

MEMORIAL

To the Hon. Frank Oliver, Minister of
the Interior, Ottawa

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Dear Sir and Chief,—We the undersigned Chiefs of the Shuswap, Couteau or Thompson, Okanagan, Lillooet, Stalo or Lower Fraser, Chilcotin, Carrier, and Tahltan tribes in the Interior of British Columbia, assembled at Spences Bridge, B. C., this tenth day of May, 1911, hereby greet you, and make known to you as follows:—

That in this letter we desire to speak to you heart to heart, and as man to man about those things which concern us most. We do not come to you with lies in our hearts, nor in any scheming way, but simply with plain statements of facts, and ask you to listen to us patiently. We do not wish to get the best of anybody, but just to obtain our rights, and the justice we believe we are entitled to. We ask for the same treatment that has been accorded to other Canadian Indians in the settlement of our land question, and in other matters. We know your government is strong, and has the power to treat us who are weak as it suits them; but we expect good and not evil from them. We regard you as a father appointed to look after our interests, that we may not be oppressed and imposed upon by others. We believe the settlement of our grievances will result in benefit to the whites of this country, as well as to us.

You already know most of those grievances we complain of, and the position we take regarding them. Some of our chiefs have written you from time to time, and several have visited the government in Ottawa within the last ten years. Your government has received petitions and complaints from the chiefs of the Thompson tribe in 1908 and 1909. The Declaration of the Shuswap, Thompson, and Okanagan tribes, July, 1910. The memorial of the same tribes presented to Sir Wilfred Laurier at Kamloops, August, 1910. Then Mr. McDougall, Special Commissioner, visited us twice, and no doubt sent in a report to your government as to our condition. Consequently we need not reiterate everything here.

You know how the B. C. government has laid claim to all our tribal territories, and has practically taken possession of same without treaty, and without payment. You know how they also claim the reservations, nominally set apart for us. We want to know if we own any land at all in this country. As a last chance of settling our land question with the B. C. government, we visited them in Victoria on the third of March last, and presented them with a petition (a copy of which we believe has been sent your government), asking for a speedy settlement. Forty of us from the Interior waited on the government along with the Coast Indians. In this letter we wish to answer some of the statements made to us by the B. C. government at this interview.

Premier McBride, speaking for the B. C. government, said "We Indians had no right or title to the unsundered lands of the province." We can not possibly have rights in any surrendered lands, because in the first place they would not be ours if we surrendered them, and, secondly, we have never surrendered any lands. This means that the B. C. government asserts that we have no claim or title to the lands of this country. Our tribal territories which we have held from time immemorial, often at cost of blood, are ours no longer if Premier McBride is correct. We are all beggars, and landless in our own country. We told him through one of our chiefs we were of the opposite opinion from him, and claimed our countries as hitherto. We asked that the question between us be submitted for settlement to the highest courts, for how otherwise can it now be settled? His answer was: "There was no question to settle or submit to the courts." Now, how can this be. That there is a question is self-evident, for Premier McBride takes one side of it, and we take the other. If there was no question, there would have been nothing to talk about; and nothing to take sides on. We wish to tell you, Chief, this question is very real to us. It is a live issue. The soreness in our hearts over this matter has been accumulating these many years, and will not die until either we are all dead, or we obtain what we consider