

and was obliged to follow it up and punish the delinquents? St. Nicholas undertakes to arrange all this. He goes a great distance and finds a tree precisely the same as the one taken by the children, and returns and plants it in the spot from which the other had been removed. Next morning the forester discovers the tree whose disappearance he had announced, believes himself to have been the victim of hallucination, tears up the paper on which he had made the charge and which he was about to submit to the authorities. St. Nicholas, it is thus seen, has not lost his old habit of protecting children.

The second story, and in some respects the best of all, is written by Jules Lemaitre. It is a running comment on the second chapter of St. Matthew, and is called "The Daughter of King Herodias." He makes the daughter of Herodias a child of fifteen years—a happy idea—interested in the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem, she becomes his protectress and deliverer by making known to Mary the cruel designs of the king, her father. Was it not thus that the daughter of Pharaoh saved Moses in Egypt? Mons. Lemaitre observes truth of tone and colour in the story, and allows no dissonant idea or word to jar on the reader's feeling.

There were, of course, many bad, and even detestable stories in the journals, intended to please their readers whose tastes are vitiated and well known to the writers of these stories.

Heinrich Heine describes the infantile childishness of a

PROVENCAL CHRISTMAS.

He never saw anything prettier, he says, than a Noël procession on the coast of the Mediterranean. A beautiful young woman and an equally lovely child sat on a donkey which an old fisherman, in a flowing brown gown, was supposed to be leading into Egypt. Young girls robed in white muslin were supposed to be angels, and hovered near the child and its mother to supply sweetmeats and other refreshments. At a respectable distance there was a procession of nuns and village children, and then a band of vocalists and instrumentalists. Flowers and streaming banners were plentifully used. Bright sunshine played upon them, and the deep blue sea formed a background. The seafaring people who looked on falling upon their knees went through a short devotional exercise and then rose to join the procession, and give themselves up to unrestricted mirth.

In the chateaux of the South of France, *creches* are said to be still exhibited, and *creche* suppers given to poorer neighbours and to some of the rich who are placed at a table "above the salt." There are also "Bethlehem stables," and puppet shows at which the Holy Family, their visitors and four-footed associates are brought forward as *dramatis personæ*. St. Joseph, the wise men and the shepherds are made to speak in *patois*. But the Virgin says what she has to say in classical French. In the refinement of her diction, her elevation above those with her is expressed. These shows are probably derived from the religious drama which used to be performed in the Churches up to the reign of Henry II. At Marseilles an annual fair of statuettes is held, the profits of which are spent in setting up Bethlehem *creches* in the Churches and other places. Each statuette represents a contemporaneous celebrity, and is contained in the hollow part of the wax bust of some saint.

While I was writing the above, I happened to read the following in a work on Burmah, which shows a close resemblance, in some respects, to the customs in Western nations. At all events it is worth quoting.

IN BURMAH

the water festival is begun on New Year's Day and lasts for the best part of a week. At daybreak the people repair to the pagoda which they sprinkle with water and pray for a plentiful season. A jar of the fluid is then presented to the priests, with a prayer that any wickedness they may have committed in the past may be forgiven. After this ceremony is over the play begins, which consists in drenching one another with scented water. Bad luck is supposed to attend those who have not been thoroughly wet at least once, and who have not soaked somebody else through and through. The custom is connected with the idea of the cleansing of sin and the washing away of any ill feeling which may have sprung up during the past year.

T. H.

Nice, France, January, 1888.

HOME MISSION WORK IN THE NORTH WEST.

MR. EDITOR,—The lands in Ontario fit for agriculture east of Lake Superior are now almost all taken up, and those coming to manhood who wish to farm will come in increasing numbers to the North-West. Last year and this a steady tide of immigration has set in. By Canada Pacific Railway excursions, many were induced to come and see the country; they were pleased, and thought Manitoba a country for their sons to settle in. Land agents and companies report extensive sales this year to actual settlers and there is great demand for homestead lands. Next season we may anticipate a considerable accession to our population. And as in the past a large percentage of the new comers are likely to be Presbyterians. The Church has acted on the principle in the past that her children going to the front were to be assisted in maintaining ordinances among them. In the Eastern Townships and other parts of Quebec, in Central Canada and along Lake Erie, the Church suffered in early days irreparable losses by neglect. She was determined not to repeat the blunders of former times in the North-West, and so far with success. Owing to the rapid expansion of work, however, and the increase of expenditure, a halt has been called. The Home Mission Committee can only disburse what the Church gives for Home Mission work. Last year there was a deficit of \$1,500 notwithstanding the strenuous efforts made to avert it, and if the deficit is repeated expansion here is doomed. Shall we lose our advanced position and our prestige? Were the Western section to give on an average per communicant forty cents, the wants of the committee could be met, and were each communicant to give one cent per week, there would be ample revenue to respond to all appeals for missionaries. Religious institutions will do much to mould the future of these Western Provinces, shall we not plant them?

In the North-west, ninety-three mission fields were occupied last summer, and there are twenty-two augmented congregations. Connected with them are nearly 450 stations. In the wilds between Lake Superior and Winnipeg—at the centres of population, along the railway and in settlements removed from the railway—nine missionaries were at work last season. Missionaries were scattered over the prairie from Winnipeg to Calgary, and as far north as Prince Albert. Exploratory work was done in the Rocky Mountains and the Gospel carried where no missionaries penetrated before. And God blessed this work. Accessions of eighteen, twenty, twenty-one, nineteen, twenty-nine, etc., were made to communion rolls where students were labouring for the summer. Owing to the state of our finances, however, we dare not extend much this year. New settlements receive only occasional visits, and this winter about 1,500 families of our people had no missionaries.

The strength of the denominations in Manitoba will appear from the figures of the census of 1886. The Presbyterians are twenty-seven per cent of the population; the Anglicans twenty-two; the Methodists seventeen; and the Baptists three; while the rate of increase per cent respectively in five years was 104, sixty-nine, ninety-eight, and 102. In the Territories, thirty-two per cent of the white population are Presbyterians. During the last seventeen years the families of our Church increased thirty-one fold, the communicants forty fold, and the contributions fifty-two fold. Last year the membership increased forty per cent, and the families seventeen. Between 1874 and 1882—eight years—we built fifteen churches and manses, and since that time about 140.

Shall we halt in the middle of our work? or rather when we have made a good beginning? Attention to the people now will prevent them from becoming careless, will retain them in connection with the Church, and will the more speedily secure self-sustaining congregations. The work is the work of the Church. She has a right to know what is being done and what the requirements are. Retrenchment now will impair her power for future effort, disappoint her sons and daughters here, and discourage the missionaries in her service. To show you the spirit of some of the missionaries, let me give you an incident. A newly ordained minister was sent to a Rocky Mountain field. During the summer, owing to a dispute between the Canada Pacific Railway and a coal company, the mine was closed. This cut off the \$5.50

per week of his salary. Shortly afterwards, he received a hearty and unanimous call from a congregation in Ontario—salary \$1,200 and a free manse. He declined the call without any delay by telegraph, and to meet the conditions imposed by loss of salary, left his boarding house and kept bachelor's hall. Shall men of this spirit be disheartened by seeing work around them left undone? The best answer is by generous aid to the Home Mission Fund.

JAMES ROBERTSON.

Winnipeg, December 5, 1888.

AGED AND INFIRM MINISTERS.

MR. EDITOR, Will you permit a few lines on that much needed question, the support of aged and infirm ministers who have spent their strength in building up the Presbyterian Church. There are a few—I am persuaded a very few—who think ministers can and should lay aside enough out of their salaries to keep them if rendered unable by infirmity. This may be fair argument where large salaries are provided, but where, for the greater part, the salary to commence on is small, and that during the earlier years arrearage of college expenses have to be met, outfit in horse and buggy secured; books (an expensive item, procured, it becomes difficult to make much headway in saving for age and infirmity.

Besides this, it is only fair to mention that in many congregations the minister must take the lead in giving for mission purposes if there is to be any fair giving at all. Indeed I know of cases where out of a very moderate salary the minister gives from the one-tenth to the one-fifth of all that the congregation gives to the Schemes.

Now, if along with this we compare the position of an employee in the civil service, the customs or post office, what do we find? This very important fact—that the Government started the fund with a very generous vote of capital from the treasury, and thus secured the success of a scheme which must otherwise have failed.

As to results—If a public servant who has served twenty years becomes infirm and retires, he receives four-tenths of his salary; if he has served twenty-five years, he will get five-tenths, if thirty-five years he would receive seventh-tenths or the maximum retiring allowance.

Apply this to one of our ministers, who is in receipt of the minimum stipend, \$750. If he were retiring after twenty years service, he would be in receipt of \$300. If after thirty years he retired, he would receive \$450. But to-day, though a man has served forty years, he could not feel assured of more than \$200.

Surely it is not too much to ask the Church, our wealthy Church, to lay the foundation for a fund which may place our ministry in a position, nearly as good as a civil servant.

I might refer to recent action in the Episcopal Church in this line, but forbear at present, hoping to be able to touch this matter again. AN ELDER.

P. S.—I think the Assembly had too low an estimate when they asked for only \$200,000.

MR. N. F. GRAVES, a well-known elder in the Reformed Church of Syracuse, New York, has given \$300 for a course of six lectures on Foreign Missions to be delivered at the Theological Seminary in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

THE Chicago papers have been discussing the Sunday newspaper, and the *Interior* has been quietly observing the progress of the discussion, injecting an occasional passing remark, such as: "The Sunday newspaper has come to stay." No doubt of it. But in breaking down the moral and religious sentiments of the people, it is preparing the way for Sunday newspapers which will break down all respect for the laws which protect personal and property rights. When the moral underpinning is knocked from under the city, all that rests on it will come down with it. And again: The *Chicago Times*, which is at present trying to cut under all the other dailies, by ridiculing the ministers, threatens to have them indicted under the Merritt law, for trying to persuade Church members from reading and advertising in the Sunday papers: If the Merritt law had a clause forbidding the use of brains in editing a newspaper, if the *Times* were indicted under it, there is not a state's attorney in Illinois who, on reading this suggestion, would not promptly *nolle* the case.