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A Great Need

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PUBLICATIONS OF THE WOMEN'S NATIONAL
INDIAN ASSOCIATION.

A GREAT NEED.

—BY—

MRS. G. W. OWEN.

PHILADELPHIA,

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A Great Need.

BY MRS. GEORGIANA WEBB OWEN.

For the year ending June 30th, 1896, the expenses of the United States Government amounted to over \$350,000,000. Of this sum more than one-third was the cost of one of the eight departments, the Department of the Interior.

Nearly fifty years ago, the affairs of our growing nation had so multiplied that Congress decided to create an additional department and place in its control various interests which had been attached to other divisions. Thus came into existence the Department of the Interior, a basket in which various and most incongruous bundles were placed, and where additional odds and ends are still deposited.

The number and diversity of the different matters in this department are astonishing.

Public lands, Pensions, Patents, Railroads, Territories, Census, Education, Geological Surveys, Public documents, Certain Government Buildings, parks and charities, and also, Indian Affairs. Last year this Department cost over \$157,000,000. Let sympathy and commiseration be given that most overburdened member of the Cabinet, the Secretary of the Interior. For four years, if he endure so long, he must extend his attention over this tremendous field. It is absolutely impossible for any one person to control, or to become acquainted even with the outlines of all the affairs for which the Secretary of the Interior stands as the official head. Any honest man who has taken the oath of office, faithfully to perform his duties, may well be appalled if he is Secretary of the Interior. The hundred and sixty-five days are none too many to supervise the United States public land affairs for one year. It takes ten years to reckon up one census, and these are not the greatest items in the Department.

In the last official report are seventeen divisions or bureaus, and in some of these again are subdivisions of such miscellaneous matters as the care of insane persons, of foundlings, a maritime canal somewhere, exhibits at the Cotton States Exposition, and

other concerns in surprising number and diversity.

Somewhere in Holy Writ, is a long list of things of this world which concludes with the words "and the souls of men." In an old collection of government reports of the Interior Department, amidst lists of lands, patents, pensions, and other un-correlated matters, is a column headed "Number of Souls," telling how many Indians are under the control of this Interior Department. Now here is the tangle, the puzzle, the unsolvability of the Indian problem. We have put human beings in a Bureau to be controlled as acres, and documents, and rolling stock, and per-centages of statistics are reckoned and managed.

Consider this pitiful department of humanity, the Indian Bureau. Every year, for more than sixty years, there have been official reports, for the most part faithful, honest reports made to the people of the United States, as to the condition and needs of Indians who have no more rights than the wheels on a railroad. They are without even the interest of a personal owner for their well-being. All this living, breathing humanity is virtually as helpless, as defenceless, as much a legal-nonentity, as acres of

land, or blocks of stone. Their official head and controller is the Secretary of the Interior and the laws for the regulation of this Bureau of humanity are usually made to depend upon his "opinion" for their application, enforcement, or construction. In regard to the Indians he is more absolute than the Sultan, more supreme than any satrap; yet he is powerless to effect radical improvements, or to carry out beneficial measures. The last report from this official, that of 1896, "most heartily" recommends sweeping changes in the system of the Bureau by what is known as "Senate Bill No. 1393." But, as the proposed change still contemplates the control of this class of human beings by a Bureau it can be no improvement. The idea of making a change in the management of this ponderous machine, with a view to remedy its evils, is like putting poison in another spoon to change its power. The fault is the Bureau, not in the management of the Bureau. It is the policy of directing all the affairs of any collection of humanity, even down to the details of food and clothes, by commissioners, agents, clerks and deputies that is the cause, the source of the evils.

At a Mohonk Conference the question was

asked "Who has authority to decide and direct the affairs of the Indians? Who can suggest and establish measures for their benefit, or who is the one person responsible for the wrongs seen in Indian affairs?" Mr. Price, a former Commissioner of Indian Affairs, was present, and was asked to answer this question. His reply was "I do not know; I only know it is not the Commissioner of Indian Affairs." There has never been in the office of Commissioner of Indian Affairs a more honest, faithful and capable man than Mr. Price. His reports, year after year, urged reforms and asked Congress to consider the evils he was powerless to correct. Little attention was ever given to either his requests or recommendations, and none of his desired reforms were adopted.

Honest, earnest and efficient men are, and always have been, plentiful in the Indian Bureau, but they are powerless in the meshes of the United States Indian Policy. Practically, there is no intelligent responsibility anywhere. Even the Mohonk Conference could not correct the evils if it had to use the Indian Bureau methods. It is not to be supposed that any Bureau, any Committee, any organization, or any official of the United States Government has started with the

deliberate intention of being unjust, dishonest or cruel, although injustice, dishonesty and cruelty are the crying evils of the Indian situation. The trouble too often is that measures have been taken which were planned without a knowledge of circumstances, or on theoretical grounds.

The pitiful farce of "treaties with Indians," although commenced in good faith more than two hundred years ago, when there were actually nations of these people, is, in effect still practiced as the chief means of conducting their affairs. No just "treaty" can be made where one party is a helpless legal nonentity at the disposal of the other. The entire machinery of Indian treaties is incompatible with justice. These agreements must be "ratified by Congress." Congressmen, realizing that they are unable to know personally the conditions, put in the law a proviso that the execution of the treaty shall depend "upon the opinion of the Secretary of the Interior," and this multifold official is perhaps very busy considering how to protect the United States against the encroachments of a Land Syndicate, or a Railroad Combine, or securing the appointment of some political friend's protege as Superintendent of a Government Foundling

Home, and really can know little or nothing of the affairs of some copper-skinned people two thousand miles away. So somebody, not an Indian, tells somebody, who continues the chain, till a clerk informs an agent, who reports to an inspector, who communicates with a commissioner, who suggests to the "distinguished consideration" of the Honorable Secretary that the opinion should be so-or-so. Here is a late item from a Pocatello, Idaho paper.

"BIG DEAL, BY INDIANS."

"Pocatello, Idaho, September 14th. It is announced that twelve of the chiefs of the Shoshones and Bannock Indians of the Fort Hall reservation have signed a treaty for the sale of 150,000 acres of the southern end of the reservation for \$4 per acre. This will open up the southern end of the reservation to public settlement." Now if the citizens of Philadelphia had the legal non-status of Indians, this item might have read "Twelve aldermen have sold 150,000 lots in the south end of the city for \$4 a lot and this will open the southern part of the city to people who are not Philadelphians." Because these people have no personal rights, but are helplessly at the disposal of a Bureau, there is no redress nor security. Because they have no "stand-

ing in the courts " they have no protection or defense.

It has been urged that the great trouble is in the management of the Indian Bureau, and that the right kind of management would make under the Indian Policy a paradise of prosperous, happy civilization. It has been asserted that honest, efficient officials, and more of them, with larger salaries, will remedy all evils, and so Senate Bill 1393 contemplates three managers instead of one. Is it probable that 10,000 subordinates, under the control of three heads will comprise any greater proportion of honest and efficient men, than the same number under one man? The root of the evil is not in the management; hence the remedy is not in the management.

A zealous enthusiast might urge that the whole institution be swept away at one stroke; that the government of the United States repeal, by one wide enactment, the "Be it enacted" of July 9th, 1832, which established the Indian Bureau, and placed it in control of the War Department, and that these living, breathing fathers, mothers and children be placed under the protection and the restraint of the common laws. It might be asserted that the quarter of a million of Indians are quite as well fitted to be absorbed

amidst the sixty-five or seventy millions of the United States as are the half million of emigrants who melt into our population in one year. But however desirable such a speedy consummation might seem to some who are well acquainted with this institution, it is hardly probable that such a summary measure could prevail, especially as there is a wide-spread opinion that there must be a "bureau," a supervision of all Indian affairs by white people.

Not only are many true friends of the Indians persuaded that the Bureau is a necessity, but also 10,000 employes, from commissioner's head clerks down, whose salaries and positions depend upon its existence, and numerous political leaders and managers whose field of patronage is so largely extended by the existence of the Indian Bureau, and all their friends and hangers-on insist upon its continuance. As those goldsmiths, whose craft was in danger nearly two thousand years ago shouted, "Great is Diana of the Ephesian," even though the greater part of the crowd knew not wherefore they were come together, so all over the United States, from Washington to the farthest reservation, comes the emphatic assertion "The Indian Bureau is an indispensable necessity." There-

fore congressional enactments which contain any provision tending to its termination or disintegration, or to diminishing its power, are always opposed, and conditions to secure its perpetuation and the increase of its authority are favored. *But Indians do not want it.*

Yet, though there is so general a sentiment that this institution is required, many of its officials recommend that some means may be found and put into operation to abolish the Indian Bureau, and the entire reservation system ; for the reservation is the foundation of the Indian Bureau. Were the Indians to become United States citizens the occupation of the Indian Bureau would be gone. It was established, and continues, "for the purpose of making treaties and of fulfilling treaty stipulations." General Morgan, Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1889, says, "The reservation system belongs to a vanishing state of things, and must soon cease to exist."

Every educated Indian from the schools, who is 21 years old, should be a citizen of the United States and free to seek a home where he or she pleases. Commissioner Morgan says of educated Indians : "There is no more reason for compelling self-reliant

Indian boys and girls to return, against their will, to an Indian reservation, than there is for forcibly sending white boys and girls there. The whole reservation system is an abomination, and should cease to exist. The policy of the Government should be to encourage Indian pupils, educated in the Industrial Schools, to seek homes for themselves wherever they find the best opportunities for earning an honest living." (See Report of 1889, page 8.) This would be one step towards the disintegratation of the Indian Bureau. The pupil of age who chooses to live off the reservation, and the land holder who can establish his own home, should be paid their share of the money belonging to the tribe, and the United States should close accounts with such individual Indians. Those venerable "sums held by the United States, the interest of which is to be paid annually to Indians forever," should become school funds for Indians, and the management of these funds should be placed in the hands of the public school systems of the states and territories where the Indians live.

Among the many most excellent and common-sense ideas which have been originated and applied by the Women's National Indian Association, is the home building

plan, and if the United States Government would adopt that plan, and give to each home-desiring student, farmer, and workman, not a loan, but what actually belongs to him, as his share of the sums, "held in trust by the United States," which belong to his tribe, and let him or her take life in independence, and as a citizen, most of them would do as well as whites who come into their patrimony when they come of age. Let a way be opened by which any Indian may cease to be a "ward," and so relieve this Indian-Bureau-Guardian of its responsibility.

The great need of the Indian situation is the opening of doors by means of which the individual Indian can step out of reservation dependence into United States citizenship and legal existence whenever he desires to do so.

This paper is not a sermon, but it has a text, and the text is given last. It is this :
Isaiah xlii ; 22, 23.

"This is a people robbed and spoiled ; they are all of them snared in holes, and hid in prison-houses ; they are for a prey, and none delivereth ; for a spoil, and none saith "Restore." Who among you will give ear to this? Who will hearken and hear for the time to come?"

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