

DISBURSING AGENCY INDIAN DEPARTMENT IN CALIFORNIA,
San Francisco, April 12, 1852.

SIR: I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt this morning of your letter of 9th instant.

In the general remarks made by your excellency touching the progress of civilization and the purposes for which governments are instituted, &c., I fully concur; many of them are familiar truisms, very prettily expressed. I am gratified by the assurance that, in relation to the unhappy occurrences referred to in my letter, you "concur with me in opinion that prompt action is indispensable." This is what the case demands, and the object I had in view in addressing you.

I have already written urgently to the commander of the United States Pacific division in relation to the establishment of small garrisons or military posts on the Indian reservations at the junction of the Trinity and Klamath, and in Scott's valley, which I consider indispensable to the peace and safety of that frontier. A copy of my letter to General Hitchcock, under date of 7th instant, will be enclosed for your perusal. I have entire confidence in the desire of General H. to employ the force and means at his command for the protection and peace of the country; but unfortunately, owing to the failure of our democratic Congress to make suitable appropriations, these means are extremely limited at present, and some time may elapse before it may be possible for him to act effectively. It was in view of this state of things that I took the liberty of appealing to your excellency to consider the propriety of the course suggested in my letter of 5th instant.

Your excellency appears to have misapprehended or misconstrued some parts of my letter, and to have been thereby led into false conclusions. I attempted no detail of the Indian difficulties which have occurred *generally, or in all past time, in the counties of Trinity and Klamath*. Those counties embrace an area of perhaps three or four hundred miles of mountain ranges, with a numerous Indian and very sparse white population, and in some of their remote parts may have had "troubles" unknown to me. What I designed to bring to your excellency's attention, and what I wrote about, was *the two distinct specific massacres in cold blood of defenceless Indians by the whites on or near Humboldt bay and on the Klamath*. I stated that my information came from reliable parties, in the form of written reports, which were corroborated by gentlemen then in this city. About these transactions, I presume "the respectable gentlemen representing those counties in the legislature," to whom you refer, had no previous information whatever. How, then, can your excellency arrive at the conclusion that I had placed myself "at issue" with those gentlemen, or their statements? If *they* had information touching these particular enormities, differing from that I communicated, *they* could make an "issue" if they thought proper; but if they did, I have entire confidence an investigation would result in showing the substantial accuracy of my information, and the inaccuracy of theirs. I could scarcely expect from gentlemen so fully committed in what your excellency terms "*the other side*," a voluntary "corroboration" of any statement I might make on Indian affairs in that quarter. If, as you say, there are "discrepancies between the statements I submitted, connected with this outbreak," and the statements laid before you by "the members of the legislature representing the northern counties," I submit that your excellency will see the propriety of sending me certified copies of those statements, that I may transmit them to the gentlemen who reported to me, and give them an opportunity of repelling this indirect attack upon their veracity. If, however, the statements referred to relate, as I think quite probable, to matters in *other and distant parts* of the country, perhaps one hundred and fifty miles from the Klamath, and two hundred miles or more from Humboldt bay, then there may, after all, be nothing which, on reflection, your excellency would denominate by the term *discrepancy*, at least in the sense of contradiction.

The intimation that especial credit should be given to the statements or counter statements of gentlemen because they happen to be "members of the legislature," is a position in which my experience does not lead me to concur. That the responsibilities of the station, and the solemnity of their oath, should lead gentlemen so elevated to weigh well and carefully every statement made, or vote given, is unquestionably true; but all experience shows that the accidental elevation of a man to a political station, especially in our frontier States, does not necessarily change his moral perceptions or sensibilities: no more in a political than in a moral sense, can "*the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots*."

In forming an opinion, therefore, about either men or things in California, I find it all-important to look at the probabilities of statements

made, and the private character of the party making them, without very particular reference to the official position he may chance to occupy. You inform me that "*the gentlemen representing the northern counties*" state "that the Indians are daily guilty of committing outrages upon unoffending citizens;" that "the number of *white men murdered by the Indians*" in the counties of Klamath, Trinity, Shasta, and Siskiyou, within a few months past, is one hundred and thirty, and the aggregate value of the property destroyed by *them* (the Indians) is \$240,000. It would be an endless, as well as a thankless task, to notice and correct the thousand extravagant statements made on this subject in the public prints, and even by honorable members of the legislature; and while I shall not controvert even the above, I will nevertheless take the occasion to say, that certainly the statement can have no reference to the region about Humboldt bay, on the Klamath, or the Lower Shasta, Trinity, or Scott's river, which is within my district, and where, *up to the time of the late murderous attack upon the Indians, no difficulties of any kind had occurred since the treaties made in October and November.* Upon the certainty of this information your excellency may rely. What may have occurred on the Upper Trinity, or on the trails through the country of the Cow Creek or Pitt River Indians, I have no information other than the constantly recurring reports and rumors of Indian depredations which appear in the papers. Your own experience in California has, doubtless, led you to remark, that if a pack-train is attacked or robbed, if a corral in one of the valleys is broken into and robbed, the conclusion is instantly reached that the Indians are the aggressors: the Oregon rifle or the Pike county revolver is at once called into requisition, and the first red skins met with made to pay the penalty. While I was in the Shasta country last fall, several extensive and aggravated robberies were committed, large numbers of mules and horses carried off, and the *blame, as usual*, laid at the door of the Indians. Large parties were organized, and a war of extermination almost determined on. Just then it was discovered that *the Indians were mostly at my camp, in Scott's valley, for the purpose of treating*, and the idea was broached, apparently for the first time, that *possibly* they were not *guilty*; that the outrages had been committed by men with *white* and not with *red* skins. Pursuit was made in the direction of Oregon and the Salt Lake; and since my return, the temporary agent writes me that the Salt Lake route party had returned with several white prisoners, and a large number of animals. The *white* Indians, at the date of his letter, were chained to a log-house prison in Shasta Butte city, awaiting the return of the other party, when they would be tried, unless meanwhile, through the influences of "consanguinity" or of money, they did not manage to escape.

Precisely similar cases have come to my knowledge in the Sacramento valley, on the San Joaquin, and in the country back of Los Angeles; in fact the cases are numerous in which, after Indians have been shot down like bullocks, for supposed crimes of this sort, it has been found, to the satisfaction of all others concerned, that *white men were the real criminals*. It is not, therefore, to be wondered at that I receive these frontier rumors and statements with some incredulity, and many grains of allowance. This principle may, I presume, be applied to the state-

ments made to you about the 130 American citizens *killed*, and the \$240,000 worth of property destroyed. The Shasta Courier, published in the very focus of the reports and rumors, gave, some days since, a statement on this subject, making the number killed 20 or 30; and as it is all *guess-work*, I think its estimate far more probable than the one you refer to. As a general thing, the Indians of this country are not at present disposed to war with the whites; they are afraid of our long rifles, and seldom attack or steal from parties travelling, unless driven to desperation by hunger, or the supposed necessity of killing a pale-face to make good the death of one of their own people. The "lex talionis" is a part of their religion; they think they would hardly lie quiet in their graves if they failed to avenge the death of such of their people as had fallen by the hand of their enemies, and generally, I believe, they manage to keep the account about balanced. This law of their education, if not of their nature, is well known to all old mountaineers; and it is surprising that, in view of the certain consequences, packers and traders on the mountain trails continue to pick off straggling Indians, wherever and whenever opportunity serves. Until a different policy is adopted, border frays and disturbances must continue of frequent occurrence. If your excellency will again read my remarks about the bloody tragedy on Eel river, you will see that I did *not* preface the details of that sad affair "*by an admission*" that the *two white men* had been murdered by *the Indians*: so far from this, I referred ironically to the conclusion *jumped at* by the whites; and I can now add, on the authority of a gentleman from Humboldt, that it is still *wholly uncertain* whether the murder and robbery were the work of *Indians at all*. There are numbers of white adventurers on that frontier, who are none too good to be at least suspected. I made, and of course meant, no reflections upon the character of "*American citizens*." I profess to entertain quite as much regard for the character and honor of my countrymen, and for all the proper claims of "consanguinity," as your excellency, or any other citizen; but my regards for *the dear people* shall not prevent my calling things by their right names, and denouncing a white man who kills an Indian in cold blood, just as ready as I would an Indian for killing a white man. They *would be equally guilty of murder*.

Upon the frontier of this State, your excellency must be aware that there are great numbers of *Mexicans, Chilians, Sydneyites, and renegades, from justice in the old States*, wholly undeserving to be classed with American citizens, or to be included in the compliments you lavish upon our countrymen. It was with reference to this part of the population, to the arrest and trial of certain "*desperadoes*," that I wrote.

If, after the rigid investigation into those melancholy transactions at Humboldt, and on the Klamath, which you promise shall be made, it shall be found that none of our own countrymen, or "*American citizens*," are implicated, certainly no person will rejoice more heartily than myself.

In conclusion, I beg to state that Walter Van Dyke, esquire, the district attorney of Klamath county, is now in this city, and will re-

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main for some days, awaiting such instructions as your excellency, as
chief magistrate of the State, may deem proper to send him.

I have the honor to remain, very respectfully, your most obedient
servant,

REDICK McKEE,

United States Indian Agent, Northern California.

His Excellency **JOHN BIGLER,**

Governor of California.
