

ON LAKE AND PRAIRIE.

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O follow in spirit those apostles in their voluntary exile, experience their humble lot or to accompany them in their visits to the Indian camps, to record some of their heroic deeds, to listen to the narrative of their travels, their labors, their fatigues and consolations, to feel the very pulsations of their generous hearts, will be a pleasure to the many who admire these brave missionaries, while it will be interesting even to those who do not share the same enthusiasm.

Now that industry and progress are working such wonders in the great North Western territories, the condition of the missionaries has undergone a change in many localities, but for the greater number toils and fatigues have increased rather than diminished. While the various missions lying along the mighty commercial artery called the Canadian Pacific Railway have suddenly been transformed, as if by magic into villages or thriving towns and are easily reached, the stations northward remain still as lonely and deserted and as difficult of access as they were thirty years ago when the rivers and lakes were the only means of communication, the bark canoe the only conveyance, the paddle and sturdy sinews of the voyageurs the only locomotive.

A half a century is not yet elapsed since the first Oblate missionaries launched their frail canoe near Montreal. Having crossed the St. Lawrence they proceeded up the Ottawa river, passed Bytown now the Capital of the Dominion, and reached Mattawa. From thence through a chain of lakes and rivers, after a journey of over two months they finally reached the Red River in Manitoba and landed at St. Boniface. Father Auber and Father Taché, now Archbishop Taché, were the two Oblate Fathers who first performed this long and tedious journey. In a sketch which Archbishop Taché published some years ago, entitled "Twenty years in the missions" he describes this voyage, and records the feelings of his youthful heart after he had left civilization behind him and reached the shores of the distant

Assiniboine and Saskatchewan. Only the purest zeal and the most generous devotion to the work of conversion of the poor Indians could counterbalance the spirit of loneliness that weighed him down. Although he did not regret the sacrifice he had made to God, he found consolation in confiding a few tears to the waters of the river at his feet, which he knew would, after repeated minglings with other streams, reach the St. Lawrence that washed the shores of his native home where dwell his loving mother.

A poetic nature may find beauties in the landscapes of the vast prairies, it may enjoy travelling through the thick wild forests, or sailing o'er the glassy surface of the extensive lakes and rapid flowing rivers; but the poetic feeling forsakes even the most enthusiastic of men when they are confronted by fatigue, hunger, cold, thirst and every bodily ill. Then the pure desire of saving souls alone survives to stimulate the energy required in the apostle, and it alone will sustain him. Like a burning fire within his breast it will quicken his blood when, in the cold of winter, he travels over the endless prairie, to bring the good tidings of the faith to some far away tribe or administer the consolations of religion to the dying children of the forest. It must be said that the zeal of the new apostles was wonderfully blessed by God. While thirty years ago there were scarcely two or three huts as chapels for an area of over one million square miles, there are now three vicariates, with one hundred and fifty chapels and as many missionaries amongst whom are four bishops. The harvest of souls has also been abundant considering the difficulties that had to be overcome. Several thousand Indians are now converted to the true faith; they received regular visits from the Fathers and their respective bishops, the children are instructed not only in religion, but also in the rudiments of profane knowledge. Training schools where the young even may learn how to till the soil, the maidens, how to perform domestic work, have been founded by the Fathers, are supported partially by the Federal Government and have proved very successful.