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Letter of the Secretary of the Interior to the Chairman of the Committee of Indian Affairs, transmitting a communication from H. B. Whipple, Bishop of Minnesota, to the President of the United States, in relation to Indian affairs in that state, recommending the adoption of measures for their improvement.

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LETTER

OF

THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR

TO THE

Chairman of the Committee of Indian Affairs, transmitting a communication from H. B. Whipple, bishop of Minnesota, to the President of the United States, in relation to Indian affairs in that State, recommending the adoption of measures for their improvement.

APRIL 1, 1862.—Referred to the Committee on Indian Affairs, and ordered to be printed.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,

March 31, 1862.

SIR: The President has sent to me a communication from Bishop Whipple, of Minnesota, in relation to Indian affairs in that State, with a request that I shall give the subject special consideration.

As the remedy for the evils complained of can only be attained by the legislation of Congress, I beg leave to refer to you a copy of the bishop's letter for your consideration.

I respectfully suggest that the most effectual remedy for the evils complained of will, in my judgment, be attained by such legislation as shall accomplish the following objects:

1. To consolidate and place the Indians upon reservations of sufficient extent to furnish each head of a family or single man a quantity of land sufficient to raise the means of subsistence, and so remote from the white settlements as to prevent communication with them.

2. To destroy entirely the present vicious system of trading with the Indians, and to provide that all debts and obligations of every kind contracted by Indians shall be null and void.

3. That the government, instead of paying the Indians the annuities provided for by treaty in money, shall pay them in goods, provisions, and agricultural implements, at cost prices.

4. To furnish them with suitable persons to reside upon their reservations, to instruct them in agriculture, and furnish suitable education to their children.

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

CALEB B. SMITH,

Secretary of the Interior.

Hon. J. R. DOOLITTLE,

Chairman Committee on Indian Affairs, U. S. Senate.

To the President of the United States :

The sad condition of the Indians of this State, who are my heathen wards, compels me to address you on their behalf. I ask only justice for a wronged and neglected race. I write the more cheerfully because I believe that the intentions of the government have always been kind, but that they have been thwarted by dishonest servants, ill-conceived plans, and defective instructions.

Before their treaty with the United States, the Indians of Minnesota were as favorably situated as an uncivilized race could well be. Their lakes, forests, and prairies furnished abundant game, and their hunts supplied them with valuable furs for the purchase of all articles of traffic. The great argument to secure the sale of their lands is the promise of their civilization: "You red men are poor; you have no houses, no cities, no fire canoes, or fire horses; you are not rich like white men—sell us your land and our great father will send you teachers to help you to become like us." The sale is made, and, after the dishonesty which accompanies it, there is usually enough money left, if honestly expended, to foster the Indian's desires for civilization. Remember, the parties to this contract are a great Christian nation and a poor heathen people.

From the day of the treaty a rapid deterioration takes place. The Indian has sold the hunting grounds necessary for his comfort as a wild man; his tribal relations are weakened; his chief's power and influence circumscribed, and he will soon be left a helpless man without a government, a protector, or a friend, unless the solemn treaty is observed.

The Indian agents who are placed in trust of the honor and faith of the government are generally selected without any reference to their fitness for the place. The congressional delegation desire to reward John Doe for party work, and John Doe desires the place, because there is a tradition on the border that an Indian agent with fifteen hundred dollars a year can retire upon an ample fortune in four years.

The Indian agent appoints his subordinates from the same motive, either to reward his friend's service, or to fulfil the bidding of his congressional patron. They are often men without any fitness, sometimes a disgrace to a Christian nation; whiskey sellers, bar-room loungers, debauchees, selected to guide a heathen people. Then follow all the evils of bad example, of inefficiency, and of dishonesty. The school a sham; the supplies wasted; the improvement fund squandered by negligence, or curtailed by fraudulent contracts. The Indian bewildered, conscious of wrong, but helpless, has no refuge but to sink into a depth of brutishness never known to his fathers. There have been noble instances of men who have tried to do their duty, but they have generally been powerless for lack of the hearty co-operation of others, or because no one man could withstand the corruption which had pervaded every department of Indian affairs.

The United States has virtually left the Indian without protection. Thefts, murders and rapes are common, and no one pays more atten-

tion to them than if they were swine. I can count up more than a dozen murders which have taken place in the Chippewa country within two years past. I have heard of a woman violated by a party of white devils where death followed, but there is no law to protect the innocent or punish the guilty. The sale of whiskey, the open licentiousness, the neglect and want is fast dooming this people to death, and as sure as there is a God much of the guilt lies at the nation's door.

The first question is, can these red men become civilized? I say, unhesitatingly, yes. The Indian is almost the only heathen man on earth who is not an idolater. In his wild state he is more brave, honest, and virtuous than most heathen races. He is a man with warm home affections and strong love of kindred and country. The government of England has, among Indians speaking the same language with our own, some marked instances of their capability of civilization. In Canada you find by hundreds civilized and Christian Indians, while on this side of the line there is only degradation and death. Every effort made here has brought its reward.

1. *The first thing needed is honesty.* There has been a marked deterioration in Indian affairs since the office has become one of mere political favoritism. Instructions are not worth the price of the ink with which they are written if they are to be carried out by corrupt agents. Every employé ought to be a man of purity, temperance, industry, and unquestioned integrity. Those selected to teach in any department must be men of peculiar fitness, patient, quick perception, enlarged ideas, and men who love their work. They must be something better than so many drudges fed at the public crib.

2. The second step is to frame instructions so that the Indian shall be the ward of the government. They cannot live without law. We have broken up, in part, their tribal relations, and they must have something in its place.

3. Whenever the Indian desires to abandon his wild life the government ought to aid him in building a house, in opening his farm, in providing utensils and implements of labor. His home should be conveyed to him by a patent and be inalienable. It is a bitter cause of complaint that the government has not fulfilled its pledges in this respect. It robs the man of manhood, and leaves him subject to the tyranny of wild Indians, who destroy his crops, burn his fences, and appropriate the rewards of his labor.

4. The schools should be ample to receive all children who desire to attend. As it is, with six thousand dollars appropriated for the Lower Sioux for some seven years past, I doubt whether there is a child at the lower agency who can read who has not been taught by our missionary. Our mission school has had fifty children, and the entire cost of the mission, with three faithful teachers, every dollar of which passes through my own hands, is less than seven hundred dollars per year.

5. In all future treaties it ought to be the object of the government to pay the Indians in kind, supplying his wants at such times

as he may require help. This valuable reform would only be a curse in the hands of a dishonest agent. If wisely and justly expended, the Indian would not be as he now is, often on the verge of starvation.

6. There ought to be a concentration of the scattered bands of Chippewas upon one reservation, thus securing a more careful oversight, and also preventing the sale of fire-water and the corrupt influence of bad men. The Indian agent ought to be authorized to act as a United States commissioner to try all violations of Indian laws. It may be beyond my province to offer these suggestions; I have made them because my heart aches for this poor wronged people. The heads of the department are too busy to visit the Indian country, and even if they did, it would be to find the house swept and garnished for an official visitor. It seems to me that the surest plan to remedy these wrongs, and to prevent them for the future, would be to appoint a commission of some three persons to examine the whole subject and report to the department a plan which should remedy the evils which have so long been a reproach to our nation. If such commission is appointed, it ought to be composed of men of inflexible integrity, of large heart, of clear heads, of strong will, who fear God and love man. I would like to see it composed of men so high in character that they are above the reach of the political demagogues. For myself I would like to see such men as William Welsh, Philadelphia; E. C. Larned, Chicago; S. H. Treat, Springfield. Mr. Welsh has long labored in the cause of Christian philanthropy, and is one of our foremost citizens. But I have no choice as to men, if the end can be reached.

I have written to you freely, with all the frankness with which a Christian bishop has the right to write to the chief ruler of a great Christian nation. My design has not been to complain of individuals or make accusations, bad as I believe some of the appointments to be; they are the fault of a political system rather than individual. When I came to Minnesota I was startled at the degradation at my door. I gave these men missions; God has blessed me, and I would count every trial I have had as a way of roses, if I could save this poor people.

It would touch your heart as it has my own, if you could hear their artless plea for help.

May God guide you and give you grace to order all things, so that this government shall deal righteously with the Indian nations in their charge.

Your servant, for Christ's sake,

H. B. WHIPPLE,
Bishop of Minnesota.

FARIBAULT, RICE COUNTY, MINNESOTA,
March 6, 1862.

SIR: I would not add a feather's weight to the heavy burdens of your heart, but I must plead to some one for my poor heathen wards, who have none else to plead for them. Where shall a Christian bishop look for justice if not to you, whom God has made the chief ruler of the nation?

I wrote to your predecessor, but no notice was taken of it. Will you not take a half hour to read my plea, and so instruct the department that something like justice may be done to a people whose cry calls for the vengeance of God.

Assuring you, sir, of my high regard, and every day praying God to guide and bless you, I am your servant, for Christ's sake,

H. B. WHIPPLE,
Bishop of Minnesota.

His Excellency the PRESIDENT of the *United States.*