and surely we have on record enough to prove the signal felicity with which they can use this wondrous living instrument of living thought. Where is eloquence more eloquent than on the tongue of an Indian orator?

We know indeed the draw-backs,—the rudeness and nudeness and scantiness of their mode of life—their hand to mouth living, their almost beastlike indifference to all that we associate with civilization. Tastes differ. Heredity is strong. Circumstances dominate. With the Indians, habit, especially the habit of ancestors, is law, at once commanding and compelling. But whether the defects are physical, mental,

moral or religious they still leave untouched all those known characteristics of power and promise which also belong to the Indian and are elements of his nature. It only needs that these be developed and directed that the defects may disappear. I say then that our Indians have special claims upon us because they are not only *men*, but *such men*, have in them as a race, or races, such potency and power of good.

III I give as a third reason their past history. Can we fail to be affected by the impenetrable mystery that hangs over their origin, the romance of their long hidden cycles of unknown existence? We call them *aborigines*, men of the land from the beginning, but who shall tell us what was that beginning? We ask, everybody asks, whence came they? when came they? how came they? why came they? The philologist studies with critical eye their languages and dialects, and compares these with the languages of the East and of the West. Archaeologists ransack valley, plain, and the whole face of the whole land for memorials, and study them with profound interest to compel them to disclose the secrets of primeval times. Ethnologists tax their power with the same intent, but who as yet has solved the problem, to the satisfaction of others, or even of himself? Still those old questions of origin are questions, and as new as they are old. Still we ask, whence, when, how and why—and the only clear answer to our question, is the echo of our voices, repeating to us those same words, whence, when, how, and why. Conjecture is busy and fruitful in diverse and contradictory answers, but conjecture remains conjecture, scarcely rising to the dignity even of theory. Still mystery hangs around the ages gone. The forests covered the continent, the streams ran among the forests, birds, beasts, fishes and Indians together owned and occupied the vast regions, from century to century, from millenium to millenium, and of it all, no record remains, or ever was made. If splendor of ancestry shall serve to interest us in individuals, surely mystery of ancestry must deepen our interest in a race.

But their history brings them yet nearer to our hearts in the fact that where their homes were, there our homes are. The land which they owned and occupied, we occupy, if we do not own it. This very house is on ground trodden by their feet. They congregated where this city stands. Here where you live and love, hope and fear, thrive and die, they too had their lives and loves, their hopes and fears, their joys and sorrows. As here, so in every city and village of Maine, so wherever there is a farm and a home. The waters and the lands of Maine were theirs, theirs the coast and the islands, the rivers, brooks, ponds, lakes and seas; theirs the hills and mountains, the valleys and plains;



theirs the blue heavens above, the starlit nights and sunny days, the winter's cold and summer's heat, the storm and the calm. Here were they buried when they died, here had been buried their fathers and their fathers' fathers. Here the living expected also to have their graves, which should be visited by their children, and their children's children in perpetual succession. Oh pathos of interest, in this our occupancy of the lands of the mystery born race! We cannot pause to contemplate it without a sad solemnity of sensibility. The bond of heredity is close and strong in us and in all, and when, as with the Indians, the community was tribal, the government in effect patriarchal, the bond was more distinctly conscious, and the affections which it carried more intense. As they turned their backs upon the lands of their ancestors and bade them a last farewell, going into new and unknown lands, it was with sorrow and often with anguish, whether their departure was by choice, or by compulsion. Where they had hoped to be, in their own person, or in their descendants, there are we, there have been our fathers and mothers. Where now are the red children of Maine, saving only the few, who still linger within our borders? It is not in man, if sane and sound, to disregard a bond like this of succession to the homes of others. It unites us almost like blood relationship.

As it has been here in Maine, so in New Hampshire and Vermont, in Massachusetts and Connecticut and Rhode Island. So all along the Atlantic coast to Florida, westward thence on the Gulf of Mexico, up the Mississippi on both its sides, eastward along the northern lakes, and now also on the Pacific coast. Oh yes, everywhere, everywhere, save only such small exceptions as even emphasize the "everywhere." In the hearts of a great, generous, growing people the thought of those to whose places they have succeeded should stir a feeling of profound sympathy for the weak and waning remnants, their descendants. This should be, even if the ancestors had voluntarily and for due reward alienated their lands and surrendered their occupancy. It is human to have and cherish such sentiment: the want of it is inhuman.

But history reminds us that, as a rule, they did not of their own will retire from their own lands. No man can; no woman will, deny that our ownership of the soil of these United States, rests in large measure upon fraud and force, upon might, regardless of right. Our title deeds have too often been written in the blood of the innocent, by the hand of injustice. The right of discovery did not annul the right of prior occupancy. This fact has been recognized in terms by our government in every treaty which it has made with the Indians from the beginning,



in reports of secretaries of the interior, and of Indian commissioners, in presidents' messages, and in the whole course of Indian legislation, negotiation and policy. To deny it, would be monstrous, yet denied it has been and is, sometimes explicitly, more commonly implicitly. The Indian must not stand in the way of progress. Manifest destiny bids the white man march on to the west, to possess and fill the land. This is God's will. This is providence. As the Hebrews were to own and occupy Canaan, as they did own Canaan, even when the Canaanites occupied it, so to the civilized Christian white man belong the lands of the savage heathen red man, who must leave "*will he, nill he.*"

Doubtless it has been God's will that this great land should be the home of the millions that have come to it from across the sea, or have been born since the coming of their fathers, of the million millions who shall descend from these and come still ever and ever to join them. The mighty growth of this mighty flood of population is of God and is for America. It was foreordained. It could not and should not be that the comparative handful of men scattered over America should keep it forever to themselves. But has God decreed that men should execute his purpose in such fashion as men have dispossessed the Indians of this land? Could they not have been dealt with in kindness, in fairness, in truth and righteousness, in Christian sympathy and fraternity, in humanity and liberality? What right has any man to say that God's purpose would have been thwarted by such conduct and that America would not have been opened on that plan to all who might have come, and at the same time have been an ample and happy home for those who were already here, and for all their descendants.

I am not here to bring a railing accusation against those who first came to these shores, against our forefathers of colonial times, or against our own government and people. But it is certain that had the Indian policy of William Penn been the universal policy at the beginning, and from the beginning, this Association would never have been formed, a call for work like theirs, and meetings like this, there never would have been. The sinning against the red man has been enormous, is enormous, perhaps will be enormous. Our government is not wholly responsible. It has it not in its power to prevent it. The men who push on to frontier life and come in contact with the Indian are, as individuals and a class, largely responsible, and no government can wholly control them. When once by their miserable crimes they have aroused the spirit of destruction in a tribe, and this spirit spreads like wild-fire from tribe to tribe, government must, in self-defense, hurl against them its forces of

war. And especially when the government comes into conflict with other governments, as in colonial times with the French, as in our Revolution with the British, and as more recently with the armed power of Secession, and when the public enemy incite and enlist against the government Indian forces, there is no other course possible save that of conflict and destruction. And when the demon of war takes possession of those forces, what horrid outcome of wholesale massacre, scalplings and conflagrations and devastations!

Oh no, we must not lay all the wrong to the charge of the government. Nor must we think of the Indians as all right. They are human. Their ancestors were human. They have their vices. They sin against each other and against the whites. They must take their share of blame for the wretched, wretched past; of mutual hate and conflict, of mutual slaughter and destruction, of mutual terror and woe.

But when all allowances have been made, it still holds true that this great and mighty nation, in both individual and governmental action, has done much that should have been left undone, and has left undone much that should have been done. As respects personal relations to the aborigines no one will deny it. And certainly a careful reading of Mrs. H. H. Jackson's work, *A Century of Dishonor*, can leave on no man's mind a doubt that our government has sinned deeply. It is not that the government has had a settled determination to wrong them, but that with an aim and purpose in the general fair and just, there has been a failure to accomplish the purpose. Government has yielded to the pressure of urgent, powerful influence, public and private. It has broken its own treaties, failed to fulfil its own promises, relaxed energy in maintaining its own laws, neglected to punish criminals who have wilfully wronged the Indians. It has taken too little pains to determine the wisest and best policy, and to carry it through efficiently.

But what is government, especially in America, save the public sentiment organized and expressing itself in the form of law? To that sentiment we revert. The root-evil has been there. Has injustice characterized the past? It has been *our* injustice. We the people have been at fault. We cannot shift the responsibility. Let us not try to do it. Ours has been the injustice. And this injustice is a quite awful motive to sympathy with its victims, and their descendants, a motive imperious and inexorable. Is gratitude a sacred obligation? the claim for gratitude a sacred and mighty motive to interest and action? That claim is tame and feeble, compared with that which comes from the consciousness of our injustice. How can we atone for wrong done?

What can we do to reverse the current of wrong? what to arrest the just retributions which the Creator has joined to injustice? The retribution may not come from the victims. They are either dead and gone, or, living, are too feeble to wreak vengeance on a nation. But God is sleepless. He vindicates his law, and the more weak the oppressed, the more completely he takes upon himself their vindication. Can we, who have lived through the Great Rebellion, ever doubt this? The black man was a thing. He had no power, no rights that a white man was bound to respect. The whole nation shared in that sentiment and asserted it in action and in inaction. But the awful tempest of war came. North and South alike were smitten. Again and again and again the whole people were made to feel that utter ruin was inevitable. In wrath God remembered mercy. Who then doubted, who now should doubt, that God was vindicating the majesty of his law, the right of the oppressed? that justice inexorable was asserting itself? Has justice fallen asleep? lost its self-respect? forgotten how to assert its majesty? Oh friends, both conscience and self-interest call upon us to give to the victims of our wrong a two-fold, a ten-fold, pity, care and help.

IV The last reason for our interest in them, is their present condition. This, after all is the most weighty. As, however, there is not the time, so also there is not here the need to dwell upon this. That condition presents itself as motive to benevolence and benefaction under the two aspects of helplessness and hopefulness.

The Indians are helpless. A mere handful of men, they are in this nation's power. If greed of land, if hate and contempt, are to dominate, if the cry for extermination is to be heard and heeded and obeyed, then must the Indian go. Slaughtered on our own soil, or fugitives in more merciful countries, they will have disappeared. They are now the "nation's wards." So we account them. So we hold them. We separate them from the people of the nation. They are not its constituents. They are *they*, the nation is the *nation*, two entities, set over against each other. There is in this a tremendous peril to these 260,000 human beings, an awful temptation to wrong. That temptation ought to be resisted until it is removed. That peril, that temptation, must continue until they become as completely incorporated into the nation, as completely identified with it, as are our fellow-citizens, the German, Irish, French, English and ourselves. They must become citizens, with the rights, the duties, the dignities, the liabilities of citizens.



The hopefulness of their condition is also an incentive to love and good works. In view of the miserable mismanagement of Indian affairs in the past, their disposition to adopt the habits of civilized life and to become Christianized is most encouraging. Francis A. Walker, Indian Commissioner in 1872, then reported that there were 130,000 who supported themselves on their own reservations and received from the government nothing save interest on their own moneys or annuities granted them in consideration of the cession of their lands to the United States. Wherever, under favoring circumstances, Christian work has been done among them, the results have been gratifying. And now that there seems to be awakened in the national mind a feeling of charity to them and a determination to see that henceforth there be shown to them justice and humanity, now that it is becoming the custom for the high officers of the national government, the executive and the legislative alike, to speak and to act in favor of the best laws and their best execution, now that the path out of dishonor into honor has been found and entered, there is ground of hope and encouragement for work. Surely every true American out of a full heart, must say to this Association, God speed you in your three-fold purpose of blessing,—to influence the people in disseminating knowledge, to influence the government to wise legislation, and the most scrupulous fulfilment of obligations, and to work among the Indians, to educate, civilize, and Christianize them. It is high time that the watchman should be able to report that the night is retreating, the morning has come.

Please send for copies,

*Chas. E.*

Address MRS. ~~██████~~ A. WEBSTER, Cor. Secretary,

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