

CHEMAWA AMERICAN

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

Vol. XXXII

Wednesday, Jan. 28, 1931

No. 20

"THE INDIAN BOARDING SCHOOLS"

Under this caption the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, in his annual report for the fiscal year 1930, has the following to say:

"Each boarding school situation is being scrutinized to determine whether the school is to be retained for sometime, abandoned soon or assigned to purposes other than that for which it now exists. The rapidity with which we can carry out our policy of eliminating young children from boarding schools depends, of course, upon a number of factors. Some of the educational factors involved have to do with home conditions, remoteness from public-school facilities, ascertained need for institutional care, possibilities of health follow up, and social case work not ordinarily available in the small rural communities in which so many Indian children live. Other factors that must be considered are the attitude of the white people of the community and the older Indians toward the boarding school and the attitude of white parents toward the Indian children. If the policy of the Government to increase public school provision for the Indian school population is to be carried out, obviously local communities will have to be considerate and take an unselfish view of proposals to abandon Indian boarding schools.

"In the meantime such boarding schools as remain must be helped to do the best work they can, especially for older boys and girls, and small children can be eliminated from these schools except where institutional care is found necessary after adequate investigation by trained social workers. Six large nonreservation boarding schools have now raised their grades to include the twelfth grade, or senior high school, and have concurrently dropped the lower grades."

The question of the boarding school versus the day school was the subject of prolonged and heated discussion in our Service twenty-five years and more ago. There have been many able and strong advocates in years past of both types of schools for Indian children. One of the ablest and most severe critics of the boarding school plan was Francis E. Leupp, Commissioner of Indian Affairs during the administration of President Roosevelt. Soon after resigning from office Mr. Leupp published his book, "The Indian and His Problem," in which he said:

"All boarding schools conducted on the lines laid down by the Government for the civilization of the Indians are an anomaly in our American scheme of popular instruction. They furnish gratuitously not only tuition, but food, clothing, lodging and medical supervision during the whole period for which a pupil is enrolled. In other words they are simply educational

almshouses. Nay, though ostensibly designed to stimulate a manly spirit of independence in their beneficiaries, their charitable phase is obtrusively pushed forward as an attraction, instead of wearing the brand which makes the almshouse so repugnant to Caucasian sentiment. Thus is fostered in the Indian an ignoble willingness to accept unearned privileges; from learning to accept them he gradually comes to demand them as a right, with the result that in certain parts of the West the only conception his white neighbors entertain of him is that of a beggar as aggressive as he is shameless. Was ever a worse wrong perpetrated upon a weak by a stronger race?"

In referring to the practice of separating children from their parents and sending them away to nonreservation schools, often long distances from their homes, Mr. Leupp says:

"No white mother need be told that her children are as necessary to her development as she is to theirs, or reminded what it would be to her to be robbed of their companionship during a long period while they are in process of transformation into foreigners. And if a woman in the midst of civilization, surrounded with everything that makes life interesting and attractive, mourns when she misses from her home the little folk for whom she must make daily sacrifices, fancy what a like experience must be for the poor starved soul whose lot is cast in a pitiless wilderness, with no intellectual resources to divert her thoughts. For the Indian mother, ignorant, coarse, uncouth though she may be, loves her children with the same fervor as if she were cultured, graceful and white.

"So the whole subject pivots on the question whether we shall carry civilization to the Indian or carry the Indian to civilization, and the former seems to me infinitely the wiser plan. To plant our schools among the Indians means to bring the older members of the race within the sphere of influence of which every school is a center. This certainly must be the basis of any practical effort to uplift a whole people."

Mr. Leupp's final objection to the boarding school is summed up in the following paragraph:

"An objection to all Indian boarding-schools, whether on or off the reservation, is that a pupil grows up amid surroundings that will never be duplicated in his own home. Steam-heating, electric lighting, mechanical apparatus for doing everything—these cultivate in him a contempt for the primitive contrivances

(Continued on page 4)