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Chief, Pottawatomie Indians

“The Future of the Red Man”

Forum, August 1897 ___ Excerpts

OFTEN in the stillness of the night, when all nature seems asleep about me, there comes a gentle rapping at the door of my heart. I open it; and a voice inquires, “Pokagon, what of your people? What will their future be?” My answer is: “Mortal man has not the power to draw aside the veil of unborn time to tell the future of his race. That gift belongs to the Divine alone. But it is given to him to closely judge the future by the present and the past.”

Hence, in order to approximate the future of our race, we must consider our natural capabilities and our environments, as connected with the dominant race which outnumber us — three hundred to one — in this land of our fathers.

First, then, let us carefully consider if Mis-ko-au-ne-ne-og’ (the red man) possesses, or is devoid of, loyalty, sympathy, benevolence, and gratitude, — those heaven-born virtues requisite for Christian character and civilization. But, in doing so, let us constantly bear in mind that the character of our people has always been published to the world by the dominant race, and that human nature is now the same as when Solomon declared that “He that is first in his own cause seemeth just; but his neighbor cometh and searcheth him.” In our case we have ever stood as dumb to the charges brought against us as did the Divine Master before His false accusers; hence all charges alleged against us in history should be cautiously considered, with Christian charity. There have been, and still are, too many writers who, although they have never seen an Indian in their lives, have published tragical stories of their treachery and cruelty. Mothers, for generations past, have frightened their children into obedience with that dreaded scarecrow, “Look out, or the Injuns will get you!”; creating in the infant mind a false prejudice against our race, which has given birth to that base slander, “There is no good Injun but a dead one.” It is therefore no wonder that we are hated by some worse than Satan hates the salvation of human souls.

Let us glance backward to the year 1492. Columbus and his officers and crew are spending their first Christmas on the border-islands of the New World. It is not a merry, but a sad, Christmas to them. They stand crowded on the deck of the tiny ship “Niña.” Four weeks since, Pinson, with the “Pinta” and her crew, deserted the squadron; and last night the flagship, “Santa Maria,” that had safely borne the Admiral across an unknown sea to a strange land, was driven before the gale and stranded near the shore of Hispaniola. Deserted by her crew and left to the mercy of the breakers, she lies prostrate on the perilous sands, shivering and screaming in the wind like a wounded creature of life responsive to every wave that smites her.

It is early morning. Columbus sends Diego de Arna and Pedro Guthene to the great Chief of the Island, telling him of their sad disaster, and requesting that he come and help to save their goods from being swept into the sea. The Chief listens with all attention to the sad news; his heart is touched; he answers with his tears; and orders his people to go at once, with their canoes well manned, and help to save the stranger’s goods. He also sends one of his servants to the Admiral with a message of sincere

regrets for his misfortunes, offering all the aid in his power. Columbus receives the servant on shipboard; and, while he listens with gratitude to the cheering message delivered in signs and broken words, he rejoices to see coming to his relief along the shore a hundred boats, manned by a thousand men, mostly naked, bearing down upon the wrecked “Santa Maria,” and swarming about her like bees around their hive. The goods disappear from the ship as by magic, are rowed ashore, and safely secured. Not one native takes advantage of the disaster for his own profit. Spanish history declares that in no part of the civilized world could Columbus have received warmer or more cordial hospitality.

Touched by such tender treatment, Columbus, writing to the King and Queen of Spain, pays this beautiful tribute to the native Carib race: —

“They are a loving, uncovetous people, so docile in all things that I swear to your Majesties there is not in all the world a better race, or more delightful country. They love their neighbors as themselves; their talk is ever sweet and gentle, accompanied with smiles; and though they be naked, yet their manners are decorous and praiseworthy.”

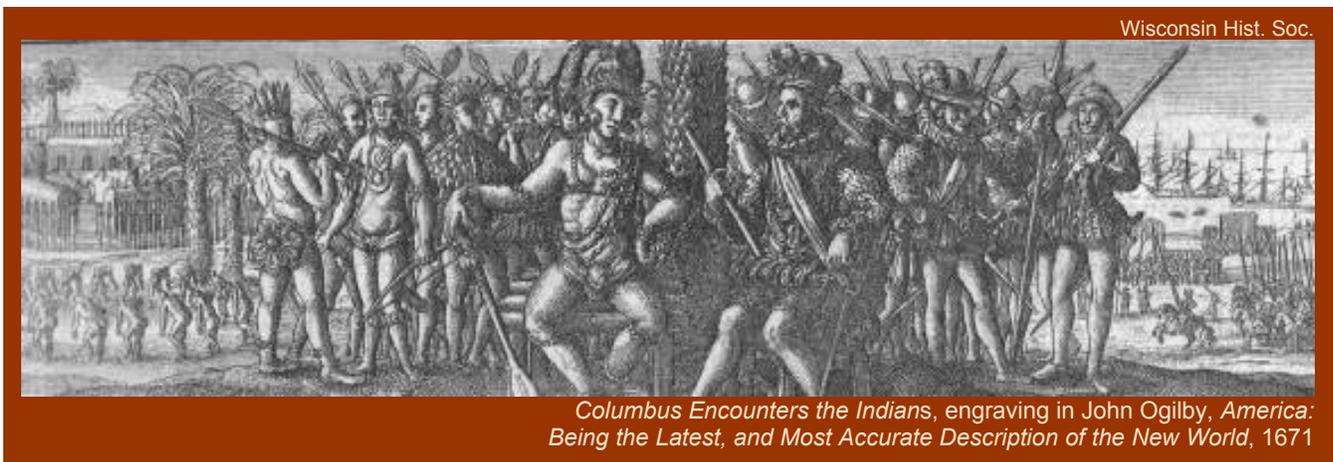
Peter Martyr, a reliable historian, has left on record the following: —

“It is certain the land among these people is as common as sun and water, and that ‘mine and thine,’ the seed of all misery, have no place with them. They are content with so little that in so large a country they have rather a superfluity than a scarceness, so that they seem to live in the golden world, without toil, living in open gardens not intrenched or defended with walls. They deal justly one with another without books, without laws, without judges. They take him for an evil and mischievous man who taketh pleasure in doing hurt to another; and although they delight not in superfluities, yet they make provision for the increase of such roots whereof they make bread, content with such simple diet wherewith health is preserved and disease avoided.” — (PETER MARTYR, Decade 1, Book 3.)

Does not this quotation most emphatically show that the red men of the New World did originally possess every virtue necessary for Christian civilization and enlightenment?

The question is often asked, What became of the numerous Caribs of those islands? They seemed to have vanished like leaves in autumn; for within a few years we find them supplanted by foreign slaves. The noble Bishop Las Casas tells us, in pity, “With mine own eyes, I saw kingdoms as full of people as hives are of bees; and now, where are they?” Almost all, he says, have perished by the sword and under the lash of cruel Spanish taskmasters, in the greedy thirst for gold.

Certain it is that in those days, which tried the souls of the Carib race, some fled from the lust and lash of their oppressors by sea to the coast of Florida, and reported to the natives there that Wau-be-au’-ne-ne-og’ (white men), who fought with Awsh-kon-tay’ Au-ne-me-kee’ (thunder and lightning), who were cruel, vindictive, and without love, except a thirsty greed for gold, had come from the other side of Kons-ke-tchi-saw-me’ (the ocean) and made slaves of Mis-ko-au-ne-ne-og’ (the red man) of the islands, which was reported from tribe to tribe across the continent.



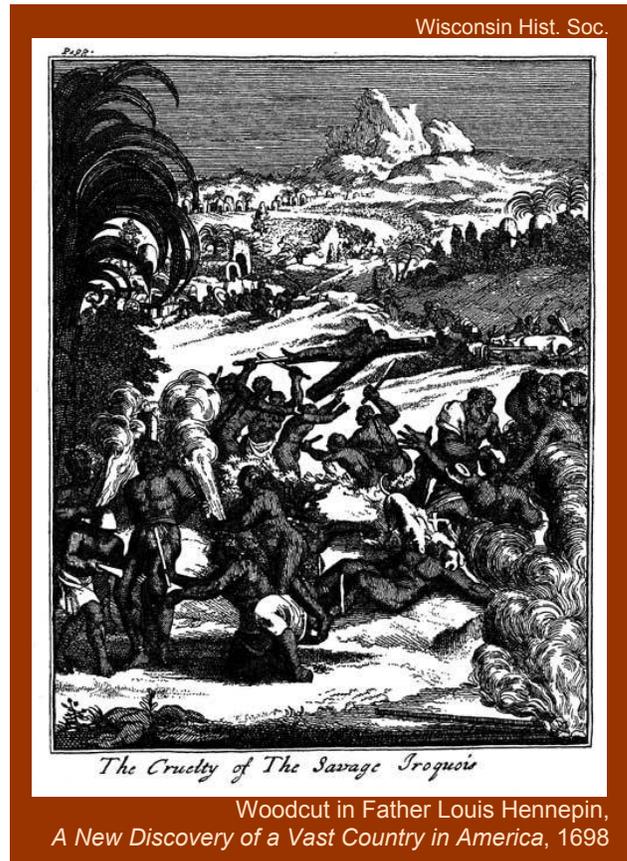
Columbus Encounters the Indians, engraving in John Ogilby, America: Being the Latest, and Most Accurate Description of the New World, 1671

Scarcely a quarter-century passes since the enslavement of the Carib race, and Ponce de Leon, a Spanish adventurer, is landing from his squadron a large number of persons to colonize the coast of Florida. A few years previously, while in pursuit of the fountain of youth, he had been here for the first time, on the day of the "Feast of Flowers." Then, he was kindly received and welcomed by the sons of the forest. Now, as then, the air is perfumed with the odor of fruits and flowers; and all on shore appears pleasing and inviting. The Spaniards land, and slowly climb the terrace that bounds the sea. Here they pause, planting side by side the Spanish standard and the cross. But hark! War-whoops are heard close by. And there they come, — long lines of savages from the surrounding woods, who, with slings and darts, with clubs and stones, fall upon the dreaded Spaniards. The onslaught is terrible. Many are killed; and Ponce de Leon is mortally wounded. He now begins to realize that among the savage hosts are Caribs who have escaped from slavery and death. He well knows the bitter story of their wrong, and that this bloody chastisement is but the returning boomerang of Spanish cruelty. They flee from the avengers of blood to the ships. The report they give of the savage attack, on their return to Spain, is so terrible that years pass before another attempt is made to colonize the land of fruits and flowers.

I deem it unnecessary to explain why these peaceful natives so soon became so warlike and vindictive. Suffice it to say: "Enslave a good man and, like the wasp which stings the hand that holds it fast, he will make use of all the means which nature has placed in his power to regain his liberty." During the first century of American history, many adventurers from different European countries sailed along the eastern coast of North America, — all reporting the natives peaceable and kind when not misused.

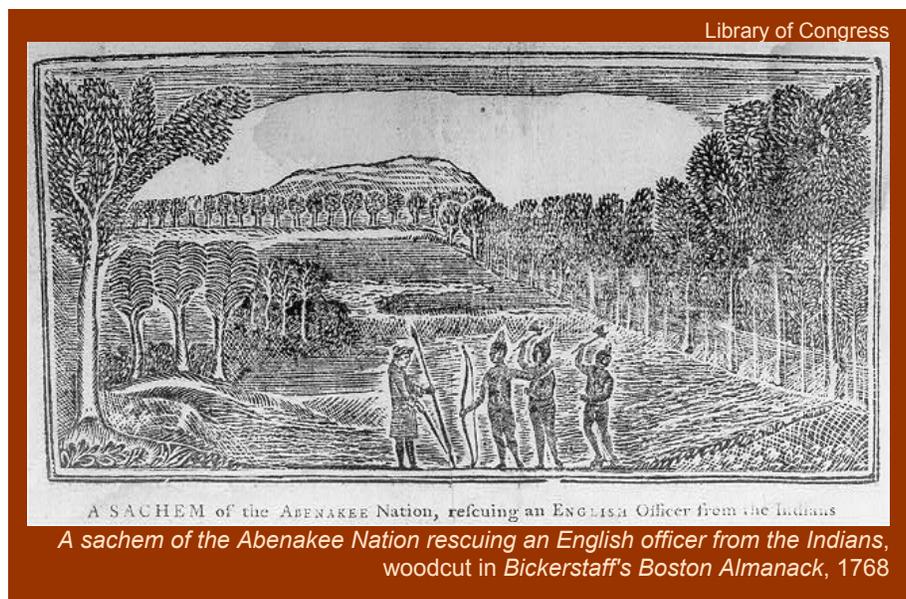
There was a tradition among our fathers that, before the colonization of North America, an armed band of Wau-be-au'-ne-ne-og' (white men), gorgeously clad, came on the war-path from the East, reaching the Dakotas, which then extended south as far as the mouth of the Arkansas River; that they were vindictive and cruel, destroying the natives wherever they went with Awsh-kon-tay' Au-ne-me-kee' (thunder and lightning). They were looking for gold, their Man-i-to (god), and, not finding him, went down Mi-che-se-pe (the great river) and were seen no more. Those cruel adventurers, who came among us by sea and land, must have awakened hatred and revenge in the hearts of our fathers, which may have been transmitted to their children. . . .

Inroads were being continually made into Taw-naw-ke-win' (our native land); and in seeking new homes we found ourselves invading the hunting-grounds of other tribes. The warlike Iroquois of New York would not even allow the eastern tribes to pass through their country, — as a result, our forefathers seemed compelled to make a stand against the advance of the incoming race. In doing so, our villages were laid waste with fire, our people slaughtered and burned by white warriors who seemed without number for multitude. Our fathers finally gave up the contest. Some, to avoid the Iroquois, went West through Canada. Others went West through Pennsylvania, meeting in Indiana, Michigan, and Wisconsin, then known as Indian Territory, where we found French priests and traders,



who gave us a hearty welcome, assuring us that we should remain safe with them. In course of time the English, finding the French traders posted along the western frontier, gave them to understand that the land they occupied belonged to the English, as well as the right to buy fur from the natives. Hence the so-called French and Indian War was inaugurated, in the course of which many outrages were committed on the frontiers, — *all of them being charged to the Indians*. During this war a manifold tin box of curious make was found in a large village called Wa-gaw-naw-kee-zee', which lay along Lake Michigan, between Little Traverse Bay and the Straits of Mackinaw. The unsuspecting Indians opened it, and in the innermost box found a mouldy substance. Soon after, the smallpox — a disease unknown to our fathers — broke out among them; and O-daw-yo-e-waw' Da-dodse-ses' (their medicine men) all died. In fact every one taking the disease died. Lodge after lodge was filled with unburied dead. The great village was entirely depopulated. Our fathers thought the disease was sent among them by the English because the Indians had helped the French during that war. I have passed over the ancient site of this village. Its bounds are clearly marked by second-growth forests, which now cover it. It is fifteen miles long and from one to two miles wide.

Almost on the heels of this war, after France had ceded her rights to the English, came the Revolutionary war. Our people had just begun to learn that they owed allegiance to the British, who had conquered our invincible French King. They had seen the Bourbon flag taken down from the western forts, and replaced by the red cross of St. George; and they were compelled to shout, "Long live the King, — King George who rules from the Arctic Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico."



We now began selling furs to our new masters; receiving in exchange dry-goods and Awsh-kontay' Ne-besh (fire-water), when we were called upon again to take the war-path, to aid our new king in subduing his rebellious colonies. We could not serve two masters at the same time; hence remained loyal to our new king, while the Iroquois of New York and Canada were divided. And so it was that all the dirty, cruel work of war between the revolutionists and the mother country was laid at the door of our people, whose mouths were dumb to defend or justify themselves in respect of the outrages charged against them. These outrages were generally planned, and frequently executed, by white men, as was, in after years, the Mountain Meadow Massacre, of Mormon notoriety, for which also we were persecuted and suffered untold disgrace.

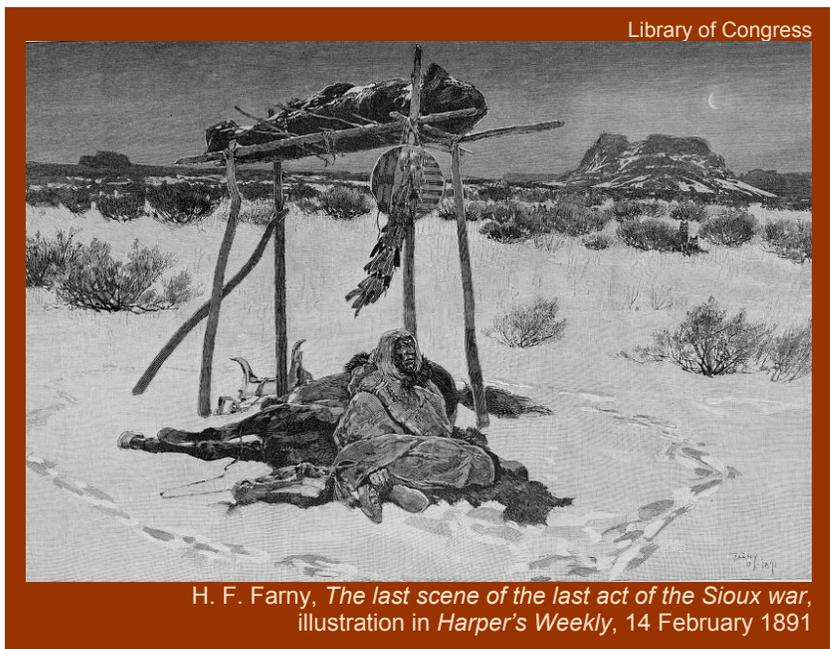
I always think of my people in those days as the dog kept by the schoolmaster to be whipped whenever a child disobeyed. During the war of 1812 we were again incited through English influence to take the war-path. Proctor, the English general of the Northwest, said to our heroic Tecumseh, "Assemble all your warriors together, join forces with us, and we will drive the Americans beyond the Ohio River, and Michigan shall be yours forever." Such a promise, from so high an authority, awakened all the native energies of our being to regain our liberty and homes, for which we had been contending against overpowering forces.

The Ottawas and Chippeways of the north, the Pottawattamies and Miamies of the south, and other tribes gathered themselves together to make the last desperate effort to regain the promised land. In this war our cause was far more sacred to us than was the Americans' to them. They had drawn the sword in defence of *one* of their rights; we, for *all of ours*; for our very existence, for our native land, and for the graves of our fathers, most sacred to our race.

The last engagement in which the confederated Algonquin tribes fought the Americans was at the battle of the Thames in Canada, on October 5, 1813, where we and the English were defeated by General Harrison, and General Tecumseh,* our brave leader, was killed.

After this battle our fathers became fully convinced that the small remnant of their tribes must either accept extermination, or such terms as their enemy saw fit to give. So they sued for peace; and the American warriors, uplifted by victory, and our Algonquin fathers, bowed down by defeat, stood around the grave of the hatchet — buried forever — and smoked the pipe of peace together.

At one time I felt that our race was doomed to extermination. There was an awful unrest among the western tribes who had been pushed by the cruel march of civilization into desert places, where subsistence was impossible. Starvation drove many to steal cattle from adjacent ranches; and when some of our people were killed by the cowboys, their friends were determined to take the war-path. I never failed on such occasions to declare most emphatically, "You might as well march your warriors into the jaws of an active volcano, expecting to shut off its fire and smoke, as to attempt to beat back the westward trend of civilization. You must teach your sons everywhere that the war-path will lead them but to the grave."



Having briefly reviewed some of our past history, the fact must be admitted that, when the white men first visited our shores, we were kind and confiding; standing before them like a block of marble before the sculptor, ready to be shaped into noble manhood. Instead of this, we were oftener hacked to pieces and destroyed. We further find in our brief review that the contending Powers of the Old World, striving for the mastery in the New, took advantage of our trustful, confiding natures, placing savage weapons of warfare in our hands to aid us in butchering one another.

* At the time of this battle, Tecumseh was a brigadier-general in the English army, with Proctor. I have seen in United States histories pictures of Tecumseh, tomahawk in hand about to strike a soldier named Johnson, who claimed that he shot the dreaded chief with his pistol. But I have repeatedly heard old Indian warriors say: "After the British infantry gave way, they came to an open or clear spot in the woods, and here Tecumseh ordered his men to halt and fight the Americans once more. Just then the open space was swept by American musketry; and Tecumseh fell, saying, 'Me-daw-yo-em' o-kawd' (My leg is shot off). Hand me two loaded guns. I will have the last shot. Maw-tchawn'we-wib' (Be quick and go).' These were the last words of Tecumseh." Our fathers believed that neither the Americans nor the Indians knew who fired the fatal shot.

My father, Leopold Pokagon, had been a Pottawattamie chief thirteen years before this battle, and so remained until his death, twenty-seven years after. Most of his band were sent West in 1837. He and some five hundred of his people, having embraced Christianity, were permitted to remain in Michigan. In 1866, they numbered three hundred and fifty: nearly all were of pure Indian blood. At the present time, they number two hundred and seventy-one: nearly one-half are of mixed blood. [Footnote in original]

It is useless to deny the charge, that at times we have been goaded to vindictive and cruel acts. Some of my own tribe, however, were soldiers in the Northern army during the civil war. Some of them were taken, and held prisoners in the rebel prisons, and the cruelty which, according to the tales they tell, was witnessed there was never outdone in border warfare with the scalping-knife and tomahawk. And yet I believe that, had the Northern people been placed in the South under like circumstances, their prisoners of war would have been treated with similar cruelty. It was the result of a *desperate* effort to save an expiring cause. I believe there is no reasonable person, well grounded in United States history, who will not admit that there were ten times as many who perished miserably in Southern prisons as have been killed by our people since the discovery of America. I recall these facts not to censure, but to show that *cruelty and revenge are the offspring of war, not of race*, and that nature has placed no impassable gulf between us and civilization.

It is claimed that the United States have paid out five hundred million dollars in trying to subdue the red man by military force. But now — thank Heaven! — through the influence of good men and women who have thrown the search-light of the golden rule into the great heart of the nation, her policy is changed. Where hundreds of thousands of dollars were paid out annually to fight him, like sums are now being paid yearly to educate him in citizenship and self-support; that his children may not grow up a race of savages to be again fought and again cared for at the expense of the nation. I

rejoice in the policy now being pursued. If not perfect, it is certainly on the right trail to success.

While a guest at Chicago, during the World's Fair, I spent much time at the United States Indian School. There I met many delegations from different governmental schools. I was particularly interested in the delegation from Albuquerque, New Mexico, composed of Navajos, Pinas-Mojaves, Pueblos, and others. With pride I examined the articles which they had made, their clean, well-kept writing-books, and listened to their sweet vocal and instrumental music. I then and there said, in my heart: "Thanks to the Great Spirit, I do believe the remnant



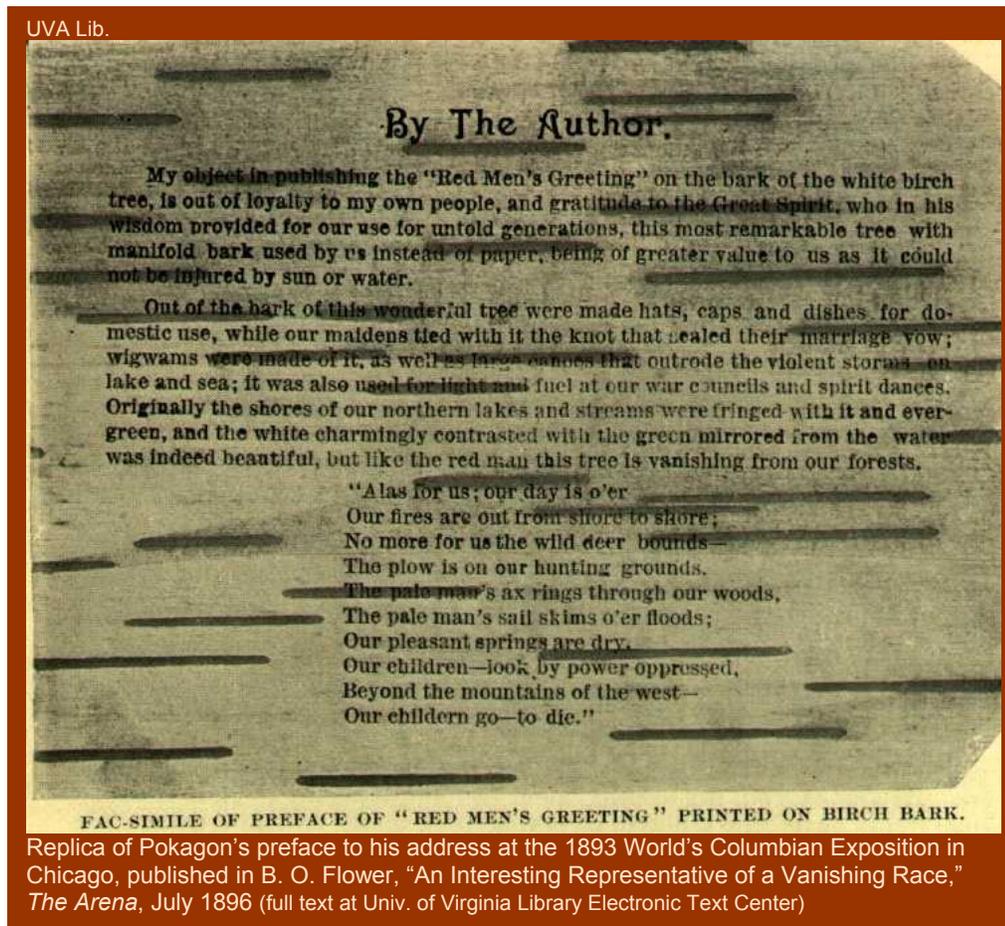
of our race will yet live and learn to compete with the dominant race; proving themselves worthy of the highest offices in the gift of a free people."

The Indian school at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, has done wonders in showing what can be effected for the education of our children. The test there made is a reliable one, inasmuch as that school is made up of pupils from more than sixty different tribes, from all parts of the United States. I was highly gratified a few months ago to learn that the football team from that school was able to defeat the champion Wisconsin team at Chicago, receiving many compliments from the immense crowd for their tact and self-control as well as for their physical development, — showing conclusively that our race is not, as some claim, becoming enfeebled and running out.

While I most heartily indorse the present policy of the Government in dealing with our people, I must admit — to be true to my own convictions — that I am worried over the ration system, under which so many of our people are being fed on the reservations. I greatly fear it may eventually

vagabondize many of them beyond redemption. It permits the gathering of lazy, immoral white men of the worst stamp, who spend their time in idleness and in corrupting Indian morality. I do hope the Government will provide something for them to do for their own good, although it should pay her little

or nothing. Again: I fear for the outcome of the Indian nations. Our people in their native state were not avaricious. They were on a common level; and, like the osprey that divides her last fish with her young, so they acted toward each other. But I find, to my sorrow, that, when you associate them with squaw men, and place them in power, they develop the wolfish greed of civilization, disregarding the rights of their less fortunate brothers. I must admit that it staggers my native brain to understand what reason, equity,



or justice there is in allowing independent powers to exist within the bounds of this Republic. If the "Monroe doctrine," which has been so much petted of late years, should be enforced anywhere, it would certainly be in the line of good statesmanship to carry it out, at least in principle, at home.

Lastly, Pokagon must admit that he feels very deeply the ravages made among his people by the "intoxicating cup." Were it an open enemy outside our lines, we might meet it with success. But alas! it is a traitor within our camp, cunning as Wa-goosh (the fox). It embraces and kisses but to poison like the snake — without the warning rattle. Before I associated with white men, I had supposed that they were not such slaves to that soulless tyrant as the red man. But I have learned that the cruel curse enslaves alike the white man in his palace and the red man in his hut; alike the chieftain and the king; the savage and the sage. I am indeed puzzled to understand how it is that the white race, whose works seem almost divine, should not be able to destroy this great devil-fish, which their own hands have fashioned and launched upon the sea of human life; whose tentacles reach out into the halls of legislature and courts of law, into colleges and churches, — doing everywhere its wicked work.

As to the future of our race, it seems to me almost certain that in time it will lose its identity by amalgamation with the dominant race. No matter how distasteful it may seem to us, we are compelled to consider it as a probable result. Sensitive white people can console themselves, however, with the fact, that there are to-day in the United States thousands of men and women of high social standing

whose forefathers on one side were full-blooded so-called savages; and yet the society in which they move, and in many cases they themselves, are ignorant of the fact. All white people are not ashamed of Indian blood; in fact, a few are proud of it.

At the World's Fair on Chicago Day, after ringing the new Liberty Bell, and speaking in behalf of my people, I presented Mayor Harrison, according to the programme of the day, with a duplicate of the treaty by which my father, a Pottawattamie chief, in 1833, conveyed Chicago — embracing the fair-grounds and surrounding country — to the United States for about three cents per acre. In accepting the treaty, the venerable Mayor said: “grateful to the spirit of the past, I am happy to receive this gift from the hand of one who is able to bestow it. Chicago is proving that it recognizes the benefits conferred through this treaty. I receive this from an Indian all the more gratefully because in my own veins courses the blood of an Indian. Before the days of Pokagon, I had my origin in the blood that ran through Pocahontas. I stand to-day as a living witness that the Indian is worth something in this world.”*

I have made diligent inquiries of the headmen of different tribes as to what estimate they place on the half-breeds among them. Their general reply has been, “They are certainly an improvement on the pale face, but not on the red man.” Which no doubt is the case; for it is a lamentable fact that criminals, outlaws, and vagabonds are generally the first who seek homes among us, bringing with them nearly all the vices and diseases, and but few of the virtues, of civilization. Yet, notwithstanding such an unfortunate mixture, we find some grand characters who have been able to rise high above the sins of parentage. I have further found, by close observation, that those tinged with our blood are far less subject to nervous diseases; but whether at the expense of intellectual force or otherwise, I am not so certain. Be that as it may, we cannot safely ignore the fact, that it is the physical development of the people of a nation that gives it strength and stability; that physical decay brings loss of executive ability, and has proved the overthrow of ancient kingdoms. I do not wish it to be understood that I advocate or desire the amalgamation of our people with the white race. But I speak of it as an event that is almost certain; and we had much better rock with the boat that oars us on than fight against the inevitable. I am frequently asked, “Pokagon, do you believe that the white man and the red man were originally of one blood?” My reply has been: “I do not know. But from the present outlook, they surely will be.”

The index-finger of the past and present is pointing to the future, showing most conclusively that by the middle of the next century all Indian reservations and tribal relations will have passed away. Then our people will begin to scatter; and the result will be a general mixing up of the races. Through intermarriage the blood of our people, like the waters that flow into the great ocean, will be forever lost in the dominant race; and generations yet unborn will read in history of the red men of the forest, and inquire, “Where are they?”

SIMON POKAGON.

* Certain it is that the families of Harrison, Rolings, Rogers, and many others tinged with the Indian blood of Pocahontas are superior in health to, and fully as strong intellectually and morally as, those families from the same branch of pure white blood. John Randolph of Roanoke, a near descendant of this Indian woman, and strongly marked with our race lines, was several times Congressman from Virginia, once United States Senator, and minister to Russia. In his time his speeches were more read than any others. His masterly arguments were the pride of his party and the terror of his opponents. [Footnote in original]