

MISSION FIELD.

Home Mission Notes From The Saskatchewan.

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A paper read before the Young People's Society of Augustine Church, Winnipeg.

Travelling some 350 miles along the main line of the Canadian Pacific Railway, in the direction Horace Greeley counselled, branching off there at Regina, the capital of the North West, to the division known as the Regina and Long Lake road, and proceeding about 250 miles farther in a direction a little to the west of north, we find ourselves at Prince Albert, a town with 1,800 of a population, nicely situated on a flat of the North Saskatchewan River. A few miles to the eastward lies the Colleston mission field, which forms the eastern half of a field under the care of one missionary. Here we see a district well settled with farmers hailing from various lands to the east of us, some from the old settlement of Kildonan; some from the more distant eastern provinces, and others from climes beyond the sea.

Starting on a Saturday afternoon we take our way to Island Lake, one of three appointments at this end of the field. It is necessary to start on Saturday as the distance to be traversed on the following day is sufficient for one day's labor to both horse and rider. On wending our way to the small school house on Sabbath morning a congregation of some fifteen or twenty await our arrival to commence the service. And as the familiar strains of "Al! people that on earth do dwell" or "O God of Bethel" rise as grateful incense to the Maker of heaven and earth, we have new impressions of the Fatherhood of God in the remembrances that flood memory of days in other lands when we helped to sing these well known songs of praise. Was it not the same God we worshipped then in the home of our childhood as we stood to worship now?

After service we have no time to lose, as another appointment, Colleston by name, ten miles to the north-east, calls for our presence at half past two. On arrival we find the little log church comfortably filled with forty or fifty people, who listen with interest to the "wonderful words of life."

Service over, we renew the journey, this time in an easterly direction along the river road, to the third and last service of the day, held in a dwelling house at the Forks. That name is applied to this part of the country on account of it being above the confluence and between the north and south branches of the Saskatchewan. This meeting over, the labor of the Sabbath is brought to an end.

About the third or fourth day of the week, having visited in the interval some of the families in the neighborhood, we return by the same road as we came, to Colleston appointment in time for the evening meeting of young people for prayer and mutual helpfulness.

On Friday we again set out on our travels, westwardly this time, to visit and hold services at the west end of the field, known as the Small River Settlement. Making an early start we pass through Prince Albert and cross by means of a ferry the north branch of the river which lies between us and our destination. The town and its surroundings being left behind we are confronted with a drive of thirty miles ere nightfall. However we do not notice the journey long, for as we proceed through large forests of pine and poplar, alternating with sand-hills and glimpses of clear land, there is plenty to catch the eye and lead the thoughts from nature up to nature's God. When about six miles from town we come to the Round Plain, on which are a few Indian tents, and at its farther side a school for training little red children who are with difficulty restrained even in school from doing whatever they feel inclined, and whose wilfulness is oftentimes a tax on the teacher's patience. A little farther on we pass a house, just before crossing the Shell River, which is the last domicile we shall see till we reach the settlement twenty-two miles ahead. Arriving there and accepting the hospitality proffered us, we sojourn for the evening. Next morning we betake ourselves to the other end of the community, rejoicing in the name of Pleasantville, which judging from the standpoint of nature at least, in one way belies its title. On our way up from Shell Brook, the end of the settlement we first touch, we pass close to some of the settlers' houses, and with the freedom generally accorded to the missionary, call in and rest ourselves by the way. In this district we have a new settlement of three or four years' growth, and as is only to be expected, farming is not carried on very extensively yet. Eleven o'clock on Sabbath morning sees twenty-five or thirty assembled in the Pleasantville school house for worship. Though far from home and without many of its binding and hallowed associations, minus of course the many opportunities that we of the city possess both on Sabbath and week day, and despite the tendency in a new land to lay

aside many of the restraints of church life, they gather to do homage to Heaven's King

"While each to his great Father bends
Old men, and babes, and loving friends,
And youth and maidens gay."

The service of an hour ended, the worshippers retrace their steps homeward to gather again in the afternoon for Sabbath School and Bible Class. Having enjoyed the refreshing influences of the afternoon spent in studying a few verses from the sacred volume, we prepare, after a short rest, for the evening meeting at Shell Brook. As we turn our backs to the sunset on our journey east, our hearts are gladdened by the wonderful beauty of the scene that meets our gaze—beauty that is by no means lessened as we view the landscape in the soft rays of the setting sun. To the left, a short distance from the road are the poplar bluffs adorning themselves with all the rich clothing of spring; on our right stretches a table-land carpeted with the tender shoots of the young grass; and away yonder in front lies the picturesque valley of the Shell River—the whole forming an impression on the mind not easily forgotten, and which may well send us in to our evening service with hearts grateful to the Creator for the wonderful beauty of the tracings of His hand, seen in these external works of creation. Probably seven or eight gather in the dwelling-house forming our place of worship for tonight, and numbers at least offer no hindrance to the fulfilment of the words of the Master when He said that "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. xviii. 20). With service over, the toil of another Sabbath day is ended and nightfall brings on its wings one of nature's sweet restorers, sleep.

On Monday morning we rise either to visit or resume our backward way to the east end of the field, to start afresh at the end of the week on the same round, which is completed in this manner once a fortnight. From end to end of the field is a distance of about seventy miles, and as a space of thirty-eight miles separates the nearest appointment at one end from the nearest of the other, we can understand how that services, i.e., Presbyterian services, are held only once in two weeks in both parts of the field. It must not be forgotten here, however, that as the Methodist denomination also have a missionary in charge of the same territory, and that as it is an understanding that while one, say the Presbyterian missionary, is at the east end of the field, the Methodist missionary shall be at the west end, there are services thus every Sabbath to which all are welcome.

On our tour we have not failed to notice the heartiness and cheerfulness with which we have been made welcome. An atmosphere of practical religion seems to pervade this corner of the vineyard in the kindly words spoken and the consideration shown for the wishes of others, which is the better understood when we see in this people mirrors but reflecting the words and actions of the man who has labored here as the servant of the living God for some two years before our arrival, who though not wise with the wisdom of this world, yet has so lived among this people that they have had an example in his life of that wisdom coming from above, which as St. James tells us "is first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be entreated." (Jas. iii. 17).

With this short account we leave the Colleston mission field and boarding the train at Prince Albert alight eighty-eight miles farther south at Saskatoon.

It is a small town or village built on both sides of the South Saskatchewan River. One part of the town, the larger, is situated on the prairie, on the right bank of the River, which here flows in a northerly direction, and the other on the left hand in a valley of the Saskatchewan. Though not a commercial centre, or even widely known, beyond being the depot of the freight for Battleford and the Indian reserves in its vicinity, yet probably the name sounds familiar to you on account of the place being used as an hospital for wounded soldiers during the rebellion of '85. The scenery from the town is not notable; but three or four miles up the river we have the beauties of nature once more unfolded in a pleasing picture, which the islands, together with a stretch of low lying land beyond aid towards impressing the memory. A brief sketch of the way in which this field is worked will probably suffice.

On a Saturday afternoon through the kindness of the Canadian Pacific Railway in extending a free pass on the lines between appointments and by means of the train from the South we journey northward to Osler, a station eighteen miles distant, where service is held the following Sabbath morning. With the meeting over we drive or walk to the ferry on the River about seven miles off, and through the courtesy of the family living there, are ferried over to the eastern side to drive to Saskatoon in time for evening service. The meeting is in the stone school-house and is greatly helped by the presence of a choir which has been brought to its present efficient state by the training of one who fills the joint position of school teacher and English Church lay-reader.

Monday morning again sees us on the train going south a distance of twenty-four miles to Dundurn, where there is a meeting in the school-house in the evening. It is held at 8 o'clock to permit of the ranchers in the neighborhood attending after the day's work is over. Owing to the stations being far apart and our being