

LETTER FROM MR. WILLIAMSON.

GREENWOOD, DAK., September 3, 1877.

DEAR SIR: Your letter of August 8 is received. \* \* \* My observation of the Sioux Indians since my childhood, forty years ago, leads me to think that the vision of the last Indian jumping into eternity toward the setting sun is a poet's dream of the distant future.

Forty years ago the Sioux were supposed to number 25,000, which was probably an overestimate, as it was based on the number of lodges, the rule being to count ten persons to a lodge, which I think very seldom the case. Now, the Sioux are estimated at 50,000, though 40,000 would probably be a better count, and as near the truth as 25,000 was forty years ago, which would show an increase of 60 per cent. in forty years. This increase, however, is with a tribe that has yielded but little to civilization.

In changing from a savage to civilized life there is always a great check to the growth of any people. I look upon the Indians in their several stages about thus:

1. In their wild state they increase quite rapidly, unless disturbed by some violent agent, as war, famine, pestilence. The wildest portion of the Sioux tribe has been the Titanwan, including the Sicangu, Itazipcho, Sihasapa, Minneconjou, Oohenopa, Oglala, and Hunkpapa bands. These have had the least intercourse with the whites, and have not planted, but have suffered comparatively little from famine, living in the best buffalo country in America. And they have increased the most rapidly. They have probably more than doubled in forty years, now numbering about 25,000; though Sitting Bull allows no census-takers in his camp. My observation, as well as the testimony of the Indians, is that they are much more healthy when they roam at large and live on wild meat, than when they are confined for a long time in one place and fed on white man's food.

2. The first effect of a change to civilized life is no doubt to diminish their numbers. Intercourse with whites brings in new diseases that are very fatal, especially those connected with licentious habits. Enriched diet and confined habits increase the fatality of all their diseases. The introduction of strong drink sweeps off many more. The very change produces a dissatisfied state of mind, which is unfavorable to fecundity or long life.

3. These causes, however, do not at all necessarily lead to their extinction. The transplanting of a tree will certainly retard its growth for a time, but, if it be placed in a better soil, it may in the end more than regain itself. So with the Indians. Were all deleterious influences cut off, and the spirit of a new life infused into them, I have no doubt they would not only recover from the change, but grow more rapidly than in their former state.

The change among the Sioux is not of sufficient standing, or has not been made under such circumstances as to furnish much evidence. The Santee or Minnesota Sioux, who have been under civilizing influences the longest, were so broken up and scattered by the massacre of 1862 that we can only get data at the points where they have been since that time. As near as I can estimate they have decreased a little in the last fifteen years. They may—I expect them to—decrease a little for the next fifteen years, perhaps for a longer time; then I expect them to take root and begin to increase. Perhaps the most civilized band of the Sioux is the Flandreau Sioux, who are citizens, and number about 350. For the last four years I have kept an account of the births and deaths, which I think quite accurate, and in that time there have been fourteen more deaths than births, though the last two years the births have exceeded the deaths.

Yours, very truly,

JOHN P. WILLIAMSON,  
*Missionary of the Presbyterian Church.*

General JOHN EATON,  
*Commissioner of Education.*

#### VITAL STATISTICS.

From time to time the births and deaths in a given period have been recorded by individual observers who enjoyed opportunities for studying different tribes or bands; but these observations have been so limited as to time and the numbers of the people studied, and have been altogether so fragmentary, that they afford no basis whatever for general conclusions. While our official Indian statistics have been improving from year to year, especially since 1861, they are still very imperfect in many respects; in none more so than in that relating to the actual increase by births and decrease by deaths.

In 1874 the first attempt was made to present such statistics in the