

REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONER OF INDIAN AFFAIRS.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,
Office Indian Affairs, November 27, 1851.

SIR: The limits of a report of this description will admit only of a very general and summary view of the condition of our Indian affairs, and the operations of this branch of the public service during the last twelve months. For detailed information reference must be had to the documents herewith, consisting of the reports of superintendents, agents, missionaries, and others, which contain a mass of facts and speculations, curious, interesting and important.

In the last annual report from this office, allusion was made to mutual aggressions on the part of the Sioux and Chippewas, attended by melancholy incidents of Indian barbarity and folly. In despite of all efforts to prevent it, similar occurrences have taken place within the last year, by which both tribes have suffered, more or less, from depredations upon their property, and in the murder of a number of their men, women and children. No treaty arrangements among themselves appear to be regarded, or are of sufficient force to prevent the deadly enmity which exists between the two tribes from manifesting itself, as often as opportunity offers, in the most shocking atrocities. With this exception, a gratifying degree of order has prevailed among all the tribes with whom we have defined and established relations, and who have felt the controlling influence of the government in directing their pursuits, and in the management of their affairs. Towards our own citizens all have been peaceful and friendly. Most of them have readily yielded to the policy and measures of the department for the improvement of their condition; and such are the advances many of them have made in civilization, that flattering encouragement is not only afforded for continued effort on the part of the government and its agents among them, but on the part, also, of benevolent Christian missionaries, who, with commendable and self-sacrificing spirit have been engaged in imparting to the various tribes the divine truths of Christianity.

During the past summer treaties have been made with various bands of the Sioux Indians, by which they cede a large and valuable extent of country west of the Mississippi river, in the Territory of Minnesota and State of Iowa. To the treaties themselves, and the report of the commissioners on the part of the government by whom they were effected, you are respectfully referred for detailed information concerning these important negotiations. In view of the rapid spread of the white population in the State and Territory within which the lands acquired by these treaties are situated, the growing discontent among the warlike Indians from whom they are obtained, embroiled, as they often are, in difficulties with the Chippewas, and threatening more and more the peace of the frontier in that quarter, the extinguishment of their title to the lands now ceded has long been a subject of serious consideration and desire by the government.

A considerable number of the Chippewas who had continued to reside on the ceded lands east of the Mississippi, in Wisconsin and Minnesota, since the treaties of 1837 and 1842, have been removed during the present year. Indeed, with the exception of the Anse and Vieux Desert bands, together with a portion of the Pellican lake and Wisconsin river bands, an entire removal has been effected. The chiefs and about one-half of the

son made good crops of corn, and are in a fair way of bettering their condition. By reason of intermarriage and association with the Iowas, to whom these Winnebagoes seem much attached, the most friendly relations exist between them, and all seem anxious that their connexion shall not be disturbed. On the part of the Iowas much devotedness and generous feeling have been displayed, illustrating in a highly creditable manner the sincerity of their friendship for these sojourners of another tribe among them. On several occasions they have gone so far as to request the agent to allow the Winnebagoes to participate in their annuities equally with themselves. This rare evidence of disinterestedness and generosity is of itself sufficient to commend the wishes of these Indians to indulgent consideration on the part of the government; and, when it is considered that these Winnebagoes have manifested an unconquerable aversion to the country assigned to their tribe in Minnesota, it may well be doubted whether the interests of the government and the Indians will not be promoted by permitting them to remain where they are. But it is apprehended by some that serious difficulties may result from the adoption of this policy; while, on the other hand, it is certain that their removal to Minnesota cannot be effected without considerable expense and trouble. No little diversity of opinion exists in relation to this subject, and it presents one of the legionary cases arising out of our Indian relations, in which it is impossible for the department to ascertain with certainty what should be done.

The three commissioners appointed by authority of Congress to negotiate treaties with the Indian tribes in the Territory of Oregon entered upon the duties of their commission in February last. They report that the Indians on the Willamette and lower Columbia rivers are peaceably disposed, but that other tribes north and south of those rivers are wild and fierce. Six treaties have been negotiated by them with the various bands of Calapoogas and Mormalles, allowing all the bands reservations on the west side of the Cascade mountains. The Indians refused to have any of their money set apart for agricultural and school purposes, except the Twallalty band, who consented to have a small portion of theirs appropriated for the purchase of agricultural implements. Many of them are good farm hands, and labor in that capacity for the citizens. They profess to be anxious to adopt the habits and customs of civilized life. The country ceded in these treaties comprises that part of Willamette valley, extending southward from Oregon city to Mary's river, and is represented to be the most valuable and thickly settled part of the district.

The commissioners, by whom the treaties referred to were negotiated, being informed by this office that their functions had been abrogated by a recent law of Congress, the commission was dissolved, and the duty of prosecuting negotiations with the Indians in Oregon was imposed on the regular officers of the Indian department in that Territory.

Superintendent Dart reports that he met a delegation from almost every tribe east of the Cascade mountains, and all, except the Snake and Rogue river Indians, were submissive to his authority; and he considers the Indians generally, in Oregon, as the most temperate, peaceful, and easily managed of all our wilder tribes. He has been successful in negotiating several important treaties with them, which are represented as highly advantageous to the government, but they have not yet been received at this office.

From our agents in California much interesting information has been

received concerning the Indians in that State, but it is unfortunately of too desultory a character to be entirely satisfactory. A number of treaties have been made with these Indians; embracing from eighty to ninety tribes or bands; and although considerable opposition by citizens of California to the measures of the agents has been exhibited, yet there is reason to believe that much good has resulted from their efforts to put a stop to hostilities, and secure peace for the future between the whites and the Indians. Of the necessity or expediency of the particular measures adopted by them for this and other purposes, it is difficult, at this distance from the scene of operations, to judge with confidence, especially as there is on some points a difference of opinion among the agents themselves.

In the treaties negotiated with the Indians in California and Oregon there are novel provisions, the practical operation of which cannot be foreseen. Whether they shall be ratified as they stand, is a question which will, of course, be duly considered by those whose constitutional province it is to determine in what form they shall become a part of the supreme law of the land.

The means heretofore placed at the disposal of the department, applicable to Indian purposes in California, have been manifestly inadequate. It is quite evident that, without the expenditures of large sums of money, our Indian affairs in California and Oregon cannot be properly conducted; and in this connection I respectfully suggest the policy of passing a law establishing the office of Assistant Commissioner of Indian affairs for that State and Territory. A general and controlling power, more direct than it is possible for this office to bring to bear, is of the highest importance in the adjustment of our relations with the numerous tribes of Indians in those remote portions of our wide-spread domain.

It will be seen from the reports of the Governor and ex-officio Superintendent of Indian Affairs in New Mexico, that no material change has taken place in the condition of our Indian relations in that Territory since my last annual report. The apparently slow progress which has been made in the work of establishing friendly relations with such Indians of the Territory as have been for years plundering and murdering the inhabitants without fear or restraint, may be justly attributed to a combination of circumstances over which the officers of this department have had no control. The country itself, wild, desert and mountainous; the savage nature and untamed habits of most of the Indians who roam over it; the lawlessness of many of its other inhabitants, often more reckless than the Indians themselves; the scattered, mixed, and heterogeneous character of its population in general—all tend to produce a state of things so discreditable and deplorable, as to render its acquisition a misfortune, and its possession a reproach to the government. To remedy these evils, liberal appropriations of money, and a more vigorous and untrammelled exercise of authority by the civil officers of the Territory, are indispensable.

The usefulness of the agents in New Mexico has been seriously impaired by their failure to obtain from the military the usual facilities. Without the means of transportation, and the escorts necessary to enable them to penetrate the Indian country with safety, it has been impossible for them to go where their presence was most needed, and the good of the service required. It is always to be desired that the utmost harmony and concert of action should prevail among the various officers and agents of the government in any way entrusted with the management of our Indian affairs; and