

CHAPTER XXXIX

Custer Prospects Black Hills in Violation of Treaty - Indians not Consulted - Finds Gold - Makes Enthusiastic Report upon Beauty, Fertility and Resources of Country - His Report a Rhapsody - Perfectly Calculated to Cause Epidemic of Gold Fever - Accomplishes that Purpose.

Notwithstanding the troubles incident to the survey and construction of the Northern Pacific railroad, 1874 opened up very quietly in the Indian country. Christian C. Cox, a special commissioner sent out by the Indian department to investigate conditions among the Dakota Indians, visited all of the agencies and reports: "I was received with marked cordiality and while smoking with the chiefs the pipe of peace, conversed freely with them on subjects of interest to themselves and of their relations to the general government. There was no reserve and much that they said added to the favorable impressions I had formed. While visiting the encampments I could be but strongly impressed with the indolent, luxurious pictures presented by their mode of life. Every tipi had its curtains of jerked beef suspended near it. The ponies grazed on the rich prairie grass on the verge young bucks were basking in the sun at the doors of their of the camp, while the lodges, dallying with their papooses. In fact, a more perfect representation of Arcadia could hardly be conceived." It was the calm before the storm.

The raids along the Northern Pacific survey during the previous two or three years had led Lieutenant General Philip H. Sheridan, in command of the department of the Missouri, to believe that he could exercise better control over the Dakotas by establishing a military post in the Black Hills. His first /⁴⁰⁸ thought was that with Fort Laramie as a base he would start his reconnoissance of the Hills, which were not more than a hundred miles distant, but visiting that post in the fall of 1873, found the Indians in no temper to permit such an enterprise. He therefore turned his attention to Fort Abraham Lincoln as the base of operation, and visiting that post in the spring of 1874, directed General Terry to organize the expedition, to make a reconnoissance in the Black Hills country, and to put