

SKETCHES OF MISSION WORK IN BRITISH COLUMBIA.

By REV. A. DUNN.

Previous to the formation of the Presbytery of British Columbia in connection with the Church of Scotland in 1875, there were but two Presbyterian ministers in that large province; Rev. Simon Macgregor, in St. Andrew's Ch., Victoria, and Rev. Robert Jamieson, in St. Andrew's Church, New Westminster; the former connected with the Church of Scotland, the latter with the Canada Presbyterian Church.

In the spring of 1875 Mr. Macgregor was sent by his congregation to lay the spiritual needs of the Province before the Colonial Committee of the Church of Scotland.

He enlisted their hearty sympathy, and soon returned with four ministers, Messrs. Clyde, Murray, Nicholson, and myself; who, with Mr. McGregor as Moderator, constituted the Presbytery of British Columbia, 21st August, 1875.

Mr. Nicholson labored for a short time in the agricultural settlements around Victoria. Mr. Clyde was stationed at the coal mining town of Nanaimo.

Mr. Murray wrought for five years in the extensive country east of the Cascades, with such zeal and fidelity that he was obliged from sheer exhaustion to leave for a time. After several years work in New Glasgow, Nova Scotia, his native Province, he returned, and for the last ten years has labored at Nicola, a part of his former wide field.

The district assigned to me was along the Fraser River, from Yale to the Gulf of Georgia, one hundred miles in length, and from ten to thirty miles in width.

At Langley there was the largest number of Presbyterian families, and there I was advised to locate. Fort Langley, an old post of the Hudson Bay Co., is seventeen miles up the river from New Westminster, and about ten miles from the American line.

I shall never forget the feeling of surprise and disappointment which I had on my first arrival at Langley. I had expected to find a village there, something like a Scotch village, with at least some open, cleared country around it. All I could see as I left the boat was the H. B. Co.'s store, the storekeeper's house, a few old buildings, and a vast stretch of gloomy giant firs.

There were some thirty settlers scattered not far away, but their houses were for the most part invisible to each other.

Langley, at that time, and for several years afterward, had an unenviable reputation for quarrelling and law suits. During the first and second years of my ministry there, it would sometimes happen that nearly the whole male population of the place would be in New Westminster attending court, in the case of some dispute regarding a road or bridge.

In nearly all new settlements, until the main roads have been located, and the sites

for schools and churches determined, sad revelations of human selfishness are often made, and bitter and unseemly wranglings often occur.

From the very beginning of my work at Langley, I resolved to stand aloof from these disputes; to refrain from expressing an opinion, or even discussing the points of difference. The result was that all parties continued to attend public worship.

Had I taken a side, even when a cause seemed to me right, I would have laid myself open to the charge of intermeddling with what did not immediately concern me, and would have ceased to influence for good a considerable portion of those to whom I was sent to minister. I believe this had much to do with any good that I was enabled to accomplish in that district.

In other settlements, and under different conditions, I have at times pursued a different course, and taken my part along with others in getting needed improvements carried out, in getting roads and schools and churches placed where they ought to be. But on all such occasions I have looked carefully to my footing beforehand, and have been convinced that my action would not disturb the peace of congregations or hurt my usefulness; and no doubt by identifying myself with the people in their efforts to get ahead, I may have been the means of doing some good.

Still, so utterly shameless and unprincipled are some of the characters met with in a new country, and with whom the minister in discussing public questions may have to come into painful collision, that had I to go over again the same ground, I would uniformly adhere to the principle of non-interference in matters outside my special work as a missionary of Christ.

In 1875 the country was new, the roads few in number and very bad in character. Where there was a road I travelled on horseback. When there was none I used the Fraser River, travelling by row-boat or canoe.

Preaching twice and three times each Sabbath, it took me three weeks to overtake the more important settlements. The fatigue was great and the danger, at times, not small, especially in the frequent crossing of unbridged streams, swollen by long continued rains.

Opening a new road through the forest was an expensive work, consequently, at first it was made no wider than was really necessary, and the traveller would often find himself stopped by a huge cedar or fir fallen right across his path; perhaps, too high for his horse to jump over, and too low to get under it.

In the latter part of summer and during autumn, when forest fires prevailed, the traveller was liable to be hemmed in by them. Once, after escaping with difficulty from such a situation, I found that my hair had been singed, and that the handkerchief, which I wore around my neck to keep off the mosquitoes, was on fire.