

The Church in Canada.

Under this heading will be collected and preserved all obtainable data bearing upon the history and growth of the Church in Canada. Contributions are invited from those having in their possession any material that might properly come for publication in this department

THE RED RIVER SETTLEMENT.

IN the "Report of the Canadian Archives" for 1886 by Mr. Douglas Brymner, Archivist, there is contained a long series of letters written by Captain Miles Macdonell on the attempted settlement of the Red River country by Lord Selkirk in 1811. Captain Miles Macdonell, a native of Inverness, Scotland, had charge of the arrangements for carrying out Lord Selkirk's plans, and his correspondence with his chief gives a narrative almost from day to day of the events preceding and following the arrival of the emigrants at the Red River. We propose at an early date to give some adequate review of these events as related by Captain Macdonell, events which at the present time have a peculiar interest when that region is being so rapidly opened out and developed. The correspondence has also a Catholic interest attaching to the person of Captain Miles Macdonell, who came of an old Catholic family, and was himself a devout son of the Church. He was a brother of Mr. William Johnson Macdonell, of Boston, father of Mr. W. J. Macdonell, K.H.S., President of St. Vincent de Paul Society, Toronto, all members of a family famous in the annals of the Church in this Province.

As a contribution to the interesting history of Lord Selkirk's exploits on the Red River we here present, through the kindness of Mr. W. J. Macdonell, a series of letters bearing on the subject. The first was written by Mr. John Macdonell to his brother William Johnson Macdonell in Boston, the second by Lord Selkirk to the same, and the third and fourth are the product of Captain Miles' pen, and, as will be observed, they are all of a later date than those printed in the Archives Report:—

MONTREAL, Nov. 16th, 1815.

MY DEAR BROTHER :

In the year 1803 & 4 when the Earl of Selkirk visited Boston, there were numbers of young Irishmen unsettled and apparently at a loss how to dispose of themselves in and about it. The Earl requested of me to mention this to you, that you might enquire how many could be induced to engage themselves for eighteen months to perform a voyage through the Upper Lakes to the Red River, where lands would be granted to the deserving who should feel inclined to settle there amongst their countrymen, who are to reach it through Hudson's Bay with their families. Catholic Priests are promised, by which means they will have the consolations of Religion to accompany them.

Have the goodness to make the proper enquiries respecting the number that could be depended upon, and what monthly wages they would expect, and let me know the result of your researches with the least possible delay. I have passed twelve years of the prime of my life in the Red River, and if I was not prevented by particular circumstances should have no objections to return to it and pass the remainder, because I have the presumption to think I could be of use to the colony from inclination, local knowledge of the country, and acquaintance with the Natives, Free-men, &c.

The settlers who were with Miles report that Wheat, Barley and potatoes yielded fifty Bushels of return for one Bushel of seed—I know that Horses are plenty; when I left that quarter the price for a good draught Horse was about a Gallon of Rum and a pound of Tobacco. To give you an Idea of the numbers of Buffaloes who occasionally frequent these parts, I shall relate that in May, 1795, I got on board of my canoe, at sunrise left the Forks of the River QuiAppelle & put up for the night at sunset the same day at a place called the *grand bois*, after having from the canoe counted 7,360 carcasses of Buffaloes Dead (i. e. Drowned and Mired) in the River & on its Banks—Such

a melancholy sight seldom occurs, for in the twelve years above mentioned I witnessed it but once.

The lands in that quarter are already cleared, nor need the Settlers cut any trees but such as they wish to convert the wood of to some usefull purpose—Plenty of Hay can be cut from partial low places in the plains where It grows long & is so good that Horses keep fat and in good spirits upon it during a long six months winter. The natives in the immediate environs where the Settlement commenced are friendly, few in numbers, and well disposed towards the Colonists.—Wheel Carriages may run in almost any direction & to almost any distance without following any direct road for the whole Country is a Road.

The meat of the Buffalo is good Beef & his wool will make garments.—What young man of spirit but would like to see such a scene as that country presents the astonished eye with, in the numerous herds of Buffaloes feeding quietly in one part, & fine bands of noble Deer basking in the sun in the same view? How would his heart leap for joy after bringing down at the first shot a huge Buffalo weighing more than an American Ox.—Remember me to my dear sister and the children and believe me ever

Your affectionate brother,

JOHN MACDONELL.

N.B.—You know I was never a good scribe & I'm at present on the fidgets to get home, & tho' in Montreal but poorly supplied with writing implements.

J. Mc D.

Mr. Wm. J. Macdonell, Boston, Mass.

SIR,—

Montreal, Dec. 1st, 1815.

In transmitting the enclosed letter from your brother, I take the liberty of explaining that it is not my wish to engage a great number of the people he refers to, but rather a few chosen men, of whose character you can have good information, & who are likely to prove trusty and useful. My idea is that they should be engaged at monthly wages for a period of 18 months, but with the option for me to dismiss them at any earlier time, paying their wages for the number of months they have served. I mean to give each man, at the end of his service, an allotment of 50 acres of land gratuitously; & also to give a free passage to any young woman who may agree, at his invitation, to come to the colony as his wife. But these advantages are to be only for those whose conduct is perfectly satisfactory to me, & are therefore to be considered as entirely in my option. All those, however, who desire it, shall be brought down free of expense to Montreal, or to Upper Canada, or any other placethat may be agreed upon, whether they serve out their 18 months or are dismissed at an earlier period.

I observe that your brother hardly does justice to the climate of Red River, as (by accurate registers of the weather) it appears that the winter does not set in till November & breaks up early in April. I do not specify any wages to be offered, as that must depend on what the people can earn where they are. I should hope that something nearly similar to the ordinary month's wages of country labourers might be sufficient, & that the extra advantages which I propose might serve to balance the distance of the settlement.

I propose, early next spring, to go up with these people myself, which may serve as an answer to anyone who apprehends danger from the Indians. I think these men will be satisfied when they know that they will be exposed to no danger, but such as I must share with them. I have the most unquestionable evidence that the people who committed such unjustifiable outrages against your brother Miles were not Indians, but British Subjects, whom I am determined to bring to justice; & I trust that the example of their punishment will prevent any similar attempt from being made in the future.

As the ordinary residence of your brother is out of the way of the post, it may be as well if your answer is sent under cover to me, here.

I am, Sir, your very obedient servant,

SELKIRK.

W. JOHNSON MACDONELL ESQ., Boston.