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Letter from the Secretary of War to the Chairman of the Committee on Indian Affairs. Transmitting information in relation to the condition of the Indians in Florida.

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FLORIDA INDIANS.

LETTER

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF WAR,

TO THE

CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS.

Transmitting Information in relation to

THE CONDITION OF THE INDIANS

IN FLORIDA.

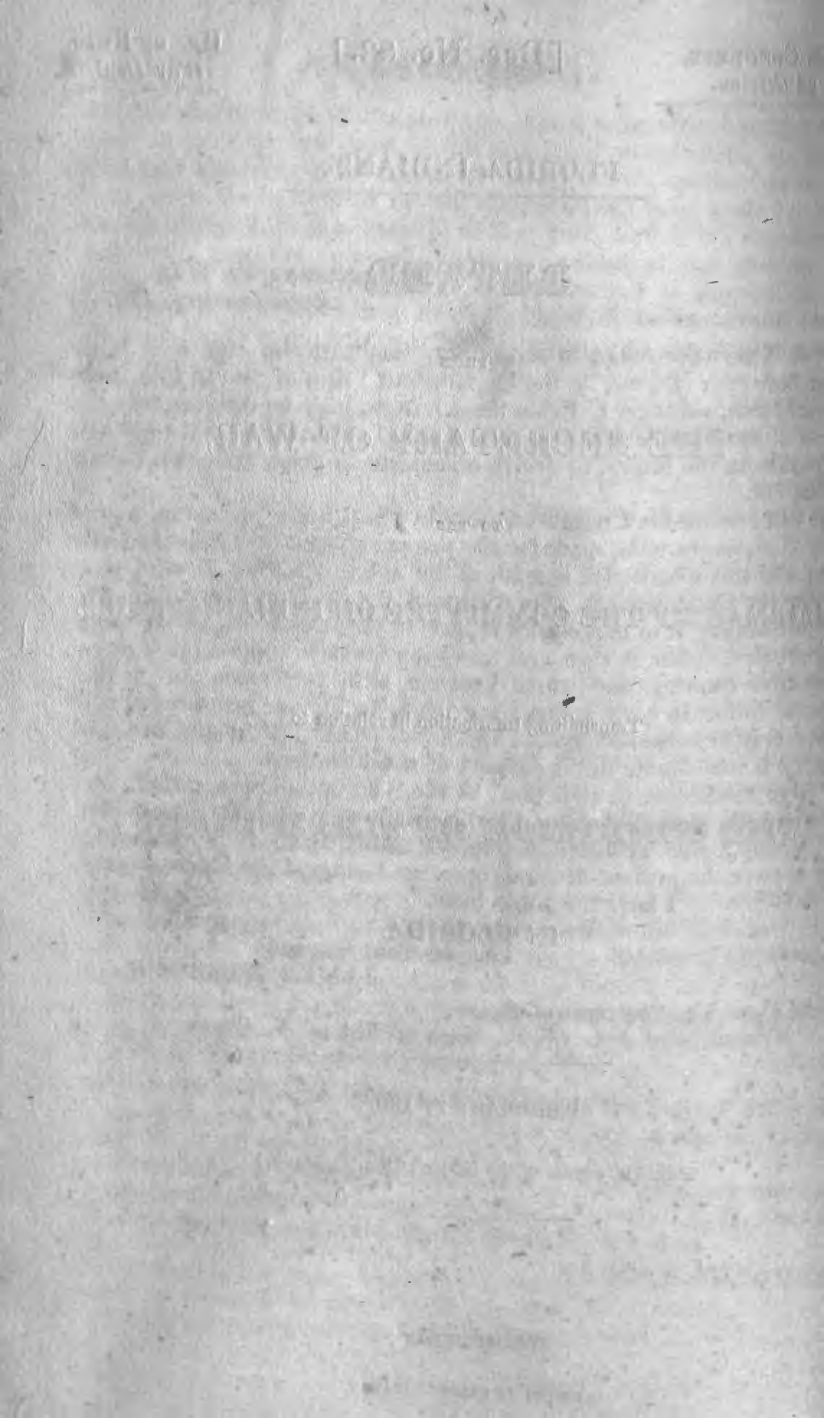
FEBRUARY 7, 1827.

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WASHINGTON :

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1827.



DEPARTMENT OF WAR,
30th January, 1827.

SIR : I have the honor to accompany this with the copy of a letter from Governor Duval, to the Department ; and of one to him, from Oren Marsh, sub-agent. From these letters, may be inferred the condition of the Florida Indians ; and the high probability that they will be unable, in the future, to derive a subsistence from either the forests or the soil.

It will remain for Congress to decide what future provision, and of what kind, ought to be made for the preservation of the Florida Indians ; and this disposition is made of the subject, with a view of possessing the Committee a knowledge of the existing state of things, and of enabling it to make such report to the Congress, as the case may require, either in a general provision for their removal to a more productive country, and which I esteem to be preferable ; or in the event of failure in such general provision, such other measures of relief as may be esteemed best. There can be but little doubt but the country is inadequate to the support of those Indians.

I have the honor to add, that, of the \$ 20,000, appropriated, by Congress, for the relief of the Florida Indians, the balance, (upwards of \$ 12,000,) was remitted on the 6th inst. ; which, it is presumed, may answer the present demands upon the bounty of the Government.

I have the honor to be,

Very respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

JAMES BARBOUR.

To the Hon. *The Chairman of the
Committee of Ind. Affairs, House of Rep. of U. States.*

TALLAHASSEE, January 9, 1827.

Indian Office.

Col. THOMAS L. MCKENNEY,

General Superintendent of Indian Affairs :

SIR : I have the honor to transmit to you a copy of a report from the sub-agent, Oren Marsh, on the subject of the disposition and temper of the Seminole Indians. I am convinced that the Mickasukee tribe are hostile, and that they never will remain within their limits, except by force : no other part of this nation has given so much trouble as this tribe. I know them well, and can assure you they are most abandoned and lawless Indians. They will do mischief if not intimidated ; and I must advise that a competent military force be stationed near the Agency. I have found it necessary to order out the sub-agent, Major Phagan, with another party of the Appalachicola warriors, to arrest all wandering Indians West of the Suwannee. Major Phagan is an excellent man, and valuable officer ; he divided his party, and, without doing any injury to Indians, he succeeded in driving out of the Ocella swamps, the Indians who were concerned in the late murder ; and a part of his men, under an active and brave young man, a Mr. Downing, succeeded in capturing two Indians, who now are in gaol, that were concerned in, or knew of the murder committed on the two Parises, lately murdered in Georgia. I hope from these prisoners to obtain the necessary information of the whole of the party that were concerned. The militia and the Indians, who were called out, have behaved well, and are all discharged. No other Indians, than those I reported to the Secretary, have been killed or injured, and those were part of the company who murdered Mr. Carr's family. The prisoners here are treated with humanity, but are strongly guarded, and will be examined in a day or two, when I will communicate to the Department any information which may be obtained deserving of notice.

Owing to the recent troubles, the expenses of the Indian Department have been greater than would otherwise have been. But the Secretary will see that the state of affairs did not permit me to consult him on the subject of the expense, as it was unexpected, and delay might have been as injurious as it would have been imprudent. I have no fear of general hostilities ; but danger is apprehended from the marauding bands of the Mickasukee tribe. The whole report of the sub-agent shews that, from these Indians, our frontier settlers have much to fear.

I am, very respectfully,
Your obedient servant,

WM. P. DUVAL.

FLORIDA AGENCY, *January 1st, 1825.*

To his Excellency WM. P. DUVAL,

Governor of Florida and Superintendent of Indian Affairs:

SIR: Agreeably to your instructions, dated December 2d, 1826, I assembled the Chiefs of the Seminole nation, and delivered to them the talk from your Excellency.

The situation of these People is truly deplorable at present, in consequence of the loss of their crops the last season, and the difficulty of obtaining their natural means of subsistence; game, of every description, is very difficult to be found in the nation.

It is a well known fact, that deer, in this part of Florida, always was much less in size, and fewer in number, than in the Northern and Western parts; and, since the removal of the Indians from those parts, nearly all the deer, as well as other kinds of game, is destroyed.

It is also certain that this climate is not adapted to the growth of corn in the most promising seasons; this last fact can be clearly shown by experiments which have been made in the Alachua settlements, which is from twenty-five to fifty miles North of this place; the white inhabitants who have been settled on some of the best lands in that section of the country for five years, with from ten to fourteen slaves, have not been able to make their own provisions, and they cultivate scarcely any thing else.

Many of the Indians in the nation planted corn enough, or land enough, to have made two hundred bushels each, if the climate had been equal to that of any other State in the Union; and, in consequence of the drought and excessive heat, which is prevalent in the country, and the difference of climate, they made not more than five to ten bushels, and many not that much.

The Chiefs of the nation are, also, peculiarly distressed at this time, on account of the disobedience of a great portion of the Mickasukee tribe, who have been absent from the nation nearly a year, and who seem determined not to return to their limits; several of the emigrant Chiefs, (but not those of the Mickasukee tribe,) have been travelling night and day, in search of these abandoned wretches, for the purpose of persuading them to return, while their own families have been starving at home, but have not been able to succeed in getting any into the nation, or but few of them.

The Chiefs have been informed of the outrages committed by their People, and that they could expect no favors to be extended to them by the Government until the offenders were given up.

All the Chiefs that were present declared their intention of joining any detachment of the United States' troops that might be sent against those who have been guilty of breaking the laws of the white People, or their own; and my opinion is, that all the Chiefs, except one, is as friendly towards the whites as they ever were; but there is one that I have my doubts of, and, in a few days, I will inform you of the result of an investigation which I am making, in order to ascertain what

his feelings are. It is the wish of all the Chiefs, except the one alluded to, that all the differences between them and the whites, should be settled as soon as possible; and they will, in my opinion, do every thing in their power to have the murderers of the whites taken and given up.

These Indians have suffered much since the cold weather set in, and must, before they will be able to make crops again, perish with hunger; if a small supply of provisions could be furnished to them soon, it would add more to their contentment than any thing that can possibly be done; and it would have the effect to facilitate the arrest of those who have been guilty of offences against the laws, for, in the present situation of almost all the Indians, they cannot, (if they wish,) pursue a man far, without something more, and better, to subsist upon than they have, or can obtain, for themselves; and it is a fact, that almost all those who have been out of the lines, have supplied themselves with corn, and other provisions, by stealth, from the whites.

It appears to me, therefore, that, if the balance of the \$ 20,000, which was appropriated by an act of Congress, of 22d May, 1826, was applied to the purchase of provisions, and furnished to these miserable beings, it would be the means of bringing them to a sense of their situation, as well as furnishing to them an evidence that the Government is willing to fulfil their promises to them, and that they intend to have their obligations to the Government also fulfilled. They were informed, last July, that \$ 20,000 had been appropriated by the United States for their relief; and they are, also, aware that not more than one-third of that sum has been applied to their benefit; hence they have reason to expect the residue as soon as it is convenient for the United States.

Very little distinction can be made in the distribution of those supplies when received, as the whole nation is suffering alike; it is true, that some of them have small stocks of cattle and hogs, but all are destitute of bread stuffs.

The Chiefs have requested that they may receive their annuity, for 1827, in cash. I am certain it will be a great favor to them to get it in this way, as, from experience, they have found that they cannot make an equal division of it otherwise. These few remarks and suggestions are, most respectfully, submitted to your Excellency, by

Your most obedient humble servant,

OREN MARSH, *Sub-Agent.*