

Δ
I 20.
1:
1865

Extract from the report of the Secretary of the Interior relative to the report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs.

The number of Indians residing within the jurisdiction of the United States does not probably exceed 350,000, a large majority of whom maintained during the past year peaceful relations. Some of them have made gratifying progress in civilization, and manifested, during the late war, a steadfast loyalty to our flag worthy of emphatic commendation. Civilized and powerful tribes, however, residing within the Indian territory, united early in the year 1861 with the Indians of the prairies immediately west and north, for hostile operations against the United States. In flagrant violation of treaties which had been observed by us with scrupulous good faith, and in the absence of any just ground of complaint, these confederated Indians entered into an alliance with the rebel authorities and raised regiments in support of their cause. Their organized troops fought side by side with rebel soldiers, and detached bands made frequent assaults on the neighboring white settlements which were without adequate means of defence, and on the Indians who maintained friendly relations with this government. This state of things continued until the surrender of the rebel forces west of the Mississippi. Hostilities were then suspended, and, at the request of the Indians, commissioners were sent to negotiate a treaty of peace. Such preliminary arrangements were made as, it is believed, will result in the abolition of slavery among them, the cession within the Indian territory of lands for the settlement of the civilized Indians now residing on reservations elsewhere, and the ultimate establishment of civil government, subject to the supervision of the United States.

The perfidious conduct of the Indians in making unprovoked war upon us has been visited with the severest retribution. The country within the Indian territory has been laid waste, vast amounts of property destroyed, and the inhabitants reduced from a prosperous condition to such extreme destitution that thousands of them must inevitably perish during the present winter, unless timely provision be made by this government for their relief.

Hostile relations, such as have existed for several generations, continue between many of the most fierce and warlike tribes of New Mexico and Arizona and the white inhabitants. A considerable military force is necessary for the protection of the latter, and the maintenance of public order.

The Indians of the plains, who subsist chiefly on buffalo, follow them on their migration toward the north in the early part of the summer, and return in autumn, spreading over the western part of the State of Kansas and the Territories of Nebraska, Dakota, Montana, and Colorado. Influenced by the unfriendly Indians of the southwest, and probably incited by rebel emissaries, they maintained active and vigorous hostilities. Our defenceless frontier settlements were harassed; the communication between the Mississippi valley and our possessions on the Pacific seriously interrupted; emigrant and government trains assailed; property of great value destroyed, and men, women, and children barbarously murdered. It became the imperative duty of the government to send military expeditions against these savages, which checked the commission of further outrages, and induced them to sue for peace. On the recommendation of the generals in command of our forces, a commission, composed of officers of the army and civilians, was sent to the Upper Arkansas and the Upper Missouri. Satisfactory treaties have been negotiated with a large number of these tribes. Some of them could not be reached on account of the lateness of the season, but it is believed that similar arrangements can be made with them during the early part of the approaching spring.

It is difficult to maintain peaceful relations with the Indians in Minnesota. The terrible massacre of the white inhabitants in the year 1862 is fresh in the memory of the country. The intense exasperation which followed led in that State to a policy, which has also prevailed to some extent in several of our organized Territories, inducing a personal predatory warfare between the frontier citizens, emigrants, and miners, and isolated bands of Indians belonging, in many instances, to tribes at peace with the government. This awakens a spirit of retaliation, inciting atrocious acts of violence, which, oft repeated, result in irreparable disasters to both races.

The policy of the total destruction of the Indians has been openly advocated by gentlemen of high position, intelligence, and personal character; but no enlightened nation can adopt or sanction it without a forfeiture of its self-respect and the respect of the civilized nations of the earth.

Financial considerations forbid the inauguration of such a policy. The attempted destruction

of three hundred thousand of these people, accustomed to a nomadic life, subsisting upon the spontaneous productions of the earth, and familiar with the fastnesses of the mountains and the swamps of the plains, would involve an appalling sacrifice of the lives of our soldiers and frontier settlers, and the expenditure of untold treasure. It is estimated that the maintenance of each regiment of troops engaged against the Indians of the plains costs the government two million dollars per annum. All the military operations of last summer have not occasioned the immediate destruction of more than a few hundred Indian warriors. Such a policy is manifestly as impracticable as it is in violation of every dictate of humanity and Christian duty.

It is therefore recommended that stringent legislation be adopted for the punishment of violations of the rights of persons and property of members of Indian tribes who are at peace with the government.

Sufficient appropriations should be made to supply the pressing wants of these wards of the government, resulting from the encroaching settlements springing up in every organized Territory. The occupation of their hunting grounds and fisheries by agriculturists, and even of their mountain fastnesses by miners, has necessarily deprived the Indians of their accustomed means of support, and reduced them to extreme want. If the deficiency so occasioned should not be supplied, it is not to be expected that a savage people can be restrained from seeking, by violence, redress of what they conceive to be a grievous wrong.

That their growing wants thus caused may not become a perpetual burden, every reasonable effort should be made to induce the Indians to adopt agricultural and pastoral pursuits. It is recommended that Congress provide a civilization and educational fund, to be disbursed in such mode as to secure the co-operation and assistance of benevolent organizations, affording an opportunity for private citizens to dispense their charities to these impoverished children of the forest through the usual channels. It is believed that all the Christian churches would gladly occupy this missionary field, supplying a large per cent. of the means necessary for their instruction, and thus bring into contact with the Indian tribes a class of men and women whose lives conform to a higher standard of morals than that which is recognized as obligatory by too many of the present employés of the government.

On taking charge of this department on the 15th day of May last, the relations of officers respectively engaged in the military and civil departments in the Indian country were in an unsatisfactory condition. A supposed conflict of jurisdiction and a want of confidence in each other led to mutual animosities, whereby the success of military operations against hostile tribes and the execution of the policy of this department were seriously impeded. Upon conferring with the War Department, it was informally agreed that the agents and officers under the control of the Secretary of the Interior should hold no intercourse, except through the military authorities, with tribes of Indians against whom hostile measures were in progress; and that the military authorities should refrain from interference with such agents and officers in their relations with all other tribes, except to afford the necessary aid for the enforcement of the regulations of this department. This informal arrangement has been executed in good faith, producing, it is believed, a salutary effect on the bearing of the hostile tribes, and securing the desired harmony and efficient co-operation of those charged with this branch of the public service.

It is earnestly recommended that the superintendents, and also agents of a suitable grade, be empowered to act as civil magistrates within the limits of reservations where the tribal relations are maintained, and also on the plains remote from the jurisdiction of the civil authorities. The want of an acceptable and efficient provision for the administration of justice has been sensibly felt in cases arising between members of the tribes, or between Indians and the white men who have been permitted to reside among them. The extent of the jurisdiction and the mode of its exercise should be clearly defined by congressional enactment.

The Secretary of the Treasury holds certain stocks in trust for the Chickasaw national fund, which amount, as appears by his report of the 6th of December last, to the sum of one million three hundred and sixteen thousand two hundred and eighty-one dollars and thirty-one cents (\$1,316,281 31.) Public securities and certificates of stock of the par value of three million fifty-three thousand five hundred and ninety-two dollars and fifteen cents, (\$3,053,592 15,) constituting the trust fund of other Indian tribes, are deposited with the Secretary of the Interior. I am not aware of any good reason for a divided custody of these funds. It is suggested that Congress designate a depository for all the securities held by the United States in trust for the Indians.

Copious details in regard to each branch of the Indian service are furnished in the voluminous and well considered report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. I respectfully refer to it for further information, and commend the various suggestions it contains to the favorable consideration of Congress.