

1.  
Cardston

That evening-party happened soon after my arrival on the Reservation. I did not visit the school again until four or five weeks later, when Canon Middleton invited me to lunch. He had as guests the two daughters of the Bishop of Gloucester. They had come from England expressly to see the Indians. The School Matron completed our little lunch-party.

Conversation turned chiefly on an Indian pow-wow of the night before. One of the Bishop's daughters commented amusingly on the Indian custom of bringing all the family to camp for the night on the ballroom floor, and said that a little girl of four or five kept coming up behind her and putting her arms round her neck.

Matron made a grimace and said: "I wouldn't have liked that?"

"Why?" asked the Bishop's daughter.

The Canon hastily filled in the awkward silence by changing the conversation.

The Matron's attitude was typical, only one hardly expected to find it within the Mission school. If the Matron felt she could not endure the embrace of a little Indian child, how could one hope that she would care for those children who, having been torn from their homes, need something more than just hygienic attention.

After lunch the Canon showed me over the school. It was rather like an artist showing his work to a friend who doesn't

admire it, but tries to hide his feelings.

I made no remarks, indeed what was there to say? Dormitories are dormitories. They are, as far as I can remember, always white, always bare, always there are many windows and a great glare. There were the usual rows of white beds, and no so much as a night table on which to place the childish treasures and reminders of home.

A small square room like a well, with a top-light and some stiff chairs round a central table, was the meeting-place for parents and children.

There was a play-room in the basement for bad ~~weather~~ weather, grim, severe, forbidding. In the kitchen, blank-faced girls were washing up. In the laundry, more blank-faced girls were ironing dresses for first Communion.

There was no response to my smile, no smile in response to the Canon's genial greeting.

Everything was just as I expected it to be, only infinitely more dreary.

Ten years of life to be lived in this prison-reformatory. Ten years is a long time for a child. I remember being ill-treated by a governess for five years that seemed an unending lifetime.

We visited the church, and were met by a repellent smell that may have been disinfectant. It was a frousty used-up smell, the smell of very old people.

In the vestry, a quantity of well-worn mortar-boards lay

upon a table. I asked: "Who wears these?"

"The Choir-----"

"Are they Indians?"

"Yes."

Red Indians in mortar-boards! Mortar-boards a substitute  
for eagle feathers----

I was not sure if I wanted to laugh or cry.

According to the Government regulations every child on the Reservation from 7 to 16 is obliged to go to either of the two boarding schools, the Anglican (which means Protestant) or the Roman Catholic. They are Missionary schools, subsidised by the State. This means that the Church (or Churches) lays hands on a whole generation of Blood Indians for ten years.

The question of whether Indians should be Christianised, civilised, and modernised according to White-man standards is a perfectly good subject for debate. There are aspects both good and bad that arise. But the main issue lies in the fact of its boarding principle, not of its teaching. The Indians were long since resigned to the White man's domination, but they have the natural abhorrence of every ~~primitive~~ primitive parent to having their children removed from them. It results in unspeakable anguish. Parents and children suffer horribly. It was the only subject of complaint that I heard during the whole time I was on the Reservation. Schools date back to the Indians' treaty, and the Government of Canada is bent on fulfilling the letter of the word. In that ~~treaty~~ treaty the Government of Canada agreed to give the Indians schools and hospitals. They did not, however, specify that the school should be a boarding school. The argument that is put forward in its favour is that children have to come from so far. The reply seems to me: Build rural schools, small ones, and scatter them about the Reservation. Day schools would cost a good deal less than the upkeep of the big

boarding schools. The next argument by the school officials is that the parents will not send their children to school, and the only way of forcing them is to forcibly take them and keep them.

Well, the little Indian children are taken from their simple homes, their loving parents, their wild outdoor life, and the first thing that happens to the little boys is the cutting of their hair, for no modern Indian must wear his hair in braids. They have the advantage of sleeping in dormitories between sheets, but they are "strapped", according to the expression of one of them, if they are caught humming an Indian tune.

During those ten years they must not sing, dance, beat a drum, or pray in the Indian way. They may dance in the manner of the White people ( I was a witness of that lamentable spectacle) to negro music; they may learn to play the piano (not one will ever be able to afford a piano in the home"; they may sing hymns and pray when they go to church--pray to Christ, not the Great Spirit.

Just outside the town of Banff the brothers Luxton have a gigantic logwood store. It is more of a museum than a store, and the Luxtons are its curators. Descended from one of the earliest Methodist missionaries, they have been welded into Indian life. Charming, intelligent, well-informed, I was fascinated by them and their Indian collection. While I talked to Mr. Luxton, Sako and Sekani were riveted by a stuffed monster in a glass case! It came from the Persian Gulf, a horrible grimacing freak, both fish and human. Sako had to satisfy himself that it was no invention, but one of God's genuine creatures. While one Luxton brother told him ~~as~~ its history the other brother told me about the Stoney Indians. They are hunters, and at the time of the treaty were allowed to choose their Reservation. They chose a richly wooded country full of game. Every year ever since, the game has grown less and less. Ranches have spread in a strangling circle around the Reserve, and every wild animal is killed on sight. The ~~Stoney~~ Stoney who once were happy hunters, prosperous traders of furs, to-day are almost ~~stargingx~~ starving. Their plight was such that he, Luxton, collected money for them and organised relief. This is the tribe nearest to "The Prince of Wales' Ranch." They invited the Prince to a pow-wow and made him Chief. (I wonder if he knows how poor they are?)

Remarkable man, this Luxton; he told me to take anything I liked, bear skins, buffalo robes, deer skins, buckskins, belts,

bags, war bonnet--"You can pay me any time."

"But," I said, "you do not know me, I am a passing stranger with a party of Blood Indians." I could see he liked my Indians (if only they were all like Sako....).

"That's all right," he said, and the parcel grew ever larger!

Banff is one of those smart seasonal places, with good shops that close in winter-time. I ransacked those that were still open, in search of a scarf for Sekani--a plain bright-coloured woolen scarf was all I asked for; it was unobtainable. I was offered Scotch plaids, red plaids, green plaids, yellow plaids--until I exclaimed irritably that "Red Indians look crazy in Scotch plaids!"

Harley

The Reservation was woodland, and the trees, mostly aspens, were a brilliant gold. I had a letter from Mr. Pugh to recommend me to the Agent, and so I drove directly to the Agent's house.

His wife came to the door and seemed quite bewildered. Her husband was out hunting, the whole Reservation was in quarantine because of an epidemic of Black Measles. Her children were just recovering. The school was closed, the hospital overflowing. She wished she could do something for us, but under the circumstances she was helpless.

The house was so warm and bright, I was so cold. The Tailfeathers were outside in the car. We surely were out of luck, I thought, and went back to them. Not so out of luck after all. They had found a friend while they were waiting, a friend whom they had not seen for eleven years and who happened to pass by at that moment. The friend was no less a person than an ex-Agent of the Bloods, recently appointed to the Stoney Reservation. Fount was the name of this perfectly good Scotsman from Scotland. I don't know whether the compliment was Mr. Fount's that a Government official had made himself so beloved by the Indians, or whether the compliment was on the Tailfeathers that Mr. Fount should remember them and be so pleased to see them. The main thing is that Mr. Fount took us to his house. He was not installed, had no furniture except his own bed and a table, but he recognised our plight and offered us the essential shelter and



shelter and warmth. We offered him our good company at supper, and so, all being well that ends well, we spent a cheerful evening. Esto cooked a perfect meal, and I had a perfect hot bath. It was a paradoxical situation. Not a chair to sit on, not a bed to sleep in, but central heating, which was the essential. I will add (and I must) that Mr. Fount offered me his bed. But one cannot invade a man's house uninvited and oblige him to sleep on the floor. I said I liked sleeping on the floor, that I had often slept on the floor. I had slept on a table in Russia, on the deck of a boat in Turkey. I had rolled up in my burnous and slept on the ground in the Sahara. I was well used to knocking about. "Thank you so much, all the same." I had a room to myself, newly painted, and absolutely empty (no--I am wrong, there was a pile of books!)

I had oftentimes complained to the Tailfeathers that I was too comfortable in their house. It wasn't "native" enough. I thought I should take my buffalo robe and go and roll up on the floor in one of the neighbour's houses. Joe Bull-Shields, who came to lunch every Sunday, said he thought one "could overdo it." Esto on this occasion said she supposed I was glad my wish was going to be fulfilled, and offered to make up my bed for me, as she knew something about sleeping on the floor. I thanked her, said I could well manage myself. I even offered her some of my blankets. She said, "You'll need them", and I thought there was

a little irony in her voice. The next morning Esto's eyes twinkled with merriment as she looked at my tired face and asked: "How did you sleep?"; and my sullen answer was: "Not a wink." How they laughed! It became a standing joke. Until the day of my departure Esto was to ask me at intervals if I felt like rolling up in my buffalo robe on a neighbour's floor. The experiment having happened in a white man's house added piquancy to the joke.

It was still pouring with rain when we said good-bye to Mr. Fount. Our first objective was the Reservation store beside the railway in the woods. An Arab shop in a Saharan oasis never felt more remote. Esto found they had one buckskin left, the last of the year. It cost only three dollars and was a good one. I discovered a pair of embroidered elk-skin gauntlets better than any I had seen in any of the craft shops. There were buckskin ~~mask~~ coats for eight and ten dollars which cost twenty anywhere else. After this shopping orgy we pushed on to Banff. Poor Kyaicou had spent the night in her cage out in the snow. I thought she looked rather depressed, she was in fact trembling. On her account I pushed on in some haste.

We ran out of the rain region into the sunshine. A fantastic world: the cotton-wood trees still retained their brilliant yellow leaves, and the ground was covered with gleaming snow. Mountains rising up on either side were lost in cloud and mirrored in still lakes.