

OUR "PRISONERS OF WAR"

BY O. K. DAVIS

"NEITHER slavery nor involuntary servitude, *except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted*, shall exist within the United States," declares the Federal Constitution. But the great charter of our liberties is silent on the subject of the treatment of prisoners of war.

In the summer of 1886 the United States made "prisoners of war" 506 Apache Indians—men, women, and children. In the quarter of a century since then the status of those Indians has not been changed. Their few survivors and their much more numerous descendants—their children and their children's children—are still "prisoners of war." There are among the band men and women of full age who were born into that condition and have grown to maturity without knowing any other lot.

It took only a telegram from President Cleveland to put these Indians and their forebears into this anomalous condition. But it will require an act of Congress to free them from it.

"All the hostiles should be very safely kept as prisoners of war until they can be tried for their crimes or otherwise disposed of."

That was the order of President Cleveland, telegraphed from his summer place in the Adirondacks to General Drum, the acting Secretary of War at Washington. Only a small part of those made prisoners of war were hostiles at the time, but the order was made to apply to them all. How literally it has been obeyed these twenty-five years! Not one of the 506 has been "tried for his crimes" in this quarter of a century, but nearly all of them have been "otherwise disposed of." Tuberculosis and different diseases, with the natural effect of old age, have attended to that.

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Now only one or two of the old warlocks whose activities evoked that order remain.

Two or three times the War Department has suggested turning the prisoners of war over to the Interior Department for allotment of land and the establishment of the same status enjoyed by all the other Indian wards of the Government. For a long time the Interior Department successfully opposed receiving them. When, at length, it consented, a new obstacle was found in the inertia of Congress. For two years efforts have been made to secure the enactment of a law that would release these ancient prisoners. Once it actually passed the Senate, only to encounter the inert opposition of an uninterested committee chairman in the House and to die from inattention at the close of the session.

For more than a decade the steadily diminishing number of old men in the band have been appealing to Washington for permission to go to their old homes. At least, if they cannot do that, they ask for homes of their own where they are. They have held councils with different men high in the Government and have urged their cause with tearful eloquence. But to no avail.

"Give us homes of our own," they plead. "Make us free as other Indians are!"

But always the plea has met only unresponsive silence.

One reason alone has sufficed to keep these Indians in their present status. It is that they have prospered and done well under the active supervision to which they have been subjected for the last seventeen years. During that period they have been quartered at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. They live on small farms clustered near the army post, the buildings of each family constituting a "village" bearing the name of the head man of the family. An army officer has been constantly in charge of them. They have cultivated their farms and done all the work of their community under his direction and instruction. Most of their property is held in common. Sales of stock are managed by the army supervisor. They come and go about the reservation pretty much as they please, except that the men are daily detailed to their tasks by the supervising officer, and they may not leave the reservation without a pass from him.

It is not a painful captivity, and they know they are well off as they are. But in the hearts of most of them there

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linger the recollections or the traditions of the old home, and they have never ceased to yearn for it. Ojo Caliente! A place far beyond their sky-line, visible only to the eyes of their imagination. They do not know that in the quarter of a century since they were taken thence Ojo Caliente has ceased to be and that its name has disappeared from the white man's maps.

Among the many thousands of Americans who were brought up to believe the old saying that there is "no good Indian but a dead one," the name Apache has long been regarded as descriptive of the very worst there could be even of Indians. And among all the Apaches the flint-hearted chief Geronimo was believed to be the worst. It was because Geronimo headed the band whose doings led to the great campaign of 1886 that this quarter-century-long captivity came about. Geronimo died some years ago, a "prisoner of war" at Fort Sill.

The official reports of General Nelson A. Miles during the hard campaign of '86 speak several times of the "chronic condition of warfare that for centuries had afflicted the territories now comprising Arizona and New Mexico." There is no doubt that from the white man's viewpoint the Apaches, especially Geronimo's band, were bad Indians. But not all the story is told when the white man's side of it is given. There is something to say, even for these Apaches, and as is so often the case when considering the white man's dealings with Indians, there is much of bad faith in it. It was a conspicuous exhibition of bad faith by the Government that caused the outbreak which led up to General Miles's campaign.

In the years immediately following the close of the Civil War a band of Chiricahua Apaches, under Chief Cochise, had their stronghold in the Dragoon Mountains, away down in the southeastern corner of Arizona. They made a great deal of trouble, swooping down on the whites from their inaccessible mountain haunts and doing much damage. In 1872 President Grant took General O. O. Howard from his work with the Freedmen's Bureau in Washington, and sent him on a roving commission to the Indians of the west and southwest, in the effort to bring about better relations generally and to see if something like a permanent peace could not be established.

General Howard managed, through the assistance of a

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white man named Captain Jeffords, whom he met in Arizona, to penetrate into the Chiricahua stronghold and obtain a meeting with Cochise. They held a great powwow, which ended in the conclusion of a treaty under which the Government was to give the Dragoon Mountains to the Chiricahuas as a perpetual reservation, and the Indians were to maintain peace with the whites.

That treaty was duly approved in Washington and for three years it operated to give entire peace to that part of the country so far as Cochise and his band were concerned. But in 1875 that treaty was flagrantly broken by the Government. There had been no offense on the part of the Indians. They were living peacefully on their reservation, abiding by the treaty, when the Interior Department determined that all the Apaches of the different bands must be gathered together into one, and designated the San Carlos reservation, a couple of hundred miles north of the Dragoons, as the place for their future home. Cochise and his band had not been consulted about this. Nothing was said to them until the decision was made, and then they were simply notified that they must move.

The Chiricahuas flatly refused to go. They held by their rights under the Howard treaty. The Interior Department called upon the army to move them, and a regiment of cavalry was sent after Cochise and his men.

"They shall never take us to San Carlos," said Cochise, and they never did.

The soldiers got the old men and women who were too feeble either to run or to fight, and they got some of the children who were too small to keep up with their parents in the desperate chasing back and forth across the mountains that ensued. And for ten years Arizona and New Mexico knew what it was to feel the unrelenting hatred of the enraged and outraged Apaches. Murder after murder was committed. Ranches were devastated and families destroyed. Stock was run off or killed and no man was safe without strong guard. There was no limit to the atrocities of the Indians.

With intermittent persistence the Government maintained its effort to get the Chiricahuas up to San Carlos. Cochise died and Natchez, his son, took up the contest as hereditary chief of the Chiricahuas. One of the ablest and fiercest of the followers of Natchez was Geronimo.

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From time to time the troops managed to persuade or force some or all of these Indians to go to one or another of the reservations in Arizona. But the period of comparative peace was never of long duration. In the spring of 1885 most of the Chiricahuas were on the White Mountain reservation. About the middle of May, Geronimo, Natchez, and some other chiefs, with seventy-five or eighty of the band, broke away and went on the war-path again.

There followed a series of atrocities that exceeded anything the Indians had ever done. Troops under General George Crook, an Indian fighter of great experience, were at once sent after Geronimo and his band, and an arduous campaign was kept up for a full year. But General Crook was under orders to force an unconditional surrender, and that was more than he could do. Finally, in March, 1886, General Crook had a conference with the Indians at which they agreed to return to the reservation.

The troops and Indians started for Fort Bowie and marched side by side for two days. Then Geronimo, Natchez, and about twenty men, with fourteen women and some children, escaped from the surveillance of the soldiers and took to the hills again. It developed afterward that they had been frightened by stories some of the interpreters had told them of the punishment they would have to meet for their actions during the long hostilities. Geronimo, especially, had been warned that he was to be hanged, and he preferred to die fighting rather than on a scaffold.

Geronimo made the most desperate struggle for himself and his party during the ensuing summer that is recorded in the annals of Indian warfare. General Miles succeeded General Crook in command of the troops in that district. He put men in every valley and organized several flying columns that were ordered to pursue the Indians without cessation until they were captured or killed. Captain Henry W. Lawton—who, as Major-General Lawton, was killed in the Philippines twelve years ago—commanded the column that did most of this chasing of Geronimo. From May 5th until September 3d it was constantly on the march. Time and again the Indian camp was struck, but never was there a pitched fight. Geronimo trusted more to his ability to run than to resist. When struck the Indians would scatter like a covey of quail. The troops would take up the trail of a single Indian and follow it until the band reunited.

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Several times most of the horses and equipment of the Indians were taken, but they always managed to replenish their outfit by raids on settlers. A few Indians were killed and some of the soldiers lost their lives, but in the main it was just a case of flight and pursuit.

President Cleveland had ordered that an absolutely unconditional surrender must be forced, and that was what Captain Lawton was working for.

"I hope nothing will be done with Geronimo," wrote the President, "which will prevent our treating him as a prisoner of war—if we cannot hang him, which I would much prefer."

Captain Lawton's report of the campaign shows that his men marched and scouted 3,061 miles in the three months they were after Geronimo, an average of about twenty-five miles a day, marvelous work over that mountain country.

But the work of the fleeing Indians was even more marvelous, for they had women and children with them. And when the band finally surrendered, one of the "prisoners of war" was a baby one month old. There were thirty-one men, women, and children in the band besides this baby.

The Apaches who had surrendered to General Crook in March and had not gone out again with Geronimo had been sent in April to Fort Marion at St. Augustine, Florida, for safekeeping and to get them clear away from the scene of their old activities. There were seventy-seven of them and they were the first of the "prisoners of war" of whom those now at Fort Sill are the survivors. During the campaign against Geronimo, General Miles came to the conclusion that it would be the best thing for both whites and Indians to remove all the remainder of the Chiricahua and Warm Springs—the latter from Ojo Caliente—Apaches from that part of the country. These Indians were then gathered at Fort Apache, Arizona, under the surveillance of regular troops. They were already prisoners of war, but they had not been disarmed and were not held in confinement or under strict guard.

President Cleveland and the War Department favored sending these Indians also to Fort Marion, but General Miles opposed it. Miles argued that as they were a mountain people, accustomed to high altitudes and dry air, sending them to the low land in Florida, with its humid climate, would be equivalent to sentencing them to death. He

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