

Our intercourse with the Indian tribes has continued for three centuries, beginning with the reign of Queen Elizabeth. For nearly two centuries the policy pursued respecting them was that of Great Britain; since then it has been that of the United States government. Of the tribes which have constituted the objects of our policy and laws, no one has become extinct, though some have greatly diminished. The European governments, founding their sovereignties on divine right, exercised power over the disposal of all territory occupied by the barbarous tribes of the countries discovered, taking the latter under guardianship as not being capable of sovereign acts or sound discretion in the management of their interests, and making pacifications and "contentments" from time to time for intrusions on their territories or hunting-grounds. The wild tribes possessed the balance of power. They could disturb or break up the new settlements, and, had they not been strikingly deficient in the power of combination, they would have swept away the colonists at these earlier periods. To conciliate and pacify, to explain and redress acts of incidental injustice, to prevent combinations for hostile purposes, and to direct the minds of the Indians to the leading truths of labor and civilization, became the general objects of European as they have been of American policy. Indian wars were occasional and of brief duration during the whole period, and they were waged with precisely the same ulterior views. The policy was pre-eminently that of peace, and not of war; and when war ensued the aim was to reform, not to destroy them. Such was the system of England, Holland, France, and Sweden, as it had previously been that of Spain and Portugal in South America. The colonial governors stood between the tribes and the throne, as representatives of the king. To prevent misapprehensions among an ignorant and suspicious people, they employed a class of executive agents to reside near or among the Indians. In the patriarchal language of the tribes the terms of a father and his children were employed. This pleased the Indians and established a political relation which they fully understood.

In its dealings with the tribes, each of the colonies before the union acted independently of the others, endeavoring to settle difficulties as they arose and to obtain cessions of land. Afterwards the general government took charge of Indian affairs, Congress, in 1775, creating three departments,—the Northern, Middle, and Southern, —and assigning to each a board of commissioners. Its policy was to preserve peace and to prevent the Indians from taking part against them in the struggle with the parent government. In 1785 it divided the Indian country into districts, with a superintendent for each, all business to be transacted at the outposts occupied by the troops of the United States.

In 1787 Congress authorized several of the States to appoint commissioners, who, in conjunction with the Indian superintendents, were authorized to make treaties, and the latter were required to correspond regularly, in relation to their official transactions, with the Secretary of War, "through whom all communications respecting the Indian Department shall be made to Congress;" and they were further required "to obey all instructions which they shall from time to time receive from the Secretary of War." The War Department, through its agents, the officers of the