

## Second Letter

## Visit to Cobalt

## Rev. Mr. MacBeth tells of Ontario's Big Mining Centre

The Hudson's Bay Company has been abused by a good many people as the opponent of settlement. These say that it was never in the interests of that great fur-trading corporation to allow the country to be opened up for colonization. Colonization and fur-trading do not get along well together. But there is another side to the question, and having known the Hudson's Bay Company since my boyhood, having visited its posts all the way across the continent, and having known its officers in all sorts of places, I think the other side should be presented. To begin with, the officers of the company have always been, almost without exception, a remarkably intelligent and well-read body of men. At their posts they had, at certain seasons of the year, abundant time for reading, and many of them took the best magazines and papers, even though they could only receive them by occasional mail. I knew of one man at a far northern post who took the *London Times*, and as the mail, or packet, as it was called, only reached him once a year, he got a year's supply at a time. Most people would have looked at the latest issue, but such was this man's desire to be well-informed, that he began at the number of "The Thunderer" farthest back and read clear through to the latest. When men like him came to the "outside" on occasional visits, they were often better posted than those who had much of their time taken up with social and business routine of civilization. My point is that men of that stamp would know the trend of events, and, discerning the signs, would not be foolish enough to try to keep back the irresistible advancing tide of the new order of things. More than that, we desire to say for these men, namely, that they became in a peculiar sense the forerunners of the settler and made his coming possible. As a matter of fact, every Hudson Bay post became the nucleus for a little settlement and around it a sort of experimental farm or garden demonstrated the capabilities of the region. And this we find to have been the case all over this new north of Ontario. The great trading concern whose charter was a huge monopoly, but whose servants at the outposts were men of such fine character that even a monopoly seemed good, became the pathfinders for many who would follow the way they blazed into the wilderness. We would not make the mistake of supposing, as one travelling man did at the Edmonton fort, many years ago, that the letters "H. B. C." must stand for "Here Before Christ," but though the Company does not date that far back, a concern that has for two centuries past been scattering its exploring employees over half a hemisphere has played no mean part in opening it up for subsequent colonization.

But though settlers have been coming or going into North Ontario for several years, the country was brought into the