

No. 36:

YREKA, *March 5, 1864.*

DEAR SIR: On the 14th of last month I held a council with the Modoc, Klamath Lake, Shasta, Scott's Valley, and Hamburg Indians, and formed a settlement with them, which is herewith enclosed.

This step may be somewhat irregular, inasmuch as the Oregon agency had received appropriations heretofore for their charge and maintenance; but the misunderstanding between Rogers, the sub-agent of Oregon, and the military, and the ill feeling that was growing up among the Indians, and being occasionally demonstrated by the Klamath Lakes and Modocs towards the whites, seemed urgently to call for an intervention to avoid war. Besides this, although the appropriations have uniformly been made to Oregon for the charge and care of the Shasta, Klamath Lake, and Modoc Indians, the former, the Shastas, inhabit entirely within the borders of California. The Klamath Lake Indians are about equally divided, as is also their land, by the State line, and the Modocs and their land are mostly in California. These tribes inhabit the country lying west of the Sierra Nevada mountains, and south of the Siskiyou mountains to the confluence of the Scott's and Klamath rivers, as follows:

The Hamburg Indians known in their language as the 'T-ka, inhabit immediately at the mouth of Scott's river, known in their language as the Otte-ti-e-wa river. The Scott's Valley Indians, known in their language as the Id-do-a, inhabit Scott's valley, above the cañon. The Yreka (a misnomer for Yeka--Shasta Butte) Indians, known in their language as the Ho-te-day, inhabit that part of the country lying south of Klamath river, and west of Shasta river. The Shasta Indians, known in their language as the We-o-how—it meaning stone house, from the large cave in their country—occupy the land east of Shasta river, and south of the Siskiyou mountains, and west of the lower Klamath lake. All of these Indians speak the same language, and were formerly under one chief (who lived in Scott's valley) and sub-chiefs, but for years past have been under separate chiefs, the former regal family having become extinct by sickness and casualties, about the time our white population first entered the country. They have since this—my settlement—elected a big chief, (Skookum-tic,) called by us John, who is a smart, sober, and well-disposed Indian. Then, next east of the Shastas are the Klamath Lake Indians, known in their

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR. 265

language as the *Okshee*, who inhabit the country about the Klamath lakes, and east about half way to the Goose lake, to Wright lake, and south to a line running about due east from Shasta Butte. Then the Modocs, (or Moadoc, as the word is pronounced,) known in their language as the *Ok-kow-ish*, inhabit the Goose lake country, and are mostly within the State of California. These and the Klamath Lake Indians speak the same language, though under several chiefs. The Modocs are under Sconges, head chief, and Skitte-hon-ges, and other smaller chiefs, and the Klamath Lakes, under La Lakes and smaller chiefs.

The word Modoc is a Shasta Indian word, and means all distant, stranger, or hostile Indians, and became applied to these Indians by white men in early days from hearing the Shastas speak of them.

The range of the Siskiyou mountains, known in their language as the *Mac-ki-a*, forms the northern limits of the country of most of these tribes. The Klamath Lake and Modoc Indians number about fourteen hundred warriors, all well mounted on Indian ponies, and armed with guns, and are skilful marksmen; are large, active, and courageous Indians and would be formidable foes; and many of our straggling citizens in the early days of the country have fallen victims to them. The large number of miners and traders emigrating this season to the northern placers having either to pass through their country or make a circuit to Portland, the temptation of this so much the shortest route would necessarily expose many small and defenceless companies to sure destruction from these powerful bands of Indians.

All of these facts, I feel, justify my interference, and fortunately, from some little incidents of early days, they all had learned to both fear and respect me, and they readily assembled in council, and were evidently highly gratified at a restoration of peace among themselves and a good understanding with us. Since this arrangement, it has been proven by actual experience that they intend fully to comply with the terms of the compact. Their guns were all kept back on their visit to Yreka, after the treaty, and individual white men have passed out into their country and back without molestation or annoyance.

The chiefs La Lakes and Sconges wish me particularly to visit their country this summer. The Shastas, Scott's Valley, Yreka and Hamburg Indians are reduced, all told, to about two hundred, and their country is fully settled up by the whites without any compensation to them, but with occasional trifling aid from citizens they are enabled to take care of themselves, and have never been the recipient of any bounty or care from the government.

The land of the Modoc and Klamath Lake Indians is a high, cold plain, nearly on a level with the summit of the Sierra Nevada mountains, too frosty to raise cereals or roots with success, and fit only for grass. The country abounds in wild game and the lakes and streams in fish. The Indians make a good living and raise a great many horses, the snow, spreading over so large a surface, not falling deep enough to cover the herbage, and their stock finding good grazing all winter. On this whole plain, from Yreka east to the eastern slope of the Nevada mountains, it is a rare occurrence to meet with a fall of snow exceeding six inches, and then to lie but a few days, the great elevation and consequently cool surface not causing much evaporation, and that little is condensed and spread over a large extent of country; unlike the Sacramento valley and its surrounding mountains, the peaks and ridges of which condense and accumulate to great depth the humidity of the atmosphere of the warm valleys.

This upper country will not be wanted by white people for ages to come, except as a thoroughfare, (and this is now fully secured,) and unless rich deposits of mineral wealth should be found there, in which last alternative the Indians soon make room for the miners.

I am thus particular, so that you may be fully advised when legislating upon this subject, and hope, should Mr. Shannon desire it, you will let him peruse it.

I start in a few days to visit the Humboldt Indians, with a firm belief that I

• 266      REPORT OF THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR

can make a satisfactory accommodation with all these hostile bands that are now costing the government so much. Their country is but little needed by our citizens, and much of the difficulty arises from evil-disposed white men who reside among the Indians. The Klamath river, from the mouth of the Salmon river down, runs mostly through a close cañon, and is a very broken country, and had my predecessor allowed the Indians to care for themselves at the time of the great overflow, they would have taken to the mountains, and in a few days after the flood had subsided they would have returned to the river banks, and with fish have provided for their immediate wants, (as in fact two-thirds of them did and yet remain there,) and would have saved the government the heavy expense of their removal and subsistence at Smith's river. The great number of Indians inhabiting the Klamath and Humboldt countries, the dense redwood forests on the river bottoms, and the high, craggy, precipitous mountains back, would, to my mind, be a serious warning against any effort to remove them by military force, and, if undertaken, would cost the government as much as the great Florida war, and would be about equally procrastinated.

True, it could be accomplished; but is it advisable thus to expend the energies of our country upon an unnecessary enterprise, when we are rent with internal dissensions, and the whole power and treasure of the government is needed to restrain the suicidal hand of rebellion?

I am, sir, very respectfully, yours,

E. STEELE.

Hon. JOHN CONNESS.

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