

# **THE INDIAN'S SIDE OF THE INDIAN QUESTION**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649257492

The Indian's side of the Indian question by William Barrows

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**WILLIAM BARROWS**

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OF THE  
INDIAN QUESTION

BY

WILLIAM BARROWS D D

Author of

"Oregon: the Struggle for Possession:"

"The United States of Yesterday and of To-morrow:"  
and others.

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Hæc mea sunt: veteres migrate coloni  
— VIRG. ECL. IX.

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BOSTON  
D LOTHROP COMPANY  
FRANKLIN AND HAWLEY STS.

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THE VIRGIL  
ALPHABET

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## INTRODUCTION.

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SERIOUS trifling with the Indian question seems to be coming to a close. The "nations" of colonial times, and the "high contracting parties" whom the Republic met as apparent equals during its first ninety years, have come down to draw rations under the drum-beat, or to be blanketed and continental tramps. In the last analysis of the Indian, in Congress and on the border, he is discovered to be simply a man, and more or less like all Americans; and the recent and so far final proposition is to treat him as an American. In coming to this we have had a tedious, annoying, nugatory, and mortifying series of theories, experiments, and makeshifts. Meanwhile, there has been an apparent decline in their numbers, from the highest official maximum, of "about 300,000," in 1872. to 259,244 in 1885.

We are now entering an era of hope for the Indian, under the Dawes Bill; and though he is at first to have a qualified citizenship in passing out of the state of a ward, his rights are not to be abridged on account of race or

previous condition. But as all rights, privileges, and immunities do not, practically, come directly to one out of the Constitution and Statutes of the United States, but are filtered to him with more or less freedom and purity through the surrounding community, and as the success of this bill lies with the border whites, it has been thought best to mark off, historically, the leading and constant obstacles heretofore to Indian civilization. Hence this unpretending treatise. Only official documents are used to give it force.

No law is self-operating; somebody must use it favorably, if the subject of it has its advantages; and intermeddling opponents must be held in check by hands friendly to the end of the law. Hitherto statute provisions for the Indians, and often wise and good, have been made powerless by a third party intervening between the government and the Indians—interested, scheming, self-seeking white men, on the border and in Washington. There was once a white border belt, poorly civilized, and with many in it decivilized, but now, interpenetrating and commingling, these men have quite destroyed border-lines.

Hitherto the work of the general government and of benevolent organizations, in the lines of education and of religion, has been thwarted



by white men quite reckless of both civil and moral restraints. This has been a constant force, both at Washington and among the Indians, hindering their civilization. Greed for Indian lands, miserable white neighborhood life, and base passion have been the constant enemy of Indian elevation, and have often added to his barbarism and profligacy. Moreover, the average sentiment west of the Mississippi concerning the Indian is that he is a worthless remnant of his race, and incapable of elevation to the average American grade; and it is no harsh judgment to express that the two-thirds of our domain thus indicated would greatly prefer a civil and moral quarantine between them and an Indian community—the breadth of a State or Territory. This is the gentler way with some of saying that the best Indian is a dead Indian. I once saw an unpopular candidate carry, as with a whirlwind, a doubtful campaign in Colorado, under the popular war-cry, “The Ute must go!”

Now, however high-toned and humane a bill may be which gains the assent of Congress, the administration of it for the wards of the nation must look for its force and temper and fidelity in the regions bordering on the Indian reservations and ranges. A law enacted on the Potomac is still subject to the veto of local

option on the Columbia or Missouri or Colorado. Climate does not more inevitably and irresistibly modify the human constitution, when one removes from the land of his nativity, than does the popular will the working efficiency of a United States law perfectly constitutional, which has started off from the halls of Congress.

Our failures in the Indian policies for a century have not come so much from the lack of fair legislation. We have had good laws enough for ends sought. Nor have the failures come so much from the quality of this unfortunate race as if it were effete, worthless, and impossible of elevation. The ends sought by the law have not been desired in those sections of the country where the law must be administered, and by the people who must administer it. This has heretofore been the point of fatal weakness in our government policy for the aborigines. Our first chapter in this book is painfully abundant with evidence on this point.

The Dawes Bill opens a new era in this branch of our national work, and it is beyond doubt the best thing possible in the line of the government, so far as it goes. It embodies a discovery, which has cost the expensive and sad experiments of two centuries, that the Indian must be made and treated as an Amer-

ican citizen. It, however, does not contemplate the removal or neutralization of the force which has made the most of our preceding laws and labors fruitless. In the diagnosis of this great national infirmity or malady, the main cause has been assigned to the red man, and the medicines have been given to him. Perhaps the bill goes as far as the government can go in its side of the work. What remains to make the new era a successful one, the people must do.

In the regions more intimately affected by the Indian question, there is need of introducing a civil, social, and moral constabulary—a picket-line of principles and of sentiments, which will constrain a superior neighbor to be a good one to an inferior neighbor. The declaration of now almost seventy years, made by the venerable and Christian Cherokee in Georgia, is yet to be disproved: "No Cherokee or white man with a Cherokee family can possibly live among such white people as will first settle this country."

A grand opportunity is now offered by this bill to solve the Indian question by saving the Indian race; Congress gives the chance, and the people must do the work. Here appears one of the choicest features of our government, that under the protecting approbation