

Anonymous

Some time ago an inspector of the Indian Bureau was sent from Washington to investigate certain charges that had been made against H. N. Rust, agent of the Mission Indians of Southern California. While the result of that investigation has not been officially announced, yet the manner in which it was conducted was such as to leave little doubt as to its character. A single instance will suffice to illustrate the farcical nature of the proceedings. At Palm Springs, where the difficulty that led to the investigation originated, Inspector Tinker began operations by making a speech to the Indians in which he told them that they had no rights whatever. They were not like other Indians, who had certain treaty rights, but were subject to the arbitrary will of the Government and must do exactly as the agent told them and give him whatever he wanted. If they were told to go to the top of the San Jacinto mountain and starve to death they would have to do it. They could not help themselves. With this encouraging announcement as a starter, it is small wonder that those who had complaints to make against Agent Rust prudently remained in the background and refrained from pressing the charges which they had freely made in public before. Instead of holding the investigation on Indian ground at Palm Springs it was held on the place of a white man with whom the Indians who had charges to make were not on friendly terms at the time and as a natural result they refused to attend. Furthermore, their own interpreter was dismissed to give way to one provided by the agent. Thus handicapped, the investigation became a farce, and was further made so by the conduct of the inspector in simply putting the questions to the few Indians who did attend that were prompted by Agent Rust himself.

It was owing to this fact that the peculiar methods followed by Rust in using his office as the means of making extensive collections of curios, which he has sold for many thousands of dollars, entirely escaped the attention of the special inspector. It appears, however, that Rust, ever since he secured his position of Indian Agent, has devoted a large share of his time, which should have been given to looking after his wards, to the collection of the stone implements, pottery, basket work, laces, etc., which are the handiwork of these industrious people. Instead of paying coin for these curios, however, as those do who recognize that the Mission Indians have a few rights, the special inspector to the contrary notwithstanding, Rust uses his authority, so the Indians say, to take whatever he wants without making any recompense. It is said that he seldom visits the remote villages of the Indians except when he hears of the existence of curios that he wants, and that he incontinently seizes and carries away such articles from the wickiups and homes of the Indians without so much as saying by your leave. Some of the owners of these coveted articles have become very wary, however, and now in many cases,

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as soon as they hear that Rust contemplates a visit to their rancherias, they make haste to bury in the sand or hide elsewhere their metates, pestles, mortars, baskets, laces and other objects which they know would excite his cupidity, and thus he is obliged to go away empty-handed, unless, indeed, he is so lucky as to catch some of them napping.

But bad as is the manner in which this agent uses his official authority in the collection of these valuable curios, the disposition which he makes of them is still worse. It is no archaeological enthusiasm which actuates him, but simply a spirit of commercial enterprise. In other words, he makes these collections in order to sell them at a good round price. Not long ago he disposed of one lot of curios, which included a quantity of specimens gathered from the Mission Indians, obtaining the comfortable sum of \$7000 therefor. This is the third or fourth sale of the kind that he is reported to have made since he was appointed agent, and it is currently stated that he has realized something like \$18,000 from the enterprise. When this is added to the comfortable salary received by him from the Government, it will be seen that he has made a very "fat thing" out of his official berth, and it is no wonder that from a poor man he has come to be regarded by his neighbors at Pasadena as one of comfortable means.

There is a positive inhibition against certain classes of Government employes making such collections for sale, it being required that curios and objects of interest collected while in the public service be turned over to the authorities. Whether this requirement applies to Indian agents like Rust does not appear, but if it does not, it is certainly contrary to the spirit of good government that he should be allowed to use his official position in such a manner, enlarging his private purse at the expense of the poor ignorant wards whose interest he is appointed to guard. Ever since Rust secured his office and began his systematic collecting of curios the Indians have made frequent complaint, but without avail. It is said that the special inspector who visited the agency recently had his attention called to the matter, but refused to pay any heed to it.

Another illustration of Rust's character is furnished by the attitude which he has assumed toward the St. Boniface Industrial Indian School at Banning. This school was the gift of Miss Drexel of Philadelphia and is one of the most successful institutions of the kind in the country. It was begun in 1888 under the supervision of the Benedictine Fathers and is at present under the management of Father Hahn, assisted by Father Emil and ten sisters. Upward of 125 Indian girls and boys have been gathered here from the villages of the desert which are under Rust's supervision. The Government makes an allowance for the care of 100 of these pupils, but this is no restriction upon the benevolence of the school authorities, who welcome all. The boys are taught such trades as shoe and harness making, carpentering, blacksmithing, etc., and are also instructed in farm work, the school having a fine orchard and garden. The girls are instructed in needlework and all kinds of household duties. Besides this they are given instruction in the usual branches of education and their religious wants are not neglected, as is shown by the fact that a large number of the children have already been confirmed.

Before being brought into the school these children were literally running wild on the desert. Many did not know what it was to wear clothes and all were about as degraded as it is possible for human beings to become. Now they are in a fair way to become good members of society and an honor and credit to those who have accomplished the transformation.

Surely such admirable work is deserving of the encouragement of all good citizens. Yet Agent Rust from the outset has shown an unfriendly attitude to the school. Although located adjacent to the Banning reservation and the inmates of the school are all under his charge as agent, he had never, down to the first of last month, at least, and not since so far as known, so much as paid a visit to the institution. Furthermore, he has fallen in with the cry of a few against "sectarian schools," and even drew up a petition to the Government requesting that further aid be withheld from such institutions as this at Banning. This petition he put up in the postoffice at Colton in order to obtain signers, but the people of the San Bernardino valley are too familiar with the good work done in reclaiming these savages and refused to sign it in any considerable numbers.

The San Bernardino Courier adds another chapter to the peculiar doings of Agent Rust and produces some damaging facts in regard to his conduct. There has been a long-standing dispute between Samuel N. Black, an old soldier, and Rust, in regard to the title to certain land claimed by Black near the Banning reservation and alleged by Rust to be a portion of that reservation. A voluminous correspondence ensued in which all concerned took a part. The matter was referred to the authorities at Washington, and finally Commissioner Morgan settled it by writing a letter to the Secretary of the Interior in which he stated that the lands claimed by Black were not included within the reservation and that Black should not be molested. Agent Rust was also so instructed, yet he actually had Black arrested for harvesting his own grain on this land. Black, of course, was acquitted by the jury that tried the case, but a civil suit was brought which is now pending.