

properous they will be considered self-supporting and further aid be refused. In trying to impress upon them the importance of self-improvement and calling attention to the fact that the gratuities eventually will and may very soon cease, they invariably adduce the argument that the authorities in treating with them promised that the Indians should receive the free rations and clothing then agreed upon so long as they were unable to support themselves, and that such support should continue throughout the lives of the children and the grandchildren of the treaty-makers if necessary. They are therefore loath to better their condition, especially by agricultural advancement, many of them expressing themselves that they do not wish to cultivate large fields or raise surplus crops, in consequence of which they might be dropped from the ration rolls and be obliged to support themselves thereafter. Notwithstanding that very family belonging to this agency is cultivating fields, this feeling of indifference is manifest and pervades all classes to a greater or less degree.

Recognizing the fact that the Indians holding such a large reservation in common, with liberty to roam and hunt over it, cannot but be detrimental to their best interests, and that the progressive and aggressive white man, with two powerful railroad corporations sitting down at the threshold of the reservation, will not remain quiescent in the matter, it is simply therefore, in my opinion, only a question of time until the Indians are confined within smaller boundaries, and the large surplusage of their present reservation opened for settlement, which fact I am gradually preparing the Indians for, as the inevitable that is sure to come. The question of opening the Sioux Reservation to settlement, or, at least, a contraction of the boundaries thereof having been long agitated, assumed definite form during the last session of Congress by the introduction of a bill (H.R. 4630) by the Hon. R.F. Pettigres, Delegate from Dakota, which bill provides for vacating a large portion of the Sioux Indian Reservation and opening it for settlement under the pre-emption bill and homestead laws of the United States. In the event of this bill becoming a law, I trust that the interests of the Indians will be carefully guarded and all conditions of the agreement fully explained and clearly made known to them through competent and honest interpreters, which important factor in treaty making has been too much neglected heretofore, resulting, sometimes, disastrously to the Indians and to the discredit of the government.

Whilst I strongly advocate the carrying out to the letter of all treaties with the Indian tribes, yet when the civilization of the Indians depends upon, and their best interests demand a change, I believe a modification is then justifiable, which alteration, in this case, should be made and brought about only through the means provided by the existing treaty, which required the consent of three-fourths of all adult males residing on the reservation to effect any such change. Questions may arise, from time to time, affecting one of the agencies on the Sioux Reservation, that would not be of the least importance to any of the others, yet under this clause of the treaty nothing can be done affecting any portion, without the consent of the required three-fourths of all. Much distrust and dissatisfaction is therefore occasioned by this, as was evidenced in obtaining the railroad right of way through the Sioux Reservation in 1880 and 1881, which necessitated three separate councils between the railroad officials, the officers of the Indian Department, and the Indians of this agency, and the Indians have not yet gotten through counseling among themselves in regard to the matter. The same can be said with regard to the small piece of land ceded by the Sioux last year, for use of the Poncas, in which session the Indians of only two of the agencies were directly interested, yet those of all five agencies were required to ratify the agreement, which was not effected without considerable difficulty, and annoyance.

The Indians could undoubtedly be more successfully managed, and much of this annoyance obviated by setting apart a separate and distinct reservation for the Indians of each agency, then make uniform laws for their government so that the Indians of the five agencies would all be treated alike, and make the issue of rations contingent upon industry and good behavior; issue nothing to able-bodied Indians except in payment for labor performed for themselves or for others on the reservation, of which should be made compulsory. Agency boarding schools would then be undoubtedly well filled, through which schools the Indians can only be permanently benefited, and their ultimate civilization assured.

The statistical reports are herewith transmitted.

I am, sir, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

JAMES McLAUGHLIN  
United States Indian Agent