

**HISTORICAL SKETCH OF THE
MISSIONS OF THE AMERICAN
BOARD AMONG THE NORTH
AMERICAN INDIANS**

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Historical sketch of the missions of the American Board among the North American Indians by
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S. C. BARTLETT

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BARTLETT'S SKETCHES.

MISSIONS AMONG THE NORTH AMERICAN INDIANS.

It has been often said, You can not tame an Indian. The statement betrays a singular ignorance of facts. No more docile pagans have been found than some of the North American tribes. Seldom have earlier fruits been reaped than in the Indian missions; seldom have brighter promises of a glorious harvest been blasted by adverse events and wicked interferences.

It has been so from the first. Within a year of the landing at Plymouth, Elder Cushman informed his friends in England of the "tractable disposition" of the Indian youth. As early as 1643, John Eliot had been through "varieties of intercourse with them, day and night, summer and winter, by land and by sea," and had had "many solemn discourses with all sorts of nations of them, from one end of the country to another."

Probably by this time commenced the long-continued and successful labors of Bourne and Tupper at Marshpee. And in 1646 began, in good earnest, the preaching of Mayhew on Martha's Vineyard, and of Eliot around Newton.

Eliot's work has become historical. The index and monument of his achievements and his prospects is found in that famous Indian Bible — the first, and long the only, Bible printed in America. It has scarcely one

living reader now; yet thirty-five hundred copies of it once issued from the Cambridge press. Eliot had, in 1674, a circuit of fourteen villages, and eleven hundred praying Indians. Next year came the terrible blight of "Philip's War," and cut down his congregations to four. They never recovered from the shock. In fact, only their Christian connections saved the whole of them from extinction at the time. The suspicions, jealousies, irritations, and revenges then aroused never ceased. Then began the long catalogue of organized Indian miseries. The General Court collected the remnant, and removed them to the islands in the bay, where they suffered "incredible hardships;" and the five hundred removed had, in 1698, shrunk to two hundred and five Indians in all what was then Massachusetts proper. Removal! The old, old story, ever new; the fatal rock of all their prospects.

In the next century, various efforts were equally hopeful, and equally frustrated. The relics of the Mohegans, at Stockbridge, were gathered by John Sergeant into a thriving town, with twenty houses, built in English style, and a church of forty communicants. The Revolutionary War made, in various modes, sad havoc among them; and after the war, they removed, first to Central New York, then to Indiana, then to Green Bay, then to Lake Winnebago. A relic of them remained in New York, and were transferred, in 1827, with the relics of other tribes, to the care of the American Board. But in all their removals, averaging one for every twenty or twenty-five years, the tribe never lost its civilization. An early and most hopeful mission of the Moravians to the Indians of New York was thrice broken up by fire and sword, and three or four times broken down by

removals. David Brainerd's mission in New Jersey, and the opening efforts of Eleazer Wheelock's Indian school and college, with its various Indian missionaries, seem to have been almost fatally interrupted by the struggles, absorptions, and complications of the Revolutionary War.

A generation passed away. Within three years and a half of the time when Hall and his associates sailed for India, the American Board was adopting measures (1815) for carrying the gospel to the Indians. One hundred thousand of them were then supposed to reside east of the Mississippi, of whom about seventy thousand were comprised in the four southern tribes — Creeks, Chickasaws, Choctaws, and Cherokees. The Prudential Committee, whose previous purposes had "from time to time been frustrated," now brought the matter in earnest before the Board and the Christian public. They appealed to the success with which Rev. Gideon Blackburn, of the Presbyterian Church, had already labored among the Cherokees, in five years enabling four or five hundred youth to read the English Bible, and receiving several individuals as "hopeful and exemplary Christians." Before another annual meeting, the first Indian missionary of the American Board, Cyrus Kingsbury, fresh from Andover Seminary, had visited the Cherokees. He passed through Washington, on the way, where a Cherokee chief expressed his deep interest in the effort. He said that his nation had long wished for schools, and had even "thought of devoting a part of their annuity to the object." President Madison also ordered the Secretary of War to say that the Agent for Indian Affairs would erect a house for the school, and one for the teacher, to be followed by others, as occasion

might require, and success might justify. The agent would also be instructed to make the munificent provision of "two plows, six hoes, and as many axes, for the purpose of introducing the art of cultivation among the pupils," and when female pupils should be received, and a female teacher engaged, "a loom, half a dozen spinning-wheels, and as many pair of cards." All these, however, "will remain public property, to be employed for the benefit of the nation" — a nation of many thousand souls. The government would gladly have done more, but its means were "limited."

Mr. Kingsbury went on his way rejoicing. In October he had a grand talk with the assembled chiefs of the Cherokees and the Creeks, at the close of which a principal chief took him by the hand, and sententiously informed him: "We have listened to what you have said, and have understood it. We are glad to see you. We wish to have the schools established, and hope they will be of great benefit to the nation." Another chief was appointed to assist in selecting a site, and they fixed upon Chickamanga, ten miles from the place forty-seven years later made famous by the repulse of the Union army, on the banks of the creek which some rebel termed the River of Death, and seven miles, also, from the brow of that Lookout Mountain, where, in "the battle of the clouds," the Confederacy received a stunning blow. The missionaries called it Brainerd. A neighboring height still bears the name of "Mission Ridge."

Mr. Kingsbury, followed at once by Messrs. Hall and Williams, with their wives, and soon after by others, immediately began the enterprise. It was a compound of mission, boarding-school, and agricultural college. The beginning, as well as the continuance of it, entailed

immense care and labor upon the missionaries. The government contractor, like many of his successors, failed to build the houses agreed upon, and the missionaries soon found themselves engaged in making twenty thousand bricks, burning lime, digging cellars and a well, besides the by-play of bringing their meal forty miles, and planting "twenty or thirty acres of corn, some cotton, flax, and potatoes," to say nothing of a school of twenty-six young Cherokees, a Sunday school of thirty blacks, and preaching on the Sabbath. In eighteen months the Treasurer of the Board visited the mission, and was delighted. He found the Indian boys alike willing to work, docile to learn, and orderly and gentle in their behavior. They could plant an acre of corn before breakfast; fifteen of them could read in the Bible, and eleven in easy lessons; and eighteen could write. Their deportment at prayers, at table, at school, would have been creditable to white children. Five natives were already in the little church, followed the same year by two others. The religious experiences of some of these Indian converts were most striking and refreshing. One day (May 27, 1819) President Monroe, accompanied by General Gaines, suddenly made his appearance, unannounced till he stood at the door. He expressed himself so well pleased with all he saw, that, on the spot, he ordered a much better building for the girls' school, at the public expense.

No wonder the friends of missions took courage. Christian farmers and mechanics offered their aid. Meanwhile the committee determined to push on to the Chickasaws and Choctaws, who ardently desired them to do so. Accordingly, in 1818, Mr. Kingsbury selected a site among the Choctaws, on the Yazoo, four hundred

miles south-west of Brainerd, and called it Eliot. He found intemperance already there to an alarming extent, and the vicious whites who introduced and fostered it. Here again the first work was chiefly of secular arrangement. A dense forest covered the ground, although the works of the ancient mound-builders, here and there, indicated a former population in the wilderness. Amid the sickness of acclimation, and innumerable difficulties and hardships, in eight months they had erected some ten log buildings for various uses, the lumber all hewed and sawed by hand; cleared and inclosed thirty-five acres of land; set out fruit trees; besides cutting roads, building small bridges, and even making tools and furniture. So eager were the Choctaws for instruction that eight children were brought a hundred and sixty miles before the missionaries were ready, and the school was prematurely opened in April (1819), under this constraint. When opened, more scholars applied than could be received. The Choctaw king promised two hundred dollars annually from the nation's annuity; and at a council, in August, a subscription was made of seven hundred dollars, eighty-five cows and calves, and five hundred dollars a year from the annuity. In one year from that date, the nation, acting in three several districts, voted to devote to the schools their entire annuity of six thousand dollars from the sale of lands to the United States. The official letters of the nation, announcing this fact, express the earnest hope of "taking their place among the enlightened nations of the land;" they overflow with gratitude to their "good, white brothers," and they add that "more than one thousand children in our nation are waiting and looking up to our white brothers for instruction."

Among the Choctaws, the missionaries, however, were doomed to incessant annoyances and hindrances, chiefly from the slanderous reports and vile influences of renegade whites, who had fled from the restraints of civilized life, and were the sworn enemies of the missionaries. For these, and perhaps other reasons, among the Choctaws, conversions lingered. But with the Cherokees, everything moved steadily forward. It is believed that from the first there was no year without conversions. "Wicked Jack" becomes a new man, and chooses the significant name of John Crawfish. Six members of one family connection (the Sanders family), men and women grown, are received into the church at one time, dedicating their households, too; and "there is not a dry eye in the house." Old John Sanders says "he can sit all night to hear the word of God;" Alexander, though tempted, "would not touch a drop of whisky for five hundred dollars;" and the brothers all became lay-missionaries at once. Catharine Brown, after "eminently adorning the doctrine of God" for six years, dies in blessed peace. David Sanders's little girl, fatally burned, passes away in prayer. John Arch, the interpreter, who had come a hundred and fifty miles to school, offering his gun for clothing, so "wild and forbidding" in appearance that the missionaries shrunk from receiving him till he almost forced himself in — he, too, after five years of Christian life, leaves "evidence of love to God and man much beyond what is common in the best organized Christian communities." The chief, Rising Sun, comes to secure a school and a pious blacksmith for his home, and is determined to "obey the Bible." The missionary Butrick, in a tour of two thousand miles, addresses a hundred and fifty meetings,