

Moreover, contractors, or their employees, would not consider themselves in any way bound to refrain from interfering in the fur trade, and their doing so would irritate and render hostile the employees of the Hudson Bay Company, who have been so friendly and obliging in the past, and whose good offices will, I have no doubt, be equally at the disposal of the country in the future, if they meet with the courtesy they are always ready to extend.

In my allusions to the contract system, I wish it to be clearly understood that I speak from my own experience of such a system in the wilderness, and, meaning no reflection on contractors in general, I would say that if such a system is adopted in the Rainy Lake Section of the country, a military force will be required to support it, and this would soon occasion a greater outlay than the full amount of my estimate for the work.

For the works on the Lake Superior Section, and the Lake Region, the head-quarters from whence supplies are to be sent in, must be at Fort William or Thunder Bay. The latter, of course, after the Dog Lake road is completed.

For the road, between the North-west Angle of the Lake of the Woods and Fort Garry, supplies and men must be obtained at the Red River Settlement. Workmen, in sufficient numbers, can be had there, and, from letters I have recently received, I am led to believe that provisions also will be abundant, such as flour, beef, etc.

THE INDIAN ELEMENT.

In opening the communication to Red River, the country will be brought, to some extent, into contact with the Indians, who have their hunting grounds on the line of route.

Hitherto, Canada has been fortunate in dealing with the Indian element; and, in the present case, I see no reason for anticipating greater difficulty than has arisen in the past.

The only localities where the Indians are at all numerous, are at the Lake of the Woods and Rainy River, but the entire population does not greatly exceed three thousand. They can, however, collect in summer in larger numbers than Indians usually do, from the fact that they have abundance of food. This is afforded by the wild rice of the country which they collect, and by the fish which literally swarm in the Lakes and Rivers, some industry practiced on their own part, too, in raising Indian Corn, serves to supply them to a small extent. I have seen as many as five or six hundred of them collected at one time, at the rapids on Rainy River, engaged in catching sturgeon, the flesh of which they preserve by drying it like Pemican and then pounding it up and putting it, with a due mixture of oil, into bags made of sturgeons' skin.

They have a rude sort of Government, and the regulations made by their Chiefs are observed, it is said, better than laws usually are where there are no great means of enforcing them.

They are very intelligent and are extremely jealous as to their right of soil and authority over the country which they occupy.

When the Red River Expedition first came in contact with them, they manifested some displeasure, and were not slow to express it, at parties being sent through their country, to explore and examine it, without their consent being first asked and obtained. On becoming better acquainted with them, we found it to our advantage to keep up a little friendly intercourse with the Chiefs, calling upon them as we passed, and interchanging a few presents of no great value. When we had adopted this course, all difficulties vanished, and, ere the explorations were brought to a close, they manifested and expressed an earnest wish to see the communication opened.

The chief danger which could arise of coming into unfriendly relations with the Indians, would be from having large parties of workmen in the vicinity of their encampments. Now, this is a contingency not likely to arise, from the fact that where the Indians are numerous, the navigation is unimpeded and but little work required; but, as a rule, extreme prudence will always have to be observed by the officers in charge of men to keep them from coming in contact with the Indians.

These Indians are all heathens and never seem to have been in the slightest degree impressed by the Missionaries who have attempted their conversion. They are, however, very pious in their own way, and much of their time seems to be occupied in religious observances, which have their manifestation in long fasts and nights of watching, when they pretend to hold familiar intercourse with Spirits whose presence, in the secret recesses of their lodges, is indicated by drum beating, chanting, incantations and many unearthly noises besides. At stated intervals, the greatest and most solemn ceremony of the tribe, the Mystical