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CITY OF SAN FRANCISCO,  
*Alta California, January 31, 1850.*

SIR: I arrived within the limits of my official duties on the 3d day of November last, and should have rendered an account, under my letter of instructions, before this date, but for the following reason. When at the city of the Great Salt Lake, I was advised by mountain men that the season was then so far advanced, it would be impossible for the train of wagons to cross the Sierra Nevada mountains this winter. Being anxious to reach my place of destination, I abandoned my wagons, left the escort, and pushed forward for the mountains as rapidly as possible. On separating from the train I placed my trunk, containing some of my papers, under the care of Capt. Morris of the escort, who retained a few of his light wagons, with which he intended to cross the mountains. As I travelled more rapidly than his train, I reached the city of Sacramento several days in advance of him. From that place I came to Benicia, for the purpose of turning into the Quartermaster's department such public property as I had on hand, and after one day's delay there, came to this city. Captain Morris did not come here, as he expected to, but remained at Sonora, and I am yet without some papers and vouchers necessary in rendering a proper account of my appropriations and expenditures. On receiving them I shall lose no time in rendering my accounts.

Soon after my arrival here the rainy season set in, and, with few intervals of fair days, has continued ever since, rendering it impossible to pass over the interior of the country. I have consequently been able to visit only a few points by water communication, for the purpose of gathering such information touching the objects of my mission as I could obtain from persons who have resided for some length of time in

the country. When the rains cease and the roads become passable, I shall lose no time in prosecuting the investigations required by the department. In the mean time I shall endeavor to collect from reliable persons and other sources such information as will enable me to report to the department at the earliest possible time.

I have been informed that some years ago, there was at the mission of Santa Barbara an ancient manuscript history of the aborigines of California, or the Indians residing west of the Sierra Nevada. It was in the possession of Padre Gonzales, of that mission. I have written to him regarding it, and if not taken to Mexico during the revolution, I hope to obtain it, at least for inspection.

The Indians residing in the vicinity of the old missions, or the ranchos of this county, so far as I have been able to observe, are of mixed breeds, and in many instances it is difficult to determine whether the aboriginal or Spanish blood prevails. They are in general stupid, indolent, and ignorant, and in intellect far inferior to any of the tribes east of the Rocky mountains. This does not perhaps apply to the pure Indians inhabiting the more mountainous part of this country, but to those residing at or near to either a mission or a rancho. They seem to consider themselves an appendage thereto, belonging to the priest of the mission or the owner of the rancho. I have not yet learned that any of those Indians hold prisoners, either Mexicans or Americans; but, on the contrary, they think themselves the property of the owners of the respective ranchos where they reside, as much as does the negro of the south to the owner of his cotton plantation. Indeed, the owner of a rancho looks upon them as his property; and in estimating the value of his lands, he always counts upon the services of his fifty or one hundred Indians, as the case may be, to enhance its value. In connexion with this subject I would call your attention to the situation of the mission lands of this country, and the object for which they were originally granted. Those lands were granted by the King of Spain to the Jesuits, for the purpose of Christianizing the Indians. On the suppression of that order, the Dominicans, or order of Saint Francis, came into possession of them, under like trusts and restrictions. The priests at one time usurped power over the lands and property of the missions, and managed them rather to enrich themselves, than for the benefit of the Indians.

In 1835 the supreme government annulled the jurisdiction of the priests, allowing them only their religious powers, with a salary or compensation; at the same time sending to every mission its administrator to manage its temporal affairs, for the use and benefit of the Indian population. There was at each mission an administrator up to the time of the war between the United States and Mexico. Such being the original object of those grants, it has occurred to me that no change was made by the treaty, and that the property held in trust for the Indians by administrators under the government of Mexico might properly pass into the hands of Indian agents under the government of the United States, to be held in trust for the Indians, as they formerly were under agents of the government of Mexico.

Should this not be the case, then those lands under the government of the United States become a part of the public domain; and in either

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view, it seems to me they should be guarded from the most unjustifiable and wholesale land piracy carried on here, that has ever developed itself in any country. I am informed that much of those mission lands have been unlawfully seized and held in possession by persons without any color of title whatever in some cases, and in other instances under false or pretended titles from persons having no right to sell or grant the same. I have made these suggestions in order that the Department of the Interior, under whose care the matter so fully comes, may adopt such measures as it may deem proper in the premises. My own opinion is, that it may be advisable to appoint a commission for the purpose of investigating and settling such titles, at as early a day as practicable.

I have the honor to be, your humble servant, &c., &c.,

ADAM JOHNSTON.

ORLANDO BROWN, Esq.,

*Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Washington, D. C.*

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