

Contributors and Correspondents.

NOTES FROM THE NORTH-WEST.

Editor BRITISH AMERICAN PRESBYTERIAN.

DEAR SIR,—My last letter left me at Sault Ste Marie. From thence we proceeded to Silver Islet, which we reached on Wednesday afternoon. Mr. H. H. McPherson, who supplies this station during the summer months, met us at the landing, as also Mr. Livingstone, one of the leading adherents of the Presbyterian cause in that place. For the present, Mr. McPherson is the only Protestant minister there, the Wesleyan Methodist preacher having left at the last conference, and no other having yet arrived. Mr. McPherson reports the attendance in the morning at 40, and in the evening over 100. There is a strong desire on the part of the Presbyterians to have an ordained minister settled among them as speedily as possible. As the church erected by the Silver Islet Company is common to all denominations, only one service would be required of us, but it is stated that the Company would willingly supplement his stipend, if he could during the week engage in teaching. There is no school whatever in the place, and the young men and women are growing up without education and discipline of any kind whatever. To a young man, ready for ordination, and who asks a quiet place for study, and who at the same time he would be the means of doing much good, Silver Islet presents many inducements. I trust this point will be supplied ere Mr. McPherson leaves.

While various conflicting reports are current concerning the resources of "Silver Islet," in a mining point of view, the weight of evidence is in favor of its productiveness and value. From 6 to 15 barrels of the ore are taken daily out of the mine, and the Company are increasing the number of miners and extending their operations. The first fatal accident that has occurred since the commencement of this enterprise, happened on the Tuesday evening before we arrived. A Norwegian miner, only two weeks in the country, fell down one of the shafts and was killed. The funeral took place in the afternoon. We were there, attended by all the miners—the exercises being conducted by Mr. McPherson.

From Silver Islet to Prince Arthur's Landing, is a run of only two hours. Here we met Mr. McKerracher, who has charge of the Station for the summer months. Prince Arthur's Landing has grown up within the last four years, and owes its importance chiefly to the fact that it is the beginning of the Dawson route to Port Garry. Like all new places, things are as yet in a very unsettled state. Our Church is as prosperous, perhaps, as any of the other denominations, but having no place of worship, is placed at a disadvantage. A site for a Church, in what seems an eligible location, has been secured, and in the event of a permanent minister being sent, the building will be commenced forthwith. The growth of the "Landing" depends very much to whether it shall be selected as the starting point of the projected railway. In any case, however, the prospects of our cause are such as to call for permanent supply of ordinances.

These three places—Sault Ste Marie, Silver Islet, and Prince Arthur's Landing—must, for a time at least, be dealt with as special cases by the Home Mission Committee. The cost of living is great, and salaries sufficient in ordinary places are entirely below what is demanded in such localities.

At the "Landing" we met with the Rev. Mr. Nisbet and family, and the Rev. Mr. Black, waiting for the "Manitoba" to take them on to Duluth, thence to Fort Garry. Messrs. Nisbet and Black sailed on the 1st July from Collingwood, on the "Cumberland," and expected before this date to have arrived at Winnipeg. But the vessel got aground at Owen Sound for 36 hours, and when they reached Prince Arthur's Landing on Sabbath morning, the "Algoma," which should have taken them on to Duluth, was found disabled, and unable to proceed. Our brethren were therefore compelled (at their own expense) to remain at the hotel until our arrival on Wednesday evening. I cannot but think that the Collingwood Line, in all fairness, should have at least paid the hotel bill of all the passengers, thus detained at great inconvenience and loss. This they decidedly refused to do, although one of the company was on board when the request was presented. The "Manitoba," in consideration of the circumstances, dealt very liberally with our brethren, and it gives me pleasure, for this and other reasons, to recommend the Sarnia route to the brethren

going to the North West. Duluth was reached Thursday afternoon, where all the passengers for Winnipeg via the Northern Pacific Railway, disembarked. Short as our voyage had been, many pleasing friendships had been made, and much Christian intercourse enjoyed, which made our parting more than mere sentiment. But it is thus through life. We meet but to part.

The city of Duluth (there are no towns or villages in the United States), is beautifully situated at the head of Lake Superior. As to its present population and prospective growth, opinions differ. Some say it has a population of 6,000—others again make it as low as 4,000. Some assert that at no distant day it must rival Chicago or St. Louis, others that its best days are over, and that it will decline in population and commerce. A Canadian from Montreal, whom we met on the streets, asserted that "it was a grand fraud and swindle"—that "the bottom of Duluth was already clean gone under," and that no honest man would remain if he could get away. This man is preparing to emigrate to Winnipeg, Manitoba, having already shipped most of his goods. He only remains in "Uncle Sam's territory" till he collects his debts—an undertaking, he declares, exceedingly hard to accomplish. Other Canadians, who have evidently been more successful in their operations, speak in exceedingly glowing terms of its certain expansion and rapid growth.

Duluth can boast of 10 Evangelical Churches, some excellent hotels, and stores of every description. It can also, I regret to say, (so far as my observation goes), more than equal the most debased city in the U. S., for drinking saloons and taverns. Every second door on the principal streets is a groggery—Dutch or American. The amount of drunkenness in this small place must be something fearful.

On Friday morning, the 11th, our party started for Moorhead, via the Northern Pacific Railway. Before leaving we received a telegram from Winnipeg that the steamer "Dakota" would wait the arrival of our train, and leave Moorhead direct for Winnipeg in the evening. After a run of 11 hours over one of the bleakest and seemingly most barren portions of Minnesota, we reached Moorhead, and embarked on the "Dakota." Our quarters are certainly not the most inviting. The boat is by much the smallest of the three at present plying on the Red River, and hardly worthy of regular passenger traffic. The accommodation in the state rooms, all told, extend to 20 persons, and there are more than double that number, I should judge, on board. The result is that every inch of sleeping accommodation on floor and deck is taken, and with the thermometer approaching blood heat, and mosquitoes by the legion, our slumbers are certainly not peaceful. The prospect of three such days and nights is not pleasing, but it may prepare us for harder times in Manitoba. If the New Province is to increase according to the sanguine expectations of Canadians, there must be railway communication forthwith between Ontario and Winnipeg.

On board the cars to Moorhead we met the Rev. Mr. Lyon, of St. Paul's, one of the District Mission secretaries of the American Presbyterian Church. He has under his care all the Mission Churches and Stations in Minnesota and Dakota Territory; and was on a visit to the more remote portions of his diocese. At Brainerd, the junction of the railroad, we met the Rev. T. G. Smith, of Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, on his way home from Winnipeg, where he has supplied Knox Church for the last 2 Sabbaths. He reports favorably of our progress. On Saturday we met the "International" on her voyage up from Winnipeg to Moorhead, having on board Miss Dorothy, the music teacher in the Ladies' School. She goes to spend her vacation in Western Ontario.

All are delighted with the beauty of the Red River scenery. If it were not so winding, its beauty would be still greater in our eyes. But to travel 600 miles instead of 200—by the direct route—is enough to weary, if not disgust the most enthusiastic admirer of Nature's flora.

Reports reach us that the grasshopper plague has again appeared in Manitoba and that the crops in certain localities are likely to be a perfect failure. To the many struggling pioneers of our New Province this must be a sad drawback. It is to be hoped that the coming harvest may prove more abundant than what is now expected.

As I write these closing lines, we are coming in sight of Fort Garry, having accomplished the journey in 9 1/2 days. The weather is all that can be desired. After our Presbyterian meeting on Wednesday, I shall send another communication. Meanwhile,

I remain, yours sincerely,
W. C.

STEVEN DAKOTA, Red River, July 14, 1873.

LAKE SUPERIOR LETTER.

Editor BRITISH AMERICAN PRESBYTERIAN.

DEAR SIR,—You requested me to write to you from this interesting place. I promised to do so, but culpable negligence has hitherto prevented me. Perhaps your readers would like to know exactly what and where Silver Islet is; for though their geographical knowledge may in general be pretty extensive, yet they may be presumed unacquainted with the exact position and size of the Islet, inasmuch as, were it marked on any ordinary school map, I believe it would require a microscope to see it. The island from which the village or shore derives main support and everything, was originally only a little rock projecting out of the water three quarters of a mile from shore. It was about seventy feet long by about thirty feet wide. It is exactly at the head of the peninsula between two large bodies of water—Thunder Bay and Black Bay. The former is a most magnificent bay. In length from North to South it is about thirty miles; in breadth eighteen. On the west of it are the two rising towns, Prince Arthur's Landing and Fort William, with the beautiful valley of the Kaministiquia, along which, by the way, in the estimation of every individual in this region, is the only sensible route for a railroad, from the head of navigation to the great North West, into which settlers are now pouring every week, both from Canada and the United States. South-west of Fort William are the McKay mountains over a thousand feet in height. Thunder Bay is guarded on the South by Pie Island, which in height varies from two hundred to nearly eight hundred feet, and on the East of this bay there is Thunder Cape which rises through a series of six steps from South to North till it reaches to the height of thirteen hundred and fifty feet. This cape therefore forms the Western side of the Peninsula, at the head of which Silver Islet is.

Small the Island originally was, but it is now greatly growing in size. Massive crib-work has been sunk in the lake around it, and filled with the rock from the shore. There are on it six or seven buildings, one of which is a large boarding house which very inadequately accommodates nearly a hundred and twenty men. Extensive additions are being made this summer. Men have been working night and day endeavoring to carry out as soon as possible the plan at present contemplated, which will make the longest extent of the island eight hundred feet, and then there will be ample accommodation for the future. The miners, of whom there are about ninety, with the exception of a very few, all board on the island. The work in the mine is carried on night and day, each miner being required to work just eight hours per day—long enough, however, to be in such a dismal place, two hundred and fifty feet below the surface of the water. The vein, which still works well, is nearly perpendicular, and runs North and South. The quantity of silver daily taken out since last winter has varied from one to eighteen barrels, each of which would average nearly \$500 in value. A large quantity of silver also has been taken up by the diver from the bed of the lake.

There are on shore over four hundred inhabitants dwelling in houses all of which belong to the Company, as everything, in fact, here does. A neat little building, with a bell on it and an organ in it, serves the purpose both of a day school and a church. Until about three months ago it was used on Sabbath forenoon by the Roman Catholics, who number about one hundred and eighty, and by the Protestants in the afternoon. Of the latter the Presbyterians are largely in the majority, and they therefore feel that they should have a minister of their own. There was a Methodist minister here when I arrived by the first boat—the "Manitoba," which, by the way, I would like to commend for its good behavior in not whistling on the Sabbath, and its temperance principles. On account of ill-health however, he left a little over two weeks after I came. Since then I have been the only representative of the Protestant ministers here. But another Methodist minister is now daily expected. Considering the place, where there are so many young men from so many different parts of the world, and away from all the restraint of a home, the people are, as a general rule, well inclined. There is a very good attendance in the church on Sabbath evenings; but in the evening the attendance has hitherto been far too small. There is no proper reason why it should not be as large as in the evening. One great blessing to this place is the fact that no intoxicating liquor is allowed to be sold. The only liquor lawfully kept in the whole place is secreted in the general provision store, and no one can get any of it without the doctor's prescription. Though well knowing the evils of intemperance at one time I did not look with much favor on a prohibitory liquor law, but after seeing its effects even on a small scale here, I believe it would be a benefit anywhere.

For the information of the members of the Students Missionary Society by which I was sent here, and with the working and objects of which your readers ought to be well acquainted, I may state that from what I know of the people here I do not think that this year the Missionary to Silver Islet will be any burden at all to the Society; and further, that after this there will be no necessity of sending a missionary either to this place or Sault Ste. Marie, for the Rev. Wm. Cochran, who last week passed through this place en route for Manitoba, told me that it was the intention of the Home Mission Committee to send an ordained minister to each of these places this Fall, and one also to Prince Arthur's Landing. This Mr. Editor, is just as it should be. These important points have been hitherto neglected by our Church. Hence the people of Thunder Bay think that the Presbyterians are "slow." And slow they are too in all the outlying portions of our country. Even when they do send missionaries for a few months during the Summer, seldom is it that they send ordained men. Hence the children of Presbyterians are everywhere baptized by ministers of other denominations and are growing up with little respect for the church of their fathers, and often, which is far worse, with none for any other. Now would it not be well were our Church, instead of sending only Students to a few of these out of the way places, to remove ordained men for a time from their regular congregations which have never known what it is to be deprived of the means of grace, and allow Students to take their places? I believe the change would be agreeable and certainly it would be profitable to all concerned. The ordained minister himself would be benefited and so would his congregation, at least when he returned. He would be inspired with a missionary spirit that can be organized in no other way, and on his return he would make that spirit be felt to a certain extent among those who seldom think of the necessities of those beyond their own circle. And I have often thought and now feel firmly persuaded that it would be a benefit to the Church as a whole, were the outlying districts better attended to and a sure footing secured on them, even though this could be done only at the expense of neglecting for a time regular congregations.

I have already written far more than I intended. If you think the above remarks are worthy of being inserted in your valuable paper you are welcome to them; if not strike out what you choose.

It is delightfully cool and pleasant here.
Yours truly,
PRESBYTERIAN MISSIONARY.
Silver Islet, July 16, 1873.

VACANT CONGREGATIONS.

Editor BRITISH AMERICAN PRESBYTERIAN.

DEAR SIR,—It is stated in your paper of the 18th inst., where the last meeting of the Presbytery of Chatham is reported, that to next meeting "the clerk was instructed to invite as many of the elders and managers of the vacant congregations of the Presbytery as can find it convenient to be present, to confer concerning the best method of securing settled pastors for these congregations as soon as possible. The vacant congregations of that Presbytery are not named, of course, and whether there are special circumstances connected with these congregations which have led the Presbytery to take the action above stated, I do not know. It is quite probable that there are no special circumstances in any of their cases. But at any rate I admire the spirit of the Presbytery, and think it worthy of imitation, in trying to secure settled pastors as early as possible. The long vacancies of many of our congregations have arrested my attention for years past; and not only my attention, but also my wonder. It will not be alleged by any person, that for congregations to remain long in a vacant condition can be of advantage to them; in all cases, or at any rate, in most of them, it is quite the reverse. Their numbers both in communion and adherence, are almost certain of being diminished; their Sabbath-school, missionary, and other organizations are likely to suffer, without settled pastors they cannot have the benefit of regular visitation; in cases of sickness, and adversity, and bereavement, they must call in the services of strangers to direct and comfort them; and it is not impossible that some party or other may try to upset their distinctive convictions, and to get them away to another sheepfold, which the presence of a stated pastor would help to counteract. There are other disadvantages of a minor kind, but they need not be stated, everyone knows that for any congregation to remain long vacant is undesirable, if not perilous. And why is it that so many of our congregations remain vacant for twelve, fifteen, or eighteen months? some of them even for a series of years? I would wonder the less if all these congregations were comparatively small and poor or if they were to give calls and prove unsuccessful, or if they had a mere minority of men from whom to make a selection. But is it so? Of course there are always evils of our congregations, which

from their limited numbers and means, may not be able to fill up their vacancies speedily; and a few others, though prompt in calling, are not successful. But are there not others again—some of them large and wealthy—who, after hearing a considerable range of probationers, and of settled ministers as well, allow a large number of months to expire before they even present a call, and if that is unaccepted, allow as much time to expire again before they decide for a second call. I fear, Sir, that the evil referred to—for evil it must be called—arises in a great measure from an appetite in the line of sensational preaching, which kind of preaching (it is supposed) would cast other kinds into the shade, and serve to increase congregational numbers, as also congregational finances. But men of the calibre of Spurgeon, or Beecher, or Ormiston, are "few and far between," and if more plentiful than they are, would not be likely to accept six, ten, or even twenty hundred dollars a year. Let our vacant congregations be more prayerful, more intent on spiritual advantage, less desirous of mere oratory in the pulpit, and it is almost certain that they would be the sooner able to agree on an object of choice, and very probably, too, would succeed more speedily in obtaining a settled pastor among them.

The question, however, is quite a fair one, whether, in the event of a congregation being long vacant, the Presbytery should not step in, and some way or other endeavor to have the vacancy supplied. There is surely a defect among us on this point. It is well said in our Church Manual, that "the duty of the Presbytery is generally to superintend the congregations and sessions within their bounds." Yes; and Presbyteries are not supposed to be obtrusive when they counsel any congregation within their bounds in regard to church attendance, or family prayer, or mission support. Well, if any of their congregations were tardy in endeavoring to obtain a minister, or if, after endeavoring, they proved unsuccessful, the Presbytery would not be obtrusive, but wise, if they dealt with them in regard to the matter, and urged them on, or consoled with them, as the case might require. It is not intended for a single moment to narrow the liberty of congregations; let them have complete and unfettered power to elect the probationer or minister whom they wish to be settled over them in the Lord. But if that power be kept in abeyance, if it be not employed in reasonable time, let the Presbytery urge them to the exercise of it; or if they have exercised it, and failed, perhaps more than once, surely the Presbytery would be doing a right thing, a kind thing, if they sought a conference with them to secure a settlement among them "as early as possible." The system of the Wesleyans and other Methodists in regard to ministerial appointments is not at all according to my liking. But still it has one thing to be urged in its favor—perhaps others—it provides against congregational vacancies, before a circuit is deprived of a minister, another minister is provided for it; and the moment the former leaves the field the latter takes possession of it, so that not merely preaching, but prayer meeting also, and class meetings, and household visitation, and magazine circulation, &c., &c., are carried on without interruption. In connection also with another body there was once a law which not unfairly may be mentioned here. More than a century and a half ago, it was provided by the law of patronage for the Church of Scotland, "that if a patron did not exercise his right of presenting an individual to a parish within six months after it became vacant, the Presbytery should (jura de facto) take measures for inducting a minister into the parish." It was clearly implied in that law that a parish that was vacant six months was vacant long enough, and that after it had been vacant so long, it was time for the Presbytery to try and amend the matter. Circumstances of course are altered now, and what may apply even now to one country, may not apply to another country. But looking at our Church in its present circumstances, and comparing the amount of demand with the amount of supply, I cannot persuade myself that any fair-sized congregation among us should remain vacant for six, nine, or twelve months without having called one to be a minister among them. And if such a step is not taken, is it not the duty of the Presbytery of the Church to stimulate them, or take measures thereamong? Vacancies in other spheres are filled up, or provided for, "as early as possible"; and if it is so with common and high schools, if it is so with places of merchandise, why should it not be so with our Presbyterian pulpits? But I will not enlarge further on this point. Let me only repeat my hearty conviction that the Presbytery of Chatham have acted wisely, and that what they have done in the matter referred to should be taken notice of by other Presbyteries.

Yours truly,
C. F.

July 23, 1873.