

The Chemawa American

Printed at Chemawa, Oregon, and Devoted to the Interests of Indian Education

Vol. XXVIII

Wednesday, February 9, 1927

No. 20

HERITAGE OF THE INDIAN

(Continued from last issue)

The following is the conclusion of a noteworthy article written by Miss Ruth Muskrat of Haskell Institute, the first part appearing in The American of last week:

Dean Briggs tells the story of a group of young people whom he saw at Rome. They were there in that great city, fabulously rich in its beauty and its historical associations. There was the Coliseum; the Forum; St. Peters'—so many treasures they might have been seeing, and every morning they settled themselves down in the lobby of the hotel for a day of bridge! "What business had they there in the City of Rome?" cries Dean Briggs. Indeed, what business had they anywhere? What business have you and I here at this Indian school when we commit an offense just as great by wasting opportunities that some other boy or girl might make use of if we did not stand in the way?

Reading bad literature when we might be reading something worth while is one of the commonest ways in which we fail to put first things first. Reading good literature is like letting a flood of light and beauty into your life. Reading bad literature is like cramming your life with wastage. There isn't one of you here, if you were given a choice between a strip of land rich in gold or silver ore, and a piece of land that is only a dump heap, there isn't a single one here who would choose the dump heap. And yet you are doing exactly that very thing when you choose to read "True Stories" or "Romance" or "Harold Bell Wright" with all that rich store of good literature waiting to be read. No greatness can come out of a life that is fed only on wastage. No beauty can grow in a dark and filthy atmosphere!

All of us can not hope to create beauty, or to achieve some great masterpiece. But we have a gift that is almost as wonderful. All of us can appreciate the beauty after it is created, and by our love of its greatness we can come, in some measure, to the level of the mind of the creator. I think it was this thought Browning had in mind when he said, through one of the characters he had created:

"I have not created verse like Homer—No
Nor swept the string like Terpander—No—Nor carved
And painted men like Phidias and his friend.
I am not great as they are, point by point.
But I have entered into sympathy
With these four, running these into one soul,
Who, separate, ignored each others' art.
Say—it is nothing that I know them all?"

One of the greatest contributions the Indian has to make to mankind, I believe, is his mysticism and his deep spiritual experience. And yet we Indians of this generation are in danger of losing this precious gift of our fathers because we do not any longer take the trouble to put our spiritual development first. Like everybody else, we are too busy acquiring lesser things. Harry Emerson Fosdick tells the story of the famous Bargello portrait of Dante that had been lost. People knew that such a portrait had been in existence at one time but now all trace of it had disappeared. An artist resolved that he would find the portrait at no matter what cost or effort to himself, and so he set out on his hunt for it. He went to the room where tradition said the painting had last been seen. The room had been taken over for a storehouse, and it was filled with all sorts of waste and storage. After clearing away pile after pile of rubbish, at last the artist found the painting he was searching for, covered over with whitewash and dirt and rubbish. With painstaking care the artist removed all the whitewash and dirt from the picture and thus the famous Bargello portrait of Dante was restored to the world. Says Mr. Fosdick: "The Bargello portrait was not destroyed, but somebody cared more for dirt and whitewash than they did for the beauty of the painting." In our busy life here at Haskell we have time only for a certain number of things. Something has to be left out, necessitating that somewhere we are going or have to make a choice. If we expend our energies on an unimportant thing here, a trivial matter there, we are going to find that we shall have, in the end, only a bare and shallow existence, missing completely the richness and the abundance of life that should have been our heritage.

Another thing we as Indians, and indeed as members of the human race, need to learn is to face the truth about ourselves, and to face it unflinchingly. I have noticed so often on the part of my students and others I have come in contact with, a tendency to ra-

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