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Memorial of Stephen R. Riggs et al

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INDIAN WARFARE.

MEMORIAL

OF

STEPHEN R. RIGGS ET AL.

FEBRUARY 5, 1840.

Referred to the Committee on Indian Affairs.

To the honorable the Senate and House of Representatives in Congress assembled :

Your petitioners would represent to your honorable body the great evils resulting to the Indian tribes on your northwestern borders, from their own continued wars of retaliation and revenge.

War in all its forms and circumstances, is a dreadful demon, which blows its deadly breath on whatever is pure and beautiful of earth ; but from our earliest years, we have attached something peculiarly horrid to its spectre, when holding the tomahawk and scalping knife. Nor is savage warfare rendered less horrible by being placed in the midst of its scenes of blood and carnage—seeing daily the trophies of victory and the dance of triumph, or hearing the wailings of such as have lost their friends by the enemy's hands.

Since we have been placed by the providence of God, in the territory of the Sioux or Dakota Indians, the sounds of war and rumors of war have but too often fallen upon our ears. I speak particularly of that portion of the Sioux who dwell on the Mississippi and Saint Peter's rivers. These maintain a continued offensive and defensive warfare with the Chippewas on the north, and the Sacs and Foxes on the south. Or rather each party consider themselves as always acting on the defensive. When and by whom the first offence was given, cannot now be ascertained. And if the dead of past centuries could be called up, the solution of this question would be equally difficult. At present, each party is confident that on the principles of retaliation, or even self preservation, they have just cause for all and more than all the murders they commit.

With these feelings it cannot be matter of surprise, that but few months pass together, without an attack from some quarter, and such an attack is not soon forgotten, nor long neglected.

In this way, of ten whole lodges of men, women, and children, are killed, and their scalps carried home to give spirit to the dance.

It is to such a system of savage slaughter that we would direct the attention of your honorable body, and ask, "Can nothing be done?"

So long as forts are engarrisoned among the Indian tribes, can they not be made more effectual in preventing hostilities between people speaking different languages? It is very evident that, let your Indian agents do all they can, by the exertion of their influence, to prevent the destruction of the Red

men, something more is necessary. And even the presence of United States troops, under the present regulations, cannot awe them into peace. Whether the principles on which Indian relations are sustained, would permit the United States to take into their own hands the power of executions, instead of delivering them over to their enemies, as has been done, is your province to determine. *It appears to us that the manifest and necessary tendency of giving up the perpetrators of outrage to their enemies to be put to death, instead of quelling, fosters those passions which end in the destruction of human kind.*

We know the opinion of many is, better let the Indian tribes spend their force in the destruction of each other—better let their wars go on unchecked and unreprieved; for while they are at enmity with each other, there is little probability that they can cause the United States much trouble. But we cannot believe that such a scheme should form any part of the policy of Government itself. Surely, in such an idea there is neither benevolence or philanthropy; and if its justification can be found any where, it can only be in that tame and selfish expediency which, we hope, finds no sympathy either in the head or heart of any of our rulers.

In the Bible, we are told that the time approaches when "nation shall not rise up against nation," and when "men shall learn war no more." And we believe it. It is the word of Him who cannot lie. And as ambassadors of the Prince of Peace, we rely on the power of truth to accomplish these glorious promises. At the same time, we believe that God's government of the world is moral; the government of mind, by means adapted to the accomplishment of ends, and in this system of means human agency is recognised as necessary.

In the work of blessing the world, Christian governments may not be the least prominent, by confirming to society happiness and peace, instead of misery and war. There are few phases of moral evil which, in some stages, may not require governmental influence and governmental pressure. The hydra heads of the African slave trade, that monster of iniquity, carried on so long, to the disgrace of England and America, could only be lopped off by the strong arm of Christian governments. Slavery, as it exists in various parts of the world, must, finally, be nailed to the cross of ignomy by the same strong arms. And war, one of the greatest curses earth has seen, more properly than any other, refers itself to legislative action for restraint and annihilation. Oh! what untold glory and unthought-of honor will be awarded to that nation, which in the midst of earth's carnage, steps forth and waves its peace-banner over the world! Such a nation will inherit the blessing of Him who said "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall inherit the earth."

We submit it then to the wisdom of a nation's councils, to devise some methods for checking more effectually savage warfare. We commend this subject to your benevolence and humanity, with the prayer, that as God has given you the power to legislate, you may be enabled to exercise it for the happiness and salvation of the poor Indian tribes, and that under your influence, peace may triumph.

And thus will your petitioners ever pray.

STEPHEN R. RIGGS,
ALEXANDER G. HUGGINS,
GIDEON H. POND,
DANIEL GAVIN.

LACQUIPARLE, March 25, 1839.