

## North West Impressions.

*Written for the Review.*

Bent on spending a few weeks in Manitoba and the North-West, passage was taken from Owen Sound to Fort William and Port Arthur. Arriving at these points late Saturday afternoon, and finding that the west-bound train did not reach Winnipeg until Sabbath afternoon, an appeal was made to conscience and a response received demanding delay until Monday to prevent transgressing that much abused commandment which affords one day's rest in seven. As there are no trains from the east on the C.P.R. on Monday the delay was necessarily prolonged until Tuesday evening. This prolonged delay made it possible to enter somewhat into the life of these sister towns, and to learn something of the out-lying districts. For it is almost amazing how much a mere stranger in a community can discover in the course of a few days, if he leaves himself open to the approaches made, and has the assurance to practice in some measure the Socratic method, of giving and receiving information.

To the stranger approaching Fort William and Port Arthur by water, the two places almost appear to be different parts of the one town; Fort William seemingly being the seaport and Port Arthur the maintown. On reaching land, however, one is soon and decidedly undeceived. For he discovers that there are emphatically two places with distinctive hopes and ambitions as well as a distinctive record, receding into the not very distant past. But he also discovers that the two are bound together in the unyielding bands of an electric railway that will forever prevent the one from gaining advantage over the other in their eager advance towards civic greatness.

Fort William traces its history back to the Hudson Bay Company's trading post of earlier times. It still retains traces of its origin in the old Fort, now converted into an engine room and in the resident officials who held undisputed sway in the good old days when the products of the chase were bartered for British merchandise through the mediation of home made coin. From this humble beginning, the place has developed into a thriving town of some three thousand inhabitants proud of their town with its large mills, its capacious elevators and its commodious and well sheltered harbor.

Port Arthur was originally the eastern terminus of the once famous Dawson Route. It was then known as Prince Arthur's Landing, a name indicative of the purpose for which the foundations of the town were laid. Since those days the place has grown, until now it boasts a population of some three thousand five hundred, but without any well established industries going to assure its rapid growth in the immediate future. It is, however, beautifully situated on high lands overlooking Thunder Bay, and fanned as it is by the lake breezes affords an inviting retreat to the peoples farther South enervated as they often are by the merciless heat of the summer months.

Both Fort William and Port Arthur are at the present suffering from the reaction consequent of the 'boom' prevailing during the construction of the railway. The intensity of this reaction may be estimated from the fact that the population of Port Arthur, according to some has during the past few years, been reduced by one half. The people however are hopeful and predict for their respective towns a thriving future. They point to the large tracts of fertile land, still clothed in its primeval forests and to the neighboring mines of silver and gold still undeveloped and affirm that such resources cannot fail to secure prosperity at some future day. The fact that the products of the west seek a market through these ports is also kept in prominence when the prospects of the future are canvassed. Few will admit that these resources warrant Van Horne's prediction that Fort William will in ten years have a population of fifty thousand. None can fail to see, however, that they do justify large hopes in reference to the distant future.

From a religious point of view it is pleasing to know that these towns are well supplied with the means of grace. In each there are found, a Presbyterian, a Methodist, an English Church, a Baptist, and a Roman Catholic congregation. The Roman Catholics have also convents, and in Port Arthur, a Separate School which some resident protestants do not regard as an unmixed evil.

Presbyterianism has done good work in these towns and surrounding country. The district has recently been organized into a Presbytery which extends from Schreiber on the East to Rat Portage on the West, a distance of some four hundred miles and from Lake Superior on the South, to the remote settler on the North, an indefinite number of miles. Within the limits of this Presbytery, well named Superior Presbytery, are found four self-supporting congregations and three extensive Mission Fields, all well manned and in good working order.

The most important of the Mission Fields is in the Rainy Lake district and centering in Fort Francis. Here scattered over a large area are upwards of one hundred families many of whom are Presbyterians. This summer two missionaries are at work in the districts, Mr. F. Lloyd of Knox College and Mr. McDermid. The other fields are Schreiber, east of Port Arthur, and Ignace between Port Arthur and Rat Portage. Each of these fields consist of stations along the railway, the latter containing as many as sixteen, and covering upwards of one hundred and fifty miles. Mr. Bryan has charge of Schreiber and Mr. McMullen of Ignace.

The self-supporting congregations are found at Rat Portage, Keewatin, Port Arthur and Fort William. The Rat Portage congregation is numerically the strongest of the four, and while not boasting an expensive church property, it is free from debt. If a hearty and well-attended prayer-meeting indicates a thriving cause; the pastor, Mr. Nairn has the good fortune of ministering to a healthy vigorous congregation.

The congregation at Port Arthur is perhaps the oldest Presbyterian congregation between Lake Huron and Winnipeg. It was an organized and settled charge twenty years ago. On May 2nd, 1875 Mr. McKersaohar, the first pastor, dispensed the Lord's Supper to twenty-seven enrolled members. From that time until the present through the ministries of Mr. Harold, Mr. Pringle and Mr. Murray the congregation has had an unbroken record of usefulness. This congregation is happy in having a solid comfortable Church and Manse. It has to bear however the cross of a heavy debt the result in part perhaps of too much assurance during the years of inflated prosperity. Under the influence of Mr. Murray's work it is pleasing to know that the burden is gradually becoming lighter. In this respect the congregation has given an example, that might well be emulated by more pretentious organizations. For with a membership of some one hundred and fifteen, its total contributions during last year, amounted to twenty-seven hundred dollars, and the prospects are that this year there will be a very considerable increase.

The congregation at Fort William is a comparatively recent organization. In its present form it is only of five or six years standing. Originally West Port, four miles up the river was the heart of the congregation; this was when expectation looked to West Port as the future harbor and main station of the railway. Now however only occasional services are held at this point, and the organization at Fort William is regarded as the congregation. During its short history it has done good work. A comfortable and valuable church has been erected and the congregational organizations put into good working order.

Under the pastorate of Mr. Bowan, a faithful scion of Knox College, there may be predicted for Presbyterianism in this place a useful, prosperous future.

The charge at Keewatin, consists of two congregations, the one at Keewatin, the other at Norman, a village four miles from Keewatin. The Rev. Mr. Omand has these united congregations under his care.

With such centres of influence held by good congregations and earnest ministers the passing sojourner cannot but feel that the ground is well occupied for the present, and that for the future the increasing population can be readily reached from these well organized centres.

## The Sunshine of Religion.

Our Lord when on earth was not a friend only for dark days. He could stand by the grave of Lazarus and weep with the sorrowing sisters, but could as well be present at the wedding at Cana of Galilee, an honored and welcome guest. In our deep realization of the solemn mission of our Lord to this sinful world, we are too apt to forget that He came as an image and expression and embodiment of the God of Love. The morose reformer is not likely to be bidden to feasts where his presence is only a gloomy shadow, and his countenance as a threatening cloud. We may be sure that even in His holy purity this was not the impression made by Him whose "compassions are new every morning." There was sunshine about Him, or the mothers would not have thronged around Him with their little ones, the despised sufferers would not have looked trustfully to Him for help, the outcast sinner would not have turned to Him for pardon. We seem to fancy that God made our eyes for tears, and that from some other power came their glad twinkle of merriment, or their expression of innocent joy, in the midst of social converse. Who wreathed the mouth with smiles that answer to smiles? Who made the dimples to in the baby's face? Who lit the glad loving light in its eyes, as it begins to be aware of the tender care of its mother? Why will we not remember that joy is as much the gift of God as sorrow; and to be as freely accepted in His presence?