

DISBURSING AGENCY INDIAN DEPARTMENT IN CALIFORNIA,
San Francisco, July 27, 1852.

SIR: Your favor of the 26th is before me. From its modified tone I am strengthened in the hope I have from the first indulged, that when better apprized of the facts and circumstances referred to, you could not continue to entertain the suspicions and prejudices which evidently influenced your mind and your pen. It was with great reluctance that I was forced into the correspondence, and for a time seemed shut up to the necessity of classing you with those rhetoricians who, from a supposed impunity of position, embrace every opportunity to

"Just hint a fault, and hesitate—dislike;
Willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike."

That through misinformation you had been led to entertain suspicions of impropriety on the part of the gentlemen named, and a want of good information on my part, I could readily conceive; but after the principal facts had been elaborately explained in my letter of 26th March, that you should reiterate *such* imputations, and, like the village master, go on to argue still, was wholly inexplicable. You were involved in an embarrassing and unbecoming position.

In proposing a candid explanation of the transactions in question, so far as I was acquainted with them, it was my purpose to defend these gentlemen, and myself too, from what I considered an insidious attack; and to show that, in the reports volunteered and forwarded to the War Office, we had been ungenerously dealt with. I imagine you will find but few who will look at the proceedings (to borrow your own expression) without reaching the same conclusion.

Although you evidently understand the matters in question better than you did in March, there are still two or three points which it seems proper to refer to, and then I flatter myself the last plank in this *Benicia platform* of imputations and suspicions will be removed.

In relation to General Estelle, I would remark:

1. When in this city a few days since, I had a short conversation with him on the street, and understood him to say distinctly that he never had received, nor expected to receive, a single dollar for his services in the military operations referred to, and had steadily opposed the appropriations made by the legislature for the volunteers improperly called out by Colonel Harper.

2. As to your liberal suggestion that he, or some one for him, had taken the flour, or a single pound of it, from the Indians, in payment or exchange for the beef they consumed when at his ranche, he repelled the idea with scorn; adding "that General Hitchcock might just as well have charged him with stealing," or words to that effect; that on his return home, he found that his major domo had been dealing out flour and beef to the Indians for several days on rather too liberal a scale for his profit, and as soon as the thirty sacks of flour ordered from San Francisco arrived, he started the party home with it upon their backs.

After all, it is quite possible the Indians you saw at the brook near his house were not from the Clear lake, but a party from Russian river, who visited the ranche during that summer, and were for a time employed assisting in herding and breaking wild horses.

As to my own course, which it appears, unfortunately, does not meet your approval, I would willingly avoid saying another word; but your remarks in connexion with my obtuseness of vision seem to render a few more "last words" necessary.

1. I confess to seeing nothing wrong, in principle or otherwise, in the verbal arrangement, or contract, as you term it, made by Captain Andrews in behalf of your department, and by myself, for mine, with General Estelle. We needed a supply of beef; he agreed to furnish it at his own risk, and at fair prices, and we promised him pay for what might be taken. That the contract was not reduced to writing, was simply owing to the fact that we expected General E. to accompany the expedition; had confidence in his promises, and he had the same in ours. If you can find impropriety in the matter, Captain Andrews is still in the country—subject, doubtless, to any investigation you may order.

2. If there was impropriety in my secretary agreeing to accept compensation for extra services in keeping the accounts of the cattle company, (which it appears from his letter has never yet yielded him a dollar in money,) my obtuseness of vision prevents my seeing it, as it did likewise in the case of the army officers on the previous expeditions, to whom the Indian commissioners paid several hundred dollars for extra, but to them important, services. If my secretary was deserving of blame, so also were Capt. Burton and Lieutenants Hamilton, Gibson, and McLean, and Surgeon King; and so also was our excellent commander, Captain E. D. Keyes, whose approval and consent were freely given.

What your precise meaning is as to my *receiving* the accumulated accounts, paying said accounts to myself, &c., I am at a loss to know, if it is not an insinuation of something dishonest or dishonorable. The accounts of the cattle company were sent not to me, but to General Estelle, by the hand of Mr. Marshall. With the settlement of those gentlemen, though made in my office, I had nothing to do, except issuing to each certificates, as agreed on, for the balance I owed them on account. They left nothing in my hands for J. McKee; and by his letter you must have observed that his compensation, whatever it was, was settled by General E. sending him an order for cattle left on a ranche near Humboldt.

In point of fact, no money passed on either hand in the settlement of the accounts. What, then, becomes of all your speculations, and conjectures, and reasoning upon the subject?

In conclusion, I hope that if you shall ever again deem it within the scope of your official duties to express an opinion "as to my mode of doing business for the public," you will do me and yourself the justice of first becoming acquainted with the facts and circumstances, and not rely upon conjectures and ex parte statements.

I am, General, very respectfully,

REDICK MCKEE,

U. S. Indian Agent, Northern California.

Br. Gen. E. A. HITCHCOCK,
Commanding Pacific Division.