

of this end, and an agreement which, after much debate, had won general approval was committed to them for presentation to the Indians. The objections of the Indians to the bill, however, were many and they were ardently pressed. Some preferred their old life, the more earnestly because schools and churches were sapping and undermining it. Some wished delay. All complained that many of the engagements solemnly made with them in former years when they had surrendered valued rights had been broken, and here they were right. They suspected that present promises of pay for their lands would prove only old ones in a new shape (when milch cows were promised, cows having been promised in previous agreements, the Indians exclaimed, "There's that same old cow"), and demanded that no further surrender should be expected until former promises had been fulfilled. They were assured that a new era had dawned, and that all past promises would be kept. So we all thought. The benefits of the proposed agreement were set before them, and verbal promises, over and above the stipulations of the bill, were made, that special requests of the Indians would be met. The Indians have no competent representative body. The commissioners had to treat at each agency with a crowd, a crowd composed of full-bloods, half-breeds, and squaw men, a crowd among whom all sorts of sinister influences and brute force were at work. Commissioners with such a business in hand have the devil to fight, and can fight him, so it often seems, only with fire, and many friends of the Indians think that in this case the commission, convinced that the acceptance of the bill was essential, carried persuasion to the verge of intimidation. I do not blame them if they sometimes did. The wit and patience of an angel would fail often in such a task.

But the requisite number, three-fourths of the Indians, signed the bill, and expectation of rich and prompt rewards ran high. The Indians understand little of the complex forms and delays of our government. Six months passed, and nothing came. Three months more, and nothing came. A bill was drawn up in the Senate under General Crook's eye and passed, providing for the fulfillment of the promises of the commission, but it was pigeon-holed in the House. But in the midst of the winter's pinching cold the Indians learned that the transaction had been declared complete and half of their land proclaimed as thrown open to the whites. Surveys were not promptly made; perhaps they could not be, and no one knew what land was theirs and what was not. The very earth seemed sliding from beneath their feet. Other misfortunes seemed to be crowding on them. On some reserves their rations were being reduced, and lasted, even when carefully husbanded, but one-half the period for which they were issued. (The amount of beef bought for the Indians is not a fair criterion of the amount he receives. A steer will lose 200 pounds or more of its flesh during the course of the winter.) In the summer of 1889 all the people on the Pine Ridge reserve, men, women, and children, were called in from their farms to the agency to treat with the commissioners and were kept there a whole month, and, on returning to their homes, found that their cattle had broken into their fields and trampled down or eaten up all their crops. This was true in a degree elsewhere. In 1890 the crops, which promised splendidly early in July, failed entirely later, because of a severe drought. The people were often hungry, and, the physicians in many cases said, died when taken sick, not so much from disease as for want of food. (This is doubtless true of all the poor—the poor in our cities and the poor settlers in the west.)

No doubt the people could have saved themselves from suffering if industry, economy, and thrift had abounded; but these are just the virtues which a people merging from barbarism lack. The measles prevailed in 1889 and were exceedingly fatal. Next year the grippe swept over the people with appalling results. Whooping cough followed among the children. Sullenness and gloom began to gather, especially among the heathen and wilder Indians. A witness of high character told me that a marked discontent amounting almost to despair prevailed in many quarters. The people said their children were all dying from diseases brought by the whites, their race was perishing from the face of the earth, and they might as well be killed