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Father Pierre-Jean De Smet, S.J.: Ambassador Extraordinary to the Sioux Indians

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FATHER PIERRE-JEAN DE SMET, S. J.
AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY TO THE SIOUX INDIANS
1862-1868

BY
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VITA

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CHAPTER I

One morning in early September, 1869, Father Pierre Jean De Smet, S. J., at St. Louis University received a letter in the handwriting of a high government official. The letter treated a difficulty that had arisen in the Pottawatami Mission. But what interests us most at this point is the conclusion of the letter:

You, Rev. Sir, know more of Indian character and their real wants than I do and it is I who should look up to you for advice and counsel in the laborious work assigned me. I hope and trust that you will never hesitate always to communicate to me fully and frankly your views upon Indian matters.

Father De Smet might have smiled at this as a bit of political chicanery had he not known the character of the writer to be such as to preclude mere flattery. The writer was General Ely S. Parker, a well educated, full-blooded Seneca Indian, who at that time was United States Commissioner of Indian Affairs.

This was one of many testimonials that Father De Smet, now nearing his seventieth year, could, if he were not too busy, recall and make the subject of long reveries. Thurlow Weed, journalist and Republican leader, had written to Presi-

1. DeSmetiana Manuscript, Archives of Missouri Province of the Society of Jesus, St. Louis, Missouri.
dent Lincoln that "No white man knows the Indians as Father De Smet, nor has any man their confidence in the same degree." Among his beloved Indians he was known as the "man who speaks without forked tongue." Stanley Vestal, writing of De Smet's relations with the Sioux Indians says: "No man in North America had more influence with them than he.")

General statements are for the most part dangerous, and usually explode upon close investigation. But it is our conviction, after close investigation, that Thurlow Weed and Stanley Vestal were not at all wrong in their superlative appraisals of Father De Smet. Their tributes are large; they cover a lot of territory, but they are substantiated by De Smet's accomplishments.

Father De Smet's work with the Indians covers a period of roughly thirty years. This study will deal especially with the years 1864 to 1868 during which time he was doing his most important work as "Ambassador Extraordinary," as he called himself, to the Sioux Indians.


Stanley Vestal in his book Sitting Bull devotes a chapter to Father De Smet. But most historians of the West deal rather shabbily with him if they mention him at all. Dan Elbert Clark in The West in American History makes no mention of De Smet.5 George Dewey Harmon in Sixty Years of Indian Affairs, gives an insignificant quotation from one of De Smet's letters, but he makes no mention of him as a peace envoy.6 Robert E. Riegel's America Moves West gives Father De Smet credit for "very effective missionary work during the '30s," but makes no mention of his peace endeavors.7 Frederick Paxson in his History of the American Frontier gives De Smet this one line, "In 1840 the Jesuits sent out Father De Smet and founded a mission on the Bitter Root."8

Some of the most vigorous of the so called "friends" of

4. Ibid. Chapter XV is entitled, "The Blackrobe Makes Peace."
the Indian seem to take particular care to avoid mention of De Smet. G. E. E. Lindquist in his *The Red Man in the United States*, makes no mention of him in the text of his book, and lists none of De Smet's numerous writings in his bibliography. The book is professedly written to "assist the Protestant churches to extend their constructive work in the Indian Field," but it also claims to be a scientific and an "intimate study of the Social, Economic, and Religious Life of the American Indian." Helen Hunt Jackson makes no mention of De Smet in her crusading work, *A Century of Dishonor*.

Even though Father Gilbert J. Garraghan in *The Jesuits of the Middle United States* devotes a chapter to Father De Smet, he makes no thorough study of De Smet's work as a peace envoy. The only specific and lengthy treatment of the subject we have found is a scholarly article by Patrick W. Donnelly, S. J., in *Historical Records and Studies*. Entitled, "Father Pierre-

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Jean De Smet: United States Ambassador to the Indians, its purpose is to set Father De Smet in his proper perspective in relation to Western History. The study is well documented, and gives a valuable survey of De Smet's work as a peace maker between Indian and Indian, and Indian and White. We shall attempt a more thorough study of De Smet's activities as a peace envoy between the United States Government and the Sioux Indians during the years 1862 to 1868; we add a discussion of the Peace Treaty of 1868.

The Indian Problem

Since the discovery of America a system of extermination, of moving the Indians, thrusting them further back, has been pursued and practiced by the whites, little by little at first, more and more as the European settlers multiplied and gained strength.... The curtain will soon fall upon the poor and unhappy remnants of the Indian tribes, and they will henceforth exist only in history.13

In these few words written by Father De Smet lie a history and a prophecy. With the expansion of the colonial territory the Indian was pushed westward; with every push he was handed a treaty and regarded as an alien by the growing republic. Periodically, the Redman was moved away from the immediate boundary of the new nation until finally the eastern tribes were almost all settled west of the Mississippi on the "permanent Indian frontier."

Secretary of War Calhoun formulated the explicit policy of removal to the west of the Mississippi in January, 1823.14 His policy was adopted by Monroe and followed by his successors. Cardinal among the tenets of the policy was a guarantee to all Indians of perpetual ownership of their new lands in the West! Congress, in giving its approval in 1830, authorized the President to make treaties with the Indians and "solemnly to assure the tribe or nation... that the United States will forever secure and guarantee to them, and their heirs or successors, the country so exchanged with them."15 More solemn promises to the Indian were made in the form of the Indian Intercourse Act of June 30, 1834,16 by which provisions and laws were set up to prevent white citizens from entering the Indian territory without permission of the United States Government. Heavy fines were to be imposed, and military machinery was set up to carry out the provisions of the law.


15. United States Statutes at Large, IV, 412.

16. Ibid., 732.
By 1840 the removal of the eastern Indians to the trans-Mississippi desert had been almost completely effected. It had brought in its trail many miseries of body and soul to the "removed" Indians, but it gave the Indian some hope of permanency in his new home, since the Great American Desert at this time was looked upon as uninhabitable by the white man.

But the permanency of the new frontier was to be short lived. Father De Smet saw unerringly the fate that must soon overtake the Indian. He had known of gold in the western mountains since 1842, and had kept its discovery a secret precisely "because he knew its revelation meant the practical extinction of Indian life in the West." It wasn't until January, 1848, that J. W. Marshall discovered traces of gold at Sutter's Mill. He and his associates, too, tried to keep the fact a secret, but it was not long before the wild sweep of the Forty-niners passed over the plains and filled the mountains in search of golden riches.

17. Chittenden and Richardson, _op. cit._, I., 118. Also confer IV, 1522, De Smet to Major General Pleasanton. De Smet tells the General of another possible source of gold, and explains that he had not mentioned it before because he feared it "might be detrimental to the Indians." This letter was written in 1865.

Hubert Howe Bancroft in the thirty first volume of his monumental work says about the Jesuits: "The existence of gold in Montana was not unknown to the Jesuit Fathers, but they had other motives than the gathering of earthly treasure, and they would not risk the souls of their 'dear Indians' for the glittering metal." 611.
The Forty-niners and later miners and settlers gave no heed to the Indian Intercourse Act which forbade their entering Indian territory without government permission. Although, Indian rights were violated, the government was too weak in its enforcement of Indian laws to prevent this new cause of Indian war. For the next twenty years the Indian question boiled to a head. Whites, illegally establishing themselves on Indian territory, gave occasion for new clashes with the Indians. The extension of trans-continental railroads necessitated new attempts at treaties with the Indians who had "once and for all and in perpetuity" been granted the right to all the western desert. Furthermore, in the very management of Indian affairs there was constant mutual incrimination between the Army and the Interior Departments.18 The Indians were growing more and more suspicious and hateful of the Great

18. Loring Benson Priest, Uncle Sam's Stepchildren, The Reformation of U. S. Indian Policy, 1865-1887., Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 1942. Cf. chapter two, The Transfer Problem, which deals with the problem of transferring the Indian Department from the Department of the Interior to the War Department. For an example of friction between the civil and military authorities see the case of Agent Twiss and Colonel Hoffman in Hoopes, Indian Affairs in the West, 1849-1860, 212-214. Indicative of the army spirit in the solution of the Indian problems is Sherman's remark to his brother that if it were not for Congress, he and Generals Sheridan and Pope could settle the Indian troubles in an hour. The Sherman Letters, 334, General W. T. Sherman to Senator John Sherman, March 18, 1875.
White Father who had so often spoken with a forked tongue. We shall see the anger that was aroused at Sitting Bull's camp when the warriors mistook the flag of the Blessed Virgin for the Stars and Stripes.

What was the cause of all the treaty violations and failures? In general a policy of expediency in settling Indian disputes, plus a weakness of treaty execution can be advanced. In explaining the failure of Indian treaties the Bureau of Ethnology says quite honestly:

a dual condition has existed—on the one side, a theoretic government plan, ideal and worthy; on the other, modifications of this plan, in compliance with local ignorance and greed. The laws and regulations of the U. S. Government applying to the Indian tribes, with few exceptions, have been framed to conserve their rights. The wars which have cost much blood and treasure, the enforced removals, the dishonest practices and the degrading influences that stain the page of history have all come about in violation of these laws and of solemn compacts of the government with native tribes.19

A commission of civilians and generals, appointed by Congress in 1867 to investigate and remove the causes of war was considerably more outspoken in condemnation of government policy:

Have we been uniformly unjust? We answer unhesitatingly, yes. We are aware that the masses of our people have felt kindly toward them, and the legislation of Congress has been conceived in the best intentions, but it has been erroneous in fact or perverted in execution. Nobody pays any attention to Indian matters.  

Father De Smet who saw the Indian problem from both sides never accused the government of injustice or insincerity. He deplored the weak policy of expediency, but always urged the Indians to listen to the government and come to terms with it; for he realized that the government was always a friend to the Indian, but was quite impotent in the fulfillment of its promises. De Smet was of the opinion that "if any one must be blamed on this point, it is rather private persons, new colonists, who act and place themselves in direct opposition with the good intentions of the Government in behalf of the savages."  

Such then were the conditions under which Father De Smet had to work as conciliator. His was the mission to establish peace between a government that had lost face, and hostile Indian tribes, who, because of the faithlessness of the Great Father, had become embittered and were calling forth all that was savage in their nature.  

CHAPTER II
EARLY PEACE NEGOTIATIONS

By 1862, Father De Smet had become known to both Indian and Government as a man who was thoroughly honest; a man devoted to securing justice for both Indian and White. His fearlessness in quest of peace between Indian and Indian had been proven as early as 1839 when, alone and unarmed, he went among the hostile Yankton Sioux. For two years the Potawatomies, De Smet's mission charges at Council Bluffs, had been living in constant apprehension of the warring Yanktons. Recently two of their number had been killed. The future of the mission was endangered as long as this threat of sudden massacre remained. De Smet determined to approach them "armed only with Faith, and in the name of God to ask them to make peace." This was his first visit to the Sioux. But when he came upon their camp they accepted the cross-bearing Blackrobe, feasted him and listened to his pleas for a lasting peace between them and his Potawatomies.

Having discussed the different points and refuted the false reports that divided the two nations, I persuaded the Sioux to make some presents to the children of such of

our Potawatomies as they had killed, which is called covering the dead, and to come and smoke the calumet of peace... The same evening I gave them an instruction on the Apostles Creed, and I baptized a great number of children.  

His mission accomplished, De Smet made his way back three hundred and sixty miles down the Missouri in a "tree hollowed out, which is called a canoe, ten feet in length by one-and-a-half in width." The recently hostile Sioux had given him two skillful paddlers who made the trip in three days.

A year later he was to see his work undone. In mid-November, 1840, on arriving at Fort Vermillion from his first Rocky Mountain journey, De Smet came upon a group of Santee Sioux who had violated the previous year's peace promises. The band was wildly celebrating a murderous raid on the Potawatomies. De Smet lost no time in mending the broken pact. He called the Sioux, and reproached them in no uncertain terms.

Proud of their victory, they performed their dance in the midst of the camp, carrying the scalp on the end of a long pole. I appeared all at once in their presence and invited them to meet in council. I reproached them vigorously with their unfaithfulness to the solemn promise they had made me the year before, to live in peace with their neighbors the Potawatomies. I

23. Chittenden and Richardson, op. cit., I., 190.

24. Ibid., 191.
made them feel the injustice they were guilty of in attacking a peacable nation that wished them nothing but good and who had even prevented their hereditary foes, the Otoes, Pawnees, Sauks, Foxes, and Iowas from coming to invade them... Abashed at their fault and dreading its consequences, they conjured me to serve once more as their mediator, and to assure the Potawatomies of their sincere resolution to bury the hatchet forever.25

Father De Smet's first service as a United States peace envoy came in 1851. The constant stream of gold seekers, settlers, and Oregon immigrants was causing the Indian to become discontented and sullen, so much so that the government thought it best to call a council and talk over grievances. On February 27, 1851, Congress appropriated $100,000 "for expenses of holding treaties with wild tribes of the prairie and for bringing delegates on to the government."26

Superintendent Donald D. Mitchell of the Indian Office, and Agent Thomas Fitzpatrick were made official commissioners to negotiate a treaty. Mitchell sought the aid of De Smet, who after obtaining the permission of his superior, Father Elet, set out from St. Louis for the Indian country along with his friend and companion, Father Christian Hoecken. Father Hoecken died of cholera on the trip up the Missouri, but De

25. Ibid., 256.
Smet went on and attended the council from beginning to end. Although he was largely instrumental in bringing in the greatest number of Indians ever to meet representatives of the government, Father De Smet says little about his efforts. But Stanley Vestal, speaking of the Great Treaty Council of Fort Laramie has this to say:

Uncle Sam decided that something must be done and sent the Rev. Pierre-Jean de Smet, S. J., to summon his red brothers to the council. And when the Blackrobe as the Indians called the good father, asked them to attend, the Prairie Sioux could not refuse. 27

Like the commissioners, De Smet thought this was the treaty to end all treaties. Writing from St. Louis after the successful Council he says:

It will be the commencement of a new era for the Indians—an era of peace. In future peacable citizens may cross the desert unmolested, and the Indian will have little to dread from the bad white man, for justice will be rendered to him. 28

It was seven years before De Smet journeyed westward again. The year 1852 was spent mainly in St. Louis, though one trip with his new provincial, Father William Stack Murphy,

27. Stanley Vestal, New Sources of Indian History, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, Oklahoma, 1934, 190.

S. J., to Louisville, Bardstown and Cincinnati added another 1,478 miles to De Smet's wanderings. Then in 1853 he sailed for Europe where he visited the principal cities of Belgium and Holland, acting as envoy for the State Department. He writes that while in Washington en route to New York:

We shook hands with President Pierce and were kindly entertained by his Excellency. I was made the bearer of dispatches to various Ministers of the great European capitals, by recommendation of Colonel Benton and the kindness of the Secretary of State, the Honorable Mr. Marcy.

His tour was completed by December when he returned to St. Louis University where he remained the next two years.

The next call for diplomatic service came in a letter from Secretary of War Floyd, in May, 1858. General William Harney was being sent to Utah to suppress the Mormon rebellion and he wanted Father De Smet as chaplain. Though a Protestant, Harney made application to Washington for the chaplaincy for De Smet. On May 15, 1858, Secretary of War Floyd wrote to Father De Smet:

The President is desirous to engage you to attend the army for Utah, to officiate as chaplain. In his opinion your services

29. Ibid., 693.
30. Ibid., 693.
would be important in many respects to the public interest,...having sought information as to the proper person to be employed, his attention has been directed to you, and he has instructed me to address you on the subject, in the hope that you may consider it not incompatible with your clerical duties or your personal feelings to yield to his request.31

Permission of superiors to accept the chaplaincy was granted De Smet after consultation. He received his commission in the Army and set out for Fort Leavenworth, Kansas Territory, where Harney the Commanding General installed the new chaplain in his post. De Smet took up his duties immediately and began the long trek to Utah. However, before the army reached the scene of the disturbance, word was received that the Mormons had submitted and laid down their arms. Harney thereupon received orders to distribute his troops to other points and to return to the United States, while De Smet returned to St. Louis with the intention of resigning his commission.

Actually he submitted his resignation in September, but General Harney and Secretary of War Floyd requested him to retain his commission in consequence of new difficulties in the Oregon region west of the Rocky Mountains. So De Smet retained his chaplaincy and sailed from New York for Oregon by way of Panama, September 20, 1858. When he arrived at Vancouver five weeks later, the actual campaign was over, but

31. Ibid., 718.
restless discontent smoldered among the Indians. De Smet wrote that:

The savages, however, still retained their prejudices and an uneasiness and alarm which had to be dissipated, and there were false reports to be rectified. Otherwise the war might break out afresh.~

Hence, under orders of General Harney, he left Fort Vancouver on the twenty-ninth of October to make a peace journey among the mountain tribes some eight hundred miles away. He spent the winter at the Sacred Heart Mission among the Coeur d'Alenes where he was happy to sing midnight Mass for them on Christmas, and hear the Indians sing the Gloria and Credo in their own tongue.

After almost five months in the mountains, on April 16, 1859, again under orders from General Harney, he left the new mission of St. Ignatius to return to Fort Vancouver. It took him and his party of Indian chiefs over a month to reach the Fort. For ten days they had to clear their way through thick forests "where thousands of trees, thrown down by storms, lay across one another, and were covered, four, six, and eight feet with snow."~ Several horses perished in this dangerous passage, many men were injured, but all stayed on in loyalty to

32. Ibid., 743.
33. Ibid., 767.
Father De Smet. He had completed his mission with entire satisfaction, bringing back with him "all the chiefs of the different mountain tribes" to renew the peace with the general and the Superintendent of Indian Affairs.34

A council was held on May 18th where terms acceptable to both sides were drawn up. As De Smet had now accomplished the task appointed him by the Army he asked permission to return overland to St. Louis. About June 15th he left Vancouver with his devoted chieftains and returned with them to the mountains, and then to St. Louis.35

He had established himself as a man of honor among the Indians, and as a competent peace envoy among government

34. Ibid., 766. De Smet lists the names of nine different tribes. He comments that "the last two are still pagans, though their children have been baptized."

The list of chiefs as De Smet records it: Alexander Temglagketzin, or Man-without-a-horse, great chief of the Pend d'Oreilles; Victor Alamiken, or Happy-man (he deserves the name, for he is a saintly man), great chief of the Kalispels; Adolphus Kwilkweschape, Red-feather, chief of the Flatheads; Francis Saxa, or Iroquois, another Flathead chief; Dennis Zenemtietze, or Thundersrobe, chief of the Skoyelpi or Chaudieres; Andrew and Bonaventure, chiefs and braves among the Couer d'Alenee, or Skizoumish; Kamiaken, great chief of the Yakimas; and Gerry, great chief of the Spokans.

35. We are not told of any medal awarded to De Smet. But that his work merited citation is clear from a letter from Harney to the Assistant Adjutant General in New York: "It gives me pleasure to commend to the general-in-chief the able and efficient services Reverend Father De Smet has rendered." Official report of General Harney to the Assistant Adjutant General, June 1, 1859. Quoted in Chittenden and Richardson, op. cit., IV, 1576.
officials. As he was the one white man in whom the Indians would place their full trust, the Government was beginning to look to him for assistance. The Mormon, the Forty-niner, the General came to him for information and advice.

36. Ibid., 1402-1415.
It is often claimed that Father De Smet was the first to direct the Mormons to the Great Salt Lake region when he met them encamped near Council Bluffs in the fall of 1846. It is doubtful that he actually directed them there. But he did answer their question about the region known today as the Great American Basin. He does not claim for himself the distinction of pointing the way to their future abode.

"They asked me a thousand questions about the regions I had explored and the spot I have just described to you [Salt Lake Region] pleased them greatly from the account I gave them of it. Was that what determined them? I would not dare to assert it. They are there."

Father De Smet's contacts with the Mormons were limited, and his opinion of them changes radically over a period of six years. In 1851 he looked upon them as a people suffering under the "tyranny and persecutions that other sectarians have brought upon them." In December, 1857, he writes:

These polygamous fanatics have lately been committing infamous atrocities upon the poor peacable emigrants. A war of extermination is being prepared for them. The Mormons could make it a long and hard one in their almost inaccessible mountains. I think that the Mormons will pass the winter in doing the Americans all the damage they can, and early in the spring take up their march and take possession of the province of Sonora in Mexico. They have a political system that is inadmissible in a republic, and a religious system still less admissible, which is the "abomination of abominations," invented in the present century. (p. 1407)

The Mormons did not march on Sonora, but, as we have seen, laid down their arms before General Harney reached them.
CHAPTER III
THE SIOUX OUTBREAK

In the summer of 1862 Father De Smet made a long journey up the Missouri River. Sailing in the American Fur Company steamer Spread Eagle, he went from St. Louis to Fort Benton in present day north central Montana. His purpose was to revisit the tribes, baptize the children, and study prospects for new missions. He didn't stay long in the north country this time; and when his journey was over he was happy over all his spiritual ministrations, but he was worried. Alarmed over the state of mind of the Indians all along the Missouri, he was especially anxious about the Sioux nations. They had never been so hostile, and Father De Smet feared that there would be another outbreak against the whites. His fears were verified almost immediately upon his return home to St. Louis — the historic Minnesota Massacre broke on August 17, 1862.

Father De Smet had seen the storm coming. Clouds had been gathering since shortly after the Treaty at Fort Laramie in 1851. As had so often happened before, the promises made there had been forgotten or whittled down. The contract to pay the Indians $50,000 a year for fifty years in provisions, merchandise, domestic animals, and agricultural implements had been tampered with by the United States Senate who reduced the period of annuity payments to ten years with a provisional
More irritating to the Indian than the Senate reduction of annuity payments was the trickery of parasite white traders who found it possible at least once to appropriate all the money payment which a particular treaty had provided. During the summer of 1851 Governor Ramsey of Minnesota had negotiated treaties in which the Sioux Indians ceded all of their lands in the State of Iowa and the Territory of Minnesota except a narrow strip along the upper Minnesota River. The payment promised the Indians was generous, but traders duped the unsuspecting chiefs to sign "trader papers" along with the treaties. The Indians soon learned that the trader claims had absorbed their promised money grant. A Senate investigating committee reporting in 1854 cleared Governor Ramsey and Luke Lea, the other peace commissioner, of any fraud or complicity with the traders. The Indians, according to the report, had requested that their just debts be taken from the grant. The


Senate Report makes no mention of any corrective measures to be taken against unethical traders. 40

These injustices, plus the new overland coach trails, the railroad surveys, the killing of the wild life of the plains by white hunters, and the constant friction with the settlers violating the Indian Intercourse Act set the Indian mind aflame. On his trip to Fort Benton, Father De Smet saw the unrest and resentment. There was as yet no organized general conspiracy but the clouds were gathering. The plains tribes seemed to agree that the time had come to resist further encroachments.

On August 17, 1862, at Acton four young braves, while drunk, killed Robinson Jones, his wife, three other men and a girl. This was the beginning of the storm. Realizing that their lives were valueless without protection the Indians sought the aid of Chief Little Crow, who formed a band of the


Indicative of official contempt for the Indian is this statement on page two of the official report:

Had the money been paid to the Indians, who at all acquainted with their habits and the influences surrounding them, doubts that it would have been improvidently used. Indeed, Mr. Young, the commissioner admits this would necessarily have been the case.
disaffected and some of the peaceful Indians, and directed raids and massacres. For seven days the Indians were on the rampage, killing over seven hundred\textsuperscript{41} white men, women, and children. Military aid under the direction of General Henry H. Sibley was sent to the Minnesotans. The "hostiles," as De Smet called them, were overtaken and defeated. Nearly two thousand Indians were taken prisoner and sent to Fort Snelling, where four hundred were eventually tried for murder, rape, and arson, and three hundred were condemned to death. President Lincoln pardoned all but thirty-eight of the ring leaders, who were to hang at Mankato on December 26.

On December 12, Father De Smet wrote from St. Louis University to the Honorable Mr. Mix, Indian Commissioner at Washington, advising that the condemned leaders be spared and held as hostages. His letter was not one of mere pious sentiment in favor of killers, but that of a level-headed diplomat who saw that further difficulties would arise from the hanging of the raiders.

Surely they deserve no better lot. The consideration, however, of the lot of the prisoners, children, women and men, who are still alive among the band of Santees and other tribes of the Sioux,

\textsuperscript{41} De Smetiana Manuscript, July 8, 1864.
and of whom I heard not later than yes-
terday, makes me shudder. I fear that
cruel and savage vengeance will be taken
on the innocent and unhappy white people
as yet under their control. Let the Sioux
prisoners be kept as hostages; let it be
known to the whole nation that for every
white man they kill, one of the prisoners
shall atone for the murder. The murderer
or murderers would thus become answerable
before their own people for the execution
of the hostages.  

There is no record of a reply to this letter from Mr. Mix.
The thirty-eight leaders were hanged at Mankato on December
26, 1862.

There were still over two thousand Indian warriors in the
field, against whom Major General John Pope, the new federal
department commander, planned a campaign. General Sibley was
to go up the Minnesota River in search of the "hostiles." He
was to attempt to drive them west from that river, while
General Alfred Sully was to go up the Missouri, intercept any
"hostiles" escaping from Sibley, and form a junction with him.
Sibley overtook Little Crow's warriors near the Missouri
Coteau and put them to flight in the two battles of Big Mound
and Dead Buffalo Lake. Sully failed to make his rendezvous
with Sibley, but he defeated a part of Little Crow's fugitive
band at White Stone Hill. Indecisive operations were continued

42. Chittenden and Richardson, op. cit., IV, 1510.
against the evasive Sioux during all of 1863.

Meantime, Father De Smet who had hoped to begin a mission among the Sioux early in 1863, laid aside his plans for the new Sioux mission and made a trip to Fort Benton in the interests of peace among the mountain tribes. All went well aboard the steamer, Nellie Rogers from the day of sailing from St. Louis, May 9, 1863, until the steamboat reached the mouth of the Milk River, near the site of present day Fort Peck Dam, Montana, where the water was too shallow for the boat to proceed. The entire load of freight and all the passengers had to go ashore and await means of overland travel to Fort Benton.

Almost a month was spent on the banks of the Missouri, during which time Father De Smet worked among the Crows and Gros Ventres in the neighboring district; his religious services being held in a tent that General Harney had given him. But the stay here on the river bank, next to a pile of two hundred tons of merchandise was not without its share of excitement. Three days after the Nellie Rogers backed away from the shore and headed down the Missouri, the camp was approached by a war party of six hundred Sioux. The entire camp of

43. The seasons of high and low water on the Missouri are described in Joseph Mills Hanson's *The Conquest of the Missouri*, Murray Hill Books Inc., New York, 1946, 54. See also Chittenden and Richardson, *op. cit.*, 867 for Father De Smet's description of the treacherous, shifting Missouri.
eighty disembarked steamboat passengers was in terror at what might have been a massacre had it not been for Father De Smet. He went out alone garbed in black robe and carrying his crucifix when one of the Sioux recognized him, he was received with friendliness.

Three days after the boat left us we were attacked by a powerful band of Sioux warriors, about six hundred in number. Our camp was in an awful fix and no ways prepared for such a visit. All rushed to their arms in a rather confused manner. For my own part I had no time to reflect and had nothing to do with fire-arms. I recommended myself to the Lord, and full of confidence in the prayers which I knew were offered for me in many places, I walked, or rather ran, up to the vanguard of the enemy, about forty strong. The partisan or captain of the band happily recognized me and cried out, "It is the Black-gown, who saved my sister." They all looked bewildered, but were kind and shook hands with me. We had a long talk, in which I gave them some salutary advice, backed with some coffee, sugar and hard biscuits, and they left us without further molestation. 44

About three weeks later, ox carts arrived from three-hundred-and-fifty miles away to carry the Nellie Rogers' baggage and passengers over the hot, dusty plains to the safety of Fort Benton. Possibly Father De Smet had saved himself and companions from massacre, but he was not fool-hardy enough to risk the return journey to St. Louis by way of the Missouri. He resolved on "returning to St. Louis by the Pacific Ocean!" 45

44. Chittenden and Richardson, op. cit., III, 809.
45. Ibid., I, 83.
When he reached Washington in December, 1863, Father De Smet was asked by the Secretary of the Interior and the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to accompany a military expedition, and again try to persuade the Sioux to come to terms. To secure a just peace between the Indians and Whites was the supreme ambition in the life of Father De Smet. Nothing was more to his liking than a mission of peace between the warring Sioux and the United States, but he must go as a man of peace, and not as a military leader, representing the might of the United States. He was determined not to jeopardize his influence for good with the Indians by using military power as a passport. His decision is best expressed in his own words.

I have been requested by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in Washington, 'to undertake the journey and to bring about, if possible, a peace among the hostile Sioux, acting in concert with the commander of the troops and the appointed agents.' They offer to pay all my expenses, with a handsome remuneration for myself. Not being well as
yet, 46 I have not accepted their request. I fear I would lose all caste with the Indians. They have hitherto looked upon me as the bearer to them of the word of the Great Spirit and have universally been kind and attentive wherever I have met them. Should I present myself in their midst as the bearer of the word of the Big Chief of the Big Knives in Washington, no longer their Great Father, but now their greatest enemy, it would place me in rather an awkward situation.

I have written to the Commissioner that if I can go, I will go on my own hook, without pay or remuneration; visit the friendly Sioux first, and in their company try to penetrate among their fighting brethren and do my utmost to preach peace and good will to them, and to make them come to a good understanding with the general in command and the agents of the Government. 47

46. Ibid., IV, 1518. Father De Smet, who was about to enter his sixty-fourth year, found each succeeding trip to the Indians a little more fatiguing. On Christmas Eve, 1863 he wrote to his brother Francis: "My health is not good, but that is generally the case after each long journey that I make. The cessation of fatigues uses me up more or less and it takes me some little time to get back into my ordinary equilibrium."

"Some little time" on this occasion meant almost two months. On February 26, 1864 he again writes to his brother Francis:

It is only in the last three days that I have begun to recover a little strength and to go out. I hope my strength may return and enable me to return among the plains Indians in April. I find myself in my sixty-fourth year, and I feel a conviction that my end is near—fiat voluntas Dei.

47. Ibid., I, 85.
CHAPTER IV
THE Santee Sioux and General Sully

When Father De Smet's health was sufficiently recovered he set out from St. Louis on April 20, 1864, and went as far as Fort Berthold on the Missouri. There he remained for most of the summer visiting some Sioux bands, but spending most of his time among the Mandans, Aricaras, and Minnetarees. While at Fort Berthold he had an experience similar to the meeting with the six hundred Sioux at the mouth of the Milk River a year previous. On July 8th, a band of from two to three hundred Sioux warriors emerged from the trees on the bank opposite Fort Berthold. Their immediate intentions were unknown, but they were definitely warriors, painted and hatchet in hand. De Smet determined to cross the river in an open boat and meet them. The whites in the fort tried to dissuade him, and all human prudence would have told him to follow their advice and remain within the protected area of the fort. The soldiers and traders probably reminded him of Charles Larpenteur's experience a year previously when the old fur trader witnessed the slaughter of three men in identical circumstances. Standing on the deck of Joseph La Barge's steamboat, Larpenteur had seen three men massacred as they approached
the shore to talk to some Sioux who said they "wanted to talk but were out of tobacco." \(^4^8\)

Although killings such as this, and the subsequent melting of the Indians into the woods, had been frequent since the Minnesota Massacre, Father De Smet could not be dissuaded. Clad in cassock and armed with crucifix he went to the opposite bank.

Contrary to the advice of all the whites in the fort I went to meet them. They received me with unmistakable tokens of friendship and respect. They had repaired to the spot for the exact purpose of having a conference with me. The council lasted nearly three hours. The great chiefs spoke favorably with regard to peace, and heard with pleasure and satisfaction the words I addressed to them on the part of the Government. \(^4^9\)

De Smet tells us that this interview "concluded in the most favorable manner," but as it was not yet time for the "big" council, the Indians disappeared into the woods. It would be a long time before he could effect a meeting of a large council with the government authorities.

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49. De Smetiana Manuscript.

This quotation is taken from a letter that lies loose in the archive files. It is undated, but must refer to July 8, 1864 because of certain definite references later to General Sully. The letter is unfinished and unaddressed since De Smet in many of his letters does not put the addressee until the end of the letter.
On his arrival at Fort Berthold De Smet had sent an "express" of runners with tobacco to the Sioux to "acquaint them with my arrival and intentions." He expected to hear from these Sioux "within a fortnight," and if their response was favorable he was prepared to accompany them into the interior and talk to their chiefs.50

It was not long before he received "tidings of the great tribe of the Santee Sioux who had the chief hand in massacring the inhabitants of the State51 of Minnesota in 1862. I was assured that they too would be glad to see me and to hear the announcements I was authorized to make on the part of the Government."52 These Santee had been hovering about the British border about a hundred miles north of Fort Berthold. Here was De Smet's chance. But before contacting them and making unauthorized promises, he determined to make certain of his powers. He was not going to make empty promises to the Sioux. To ascertain his position he made a long trip down the Missouri to General Sully's camp.

51. Minnesota was admitted to the Union on May 11, 1858.
52. De Smetiana Manuscript, July 8, 1864.
Before setting out to them I wished to consult the general of the army, which was 5,000 men strong, and inform myself of his dispositions toward the savages. So I descended the Missouri and at a distance of about two hundred miles I found the great camp of the whites. I gave the general an account of my mission and of my different interviews with the Sioux. He told me plainly that circumstances obliged him to punish by force of arms all the Sioux tribes that harbored in their camps any murderers of white men. 'Unfortunately', he added, 'all the Indian camps harbor some of these desperate ruffians, over whom the chiefs have little or no power.'

In consequence of this declaration of General Sully De Smet saw that his errand of peace, though sanctioned by the Government, was "bootless and could only serve to place me in a false position: namely, that of being face to face with the Indians without being able to do them the least service." He determined to return to St. Louis and report to the government all that had passed during his stay in the plains. Accordingly he left for St. Louis on July 15 and arrived there on August 23. A few days later he set out for Washington to make his official report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs.

Meanwhile, General Sully had succeeded in finding the main camp of the Sioux and on July 28th in the battle of Kill-

53. Ibid.
54. Ibid.
deer Mountain had inflicted on them a severe defeat. The Sioux were now beaten into a sullen submission, but there was no real peace. As small depredations continued, steamboats travelled only if heavily barricaded.

After making his report in Washington, De Smet was again away on one of his frequent trips to Europe to obtain men and money for his missions and his province. He reached Liverpool late in October, spent some time in England, then crossed to Belgium, and soon went to Rome where he was graciously received by Pope Gregory XVI. We are not told how much financial aid De Smet was able to obtain on this European tour, but in recruiting religious candidates his mission was most successful. He arrived in St. Louis on June 30th, 1865 with "four candidates from Holland, five from Belgium, and three from England, besides four sisters of Ste. Marie from Namur."55 The remaining months of 1865 were spent at St. Louis University.

In April, 1866, he made another journey on the steamer Ontario to the upper Missouri. This time he went in a completely unofficial capacity, travelling only as a missionary, but since the country was infested with hostile Sioux, and military forces were guarding all the ports, he thought it best to ob-

55. Chittenden and Richardson, op. cit., III, 836.
tain a passport from his friend General William T. Sherman. This was readily granted.

Headquarters Military Division of the Mississippi.
St. Louis, Mo., April 9, 1866.

All officers of the Army within this Military Division are required, and all citizens are requested to extend to the bearer of this letter, the Reverend Father De Smet, a Catholic Priest who has heretofore travelled much about the Rocky Mountains and is now en route for the missions under his control, all the assistance and protection they can to enable him to fulfill his benevolent and humane purposes. He has always been noted for his strict fidelity to the interests of our government, for indefatigable industry and an enthusiastic love for the Indians under his charge.

56. Father De Smet was a family friend of the Shermans from the year 1851. Ellen Ewing Sherman, the General's zealously Catholic wife gave unstinted support to De Smet in his missionary work.

"She secured passports and government maps, called her husband's attention to general and individual abuses of the Indians from the white settlers...... She was Father De Smet's special advocate with General Sherman, and saw that his requests received attention and that her husband's promises in behalf of the Indians were not forgotten."


57. Chittenden and Richardson, op. cit., III, 845.

The personal letter accompanying this letter of passport is in the De Smetiana archives. It is a long letter, and contains much that in modern warfare would be labeled "Top Military Secret." It lays before De Smet the entire military setup and proposals for new roads and posts to be established during the summer.
On entering the Sioux country the *Ontario* was armed against attack by hostile Indians. The pilot house was planked over and made bullet and arrow proof. A cannon was mounted in the bow. All carbines, guns, and pistols were inspected and loaded. Lookouts were posted day and night to watch the shore for signs of hostility. Fortunately, all the way to Benton, as De Smet puts it, "our firearms have served only to slay the timid animals of the desert which were cut up for the kitchen and dinner table."58

His stay at Fort Benton was short. He moved to Fort Sully after a couple of weeks, and from the fort accompanied the Indian Chiefs to their camp where he had a long talk with them. In the course of their discussion all the Indians' "Miseries, suffering, and grief came to light," but as De Smet was there in an unofficial capacity he could promise them nothing material, but only the invaluable spiritual aid he always administered to them. He was back in St. Louis by the middle of July and remained there the rest of the year 1866. Of this visit De Smet says:

> In my quality of Black-robe I did my best to give them salutary counsels, as well as to console them. The grievances of the Indians against the whites are very numerous, and the vengeances which they on their side provoke are often most

cruel and frightful. Nevertheless, one is compelled to admit that they are less guilty than the whites. Nine times out of ten, the provocations come from the latter—that is to say, from the scum of civilization, who bring to them the lowest and grossest vices, and none of the virtues of civilized men.

59. Ibid., III, 856.
On March 20, 1867, Father De Smet, now sixty-six years of age, and none too robust, on finishing his annual retreat wrote to Lewis V. Bogy, Commissioner of Indian Affairs:

I finish this evening my eight days retreat, as my first preparation to my visit and mission to the Sioux Upper Missouri Tribes.60

The same evening he wrote to a Father Hoecken asking prayers for "my long and dangerous mission among the Sioux."61 This, he realized was to be the most important journey he had yet made up the Missouri. He knew also its danger. Several times before he had come close to death at the hands of the Sioux. In a letter to Father Imoda he reveals that he had actually been the object of attack by them.

I was several times in great danger on the part of the Sioux: even a plot was laid on one occasion, to murder me and my band of whites, had not kind providence interfered. A chief recognized me and attributed to me the deliverance of his daughter, a captive among the Crows.62

60. De Smetiana Archives, Letter Book D 12, p. 103.
61. Ibid.
Each of the letters in his letter book from this time until his
departure for the upper country beg for prayers. To a Mrs.
Shea he writes: "Recommend me to the prayers of the dear
children that the Lord might protect me."

On March 2, he had been appointed a special commissioner
to the Upper Missouri tribes, and had been given a commission
as Major in the Army. His official orders from the Secretary
of the Interior directed him to "bring them [the hostile
Sioux] back to peace and submission and to prevent as far as
possible the destruction of property and the murder of the
whites."

The route taken this time reveals the progress in trans­
portation made since Father De Smet's early tours west by way
of New York and Panama, or by the long dangerous journey up
the Missouri. Until almost the day of departure he had ex­
pected to go the whole way by the river route, but we find
that on April 12th he went by rail to Chicago where he boarded


64. Chittenden and Richardson, op. cit., I, 89.

65. On March 26th, De Smet was still going to go by way of the
Missouri, though he realized its dangers. In a letter to
Father Grassi he writes that he has advised a certain T.
Tomada to go West by way of Panama because "knowing the
dangers of the Missouri route, and how they would have
been left by themselves in case of an accident, or for want
of water on the upper Missouri, I could not in conscience
courage them to come by the Missouri."
Letter Book D 12, De Smet to Grassi, March 26, 1867.
one of the new Northwestern Railroad trains. The line had just been completed to Council Bluffs on the Missouri River. De Smet expected to ride to the end of the line, and thus save days of slow travel up the winding Missouri. But the trip was by no means swift or smooth. At Boonesboro, a hundred and fifty-eight miles from Council Bluffs, the train was delayed three days because spring thaws had caused flash floods that carried away the Northwestern's bridges and made the track impassable. On the sixteenth the train made its way to Denison, ninety miles from Boonesboro, where De Smet with five other travellers hired a wagon and continued overland to Sioux City where the Missouri bends west. While at Sioux City he took time to write a long letter to Father Terwecorens in which we read again De Smet's realization that this is a dangerous mission.

Will they receive me among them? While all hatchets are raised against the whites,

66. De Smetiana Archives, De Smet to N. G. Porter, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, June 1, 1867. This is a copy of De Smet's report to Porter written by De Smet in a notebook that he apparently carried with him on this 1867 trip. The notebook is in the archives. It is bound in red leather and has the word cash stamped on the front cover. Pages 1 to 23 of this ledger book have the recordings of baptisms and a few marriages dating from May 4 to August 4, 1867. The remaining pages are used from the back of the book and upside down. The page numbers are written in by hand. Besides this letter the book contains an on-the-spot report of Iron Shell's speech to General Sully, and Sully's reply.
while hundreds of scalps dangle and flutter in token of triumph from the tips of their lances and are used for decoration for the warriors and their ponies? Eagle feathers are in great demand among the Indians at present and their bonnets and their horses manes and tails are covered with them—each plume denoting a scalp taken from the enemy.67

Here at Sioux City, De Smet met chief Pananniapapi who was returning from Washington with a band of twenty-eight Yankton Sioux. The friendly chief had gone to Washington at the summons of the Secretary of the Interior68 and was on his way back to his own people. De Smet determined to accompany him to the Yankton reservation and "thence to penetrate into the interior of the country in search of the Sioux tribes."69

On April 30th the party boarded the steamer Sinclair and six days later arrived at the Yankton Agency where chief Pananniapapi and the other Yanktons were joyously received by their families after an absence of three months.

On the seventeenth of May, the steamer Big Horn arrived from St. Louis with De Smet's wagon, travelling necessities, two mules and a horse. De Smet was ready to depart for the interior immediately, but three days were required to "bring our quadrupeds into tractable shape." On May 21st, De Smet

68. Ibid., 865.
69. Ibid., 865.
left the Yankton Agency for the interior, taking with him only a Sioux interpreter, the son of old Zephyr Rencontre, Joseph Picotte as a guide, and a half-breed horse guard.

Five days later, on the evening of the twenty-sixth, the party arrived at Fort Thompson where over a hundred lodges chiefly of Brules, Two Kettles, and Yanktonnais were encamped. De Smet called his first peace council. He was still among friendly, or at least neutral Indians, but the disaffection of the "hostiles" was noticeably affecting them. De Smet summoned thirty-six of the principal chiefs and braves for a council that lasted several hours. He laid before them the object of his mission and the desires of the government in their regard; he endeavored to strengthen them in their good dispositions, to keep them apart from the hostile bands, and to bring them to conclude a permanent peace. The chiefs and braves listened attentively and promised to hear the advice of the Great Father, the President.

But in their speeches the Indians quite honestly showed that they were caught on the horns of a dilemma. If they sided with the government, the government's promises probably would not be kept; if they sided with their blood relatives they would probably have to fight to the death.

On the one hand they alleged their nearness to and relations with the fighting bands, who are their own blood and kin; and the invitations of the latter to take up the hatchet against the whites in defense of the land of their birth...
On the other hand...I will quote their own words: "Commissioners and agents of the Government come to us every year; they are affable and prodigal of speeches and promises in behalf of Our Great Father. What is the reason that so many fine words and pompous promises always come to nothing, nothing, nothing?" 70

More conferences were held on the next day; when De Smet left them on the twenty-ninth he felt that the conference had had a "happy effect" and that these tribes would listen to the peace proposals of the Great White Father.

On May 30th Father De Smet arrived at Old Fort Sully where he found over two hundred lodges principally Two Kettles bands, Blackfeet Sioux, Brules, Yanktonnais, Yanktons, Sans Arc, Minneconjous, and Ogallallas. 71 The next day a long council was held with the twenty-four chieftains. As at Fort Thompson, the Indians listened with attention, but they complained bitterly of the bad faith of the whites, of the commissioners, and agents of the government, always so prodigal of promises and always so slow in

70. Ibid., 874, De Smet to Father Terwecoren, July 8, 1867.

71. There is some significance in the long lists of different tribes at these agencies. It shows how concentrated the tribes became after the big removals. Tribes with the deepest animosity were practically forced to be neighbors. For this Indian tribe-pride see The Trans-Mississippi West, Papers read at a conference at the University of Colorado, 1929, James F. Willard and Colin B. Goodykoontz eds., University of Colorado Press. See especially the paper by Walter S. Campbell (Stanley Vestal) on "The Plains Indian in Literature and in Life."
fulfilling them, if they ever do so. This conduct sticks in their minds; they propose to wait a while longer and see. 72

On June 1, 1867, De Smet drew up a long report to Commissioner N. G. Porter detailing all the work of this trip. He explained to the commissioner the grievances of the Indians, but said that he entertained "no doubt of their good dispositions towards the whites. Fatherly and kind agents, with proper attendants will always effect great good among these poor benighted people. They look to the government for protection and assistance, of which they stand much in need." 73

While he was attending councils and holding conferences with the friendly Indian tribes, De Smet was also making long range preparations to meet the "hostiles." From Fort Thompson he sent out six of Chief Long Mandan's young warriors stocked with passports of tobacco to carry the words of their great father to the hostile bands on the plains; at the same time to apprise them of my presence in the country, and my earnest desire to meet them. They may soon bring back the answer of the enemy. 74

"Soon" might mean anytime within the next two months as De

72. Chittenden and Richardson, op. cit., III, 877.
73. De Smetiana Archives, Manuscript notebook, De Smet to Porter, June 1, 1867.
74. Ibid.
Smet expresses it to Father Terwecoren.

I have sent several expresses into the interior of the country to announce to the hostile bands my intention of visiting them. I expect their reply within the next two months.  

From June first to fifth De Smet conferred with the Indians who "after the whites have proclaimed a sort of martial law; the war chiefs have assumed sole command." On June sixth, General Alfred Sully and General Ely Parker of the Congressional commission to investigate the causes of Indian wars appeared at Fort Thompson. Immediately they conferred with De Smet, and two days later called a grand council of the Indians which was very similar to those already held by De Smet. But on the next day, a Sunday, after Mass, the head war-chief Mazakampeaka, or Iron Shell, presented himself before the three envoys. He asked for a council, and one was held at once. The Commissioners now heard for the first time the conditions of peace laid down by the Indians. Iron Shell desired tranquillity and peace for his people, but to establish it three conditions appeared to him absolutely necessary. Briefly they were: remove the soldiers, close the public roads, and give

75. Chittenden and Richardson, op. cit., III, 878.
76. Ibid., 878.
the Indians the traders they wanted. Father De Smet jotted down Iron Shell's remarks.

This is my country. In olden times we all lived here contented, we were happy in our land. Now look at it, it is all cut up with your roads—the weather even is not good—things have changed. The soldiers have caused it all. You have made four roads through my country and scared away all the game. No Indian likes this my brother, if you want to do what is right, you must abandon all the roads and take away all the soldiers, and give me the traders I want, and then I will be happy."

General Sully made no promise but explained that the soldiers had been brought into the country by the massacres in Minnesota and on the Missouri plains. He added a threat that if these murders and massacres continued, the number of soldiers would be increased, until they would cover the country as the grasshoppers cover fields. He did promise to make a faithful report of the Chief's complaints to the Great Father

77. De Smetiana Archives, Manuscript notebook No. C. 5.
General Sully's speech as copied by Father De Smet in his note book. The speech is a good type of the language used by the Army and Peace Commissioners to the Indian.

I know it is bad to have soldiers in your country, because it frightens away your game. At the same time it is not pleasant for the soldiers themselves to be here. They come because the Great Father sends them—they don't like to come. Their squaws and children are a long way from here. They would rather be at home with them. You say that before the soldiers came all were happy. Do you not know why they came? Do you not know that the Indians in Minnesota killed hundreds of women and children? Do you not know that these same Indians have shot and killed people passing up and down this river? These are the reasons that the Great Father had to send his soldiers and build forts in your country. He is going to stop this thing. If you choose war your country will be filled with soldiers and forts. If the Great Father does not send enough soldiers this year, he will send more next year, and keep sending them until they will be as plenty as grasshoppers. The Great Father sends us to tell you that he does not want war. He wants you to control your young men. If people (whites) and boats are not molested on this river, the Great Father will not have to send his soldiers here. I hope when you go among your young men, you will tell them of these things. I know that some are foolish and will not listen, but you should talk until they hear. If they behave themselves and are quiet, all will be well. All that is said is written down and will go straight to the Great Father. When I see him I will tell him what the Indians want and those that are good he will help.

I have some provisions to give you for a feast—we shake hands and make friends.
That evening the three envoys left for the new Fort Sully where they boarded the steamboat *Graham*, at that time the largest and most luxurious boat to ascend the Upper Missouri. Even this luxury liner, however, made no more than twenty miles a day because so much time was "consumed in cutting and taking on wood to supply the furnaces." On June 16th, Fort Rice was reached, and a sight of over five hundred Indian lodges on both sides of the river greeted De Smet's eyes. All the tribe of the Yanktonnais, three hundred and eighty lodges, were there with Hunkpapas, Blackfeet Sioux, and others. In two days of conferences with these Indians, Father De Smet and the commissioners heard the same complaints, and the same requests as had been made by the Indians at Fort Thompson, and at the Old and New Fort Sully.

From Fort Rice the Commission sailed to Fort Berthold, 1916 miles up the Missouri from St. Louis. Here, in permanent earthen dwellings, lived old friends of De Smet among

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79. In the De Smetiana Archives is a small notebook that belonged to Captain John B. LaBarge. On the inside of the cover is written, "Distances from St. Louis and Fort Benton, taken by Capt. John B. LaBarge." The notebook contains the exact mileage between each stop along the Missouri from St. Louis to Fort Benton. Three columns give the names of stops, the distances between them, and the graduated totals. Many of the named stops no longer exist today. LaBarge lists and names (for some he gives a double name) four hundred and thirty seven stops. No wonder it took De Smet so long to go by way of the Missouri. There is no dedication to De Smet in the pencilled notebook but apparently LaBarge gave it to him.
the Aricaras, Mandans, and Grosventres. Though at complete peace with the whites, even they had some bitter complaints to make to Father De Smet and the two generals.

They complained bitterly of the Government agents and soldiers. They first deceive them and rob them in the distribution of their annuities, and the others demoralize them by their scandalous conduct. All last winter they were the playthings and slaves of a hard and tyrannical captain, who seemed to make it his business to torment the poor wretches. When the old women with their starving babies came up to the fort to pick up the filthy refuse thrown out of the soldiers' kitchen, they were pitilessly driven off with scalding water, thrown upon their emaciated bodies, covered only with rags in the severest of the cold weather.80

This together with all the complaints gathered along the Missouri, was transmitted to the Department of the Interior.

The next stop was Fort Buford at the mouth of the Yellowstone River. The boat was slow and was further delayed when a green-horn hunter was lost!

We saw the first herd of buffalo. A large number of the passengers leaped ashore to go in pursuit of the animals. A single buffalo was killed. One of the hunters, still green in this kind of hunting, got lost; and in spite of all searches and firing of cannon, could not be found.81

80: Chittenden and Richardson, op. cit., III, 385.
81: Ibid., 383.
At any rate, the steamer reached Fort Buford only on June 28th. On July 7th the Assiniboine chiefs arrived for a grand council. Once again, the list of grievances, as well as the peacable assurances, were noted down by Generals Parker and Sully.

About the middle of July, Father De Smet headed back to Fort Rice to get the answer of the six young warriors he had sent in search of the "hostiles." He found in answer that:

Upward of one hundred chiefs and warriors came at my request to Fort Rice, in the hope of finding me there with the commissioners, Generals Parker and Sully. They waited for us for ten days, and only went away when lack of provisions forced them to do so... At leaving they sent word to me especially by two interpreters that they greatly desired to see the Black-robe and talk with him. I was assured that they all seemed favorably inclined toward peace. 82

His mission accomplished for the time, De Smet descended the Missouri to Leavenworth, where on August 13th he met the new peace commission appointed by Act of Congress "to establish peace with certain hostile Indians." This group consisted of several distinguished army officers 83 appointed by the government to probe thoroughly the entire subject of the relations between the Indians and the Whites. The commission took down

82. Ibid., 887.

De Smet's statements and asked him to accompany them to the upper country, but since his "trunk, bed and all travelling necessities" had been shipped to St. Louis he was obliged to return to the city. He intended to pick up his luggage and return to the peace commission, but the sudden change in temperature made him so gravely ill that under the doctor's direction he gave up his plan of joining the peace commission on its tour. He had come from a region where the thermometer hovered around forty-eight degrees, to St. Louis which was sweltering in a hundred degree heat wave. This, plus his weakened condition, brought on serious general exhaustion.

Another peace journey had been accomplished. And De Smet received a note from the Secretary of the Interior thanking him for his services.

You will please accept my thanks for the faithful and efficient manner in which you have discharged the duties entrusted to your care.

The trip had been successful in bringing to light in a peaceful manner the grievances of the Indians. It was the government's task now to determine on a workable plan for a lasting peace.

For Father De Smet there was the joy of having brought the blessings of the Church to thousands of his beloved Indians.

84. Ibid., 488.
85. Chittenden and Richardson, op. cit., I, 85.
Everywhere he went he gave aid to Indian and White alike. He mentions that his being a Major in the Army gave him much freer access to the soldiery. On July 17th he notes that the number of baptisms to date is eight hundred and fifty seven.86 On the boat from Fort Rice to Fort Berthold he had the happiness of uniting in marriage a young Irish sergeant and the Irish maid-servant of General Sully.

86. Ibid., III, 883.
CHAPTER VI

TO THE HOSTILE CAMP

Upon his recovery in 1868, Father De Smet was to embark upon the most remarkable of all his peace missions to the Indians. From the time he first fell ill on his return to St. Louis, till he felt himself able to sail the Missouri and roam the prairie, he planned to return to the plains and seek out the hostile Sioux. He kept in touch with his interpreters, asking them to watch for hostile Indians, and try their best to make some preparations for his reception among them. Just before Christmas, 1867, he wrote to Messrs. Galpin and La Framboise, interpreters and guides at Fort Rice. During the winter he had received several letters from them in which they mentioned that they had actually encountered several chiefs and warriors of the hostile bands. In his Christmas message he wrote that his health was "tolerably good at present," and that he expected to set out for Fort Rice as early as possible in the spring. He wanted them in their next letter to "enter into particulars" on the possibility of getting an interpreter to brave a journey to the hostile Sioux; and on the availability and cost of a light wagon, and a couple of horses and mules and all other travelling necessities.87

87. Ibid., 890.
A month later he wrote to his old friend, General Sherman, now a member of the Peace Commission. De Smet had in August, 1867, been asked to accompany this committee, but because of his illness had had to leave it. Now in all humility he asks if he might be readmitted to their company since he feels certain that he can gain entrance to the hostile camps.

That he was most welcome is evident from a personal letter of General Harney to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Speaking of Father De Smet he says:

It is well known that he has almost unbounded influence over them, and his sole object in going among them is to prevent further hostilities, and to induce them all to meet us at some point in the Spring and conclude a permanent peace... You know, I am sure, that he charges nothing for his individual services—the Priests never do—. I wish, my dear General, you would write to him on the subject of his visiting the Indians. His sole object is to do good... Father de Schmidt [sic] is one of the most modest and diffident men I ever knew and he is afraid of being misunderstood. He is universally beloved by all denominations where he is known and I think his presence and influence among the Indians will insure all we want. 88

The matter of finances had been mentioned in the letter

88. Historical Records and Studies, Vol. XXIV, 1934, 89., quoting a manuscript from the Archives of the Indian Office.
to General Sherman. In 1867, De Smet had been given a sum of $2,500 by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for his trip in the upper country. De Smet, kept scrupulous account of this government money and wrote that he had $923.30 left in his possession. He asked General Sherman to obtain permission for him to use this sum to defray the expenses of an interpreter, and a man in attendance. He might not have asked this much, but "on such occasions and whilst there is danger of life, wages are pretty high." Sherman referred this matter to Commissioner Taylor who on February 17 wrote that "should the amount above stated not be sufficient to meet your expenses, the Office of Indian Affairs will see that the deficiency is paid upon the presentation of your statement and account." No explicit directions were given to De Smet by the Indian Office. He was left entirely on his own to plan a course of action. Commissioner Taylor wrote that:

"your judgement and experience will suggest to you the best manner in which to proceed in carrying out the desires and intentions of Government."

On the 30th of March, Father De Smet and the Peace Party including Generals Sherman, Sheridan, Harney, Sanborn, Terry, 

80. Ibid., 897.
91. Ibid., 899.
and several other envoys of the Government, boarded a train at St. Louis for Cheyenne City, Nebraska, by way of Chicago and Omaha. A short council was held at North Platte City with Spotted Tail, head chief of the Brule's, at the conclusion of which the Generals and Father De Smet were taken on an excursion to the Sherman Pass in the Black Hills to view the new 8,000 foot railroad pass. After this excursion De Smet left the peace commission and headed for the Sioux tribes according to plan. While the peace commissioners continued up the Platte River to Fort Laramie, De Smet returned to Omaha and boarded a steamer for the thousand mile, thirty-three day trip to Fort Rice.

Upon his arrival at Fort Rice on May 24th he was greeted by the Indians who were waiting for him in all their native finery. He writes that he

had to pass through a numerous file of Indians, ranged along the shore. In all their fantastic accoutrements, they made a truly picturesque and for the kind, admirable spectacle; their heads were adorned with feathers and silk-ribbons, in which red and blue predominated, and their faces were daubed with the most varied colors.

92. Much could be written on the interest of the Sherman Brothers, General William T., and Senator John, in the western railroads. The Senator was on the Pacific Railroad Committee. See The Sherman Letters for exchange of ideas on railroads between the two brothers. The General is listed as the president of The St. Louis Railroad Co., in 1861. But that was just a street-car presidency.

93. Chittenden and Richardson, op. cit., III, 902.
The first four days after his arrival were spent in spiritual ministration to the Indians, chief among them being the conferring of Baptism on "six or seven hundred little children." The next three days were "devoted to the Catholic soldiers, Irish and German." Then came the business of gathering volunteers to accompany him in search of the hostile Sioux bands. He held interviews with the Indian chiefs and warriors, who though brave men, were a little startled at the foolhardy courage of the priest.

My plan seemed to astonish them and they hardly concealed from me the dangers that were involved in it, even touching the security of my scalp.94

However, De Smet's mind had been made up. He had written to F. F. Gerard, a Sioux trader:

My intention is if I can possibly effect it, to penetrate into the interior among the hostile bands. I know the dangers of the trip. I have no other motive than the welfare of the Indians and will trust entirely to the kind providence of God.95

Nothing would shake him from his resolve. To their objections he merely said:

Before the Image of the Holy Virgin

94. Ibid., 903.
95. Ibid., 896.
Mary, the good Mother and the great protectress of all nations, six lamps are burning night and day, through all the duration of my journey. In St. Louis and in other places, more than a thousand little children are implored every day before these burning lamps, the favor and protection of heaven upon all the band who accompany me. I intrust myself with all my fears to the hands of the Lord. 96

This disarming confidence in God won for De Smet a corps of volunteers. Many offered themselves "generously and freely in my service, with the sole object of persuading their hostile brethren to lend me an attentive and favorable ear, and if need were to protect me." 97

The escort, as finally organized, included Two Bears, head chief of the powerful Yanktonnais, and Running Antelope, chief of a large tribe of Hunkpapas, "renowned for his bravery and his deeds of arms against his enemies, more especially against the whites." 98 Besides these there were other well known chiefs, namely, Bear's Rib, The Log, All Over Black, Returning Ghost, Red Cloud, Little Dog, and Sitting Crow. With the Chiefs, supreme in their own tribes, went eighty of their principal warriors and braves, representing nearly all

96. Ibid., 903.
97. Ibid., 904.
98. Ibid., 904.
the bands of the Sioux family.

As interpreter De Smet secured the services of Major Charles Galpin, a trader, guide and interpreter, of good standing among the Indians of the Upper Missouri region. Along with Galpin went his Sioux wife, a zealous convert to Catholicism of whom General Stanley wrote:

This lady is a good Catholic and an excellent person, a striking example of what the influence of religion and civilization can accomplish for the welfare of the Indian.

The Galpkins had been De Smet's friends for many years, and Father De Smet seems to have acted as guardian for their mixed-blood daughter who had been sent to school in St. Louis. In one of his last letters before leaving St. Louis De Smet had written:

I see your daughter occasionally at the convent. She is in the enjoyment of good health, and very much beloved and esteemed by the kind and motherly

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99. When Galpin died in 1870 the Indians lost a dear friend. In a letter that Father De Smet received from the Cheyenne Agency, he is given the following message from The Log, one of the escort Indians on the march to Sitting Bull's camp: "He The Log tells me to write to you that the death of Major Galpin has left him as an orphan, that the only hopes of the Indians were in Major Galpin and you; and one being dead their hopes are solely in you." Chittenden and Richardson, IV, 1589, Gus. Guelberth to De Smet, March 13, 1870.

100. Ibid., IV, 1584, General Stanley to Archbishop Purcell, July 12, 1868.
ladies of the academy. I intend to pay her a final visit before I leave St. Louis, and shall take charge of her commissions, if she has any to send to her good parents.101

The first object of the journey was to find the camp of the "hostiles," made up of Sioux from various tribes under the command of Sitting Bull. Their hatred was such that they had refused all invitations to conferences with the whites. The location of Sitting Bull's camp was not known exactly, but the friendly Sioux and Galpin knew that it would be somewhere beyond the Bad Lands country, due west from Fort Rice.102

On the morning of June third103 Father De Smet called together the entire band.

A large circle was formed, in which several officers from the fort and

101. Ibid., III, 899.

102. One modern writer on the West calls the Bad Lands country, which the sixty-seven year old De Smet is about to traverse under strain of possible Indian attack, "dry and wicked country of strangely carved hills which no man, even today, crosses alone if he can help himself." Dorothy Gardiner, West of the River, Thomas Y. Crowell Co., New York, 1941, 5.

103. The principal sources that I have used for this journey are De Smet's own account, written in French and translated by Chittenden and Richardson, and Galpin's Diary, written in English and published in Mid-America, The Illinois Catholic Historical Society, Chicago, Illinois, Volume XIII, July 1930, 141-163. The manuscript of Galpin's Diary, presumably written in his own hand, is in the De Smetiana Archives having been brought there from Belgium by Father Garraghan in 1924. Father De Smet's twelve page manuscript is also in the De Smetiana files.
some of the soldiers joined, besides a great number of Indians from all these tribes. I then offered a solemn prayer to the Great Spirit to put us in His keeping, and made a short address to the numerous friends who surrounded us, recommending us to their pious affections.\textsuperscript{104}

At seven o'clock, the march to the hostile camp got under way. Twenty-two miles "following the direct course of the sun" were covered the first day, and the party camped on the north bank of the Cannonball River, where they kindled fires, filled kettles and coffee-pots, and prepared to "content the inner man"\textsuperscript{105} after the first day's journey.

The first six days journey passed with little difficulty except the discomfort the Indians suffered from their wet blankets after a heavy rain on Friday the fifth. De Smet describes the land traversed this first week as "a succession of undulating plains and of immense high plateaus, entirely without timber." The Indians of the different bands got along well together, but one day, the day of the big rain, De Smet had to act as conciliator in a mild disagreement between Two Bears and Running Antelope. Two Bears had settled for the night when Running Antelope came up with the pack wagons. He wished the camp to be moved to a more desirable spot, but Two

\textsuperscript{104} Chittenden and Richardson, \textit{op. cit.}, III, 904.

\textsuperscript{105} \textit{Ibid.}, 905. Eight hundred antelope and five buffaloes were killed and eaten on this trip.
Bears was already quite comfortable and had his robes and blankets drying by the fire. After a few sharp words, Running Antelope went about a mile and a half farther and camped. Galpin and De Smet talked over the altercation, and soon found a plan to settle this difficulty. Galpin says of De Smet:

He had a large kettle of rice boiled and well sugared, then called each party to his tent to partake of the feast, also gave them a few kind and encouraging words, after which they only treated it in a joking manner.106

To say that the sugared rice treatment saved the expedition would be to exaggerate, but it does reveal De Smet's knowledge of Indian nature. Two days later when the march was halted for a full day because of Galpin's illness, the camp rested, fished, smoked and slept. Toward the end of the day, when Two Bears gave a long "pep talk" to the entire camp, Running Antelope, not to be outdone by Two Bears, also gave a talk. Galpin ends his diary for that day with this statement: "Running Antelope made a speech of the same nature; but with more enthusiasm, if not equal sincerity."107

On July 9th, since there was no sign of the enemy camp, it was decided to send four scouts ahead to "beat up the country." The line of march of the main column was agreed

106. *Mid-America*, XIII, 149.
upon. The scouts were to rejoin it as soon as they had any definite information. Red Cloud, The Log, Little Dog, and Sitting Crow were given liberal presents of tobacco to give to the hostile Indians if they should be found. Father De Smet in his diary skips from the ninth of July to the sixteenth, on which day the scouts returned. Galpin, however, kept a daily diary and from it we learn that he and Two Bears knew just about how far away the enemy were. They expected the scouts to return with news—good or bad, in about four days.

When on the thirteenth the scouts had still not appeared, Galpin noted:

All are anxiously looking for the messengers we sent to the camp; they should be back today. The sun went down, but no news from our party. What can be the matter? 108

On Sunday, the fourteenth, the prairie was set on fire as a signal to the returning scouts, and on Monday runners were sent in different directions to try to establish contact with the messengers. Great anxiety was felt when the runners returned to camp in the evening without having seen any of the messengers.

On Tuesday, the sixteenth, the column moved to a fork of Beaver Creek to await the return of the envoys. About two thirty in the afternoon clouds of dust announced the approach

108. Ibid., 154.
of a band of Indians. With field glasses De Smet was able to make out the returning scouts, who before long came into the camp at the head of a deputation of eighteen warriors announcing their arrival by "sounding shouts and joyful songs."

All came and shook hands with me with especial eagerness, and after we had smoked the pipe of peace together—a first proof of their good will toward me—they announced in the name of the head chiefs of their camp, that "my tobacco had been favorably received;" that entry into their camp was open to the Black-robe alone; that no other white man would get out of it with his scalp; that all the chiefs and warriors were awaiting me with impatience, wishing to hear me and learn the motives of my visit.¹⁰⁹

That night there was feasting for the entire camp. As the night wore on the reunion became more and more uproarious, "a la sauvage, but harmony and cordiality prevailed."

It was learned that the camp of Sitting Bull was hidden on the other side of the Bad Lands, about three days journey away. Camp was broken the next day at four-thirty in the morning, and the long march through the desolation of the Bad Lands began. Galpin, who had roamed most of the difficult terrain in and around the Indian country, calls it the most desolate country that imagination could picture.

Away in front, and far below us, perhaps five hundred feet, not a living creature

¹⁰⁹. Chittenden and Richardson, op. cit., 909.
could be seen to animate the aspect of the dreary waste: like the bed of some vast lake or sea, it lay before us. 110

Father De Smet describes the land in terms of transportation difficulties. The area seemed to him to be impenetrable to the two wagons, but "by sheer strength of arms, and by doubling and tripling the number of animals for a distance of six miles, all the ascents and descents were accomplished." 111

Finally, on the nineteenth, after crossing a plateau about a dozen miles wide, the column came to the bluffs of the Powder River. From their stand high on the bluff above the river, De Smet and his escort of Indians witnessed a most welcome and soothing sight. They had come from a country without life, without shade, without water. Now there lay before them a land of trees and lush forests:

Standing upon the lofty bluffs that define the courses of the Powder and Yellowstone valleys our travellers beheld to the west the broad valley of the latter stream and to the south that of the Powder. Along each were lines of trees that marked the course of the streams as far as the eye could reach, while the glimmering water appeared here and there like quiet

111. Chittenden and Richardson, *op. cit.*, III, 909.
mimics on the landscape.112

And some four miles off in the river bottom De Smet saw the object of his long search.

We saw a strong force of horsemen, composed of 400 to 500 warriors, coming to meet me; I at once had my standard of peace hoisted, with the holy name of Jesus on one side and on the other the image of the Holy Virgin Mary, surrounded with gilt stars. They took it at first sight for the hated flag of the United States. At this signal all the cavalcade halted and appeared to enter into consultation. Immediately afterwards, the four head chiefs came toward us at full speed, and seemed as it were to flit around the banner. They considered it, and upon perceiving its meaning and high importance, they came up and shook my hand and made signals to all their warriors to advance. They formed in a single line or phalanx; we did the same, and with the flag at our head we went to meet them....

112 Chittenden and Richardson, op. cit., I, 96. Matthew Hastings, St. Louis painter, who made a trip to the West with Father De Smet for the purpose of painting Indian scenes has left us his concept of this meeting with the Sioux. The original painting in water colors was given to De Smet along with a number of Indian sketches. These paintings can be seen in the De Smetiana Archives in the Linton Album.

Hastings who was thirty four years old at this time died in St. Louis in 1919.

113 Mid-America, XIII, 158. Sitting Bull was not a member of this greeting committee. But he told De Smet and Galpin later that: "When he first saw us with the flag his heart fluttered, he bade it be quiet, and now he had learned it was the flag of peace." Sitting Bull may have been with the advance party and saw the flag high upon the bluff. Or his runners may have brought him the bad news.
Upon arriving at a distance of 200 to 300 yards, the two columns halted face to face. All the chiefs came and shook hands with me in the sign of friendship, and bade me welcome to their country.\textsuperscript{114}

After formal greetings had been completed, the long line of Indians prepared to make the ten to twelve mile march to Sitting Bull's camp. The four head chiefs placed themselves at De Smet's side as an escort and to "prevent any perfidious attack by secret traitors who might be determined to take vengeance on the pale-face."\textsuperscript{115} By a code of honor in force among these Indians, every one who had lost a member of his family at the hands of the whites was obliged to avenge himself on the first white man he met. For this reason a guard of twenty warriors was constantly at De Smet's side, and upon awakening from his first siesta in Sitting Bull's camp, he found the big chief himself on guard by his side.\textsuperscript{116}

\textsuperscript{114} Chittenden and Richardson, \textit{op. cit.}, III, 911.

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 911.

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 912.
CHAPTER VII
COUNCIL WITH SITTING BULL

A fast ten mile march brought De Smet to his goal -- Sitting Bull and the camp of the hostile Sioux. The camp was made up of from four to five thousand Indians all under the supreme command of Sitting Bull, the strong, thirty-seven year old champion of the Sioux. The Indians cheered the entry of the envoy into their camp, but Sitting Bull had the camp soldiers, as they were called, dismiss the too curious from the immediate presence of the white man. 117

The sixty-eight year old De Smet was worn out by the long arduous journey through the Bad Lands. After a small luncheon he retired to a lodge prepared for him by order of the "generalissimo," and when he awoke he found Sitting Bull beside him with three other leading chiefs, Four Horns, Black Moon the orator, and No Neck. Sitting Bull spoke to De Smet, who reports his speech in these words:

Black-robe, I hardly sustain myself beneath the weight of white men's blood that I have shed. The whites provoked the war; their injustices, their indignities to our families, the cruel, unheard of and utterly unprovoked massacre at Fort Lyon (Chivington Massacre) of 600 to 700 women,

117. Mid-America, XIII, 158.
children and old men, shook all the veins which bind and support me. I rose toma­hawk in hand and did all the hurt to the whites that I could. Today thou art among us, and in thy presence my arms stretch to the ground as if dead. I will listen to thy good words, and as bad as I have been to the whites, just so good am I ready to become to them.118

The rest of the day was spent in visiting the principal warriors. When it came time for De Smet to retire, Sitting Bull and his three chiefs again took up their places in the center lodge to keep the ambassadorial watch.

Early the next morning women began to erect the amphitheater for the council. "This was made by setting tall, slender tipi-poles upright in the ground in a circle, and suspending from them great curtains made of the leather coverings of these tents. The amphitheater enclosed half an acre."119 The banner of the Blessed Virgin which had so nearly been mistaken for the white man's flag had the position of honor in the center of the council ground; it was flanked by a seat of fine buffalo robes for Father De Smet.

When all the nearly five thousand Indians were seated, Father De Smet was escorted to his place of honor. The council

118. Chittenden and Richardson, op. cit., III, 912.
119. Vestal, Sitting Bull, 103.
opened with songs and dances in which the warriors alone took part. Then Chief Four Horns lighted his calumet of peace, presented it solemnly to the Great Spirit, imploring his light and favor, and offered it to the four points of the compass, and to the sun and earth. After this he himself passed the calumet from mouth to mouth according to the rank of the chief --De Smet being the first to receive it. When the ceremony of the calumet was completed, De Smet was asked to speak.120

Upon arising, Father De Smet lifted his hands in prayer to the Great Spirit, and asked for light and help for this assembly. For almost an hour he laid before the Indians his reasons for coming, the dangers that surrounded them, their weakness against the Great White Father if he should choose to use his military strength against them. The Great Father, he insisted, was ready to admit that harm and injustice had been done by both parties. Today his hand was ready to aid them, to give them agricultural implements, domestic animals,

120. Concerning this council, Stanley Vestal, Sitting Bull's official biographer, says: "Carefully considered, this council exhibits almost every factor in the relations between the Sioux and Whites. It also has the interest of being the only great council between the "hostile" or hunting bands and the United States for which exact contemporary record exists. The chiefs spoke freely, man to man, and not as at the agencies. The interpreter also, was excellent, and Major Galpin took down the speeches word for word on the spot. For us, this council has extraordinary interest, because it gives us the first important speech of Sitting Bull of which there was immediate record made in writing." Vestal, Sitting Bull, 103.
men to teach them to farm, and instructors for their children. And all this would be offered without the least remuneration or cession of lands on their part. Toward the end of his speech Father De Smet formally presented to the Sioux nation the flag of the Blessed Virgin and promised that:

I will always do, as I have always done, continue to offer my feeble prayers for your good, but remember peace must reign in your land.

Black Moon was the first of the Indian chiefs to speak. He rose, raised the calumet solemnly to heaven and earth invoking the aid of the Great Spirit. Then as a part of the ceremony he bade Father De Smet touch the calumet with his lips, putting his right hand on the stem. De Smet drew a few puffs; Black Moon passed the pipe to the other chiefs and then began his speech. He welcomed the Black-robe who had come to them from so great a distance with words that are "good and full of truth." He explained that they had been forced into

121. Vestal, New Sources of Indian History, 219. "It is the only treaty made by the United States in which nothing but peace was demanded of the other signatory. Moreover, it was remarkable for the courage shown by Father Pierre-Jean De Smet, S. J., who was daring enough to visit the hostile camp of Sitting Bull at the mouth of the Powder River and persuade him to send delegates to Fort Rice to meet the commissioners."

122. Mid-America, XIII, 159.
the war with the white man by the "Sioux east of us [The Santee] and the Cheyenne South of us who raised the was first, to revenge themselves for the white man's cruelties and in­justice." More was said of the white man's driving away the game that was the sustenance of the Indian, but eventually Black Moon came to the heart of the difficulty between the White and the Indian. What he said, was to be repeated by the three chiefs who followed him. Black Moon continued:

I will say further--against our will, the whites are interlacing our country with their highways of transportation and emigration; they build forts at various points and mount thunders upon them. They kill our animals, and more than they need. They cut down our forests in spite of us, and without paying us their value. They are ruining our land. We are opposed to having these big roads which drive the buffalo away from our country. This soil is ours and we are determined not to yield an inch of it. Here our fathers were born and are buried. Like them too, we have been forced to hate the whites; let them treat us like brothers and the war will cease. Let them stay home; we will never go to trouble them. To see them come in to build their cabins revolts us, and we are determined to resist or die. Thou, Messenger of Peace, thou hast given us a glimpse of a better future. Very well, so be it; let us hope. We accept your tobacco. Some of our warriors will go with you to Fort Rice to hear the words and the propositions of the Great Father's commissioners. If their words are acceptable, peace shall be made.

123. Chittenden and Richardson, op. cit., III, 916.

124. Ibid., 917.
Black Moon, the official orator of the camp, had spoken the mind of the Sioux Nation. He was followed by Sitting Bull, Two Bears, and Running Antelope all of whom touched on the points expressed by Black Moon. In turn each went through the ritual of the calumet and spoke briefly. Sitting Bull who excused himself from a long speech because "I am not full of words" welcomed De Smet officially and expressed his hope that peace could be established. He returned to his place, but:

soon came forward again and said he had forgotten two things. One was he wished all to know that he did not propose to sell any of his lands to the whites, nor did he wish them to cut his timber, particularly the oak. 125

To obtain a lasting peace, the Whites would have to promise to remain off Indian Land. That was demanded without qualification.

The next two speakers, and the last at the council, were the two chiefs who had been De Smet's guides on what they had feared might be a march into the jaws of death. Two Bears spoke first. After eulogizing Father De Smet as "our best friend," he expressed the mind of his own tribe on the subject of peace:

I do not come here to beg you any favors on the strength of our relationship, but I am here with a few of our chiefs and braves who represent a large portion of the Sioux nation,

125. Mid-America, XIII, 161.
some seven hundred lodges, to
tell you that our minds are made up
to follow his advice and be guided by
the men sent by the President to accom-
plish something definite for our future
good... I shall leave with a heart full
of joy, with hopes you may ever continue
to be friends with the Whites, and that
this cruel war that has so long been
hanging around us will soon be over.
I now thank this good man, and raise my
hands to the Great Spirit that he may
pity and guide us through our future life.126

Running Antelope concluded the council with a message very
similar to that of Two Bears, and the five thousand Indians
broke into a song and dance that made the earth tremble.
Father De Smet retired to his lodge where many Indian mothers
were waiting for him. They wanted the Good Father to give his.
blessing to their children. Later, the same guard that had
been assigned to him on his first day in camp took up its
station at his lodge. The four head chiefs, Sitting Bull, Four
Horns, Black Moon, and No Neck kept watch as De Smet retired
for his last night in camp.

As the next day was Sunday, the feast of Saint Aloysius
Gonzaga, Father De Smet said Mass before sunrise, and at about
four-thirty the nine day trek back to Fort Rice was begun. In
the return column were his faithful guide and volunteer es-
cort, plus the eight Hunkpapa deputies appointed by Sitting
Bull, and about thirty families of the "hostile" camp. The
four principal chiefs of the camp escorted De Smet to the

126. Ibid., 162.
crossing of the Powder River where they bade him a respectful farewell.

On the twenty-fifth, De Smet sent the runner, All Over Black, with a message to the peace commission at Fort Rice, advising them of his arrival in about five days with a representative delegation from the united camp of the "Hunkpapas, Blackfeet-Sioux, Minniconjous, Sans Arcs, etc." General Terry's acknowledgement of this message is noteworthy not only for its official recognition of De Smet's extremely successful journey, but also because it gives us the first hint that De Smet had been working under pressure of very poor health.

Writing from Fort Rice, General Terry says:

We are delighted to learn that your expedition has been so successful, and we feel that not only ourselves, but the nation owes you a debt of gratitude for the extremely valuable service you have rendered it. I very much regret to learn from a letter to La Framboise from Major Galpin, that you are quite unwell. I sincerely trust that you are suffering from only temporary illness.127

Five days later De Smet and his company of over two-hundred Indians made their solemn entry into Fort Rice, where Father De Smet handed over the direction of affairs to the Army Generals, and quietly slipped away from the crowds.

127. Chittenden and Richardson, op. cit., III, 920.
CHAPTER VIII
THE "TREATY OF LARAMIE" AT FORT RICE

On the second of July the treaty was concluded. Peace between the white man and the Indians of the plains was now established. Although Father De Smet was present as a consultant to the Indian and to the Peace Commission, he had no authority as a Peace Commissioner. His signature appears on the treaty as one of five "attestors" to the verity of the Indians' signatures and marks. The council was headed by three members of the Peace Commission, Generals William S. Harney, Alfred H. Terry, and John B. Sanborn, who as President of the Committee, was spokesman for the whites.128

The treaty was unique in our history as being the only one in which we demanded nothing but peace. The United States desperately wanted peace so that it could complete its trans-continental railroads, assure safety to the frontiersmen, and end the expensive Indian wars.

128. Other members of the Peace Commission were at Fort Laramie where they had concluded a peace council and obtained the signatures of other bands of Indians on identically the same treaty as that offered at Fort Rice. Both treaties go under the official title: Treaty with the Sioux—Brule, Oglala, Minniconjou, Yanktonnais, HANKPAPA, BLACKFEET, Cutter, Two Kettle, Sans Arc, and Santee—and ARAPAHO, 1868. By far the larger number, and the more hostile of the Sioux were represented at the Fort Rice Council. Kappler, op. cit., II, 770.
During the peace talks the Indian delegates repeated the demands made to Father De Smet at Sitting Bull's camp. Again their demands were: close the roads into the Indian territory; burn the military forts; stop the steamboats from entering the Upper Missouri; and expel and keep out all white settlers. Gall, Sitting Bull's chief representative, spoke his mind clearly:

God raised me with one thing only, and I keep that yet. There is one thing I do not like. The whites ruin our country. If we make peace, the military posts on the Missouri River must be removed and the steamboats stopped from coming up here. The annuities you speak of we don't want. Our intention is to take no present.

You talk of peace. If we make peace, you will not hold it. We told the good Blackrobe who has been to our camp that we did not like these things. I have been sent here by my people to see and hear what you have got to say. My people told me to get powder and ball and I want that. Now many things happened that are not our fault. We are blamed for many things. I have been stabbed. If you want to make peace with me, you must remove this Fort Rice, and stop the steamboats. If you won't I must get all these friendly Indians to move a way. I have told all this to them, and now I tell you. 129

Bull Owl demanded that the forts and steamboats be taken away so "that the buffalo will come back." Running Antelope who spoke third reiterated the demands of the first two speakers, and then addressing himself to General Harney said:

129. Vestal, New Sources of Indian History, 226.
White Beard, I saw you when you came to Fort Pierre. I keep in my heart the talk we had then—it is thirteen years ago. I have never met a white man with any sense since, except the Black-robe. 130

Another chief, dwelling on the broken promises, and the frauds perpetrated on the Indians said:

Tell the interpreters and half-breeds and white men with Indian families not to tell so many lies after this... I have met a great many white men, and never saw one who would not lie except the Black-robe. 131

In reply, General Sanborn declared that the steamboats and forts could not be removed from the Missouri, as they were needed to protect the Indians from white invasion! He offered attractive inducements to the Indians who would settle down and farm. But in the final draft of the treaty, Article sixteen provided for the removal of forts and the closing of roads into the Indian territory. This Article reads:

The United States hereby agrees and stipulates that the country north of North Platte River and east of the summits of the Big Horn Mountains shall be held and considered to be unceded Indian territory, and also agrees that no white person or persons shall be permitted to settle upon or occupy any portion of the same; or without the consent of Indians first had and obtained, to pass through the same; and it is

130. Ibid., 227.

131. Ibid., 228.
further agreed by the United States that within ninety days after the conclusion of peace with all the bands of the Sioux Nation, the military posts now established in the territory in this article named shall be abandoned, and that the road leading to them and by them to the settlement in the Territory of Montana shall be closed.132

Article eleven had provided for game, the sustenance of Indian life, for it gave the Sioux the right to "hunt on any lands north of the North Platte, and on the Republican Fork of the Smoky Hill River, so long as the buffalo may range thereon in such numbers as to justify the chase."133

Moreover, the government proposed to pay for all roads built through the Sioux Reservation, if the Indians did not oppose them. And it was provided that in the future no treaty would be valid unless it had been signed by three-fourths of the adult males of the tribe.

On their part the Sioux contracted to keep the peace, not to oppose "the construction of railroads now being built on the plains." not to oppose railroads "not passing over their reservation as herein defined," not to raid white settlements, nor molest the military posts south of the North Platte River. The treaty was ratified by the Senate on February 16th, 1869, and proclaimed by President Andrew Johnson eight days later.

133. Ibid., 773.
Since with the signing of the treaty, Father De Smet's government mission was completed, he set out at once for home. The initial words of the treaty had by law established a permanent peace: "From this day forward all war between the parties of this agreement shall forever cease. The Government of the United States desires peace, and its honor is hereby pledged to keep it." And peace certainly would have continued longer than it did had our government not failed to live up to that pledge of honor.

Stanley Vestal in his biography of Sitting Bull quotes a poignant inquiry of some old Sioux warriors with whom he had talked. Speaking of the words of Sitting Bull to Father De Smet at the Powder River camp, Vestal says, "But nowadays the old men ask, 'Why have those words been forgotten?'" Father De Smet never forgot those words! He died while still in hopes of establishing a mission among the Sioux. His heart was with the Indians, but unfortunately there were few who cared for the Indian as he did. Too many looked upon the Indian as a vanishing race that should give way to white supremacy at all cost. Few phrased it so baldly, but many were of the opinion of General James H. Carleton, who in an official reply to the Joint Special Committee on Conditions of the

134. Ibid., 770.
135. Vestal, Sitting Bull, 103.
Indian Tribes gave the following answer to the question, "Why are Indian tribes diminishing?":

The causes which the Almighty originates, when in their appointed time He wills that one race of men—as in races of lower animals—shall disappear off the face of the earth and give place to another race, and so on, in the great cycle traced out by Himself, which may be seen, but has reasons too deep to be fathomed by us. The races of mammoths and mastodons, and the great sloths, came and passed away: the red man of America is passing away! 136

Eighty years later the world was plunged into its worst war because a German paper-hanger carried such a thought to its logical conclusion. Alexander Pope chose to phrase this attitude of mind more poetically. Pope said:

Lo! the poor Indian, whose untutored mind Sees God in the clouds, or hears him in the wind.

On his part, Father De Smet chose to see that mind as one made to know and love God like every other mind. He saw the Indians' weaknesses, but he realized their handicaps in our civilized world—but he did not forget his promises; he did not forget those words to Sitting Bull! By himself he was helpless to carry out the clauses of the treaty made by our

Within three months after the treaty was ratified the War Department issued an order which violated the clause providing for the right to hunt outside the limits of the reservation. This order admitted that the Indian Bureau had jurisdiction over the Indians on their reservations, but declared that:

Outside the well-defined limits of their reservations they are under the original and exclusive control of the military, and as a rule will be considered as hostile.\(^{137}\)

Till August 1872, Sitting Bull kept his promise to allow the white men to survey for the Northern Pacific Railroad. A committee sent out to arrange for the survey roamed unmolested more than six thousand miles through the territory of the "hostile" Indians, without any military escort whatever.\(^{138}\) But in the middle of August Sitting Bull was fighting skirmishes with General David J. Stanley who commanded the escort for the surveying party. Why did he now fight? Because when the surveyors reached the Yellowstone they placed their lines on the south bank of the river in violation of the treaty.\(^{139}\)

Other violations could be cited which eventually lead to another Sioux war in 1875. It is not, however, our purpose to

\(^{137}\) Vestal, Sitting Bull, 111

\(^{138}\) Ibid., 127.

\(^{139}\) Ibid., 138.
show why the treaty of Fort Rice failed. The instances above are cited to show the helpless situation of the Indian Department—and of De Smet, had he lived—in carrying out the provisions of the treaty.

Father De Smet had successfully carried out his mission. According to his chief biographers, one of them a Major in the Army Engineers Corps,

His achievement was one of the most remarkable in the history of our Indian wars. He was sixty-eight years old and suffering with bodily infirmities which in a few years were to end fatally. He made the journey of 350 miles through a rough and unknown country to a large force of Indians who had sworn death to any white man who might fall within their power. There was no other man who could approach them. Yet by virtue of his great reputation among the tribes, their absolute faith in his word, and their belief that he had their interests at heart, and, we may add, his devout trust in the Lord whom he served he did this remarkable thing, and brought about a peace in the most hateful and difficult situation that our government had been called upon to face in all its troubles with the Indians.140

The Commissioners acknowledged that but for Father De Smet their work would have been a failure.

We are satisfied that but for your long and painful journey into the heart of the hostile country, and but for the influence over even the most hostile of the tribes which your years of labor among them

140. Chittenden and Richardson, op. cit., I, 102.
have given you, the results which we have reached here could not have been accomplished.  

Shortly after the treaty, General David S. Stanley in a letter to Archbishop Purcell said that De Smet "alone of the entire white race, could penetrate to these cruel savages and return safe and sound." General Stanley's letter is a long testimonial of Father De Smet's worth as a peace-maker between Indian and Government. Whether the treaty succeed or not, the General was ready to admit that Father De Smet had done his work well.

Whatever may be the result of the treaty which the commission has just concluded with the Sioux, we can never forget nor shall we ever cease to admire, the disinterested devotion of the Reverend Father De Smet, who at the age of sixty-eight years, did not hesitate, in the midst of the heat of summer to undertake a long and perilous journey, across the burning plains, destitute of trees and even of grass; having none but corrupted and unwholesome water, constantly exposed to scalping by Indians, and this without seeking either honors or remuneration of any sort; but solely to arrest the shedding of blood and save if it might be, some lives, and preserve some habitations to these savage children of the desert, to whose spiritual and temporal welfare he has consecrated a long life of labor and solicitude.

141. De Smetiana Manuscript. The letter is written in General Terry's handwriting and is signed by Wm. S. Harney and John B. Sanborn also.

142. Chittenden and Richardson, op. cit., IV, 1584, General Stanley to Archbishop Purcell, July 12, 1863.
Father De Smet had by no means forgotten Sitting Bull's words. On June the first, 1870, he set out for the upper Missouri again to arrange for establishing a mission among the Sioux. On this his last missionary excursion he visited close to twenty thousand Sioux. In April, he wrote to Ely Parker, Commissioner of Indian Affairs that he is desirous of making another trip up the Missouri and hopes the "advancing spring will somewhat renovate my strength and permit me to accomplish my wish." Just two months before his death he wrote that Captain La Barge's boat is going to leave soon for the Upper Missouri and that he hopes to be aboard.

My room is kept ready and at my disposal. Should my health permit I shall gladly undertake the trip. I had of late a very severe attack of sickness. I am again convalescent and in good hope.

Death came in May, just two weeks after he had christened a new steamboat for his friend Captain Joseph La Barge. The old river-boat captain wanted Father De Smet himself to bless the new Steamer De Smet. Though not at all well, Father De Smet consented to go down to the docks and bless the boat that was soon to visit those regions he knew and loved so well. In the evening his condition grew rapidly worse. An operation was performed which gave him temporary relief, but death was

143. Ibid., IV, 1538. April 8, 1870.

imminent. On the twentieth of May he asked for the last sacraments, and thereafter lived only in prayer, until the end came at a quarter after two on the morning of May 23, 1873.

On the day of De Smet's death The Missouri Republican reported:

Indian troubles are multiplying all around the frontiers and all over the territories. Signs are abundant that the events of the coming summer will render more conspicuous than ever the incompetence and feebleness that has always characterized the dealings of our government with the Indians. Swindling agents starve him; the government breaks faith with him; provocation and temptations are never wanting.

The smoldering embers of Indian hate of injustice were beginning to glow, and in two years would break into the largest conflagration of all our Indian wars. But the one man who could soothe the savage heart lay dead.

Father De Smet had given thirty years of his life to establish peace between Indian and White. Government Agents and peace commissioners, steamboat captains and fur traders, Indian and White alike sang the praises of this ambassador who had successfully accomplished every difficult diplomatic mission entrusted to him. In 1851 he had been instrumental in bringing together the largest number of Indians ever to meet representatives of the government. Eight years later he led

145. The Missouri Republican, St. Louis, Missouri, May 23, 1873, 4.
over a long, dangerous winter trail, "all the chiefs of the different mountain tribes"146 to renew peace with the superintendent of Indian Affairs. Four years before the Fort Rice Treaty, Father De Smet had been approached by hostile Santee Sioux and had been asked to be their intercessor with the government. But General Sully's resolution to "punish first" frustrated that hope of an early peace with the Santee Sioux. Father De Smet had proved himself to be the only white man who could approach the hostile Sitting Bull. De Smet not only approached the Sioux Chief, but convinced him that peace was essential to the Indian's well being. He had calmed the savage heart, so that it rested until stirred again by the injustices of the railroad surveying parties. Surely Father De Smet has merited a place of distinction among the great men of Western History; surely he has merited the title; "Ambassador Extraordinary to the Sioux Indians." But the title he would most appreciate is that given him a week after his death by the New York Tablet.

On Friday, the 23rd instant, the greatest missionary of this age gave up his soul to God.147

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The thesis submitted by Delmar Robert Dosch, S.J. has been read and approved by three members of the Department of History.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

March 13, 1946
Date

Signature of Advisor