

BLACK FEET INDIANS, GROS-VENTRES, AND OTHERS.

LETTER

FROM THE

SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR,

TRANSMITTING

Communications showing the importance of an appropriation for defraying the expenses of holding a council with the Indians therein named.

APRIL 5, 1854.—Referred to the Committee of Ways and Means.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,
Washington, April 4, 1854.

SIR: As having relation to certain estimates of appropriations required for the Indian service in the Territory of Washington, recently submitted to the Committee on Indian Affairs, (see Senate Executive Document No. 35,) I have the honor to transmit to you, herewith, and to invite your attention to, a communication from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, dated the 31st ultimo, with the accompanying papers from Governor Stevens; and in view of the facts therein stated, and those heretofore communicated, I respectfully recommend that the appropriation asked for may be made.

I am, sir, with much respect, your obedient servant,
R. McCLELLAND,
Secretary.

HON. GEO. S. HOUSTON,
Chairman Committee of Ways and Means, House of Reps.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,
Office Indian Affairs, March 31, 1854.

SIR: I have the honor to transmit, herewith, a copy of a letter received at this office yesterday from his excellency Isaac I. Stevens, Governor of Washington Territory, dated the 31st January last, as also a copy of a letter from Lieutenant Mullen to him of the 18th November, 1853, which exhibit facts tending to show the importance of favorable action by Congress upon the estimate, recently transmitted to you, and by you to committees of that body, of an appropriation

“for defraying the expenses of holding a council with, and making presents to, the Blackfeet, Gros-ventres,” &c.

Should the proposed council not be held, it appears to me that hostilities between citizens of the United States and the Blackfeet and other Indians of the same region, and between the tribes referred to among themselves, will immediately result.

It may not be proper to assume that by holding the council, &c., all hostile acts will be avoided, but in my opinion such results may be confidently looked for in mitigation of injuries, conflicts, and murders, as will far more than compensate the United States for the outlay.

The certainty that good will result from the proposed council, renders it my duty to urge, in every proper manner, that favorable action be taken by Congress on the estimate alluded to, so that in case any disastrous consequences follow from its rejection, the responsibility will not rest with this department.

In case you approve my views of the importance of this appropriation to the promotion of the general well-being of the country, and the proper management of its Indian relations, I would respectfully suggest that you transmit copies of this communication, and the papers accompanying it, to the chairman of the Committee on Finance of the Senate.

Copies of these papers will be transmitted by this office to the Committees on Indian Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives immediately.

In view of the information contained in the letters of Governor Stevens and Lieutenant Mullen, in regard to the hostile attitude of the Blackfeet tribes, I would also respectfully suggest that copies of these letters be furnished to the Secretary of War.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

GEO. W. MANYPENNY,
Commissioner.

Hon. R. McCLELLAND,
Secretary of the Interior.

OFFICE OF SUPERINTENDENT OF INDIAN AFFAIRS,
Olympia, Washington Territory, Jan. 31, 1854.

SIR: I have the honor to inform you that I have this morning received from Lieutenant Mullen, in charge of a winter post in the valley of the St. Mary's river, in connexion with my exploration, a report of outrages committed by the Blackfeet Indians since the period of my passing through their country; a copy of which is herewith enclosed. It seems that, notwithstanding the promises made to me in council at Fort Benton, they are still committing their terrible depredations; and I consider that the convening of the council at Fort Benton during next summer, which I recommended in communications from that point, is become a matter of necessity. It is my belief that the chiefs whom I met at Fort Benton are abiding by their promises; but their young men are numerous, and require a stringent course to compel them to aban-

don their accustomed depredations. It is mentioned by Lieutenant Mullen that the traders at the posts of the American Fur Company purchase horses of the Indians without inquiries as to where they were obtained, and it is my impression that those in charge of these posts have not paid sufficient attention to this matter.

I will most urgently repeat my recommendations to convene the council at Fort Benton; and, though I would still further try the influence of kindness with these Indians, my opinion is that a military force should be present at the time of the council, and that a military post should be established at this point. If then, after a fair trial of the influence of kind treatment, outrages continued to be committed, the force of government should be brought to bear upon them with great weight.

A report just received from Mr. Finkham, one of the civil engineers of my exploration, states that in crossing the Rocky mountains, for the third time during the fall, he took a trail which carried him through a pass which even now will permit of the passage of an emigrant wagon. It seems to me that a route for emigration is now open which will come into competition with the route through the South Pass. By steamers emigrants can probably ascend the Missouri river as far as Fort Benton, and certainly as high as the mouth of the Milk river, carrying with them their effects, and driving their cattle along the river trails. From either point good wagon routes lead to the passes of the mountains and to the St. Mary's valley.

For the protection of our emigrants, as well as to secure peace between the Indians, the importance of the council at Fort Benton becomes more and more obvious; and I cannot doubt that a military force ought to be present, and a military post be established at that place.

Mr. James Doty, in charge of a meteorological post at Fort Benton, is engaged in collecting all possible information concerning the Black-foot Indians, and by the hands of Lieutenant Grover, who is expected to arrive here in March, I shall probably receive a full report, which will be immediately communicated to the department.

Very respectfully, sir, your obedient servant,

ISAAC I. STEVENS,

Governor Wash. Territory and Sup. Indian Affairs.

Col. GEO. W. MANYPENNY,

Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Washington, D. C.

CAMP STEVENS, ON THE BITTERROOT RIVER,
November 18, 1853.

SIR: I have the honor to state that your instructions with reference to the council of Indians to be held at Fort Benton during the coming season have been duly carried out, and information has been given to all Indians visiting this place concerning the same. The objects and results to be obtained have been fully set before them and explained in detail; and now especially do the Flatheads await patiently for the expected change that will be wrought through the agency of the government, in their relations with the Blackfoot Indians. The Flatheads,

as a nation, have more reason to complain of a want of attention and care on the part of the government, than any other tribe of Indians, probably, in North America. Their numbers have been so greatly diminished during the last few years, by being murdered by the Blackfeet, that at present there remains but a handful of the noblest of the Indian tribes of North America to tell the tale of woe, misery, and misfortune that they have suffered at the hands of the Blackfeet—these hell-hounds of the mountains.

For years, now, has their country been the theatre where have been committed murders the most brutal, and robberies the most bold and daring, till there is not left a spot but that is pointed out to the traveller where some innocent and unsuspecting Flathead was put to the knife in cold blood, or where were shot down scores of other friendly Indians, by these devils of the mountains. So long has this state of things existed, that the word "Blackfoot" has become the by-word of terror and fear among all the tribes of Indians west of the Rocky mountains; and now it is that the young Flathead child is taught, as soon as it can comprehend the words of its father, to watch and guard his nation against the inroads of these devilish fiends. Thus are the seeds of hate and enmity thus early sown; and when the child becomes the man, he deems it his duty—a duty he owes not only to his family, but to his tribe—to ward off every encroachment of these their enemies. Thus it is that deadly feuds have ever existed among these Indians, and so will they ever exist, till the government shall take such measures as will put an end to the same.

When you passed through the country of the Blackfeet nation, they promised to live on terms of amity and peace with their neighbors the Flatheads, and now I have to communicate that since that time they have kept their promises most faithlessly. News has just reached me by the Pend d'Oreille Indians, that while the chief Victor was on his way to the buffalo hunt, east of the Missouri, he encamped on a prairie after having crossed the dividing range, and that while here a portion of his horses were stolen by a war-party of Blackfeet. There were Pend d'Oreilles also with him at the time. The Flatheads started in pursuit of the Blackfeet, and succeeded in killing one Blackfoot and wounding a second. The dead body of the Blackfoot was seen by Mr. Finkham's party, on their route from Fort Benton to this place. The Pend d'Oreilles being highly incensed at this want of faith on the part of the Blackfeet, (they having been told by Victor that they had promised you most faithfully to abstain from all further depredations,) followed the Blackfeet into Fort Benton, and there seeing a band of horses and mules, they chose from this band a number of Indian horses. These they thought belonged to the American Fur Company. They reasoned thus: "Here are these whites, the employés of the American Fur Company at Fort Benton, who have bought and who still buy from the Blackfeet the horses that they steal from us—thus giving encouragement to their thieving propensities—and here are some of our horses; we will take them off." And so they did. On arriving at the camp of Victor, they narrated what had taken place; when the chief Victor told the Pend d'Oreille chief to take the horses back to Fort Benton, and turn them over to the chief at the fort: and this they did.

The horses were turned over to Mr. Clarke, at Fort Benton. These same Pend d'Oreilles joined Mr. Finkham on their return, on his fifth day out from Fort Benton, and accompanied him to the village of St. Mary's. The chief Victor said that they, the Flatheads, had promised to live in peace with the Blackfeet, and only to war when their lives were threatened, and that none of his people should steal horses from either the whites or Indians; that since you had promised to protect them, the matter should be referred to you.

Here, then, is an act of nobleness, bravery and honesty on the part of these Indians, that is but seldom if ever met with among any other tribe of Indians either east or west of the Rocky mountains; and here, too, is a strong and evident example of the reputed faithlessness of the Blackfoot nation. This last act of bad faith on the part of the Blackfeet has occurred at a most unpropitious period. Since here, I have told the Pend d'Oreilles and Flatheads of the council to be held at Fort Benton and the promises of the Blackfeet; but here the Blackfeet by their acts have given the lie to everything that I have told the Flatheads, and now I fear that the Flatheads will place all the promises made to you by the Blackfeet in the same category that they have placed those made to them and others for the last half century. They have told me that the Blackfeet have made these same promises time and again; and as often as they are made, so often have they been violated. And now I would most urgently recommend to you that the absolute and great necessity of the establishment of a military post at or near Fort Benton be set forth before the proper department, and that immediate action be taken upon it. The necessity for this step is becoming more and more apparent, and is being more and more felt every day. The presence of a military force, only, will restrain the Blackfeet from their incursions and depredations on their neighbors.

The council, should it be held next summer, will probably do a great deal towards settling the feuds that exist among these northern tribes of Indians, but I fear that it alone will prove ineffectual. It, however, with the presence of a military force, will, I think, succeed in putting an end to the enmity that has existed among these tribes for centuries back.

They have never been made aware of the power and influence of the government, save in your council with them while at Fort Benton, and what they now need is to have the fear of the government held over them; and a policy that I should recommend would be, should they continue to keep their pledges and promises as faithlessly as they have done before, that our military force should be sent among them, put every man, woman and child to the knife, burn down their villages, and thus teach the nation that, since persuasion will not, force must and shall, effect the ends that we have in view. This will be a forcible, and I think salutary example to them, and will, I think, be the only means of accomplishing the purposes of the government. They had better by far be totally exterminated, than thus left to prowl the mountains, murdering, plundering, and carrying everything before them. I have also found, myself, in this valley, a Nez Percés scalp taken by the

Blackfeet, quite recently, and but a few days have elapsed since twenty-five of these were at Hell Gate; and thus I think they will ever be through the land of the Flatheads, until they receive a prompt, thorough, and severe chastisement at the hands of the government.

Truly, your obedient servant,

J. MULLEN,
Lieutenant U. S. Army.

Gov. I. I. STEVENS,
In command of N. P. R. R. Survey, &c.