

## RED AND WHITE ON THE BORDER.

BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT.

ALONG the line of the Little Missouri, where my cattle range, we are not brought very much in contact with Indians; still from time to time we are visited by wandering bands, and the outlying ranches are never free from a certain uneasy fear of possible inroads. To the southeast of us, in a vast tract of fertile and well-watered country, lies the great reservation of the warlike Sioux people; to the north our lands march upon those of the more peaceful Mandans and Grosventres; while bands of Cheyennes and Crows sometimes penetrate to us from the west and southwest. Although for some years none of these tribes have been on the war-path, yet their relations with the white frontiersman are at best but those of armed neutrality, and there are all the time occurring additions to the long list of injuries, wrongs and insults done to each other by the two races.

The bad feeling thus existing is partly due to lack of governmental wisdom in dealing with the Indian tribes, and in part is simply the inevitable outcome of the contact between brutal, reckless and overbearing frontiers-men on the one side and a set of treacherous, revengeful and fiendishly cruel savages on the other. As illustrating this feeling, I may speak of what goes on and is now going on in my own immediate neighborhood. In the first place the Indian tribes look on the whites with precisely the same feelings of hatred or friendship that they feel for each other; that is, just as a group of wild beasts would look upon another group. Of course I am not now speaking of "good Indians" like the Pueblos, nor of almost civilized tribes like the Cherokees, who are quite as straight in

their conduct as are the good whites. An Indian tribe will, if left free, always destroy another tribe that is much weaker than itself; and so it will a body of defenceless whites. It will, however, make treaties with tribes of equal strength; and again, so it will with the white-skinned intruders. It will resent injury or crowding from the one and the other alike; and naturally it regards the destruction or the driving out of the game on which it lives with the keenest indignation. On the other hand, the white settlers naturally and properly fail to see that there is any justice whatever in keeping them out of vast tracts of lonely wilderness, to which they have quite as much title as the red-skinned hunters who occasionally roam over them. In places in the West, the cattlemen have tried to claim for their own use many scores of square miles of territory, and some of these ranches have even been fenced in ring fences, thus enclosing sometimes as much as fifty square miles of good ground. Very properly the settlers refuse to recognize any such claim, proceeding from mere partial occupancy of a great tract of wild ground; and they have been backed up by public sentiment in the East. But there is even less reason for their recognizing the claims of Indian proprietorship, for the cattlemen have at least put on stock, expended labor on improvements, etc., while the Indians have done nothing whatever. When my cattle first came to the Little Missouri, the only inhabitants were a score or so of white hunters, who viewed the advent of settlers with grim dissatisfaction, and did all they dared to keep them out. Nobody paid much heed to their threats, or regarded the boundary lines of their imaginary

property; they were very plainly given to understand that they must run their chance with the rest, and that each could have his own small claim, that he could cultivate, and no more. This was certainly the proper course to follow as regards them; and it is difficult to make a settler understand why the measure he metes out to a set of white-skinned hunters is not also good enough for another set whose skins happen to be red.

Unfortunately, the honest settler as soon as he has established himself promptly proceeds to make common cause with every white rough against all Indians. The great trouble is that neither reds nor whites pay any attention to individuality, but merely to race. I have known a party of white hunters shoot a couple of Crows because some Cheyennes had plundered their camp; and a body of Sioux to raid a harmless settlement of grangers because some horse thieves had stolen a band of their ponies. Each party holds all of the other side responsible for the deeds of a rascally few. Thus by degrees even the decent whites get to adopt a very unfortunate code of morals by which to regulate their treatment of Indians; and they view an outrage upon the latter with perfect indifference or even approval. The one crime, par excellence, on the plains, which dwarfs all others, is horse-stealing; it is the one offence for which there is no pardon. No matter how bad a man may be, or how much he may be disposed to make a show and brag of his badness, he will yet be exceedingly wary of allowing any one to think that he can be even suspected of being a horse-thief. Nevertheless I have time and again heard men in the most mixed company boasting of, or quietly discussing, their feats in stealing horses from Indians, without the slightest attempt at concealment, and apparently without a thought that they could be accused of any wrong-doing. The rougher characters go much farther than this and will often commit gross outrages, even to killing

perfectly peaceful Indians, if there is anything to be gained by it; although such outrages are usually carefully concealed. On the other hand the Indians show quite as little hesitancy in wrong-doing whenever they think they can escape reprisals; and many so-called outrages upon Indians are in reality merely instances of the same summary revenge being taken upon a red as would also be taken upon a white offender. In the cattle country, offenses like burning the grass or killing steers are those which it is of the greatest importance to the community as a whole to see punished; and the man who suffers by or first discovers the offense is expected to take the law into his own hands. Indians are very apt to set fire to the grass, and if game is scarce will kill cattle without hesitation; if discovered in the act by any cowboys the latter are almost certain to assail them, as they would also do if they were white, and, indeed, it is hard to say why they do not act rightly. After one or two of these encounters the cowboys get to regard Indians as their natural foes; and the more reckless and lawless spirits among them then do not hesitate to attack them in any way whenever they can get a chance. It is frequently a boast with such men that they have killed Indians, almost without provocation. Still it is to be remembered that these same men would and do kill their fellow whites quite as quickly; their conduct simply illustrates one phase of frontier lawlessness. What we have to complain of, as before said, is the indifference with which their decent neighbors look on.

Among numerous other cases that have come to my knowledge I may mention the following. At one time three white horse-thieves ran off a band of ponies from the Grosventres north of us and drove them down through our county. Several ranchmen knew of it, as it afterwards turned out, but gave no information to the Indians, nor in any way hindered the escape of the thieves; yet had the

sufferers been whites, these same ranchmen would have been the first to raise the hue and cry. No allowance is made on either side for the difference with which individuals behave; the Indians will kill the cattle of a man who has always done them strict justice exactly as quickly as a horse-thief will run off the ponies of a perfectly inoffensive and friendly tribe.

Around us the main trouble arises from the size of the reservations and the lack of an adequate guard to prevent the mutual wrongs and reprisals from going on. The Indians are half pauperized by the issue of government rations; the game having been killed off, these great reservations are of no use whatever to them; and then they are allowed to wander off of them, with the inevitable result of producing serious collisions with the surrounding cattlemen and settlers. Were the reservations cut down to a fractional part of their present size, the land allotted in severalty and made inalienable, the Indians being gradually taught trades, there would be at least a step in the right direction. A comparatively small space of land would be easier guarded; the Indians would be kept much closer together, and it would be easier to protect them from wrong-doers and to prevent them from themselves breaking out. Above all it would be easier to prevent them from getting at liquor, a curse to the whites, but simple death and destruction to the reds; at present the wandering bands will barter everything, from their wives and daughters down, for rum.

When they visit a frontier town they have for their prime object a bestial orgy, and there are plenty of unscrupulous and degraded whites to help them to their wishes.

Were the Indians kept together and guarded, if possible, by army officers, they would be very quick to learn the benefits of strict and even-handed justice. Nothing can be more demoralizing than the way in which at present the fiercer spirits of a tribe escape with impunity from the effects of their own misdeeds, while perfectly harmless members are brutally maltreated by some white ruffians only to see the latter in their turn go scot free. Certainly there will have to be a change if there is to be any progress whatever on the part of the Indians. At present the bands around us seem quite as vicious and degraded and quite as little advanced towards civilization as was the case five years ago. Under a change of system such as spoken of above the majority of a tribe would doubtless fail to accommodate themselves to the altered conditions of their life, and would die out; but many, and these the best, would so accommodate themselves, and the rest would after all merely share the fate of the many thousands of whites along the frontier who are too vicious, ignorant and shiftless to work, and, like them, would perish from the face of the earth which they cumber. But if the present mode of treatment is continued the good will die out as rapidly as the bad.