

VISIT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF INDIAN AFFAIRS TO SOUTHERN UTAH.

G. S. L. CITY, May 5, 1857

HON. ELIAS SMITH:

DEAR SIR:—Yesterday I returned from a laborious, though interesting trip through the extreme southern portion of the Territory.

The purpose of my visit was to see and learn the condition, locality and character of the Pi-ute tribe of Indians and to bring certain children to this city.

The Pi-ute Indians, living in the southern part of the Territory, are divided into ten bands, each band numbering from 60 to 150, which live and roam on and adjacent to the Southern California road, from Beaver to the California line, and along the Santa Clara, Los Vegas, and the Virgen rivers. There is one principal chief, whose name is Tut-se-guvvit, whom all the bands recognize as their head. Each band has one or more sub-chiefs.

I saw all the chiefs, and many of the Indians during my recent visit. The Pi-ute Indians are not an exception to the other Indians in the Territory in regard to poverty; if there is any difference, these are the most destitute.

There is less game in the country claimed by the Pi-ute Indians than any other part of the Territory. The vegetation consists in a few scrubby cedars; cottonwoods on the banks of rivers; the cactus, bearing large pods, which, when roasted in ashes, are of indifferent taste; a few roots; some grass and weeds, the seeds of which are carefully gathered; and a peculiar shrub, called mesquite.

A few bands cultivate small patches of land; already, however, most of the land, which is advantageously located for irrigation, is occupied. By begging from the whites, and all sorts of shiftings, these Indians merely sustain life; and I very much fear that necessity has compelled them heretofore to steal cattle, horses and mules, and to commit the many crimes too fresh in our memory. I will render them such assistance, in future, as will be in my power.

There was during last winter, and still is considerable travel on the southern California road; most of which consisted in trains with goods from California for Utah Territory. This was during the season of the year when the Indians are most destitute; many, indeed, being in a starving condition, and, as I am informed, some of these trains were severely taxed by the Indians.

You are well aware that, owing to the entangled condition of affairs here, I could do but little officially until last June. Since then I have been constantly engaged among the Indians in different parts of the Territory, endeavoring with my utmost to ameliorate their condition. It was my desire to have visited the Pi-utes much sooner; this was impossible.

The awful Mountain Meadow tragedy was perpetrated in the Pi-ute country. But more of this by and bye.

On my way south I found the roads in an exceedingly bad condition, in consequence of snow, mud, tremendous hills, and innumerable rocks and stones. One wheel of each wagon and my carriage "smashed flat," besides minor accidents. Occasionally my mules would stray away; and always at a place from ten to twenty miles from any place. Patience would have been a great help, under such circumstances, but, never having, in my previous life, had occasion to very carefully cultivate this quality, I found, under these circumstances, some inducement to experiment on the cultivation of patience; which, I am happy to say, has resulted in the acquisition of a small store of that desirable commodity.

After I got south of Fillmore, on my way south, I found it difficult to procure a sufficiency of grain for my stock; for what reason I cannot tell. However, we finally got to Santa Clara.

I neglected mentioning that Mr. Rogers accompanied and rendered me valuable assistance.

I reached the memorable Mountain Meadow valley, 300 miles south of this city, Wednesday, April 14, and nooned at the spring in the south end of the valley, where the unfortunate emigrant party was camped from five to eight days.

This valley, usually called Mountain Meadows, is about six miles long and from one to three wide, running in a southerly direction, almost a continuous meadow, and excellent grass already growing throughout the whole valley. The road leading into the valley from the east goes through a narrow canyon; the road from the valley on the south turns abruptly to the eastward and passes over a considerable hill. There are two narrow outlets from the valley, besides those already mentioned, through which the water runs. The entire valley, excepting the roads and outlets above alluded to, is surrounded by high hills, with several small ravines or gulleys between broken and abrupt hills. From several points within the valley proper I could have a distinct view of anything that might be transpiring in the whole valley. There is one house in this valley, situated in the east end, where there is a corral, &c.

I have now traveled over much of this extensive Territory, and the Mountain Meadow valley is the most extraordinary formation

vest of the Rocky Mountains; probably in a higher altitude than any other valley, small or large, on the continent, yet it is a continuous and handsome meadow, furnishing grass for much stock, but in too high altitude for agriculture of any kind, and, even if it would admit of agriculture, nature has not supplied it with sufficient water, there being but two springs in the whole valley.

About the centre of the valley, in what is called the "Rim of the Basin," or the point where the water either finds its way to the Pacific or lakes of Utah Territory, nature, always profuse in making provision for the weary traveler and his stock, has, it would seem, designed this extraordinary and beautiful little valley, in so high an altitude that it can never be despoiled by the hands of the agriculturist, as a resting place, and for resuscitating the broken down stock of the anxious traveler before reaching the deserts that all travelers over the southern California road must encounter before reaching the healthful and rich California climate and soil, and on which deserts are now bleaching the bones of thousands of human beings and tens of thousands of animals.

I fear I have taken up too much space in describing the Mountain Meadow valley. But the terrible "drama" consummated in this little valley, hardly eighteen months ago, with the cries of women and children almost sounding in one's ears, must necessarily make this peculiar valley among the clouds, a subject of concernment to the inquiring mind.

I informed my then guide and interpreter (Mr. Ira Hatch) that I was anxious to see the spot where the massacre took place, and also where the dead were buried. I saw the three places where the dead are buried.

Information received from persons in and out of the Mormon Church, and observations whilst at the place, enables me to say that the emigrant party in question arrived and camped at the spring in the south end of the valley, Friday, Sept. 7th or 8th, 1857. The amount of property is estimated at from 200 to 700 head, with from ten to thirty wagons. My own impression is, that they had 600 head of cattle and about 40 wagons.

It is said the firing commenced on Monday, Sept. 10, before daylight, and that the firing was by the Indians fighting the said emigrant party then in camp at the spring, as already stated. The firing was continued, some say five, others say seven days.

During the five or seven days of firing and fighting by the Indians, the emigrant party was corralled, that is, they made a corral and temporary fort by their wagons and filled under the wheels and to the bed of the wagons with sand and earth dug in the centre of the corral. I saw the ditch and other evidences of there having been a corral. Sept. 17th, 1857, in the morning, a friendly Indian and one who could talk English, came into the corral. The emigrants having then been without water from five to seven days, made arrangements or treaty with said Indian—in which the Indians were to have the property, spare the lives of the whites, and permit them to return to Pinto Creek and Cedar city. From the spring and corral to the place where it is said they were murdered, and where I saw the graves (or imperfect holes) is at least one mile and a half.

I walked over the ground where it is supposed they were killed—the evidences of this being unmistakable from skulls, and other bones and hair laying scattered over the ground. There are there buried, as near as I can ascertain, 106 persons, men, women and children; and from one to two miles further down the valley, two or three who, in attempting to escape, were killed, partly up the hill, north side of the valley, and there buried, and three who got away entirely, but were overtaken and killed at or near the Vegas or Muddy; in all 115. I made strict and diligent inquiry of the number supposed to have been killed, and 115 is probably about the correct number.

April 15th—Arrived at Santa Clara this afternoon, and camped in town. Here I met Mr. Jacob Hamblin, who has been in my employ since last fall, collecting certain children, and other business among the Indians. Here (Santa Clara) myself and party were kindly treated during our stay—two days.

I say in the beginning of my letter that I purposed bringing to this city certain children remaining of the Mountain Meadow massacre. These children, sixteen in number, I have now in my possession. Thirteen I got in Santa Clara, at Mr. J. Hamblin's, who collected them in pursuance to my directions, and three I got in Cedar city on our way home, who were left there by Mr. Hamblin. I am pleased to say that Mr. Hamblin has discharged his duty in relation to the collection and keeping of those children.

The following is all I have been able as yet to collect of the history of these unfortunate, fatherless, motherless and penniless children:

John Calvin, now 7 or 8 years old; does not remember his name; says his family lived at Horse Head, Johnson co., Arkansas.

Ambrose Moroni, about 7 years, and William Taggit, 4 1-2 years, brothers. These also lived in Johnston co.

Prudence Angeline, 6 years, and Annie, about 3 years. These are said to be sisters.

Rebecca, 9 years; Louisa, 5 years, and Sarah, 3 1-2 years, named Dunlap.

Betsy, 6 years, and Annie, 3 years; said to be sisters. These know nothing of their family or residence.

Charles Francher, 7 or 8 years, and his sister Annie, 3 1-2 years.

Sophonora or Mary Huff, 6 years, and Elisba W. Huff, 4 years.

A boy—no account of him. These among whom he lived called him William.

Francis Hown or Korn, 4 1-2 years old.

I have come to the conclusion, after different conversations with these children, that most of them come from Johnston co., Arkansas. Most of them have told me that they have grandfathers and grandmothers in the States.

Mr. Hamblin has good reasons for believing that a boy about 8 years, and belonging to the party in question, is among the Navajo Indians, at or near the Colorado river. ~~XXX~~

My communication is already too long, but I must ask your indulgence for a few lines more.

I will keep the children under my immediate supervision, until the person appointed to take them to Fort Smith arrives.

The massacre of an entire train, not one remaining to speak of the "drama" but sixteen fatherless, motherless and penniless children, supposed, probably, to be too young to give the affair tangibility, cannot remain long uninvestigated.

The cause or reason for the commission of a crime so terrible as that of killing at least 115 persons must assuredly become a subject of inquiry with the proper legal authorities.

The Pi-Ute tribe of Indians have been and are charged with the above crime. Last August, my attention was called to the Mountain Meadow affair officially. Since then I have made diligent inquiry, got the written statements of persons living in the neighborhood, and finally visited the southern country; and now, after full inquiry and examination, I deem it to be my imperative duty to say that the Indians had material aid and assistance from whites; and, in my opinion, the Pi-Ute Indians would not have perpetrated the terrible massacre without such aid and assistance.

Mr. Jacob Hamblin and others, of Santa Clara, expressed much anxiety to bring the guilty to justice. ~~X~~

I remain, very respectfully, yours, &c.,
J. FORNEY.