

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

BIRTLE MISSION.

MR. EDITOR,—Since coming here I have often thought of sending you some brief account of matters in these parts, but I have scarcely time to attend to anything outside my proper work, or even to overtake all that. It may be easy enough for ministers in the east, who have their comfortable manse, and their attractive studies in them, with books and all the latest literature to send the account of a vacation or a trip to some place of popular resort, but with the busy Missionary, struggling to overtake the ever-increasing work of one of these vast fields in the west, newspaper correspondence is a very different thing. I purposed sending you some notes on the Communion occasions we had in the fall, but time slipped away. We had five of those happy seasons, and we all felt that they were both pleasing and profitable. Tears filled our eyes as we thought of other days when we went to the house of God, in company with friends and dear ones in other provinces and other lands. We did not, however, hang our harps on the willows, but sang the old songs of Zion as though not in a strange land.

It is solemn to stand in the porch and try to look into the great temple of the future, and feel that you are laying down the foundation of a series that probably the trump of judgment alone will interrupt. We were privileged to hold the first Communion service here; possibly the last will not be held until the Angel shall have said "Time shall be no more." On those happy occasions we had also an opportunity of marking the wonderful cementing power of the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ, and how strongly Christians feel at the table of the Lord that they are brethren. We had some from nearly every Province of the Dominion, and from countries beyond the seas, but "only one family in Christ."

However, what I intended claiming space for in your valuable paper was not this, but the incidents of my last ordinary trip around this Mission field, as in this way the readers of THE PRESBYTERIAN will get a better view of the work here than they could get from any general statements.

Sabbath, the 20th of November, rose bright and clear and cold on the little village of Birtle. (The thermometer had already gone 30° below zero, and there was considerable snow.) We held service at eleven a.m. in the hall. It is a credit to Birtle to have so good-looking a hall at so early a period of its existence, but it is not much to the praise of the trustees that it is generally so cheerless and uncomfortable. There was considerable dropping on this occasion. We want a church at this point badly. Service over, I hastened to leave Birtle. About three p.m. I reached the house of Mr. W. Bartley, on the east bank of the Assiniboine, where I have just taken up a new appointment, and preached to a nice little company of settlers, who in a brief while will, I think, add much to our strength in this neighbourhood. After service I had not time to sit down, but had to hasten away to Fort Ellice. As we approach the rivers of this country, travel becomes exceedingly difficult. The smaller streams have cut for themselves deep and almost impassable ravines through the sides of the larger valleys, and getting around them is far from pleasant. From Mr. Bartley's to Fort Ellice by an air line would not much exceed three miles, but by the road we have to travel, and that of the worst possible description, it is nearly six, and no place for a novice after dark. However, things went moderately well, with an occasional thud against a huge stone as we slid down the east bank of the valley and along the flat; not so, however, when the ascent had to be made on the other side of Snake Creek. Presently my horse went to his knees, and to prevent an advance backward over the steep already climbed, he rolled over, smashing one of the shafts of my homely jumper. We do not often cry over things of this kind in this country. A strap is at hand, the injured member is bound up, and in a little while we were again climbing the hill. We gained the summit at last. It was now growing dark, and we had to wind down another ravine a little farther north and opposite to Fort Ellice. Half an hour later and we were on the banks of the swiftly-rolling Assiniboine. But what a difference. Three weeks ago the river rolled along whirling and foaming, but now it is as still as death, and there is not even the appearance

of a river. It is more like the crooked winding street of some ancient city; still the currents are there, only buried beneath the ice. How like the great forces of good and evil that roll through the world and influence the life of men! Now they rage like the rolling of the troubled sea, then they settle down to the mildness and the calmness of a pool, and there is not a ripple to disturb the quiet. Still, however quiet and however calm, like the river beneath the ice, there the currents certainly are. It was now dark, and I had to depend almost entirely on my patient, faithful horse. We crossed the river and reached the Fort at the top of the steep bank on the opposite side in due time.

Mr. and Mrs. McDonald, the host and hostess of Ellice, were both away on the occasion of this visit, a thing that had not happened with me before. The clerks, etc., in charge, however, kindly interested themselves, and we had a gathering at the boarding-house, where I preached. Fort Ellice is a Hudson's Bay trading post, and Mr. McDonald is its chief factor. Here all travellers for the interior halt. The Canada Pacific Railway will no doubt change that, but settlement, which has not reached Ellice yet, will more than compensate for the change.

The following Monday I remained at Ellice until three p.m., to repair the damages of the previous day. I reached the house of Mr. E. Bligh in township 18, range 28 west, for the night. Mr. Bligh and his brother are gentlemen from Halifax, N.S., and appear to be doing very well on their farm. I intended getting to Shell River on the following day. But it is not as we say always on these prairies. Thirty miles in the face of that storm was not to be thought of; so there was nothing for it but go and see settlers, and make the acquaintance of some fresh arrivals. Wednesday was a little better, and I hastened away, knowing that the people would be looking for me at Shell River. I was pleased to find that three houses had gone up since I had passed before. On the occasion of my last trip I took dinner on the green with the gophers. On the banks of Silver Creek there is now a nice family, on whom I called on my way up. I could not, however, stay long, as I do not like to get benighted on these trails if I can help it. I reached the upper settlement about five p.m., arranged for service as I passed through, and stayed for the night at the house of Mr. Lowther. I passed Thursday visiting the various parts of that settlement, and on Friday passed over to Silver Creek, as I had to arrange for Sabbath services, as I am not able to be there regularly on the Sabbath. We have a very excellent class of settlers at these two points, and they appear to be getting on very well in their new homes. Services on Sabbath, 27th November—Shell River eleven a.m., Silver Creek half-past-three p.m. Most of the people here are of our Church, and it is a great pity they cannot get more frequent services than I can give them, living—if I may be said to live at any special point—forty miles away.

I had intended going a little farther, but it was now dark, and my horse was tired, having travelled about 100 miles, breaking roads all the way. We were both, therefore, glad to put up for the night. Monday morning was mild and enjoyable, but the trails were unbroken. I could only make a call or two to see a sick person in the neighbourhood. I had the no pleasing prospect of twenty miles of unbroken road before me; still I had to go, as the people whom I had engaged to meet would be waiting. I arrived on the banks of the Bird Tail Creek in due time, held meeting, stayed for the night with my kind friends, Mr. and Mrs. Waldock, who have a neat, comfortable little cottage commanding a delightful view on the sunny side of the above-named river. There are but few settlers at this point, but as there is a strong probability of a railway crossing just here the friends are very hopeful. On Tuesday morning the haze and clouds of the few past days lifted themselves off the face of the prairie, and the sun shone out most beautifully, giving the handiwork of Jack Frost, who in the few damp days of the past week had silvered everything, a most gorgeous and enchanting appearance. The day was fine and the roads were good, and even my horse, though tired, enjoyed the drive to Rossburn, about eight miles farther up the river. The people gathered in goodly numbers to the meeting at night. After preaching we had a congregational meeting, had a talk about finances, and appointed a committee to mature some plan for the erection of a church. About the matter of church erection I may say there are two difficulties: it is hard to get the requisite money in so new settle-

ments, and often more difficult to tell where population will centre itself. The growth of a year may leave us entirely out of position.

Rossburn is a very promising settlement, and I am happy to state that the Presbyterian Church has the largest following by far. On Wednesday I had only fifteen miles to go, and as the trail was broken I found it easy work. I called on several families by the way, and arrived at my destination about dark. Here there is a good settlement, known as Oak River north, and the abundant harvest has given the settlers considerable courage. The threshing machine has plied here, and I was pleased to hear the farmer at whose place I stayed say that he had counted in some 1,500 bushels of grain—not bad for the second year of settlement. The Baptists are disputing the situation with us here, and I expect the nothing-but-dip controversy along soon. We hope to see a church erection soon at this point, though the people have many other engagements pressing upon them, as is always the case in a new country.

On Friday I went fifteen miles farther east. Returned to an appointment on Saturday. I preach here once in three weeks—on Sabbath eleven a.m., nine miles farther south at three p.m. Here also the friends are arranging for building. I got to Shoal Lake seven miles farther still, at seven p.m.

4th December.—We occupy the boarding-house here at present, but hope to have a building of our own at no distant day. There are no less than five or six town plots at Shoal Lake, but we are waiting to see where the town will be before we build. Mr. Young, of Toronto, has kindly offered us a lot and \$100 on his place, and I expect we shall build there. Several parties to be seen on Monday; Tuesday to Birtle; Wednesday to Beulah Doyle's settlement, fourteen miles south, or close by Solomon's Indians. Here I remained a day, held service, and returned to my home on Friday afternoon, the 7th of December.

My letter is too long, I know; still, I have taken you over my Mission about as hastily as possible. It occupied nineteen days, and without allowing even for going far off the main trails, it involved a journey of 250 miles. The above repeated every three weeks leaves little time for other matters.

December 15, 1881.

WM. HODNETT.

CARROT RIVER, N.-W. T.

MR. EDITOR,—A brief account of a recent visit to this detached settlement may help to excite a desire to aid mission work in the far west. Though not in Prince Albert district ecclesiastically, it is supposed to be within its bounds. The South Saskatchewan intervenes. There was no ferry last summer within several days' journey. Neither man nor horse are experts in swimming. For months this promising locality was left deprived of the institutions of religion. The hard frost bridging river and lake, making marshes firm as granite, made the journey possible in one day. The equipment was of the most primitive kind: a sled not much larger than a hand-sled; a bag of oats, which served also as a seat; another bag with provisions, camp kettle, axe, a coil of rope, buffalo robes, and a horse inured to north-west travel. The sun shone bright and fair on the landscape, whitened by snow, as the houses, stores and mills of Prince Albert disappeared from view. The first part of the trail for fifteen miles leads over a monotonous succession of hill, hollow and slough till the South Branch is reached. All the best claims have been taken up—the breaking on them a precursor of building. At the crossing of the river there is a Cree Reserve with its mud-plastered houses, and an Episcopal Mission with its church and school. The reserve system destroys all habits of patient industry. There can be no reason why Christianized Indians should not have the full rights of citizenship. On the other side of the South Saskatchewan the road leads over densely wooded hills—sweeps mile after mile over a dreary sameness of hill meadow and marsh. About noon a halt is made at the edge of a bluff, a fire kindled and a meal prepared. All is silent around as the air. On the horizon the steep acclivities of hills, lakes and islands like belts of timber mantled in dazzling sheets of snow, make a picture of wild beauty. No signs of man's handiwork are visible, save the thin poles of a hunting lodge which had served as the summer abode of some son of the wilderness. Along the trail, the footprints of wolves, timber prairie and grey