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Helen Hunt Jackson

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### A Century of Dishonour

Author and activist Helen Hunt Jackson (1830–85) is remembered for her work in support of Native American rights. She was also a friend and correspondent of the poet Emily Dickinson, and her own verse was praised by Ralph Waldo Emerson. Her highly popular novel *Ramona* (1884) addressed discrimination against Native Americans, raising public consciousness as Harriet Beecher Stowe had done for slavery in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). Jackson's novel emerged out of her passionate seeking of justice for her country's indigenous peoples. She describes decades of government-sanctioned mistreatment of Native Americans in this 1881 publication. The work introduces seven major tribes, their claims to ancestral lands, and the history of broken treaties and massacres they had endured. Alongside this, Jackson also presents details of Native American culture, resilience and creativity. This remains a vital and substantial account of minority persecution in North American history.

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# A Century of Dishonour

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# A CENTURY OF DISHONOUR

A SKETCH

OF THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT'S  
DEALINGS WITH SOME OF THE  
NORTH AMERICAN TRIBES

By H. H.

AUTHOR OF "VERSES" "BITS OF TRAVEL" ETC.

*"Every human being born upon our continent, or who comes here from any quarter of the world, whether savage or civilized, can go to our courts for protection—except those who belong to the tribes who once owned this country. The cannibal from the islands of the Pacific, the worst criminals from Europe, Asia, or Africa, can appeal to the law and courts for their rights of person and property—all, save our native Indians, who, above all, should be protected from wrong"*

Gov. HORATIO SEYMOUR

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## PREFACE.

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I HAVE been requested to write a preface to this sad story of "A Century of Dishonor." I cannot refuse the request of one whose woman's heart has pleaded so eloquently for the poor Red men. The materials for her book have been taken from official documents. The sad revelation of broken faith, of violated treaties, and of inhuman deeds of violence will bring a flush of shame to the cheeks of those who love their country. They will wonder how our rulers have dared to so trifle with justice, and provoke the anger of God. Many of the stories will be new to the reader. The Indian owns no telegraph, employs no press reporter, and his side of the story is unknown to the people.

Nations, like individuals, reap exactly what they sow; they who sow robbery reap robbery. The seed-sowing of iniquity reaps in a harvest of blood. The American people have accepted as truth the teaching that the Indians were a degraded, brutal race of savages, whom it was the will of God should perish at the approach of civilization. If they do not say with our Puritan fathers that these are the Hittites who are to be driven out before the saints of the Lord, they do accept the teaching that manifest destiny will drive the Indians from the earth. The inexorable has no tears or pity at the cries of anguish of the doomed race. Ahab never speaks kindly of Naboth, whom he has robbed of his vineyard. It soothes conscience to cast mud on the character of the one whom we have wronged.

The people have laid the causes of Indian wars at the door of the Indian trader, the people on the border, the Indian agents, the army, and the Department of the Interior. None of these are responsible for the Indian wars, which have cost the United States five hundred millions of dollars and tens of thousands of valuable lives. In the olden time the Indian trader was the Indian's friend. The relation was one of mutual dependence. If the trader oppressed the Indian he was in danger of losing his debt;

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if the Indian refused to pay his debts, the trader must leave the country. The factors and agents of the old fur companies tell us that their goods were as safe in the unguarded trading-post as in the civilized village. The pioneer settlers have had too much at stake to excite an Indian massacre, which would overwhelm their loved ones in ruin. The army are not responsible for Indian wars; they are "men under authority," who go where they are sent. The men who represent the honor of the nation have a tradition that lying is a disgrace, and that theft forfeits character. General Crook expressed the feeling of the army when he replied to a friend who said, "It is hard to go on such a campaign." "Yes, it is hard; but, sir, the hardest thing is to go and fight those whom you know are in the right." The Indian Bureau is often unable to fulfil the treaties, because Congress has failed to make the appropriations. If its agents are not men of the highest character, it is largely due to the fact that we send a man to execute this difficult trust at a remote agency, and expect him to support himself and family on \$1500 a year. The Indian Bureau represents a system which is a blunder and a crime.

The Indian is the only human being within our territory who has no individual right in the soil. He is not amenable to or protected by law. The executive, the legislative, and judicial departments of the Government recognize that he has a possessory right in the soil; but his title is merged in the tribe—the man has no standing before the law. A Chinese or a Hottentot would have, but the native American is left pitifully helpless. This system grew out of our relations at the first settlement of the country. The isolated settlements along the Atlantic coast could not ask the Indians, who outnumbered them ten to one, to accept the position of wards. No wise policy was adopted, with altered circumstances, to train the Indians for citizenship. Treaties were made of the same binding force of the constitution; but these treaties were unfilled. It may be doubted whether one single treaty has ever been fulfilled as it would have been if it had been made with a foreign power. The treaty has been made as between two independent sovereigns. Sometimes each party has been ignorant of the wishes of the other; for the heads of both parties to the treaty have been on the interpreter's shoulders, and he was the owned creature of corrupt men, who desired to use the Indians as a key to unlock the nation's treasury. Pledges, solemnly made, have been shamelessly violated. The Indian has had no redress but war. In these wars ten white men were kill-

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ed to one Indian, and the Indians who were killed have cost the Government a hundred thousand dollars each. Then came a new treaty, more violated faith, another war, until we have not a hundred miles between the Atlantic and Pacific which has not been the scene of an Indian massacre.

All this while Canada has had no Indian wars. Our Government has expended for the Indians a hundred dollars to their one. They recognize, as we do, that the Indian has a possessory right to the soil. They purchase this right, as we do, by treaty; but their treaties are made with *the Indian subjects* of Her Majesty. They set apart a *permanent* reservation for them; they seldom remove Indians; they select agents of high character, who receive their appointments for life; they make fewer promises, but they fulfil them; they give the Indians Christian missions, which have the hearty support of Christian people, and all their efforts are toward self-help and civilization. An incident will illustrate the two systems. The officer of the United States Army who was sent to receive Alaska from the Russian Government stopped in British Columbia. Governor Douglas had heard that an Indian had been murdered by another Indian. He visited the Indian tribe; he explained to them that the murdered man was a subject of Her Majesty; he demanded the culprit. The murderer was surrendered, was tried, was found guilty, and was hanged. On reaching Alaska the officer happened to enter the Greek church, and saw on the altar a beautiful copy of the Gospels in a costly binding studded with jewels. He called upon the Greek bishop, and said, "Your Grace, I called to say you had better remove that copy of the Gospels from the church, for it may be stolen." The bishop replied, "Why should I remove it? It was the gift of the mother of the emperor, and has lain on the altar seventy years." The officer blushed, and said, "There is no law in the Indian country, and I was afraid it might be stolen." The bishop said, "The book is in God's house, and it is His book, and I shall not take it away." The book remained. The country became ours, and the next day the Gospel was stolen.

Our Indian wars are needless and wicked. The North American Indian is the noblest type of a heathen man on the earth. He recognizes a Great Spirit; he believes in immortality; he has a quick intellect; he is a clear thinker; he is brave and fearless, and, until betrayed, he is true to his plighted faith; he has a passionate love for his children, and counts it joy to die for his people. Our most terrible wars have been with the noblest types of

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the Indians, and with men who had been the white man's friend. Nicolet said the Sioux were the finest type of wild men he had ever seen. Old traders say that it used to be the boast of the Sioux that they had never taken the life of a white man. Lewis and Clarke, Governor Stevens, and Colonel Steptoe bore testimony to the devoted friendship of the Nez Percés for the white man. Colonel Boone, Colonel Bent, General Harney, and others speak in the highest praise of the Cheyennes. The Navahoes were a semi-civilized people.

Our best friends have suffered more deeply from our neglect and violated faith than our most bitter foes. Peaceable Indians often say, "You leave us to suffer; if we killed your people, then you would take care of us."

Our Indian wars have not come wholly from violated faith. In time of peace it has been our policy to establish "almshouses" to train and educate savage paupers. We have purchased paint, beads, scalping-knives, to deck warriors, and have fed them in idleness at the agency. Around this agency and along the border were gathered influences to degrade the savage, and sink him to a depth his fathers had never known. It has only needed a real or a fancied wrong to have this pauperized savagery break out in deeds of blood. Under President Grant a new departure was taken. The peace policy was little more than a name. No change was made in the Indian system; no rights of property were given; no laws were passed to protect the Indians. The President did take the nomination of Indian agents from politicians, who had made the office a reward for political service. He gave the nomination of Indian agents to the executive committees of the missionary societies of the different churches. Where these Christian bodies established schools and missions, and the Government cast its influence on the side of labor, it was a success. More has been done to civilize the Indians in the past twelve years than in any period of our history. The Indian Ring has fought the new policy at every step; and yet, notwithstanding our Indian wars, our violated treaties, and our wretched system, thousands of Indians, who were poor, degraded savages, are now living as Christian, civilized men. There was a time when it seemed impossible to secure the attention of the Government to any wrongs done to the Indians: it is not so to-day. The Government does listen to the friends of the Indians, and many of the grosser forms of robbery are stopped. No permanent reform can be secured until the heart of the people is touched. In 1862

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I visited Washington, to lay before the Administration the causes which had desolated our fair State with the blood of those slain by Indian massacre. After pleading in vain, and finding no redress, Secretary Stanton said to a friend, "What does the Bishop want? If he came here to tell us that our Indian system is a sink of iniquity, tell him we all know it. Tell him the United States never cures a wrong until the people demand it; and when the hearts of the people are reached the Indian will be saved." In this book the reader will find the sad story of a century—no, not the whole story, but the fragmentary story of isolated tribes. The author will have her reward if it shall aid in securing justice to a noble and a wronged race. Even with the sad experiences of the past we have not learned justice. The Cherokees and other tribes received the Indian Territory as a compensation and atonement for one of the darkest crimes ever committed by a Christian nation. That territory was conveyed to them by legislation as strong as the wit of statesmen could devise. The fathers who conveyed this territory to the Cherokees are dead. Greedy eyes covet the land. The plans are laid to wrest it from its rightful owners. If this great iniquity is consummated, these Indians declare that all hope in our justice will die out of their hearts, and that they will defend their country with their lives.

The work of reform is a difficult one; it will cost us time, effort, and money; it will demand the best thoughts of the best men in the country. We shall have to regain the confidence of our Indian wards by honest dealing and the fulfilment of our promises. Now the name of a white man is to the Indians a synonyme for "liar." Red Cloud recently paid a visit to the Black Hills, and was hospitably entertained by his white friends. In bidding them good-bye he expressed the hope that, if they did not meet again on earth, they might meet beyond the grave "in a land where white men ceased to be liars."

Dark as the history is, there is a brighter side. No missions to the heathen have been more blessed than those among the Indians. Thousands, who were once wild, painted savages, finding their greatest joy in deeds of war, are now the disciples of the Prince of Peace. There are Indian churches with Indian congregations, in which Indian clergy are telling the story of God's love in Jesus Christ our Saviour. Where once was only heard the medicine-drum and the song of the scalp-dance, there is now the bell calling Christians to prayer, and songs of praise and words of prayer go up to heaven. The Christian home, though only a

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PREFACE.

log-cabin, has taken the place of the wigwam; and the poor, degraded Indian woman has been changed to the Christian wife and mother. With justice, personal rights, and the protection of law, the Gospel will do for our Red brothers what it has done for other races—give to them homes, manhood and freedom.

H. B. WHIPPLE, *Bishop of Minnesota.*

NEW YORK, *November 11th*, 1880.