

Mr. Sandford Fleming, ex-Chief Engineer, was quite right in projecting the line of the railway north of the Height of Land.

SOCIAL CONDITION.

In the first report which I had the honour to submit on this territory, the social condition of the natives was described at considerable length. With trifling and unimportant exceptions, the views and opinions then expressed have been confirmed by subsequent observation and experience. It is unnecessary, therefore, to go over the same ground again.

The population actually resident or domiciled in the territory claimed by Ontario, north of the Height of Land, cannot be very accurately ascertained, for reasons that need not be explained at length. I am of opinion, however, that the bona-fide population does not exceed two thousand five hundred.

This is a very small number of inhabitants for a territory, the area of which is equal to that of England and Wales. It is even to be feared that the native population, small as it is, will be further reduced when it has passed through the ordeal that inevitably awaits it when brought into more general intercourse and contact with our race. In addition to those who will fall victims to the intemperate use of alcoholic liquors, several of the diseases, such as small-pox—against which we take special precautions—and others, such as measles—which we easily get over—are very fatal to the Indians; the mortality in the case of measles being almost as great as in small-pox. Last fall and winter measles carried off a very heavy percentage of the natives at Long Lake and Mississauga Posts, both in this territory; but fortunately it did not reach the posts on the coast of James' Bay.

Notwithstanding the smallness of the population, the food question is still by far the most important to the natives of this territory. Like all those who depend solely on hunting or fishing for their living, it is either "a burst or a starve;" too often the latter. In most countries it is over-population that leads to a deficiency of food and consequent famine. In this territory it arises rather from the great scarcity during the long winter months of those wild animals and birds which are capable of withstanding the cold, and of themselves obtaining food at that season. Among animals, the deer, bear, beaver, muskrat, and rabbit are those on which the Indian chiefly relies for food. Of these, the rabbit, muskrat, and beaver, are, in this territory, by far the most important. When rabbits are plentiful the Indians do not suffer for want of food, although the flesh of the rabbit is not very nutritious. But this animal, really a variety of "hare," is subject to epidemics or diseases, which periodically destroy them almost entirely; and after one of these plagues has passed over the country they are so scarce that every creature that is dependent, either wholly or in any considerable degree, on them for subsistence, suffers accordingly. Thus not only the Indian, but the lynx, fox, fisher, etc., among animals, and the owl among birds, suffer more or less from starvation and hunger, when the rabbit fails or becomes scarce. Rabbits have, unfortunately, been very scarce for several years, and a number of deaths from starvation have occurred among the Indians near the coast. Many more have barely escaped with their lives, and the suffering has no doubt been general and great.

At such seasons I believe the population would almost perish bodily, but for the beaver. This interesting animal is of greater value than any other to the native population of this territory. The meat is wholesome and good; and a full grown beaver, weighing say forty pounds, affords, after deducting offal, skin, and bones, as much probably as twenty-five pounds of actual food, besides the fur, the value of which often exceeds that of all the other furs trapped by the hunter added together. If sufficient numbers were left as a breeding stock, there is food enough in this territory for millions of beaver, but so little regard is paid to this vitally important point, that were it not for the extraordinary sagacity of the creature, it must long ere this have been almost exterminated. One of the officers of the Company told me that in the neighbourhood of his post there is a small lake or pond, the privilege of trapping in which he had acquired from the Indians, and, with a certain area of the country around, reserved for himself. In this pond lived