

INDIAN AFFAIRS.

REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONER.

We learn from the Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, lately laid before Congress, that during the past year peace and tranquility have prevailed generally among the emigrated and other Indian tribes along the extensive frontiers, from Lake Superior and our northern boundary to Texas, with whom we have conventional relations and intercourse of long standing; and that, in regard to those more remote and more recently brought under the supervision of the Department, fewer occurrences of a painful nature have been reported than might have been anticipated.

The whole number of Indians within our limits is estimated at 400,000, about 18,000 yet linger some of the States east of the Mississippi river—Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, Seminole, and others; the remainder, consisting of Cheerokees, Choctaws, and Seminoles, being in North Carolina, Mississippi, and Florida.

The number in Minnesota and along the frontiers of the Western States to Texas, comprising mainly emigrated and other Indian tribes, is estimated at 100,000; those in Texas at 29,000; those in New Mexico at 45,000; those in California at 100,000; those in Utah at 12,000; and those in the Territories of Oregon and Washington at 25,000. The unfortunate and distracting controversy for some time existing among the Seneca Indians of New York, in regard to their form of government, seems happily to have terminated; the republican system, adopted by the majority in 1848, being apparently now acquiesced in by the remainder, by whom it was long and strenuously opposed. The early and effective interposition of the Government in respect to the Indians of Michigan. These Indians, some seven thousand in number, are represented to be divided into more than sixty separate communities, and are to be found in nearly every county of the State. Many of them being without any settled places of habitation, and gradually imbibing the worst vices of civilization, are becoming vitiated and degraded, a pest and a nuisance to the neighborhoods where they resort. In this unsettled, dispersed, and otherwise unfavorable condition, it is not surprising that they are unable to improve themselves. Those of their more fortunate brethren who have enjoyed the advantages of fixed locations present a much more favorable aspect. Most of them have comfortable homes, and, under the influence of the devoted efforts of several Christian denominations, are gradually improving and acquiring the habits of a civilized life. By a provision of the State constitution they are entitled to citizenship on becoming qualified therefor by intelligence and good character, and abandoning their tribal connection; and numbers have manifested a proper appreciation of this high privilege, and a laudable ambition to fit themselves for it.

A portion of the united tribes of Stockbridges and Muncies, of Wisconsin, are under treaty obligations to emigrate west of the Mississippi river; but their removal has necessarily been delayed from want of adequate means to defray the expense thereof, and of their year's subsistence. In 1848 the Menomonee ceded their entire country in Wisconsin, and agreed to remove to another stipulated to be given them in Minnesota west of the Mississippi. From this obligation they were exempted by the late President of the United States on the ground of the inability of the new country intended for them; and, with the approval of the proper authorities of Wisconsin, they were assigned and removed to a remote portion of the extensive tract which they had ceded, embracing about 445,000 acres. The information in possession of the Department is that the Menomonee are now, in all respects, suitable for them; and that they can probably remain there for many years without interference with the advancement or interests of the white population.

The Oneidas, of Wisconsin, have a permanent location near the city of Madison, and are gradually becoming civilized. The only other Indians in the State consist of a few bands of those known as the Chippewas of Lake Superior, still living on lands heretofore ceded to the United States, but where it has been thus far deemed proper to reserve them, as reasons materially affecting their preservation and welfare.

The large and populous tribe of Chippewas, the great body of whom are in Minnesota, still own an extensive tract of country east of the Mississippi, of which, on account of their present poverty, they are unable to dispose of to obtain possession. The lands lying west of the Mississippi are sufficiently ample for the whole tribe, and their concentration there would be an arrangement advantageous both to them and the Government.

The country assigned to the Winnibagoes by the treaty of 1825, and which they have been unable to occupy, proved to be not altogether suitable. The new location fixed upon, which is further south than their present country, is objected to, it is understood, on the ground of its bringing them too near the white settlements; and its close proximity to the Mississippi river is believed to be prejudicial to their health. The Department has not yet determined whether these objections are sufficiently well founded to justify the rejection of this arrangement.

The present situation of that portion of the Sioux Indians who are located in the Territory of Minnesota, in 1851, is peculiar, unfortunate, and to them most ultimately prove extremely injurious. No time should be lost in determining upon some final and permanent arrangement in regard to them.

The tribes of the Upper Missouri agency, with the exception of the Mandan, Arikara, and Crow, are generally quiet and peaceable. Such of them as are parties to the treaty of Fort Laramie have maintained, with but one single exception, friendly relations among themselves, and manifested an increasing confidence in and kindness towards the whites. Some of the Indians in this agency raise corn, beans, pumpkins, &c., and are becoming more and more civilized. The amendments of the Senate of the 24th of May, 1852, to the 7th article of the treaty of Fort Laramie, were promptly assented to by such of the tribes as the agent had conferred with, and it is not doubted that they will readily do so when he has an opportunity of seeing them, they being absent at the time of his arrival in their country on their usual hunts.

The general condition of the Indians within the limits of the Council Bluffs agency is not encouraging. The Omaha and Pawnee tribes, with the exception of the latter, are suffering from the winter; and by a judicious application of the money paid them by Government this season, it is thought they may to a great extent be saved from suffering.

The Otoes and Missourias, a confederate tribe, are in a state of almost misery. Reduced by a combination of causes, and by the loss of their lands, they are in a state of destitution. The Pawnees are also in a destitute condition. Their number now does not exceed one-half of what it did four years ago. The Indians of this agency, like all others, indulge in the use of intoxicating liquors, when they can obtain it; and unfortunately the same is the case with the Kiokopans, from the location of their villages, never free from the temptation.

The Half-breeds, located between the Great and Little Nemaha rivers, and numbering, including their families, about sixty souls, have made some considerable advance in civilization. The Ioways have many advantages, but they have not profited availed themselves of them. Indolence and vice predominate. By the census recently taken they number only four hundred and thirty-seven.

The Sac and Fox tribes, who occupy the same tract of land with the Ioways, their condition, however, is rather better; but the remarks in relation to the Ioways are, to a considerable extent, applicable to the Sac and Foxes.

The Kiokopans are more advanced than any other tribe in the Great Nemaha agency. They are engaged in making some progress in civilization. A few have comfortable houses, with domestic animals about them. The Wyandotts, Shawnees, and Delawares are embraced in the Kansas agency. A number in each of these tribes are educated, intelligent men, having good dwellings, and surrounded by the comforts of civilization. Various religious denominations have missions in this agency, and some of the Indians are professors of the Christian religion; but many of them are habitual drunkards. The Wyandotts have in operation a system of common schools and a code of laws for their own government.

The Pottawattomies are not, as a general thing, improving. They have a large money annuity, the corrupting effects of which are clearly visible. The Government has provided no limitation for an agent in their country; disputation prevails, and many of the principal men are, it is believed, destitute of integrity, and are used to subvert the purposes of the avowed, designing, and heartless, who seek, and but too often obtain, the control of them for the promotion of their own sinister views. A few of the bands are to a considerable extent cultivating the soil; and there are some good men in the nation who appear to have availed themselves of the benefits of the missionary efforts among the Pottawattomies.

number of our citizens who suffer from their deprivations. The tribes embraced in the Sac and Fox agency are the Sac and Foxes of the Mississippi, the small band of Chippewas of Swan creek and Black river, and the Ottawas of the Mouth and Blanchard's Fork. The Sac and Foxes are a wild, roving race, depending almost entirely on the chase for subsistence. The Chippewas and Ottawas depend for subsistence on the cultivation of the soil, and are comparatively in an advanced state of civilization. It is the opinion of the Commissioner that they will this year attain a surplus in agricultural productions. The Ottawas have adopted a simple code of laws for their government.

The Weas and Piankeshaws, Kaskaskias and Peorias, are known to be doing reasonably well. They depend principally on agriculture for their support. The Weas are not doing well. The village is so convenient to the white settlements that they have at all times the opportunity to gratify their appetite for ardent spirits, and they may be said to indulge habitually and very freely in its use.

The Chippewas, Ottawas, Weas and Piankeshaws, Kaskaskias, Peorias, and the Miamies, all complain of the deprivations of the Sac and Fox Indians, and express the hope that they may be removed far away from them. There is no doubt but the complaints of these small tribes are to a considerable extent well founded, and that the removal of the Sac and Foxes in their vicinity has been injurious to their interests.

By a provision contained in an act of Congress approved the 3d of March last, the President was authorized to enter into negotiations with the Indian tribes west of the States of Missouri and Iowa, for the purpose of procuring their assent to the relinquishment of their lands claimed by them, and of extinguishing their title, in whole or in part, to those lands. The Commissioner of Indian Affairs was designated by the President as the officer of the Indian Department to conduct the necessary negotiations, and that duty was undertaken by him in due season, and with the most judicious official engagements. A preliminary visit to the Indian country, with a view to explore it, and to obtain such information as would be useful and necessary in preparing full and detailed instructions as to the terms and conditions of the treaties to be negotiated, was deemed necessary, and was accordingly made by the Commissioner in person, and accompanied by Messrs. B. J. F. and J. M. M. The Commissioner was unable to visit. The same cause operated to prevent his seeing the Pawnees, Kansas, and Osage Indians, with whom, although their lands are not contiguous to the boundaries of either of these States, it is desirable that treaties also be made, should the civil war be established and the country opened for settlement.

The Commissioner held councils with every tribe whom he visited, and disclosed to them the object of his journey to their country. He found the Indian mind in an unfavorable condition to receive and calmly consider his message. For some time previous to his arrival in the Indian country individuals from the States had been exploring portions of it, with the intention, as was understood, of attempting to make locations and settlements. The discussion of the subject, and the exploration of the country by citizens of the States, alarmed and excited the Indians. Some of them were proposing a grand council, at which it was designed to light up the old Indian fires and confederate for defence against the white people, who they believed were coming in force to drive them from their country, and to occupy it without their consent. The Commissioner endeavored to allay their fears, and to direct their minds to a more peaceful and useful course. His visit was not in some way or other intended to aid the whites in a forcible occupation of the country. As he progressed in his journey and conferred with the tribes near the mouth of the Missouri, he found that the Indians were in a state of excitement, and were desirous of selling any part of their lands, as announced in their replies to the speeches of the Commissioner. Finally, however, many tribes expressed their willingness to sell, but on the condition that they could retain tribal reservations for their present and future use. The Commissioner deemed it objectionable, and not to be adopted if it could be avoided; and with such tribes the time of treating was deferred until next spring, with the hope that the Indians at that time might see that their permanent interests required an entire transfer of all their lands and that they should be content to receive the proceeds of the sale of their lands, and with all the exception of the Wyandotts and Ottawas, who expressed an opinion on the subject of an organization of a civil government in that territory, were opposed to the measure. They have, with the exception of the Mandan, Arikara, and Crow, no objection to the "white man's laws," deeming their engines of tyranny and oppression, and they dread as well as fear them. 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