

*Manitoba Flood*

here by the government of the United Kingdom to look over the Hudson bay lands in western Canada. He reported that near my hon. friend's home of Souris, and I recollect the date very well, on July 2 of that year the horses refused to go forward because the grasshoppers were so thick in the air that even the horses would not face them as they were swept along by the wind. And all of us from the west, I am sure, can remember the disastrous years between 1930 and 1940, when we had to face the same conditions. I have seen the sky clouded with grasshoppers in the middle of the day. The sun was shining, but you seemed to see a mist, and when you looked up you could see countless billions of grasshoppers in the air. On the same page of this volume is this reference to the flood of 1826.

Natural reverses culminated in the disastrous flood of 1826. During the preceding winter a phenomenally heavy fall of snow drove the buffalo from the vicinity; more than thirty of the plain-rangers perished on the prairies from exposure or starvation. In the spring the river, swollen by the melting snow, rose nine feet in a single day. A few days later the stream swept over the river banks and buried the settlement beneath several feet of icy water. The flood of 1826 was considered "an extinguisher to the hope of Red River ever retaining the name of a settlement." When the water subsided there was a migration to the United States of the "de Meurons" and a party of Swiss who had been induced in 1821 to settle in Assiniboia. For the third time within eleven years the Scottish settlers resolved to begin anew at Red river.

During this whole century and a quarter since the great flood of 1826, and before that, there have been recurrent disasters in the Red river valley and, indeed, in some other river valleys also. Some of us can remember seeing the Assiniboine in flood at Brandon, and not many years ago the Saskatchewan overflowed its banks south of Saskatoon and did a great deal of damage, though not as much as we are witnessing at the present time. Of course I am not forgetting the great flood in the Fraser river valley, which we hope will not be repeated this year though conditions are ripe for such a disaster.

I have another volume in my hand, the story of the women of the Red river valley, which contains a very interesting letter written on May 27, 1852, by Reverend John Black, who was the first Presbyterian minister to build a church in the valley. Up to that time services had been conducted by the Anglican church. It is interesting to note that this Presbyterian minister baptized the late Archbishop Matheson into the Presbyterian communion, though later he became the Anglican Archbishop of Rupert's Land.

I think this letter is worthy of being placed on record. Reverend John Black wrote.

On Sabbath May ninth I preached for the last time in our temporary church and had to go part of the way to it in a canoe. On Monday the tenth the flight from the Scotch part of the settlement was general. In trying to reach a place of safety, men and women were seen plunging through the water driving and carrying, while the aged and little children were conveyed in carts drawn by oxen or horses. Most of the Scotch settlers had from one hundred to three hundred bushels of wheat in lofts which they kept from year to year in case of failure, and now for this there was much anxiety. The first night we encamped on the plain without wood or shelter, saving what we erected, amid the lowing of cattle and the bleating of sheep, and the roaring of calves, and the squealing of pigs, and the greeting of bairns. After three days we arrived here, on a beautiful woody ridge thirteen miles from our houses. A few families are with me here, but my congregation is scattered, so that, from extreme to extreme is, I suppose, more than thirty miles. Thus the waters prevailed and spread themselves over the cultivated lands, sweeping away everything loose and much that was thought fast. Houses, barns, byres, stacks of wheat, etc., were floating down thick and fast. Not a bridge is left on the road in all the flooded district. Sometimes the wind blew very strong, and acting on the lake-like expanse of waters, agitated them like a sea, and this was very destructive to the houses of the settlers. The breadth flooded in our part of the settlement is eight or nine miles, while the ordinary width of the river is not more than one hundred and fifty yards. I have crossed this wide expanse twice to visit our people on the east side. I have now three preaching stations instead of one—all camp meetings. The water began to fall about the 21st. We hope to get home again in about two weeks.

What I am driving at is that for over a century and a quarter, ever since the Red river valley was settled, there have been these threats of flood and at times great floods, and it seems to me that long ere this the governments of the two countries should have done something about it. South of the line, from Emerson all the way down to Crookston and as far as Grand Forks, they have floods similar to those in Manitoba. Over those years it seems to me there should have been more of an attempt to prevent this kind of disaster than has been made. Indeed, I think the time has come when this country should consider conservation generally in a very big way. This particular area, of course, is not affected by the conditions that affect the Fraser valley, because the headwaters of the Fraser river come from mountainsides denuded of trees. Once trees delayed the melting of the snow, and the valleys and river courses were deep enough and wide enough to carry out the water as the snow melted in the spring. The same is true of southern Ontario, in connection with the Thames, the Grand and so on. Once upon a time this province was covered with dense forests. The melting