

Sir J. Richardson,
C. B.

9 March 1857.

2990. In what districts particularly have you heard of that occurring?— I think mostly among the northern Indians; I have heard of several cases.

2991. Upon the Mackenzie River?—Upon the Mackenzie River, and eastward of Fort Chipewyan, when they have been out hunting, and have destroyed their property very often. When a northern Indian dies, the habit is to destroy everything at the encampment, and to make for the nearest post of the Company, and they very often starve on the way. That and other causes, such as a bad hunt, a bad season, or epidemic disease, will produce famine in a country where the natives depend almost solely upon hunting or fishing for support.

2992. Mr. Grogan.] Those Indians could not go on their hunt without the supplies which they receive from the forts, could they?—Not now that they have been accustomed to firearms.

2993. Are not the Indians supplied with the ammunition in barter for their skins or the products which they are able to exchange with the Company?— I believe ammunition is never supplied by the Company in exchange for skins, as far as I understood. The traders give ammunition for provisions, or supply it to the natives gratuitously if they require it; they barter goods, blankets, and other articles of clothing for furs.

2994. Is the ammunition supplied as a kind of present, then, or is there a kind of right in the Indian to get it?—The ammunition is a present if the Indian is in want. If he has provisions, they give it for provisions; if he has a quantity of meat to dispose of, they give ammunition for meat, but if he is destitute he receives it gratuitously.

2995. So that there is a distinction; they will not sell ammunition for skins, though they will for the other Indian products?—I do not know as to their not being willing to sell; but the fact, I believe, is, that they do not; as far as I can learn, the Indian never parts with his skins for ammunition.

2996. Have any instances come within your knowledge in which ammunition has been refused to the Indians for the furs?—No; as far as we were concerned ourselves in the expedition, we have been compelled to refuse ammunition from not having it to give; but I think that when ammunition is abundant in the trading forts it is never refused.

2997. It is given away gratuitously?—Provided the Indian is in want and he cannot subsist without it, the Company find themselves bound to support him in some way or another, and give him ammunition, but it very frequently happens that the ammunition at a post is exhausted.

2998. You have said, "provided the Indian be in want of the ammunition;" how is the Indian's want of ammunition ascertained?—What I mean by his being in want is, if he has no provisions to dispose of. An Indian, if he has a successful hunt, kills more provision than he requires for his own use, and he barters it for ammunition. It is a common thing. We frequently purchased geese and fowl and deer from the Indians, and gave them ammunition for them.

2999. I am speaking exclusively of the establishments of the Hudson's Bay Company?—I am merely illustrating the practice. Not having resided at the trading posts of the Hudson's Bay Company for many seasons, I cannot tell whether it is invariably the case or not; but I was told in the country that they never do purchase furs with ammunition. How far that was correct information, I cannot say.

3000. My question was, whether any instances had come within your knowledge in which ammunition had been refused to the Indians?—No; nothing has come under my knowledge as to the refusal of ammunition.

3001. Lord Stanley.] But it might very well happen that ammunition should be refused to a party of Indians at one of the forts in consequence of the supply at the fort itself being short?—Yes, I dare say that has frequently occurred. I have known the posts without ammunition, and in descending the Mackenzie's River the last time we supplied one of the forts with ammunition, because theirs was exhausted, and the Indians were remaining at the post waiting for the supplies coming in. Upon our having supplied the fort they were enabled to give ammunition to the natives, and send them on their hunts.

3002. In reference to what you said about the famines among the Indians, were these common in the southern part of the territory, or only in the far north?