

Indians Who Deserve Pensions.

I SAW recently in one of our prominent magazines a reference to what the writer was pleased to call the "murder" of Sitting Bull, the great Sioux medicine chief, who was for so many years the mainspring of hostility to the United States among the Dakota tribes, being even a greater bane to his own people than to ours.

Of course to speak of Sitting Bull's killing as "murder" is a piece of simple hysterics. Sitting Bull had always been an arch-plotter and stirrer-up of mischief. In the fall of 1890 various causes combined to bring about a condition of extreme unrest among the Sioux in North and South Dakota. Some of them were due to our own governmental mismanagement, notably to the parsimony of Congress in cutting down the needed appropriations for the Indian service, and to the working of the spoils system in thoroughly disorganizing the agency service. The main fault, however, was with the Indians themselves, or rather with that large minority of them constituting the heathen and hostile party. Among these an epidemic of ghost-dancing broke out, the leaders prophesying that a Messiah would shortly arise through whose agency the Indians would be restored to power and the whites swept off the face of the earth. Fierce, superstitious, fickle, and suspicious savages can very easily be thrown into a state of mind which inevitably results in war—a war certain to end in their own ultimate ruin, and only too apt in the mean while to entail untold suffering upon all the friendly Indians and all the white settlers roundabout. In this case the prompt action of the Government, and the skill with which large masses of troops were handled, together with the unflinching loyalty of the Indian police, and the fact that the majority of the Sioux remained steadfast in their attitude of peace, brought the war to a close with comparatively little loss of life. As always happens in an Indian contest, some of the lives lost were those of innocent non-combatants on the one hand, and of men the community could ill afford to spare on the other.

It is, however, a matter for congratulation, so long as lives had to be lost at all, that Sitting Bull's was one of the number. In 1890 he was active in fomenting the discontent, and was the most influential of the powerful chiefs who were inciting the reckless young men to hostilities. As the outbreak drew to a head, he gathered around him a band of hostiles on the Standing Rock reservation, and took up a position some forty miles from the military post, declining to come in. When it was learned positively that he intended to take all of the young men who were willing to go on the war-path, and to march overland to join the ghost-dancers at Pine Ridge, the commander, after consulting with the agent (who was himself one of the best agents in the service, with a long experience in dealing with Indians), decided to try to arrest him. Hoping to accomplish the arrest without bloodshed, it was arranged that it should be made by a party of the Indian police, a small battalion of white troops following some miles in

the rear, merely to give assistance if the police were endangered. A bloody skirmish followed. I give the facts concerning it as I gathered them from conversation with a number of Indians who were present at the fight, including both Indian policemen and members of the hostile party. For corroboration of their accounts I refer to the report of Captain Fechet of the Eighth Cavalry, commanding the battalion which came to the rescue of the Indian police.

The police, under the command of Lieutenant Bull Head, entered Sitting Bull's camp, or village, about daybreak on December 15, arrested Sitting Bull in his house, and were immediately surrounded by several times their number of furious hostile Indians. They used no violence, and did their best to persuade Sitting Bull to go with them quietly and without resistance. At first it seemed likely that he would do so; but the hostiles, including his own son, kept calling to him, and taunting him, and demanding that he ask them to rescue him. After going a few steps quietly with the police, he stopped, and began to call out to his followers to come to his assistance; and one of the latter, named Catch The Bear, shot the lieutenant of police, Bull Head. The latter immediately, and properly, killed Sitting Bull, and a desperate fight ensued, the police getting possession of the village, while the hostile Indians surrounded them under the cover of the adjoining woods and hills, and kept them prisoners until themselves driven off two hours later by the approach of the white troops. Eight of the hostile Indians were killed, including Sitting Bull, Catch The Bear, and Sitting Bull's son, Crow Foot. Seven of the Indian police were killed or mortally wounded, including their gallant leader.

The hostile Indians whom I questioned, and who had been present at the fight, substantially agreed to this account, although some of them asserted that the Indian police fired first, while others said that both the police and hostiles fired together. All agreed, however, that Sitting Bull was shot while resisting arrest, and while inciting his followers to rescue him from the hands of the police; and all agreed that he at first went quietly with the police, but was taunted by his son and other Indians until he halted, refused to go further, and began to call for help. A curious instance of the spread of our habits of thought among the Indians is to be seen in the fact that all those I interviewed, including both Indian policemen and members of the hostile party, were particular to request me to keep their names out of the papers, lest it should bring them into trouble.

Recapitulating, the testimony shows that in the first place Sitting Bull was inciting the heathen party to outbreak, so that his arrest was a matter of absolute necessity in the interests of the public peace; secondly, that with due warrant of law the Indian police tried to arrest him, acting without violence until forced to take arms in self-defense; and thirdly, that Sitting Bull was shot while resisting arrest and inciting his followers to rescue him, and only after one of the latter had himself shot the commander of the police. The killing was not only a most righteous deed, but was absolutely inevitable, and very beneficial in its results. It would be difficult to speak too highly of the loyalty and courage of the Indian police engaged, and I most earnestly wish that Congress would see that

the relatives of those who were killed while thus manfully doing their duty (in the interests not only of their own people, but of all the white settlers) should receive some pension or other reward. No white veteran, of no matter what war, can have a better claim on the Government.

Theodore Roosevelt.

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