

Topic for Week beginning Sept. 16th

**Our Work among the Indians of the  
N. W. Territories and British  
Columbia.**

Mission work among the Indians is oft-times discouraging and results seem small, but this work has a special claim upon our Canadian Churches:

1st. Because these people are heathen within our own country. In their weakness, poverty and wretchedness they are a Lazarus at our very doors.

2nd. Because they are the people of the land whose hunting grounds we have possessed and whose game we have destroyed. We have possessed ourselves of the best they had, and now they have a right to the best we have—the religion of Jesus Christ.

3rd. Because as the Rebellion of 1885 taught, the safety and well-being of society in Western Canada requires that what is left of the Pagan population should be Christianized and civilized.

Information regarding the work of our Church among the Indians may be obtained from the printed reports of the last two or three General Assemblies, and from the following Articles:

**WORK AMONG N.W. INDIANS.**

By Prof. A. B. Baird, Winnipeg.

It is thirty-four years ago, almost to a day, since the Rev. James Nisbet, with his family and a little company of helpers, set out from Kildonan on the Red River to found the first Presbyterian mission among the Indians of the West.

The project had been talked over for several years in the Canadian Church courts and especially in the homes of the Red River settlers, but it was a serious undertaking to penetrate 500 miles westward into the great buffalo plains, from a centre like Kildonan, which was itself so far west as to seem out of the world, and it seemed still more hazardous to think of maintaining oneself there, more than a thousand miles away from a railway or military assistance, and in the midst of a savage and possibly hostile populace.

A suitable spot was found on the banks of the Saskatchewan River at a distance of about 90 miles from the nearest trading post of the Hudson's Bay Company; some temporary buildings were erected and the work of teaching and preaching to the natives was begun.

The Indians were at first unwilling to have any white man settle among them, but a little friendly diplomacy overcame their scruples and "The Mission" soon became a favorite resort, especially when the hunt had failed or when medicine and nursing were needed.

Those were the days before the Govern-

ment had made any treaties with the Indians and before there was any attempt to persuade them to settle down on reserves. They were entirely nomadic, and made their living by hunting and fishing, which necessitated very frequent changes of abode and the little missionary company found it very difficult to adapt itself to the wandering life these buffalo-hunters lived.

But two of the mission helpers—John McKay and George Flett, who were themselves afterwards ordained as missionaries—were men who had Indian blood in their veins, and much good was done partly by following the red men up in their camps and partly by making the most of their increasingly frequent and increasingly lengthy visits to the mission which now began to be called Prince Albert, and to attract settlers from the Red River and elsewhere, by the fertility of its soil and the abundance of its other natural advantages.

The very features which had seemed to Mr. Nisbet to make the place so desirable as a location proved its undoing as an Indian mission, for the influx of settlers discouraged the Indians from coming as freely as in the early days, and at last Prince Albert became as it is yet a home missionary centre, and our Indian work was transferred to Mistawassiss, some sixty miles further west, where, after the death of Mr. and Mrs. Nisbet, in 1874, the Rev. John McKay, who had been an assistant in the mission from its beginning, carried on the good work till he too was carried off by death in 1891.

The only other mission which was established in these earlier days was begun by the Rev. George Flett in the outskirts of the Riding Mountain in what is now North-Western Manitoba. These three pioneer Indian missionaries were men of great capacity for enduring the hardships of frontier life. They were men of strong personality and they were, above all, men who had great skill in presenting Scripture truths in a form adapted to the intelligence and circumstances of their hearers. The Church of the present day owes them a debt of gratitude for their services in laying so faithfully the foundations on which we are now permitted to build.

The expense of carrying on these remote missions was heavy, the amount of information which came to the home church about them was meagre, for native missionaries like Messrs. McKay and Flett did not do much in the way of letter-writing and scarcely a visitor who could tell the story ever passed that way. As a result, the interest of the Canadian Church in its Indian missions languished until the rebellion of 1885 came and taught the country by the loss of valuable lives the danger to which it was exposed in allowing an ignorant superstitious and Pagan population to grow up alongside its own children in the