

# Field Talks

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## THE AMERICAN INDIAN, No. 4

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**O**PINION on the status of the American Indian today varies widely. Some people think the Indian is a member of a vanishing race and is doomed to extinction. Others think the Indian problem has been solved. In reality both groups are entirely wrong.

The Indian is no longer a member of a vanishing race. Quite to the contrary, the Indian population is the fastest growing minority group in the United States, increasing at the rate of about one per cent per year as compared with 0.7 per cent for the general population.

On the other hand, any one who thinks the Indian problem has been solved is misinformed. True, the governmental attitude toward the Indian has undergone a decided change in the last twenty years. In that time Indians have been granted full citizenship; public health service has been increased; more adequate and more suitable schools and educational curricula have been provided; more adequate protection of Indian land has been evolved. But only a good start has been made toward a solution for the many ills that visit themselves upon the Indians—physical, economic, spiritual, and mental. Many serious problems remain unsolved; much remains to be done.

### *Where Presbyterian Missions Fit In*

Presbyterian missions today serve Indians in over thirty different tribes scattered through many states. One hun-

dred thirty-eight churches are maintained, not to mention the numerous outstations where Sunday schools, church services, and other related activities are carried on. Seven schools and medical stations, serviced by eighty-seven workers, also serve the Indians. Various types of mission service include community house work, health clinic and dispensary, a 150-bed hospital, four boarding schools, one day school, evangelistic work, vacation schools, week day religious education, workers' conferences, and young people's conferences.

### *Problems Faced by Missionaries to the Indians*

Increased drinking and reversion to native dances and ceremonies are the problems most frequently mentioned by missionaries among Indians. Other problems confronting many missionaries among the Indians are: lack of knowledge of Indian languages and an insufficient number of interpreters; prejudices against the use of modern implements; high death rates, particularly among children; keen conflict between the younger, educated, inexperienced Indians and the older, less well-educated, conservative Indians; bitterness against white people for past injustice and present racial discrimination; wardship, i.e., the problem of the relationship between the Indian and the Government; Peyote worship, an Indian cult combining a warped conception of the Christian religion with the ritual of eating the peyote bean which produces hallucinations similar to hashish dreams; not enough land to support themselves; complications revolving around heirship land; difficulties involved in transporting people from outlying sections so that they can attend church services and Sunday school; and finally, the scarcity of good religious leaders and teachers. One missionary sums it all up so, "How can we reach these scattered and primitive Indians with the gospel *effectively* so as to obtain *genuine* conversions and build a Christian church and a Christian way of life."

## *Encouraging Features of Mission Work*

A missionary to the Pimas reports an expedition of Pima Indians to the Papago tribe one hundred ten miles south, in order that they might preach in neglected areas. . . . In the Dakota area two new churches have been built and a new one organized, while attendance at Sunday school in one town has been raised at least twenty per cent and at church services nearly thirty-two per cent. More than three thousand Indians have come to one missionary among the Dakotas for help since November 1939. . . . During the past year Indian young people's conferences have been held among the Seminole, Cherokee, Choctaw, Mono, Pima, Papago, and Sioux Indians, with a total attendance between four hundred and five hundred. . . . At one station in Arizona a new church has been built and work has been completed on a house for the interpreter. . . . In California one station reports the organization of a woman's Bible study and sewing group which reaches many who do not attend regular church services. . . . Ganado Mission has a new gymnasium and, best of all, a new church, and this year was able to set up a religious education program with a director, an assistant director, and a Bible teacher.

## *Cook Training Institute, Phoenix, Arizona*

The latest step in missionary service to the Indians has been the reorganization of the Charles H. Cook Bible School into a new type of school to be known as the Cook Training Institute. It has long been recognized by the missionaries of all denominations working among American Indians that the greatest need is for intelligent, well-trained, native workers. It has been said many times that even a partially-trained native can do more in leading his people than the best trained white man. It is absolutely essential to the furtherance of Indian work that native leaders, who can speak both English and Indian, be trained for Christian service. It is for this reason that the Cook Training Institute

is being set up under an entirely new plan to serve as a national interdenominational school for the training of native religious workers on a lay and semi-professional basis for Indian churches and Indian communities.

Phoenix makes an excellent location for such a school, because of the close proximity to several large Government enterprises for Indians: a vocational school of high school level, a sanitarium, and an orphanage. Then, too, it is close to the Pima Reservation where a great deal of rural Indian work is carried on. The Government school has evinced interest in this new school, and its leaders are cooperating to give it a good start.

### *Democracy in Action*

From the Rev. Albert H. Cropp, district supervisor of the Montana and North Dakota work with Indians, comes a report that speaks well for the type of work being done. "Early in the fall of last year we organized the Dakota Presbyterian Evangelical Association. Eligible to vote at these association meetings were all officers and their wives. This meant that all churches were represented and that all were responsible for what took place at the meetings. The officers of the association are a president, a vice-president, a secretary, and a treasurer. Besides this there is a cabinet that is made of up an elder from each church. These cabinet officers are elected by the association, as are all the other officers. All ministers and missionaries are members of the association.

"Its largest accomplishment has been the reawakening of respect for and interest in the Church. This was both individual and collective. The organization has returned no fewer than four elders to active interest, and it has also brought many to church meetings."

### *Indian Workers Meet*

An important step toward the in-service training of



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native Indian missionaries is the interdenominational summer school for white and Indian missionaries working among American Indians held in cooperation with the State College of Agriculture at Brookings, South Dakota. A total of thirty Indians attended the school; eighteen of them were Presbyterian. The experiment has been successful and will be continued.

Another interdenominational conference for Indian workers was held at the Methodist Navajo Mission School at Farmington, New Mexico. Approximately 250 Indian and white workers attended. The conference faced such problems as wardship, Government education, and native leadership. There were about fifty Presbyterian workers present.

### *Life Among the Choctaws*

The Choctaw Nation has a population of 25,000 people, living for the most part in the southeastern part of Oklahoma. Today they live on some of Oklahoma's poorest mountain land, with poor roads, poor schools, and rapidly disappearing forests, pushed there by the white man who bought up all the good land. The Choctaws live in little boarded-up cabins and achieve but a scant, hazardous living from the soil. Food consists chiefly of corn and pork in various forms, not conducive to the best of health.

There is no social life among the Choctaws but that of visiting and going to church. If there is a church service on Sunday, the family will load food, cooking utensils, bedding, and themselves into the wagon, drive to church, set up camp in a wooden shack or under a shade tree, and remain until Sunday night or Monday morning. The children and youth play together in a free social atmosphere. Here the traditions and legends of the Choctaw Nation are kept alive. Here stories of bravery and heroism are told and retold. Here, because of the sacred presence of

the church and the nearby graves of ancestors, life is tempered to its best. Church membership among the Choctaws is taken as a serious matter. Church eldership is considered a high and sacred office. There is a keen sense of Christian rightness among them.

### *Tawaoc Tales*

From Lois Fraser, religious education worker at Tawaoc, serving the mission stations of Arbor, Cortez, Beulah, and Mariano in Colorado, comes a little mimeographed paper, *Tawaoc Tales*, telling in vivid detail of the everyday life among Ute and Navajo Indians.

She writes: "Just at present there are a man, a squaw, a baby, two girls, Anita, myself, and the typewriter in the kitchen, which is nine by ten and one-half . . . When I finish this draft, I've promised to tell the story of a picture on the Sunday school calendar . . . and I'm to help sing *Empty Saddles in the Old Corral* and *Down Where the Trade Winds Blow*. Believe it or not, it makes for better singing in church!"

### *Changes Made at Tucson and Dwight*

The Rev. Martin L. Girton has retired, after long years of service as head of Tucson Indian Training School, Escuela, Arizona, and his place has been filled by John E. King, previously superintendent of Dwight Indian Training School, Vian, Oklahoma. G. Harland Davis is now principal of Dwight, where he served as acting principal while Mr. King was working for his doctorate at Cornell.

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