

"EXCEPTIONS"—NOT THE RULE

EDITOR THE CHEMAWA AMERICAN: In your very interesting little paper of March 30 I noticed a news item and comment by you thereon which explains in a very large measure the great difficulty in arriving at a proper solution of the so-called "Indian Problem."

The item referred to, in part, reads: "That the Indian student has special talent in the line of public speaking is shown again in the case of.....who has won first place in oratory at....." etc.

Now while I will admit that many of our student body have won honors, most of which were no doubt merited, the habit of exaggeration on the part of some enthusiastic writers and sentimentalists whenever they undertake to mention the success of this or that Indian boy or girl, or, in fact, anything pertaining to an Indian, not only misleads the public at large (which naturally wonders why we don't accomplish more with the Indian if he is so wonderful), but puts false valuations of himself in the head of the student, often to such an extent that he is practically unfitted for the serious problems of life, such as getting a job, sticking to it, and making good use of the Three Rs of his education first, before attempting to branch out in the realms of oratory, the science of government, or other highbrow stuff that many of our Indian schools are wasting government money and the Indian students' time upon.

Only a short time ago a high official in the Indian service in Washington (who, of course, knew nothing for certain about Indians) announced that "the Indian is a natural stockman." And he proceeded to invest millions of dollars in that idea, with the result that most of the money was worse than wasted. Other freak experiments have been made because some fellow with a little brief authority imagines that he sees in the Indian a "difference" that other mortals were unable to see; when, as a matter of fact, the Indian is just an ordinary human being with all the human elements. Some are good, some are bad, many are indifferent; some are bright, many are dull. The average Indian is susceptible of reasonable improvement, and a very few have special talents, such as in oratory, music, mechanics, etc., but these are exceptions and should be so regarded.

When we get down to the solid earth with the Indian we will be able to help him get the right start in life, a start that he will be able to maintain and improve upon; but when we put the Indian in the clouds and adorn him with a halo we are wasting valuable time, spoiling the Indian, and, incidentally, making ourselves the laughingstock of the suffering public.

AN OLD INDIAN EMPLOYEE.

It gratifies us to learn that an "Old Employee" finds our little paper "very interesting," even our small local items.

We extend our sympathy to those who "admit that many of our student body have won honors." We are proud indeed of our nineteen boys and girls who are every day going in to the Salem high school, business college and university. Whenever we pause to realize that these boys and girls are but three, two, or even just one generation removed from the blanket, the tepee, and the medicine man, we must admit that they are wonderful. For, Mr. Old Indian Employee, these children are not merely doing splendidly, "for Indians," as we so often hear the Service employee remark, but they are doing splendidly without any qualifying phrases. They are standing up to the same tests and requirements which confront every one of the hundreds of Salem high school pupils, and upon the authority of the principal of that institution we can say "they are above the average." This means that the average of our pupils attending Salem high is above the average for all pupils attending that school and our full-bloods are doing as well as the mixed-bloods. They are passing their examinations exactly as the other pupils; that there is a rather noticeable aptitude for public speaking would seem to be not entirely unwarranted by some of our facts: One of our girls won the honor of representing the senior class in the dramatic recitation in the inter-class contest; another represents the same class in humorous recitation, and another represents the junior class in dramatic recitation.

To us this does not so much prove unusual ability in that particular line, as it proves that our young people are vindicating the educational system of the U.S. Indian Department as a solution of the "Indian Problem." They are doing the identical work of their Caucasian brother.

We agree heartily with his opinion that "the Indian is just an ordinary human being, with all the human elements." We have been, at times, impatient with the sentimentalist who makes of him a super-human, but at times we have been far more impatient with the visionless person who makes him sub-human. So we feel sure that it is necessary for you, and for us, and for all our friends in the service, who realize the "humanness" of our people, to work all the harder to produce those good, strong, practical results which carry conviction in spite of the laughs of the long-suffering public. Let them laugh at our mistakes, but dare them to laugh at our successes.

It is a poor business house that advertises its own failures, a poor parent who complains of his child's weaknesses, even though he is in a position to know them best. We must tell to the world our best truths about Indian education—we must tell nothing but the truth—but we must recognize the whole truth ourselves and have the vision to make our charges fit to meet life as they find it now, not as we found it when we were their ages.