
NORTH-WEST MOUNTED POLICE FORCE.

COMMISSIONER'S REPORT—1879.

While I was absent in the east, during the first half of the year, the Assistant Commissioner was in active command of the force. Reports from him during the winter and early spring gave very gloomy accounts of the state of the Indians. The winter was very severe, and although there were a considerable number of buffalo still in the country, the snow was so deep and storms so frequent, that with their weak horses the Indians were not able to supply their wants from the small bands scattered about the prairies.

I ventured, in my last annual report, to express a fear that the large herd of buffalo, after being driven south, with so many Indians behind them, would never return in anything like the number of former years. I little thought the prophecy was to be so literally fulfilled. Unfortunately, such has been the case. Once during the summer a very large herd crossed the line east of Cypress Hills, and smaller bands have come into the country, in some instances making their way north to the South Saskatchewan. The main herd, hemmed in by nearly all the Indians of the North-West and Montana, remained south of the Milk River about the "Little Rockies" and the "Bear Paw," extending, I believe, across the Missouri into the "Judith Basin." During the spring and early summer the condition of our Indians was deplorable in the extreme. Buffalo, their only source of supply, had moved south, and their horses were too weak to follow. The flour and beef supplied by the Government was sufficient, for a time, to ward off the impending famine, and to supply a large number with enough to take them to the Milk River country. The great bulk of the "Bloods" and one large band of the "Blackfeet," together with some "North Pie-gans," the "Assiniboines" and other Indians about the Cypress, pursued this course as soon as they were supplied with food to take them to where the buffalo were. The larger portion of the Blackfeet remained with "Crow Foot" at the "Blackfoot Crossing" until after the payments, and suffered the most dire distress from want of food throughout the summer.

The Canadian Indians who crossed the line managed to secure a large supply of meat, but were, after a time, ordered off by the United States authorities. They came flocking into Fort Walsh, and those who belonged to Treaty No. 7 made their way through to Fort McLeod, where they remained until they were paid, at the end of September.

Under such circumstances, I think it a matter of congratulation that the Indians throughout the territories generally have behaved so well. They have, however, been accused of killing large numbers of cattle in the "Bow River District," and some in the neighborhood of Fort Walsh. It is undoubtedly the case that they killed some, but nothing like the numbers claimed. It is the opinion of many respectable stockmen that whites had more to do with it than the Indians. A great many cattle must have strayed back to Montana, and a great many more must have perished in the storms which passed over the country in March last. The fact that seventy carcasses were found in one coulé shows the damage to be attributed to this cause. When I visited Fort McLeod for the Blackfeet payment, in September, I was