

The proposed transfer of the Indian Bureau to the War Department is now and has for the past few years been agitating the public mind. All trouble with the Indians has of late years been attributed to their mismanagement; the Indian Bureau has been shamefully maligned, and Indian agents have been so vilified, misrepresented, and shamefully abused by the public press, that it is taken for granted by many that because a man is an Indian agent he is necessarily a thief. This newspaper slandering has been allowed to continue so long that it has become almost a disgrace to be known in public as an Indian agent. The department, intending (undoubtedly) to better the service, has added to the unpopularity of agents by having Army officers appointed to inspect the deliveries at agencies. This has been of no benefit whatever to the service; but, on the contrary, the civil management with mixed military interference has disaffected the Indians to a considerable extent, by exciting suspicion in their minds and causing them to doubt the ability of their agents. Apart from this being humiliating, it is a source of annoyance to agents, who are often obliged to wait the pleasure of such officer's presence, with Indians, some from distant parts of the reservation, waiting for their supplies, who naturally get impatient upon being needlessly detained; and they, thinking that if their agent is a good man he should be all-powerful, always blame him for such delays. Aside from this, the natural interference is that the department has no confidence in its bonded and sworn agents, and that there is either a lack of ability or honesty among these civil officers, and by these appointments have conceded that Army officers are either superior in judgment, or more to be trusted and relied upon in protecting the interests of the Indians and administering the affairs of an agency. Indians being close observers, are not slow to notice this, and soon lost respect for their agent, for Indians desire that their agent should know (at least) as much as any other white man around him, and with confidence once shaken in their agent, his usefulness to them is gone. With all due respect to the officers of the Army, I claim that there are today in the Indian service as efficient and honest agents as there are officers in any other department of the government, and that Indian agents are the hardest-worked, poorest paid, and worst abused officers now in the public service.

The present method of appointing agents is certainly an improvement over the old scheme of rewarding men for political services regardless of their knowledge of Indians and the different religious bodies in nominating men for agents have undoubtedly selected good men, but that some should fail or fall short of what was expected of them is not to be wondered at when so many qualifications are necessary to be concentrated in one man. To successfully manage Indians and conduct a large Indian agency requires a man of extraordinary ability. He must be a business man, a farmer, and mechanic, together with a good judge of human nature, have great patience, and be endowed with practical common sense. Such a man, with his heart in his work, if left alone to manage his Indians, will succeed; but when set upon by designing whites who are always working up some imaginary charge or intriguing with disaffected Indians or disappointed whites to find fault with the agent, who is left alone to defend himself against all who may array themselves against him, with no encouragement or support from his superiors, being accountable, under heavy bonds, for the proper disbursement of large sums of money and property, obliged to keep complicated accounts under exacting rules, with a large amount of tiresome correspondence pertaining to the office, with a salary such as is paid to a second-class clerk--so much responsibility and labor for so little pay; no gratitude in the Indians, and no recognition or seeming appreciation of his efforts from the whites; never judged by his success, but the slightest error taken advantage of to injure him, there is certainly but little encouragement for a man to remain in the Indian service as an agent unless he wishes to see his name appear in the newspaper on the slightest pretext and be brought into ridiculous notoriety by every penny-a-line writer who lacks an article to fill his sheet or who is paid by the "em" for what he writes, regardless of its standard. While I admit that some agents have been found dishonest, and others have failed from incapacity, still I believe the majority to be conscientiously working for the best interests of the government in the elevation of the Indians, and for the good name of the religious body which they represent. I further believe that there is a better class of Indian agents in the service