

HOME MISSIONS—WESTERN SECTION.

By REV. A. HENDERSON, OF APPIN, ONT.

The following is the deliverance of the General Assembly at Winnipeg on the Home Mission Report for 1896-97:— * * *

"That the General Assembly expresses its gratification at the satisfactory state of the Home Mission Fund, and its grateful sense of the liberality of the Congregations, Sabbath Schools and C. E. Societies of the Church in its support; cordially thanks the congregations in the Maritime Provinces for their continued liberality, and the Colonial Committees, Congregations and friends in Great Britain and Ireland for their generous grants; records its satisfaction with the extension and consolidation of the work, especially in the North-West and British Columbia, and its pleasure that the Committee has found it less difficult than ever before to secure suitable men for the fields under its care; that the General Assembly expresses its thankfulness for the success that has attended the labors of Dr. Robertson, Superintendent of Missions, in Britain, and its pleasure in welcoming him back to his work in our own Church. Above all, the General Assembly expresses its devout gratitude to God for a large measure of success vouchsafed during the year, and resolves anew to prosecute with vigour and earnestness the Home Mission work committed to it by the Great Head of the Church."

Every note in this resolution is of a cheerful and hopeful tone, and the Report itself fully bears it out in every detail. The field has been extending; the obligations of the Committee, undertaken last March, have been met; the fields have been fairly well manned; and the British Churches have continued generously to help us.

But we must guard against one or two errors into which we are liable to fall, and from which a study of the Report may save us.

APPEALS UNANSWERED.

The first is the possible impression that during the past year we have overtaken all the work that "the Great Head of the Church committed to us." It was enough to make one's heart sore to sit in the committee last March and listen on the one hand to the earnest appeals from the men of the North-West, and of Algoma and Muskoka, for larger grants to meet the needs; and on the other hand to the strong protests from the older members of Committee that at the rate the contributions were coming in it was morally certain there would not be funds to warrant the Committee in making the desired grants, and to be compelled to refuse them. The consequence was that fields were left unoccupied, and grants were reduced when there was moral certainty that the missionary would have to suffer the loss. Here is what the report from Algoma says:—

"In this widely extended Missionary Presbytery it is found very difficult, indeed impossible, to overtake fully all the mission work which needs to be done, not because of want of men to do the work, but because of want of sufficient means to support them. The general depression and scarcity of money, which affected our work severely a year ago, have continued throughout another year, and the result has been that many fields have been unable to raise the amounts expected of them towards the salaries of their missionaries. This fact, together with the straitened condition of the Home Mission Fund, has led to some retrenchment in the work, which, however, it is hoped, may be only temporary.

For example, the fishermen on the Duck Islands earnestly desired to have a missionary sent to them for the present summer, but for lack of funds their request had to be declined. They have therefore no supply of religious service from any denomination. Two fields also which had been wrought formerly by the Students' Missionary Society had to be left this year without supply for the same reason. These fields are Mills, on the Manitoulin Island, and Whitefish, on the "Soo" branch of the C. P. R. There are connected with these two fields eight preaching stations."

Is this state of things according to the mind of the Church? We think not. In some quarters the Committee is blamed for practising economy after this sort; in other quarters it is blamed if its expenditure much exceeds its income, and it has thereby to report a deficit. If it is the mind of the Church that the Committee overtake the work that the Head of the Church is laying to their hands, then the membership of the Church must express its mind, not in words but in still more liberal gifts. Surely it would be a great blot upon our name if we were to abandon a people because they happen to be few in number or poor in circumstances. Study, for instance, this condition of things reported by Rev. Mr. Findlay, and say if these people are to be refused gospel ordinances until they can "guarantee" a certain proportion of the salary of the missionary:—

"The season just closed has been the most discouraging through which our work has passed since the organization of the Presbytery. The chief cause of this has been the almost utter failure of the lumber business during the winter, as well as the uncertainty connected with the pulp-wood trade. The larger portion of this product, like the saw-logs, finds its market on the American side of the lines. The practical result is that those engaged in it have no certainty as to when or whether they shall be paid for their labour."

INCOME LESS THAN THE OUTLAY.

Another mistake into which we are apt to fall at first sight of the Report is that of