

**CIVILIZATION AMONG THE SIOUX
INDIANS: REPORT OF A VISIT TO
SOME OF THE SIOUX RESERVATIONS
OF SOUTH DAKOTA AND NEBRASKA;
NO.7 - 2D SERIES - 3000**

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Civilization among the Sioux Indians: report of a visit to some of the Sioux Reservations of South Dakota and Nebraska; No.7 - 2D Series - 3000 by Herbert Welsh

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HERBERT WELSH

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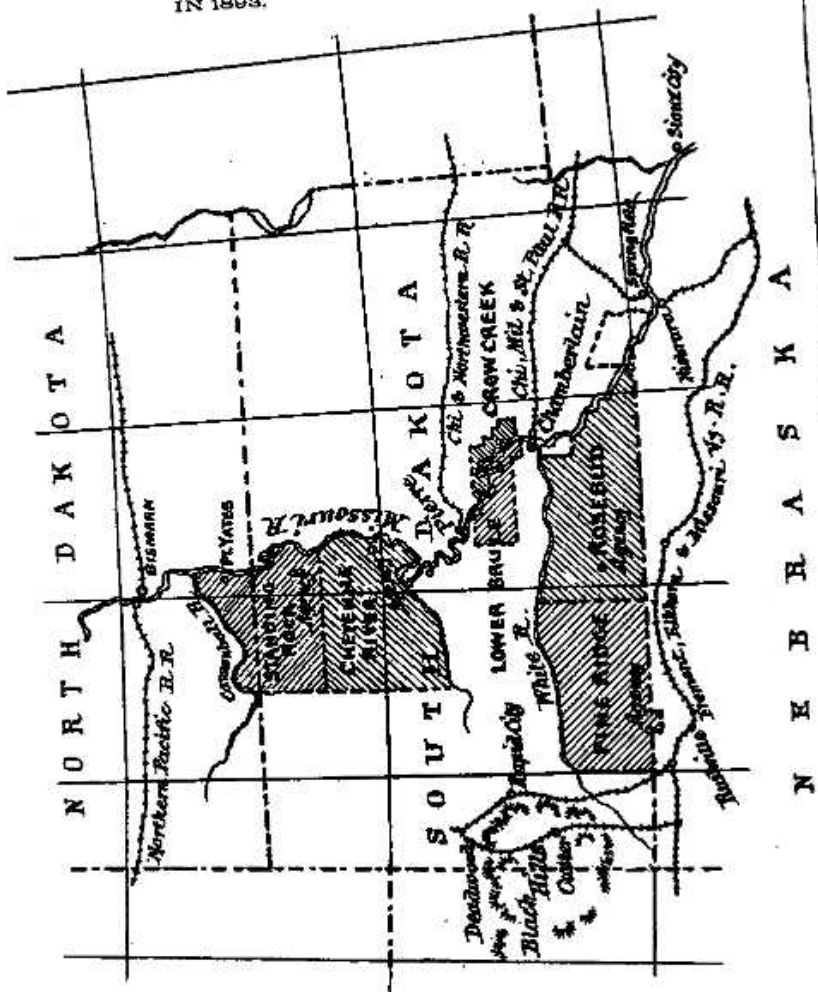
BY
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MAP
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IN 1893.



2,100
(Mar, 1924)

See also [unclear] [unclear]

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(2189)

Madeline

Report to the Executive Committee of the Indian Rights Association of a Visit of the Corresponding Secretary to some of the Sioux Reservations of South Dakota and Nebraska.

My journey during the past autumn among the Sioux was one of the most interesting and suggestive I have ever made through the Indian country, either of Dakota or other parts of the west. I started with feelings somewhat depressed, due partly to private reasons, and partly to the prospect of a long and—for the greater part of the time—solitary journey in an inaccessible region; in part, also, to apprehensions as to the condition of progress in which I should find the people in whose interests the Association works, especially those who had recently been subjected to disturbance and violence. I returned cheered and stimulated, after a six weeks' absence, by what seems to me abundant evidence that the work which has been undertaken for the civilization of the Indians is vital and real.

The observations of my journey especially impressed me with the belief that the danger-line of this work runs rather through the attitude of white civilization toward the Indian than that of the Indian toward white civilization.

It was my plan to visit a number of the Sioux reservations in South Dakota, subdivisions of the Great Sioux Reserve, which includes the following: Standing Rock, Cheyenne River, Crow Creek, Lower Brulé, Rosebud, and Pine Ridge Reservations. All but one of these, Crow Creek, lie on the west bank of the Missouri River. Until the passage in 1889 of the Sioux agreement—a treaty negotiated with the Indians by a Commission of which the late Gen. Crook was the inspiring force—the Great Sioux Reserve stretched an unbroken area of twenty-two million

acres, shaped like a boot, with the sole resting on the northern boundary line of Nebraska, the heel touching Wyoming to the west, the top outlined by the Cannon Ball River to the north, the Missouri River corresponding to the line of the shin bone on the east, while of the calf of the leg on the west half touches Wyoming to the south and half Montana to the north. But the Creek agreement cut out a great segment running midway through the reservation, leaving those portions of the Indian country to the north and south separated from each other by land which had been thrown open to white settlement. But very little of this land has as yet been occupied by permanent settlers; these have mostly taken up claims on the eastern portion of the ceded lands near the Missouri, while the western part remains either unused or in the hands of cattle men, who find upon it excellent pasturage for their herds.

I proposed on this my fifth visit among the Sioux, to join Mr. Theodore Roosevelt, of the United States Civil Service Commission, at Cheyenne River Agency. We were to meet during the Indian Convocation of the Episcopal Church, which was to take place at this point early in September and which was to last three days. Mr. Roosevelt planned first to spend a few days at Pine Ridge, and there to catch a glimpse of the westernmost and wildest of the Sioux reserves. Here an Army officer, Captain George LeRoy Brown, is Acting Agent. Mr. Roosevelt's object in visiting these Indians was to ascertain facts regarding the working of the Civil Service rules which were recently extended by Presidential order so as to cover some seven hundred places in the Indian service.

I reached the little town of Gettysburg, South Dakota, at the unseasonable hour of 2.30 o'clock in the morning, Wednesday, September 7th. Gettysburg is the present terminus of the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad. It lies eighteen miles east of the Missouri River, and the same distance from Forest City, a still more diminutive town connected by ferry with the Cheyenne River Agency, which is on the west bank of the river. While waiting in the office of the little hotel in Gettysburg, in the hope of getting a bed for the few remaining hours of darkness, I was surprised and delighted to discover among the passengers just starting for the early morning train, Superintendent

Meserve, of the Haskell Institute, Indian Training School. He is one of the best men in the Indian School force,—earnest, efficient, indefatigable in his effort for the education of the Indians, and one who fully appreciates the importance of a complete divorce of the Indian service from politics. Mr. Meserve faithfully and successfully resisted the determined efforts which Kansas politicians originally made to appoint their henchmen as his subordinates. The same politicians had tried to prevent his own appointment, but Commissioner Morgan fought for him and he maintained his position. Mr. Meserve told me during our hour's conversation that he was just returning from an unsuccessful hunt at Cheyenne River Agency for recruits to his school. He had gone under orders from the Department, and had found other Superintendents on the same errand, the presence of the Convocation at this point having been regarded as opportune. The pursuit of Indian children to furnish scholars for the boarding schools outside reservation limits has been very keen, and under its stress the rights of both Government and Mission Boarding Schools *on the reservations* have not always been fully respected. I think from much that I heard on this subject during my journey that there is need for a careful adjustment of the relations of the two lines of work.

The following morning I took the little train which runs down to Forest City, reaching there before noon. It was a beautiful warm September day, and as we stood on the grassy, rolling bluffs above the broad tawny Missouri, we caught sight of the group of Agency buildings on the other side of the river, shining white in the sun. Near them on a broad open space among the hills, stretched a great semicircle of Indian tepees—three hundred and fifty in all—temporary abodes of the fifteen hundred Christian Indians who formed the Convocation of the Episcopal Church. The Convocation is held annually in the autumn; first at one Agency and then at another, as the Bishop may determine. It is growing more and more popular among the Indians, and has now come to be a religious and social event to which everybody looks forward eagerly. The people flock to it from all parts of the Sioux reserve, travelling across the country from points, in some instances one hundred, even two hundred miles distant. The Indians keenly enjoy these journeys over the great

treeless plains, once rich with immense herds of buffalo and antelope, but now wholly destitute of game; the outing itself is a pleasure to them, and the Convocation is not only a pleasure but a positive benefit, for there lonely and scattered workers in the field are refreshed and stimulated by vital contact with friends and fellow laborers; they are instructed, as well, and guided for future efforts, by debate upon the interest of the Missions and by the advice of the Bishop and his ministers.

On reaching the Agency I found Mr. Roosevelt engaged in a conference with the corps of Agency and camp school teachers, which on his side was conducted with that intense energy and sparkling enthusiasm so characteristic of him, and on theirs with equal interest if with less animation. Among other things spoken of, Mr. Roosevelt assured the teachers and other employees that they were to be protected from the illegal extortions of political assessments on their salaries, which certain political committees, as he had discovered at the Pine Ridge reservation, during the Presidential campaign, were trying to exact from employees in the Indian service. A Republican Agent—not now in office—had been assessed \$200 upon his salary, and lists even of teachers and Indian helpers had been called for so that they might be mulcted in like manner. It is but fair to say that the Democrats in their day of power did the same thing. There was a certain openness and simplicity about the way in which this business was carried on, an evident ignorance that there was anything wrong about it, which showed that echoes of reform agitation had not yet reached these primitive corners of the political field. A newspaper notice issued by Commissioner Roosevelt at Sioux City, a fortnight later, denouncing "the infamy of meanness" that would rob women and Indians of their meagre wages, and stating that the offenders would be prosecuted, broke rudely upon the primeval stillness.

That afternoon I was present at a remarkable scene. Under a rude shelter of cotton-wood boughs, erected as a shield against the hot sun, were collected together two hundred and fifty Indian women. These were members of the Woman's Auxiliary to the Board of Missions, an organization of the Episcopal Church. Back of them sat a large body of Indian men waiting to hold a conference with the Bishop, which was to come later.

The women came forward one by one as their respective Mission Chapels or localities were called out, and laid upon a table in front of the Bishop their offerings for the spread of Christian work among themselves and in distant lands. The total amount contributed was \$2237.38, about \$1000 more than was given last year; certainly a striking illustration of the fact that the spirit of generous self-sacrifice is not wholly wanting among these humble people.

Mr. Roosevelt, who had the advantage of arriving at the Agency much sooner than I, and consequently of seeing and learning more, told me that he was much impressed with the animated debate that he heard at one of the men's meetings, in which individuality of view, a sense of humor, even a reasonable and refreshing amount of quick temper were displayed.

The mischief wrought by the interference of partisan politics, and the spoils system at this as at almost every other reservation in the service is much to be regretted. There have been not less than four incumbents in the post of Indian Agent at the Cheyenne River Agency within one year.

President Cleveland must be credited with the appointment here of an excellent Agent, Dr. Charles E. McChesney, who was removed wholly for political reasons, while a politician, ignorant of the requirements of the work, and unsuited to agency duties, was appointed in his place. Agent Palmer's official career terminated by a financial scandal. An embezzlement of government funds occurred, due not to any dishonesty on the Agent's part, but to the unworthiness of his chief clerk, who was his son-in-law, and to whom he trusted his books implicitly. Spoils-system appointments not only bring an unsuitable class of men into the Indian service, but necessitate a constant change of officials, and a weakness and vacillation of policy which is very detrimental to the interests of the Indians.

In relation to affairs at the Cheyenne River Agency I shall quote a few items of especial interest from the report of the Agent and Agency Physician for 1891. The present location of the Agency is at a point on the Missouri River, fifty-five miles north of where the old Agency stood. The change was made because under the terms of the agreement of 1889, popularly