

STATEMENT

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SUPERINTENDENT OF MISSIONS.

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The Church and Manse Building Fund was born of necessity. For several years before the Northwest was connected with the outside world by rail, settlers in considerable numbers were coming in. Their numbers increased as the prospects of a railway brightened. A large proportion of the new comers were Presbyterians. Many of them were young, with characters unformed and with religious convictions unsettled. Some were in quest of homes, others of wealth. The wholesome restraints of settled society were wanting. With the break-up in associations and the absence of restraint there lay the danger of the religious instincts becoming enfeebled and the sense of moral obligation blunted. If religious institutions were not planted among them and the teachings of early life followed up, indifference, irreligion and vice were certain to become prevalent. The facts were laid before the Church and prompt and energetic action was taken. Missionaries were appointed and money voted to support them.

But no sooner did missionaries appear on the ground than other difficulties presented themselves. There were neither churches in which to hold services, nor houses to shelter missionaries and their families. The Foreign Mission Committee appropriates its moneys to erect chapels, purchase bungalows or procure health retreats. The moneys of the Home Mission Committee can only be voted to help pay the salaries of missionaries.

My first tour through our mission fields opened my eyes. Settlement was being rapidly effected but for the eight years between 1874 and 1882 only 15 churches had been erected. School houses were few in number, and when available the low seats and narrow spacing proved rather trying to the long leg and longer thigh of the athletic Manitobans. I shall say nothing of the trials of female dress with its projections and distensions. Services were consequently held for the most part in private houses, and as the ceiling was sometimes low and formed of hay or sod it seemed a blessing to be short of stature. In summer, stables and stable lofts, byres and granaries, were fitted up, but the crowing, clucking and cackling of irreverent poultry, the barking of dogs, or the gambols of cattle, were too trying to the risibilities of the young; and odors more pungent than pleasant gave the sensitive nostril or the refractory stomach an excuse to rebel.

Railway stations and section houses, unfinished stores and dwelling houses, private and public halls were extemporized into churches wherever available; but the rent of halls frequently left little of the revenue to be applied on salary, as such halls were built "on spec" and supposed to pay themselves in three years. Hotel parlors and dining rooms, billiard and bar rooms were secured, but only occasionally. It was feared by the owner that the service might interfere with the legitimate trade of the place. I have preached in the front of the house when the proprietor was selling whiskey in the rear, but I had the satisfaction of knowing that he was fined \$300 and sent six months to gaol. Ludicrous incidents could be given and laughable stories told. But missionaries compelled to labor in this way felt as if they labored in vain and spent their strength for naught.

The need of manses was greater still. Missionaries could get houses to rent at only a few points, and \$30 per month was asked for very inferior accommodation. When it is borne in mind that the salary was only \$600, it will be seen that it was impossible for a minister to engage a house at such a figure. I have visited delicate refined women and cultured ministers in houses scarcely fit to shelter cattle. Dr. Guthrie, in appealing to Scottish audiences for money with which to build manses for Free Church ministers, pointed his appeals with incidents of heroic suffering. Cases of greater hardships could be cited in the history of missions in Manitoba. Disappointment, sickness and diminished power for work followed. Men lost their "spring"—their energy, and the work languished. An effort was made to reach the ear of the East, but a wilderness lay between, and eastern pastors were busy with their own work.