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## THE INDIAN DILEMMA

RECENT YEARS HAVE SEEN AN UPWELLING of Indian grievances which no administrative plans have been able to satisfy. In part this is merely the current malaise of civilization, in which all less fortunate elements have begun to assert claims to share in the affluence of the industrial society and even to control or direct it. The arguments in support of these movements are rarely convincing to any except those who propound them; but the fact remains that the extravagance of the affluent is the driving force of our society and also the cause of the impoverishment of the less affluent and of the destruction of the environment.

The problems of the Indians are among the most tangled of any in our society. The first is the question of rights; the second concerns discrimination; the third is that of the retention of Indian culture. My own experience of Canadian Indians has been confined almost entirely to the Algonkian Micmacs of Nova Scotia, who are perhaps the most deculturated of the hunting tribes and are therefore not wholly typical. Their problems, however, differ chiefly in degree from those of other hunting tribes.

Among whites, the old arrogance has now diminished to the point at which a great number will recognize that the reserves for the Indians—small tracts commonly of useless land—are scarcely generous shares of a country which once belonged to them. Indians, for their part, are very ready to claim all the land as their natural heritage, but the facts are somewhat more complicated than that.

In Nova Scotia, for example, the land was taken from the French by the English. The French had acquired their right to it by setting up crosses on the soil and claiming it in the name of the King of France, disregarding any rights of the Indians. In the period 700-1000 A.D., the Micmac Indians had invaded the country from the north and absorbed the shell-fish cultures

of mainland Nova Scotia, and had exterminated or driven out the "Red Indians" from Cape Breton. These Red Indians had drifted into the area during the period 4000-2000 B.C., and had absorbed the scanty earlier fishing and hunting inhabitants. In short, in every age the stronger has taken the land from the weaker. Today we consider that even the government should pay for expropriated land, but, if our consciences demand that we restore the original inhabitants, should we begin with the fishing tribe of which we know very little, or the Red Indians whom the Micmac, according to their traditions, had driven across to Newfoundland? Unhappily, these Red Indians (or Beothuks) no longer exist, and the Micmacs retain the tradition of expeditions to Newfoundland to kill Red Indians for sport, thus helping the unpardonable genocide of the white fishermen of the island. It is doubtful whether appeals to ancient history achieve anything but confusion.

Discrimination, the second grievance, is not a matter that can be satisfactorily settled by legislation. We all have a prejudice against outsiders, those people who differ from ourselves in appearance, speech, or behaviour, and only frequent and co-operative contact can reduce the gap. Several intelligent and energetic Indians have realized that the reserves are stagnant pools without present or future promise, and have deserted to the open society. A capable and reliable Indian, when he is known personally, is accepted without discrimination, but his children will have to go to white schools and will usually end by marrying white, and it is sad to see one's seed become submerged in a faceless society. In general, however, the unknown Indian is discriminated against by employers from experience of the usual Indian lack of education and tendency toward drink, violence, and wanderlust. The segregation of the reserves has hampered education, for children learn more from their parents and elder children than from teachers, and, when the language is also unfamiliar, progress is slow. When the subject matter fails to touch the instincts or interest of the child, what is learned will soon be forgotten. The parental pressure by which our own children are driven through a largely meaningless curriculum is usually lacking to Indian children, since their parents have had even less education. Yet, because Indians have as good brains as other people, some of them reach creditable levels, only to find themselves hampered by the reputation left by other Indians and by their own upbringing. But before we assign blame to one side or the other, it is necessary that we understand the causes of the prejudice. So we come to the third problem, the retention of Indian culture.

Culture may be divided into two groupings, economic and moral.

Without an adequate economic culture a people cannot survive except as paupers; without a moral code they cannot live together.

In dealing with the economic side of culture, I shall treat only the extreme group of the hunting Indians, partly because I know them better, partly because their problem is more critical than that of the agricultural Indians or even of the more adaptable Eskimos. The Micmacs had been a hunting people, although some of their legends suggest that they had planted corn before they came to Nova Scotia, and a single sentence in Lescarbot's *History of New France* suggests that they planted tobacco. For a hunter, especially in forest, a minute knowledge of the environment, of the behaviour of animals and fish, of the sources and seasons of fruits, wood, bark, and shellfish, and of the local topography was absolutely essential. As an old Indian explained to me: "The moose is an easy animal to kill. You know how many there are in the yard (hunting ground). You think which way the wind has been blowing this past week and you know where every moose is. Then you go and kill one." It is as simple as that if you know how, but consider the generations of experience needed to build up this knowledge and the familiarity with the topography necessary for applying it, especially as the annual round of an Indian family in search of fish, deer, berries, birds, and seals would often cover a hundred miles. A wigwam is rather a simple structure, but not all paper-birches produce the tough bark required for wigwam-cover or canoe, and I have known an Indian to go thirty miles to the hill which produced a satisfactory bark.

Today, a few of the older Micmacs still know these details, but younger generations have not met such problems in school or on television, and many are lamentably unaware of their ignorance of the old culture which, in any case, has been shrinking since the arrival of the first fisherman in the fifteenth century. An Indian woman in a reserve told me that they could easily return to the forest and live by hunting and by gathering "potatoes" and "turnips". She had no inkling that the game had ceased to exist, and she did not know by sight the wild tubers she mentioned. Lately one reserve appealed to a museum for instruction in the lost techniques of their culture. In the far north the deculturation has been far less, but even there life would scarcely be possible without the equipment provided by urban industry.

The Micmacs were the first North American Indians to be converted, although the earlier efforts were local and interrupted. Therefore many features of the original moral culture have been changed by missionary influence and by imitation of French and English customs. The missionaries tried in

vain to win the Micmacs to agriculture and a sedentary life, but in general they are said to have had to reduce their demands to the abandonment of magic and polygamy. Even these changes were only partially accepted. The priest took over the authority of the *buoin* who was both medicine-man and chief; the obvious ceremonies were abolished, but the belief in magic still remained. The change to monogamy might be practicable in agricultural areas where convents could absorb surplus women, but in the hunting life every woman needed a hunter in winter. Among these people, monogamy merely shifted an orderly relationship into a demoralizing promiscuity. To trace the moral culture of the early Micmacs would now be impossible, but we can use the culture of the less-Christianized northern Algonkians as a probable parallel.

This people had evolved a social and moral culture suited to their life, a body of taboos which could be violated only with a certainty of resulting illness. Since they believed this without question, illness promptly followed sin. This could be cured only by public confession to the band, a humiliating situation since it involved loss of prestige. Of course there were other ailments than those of conscience, but these could be treated differently.

Prestige was very important in Indian life. It might be achieved by skill in hunting or by bravery in war, but it was essentially magic. After all, how could a man be a successful hunter if he lacked magical power, or be a successful warrior if he were not magically protected? Everyone had magic to a certain extent. The order and what little discipline there was in the band depended upon magic. In winter, the life of the family depended upon the hunter, and for his dangerous and uncertain craft a man needed complete self-confidence. The children were not punished, so that they would have a good start in self-reliance and in discipline. The fear of other men may have been the source of the habit of sharing game, though it is possible that this was merely moulded by the ever-presence of magic. In a hunting community where ill-success and hunger were frequent, it would have been disruptive for one family to feast while another starved. It was better to share food and gain prestige by doing so.

The old economic culture and the taboos with their retribution have disappeared from among the Micmacs, but the behaviour-pattern remains to hamper the Indians in modern society. Those who remain in the reserve are still haunted by public opinion. An Indian can not build up capital, for the others will come to share his surplus. He can not improve his equipment, for any other Indian, lacking an item, may enter his house and carry it off, and to lock the door would be to lose prestige. The old value of property

had been in the prestige to be gained by giving it away. The children are prepared for a hunting life and are not disciplined. The old yearly cycle of the pursuit of food has disappeared and been replaced by the nomadism of seasonal labour in the potato fields, the orchards, and the blueberry barrens. From early years the children play their part in this, and the hunger for wandering remains fixed in them for life.

Prestige is difficult to acquire by unskilled work, and there are easier methods of reaching it. With a few drinks the Indian can find himself greater than all men, and the habit is begun. An Indian chief, when forty years of work had established him with a pension, toured the reservations in the United States, and he told me that everywhere the main problem was drink. This overvaluation of a dream world is typical of people under pressure, as in hunting or warring societies and in the enslavement of our own society. Attempts to keep drink from the Indians have not been successful and do nothing to satisfy the demand. All mankind come into life with certain dormant instincts or "drives". These may be developed or repressed or left to personal experience, but they are there, and the traditional experience of each society has led to a cultural mould suited to its needs. Among the Indians nurtured in the reserves the old obsolete pattern becomes ingrained, and only the strong-minded can escape it. Among the Indians brought up in white society it is absent.

Our own society is also patterned, and the present pressure centres around the belief that money is the most important reward of life. It is customary to attribute this to the "Calvinist ethic", but a glance at the Renaissance in Italy should convince anyone that Calvinism was rather a religious pattern developed to suit a pre-existing trend. Like the Indians, we have our instincts, and these were developed for a life very different from urban industrialism. The child expects love and receives "formula". He needs affection and recognition and control, but both his parents are involved in work. He learns naturally from those of his own sex a little older than he, but in a school class the oldest, and therefore the natural leaders, are the stupidest or the most recalcitrant. With adolescence he must specialize into an ever-narrowing field if he will succeed, and he must cram the whole wonder of the world into evenings, spare time, and holidays and be content with an excellent car. For most people, our culture provides a greater degree of comfort, more adequate supplies, and release from much of the physical drudgery of simpler cultures; but it provides remarkably little to satisfy the instincts of the Indian.

The rebellion of young, and even older people from this mechanical life is understandable. That it is possible at all is perhaps due to the two hundred

generations of simple agriculture to which most of our ancestors were exposed. They moved into it gradually. At first the men had hunted and the women had gathered what food the environment offered. When population became too dense, hunting changed to pastoralism, gathering to gardening, and the combination developed into farming. The hunting family had necessarily been small. Now children became an asset from early age. They learned early to take their part in the family labour and to be judged by their achievement. When industry came, it was not too difficult to shift from the drudgery of the small farm to the drudgery of urban labour, to accept the discipline of employment instead of family discipline. Our hunting Indians have no such pattern in their upbringing. Indians seem to be as intelligent as other people, but it is very common for Indian college graduates to return to the reserve and its low standard of living rather than face the low standard of life in the cities. Such behaviour among Indians is too familiar to employers for them to accept unknown Indians readily.

At present the aim seems to be to encourage Indians to make the immense leap from a hunting culture into urban industry, and it is uncertain whether this would be more unkind to the Indians or the employers. The alternative of leaving them in a state of near-pauperism in the reserves is equally unsatisfactory. The transition must be gradual, except for the most adaptable who can make their way without heartbreak. For the others we need a transitional culture which will change the juvenile pattern into one more practical than hunting is today. In India, the British administration sought to make castes of thieves into self-supporting citizens. Agriculture was not a successful outlet, but industry was, provided that the group remained together. Canadian Indians show considerable talent in handwork and should make excellent mechanics. Small industries established in reserves might make a beginning. Attempts to lead the Indians into agriculture have not been very successful, but there are Indians who are willing to practise it in a small way, except that most reserves are on useless land. Modern farming is making more land unnecessary than has been the case for generations past. It might be possible to open some agricultural reserves where those Indians who wished could practise subsistence-farming in the companionship of their own folk. A few generations with adequate education might equip some of them for more profitable farming or make specialized repetitive work less emotionally devastating to them.