

Tales of the Blackfeet

(By Max McD.)

Perhaps the most interesting tribe of Indians in the Great West of Canada is the Blackfeet. This nation belongs to the great Algonkian linguistic stock and comprises four bands on four separate reserves—Bolds, Blackfeet and Peigans, all resident in Southern Alberta, and South Peigan, located in Montana immediately south of the International Boundary line. These four bands with their allies, the Gros Ventres and Sarcees, formed the Blackfoot Confederacy, a powerful combination which for a century held by force of arms against all comers an extensive territory reaching from the Missouri river north to the Red Deer, and from the Rockies east to the Cypress Hills. The protection of their vast territory against invasion imposed upon the Indians a life of almost constant warfare with the numerous enemies surrounding them on all sides, and developed in them a proud and imperious spirit which, after more than thirty years of reservation life, is still the prominent characteristic of the Blackfeet.

No tribe of the plains has excited more admiration among observers competent to judge. Physically, they were magnificent men, and at one time are said to have numbered from twenty to thirty thousand people.

man to settle in Calgary, having a mission church there, says that while the Crees regarded white men as brothers, the Blackfeet regarded them as demigods, superior in intelligence and capable of doing the Indian good or ill.

They were proud, haughty and numerous. It is said there were some 10,000 of them in Canada in the sixties. They had a regular politico-religious organization. But in ten years their numbers decreased by half and their organization fell into decay. The reason? The Americans about 1866 crossed the line, and established ten or more trading posts or forts where fire water flowed freely and hundreds of the poor Indians fell victims to the whiteman's craving for money. Some poisoned, some frozen to death while in a state of intoxication, many more were shot down by American bullets. In 1870 came small pox. In 1874 they are said to have been "clothed in rags," without furs and without guns.

It was this state of affairs that led to the mounted police being sent to Macleod to crush out this wanton debauching and robbing in the name of trade. In a few years they had gained again much of their former prosperity and became a peaceful tribe. Father Scollen is authority for the statement that in 1875



Just now the chief interest in the war is centered in the Balkans, where the unexpected has occurred. The photo shows a British Red Cross Convoy enroute to Serbia.

L. V. Kelly, author of "The Ranch Men" has this paragraph regarding them:

"When the white men came to trade with the natives they found the Blackfeet a warlike race of magnificent horsemen, trappers of beaver, hunters of buffalo, living handsomely on the spoils of chase and war. They found them already engaged in almost incessant war with the Assinaboines and Crees; they found them treacherous, reckless, brave, underhanded as occasion required, and quite open to trade for whiteman's blankets, guns and whisky."

Their bitterest enemies were the Crees who held the country in the vicinity of Edmonton. Something of the fear of this northern nation for the Blackfeet may be seen in a letter which Sweet Grass, Chief of the Crees, dictated to W. J. Christie, chief factor of the Hudson's Bay Company at Edmonton, for transmission to the representative of the "Great Mother" at Ottawa, in 1876. In part it read:

"We want you to stop the Americans from coming to trade in our lands and giving 'fire water' ammunition and arms to our enemies, the Blackfeet."

That such an overture was neglected for years without untoward results is our good fortune.

It was death to a Cree to cross the Blackfeet border. Fortunately these wars with the Crees often were mere frays for the glory of young bucks seeking a reputation, not a war to the bitter end.

The Blackfeet did not allow whitemen in their territory. Captain Palliser was admitted in 1857 because he represented her majesty and carried the British flag. Captain Butler also was allowed into their domains for the same reason. Rev. Father Scollen, who was the first white-

the Sioux Indians who were at war in the United States, wanted the Blackfeet to make an alliance with them to exterminate the white men in the land. This, he says, they flatly refused to do, because they saw that the white man of Canada was their friend and could be relied upon to do justly with them.

Thomas R. Clipsham, pioneer missionary of Protestant denominations to the Blackfeet has had some interesting experiences in his work with the red men. Over a score of years ago he came, when there was little else on the bald bleak prairie than coyotes, buffalo and Indians. He helped to run the fifth and third meridians in 1882, when it was a "sight for sore eyes" to see a white man. While thus engaged the party on a Sunday morning topped a rise near Fort Walsh to find an encampment of 2,000 Blackfeet with Big Bear as their leader. The valley, he tells, was covered with teepees, and the fear of the surveyors was great. It looked as though the old fort was surrounded. But all fear was dispelled when it was learned that the Indians had merely gathered to remind the authorities that their grub stake had disappeared. Once the larder had been replenished all signs of hostility vanished.

In 1884, Mr. Clipsham parted with \$54.00 for two day's travel over the dusty plains to get from Calgary to Macleod in a creaking and uncomfortable old stage. He had been directed by the Methodist Church to carry the gospel to the red man of Southern Canada West, and for long years he toiled amongst them, living their life and sharing their meagre comforts and many hardships.

This was during the time of the terrible Riel rebellion, when the mere mention of a white man stirred the fire of hatred in the red man's breast and when



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