

## REMOVALS OF INDIAN AGENTS.

INDIAN RIGHTS ASSOCIATION, Office 1316 Filbert Street,  
PHILADELPHIA, PA., Jan. 7, 1886.

RICHARD H. DANA, Esq.,

*Of the Board of Editors of the CIVIL SERVICE RECORD:*

Dear Sir,—I have just received your favor of January 2, for which please accept my thanks. You ask me to make a statement, for use in the CIVIL SERVICE RECORD, regarding the removal of Indian agents and their subordinates from office. I gladly comply with your request, since I believe that the point at issue is of paramount importance in relation to the civilization of the Indian. It may not be amiss for me to say, just here, that, in my examination of the Indian problem, I am entirely free from partisan bias. With the political views entertained by those in the Indian service I am in no way concerned. In my opinion, that service should rest upon business principles; and the officers in it should be chosen on account of their ability to perform the work which they are paid to do, and not because they have evinced zeal for this or that political party. I am personally convinced of the truth of this principle; and I do what is in my power to urge it upon others, as the result of four years' unremitting study of the Indian question. I presume that you are quite willing to accept my view of the case, so that further argument on this point is unnecessary.

The question to be answered is simply this: Does the Indian Department at present select agents and their subordinates in accordance with this principle, or does political partisanship take precedence of it and determine appointments? Up to the present time, sixty per cent. of the Indian agents in the service at the incoming of the present administration have been removed. A large number of subordinates, such as physicians, clerks, etc., have also been displaced. The number of the latter I am not able to state in exact terms. So far as my knowledge goes, in every instance the places of those who have been dismissed have been filled by Democrats. In almost every instance, the new men chosen were altogether unacquainted with Indians,—their needs or peculiarities. The large number of dismissals to which I have alluded is, of course, not conclusive evidence, but only presumptive evidence, that the Department is yielding to political pressure instead of acting upon the merit system in the matter of appointments. Permit me, however, to lay before you cases which have come within my immediate knowledge, which throw clearer light on this question. John G. Gasmann, recently agent at Crow Creek Agency, Dakota, has just been dismissed from office. The facts are these: Agent Gasmann was appointed agent of the Consolidated Agencies of Crow Creek and Lower Brulé Reservations, Dakota, under the last administration. His appointment was secured mainly through the efforts of General S. C. Armstrong, Hampton, Va. His

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In 2p  
1:19

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370.5  
In 28  
1:18

appointment was solicited simply with a view to securing a man of high moral and Christian character, long experience among the Indians, and knowledge of their needs and habits.

Major Gasmann has taken no active part in politics. During the troubles which existed last spring and summer at Crow Creek Reservation, incident to the revocation of President Arthur's executive order by President Cleveland (whereby a large portion of land which had been illegally opened to white settlement was restored to the Indians), Agent Gasmann displayed qualities which entitle him to the highest praise. He defended the rights of the Indians, with remarkable courage and patience, at a time when he was himself the subject of bitter attack upon the part of many of the border newspapers on account of the stand which he had taken. He restrained his Indians (who were smarting under a sense of the wrong inflicted upon them) so successfully that they were prevented from committing any acts of violence. I believe it was through Agent Gasmann's tact and firmness that the Department was able to carry out successfully and peacefully its plan of evicting the white intruders. The reason assigned for Agent Gasmann's dismissal by the Interior Department is his failure to remove all the intruders from the reservation. How far this excuse is valid may be determined from the following extract contained in the report of Secretary Lamar, just issued: "The Governor of Dakota states that this order has been almost universally obeyed, and that these lands are practically free from settlers. *The exceptions, if any exist, are cases in which removal would cause suffering.* Many of the settlers, I am told, went there in good faith under what they regarded as proper authority."—*Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, 1885, p. 32.

Previous to Agent Gasmann's removal, and at a time when I was visiting his agency, Mr. Dale, his chief clerk at Crow Creek, and Mr. Gregory, clerk at Lower Brulé, were removed and their places filled by Democrats. Mr. Dale's removal was made first. Having the best reason for believing him to be a man thoroughly experienced in the duties of his position and conscientious and exact in their performance, I wrote to Secretary Lamar, respectfully suggesting that he might be retained in the interests of the service. My suggestion regarding Mr. Dale was ineffectual. His successor practically confessed his inability to perform the duties of his office, and employed his predecessor for more than a month to do his work. I have in my possession the sworn testimony of three witnesses to the effect that this gentleman recently presented himself at the agency in a condition of intoxication, during which he twice offered liquor to Indians. This, as you are aware, is an indictable offence.

While I was in Dakota, during the past month of September, a letter signed by Rt. Rev. William H. Hare, D.D., Episcopal Bishop of Southern Dakota, who has labored for thirteen years among the Indians, Miss Elaine Goodale, Miss Florence Bascom, teachers at Hampton Institute, Virginia, Robert Frazer, Esq., member of the Executive Committee, I.R.A., and myself, was addressed to the Honorable Secretary of the Interior, bearing testimony to the excellence of Major Gasmann's work, and requesting for the welfare of the Indian that he might be retained in the service. All the signers of this letter had personally inspected Major Gasmann's work at Crow Creek. This letter produced no sensible effect.

In addition and in conclusion, I ask your attention to the following interesting case. Dr. W. V. Coffin has for the last two years

been connected with the Forest Grove United States Indian Training School, Oregon (now known as the Chemawa School), one of the most important in the country. During the last year, he has filled the post of superintendent of this school. Dr. Coffin is twenty-eight years of age, and is a man vigorous in body and mind. He graduated from Earlham College, and bears a high recommendation for general intelligence, efficiency, and moral character from a gentleman at that time its President, Joseph Moore, a distinguished member of the Society of Friends. He has also the strongest testimonials as to his mental and moral endowments from the President of Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania, Dr. James E. Rhoads. For further evidence as to his character and capabilities, the following letter will suffice:

DR. W. V. COFFIN, *Superintendent Chemawa Indian Training School:*

On the eve of your departure for the East, and your retirement from the superintendency of the United States Indian Training School located near Salem, we, who have with others taken a deep interest in the solution of the Indian problem, desire to bear testimony to your faithful work while in charge of said school. Familiar as we are with every detail of its management and with the character of its work, it gives us great pleasure to say that in our judgment your work has been successful in the truest sense of the word. You will leave behind you a lasting influence for good, and the direction which you have given the school will hereafter be found to be the only one which will stand the test of trial. Wherever you go you will carry with you the regard of all sincere workers in behalf of Indian civilization, and it is our hope that your services may not be lost to the cause, but that soon again you may be called to take up a similar work to that which to-day you relinquish.

With a deep and lasting appreciation of your work, we beg to subscribe ourselves, not only the friends of Indian education, but as well of yourself.

Z. F. MOODY, Governor.  
R. P. ENCHART, Secretary of State.  
EDWARD HIRSCH, Treasurer.  
A. F. WHEELER.  
FRANK E. HODGKIN, Assistant Secretary of State.  
R. W. HILL, Superintendent Indian Education under  
Presbyterian Foreign Board of Missions.  
CHARLES B. MOORE, Private Secretary to Governor  
Moody.  
SQUIRE FARBER.  
E. J. THOMPSON, Pastor Presbyterian Church.  
E. B. MCELROY, Superintendent Public Instruction.

SALEM, ORE., Oct. 28, 1885.

Dr. Coffin was removed from his position during the past autumn. At a farewell dinner given in his honor by many of the leading men of Salem, Ore., Colonel John Lee, his successor in office, a Democrat from Indiana, is reported by the *Morning Oregonian* as having thus expressed himself in a public speech: "Referring to himself, he said 'he came there through the *mutation of politics* to take the place of a most faithful and efficient man, and as he said to his wife, when he examined the work after his arrival, he was tempted to believe a mistake had been made.'" At the time Dr. Coffin was notified of his removal, no cause was assigned for it by the Department. The official notice of his suspension did not reach him until two weeks after the fact was announced in the public press. Upon visiting Washington, after his removal, Dr. Coffin inquired at the Indian Commissioner's office whether there were any charges affecting injuriously his character or official record. He was informed to the contrary. Subsequently, Honorable John H. Oberly, Superintendent of Indian Education, without solicitation on Dr. Coffin's part, stated to him that just at the time when Colonel Lee's friends were making strenuous efforts to procure an Indian appointment for

him charges of inefficiency were made against Dr. Coffin. These charges afterward proved groundless. Mr. Oberly expressed the opinion that, if he had known the true state of the case at the time of Dr. Coffin's removal, things might have been otherwise.

All of Dr. Coffin's subordinate teachers at the Chemawa School, so Dr. Coffin has informed me, have been displaced by the present superintendent, Colonel Lee, who has filled the vacancies principally with his own relatives.

The knowledge of removals and appointments, of which the above furnish an illustration, has deeply impressed my mind with the fact that the only hope for a better state of things that may reasonably be entertained is in the extension of the civil service rules to the Indian service. Until the government shall adopt a basis of action in making appointments for the Indian service which is reasonable and business-like, those three essentials to the successful conduct of any great work—intelligence of plan, vigor of execution, and permanence of result—will be wanting in our efforts to civilize the Indian. The adaptation of the reformed civil service principle to Indian affairs would obviate some of the most serious difficulties with which we now vainly contend. Are the people sufficiently interested in securing a peaceful and honorable solution of the Indian problem, as well as in a wise and economical expenditure of their own money, to demand this reform?

Very respectfully yours,

HERBERT WELSH,  
*Cor. Sec'y I.R.A.*

[It is but fair to the Department to say that, in addition to the reason assigned in Mr. Welsh's article for the dismissal of Agent Gasmann, there was a charge that he had allowed government property to go to waste by exposure to wind and rain. Mr. Welsh informs us, however, that a careful investigation by him has failed to disclose any evidence of carelessness on the agent's part. On the contrary, he has the testimony of several competent witnesses to the fact that this agency is remarkable for its general cleanliness and order.—Eds.]