

TARDY JUSTICE TO THE INDIANS

A valuable contribution is made to the early history of the Northwest and tardy justice is done to the Indians by an article which O. B. Sperlin, of Tacoma, contributes to *The Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society*. From the journals of those white men who first came into contact with the Indians he describes the aborigines as these men found them in their natural state before they had been changed by association with the whites. He thus reaches certain conclusions as to what the Indian was before commerce degraded him and before white men began indiscriminate slaughter. He makes "a record of observations by explorers, traders, scientists, surveyors, friars, adventurers, captives, lieutenants, clerks and sergeants" and thus sums up the case:

They show that the Indians received the strangers hospitably; that they practiced a simple, unostentatious religion; that they were men of honor, of simple industry and physical skill; that their government was simple, but efficient; and that the home embodied strong attachments, though it exhibited at times improperly apportioned burdens. Indian vices, not necessarily crimes, were such as improvidence, gambling and occasionally cruel treatment of enemies; but we cannot justly charge the race with the alleged crimes of treachery, drunkenness nor with atheism nor idolatry.

If the white race could honestly claim all of these virtues and could honestly acquit itself of more or worse vices than are here attributed to the Indians as the first white men found them, it would have more cause for pride. After the first explorers came the traders with sharp practices, hunters of fur-bearing animals, who were wild, drunken and reckless, and miners who were of the same general character. They taught the Indian their vices, familiarized him first with the shady side of civilization, and then denounced him for being what they had made him. By the time the great flood of peaceful, law-abiding settlers came, the Indian had been condemned as the natural enemy of the whites and had accepted that role. Nothing but mutual hatred and slaughter was then possible.

It would be well for the whites if they could say of themselves, as Mr. Sperlin says of the Indians, that their religion was simple and unostentatious. As for our Government, it yearly strays further from simplicity and efficiency. The vices of the primitive Indian are such as we might expect among children of nature and are so common among us that we dare not cast the first stone, while he has learned worse vices from us. In the interest of justice we should do well to revise our opinion of the Indians in the light of Mr. Sperlin's records as to what they were when contact with the white race began.—Editorial in *The Oregonian*.