

A WORD TO THE SERVICE

FROM ROBERT R. VALENTINE
Commissioner of Indian Affairs.

Office of Indian Affairs,
Washington, D. C.
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The time has now come in Indian affairs when the end of that road which began at the spot where Columbus landed is in sight. The trail along which the first colonists marched, the beaten track on which the early settlers rode, the broad highway of the invention and industry of later times, crossed and re-crossed by the millions of pathways of our complex civilization of today, through twenty-six great states, from the Mississippi basin to the Pacific, have divided the Indian problem into the problem of three hundred thousand more or less helpless individuals whose destinies are in our hands. For four hundred years, by economic, social and political forces, were sown the tares among the tribes: today we are reaping. On the one hand, forces, whether economic evolution or personal selfishness, have striven to take from the Indians material well-being; on the other hand sentimentalism has taken character and the vital spirit which goes to the making of a man.

This is no time to review history, or dispute as to the past; rightly or wrongly, what has been done leaves us with a present task which it is essential we should grasp in its entirety, and of which we must, for the decade or two which remains, never lose sight and those of us who are to be the workers, must possess clear purpose, tireless energy, unflagging courage, patience and gentleness.

But it is not on the Indian Office at

Washington that the weight of this task chiefly falls; it falls in even greater measure on the men in the field—the men in charge of the reservations and in the allotted districts. It is within their hands to perform a task worthy of far greater honor than that which any private or personal interest could possibly bring to them. That they should be men of great intellectual force or ability is not necessary; but it is necessary that they possess those greatest of American qualities—clear common sense and an unwavering personal honor. It is no disparagement of our present force or what they have already done that I say they must rouse themselves as never before. Judicious and judicious, co-operating with what is best in every force and every man they meet, the Superintendents of the Indian Service must work with one object in view—the best possible advancement of each man, woman child under their charge. Tribes and all of the easier generalizations must disappear from their calculation. A Superintendent of a thousand Indians has a thousand separate and distinct problems to solve. He should take no step without the prophet's insight; the recommendation of a lease or patent in fee he must make in clear prevision of what may take place five or ten years hence. Able-bodied Indians whose trust patents expire in a few years must have that day constantly held before them, and the value of every intervening season constantly pointed out. Vagueness and uncertainty must be rooted from their lives. On each Indian responsibility must be thrown to the full limit he can bear, but not beyond that limit. He must be taught, if necessary, by bitter experience; yet enough must be saved to him to enable him to