

CHEMAWA AMERICAN

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

Vol. XXXII

Wednesday, Apr. 8, 1931

No. 30

GOING BACK TO THE BLANKET

About the most disappointing thing a Chemawa student can do is go back to the blanket. Now the wearing of the blanket is not itself seriously objectionable. Some of the best Indians I have known wore blankets. Some of the best friends I have today among the old Indians, whose friendship I prize highly, still wear long hair and blankets. But these are old men. They never had the advantages of schools. They were educated to follow the pursuits of the chase and to live the lives of hunter-sportsmen. They were not trained in the uses of the modern implements of civilization. We cannot expect the old Indian greatly to change his habits of living, nor are we going seriously to object if he continues to wear long hair and a blanket.

But the blanket, as we use the term, is the emblem of bondage—of savage pomp and circumstance of barbarity. The Indian who wears a blanket and long hair and paints his face is usually regarded as non-progressive. Old men do so largely from force of habit. Young men do so through ignorance and fear. There is no bigger coward in the world than an Indian young man or woman on whom the Government has expended a thousand dollars or more in giving training and education who deliberately returns to the reservation and goes back to the blanket. Physically they may be brave but morally they are rank cowards. We pity them, but are unable to work ourselves up to the point of shedding copious, gushing tears of pity.

The Indian young man who has not availed himself of the opportunity to get an education and grows up under the bondage of the blanket is more to be pitied than is the educated one. His mind is closed and he is living in fear begotten of ignorance. In his own way and after the custom of his people he may lead a respectable and unselfish life. Of the two he is the better man. Education is power. Directed aright, it is a power for good. Wrongly directed, it is a power for evil. Unused it atrophies and dies, leaving its possessor burdened with useless junk.

Educated Indians are not the only people who go back to the blanket. Nor do all Indians who return to the blankets do so literally. Many of the present day tribes have never worn blankets and know nothing of the custom. Others have largely discontinued the habit and have adopted the garb of civilized Americans. But sometimes these go back to the blanket figuratively speaking, but none the less truly.

I am frequently asked if our Indian boys and girls ever go back to the blanket after spending several years in our schools. And I reply, "Yes, and so do many white boys and girls go back to the blanket." And this is true. I have seen well educated white men, some of them graduates of the big universities, turn out to be common loafers and drunkards. So have you. Almost every Indian reservation has a few of them and they are usually the most troublesome bootleggers and grafters on the reservation. No, educated Indians are not the only persons who go back to the blanket. It is a pity that any of them do, but the percentage of successes among those who remain in school until they fully complete some course will compare favorably with the products of our white schools of similar grade.

The point I wish to make is the great importance of staying in school until you have thoroughly completed some definite course. You may develop initiative and responsibility. Take advantage of every opportunity to become responsible for some specific performance or duty. When you are placed in charge of a particular job or duty take hold with all the zeal, energy and skill you possess and stick with it until the job is completed. Remember that Abe Martin says, "Some folks have a way o' doin' nothin' that can hardly be distinguished from work." Don't be one of that kind. Do your work so promptly and so thoroughly that it will recommend you and do you honor. Get the work habit and keep it. If you do these things there will be little danger of your going back to the blanket either literally or figuratively.—O. H. L.

"A LUCKY BREAK"

All of Chemawa had "A Lucky Break" last Saturday evening when they attended a play by that name that was put on by a cast made up of seniors and directed by Miss White. It was a three-act comedy and between acts two and three Harold Masten and Robert Thomas played most acceptably a clarinet duet, and an octette of our girls sang between acts one and two. There was a large crowd, and a well-entertained one, too, and many nice things were said of the entertainment in its entirety. So in summing up we congratulate Miss White and the cast on the excellence of their production. We cannot close without reporting the suspicions of our chum on observing Asst. Supt. Ryan carrying something in a large basket back stage after the show. Chum was certain that basket contained a treat for the cast, and we believe it.