

MISSIONS IN MUSKOKA.*

OPENING OF KNOX CHURCH, PORT SYDNEY.

"The Presbyterian Church at Port Sydney was on the 21st of August, opened for public worship by the Rev. Dr. Cochrane, of Brantford, who preached two excellent discourses to large and interested audiences. The Presbyterians in Port Sydney are comparatively few, and have had a good many difficulties to contend with in the erection of their place of worship, but thanks to their own energy and to the kind assistance of friends, especially in Toronto and Orillia, they have succeeded in completing a very neat and commodious little church, and in being able to say at the opening services that it was entirely free of debt. At one time it was thought that all that could be done for years would be to use the building in a very rude, unfinished condition, but through the kind encouragement and help given by the Rev. Mr. Macdonnell and friends in Toronto, and by the Rev. Mr. Gray and the Presbyterians in Orillia, as well as by the strenuous efforts of the Presbyterians in Port Sydney themselves (and among these it will not be thought invidious to mention especially Mr. and Mrs. Jarvis and Mr. and Miss Kay), the work has been brought to a successful termination, and the Presbyterian church in Port Sydney is as neat and well-finished a place of worship as is to be found in any such locality in the Province. The opening services were followed on the succeeding Monday by a large and enthusiastic meeting held in the town hall, at which Dr. Cochrane delivered his well-known and justly-popular lecture on 'Glimpses of the Old World,' and fully sustained his well-earned reputation as an able and eloquent platform speaker."

NOTES BY REV. DR. COCHRANE.

The above notice which has already appeared in the public press, affords me an opportunity of saying a few words, in behalf of our Presbyterian Missions in Muskoka. Next in importance perhaps to our great Mission work in Manitoba—certainly next in respect to the extensiveness of the field—the Muskoka or free grant district, as it has been called, claims the attention and sympathy of the richer portions of the Church. It is less than ten years since this part of Ontario received any notice whatever, and it is within the last eight years, that Mission work has been carried on in that necessitous field with any degree of vigour. And yet we find that under the care of the Presbytery of Barrie and Home Mission Committee of our Church, there are now no less than sixty preaching stations, with a

sabbath attendance of 2751, with nearly 1000 communicants, and 611 families belonging to our Presbyterian faith!

The Muskoka region differs in several respects from the great North-West. It can never attract settlers in such numbers as Manitoba, by the fertility of its soil. It is rocky and hilly, with only here and there, large tracts of arable land. It affords in many places good pasturage for cattle, and may become, in course of years, a source of great wealth to stock raisers; but for farming pure and simple, it cannot compare with the rich land and boundless prairies of the great lone land. It possesses however what Manitoba has not, timber lands of great extent, and lakes whose scenery it is not extravagant to say, equal in variety and beauty, anything in the Dominion of Canada. The numerous islands, which dot these inland lakes, are now eagerly sought after by tourists and excursionists, and promise to become immensely popular in summer time, as their attractions become better known from year to year. At the time when the free grant district was thrown open to settlers by the Ontario Government, large numbers entered and took up land. These were chiefly the poorer labouring and farming classes of Ontario, who in hope of bettering themselves and their families, and reaching an independent livelihood, were attracted thither. It is only truth to say, that in many instances, the land was found dear at nothing. With little or no farming appliances to begin with, (neither cattle nor agricultural implements),—with houses and other necessary buildings to erect, and with but poor crops for many years, and some years none whatever, their situation was hard indeed. I have read letters from these settlers of the most touching character, asking aid to keep their children through the winter from actual starvation! In some cases, these hardships of pioneer life have been overcome, but in many cases it is still, I fear, a hard struggle against poverty. This necessitous district is under the charge of the Barrie Presbytery, who have to the very utmost of their ability and resources endeavoured to supply gospel ordinances, to the scattered groups of Presbyterians within their bounds, and by personal service, made up for lack of regular missionary labour. During my recent visit to Muskoka, I found that three members of Presbytery, Messrs. Leiper, Moodie and Findlay, were absent on a Mission tour, extending over three or four weeks, visiting the stations and dispensing ordinances. In a graphic account of a tour in the neighbourhood of Lake Nipissing which appeared in the Daily Globe of September 6th this sentence occurs—"A fortnight ago, divine service had never been performed

* This should have appeared on page 264,