

THE INDIANS.

Queries by Dr. Atkinson, and Answers by Gen. Howard, on Many Points of Interest Concerning the Indians.

PORTLAND, Oct. 22, 1878. Gen. O. O. Howard, U. S. A: As a citizen of Oregon for thirty years, in common with others, I have of necessity felt a very strong desire to see a solution of the Indian problem. During this long period, I have witnessed the close of the Cayuse war which was caused by the murder of Dr. Marcus Whitman and family, and about twenty other citizens, and which was finally settled by the arrest (by Governor Lane), and the execution of seven of the Indian murderers in 1850.

Next the Indian war of 1855 involved the entire Territories of Oregon and Washington, and put the scattered settlers in peril in their village homes as well as on their journeys. This war began in a wrong done to Indians. It was made the occasion by the Klickitat Indian runners of arousing and uniting most of the tribes in a plan to fall upon and exterminate all the American whites on the same day from the California lines to British Columbia.

The more recent Modoc war followed other disturbances in southern Oregon, and ended in a costly sacrifice of noble men and millions of money. The wars of 1877 and 1878, though speedily closed by the vigor and celerity of your command, have both been signals of the constant irritation, which is excited by the progress of settlements, wherever the Indians retain their tribal relations.

The closer this contact becomes between the two classes, which we can hardly call two civilizations, the surer are we to witness a conflict.

Judging from the past we may expect another war with the Indians of this northwest not many months hence.

This is the judgment of men who know the ravages that are harbored and perhaps encouraged by the barbarities and destruction of stock as well as murders committed by the hostile Indians this year.

In view of these sad facts which occur within the purview of the officials of the United States, and of the States and Territories involved, and under every policy of managing our Indian affairs, and within sight of British territory, where whites and Indians dwell together in peace under the regis of English law; which protects and holds alike responsible every person of both classes, certain grave questions arise, no doubt deeply and often pondered by yourself, to which you may be willing to give such answers as your official position and opportunities have enabled you to discover.

A case in point occurred at the session of the circuit court in Yakima City last week, as I am informed by Hon. J. B. Allen, prosecuting attorney for said district: A Yakima Indian murdered an Indian doctor. Mr. Allen brought the case before the grand jury who found a true bill against the man. He was about to be prosecuted before the court, witnesses were subpoenaed, and the day of trial set. The Indian agent appeared and affirmed that the criminal had been tried by the tribe under their law of holding doctors responsible for the death of patients and condemned to confinement on the reservation for one year. Under the United States statute which forbids a second trial for the same offense, Mr. Allen was obliged to quash the indictment and withdraw the suit.

Such duplex proceedings would seem to prolong and nurse the barbarism of tribes and continue to make murder, in their minds, a mere trifle. I submit the following questions, marked from I to VIII.

Very truly yours, GEO. H. ATKINSON,

HQ. DEPT. OF THE COLUMBIA, FORT VANCOUVER, W. T., Oct. 23, '78.

Rev. G. H. Atkinson, D. D.—DEAR SIR: Your very comprehensive letter has come promptly to hand. Among the interesting incidents of history that you embody therein you drop this prophetic remark: "Judging from the past, we may expect another war with the Indians of this northwest not many months hence."

While I agree with you that there is danger of a conflict in at least two localities within this geographical department, still I think our authorities can and will take proper preventive measures and save us from the fearful losses that are always consequent upon an Indian campaign. Permit me, now as I am driven from time, to make very brief answer to your several questions. You ask:

QUESTION I.

Is it your judgment that the extension of U. S. law and legal tribunals among all Indians, both on and off the reservations, as the sure and final arbiter of all civil and criminal questions, whether between Indians themselves, or between Indians and white people, will tend to promote the peace, good order, safety and welfare of both classes?

ANSWER.

That is my judgment. The effect of the decisions of Judge Lewis, U. S. dis-

trict judges, both in the Colville valley and on Puget Sound, upon such subjects as are plainly within his jurisdiction, have had a wonderful effect in the promotion of good order and good morals.

QUESTION II.

Have you reason to believe that the past disturbances are due, in part, to the failure of government to fulfill the provisions of the treaties of 1855 and ratified in 1859, which pledged the Indians separate allotments and patents in severalty of homesteads on the reservations?

ANSWER.

Yes, indeed. A promise made by the government officials, put into formal treaties and read to the different Indian tribes concerned, again and again, year after year, cannot be so completely ignored and so universally broken as the one to which you refer has been, without causing almost absolute distrust of all government agents, on the part of the Indians.

The Nez Perces and Piutes, as also the Umatillas, claim that these promises of the ownership of land often made to them have never been fulfilled.

III.

In your judgment will the grant of homesteads under patents, with all their legal rights and obligations on the reservations as per treaties, tend to promote their civilization?

ANSWER.

There are numerous heads of families in this department, Indians, I mean, who live in houses and cultivate land on nearly every reservation I have visited.

These Indians are now restless because their treaties are soon to expire by limitation of law, and they have no security of either the patent promised in their treaties, nor of the title in fee.

In fact, citizens who are eager for the good land where the Indians dwell, tell them that they have no title, that the land is not theirs. So that no more conservative and civilizing influence could obtain than to remove by giving title this existing restlessness on the part of well-behaved and capable Indians.

IV.

Will this fulfillment of treaty pledges, in your view, tend to revive their confidence, quiet disturbances and assure the friendship of Indians invested with such rights, and cause them to ally the war spirit of hostile bands?

ANSWER.

It is difficult to answer this question in a single sentence. The fulfillment of such pledges will give the government substantial Indian allies. Of course, there are wild tribes and renegades from all the reservations who cannot be caught with any bait which, in its nature, they abhor. The Indian Spiritists of Smohalle stamp, which include non-treaty Nez Perces and renegades in this region, generally claim for Indians an absolute ownership already.

V.

Does it seem wise to you and the first duty of the government to proceed immediately to fulfill those treaty pledges?

ANSWER.

Why not? A government that breaks its most formal and solemn obligations with a people because they are weak or ignorant cannot endure. The only objection is the possession of valuable land of comparatively worthless cultivators. Such an objection is not tenable. In time the worthless and the idle always lose their neglected farms. With the temporary insurment against alienation, there is sufficient guaranty to an Indian regarded as a ward of the government. The important lesson of self-dependence will be mastered, if ever, in the allotted period.

VI.

Does it seem to you that the present law, embodied in the treaties, empowering the president to issue such patents to Indians in severalty on the attested fulfillment by them of the conditions specified in the bond, is all that is needed in the case, without an enabling act or their action of Congress?

ANSWER.

The present law (in the treaties) does appear to me sufficient without an enabling act; I mean, of course, for all those tribes that are named in the enactments.

If there are tribes on any reservation where treaties exist without a provision to which you refer, these tribes would, in my judgment, require an act of Congress to secure to them titles to land within the limits of the said reservations.

VII.

Do the necessities of the hour seem to you to demand especial attention now to this duty in Oregon, Washington and Idaho?

ANSWER.

What you say in reference to existing troubles cannot better be answered than by the adoption of some positive plan. I say, with the Indian as with other men, "make as few promises as possible," but after you have made one, keep it by all means. Then hold the Indian to his responsibility. Even if it is too late to ally the present fever until it has had

its run; still it strengthens the hands of those who fight battles to feel that their cause is just.

I believe it will complicate our difficulties incalculably when the several treaties shall expire, if the sacred promises therein are ignored. Certainly justice and policy, if not absolute necessity, loudly call for attention to this matter.

VIII.

Do you think it wise for the U. S. government to employ an Indian police in part to co-operate with white sheriffs in the execution of laws in which Indians are involved.

ANSWER.

Doubtless there are such circumstances, for example, where the Indians are so located, or so low in the scale of civilization, that such a police would hardly be practicable. But there is, I think, a better method of governing Indians than through Indians. It is the same in war and in peace measures.

In 1872 I instituted an Indian police under pay among the Navajos of New Mexico. The result was that stolen stock was very soon returned to the owners, and the percentage of depredations by these Indians were diminished seven-fold. And I believe it was false economy that caused its abolition afterwards.

You are well aware that Indians can take up land under existing laws. The conditions are set forth in the collection of laws or extracts from laws and regulations that I gave you at our last interview.

It will help, will it not, to break the tribal relation and bring Indians into actual conformity to the laws and customs of the white man to encourage them where they exhibit proper industry to take up farms outside of the temporary reservation limits?

I understand that the most of our citizens agree to this.

You speak of English justice. Certainly our free Republic will not suffer itself to be outdone in securing impartial justice to its inhabitants.

Very truly yours, O. O. HOWARD, Brigadier-General U. S. A.

IMPORTANT RECOMMENDATION.—The annual report of Gen. Humphreys, chief of engineers, has just been issued. A telegram states that it contains the following recommendations for appropriations: Lower Willamette and Columbia rivers, \$150,000; upper Willamette, \$40,000; upper Columbia and Snake rivers, \$70,000; Canal at the Cascades of the Columbia, \$500,000. These appropriations are just about the amounts necessary to push improvements on our rivers for the next fiscal year.—P. Rec, Oct. 28th.

LET us hide our diminished head; let the heavenly breezes no more waft our name to the utmost limits of terrestrial space; let mother earth hide us in her silent breast! We have had our hair cut. The knight of the shears and razor did as we directed, very true; but nothing more. Not a word did he say of a shampoo, nor of hair restorative, nor yot of shave. Great Caesar! has it come to this? Have we fallen so low that we are beneath the notice, that we receive not even the contempt of such as these? LATER—That barber was a deaf mute.—Ex.

Lewiston Wholesale Prices.

Table with 2 columns: Item and Price. Items include Cr. Sugar, No 1. Island, No 2., No 1. C. R. Coffee, No 2., No 1. China Rice, Dried Apples, Peaches, Coarse salt, Fine, Liverpool, Nails, Calico, Cabot A., W., Blew Muslin, Wheat, Potatoes, Butter, Eggs.

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April 13th, 1878.

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