

Treaty Number Seven; Or The Blackfeet Treaty

The Treaties with The Indians of Manitoba, The North-West Territories, and Kee-Wa-Tin, in The Dominion of Canada.

The making of this treaty, which completed the series of treaties, extending from Lake Superior to the slopes of the Rocky Mountains, was entrusted, by the Privy Council, to the Hon. David Laird (who, after the effecting of the Carlton and Fort Pitt Treaties, had, in 1876, been appointed Lieutenant Governor of the North-West Territories, subsequently to the erection of these territories into a distinct Government) and Lieut. Col. McLeod, of the Mounted Police Force. The necessity which had arisen for making the treaty is thus stated by the Hon. the Minister of the Interior, the Hon. David Mills, in his Annual Report for 1877:

"The conclusion, in 1876, of the treaty with the Cree, Assiniboine and Saulteaux Indians (being the sixth of the series of treaties up to that time negotiated with the Indians of the North-West) left but a small portion of the territory lying between the boundary line and the 54th parallel of latitude un-surrendered.

"The un-surrendered portion of the territory, including about fifty thousand square miles, lies at the south-west angle of the territories, north of the boundary line, east of the Rocky Mountains, south of Red River (Treaty Number Six) and west of the Cypress Hills, or Treaty Number Four. This portion of the North-West is occupied by the Blackfeet, Blood, and Sarcees or Piegan Indians, some of the most warlike and intelligent but intractable bands of the North-West. These bands have for years past been anxiously expecting to be treated with, and have been much disappointed at the delay of negotiations.

"In last year's report I stated that His Honor Lieut. Gov. Morris, very strongly recommended that no further delay should take place in entering into negotiations with these Indians. His Honor reported, in effect, "that there was a general consent of opinion amongst the missionaries settled in that territory, and others who are acquainted with these Indians, as to the desirableness of having such a treaty made at the earliest possible date, with a view to preserving the present friendly disposition of these tribes, which might easily give place to feelings of an unfriendly or hostile nature, should the treaty negotiations be much longer delayed."

"In view of these facts, and in order to satisfy these important tribes, and to prevent the difficulties which might hereafter arise through the settlement of whites, who are already flocking into Fort McLeod and other portions of this territory, Your Excellency decided that these Indians should be treated with this year, and the Indians were notified accordingly.

"His Honor Mr. Laird, the Lieutenant Governor of the North-West Territories, and Lieut.-Col. James F. McLeod, C.M.G., were selected by Your Excellency to negotiate the treaty. The former of these gentlemen, had assisted in 1874 in negotiating Treaty Number Four, with the Cree and Saulteaux Indians, and the latter, during his residence for some years past at Fort McLeod, as Commandant of the Mounted Police Force, had acquired the entire confidence and good will of the Indian tribes proposed to be dealt with."

Besides all this, the Chiefs of the Blackfeet, in 1876, sent to the Lieutenant Governor of the North-West Territories, a letter, with regard to a treaty, and also by a messenger, in whom they had confidence, a message, to a similar effect. The Blackfeet Indians are a bold and warlike race. When the Sioux war with the United States was about being initiated, the Sioux invited them to join in the war, but they promptly refused. They are unlikely to become farmers, but as the country they inhabit presents unusual facilities for that industry, they may be induced to adopt a pastoral life. They already possess large herds of horses, and may be taught to raise cattle also.

I requested the Rev. C. Scollen, who had for many years been a missionary among the Plain Cree, and latterly, for several years, among the Blackfeet, to make a report to me of the character, habits and condition of this nation, with which request he willingly complied. I now give place to this report, which gives a vivid view of the character of this bold and warlike race, and shows the benefits they had, so far back as 1876, derived from the presence of the Mounted Police, the prohibition of liquor, and the establishment of law and order in the North-West Territories, under Canadian rule. I may here remark, that another great benefit has resulted from the judicious steps taken by the Canadian Government, and that is the cessation of warfare between the various tribes, which was before of constant occurrence. An intelligent Ojibway Indian trader told me, that the change was wonderful. "Before," he said, "the Queen's Government came, we were never safe, and now," he said, "I can sleep in my tent anywhere, and have no fear. I can go to the Blackfeet, and Cree camps, and they treat me as a friend."
