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SENATOR ALEXANDER'S SPEECH

On the Destitution among Indians in the Northwest,

IN THE SENATE, FRIDAY, APRIL 20th, 1888.

HON. MR. ALEXANDER. — Before the leader of the House replies to the enquiry which has just been made by the hon. gentleman from St. Boniface, I desire to add one or two observations. This is a grave enquiry, coming from such a quarter. The enquiry comes from a gentleman, who, from his residence in the North-West—from his intimate acquaintance with the condition of the Indian tribes—is competent to speak with authority. When we further consider that that enquiry is from a warm supporter of the Government, and is moved now from Christian sympathy with the poor tribes of Indians at Lake St. Anne's which I believe lies north of Edmonton,—I say that such an appeal must be effective with the Executive Government. When we come to regard the history of the red man, going back beyond history and all tradition, we cannot remain unmoved as to our solemn obligations to protect them from want. We know little of their existence beyond the time, when Prince Rupert in the reign of Charles II. was instrumental in establishing the Hudson's Bay posts for the purpose of opening trade with those tribes of Indians, purchasing their furs in exchange for rifles and powder, blankets, cottons, etc. etc., to enable them to endure the severity of their Arctic winter. When we reflect that God has placed those Indians there (and they may have existed there for thousands of years; for we know nothing of their past history.) scattered as they have been over those broad prairies—prairies covered with the buffalo, their rivers teeming with fish—their forests abounding with moose and other large animals constituting abundance of food for them, and now behold these hunting grounds all destroyed, it would not be right to ignore their claims upon our sympathy. The Indians—have no ambition beyond obtaining their daily food. From all that we can gather from tradition they believe in a Great Father above. Their spirit ever looks up to their Manitou, and when the European races appeared, the Indian tribes looked to the queen mother to protect them against injustice or wrong, that might come from their presence. We have all read the works of the earliest travellers—of Palliser, Mackenzie and Lord Milton, as also of the officers of the Hudson's Bay Posts, which paint the Indian living from generation to generation in melancholy solitude, but apparently contented with his lot. They never wanted food, so numerous were the buffalo. But what a change is brought in their condition by the advent of the white man with his pretended civilization,—with the blighting influences of his vices? Of course the territory must be used for the white races of the earth, coming like a torrent to disturb all the Indians' hunting grounds disturb his paradise upon earth. Surely a solemn duty rests upon the Queen and upon the Parliament of the country, to see that every treaty with those native tribes shall be faithfully carried out on our part. And that, no red man, whether under treaty or no treaty, shall be allowed to starve. The simple obligation rests upon us to see that the red man shall not suffer from famine. The hon. gentleman

from Kildonan, as also my hon. friend from Lisgar, have every session called the attention of Parliament to this subject. The Senator from Lisgar has devoted much time and energy to obtain information with regard to those vast regions in our North-West upon the Saskatchewan, the Peace and Mackenzie Rivers, to see how we can best throw in a vast population there, while we take every possible step to prevent the Indian from suffering. This House and the country are indebted to the hon. gentleman from St. Boniface (Girard) for calling attention to-day to this subject; it is just such a question as we should expect to emanate from a gentleman whose kindness of heart and Christian sympathy have prompted him to touch that subject now. He, along with the Senators from Lisgar and Kildonan, feel it a solemn duty to raise their voice, as they have always done, upon this subject. I will not say anything more because it would be wearying the House, but perhaps I may be permitted to relate an anecdote of a scene which once took place between an Indian chief and the late Bishop of Algoma—(Fauquier)—who performed the duties of his mission with little salary, and travelled the whole region north of Lake Superior, and westward to the Lake of the Woods. I have the anecdote from the late Bishop, who was a warm personal friend of mine all his life. On that occasion he went up to the heights beyond Port Arthur to meet a tribe of Indians who with their chief had assembled for that purpose. He was anxious to spread the mantle of the Anglican Church over them. The Church of Rome had not reached that particular tribe, although they had christianized many others, and when the Anglican Bishop came there to reveal the glad tidings of our Christian Faith, he met a very enlightened Chief to whom he observed—"What are your views of religion? What is your view of the next world?" "Ah," said the Chief, "We hope to have our hunting grounds in the next world." "Yes," said the Bishop, "That is very well for the good; but what about the next world for the bad?" "What about the hell?" "Hell?" said the chief, "Hell never could be for the poor Indian, it must have been made for the white man. The Indian lives as God constituted him, clothed in his native simplicity. He lives in the love and fear of God, except when there happens to be a conflict between the tribes. But as regarding the white man, it may be necessary to have a hell for him—for those white men who rob the poor, who bring families to ruin and misery that they may have the means to satisfy their avarice, and feed their vanity and pride, residing in costly mansions. Hell may be necessary for such men, but not for the poor untutored Indian."

Senator Alexander interviewed after he left the Senate Chamber.

A member of the press asked him to whom he referred in the above speech as "the wicked white men."

Senator Alexander replied,—that he considered it his duty, before God and man, to expose grave wrongs, which had been committed. He had recently obtained important evidence, pointing strongly to three prominent public men, namely: Sir John Macdonald, the Hon. G. W. Allan, (Speaker of the Senate), and the Hon. Sir David Lewis Macpherson, as the three persons, who had been chiefly instrumental in bringing a hundred innocent respectable families, to woe and penury. Those three men, had been mixed up in transactions, secretly and privately, which ought to be investigated at once, in our Courts of Justice. They had for their own selfish purposes, conspired to obtain the money of others, and wrecked a Government Bank. By secret cognizance of which evidence had been lately obtained, they had thus brought about the ruin of such families, some of the heads of which had sunk into their graves with broken hearts, leaving their families destitute.

How strange that the Parliament of the Dominion, with such facts staring them in the face, has never called for a committee to investigate so dark a history of crime? How strange that the Dominion Parliament have never taken steps to enquire of the present First Minister of the Crown, Sir John Macdonald, what has become of all the assets of that old Government Bank, which, according to the report of Sir John Rose, then Minister of Finance of date, March, 1859, amounted to at least half a million of dollars of the public money, no part of which, as far as I know, has ever been restored to the public chest?

Every one in Toronto knows, that the First Minister of the Crown, Sir John Macdonald, dispensed with the Government Bank trustees, ordering the Ledgers of such Bank to be placed in the hands of Mr Speaker Allan's cousin, Mr. Clarke Gamble, and the next thing that we hear of such Bank Ledgers, is contained in an extraordinary confession made by Sir David Lewis Macpherson, in a speech delivered in the Senate of date 11th Feb., 1885.

The following are his words:

"The books of the Bank had been destroyed. They had been placed in a basement room, on Church Street, where the sewage came in upon them, and they became so offensive, that they had to be destroyed."

I have only to add, that there can be no difficulty in proving in the courts, that Sir John Macdonald escaped thus by the destruction of such books, the payment of his large debt to the said Bank,—money obtained for political purposes. And it would be well to put under oath, the present speaker of the Senate the Hon. by G. W. Allan as to what he had actually paid of his large debt of \$36,000 and interest? This matter ought to be investigated in our Criminal Courts without delay. It is not in the interests of Society, that such crime should be smothered up. If the Parliament does not investigate the matter then, we can only look to the Ministers of our religion to make it a subject of pulpit utterances throughout the Dominion.