Cahwia River, Cal., September 26, 1851.

Sir: With this my last monthly return I very respectfully submit the following:

Around the various reserves made to the Indians American citizens have settled for the purpose of farming, mining, and continuing permanently other occupations. Through these reserves are, for the most part, the great roads leading to the principal mines of the Sierra Nevada. Indeed such are the locations of the Indians (and the character of the country geographically and socially will admit of no other location,) that they must of necessity intermix and be in constant communication with the whites. To the extent of their intermingling will they communicate such epidemics, infectious or contagious diseases, as may be generated by or affect either. If, then, it is proper or necessary to protect American citizens by quarantine or hygienic laws in other places, it is equally necessary, to effect the same object, to adopt such preventive measures in this country as will protect our own citizens from the baseful effect of diseases generated or continued among their immediate neighbors, the Indians, with whom they must daily more or less associate in business, or in the travelling of the great roads to the mines.

Of the class of diseases most dangerous to the miner, unquestionably small-pox is among the most important; for of all diseases there is not one that calls for the protection of a house, a uniform temperature of the air, and the luxuries of a well-arranged sick chamber, more than the small-pox. You well know that the miners of California, for the most part, sleep in blankets on the ground, in the open air, or under
the shelter of a tent or a bush-house, which ill protects them from the
clemencies of the season, and renders them obnoxious to the assaults
of disease. They are poorly supplied with the necessaries for the curing
of disease, and it is not to be presumed that a disease of so much viru-
ulence would pass among the settlers and miners near the reservations
without numbering hundreds among its victims. Then, our duty to
our fellow-citizens calls for the vaccination of the Indians to prevent
them and our citizens from being exposed daily to the contagion of
small-pox.

The Indians in good faith have come from the mountains, given up
their mines and hunting-grounds to the miners, and have settled upon
the various reserves set apart for them, and are desirous of learning
from the white man the customs of civilized life. They daily are with
the whites seeking employment or partaking of their bounties; or, if
not these, then some other communication is had, for they are almost
always with some of our people, as the roads from the cities to the
placers lead by the “rancherias” of the Indians.

But a short time since several cases of small-pox were in San Fran-
cisco and Stockton. If but one case had reached the nearest “ranche-
ria” of the Indians, hundreds would have fallen victims to the disease.
It would have spread among them, as the fire spreads on our wide
prairies; they would have called upon the settlers around the reserva-
tions for assistance, and spread the disease among them and the trav-
cellers of the road; or, if they did not do this, then they would have fled
to the mountains, abandoned the reserves set apart for them by the
agents of the government, and thrown themselves upon the miners,
carrying with them disease and death. But again: apart from the
necessity of vaccinating the Indians as a preservative measure to the
white settlers in California, there are other considerations of duty still
higher. The Indians are unable to cope with diseases of so formidable
a nature, and they must succumb to their ravages. They have given
up the placers and the lands ceded to them by the association of
birth and childhood; they have thrown themselves upon the generosity
of the “pueblos,” and beg of them to aid them from their superior
endowments and wisdom, and prevent the decimation of their tribes
by such malignant diseases as may be introduced among them by the
white men. They have been called upon, and they have come to learn
civilization, and to abandon the habits of years. In doing this, it has
been so arranged that they see daily the manners and customs of our
own people; from them the Indians take diseases imported from foreign
States by our commercial connexion with them.

It is scarcely just for us to refuse aid to those who have become de-
dependants upon us, after we, by our own voluntary act, have made them
depending. If we put them in positions to contract disease, we cer-
tainly can do no less than assist them by those means which superior
wisdom and intelligence places in our power for the prevention and
curation of disease.

It is the liberal policy of our government to treat the Indians with
parental regard, and in the spirit of benevolence and Christianity.

In this view the agents of government have made promises to the
Indians in their treaties, that they would endeavor to teach them, by
furnishing farmers, mechanics, school-teachers, &c., the arts of the
"white man," and fit them for association with the civilized.

It is not difficult to perceive that the first step which must be taken,
to cause the Indians to adopt the customs of our people, is to fortify
them, to the extent we are capable of, against such diseases as may be
brought to this country by our commerce with foreign nations, and to
endear them to us by protecting rather than to estrange them by the
fear they would have of our diseases.

I do not think it is the will of our government to destroy the Indian,
(although we know that of many tribes there is not now one drop of
their blood flowing in the veins of any man living) for the generous
policy of the giving to them flour and meat, implies that the govern-
ment would not let them perish of hunger in California. Surely it would
scarcely be consistent if they were permitted to perish of a disease,
which could have been prevented.

The holy fathers of the Catholic church, in the missions, held it as
a religious duty to vaccinate the Indians, and they vaccinated a great
number of the chiefs of the tribes of the Sierra Nevada. They ever
have vaccinated whole tribes, as in the case of "Capitan" Cornelius's
tribe.

With this manner of reasoning, I have gone forward and vaccinated
and treated, during the vaccine disease, all the Indians between the
Cahwia and Stanislaus rivers, (with the exception perhaps of a few
stragglers) according to my appointment and contract; and although,
when I have deducted the expenses I have been subjected to, from the
amount expressed in the bills, I will have made less prospectively than
I would directly by my private practice in Stockton, yet I feel pleased
that I was the selected agent to carry out an undertaking so commend-
able.

The Indians understanding from the "padres" of the missions the
object of vaccination, submit cheerfully, and in some instances crowd
around or follow me for the purpose of receiving the virus upon their
arms. They have in most instances manifested a grateful appreciation
of the act, and seem to believe that the government intends not to
destroy them, or the agents would not use means to prevent the ravages
of disease.

It is my desire, as soon as I recover from my present fatigue, to
make an extended report of the diseases of the Indians in the mount-
ains and on the plains of California, and of their medical wants, &c.,
&c., and will with pleasure forward it, should the department require
it of me.

In referring to my notes, I find that I have travelled over fifteen
hundred miles in the fulfilment of my obligations to the government.
Much of this has been on mountain trails, where many a lone traveller
has received an Indian burial. I have almost every night been com-
pelled to sleep, wrapped in my blankets, upon the ground. I have
been compelled to call to my assistance two medical gentlemen, and
have employed assistants in the prosecution of this task; this, too, in
a country where the price of grain per pound for your horse-feed
varies from twenty-five to fifty cents, and where the individual travel-
ler's expenses will range from ten to sixteen dollars per day.
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Sir, you have seen me at my labor, and been a witness to the privations, hardships and dangers I have mentioned, for you too, sir, have experienced many of them.

In conclusion, I beg to assure you that my original price, before you reduced it by the contract, would have been reasonable and just, and my private practice in Stockton, in a financial point of view, would have been more valuable to me than the contract.

I have the honor be, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

W. M. RYER, M. D.

Col. ADAM JOHNSTON,

U. S. Indian Agent, California.