

1891

Indian Commissioners.

A delegation from our Committee attended the Annual Conference of Religious and philanthropic bodies, with the members of the Board of Indian Commissioners, held in Washington in First Month last. We made a brief report of our connection with the work and were interested and profited by the experiences that were laid before the meeting.

During the past year our Field Matron at the Santee Agency, Marie L. H. Steer, has been faithfully at work and reports frequently received from her indicate that she is, on the whole, encouraged with the progress she has made. It is greatly to be regretted, however, that the Agent who succeeded Charles Hill, last year, has evinced an open hostility to the work she is engaged in, and has, as far as he was able, interrupted its progress and counteracted its effects. This attitude of the Agent has entirely prevented any cordial relations between the Field Matron and himself and will if persisted in, and he is allowed to remain in charge of the Agency, ultimately drive her from this field of usefulness wherein she has patiently and conscientiously labored for the past two years. We have asked for an investigation of the affairs of the Santee Agency, as we have reason to believe, that if an explanation is honestly and thoroughly made, the Agent will not be allowed to retain his position. We have the promise that an inspector will be detailed for this work at an early day.

During the summer the Commissioner called upon us to nominate another woman for Field Matron and offered to assign her to any reservation we might select. After careful deliberation, and upon ascertaining that Philadelphia Friends proposed to supply the necessary equipment and outfit, we recommended Miss L. H. Douglass, of Nebraska, for appointment and asked that she be assigned to the Ponca Agency in South Dakota. She was promptly appointed and assigned as requested, the equipment was supplied by Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and she is now busily at work among the Poncas. A brief report of her experience and progress has been received and is inserted here as a part of our report.

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Nebraska, Neb., September 29th, 1891

Dear Friends:— The work of Field Matron among the Poncas has opened pleasantly. There is certainly no lack of work to do among them. The question is, how to get at it in a way to make it profitable, and bring about the needed change in their condition. Everyone knows it would require no little tact to enter a white woman's house and intimate to her: "You should black your stove and sweep your floor, wash your windows and scrub your table." How do Indian women take such advice? Some of them have lived five years in houses where never a drop of water, except by accident, has fallen upon the floor. Piles of rags and dirty pillows upon which they sleep, old moccasins, bags of wheat, dishes clean and otherwise, and all kinds of incongruous articles fill the corners of the two rooms. It is hard to know where to begin, especially as there is neither cupboard or closet in which to stow things away. Worst of all there is no wish for better things. But this is not a fair picture of the whole tribe. This is the lowest stratum. In the next above they have a table and a few dishes in a cupboard, a rude bedstead and some soiled bed clothing, and so step by step until we come to some comfortable houses with children clean and well cared for, and all things in fairly good order. There are but few of these and it has taken ^{two} generations of discipline, living in white families, and in most cases an admixture of white blood to bring this about.

The older women, like Standing Bear's wife, seem almost hopeless cases, but some of the younger women are willing to learn and the girls who have been away to school have some knowledge of the scrubbing brush and broom, if they can only have the pride and ambition to use them. I have been gratified so far in being well received. In two or three cases have been asked to come again and teach them to cook and put up fruit, etc. The great discouraging feature of the work is their want of order, method or persistency in anything, and in making no plans for the future.

Perhaps it will come in time. They are but grown up children. To get up at a regular time every morning, to get their meals at a specified time every day, to make bread or anything, in preparation for a time to come not actually present,