

## Indian Work.\*

BY ANNA ASENATH HAWLEY.

The Indian has been more or less in the public eye since the day Jacques Cartier sailed up the St. Lawrence, and some effort has been put forth (with more or less enthusiasm) toward civilisation, since the gentle ladies of France bravely sailed over the seas to spend and be spent for the aborigines of the newly-found lands. After a lapse of three centuries what is the condition of the race to-day?

It is true we have shining examples of the possibility of the Indian; individuals have climbed to enviable positions in the ladder of fame, but as a race it is still the day of small things.

The great difficulty in the past has been the nomadic habits—no fixed place of abode—here to-day, there to-morrow. Under these conditions it is evident that outside of evangelistic work very little could be accomplished. Happily, to-day, the roaming habit of the Indian is practically a thing of the past. Owing to the onward march of civilisation the red man was induced to resign his lordly estates and to take up his hunting-grounds farther and farther back. The day has come when the last west and north have shown up possibilities to the settler undreamed of a few years ago. The buffalo has disappeared from our great western prairies, the fishes and game are gradually being eliminated from our lakes and woods; the ever onward rush of emigration is depriving the Indian of his livelihood. Year after year the Indian problem is one of greater increasing urgency. In the name of honour and justice there is but one solution. Such judicious assistance as will enable the red man to become a self-supporting, self-respecting Canadian citizen. It is evident the Indian must become an agriculturist. This is what the Canadian Government is aiming at and putting forth every possible effort with this end in view.

Reservations have been allotted to the various bands, upon which they have built their primitive homes. From sheer necessity they are giving up the hunt and chase as a means of livelihood and depending more and more upon the cultivation of the land. These reservations afford great scope for nurses with strong missionary tendencies and a love of the work for the work's sake. One must deal with stupendous ignorance and superstition, with a people who know not how to care for themselves in health, much less in illness. Abscesses securely covered with ratskins, sep-

tic wounds generously besmeared with blueberry juice, the body wound with brightly coloured ribbons, betoken some of their efforts to check the progress of disease. When illness comes upon an Indian there is a threefold duty which the friends feel they owe the unfortunate one.

First—To keep him as a hot house plant. One finds blankets like portieres hanging over the door to ward off the possibility of any fresh air reaching the patient, every crevice stuffed with rags, the patient always fully dressed even to the moccasins and often wearing some of his outdoor garments. A familiar sight is rabbit skins wound round each foot and hand and a band of cotton encircling the head.

Secondly—To urge the sick one to eat his usual portion of meat and bannock that he may not get weak.

Thirdly—To induce the patient to walk a short time every day that he may not lose the use of his legs.

In regard to medicine, it must be highly coloured, preferably bright red, and also have an agreeable odour, or to the Indian's mind it is "no good" and he will not use it. One has rivals in the native medicine men. Even Christian Indians of many years' standing retain some heathen ideas and are loth to give up the traditions of their race. Regarding compensation, the medicine men are often very relentless and will demand anything which a man possesses—perhaps his only cow, in one instance the sick man's last pair of trousers. One must admit some medicine men possess an extensive knowledge of the medicinal properties of some herbs and sometimes are remarkably successful in curing diseases which they know, but in general their skill is a fraud and violates every principle of physiology.

In an interesting address on "Heathenism" before the Woman's Auxiliary, the Rev. Louis Laronde, B.A., of Winnipeg, said: "The secret fraternity of medicine men is the chief institution of heathenism. These are of different grades and of different degrees of power according to the number of years of their probation. The Indians are naturally credulous and superstitious in everything connected with native religion. They attribute every sickness to the secret enmity of man or to evil spirits. The medicine men understand this characteristic and they take full advantage of it for their own ends. They magnify even simple ailments into dangerous illnesses, and when they have frightened their patients (as they readily do) they have them at their will. Should a patient recover from a supposed dangerous illness after treatment the medicine

\* From the *Canadian Nurse*.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)