

Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute.

Hampton, Va., Feb 20 1885

Dear Capt. Pratt

Will you
please write say three
a four four or five pages in
reply to enclosed extracts
from Col Dodge's book.

I wish to publish your
in reply to Col Dodge -
along with three or four
other replies making
a "Symposium" which
will I think be interesting
Can you do it within

a month? Do you
can.

I leave for Washington
tonight - sorry not to meet
you in Washington. You
are taking good care of
Pennsylvania

Very truly
C. Sumner

Indian Characteristics.

:o:

We have been reading with great interest at Hampton recently, Col. Richard I. Dodge's brilliant volume on his "Thirty-three Years among Our Wild Indians." Nothing in Cooper or Catlin can exceed, for thrilling excitement or graphic power, some of its pages. An experience of thirty-three years with such exceptional opportunities for observation as Col. Dodge had, should give to opinions great weight. He makes statements and generalizations however, some of which, unless they are more brilliant than careful, would seem to seriously compromise the wisdom of some of his final conclusions, and we fear will not commend them to public effort.

Practically interested in the Indian problem, as engaged in Indian education, we believe that our own far briefer experience has given us some opportunities for judging of essential Indian traits from a different but valuable standpoint. A question of so much interest and difficulty should have all the light thrown upon it, possible to obtain; and for the enlightenment of public sentiment, as well as for assistance and guidance in our own work for Indian youth, we take the liberty of requesting that you will give us the benefit of your own experience and opinion on any of the points thus considered by Col. Dodge.

Col. Dodge explains, p. 54, that when he speaks of Indians he means the Plains Indians, unless otherwise specified or implied—those "between the Mississippi and the Rocky Mountains—from the British line almost to the Gulf of Mexico." These are the subjects of discussion.

He says p. 50: "The mental capacity of the Indian is of superior order".

P. 81. "They seem to be lacking both in memory and inventive faculty, and though great story tellers, to be unable to weave fact and fancy into tradition."

P. 56: "He is vain, crafty, deceitful, grasping and utterly selfish. He is lecherous, without honor or mercy; filthy in his ideas and speech and inconceivably dirty in person and manners. He is affectionate, patient, self-reliant and enduring. In short, he has the ordinary good and bad qualities of the mere animal, modified to some extent by reason."

P. 248. "The Indian is proud, sensitive, quick tempered, easily wounded, easily excited, but though utterly unforgiving, he never broods. This is in my opinion the whole secret of his happiness."

P. 59. He is as excitable as a Frenchman, and as fond of pleasure as a Sybarite."

P. 62. "Endurance and patience appear to be the warp and woof of Indian character."

P. 210. "The Indian has no moral code—he has not the faintest conception of an idea of moral obligation." P. 58; "It is simply impossible for him to grasp the abstract idea that anything is wrong in itself. He has no word by which the idea can be conveyed to him. His nearest synonyms are good and bad. He will tell you it is wrong (bad) to steal from a man of his own band, not that theft is wrong, but because he will be kicked out of the band if detected. There is no abstract wrong in the murder of a white man or Indian of another tribe; it is wrong (bad) because punishment may follow." P. 64. "In their own bands, Indians are perfectly honest; * * * outside of it not only one of the most arrant thieves, but this quality is held in highest estimation." P. 66. "The Indian as a rule is honorable after a fashion of his own. Hide anything from him and he will find and steal it. Place it formally under his charge, and it will in all probability be returned intact, with, however, demand for reward."

P. 58. The Indian is absolutely without what we call conscience.

He is already as religious as the most devout Christian.

Pp. 62, 63. Modesty, as we understand the term is totally lacking. * * Self praise is no disgrace. * * Ordinary conversations at home or in company are broad even to indecency. Clothing is for ornament, not decency." P. 365. "The Indian is vainer than a peacock."

P. 371. "There is no social ostracism of women of any kind or for any cause."

The domestic life of the Indian will bear comparison with that of average civilized communities. The husband, as a rule, is kind; ruling but with no harshness. The wives are generally faithful, obedient and industrious. The children are spoiled." P. 205. "A happier, more light hearted, more contented woman, cannot be found."

P. 110. "While I have known many Indians who professed Christianity, I have never met one who in his conversion had really quitted his ancient faith. He is a Christian just as far as it is expedient or useful to him."

P. 114. "Through the influence of missionaries, a few individuals may have come to believe in a God ruling both this and the future life, and occasionally a man may be found who claims to have so far overcome the great stumbling block to Indian proselytism as to believe that the Good God is more powerful than the Bad. These cases are however not only exceedingly rare, but a few pertinent questions will show that the "faith in them" is assumed and without any foundation in conviction. I have never yet seen a so-called Christian Indian who did not, in times of real trouble or affliction, go back to his ancient faith."

P. 66. "Here and there, a small tribe—as the Nez Percés—show a slight advance in morality, due to the efforts of Roman Catholic priests so many years ago that their traditions but vaguely fix the time. Here and there also, even among the wild tribes, are found men who give some evidence of moral perception, probably due to the influence of missionaries and teachers. These cases however are individual."

P. 67. "The Indian has never had a fair chance, and he is entitled to a full and fair trial. * * * There is ample evidence of capacity for further improvement."

Col. Dodge's conclusions, and plan for solving the Indian question, are, in brief, to "1, Turn the Indians over to the War Department; 2, Abolish the Indian Bureau; 3, Abrogate existing treaties; 4, Give Indians the same rights in trade as white citizens, arms and liquor excepted, till they become citizens; 5, Enact laws *pro tem*, for their control; 6, Make commanding officers of posts on reservations, *ex officio* Supts. of Indian Affairs; 7, Give the Indians farms in severalty; 8, The rest of their lands to be bought by Government and thrown open to settlement. 9, Give the Indian the ballot and all the rights and duties of citizenship as soon as the country in which he resides shall have been organized into a county. 10, Feed the wild Indians sufficiently."