

Company might be attended by more serious loss to the trade than that which is incurred in its retention. Undoubtedly the Saskatchewan, if abandoned by the Hudson's Bay Company, would be speedily occupied by traders from the Missouri, who would also tap the trade of the richer fur-producing districts of Lesser Slave Lake and the North. The products of the Saskatchewan proper principally consists of provisions, including pemican and dry meat, buffalo robes and leather, linx, cat, and wolf skins. The richer furs, such as otters, minks, beavers, martins, etc., are chiefly procured in the Lesser Slave Lake Division of the Saskatchewan District. With regard to the subject of Free Trade in the Saskatchewan, it is at present conducted upon principles quite different from those existing in Manitoba. The Free Men or "Winterers" are, strictly speaking, free traders, but they dispose of the greater portion of their furs, robes, etc. to the Company. Some, it is true, carry the produce of their trade or hunt (for they are both hunters and traders) to Red River, disposing of it to the merchants in Winnipeg, but I do not imagine that more than one-third of their trade thus finds its way into the market. These free men are nearly all French half-breeds, and are mostly outfitted by the Company. It has frequently occurred that a very considerable trade has been carried on with alcohol, brought by Free Men from the Settlement of Red River, and distributed to Morians and others in the Upper Saskatchewan. This trade has been productive of the very worst consequences, but the law prohibiting the sale or possession of liquor is now widely known throughout the Western territory, and its beneficial effects have already been experienced.

I feel convinced that if the proper means are taken the suppression of the liquor traffic of the West can be easily accomplished.

A very important subject is that which has reference to the communication between the Upper Saskatchewan and Missouri Rivers.

Fort Benton on the Missouri has of late become a place of very considerable importance as a post for the supply of the mining districts of Montana. Its geographical position is favourable. Standing at the head of the navigation of the Missouri it commands the trade of Idaho and Montana. A steamboat without breaking bulk can go from New Orleans to Benton, a distance of 4,000 miles. Speaking from the recollection of information obtained at Omaha three years ago it takes about 30 days to ascend the river from that town to Benton, the distance being about 2,000 miles. Only boats drawing 2 or 3 feet of water can perform the journey as there are many shoals and shifting sands to obstruct heavier vessels. It has been estimated that between 30 or 40 steamboats reached Benton during the course of last summer. The season, for purposes of navigation, may be reckoned as having a duration of about 4 months. Let us now travel North of the American boundary line and see what effect Benton is likely to produce upon the trade of the Saskatchewan. Edmonton lies *N. N. W.* from Benton about 370 miles. Carlton about the same distance *North-East*. From both Carlton and Edmonton to Fort Benton the country presents no obstacle whatever to the passage of loaded carts or waggons, but the road from Edmonton is free from Blackfeet during the summer months, and is better provided with wood and water. For the first time in the history of