

Comm

June 7, 1923.

Commissioner of Indian Affairs,
Washington, D. C..

For the personal attention of
Commissioner Burke.

My dear Mr. Commissioner:-

This spring when it was first decided to have a meeting of all the Superintendents of the Navajo country, Superintendent Brandon requested me to give a little talk before them regarding Irrigation, and I prepared a paper to cover the subject of the non-use and poor returns of the Irrigation project on this Service.

When this conference was called off, I determined to use this as a part of my annual report, on more mature consideration, I have come to the conclusion that it is of sufficient importance to bring it to your immediate attention, in order that something may be done to work out a solution of this problem, either along the line suggested, or some other line that you may have to suggest.

"The success or failure of an irrigation project is measured by the use made of the lands and the cash returns or value of the crops raised thereon.

Based upon this measure of value, the irrigation projects in the Navajo country, and one might say, in the entire irrigation district, cannot be considered at the present time as great successes.

When any business or undertaking is a failure, or falls short of the measure set for it, there is some reason behind it for this lack of success.

And when an undertaking directed by the Government lacks in any measure of what is considered success, it seems that we who have the responsibility for the success or non-success of the work should investigate and try to determine the reasons underlying this, and to see whether it is possible to find a method by which the failure or doubtful success can be turned into a full measure of what it should be, or what was anticipated.

In endeavoring to benefit the Indians, the government has directed that ~~these~~ various irrigation projects be built with the belief that the Indians would make use of the land and the water to the betterment of his financial and social condition.

Like so much of the business of the government, the desired results are not obtained. In the matter of irrigation for the Indians, Congress appropriates money and the Indian Office allots it for these various construction problems. The construction of these projects is placed in the hands of the irrigation section, the officials of which are not only expected to construct the projects but look after the operation and maintenance of the larger ones at least for some time thereafter.

This practically ends the functions of the Irrigation Service on any particular project. The supposition is that it is then in the hands of the superintendent or agency forces for all other matters concerning allotments, either permanent or tentative and the settlement of the lands. I do not know that there are any specific regulations out covering this, and it seems to be left by the Office in a very indefinite way, the idea seeming to be that if we have the land and the water together on an Indian Reservation, the Indians will voluntarily come in and take the land and make use of it.

When an irrigation project is started among white people, one of the principal things necessary is to advertise and do more or less propropaganda work to urge people to come in and take up the lands before this project can be a success. In such projects, success means financial success.

It used not to be considered that the financial returns counted for so much on the Indian projects, as they were built to aid the Indian and if his condition can be ameliorated by giving him some irrigable land, even though the cost is great or the returns comparatively small, it was felt that the money is will expended. However, Congress is now beginning to look on the matter more with the eye of a financier who is building a project for profit and with every renewal of a request for more money for a project or for any projects in a given section, the question is asked "What is this of that project doing in a financial way?" "Are the returns being made by the Indians sufficient to pay a return on the investment?"

For that reason requests for money that a few years ago would have been unhesitatingly honored are being turned down.

In what we might term the scramble for water throughout the southwest, the white man is appropriating water wherever he can get it. The division of the waters of the Colorado River by the Seven State compact, that has lately been put through, and which it is hoped, will be ratified by all the States party to it, will mean that every effort will be made to utilize all of the water of this great river system. While we claim and have made our claims stick so far, under the Winters Decision, that in case a reservation which is in the arid region which may need water for its irrigation before it is productive, the act of setting aside the reservation also reserves any water available therefor. It is also true that as the Indians do not begin to utilize this water and efforts are not made by the government to put all of the water necessary on the lands and put to beneficial use, the pressure upon Congress will become so great from white settlers, or others who are interested in getting water for irrigation, that there will be large areas of Indian lands in the water shed of this system that will eventually be deprived of their water through future action in Congress, notwithstanding the fact that the contract above referred to seems to have taken care of the rights of the Indians in Article Seven of the compact, which is as follows:

"Nothing in this compact shall be constructed as effecting the obligations of the United States of America to Indian tribes."

This being true, it is necessary to build the additional possible irrigation projects for the Indians throughout the entire Southwest.

We are then confronted with the following problem:

There are large areas of land on Indian reservations susceptible of irrigation. There are certain parts of these areas where water may be secured. In most cases there are lands off the reservation more than sufficient to utilize all of the water. In order to secure these waters for the Indian, prompt construction must be undertaken. Requests to Congress for money to build these projects are met with the argument, "First put the projects now constructed under cultivation and money will be forthcoming for the new projects desired!"

It would therefore seem to be up to the Indian Service to get these lands under cultivation as rapidly as possible for this one reason alone if no other. As I said before there have been no regulations issued by the Indian Office by which a special work can be done to bring the Indians to the land. It has been left to the volition of the Indian and such action as may be voluntarily undertaken by the agency forces. In most cases, the superintendent and agency forces have already more work than they

can successfully accomplish and any action they take in connection with the settling of the irrigation projects, unless they have special orders from the Indian office for that particular project, is very spasmodic and usually is relegated to such times as they are not busy with something else, and these times of leisure very seldom come.

Among Indians who are living in small settlements or the village dwelling Indians where the irrigable land is very close to their regular habitation, a great deal of propaganda is unnecessary. But in the case of the nomadic Indian, such as the Navajo, who is scattered over a tremendous area of country, whose habitation is moved from place to place as his flocks require, who is substantially a sheep herder and stock man, it will be much more difficult to get these people to take up a small tract of say, ten acres of land, and put it under cultivation inasmuch as their interests would then be divided as between their flocks out on the plains or in the mountains and the little tract of land that would seem so small to them in comparison with the range.

The Indians are creatures of custom and will not voluntarily break these customs unless it is shown them conclusively that their condition will be much improved thereby. To get them to leave the range where their flocks and herds are and get them to settle down on a very small tract of irrigable land is something they have not been accustomed to and in order to get them to come and take the land and cultivate it for the short period of time during the growing season will need a great deal of urging and arguing. Of course, the more who go onto the land and make a success of it, the greater the influence will spread without active work by the Service.

This matter of the settlement of Indian lands on the irrigation projects has come up at other times and there has been some discussion between myself and individual superintendents. It is not to be construed, however, that anything personal has been intended in any case other than a desire to see the fullest use made of land and water where it has been made available. If at times I have seemed to rather insinuate that it was the fault of the agency forces that the land was not settled more rapidly it was with the feeling that if the settlement of the land was not in the hands of the Irrigation Service it must be in the hands of the only other forces on the reservation. But the more the matter is considered, the more it seems that the agency forces have their hands full of other work, and so are not the ones to look after the settlement of these lands in the way that it should be done. After long thought and careful consideration the following solution, if the question can be solved and it is believed that it can be, is offered:

That as soon as an irrigation project has reached a point where water can be furnished to some of the land, the Indian Office should appoint a man, whose duties would be to go among the Indians and get them to come in to the project, settle on the land and commence cultivation. It is immaterial whether this man be under the superintendent or under the irrigation forces; and it is possible that better results would be obtained if he were not under either one, but directly responsible to the Indian Office and directed to work absolutely in harmony and cooperation with both agency forces and irrigation forces to accomplish his end.

This man should not only have the authority to urge and advise the Indians, but should be authorized to make tentative allotments of irrigable tracts and in all cases where there might be a necessity, of assisting the Indian financially in getting his tract in shape by giving handtools or seed or any of the other reimbursable equipment, that he be authorized by the Indian Office to do this, or do anything else of a similar nature that will tend to make the project a success.

On the larger projects one man would more than have his hands full in getting the project settled up. On some of the smaller projects where there are only a few hundred acres of land one man might look after several, but the main idea is to use intensive work and get the land producing something at the very earliest possible time.

I have found in presenting questions of this kind to the Indian Office that the strongest argument that can be brought up is to put the question as nearly into a financial statement as possible, so that it will show up in dollars and cents, in gains and losses. If you will bear with me I will give you a few figures which are based on some actual conditions in the Irrigation Service.

Without naming any particular project, there happens to be one in one of the Irrigations Districts upon which certain figures were made a few years ago, and it will be used as an illustration of the loss to the Indians by allowing these various projects to remain unsettled for a long period of time after they have been completed. This project has approximately 4000 acres of land and from the time that the water could first be put on a few acres, six years had elapsed during which time some thirty allotments of ten acres each had been made. This may seem a small number to get on an irrigable tract in that length of time, but it is better than has been done on some of the other projects. At that rate of settlement, an average of 5 a year, it would take 38 years to get the entire tract under cultivation.

To the government, we might ^{say} ~~say~~, that there is ⁷⁰⁹⁵ ~~less~~ each year in the operation and maintenance of this project, because with the area that ^{is} ~~is~~ that there is under ditch, the canal must be

operated each year and the cost for operation for about 20% of the area is almost as great as it would be for the entire tract. This in itself is a bad showing to make before Congress. This particular project lies in a favorable locality and the value of the crops raised is fairly high. We do not know exactly what the Indians can raise on his land, but from the best information on twenty different projects, we find that their produce per acre runs from about \$12 to \$46 per acre during one particular year, with an average of about \$19.00. From a statement made by the Hon. F. G. Tracy of Carlsbad, the average crop produced in the Pecos Valley from irrigated land is \$42.50. The average produced of the irrigable lands throughout the Southwest is practically as much; while the production throughout the United States will average \$14.52, which includes irrigable and non-irrigable land.

On this particular project for the year already quoted, the production was estimated to be a little over \$28.50 an acre. Just for the sake of argument, let us estimate the value of the crops on this project to be about \$20.00 per acre per annum, which would only mean that each allottee would raise \$2000 worth of produce. Allowing an average settlement on this project each year of the same percentage that had been for the past, there would be raised on the tract for all of the land under cultivation by the time the whole project was settled up, \$720,000 worth. If under our plan of an immigration man, estimating that the entire 4000 acres of land would be under cultivation in a period of five years, and that does not look at all out of the way, the produce at the end of the same period of time for the Indians would have amounted to \$1,345,000.

These are only tentative figures, used as an illustration, but if on one project within the working life of any one Indian, we can cause a group to produce for themselves a million and a third in actual dollars or crops whose use will be equivalent thereto, a great work, has been accomplished and the Indians have been lead a long step toward what we fondly believe is civilization.

You probably remember what Dean Swift says about the man who can make two blades of grass grow where only one blade grew before, and if the cooperation of those in the Indian Service can make a few million dollars worth grow on land where none grew before, they will have justified all of the work necessary and the money that is expended in doing this."

I trust that I will be pardoned for taking so much time in this matter, but the importance of the subject seems to me to be fully worth it.

Sincerely yours,

EPR'Q

Supervising Engineer.