

LOWER FORT GARRY, *July 29th, 1871.*

SIR,—I have the honor to inform you that on Monday last I came to this Fort with the Commissioner to meet the Indians called here, with a view to negotiate a treaty, intending to open the business on Tuesday morning.

It appeared, however, on inquiry, that some bands of Indians had not arrived on Tuesday morning, and we were therefore obliged to postpone the opening of the meeting till Thursday. On that day the Indians from all the sections of the country to which the invitation extended were found present to the number of about one thousand. A considerable body of half-breeds and other inhabitants of the country were also present, awaiting with some anxiety to learn what should be announced as the policy of the Government.

I enclose you a memorandum of the observations with which I opened the meeting. On reading them you will observe one or two points which may require some explanation.

At the time of the treaty with the Earl of Selkirk, certain Indians signed as Chiefs and representatives of their people. Some of the Indians now deny that these men ever were Chiefs or had authority to sign the treaty.

With a view therefore to avoid a recurrence of any such question, we asked the Indians, as a first step, to agree among themselves in selecting their Chiefs, and then to present them to us and have their names and authority recorded.

Furthermore, the Indians seem to have false ideas of the meaning of a reserve. They have been led to suppose that large tracts of ground were to be set aside for them as hunting grounds, including timber lands, of which they might sell the wood as if they were proprietors of the soil.

I wished to correct this idea at the outset.

Mr. Simpson followed me with some observations in the same strain, after which the Indians retired to select their Chiefs and spokesmen.

On Friday morning the Chiefs and spokesmen were duly presented, and after their names were recorded, the Indians were invited to express their views.

After some delay they stated that there was a cloud before them which made things dark, and they did not wish to commence the proceedings till the cloud was dispersed.

On inquiring into their meaning, I found that they were referring to some four of their number who were prisoners in gaol. It seems that some Swampy Indians had entered into a contract with the Hudson's Bay Company as boatmen, and had deserted, and had been brought up before magistrates under a local law of last session, and fined, and in default of payment sent to prison for forty days.

Of this term some considerable part had expired. A few of the offenders had paid their fines, but there were still four Indians remaining in prison.

On learning the facts I told the Indians that I could not listen to them if they made a demand for the release of the Indians as a matter of right; that