

FORT FRANCES MISSION.

Interesting Letter From Father Cahill.

It is to be hoped that the establishment of a permanent mission—of a fixed mission station—at Fort Frances will give a fresh impetus to the work of evangelisation among the Indians of this district. Fort Frances by the way, is a small village on Rainy river—two miles of its source which is Rainy lake. It is a high plateau overlooking a magnificent waterfall with the rich scenery of the Minnesota border to arrest the gaze—the approach to it from the west especially amid high banks of verdure is very picturesque. The town site is registered as Alorton, but the name of the Hudson Bay trading post is the only one familiar to the public. The post office address is also "Fort Frances." We have taken quarters in the village for the present, but our labor is principally centered on the Indian reserve near by. We have a Catholic population there of about one hundred souls, all most eager to profit by our ministrations. Our aim and trust is that by giving proper attention to this little flock we will make of them shining lights, and have them serve the purpose of an object lesson to the pagans that surround them. Yes, dear friend, so far as the Indians are concerned, we are in the very heart of a heathen land. The district of which Fort Frances is actually the centre contains an Indian population numbering 3,000 souls. Of this number at least 2,000 are yet pagans, and I may add, the most abject of pagans. Not that they worship gods of their own making they believe in the Great Spirit—the Maker of all—and hope to live beyond the grave, but their conception of life and immortality is so debased, their minds so besotted by superstition, one is tempted to doubt that they are susceptible of being lifted to the sphere of things intangible and made peer into regions of bliss unspokeable.

The divine element latent in every human soul, by which it is capable of corresponding to the touch of grace and quickening into life—seems to be almost crushed out of these unfortunate beings. The same does not obtain with every tribe of Indians, some tribes are very prompt in corresponding to the call of grace, but it is especially the case with this portion of the Sautaux tribe among whom my lot is cast. It is not that the tidings of the Gospel never have been announced to them before for as far back as a century and a half ago missionaries appeared in their midst and have been going to and fro ever since. It may well be noted that the water courses from Lake Superior by Rainy lake, Lake of the Woods and Winnipeg rivers was the only highway to the west for over a century from the time of its discovery in 1731, by the chivalrous and daring explorer La Verandree. It was by this route that Mr. Provencher who became first Bishop of St. Boniface reached the great west. It was also through here that our illustrious Archbishop, then Brother Tache, wended his way in the summer of 1845. The fact that the Fort Frances mission (Catholic Reserve) stands out in relief as an oasis in this desert of spiritual desolation is due to its being composed principally of half-breeds who are descendants by the male side from the employers of the once famous North West Trading Company (Compagnie du Nord Ouest.) What I have just said of the obstinacy of these Indians applies principally to that portion of them situated south of the line of the Canadian Pacific railway. Thus the famous Lake of the Woods which counts nine or ten reserves is pagan in toto. The same applies to Rainy river and Rainy lake with the exception of one reserve. But north of the railway line, in the region of Lac Seul extending west to Selkirk on Winnipeg river the Indians are mostly Christians. I must admit that the majority of the last named are now adepts of the English Church although our missionaries were the first in the field and reaped the first harvest. But an easy explanation is found in the fact that for several reasons which I need not enumerate we were forced to practically abandon this field for several years, in the meantime the English Church missionaries stepped in, settled among the Indians and succeeded with time in ranging most of these Indians under their banner. They have now extensive missions at the Lac Seul and Selkirk.

After viewing such a sombre tableau as the one I have just traced it may be well queried, what are the prospects, if any, for the future, and are there any signs of the times calling for and justifying the expenses of an active campaign. My conviction is that the time is near at hand when this portion of the vineyard now so barren of fruits will yield an abundant harvest. I explain myself briefly. I notice a great change has come over these Indians of late. Not so many years ago they would brook no interference on the part of a minister of the Gospel. The genial and Sainly Father Labombe was made to retreat when attempting a landing at an Indian encampment on an island on the Lake of the Woods. Other missionaries also were order under menace of the tomahawk to pull up their stakes and betake themselves elsewhere. These instances occurred within the last decade or so. I have been among these Indians for four years, and have gone backward and forward right and left, and have encountered no resistance nor signs of hostility in any quarter. The only sign of displeasure I met with was a reluctance on the part of a few to shake hands with me. Another sign of the times is that the Indians themselves admit that their religion (a few superstitious but really diabolical rites) is doomed to disappear because the younger generation do not take to it agreeably. Indians have told me time and again that as soon as their own form of worship is discarded by consent of the chief, they will become Christians, for "we must have some religion" say they. Their unsophisticated minds are as yet wholly innocent of the beauties of agnosticism. How true it is that the human soul is what St. Augustine would call "naturally Christian" and that it is only a perverse teaching that can dislodge it from this estate! But to conclude my explanation let me say that the upholding of paganism

among these Indians is in the hands of a few. They are known as medicine men, are mostly old men and their number is fast decreasing.

We who enjoy all the blessings of Christianity and civilization, shall we not at least pour out fervent prayers that a new era may dawn upon these children of the forest; that the veil of error and superstition be lifted from their eyes, and the effulgent rays of Christianity pour into their benighted souls illuminating their existence here below and quickening them to the struggle for a glorious immortality beyond the grave.

C. CAHILL, O. M. I.
Fort Frances, Oct. 26, 1893.

OUR BUDGET OF FUN.

Her Father—It's your money he wants.

Herself—Oh, no, papa; he said if you gave me a dowry he would refuse it. He wants myself only.

Her Father—That's worse still. I'm not going you to have you marry such a loonatic as all that.

Widower—Will you share my lot?
Widow—No, it's full; I was up in the cemetery looking at it yesterday.

Her Friend—I thought you were going to marry a man with a title or forever remain single.

Mrs. Nuwedge—He has a title, I beg leave to inform you.

"What is it pray?"
"Ducksy darling. I gave it to him myself."

Memma—My darling, have you been a good girl this summer? Daughter—Yes, indeed, I've been a "best girl."

Arithmetic Teacher—Now Tommy, you have finished the tables: twelve quires make what?
Robbie—I know; they would make an awful fuss if they were all like the one at our church.

The Sacred Heart.

The Messenger of the Sacred Heart publishes a letter from the Most Reverend Apostolic Delegate, Mgr. Satolli, in behalf of devotion to the Sacred Heart and the Apostleship of Prayer. Its beautiful tribute to the most popular of all devotions will give a new impulse to the fervor and zeal of all the associates of the pious work. As the general intention recommended by the Holy Father to the prayers of the associates for this month is "The Missions of the Far East," the editor has set for this subject by illustrated sketches of Catholic interests in China, India and Japan. The story of the origin of devotion to the Sacred Heart in China, is told under the title "St. Paul's of Macao." "The Martyrs of Salsette," India, gives an account of the martyrdom of Blessed Rudolph Acquaviva, lately beatified. "Railroad Missions" is a story cleverly illustrated and humorously told about catechism classes in railroad shanties. "Life at Lourdes" by a resident; and illustrated pieces on the Cathedral Library of New York, and on the late Congress of Catholic Sioux, go to make up a number of The Messenger which should interest not only associates of the League of the Sacred Heart, but Catholic readers generally.



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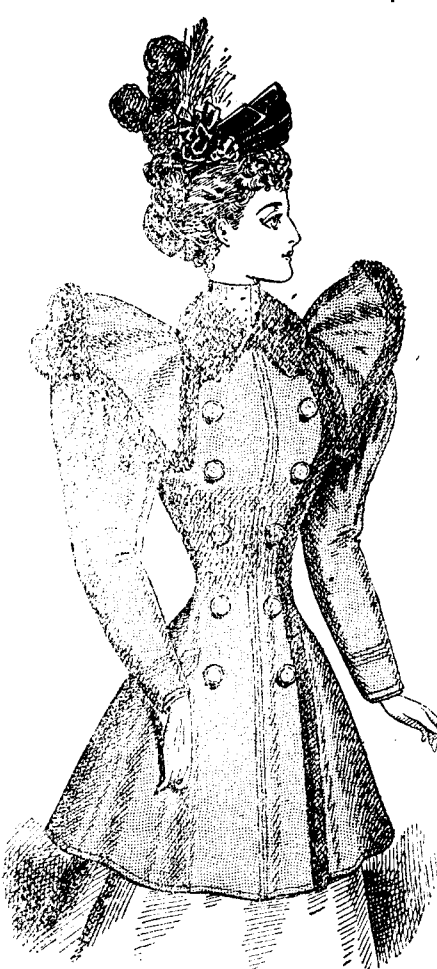
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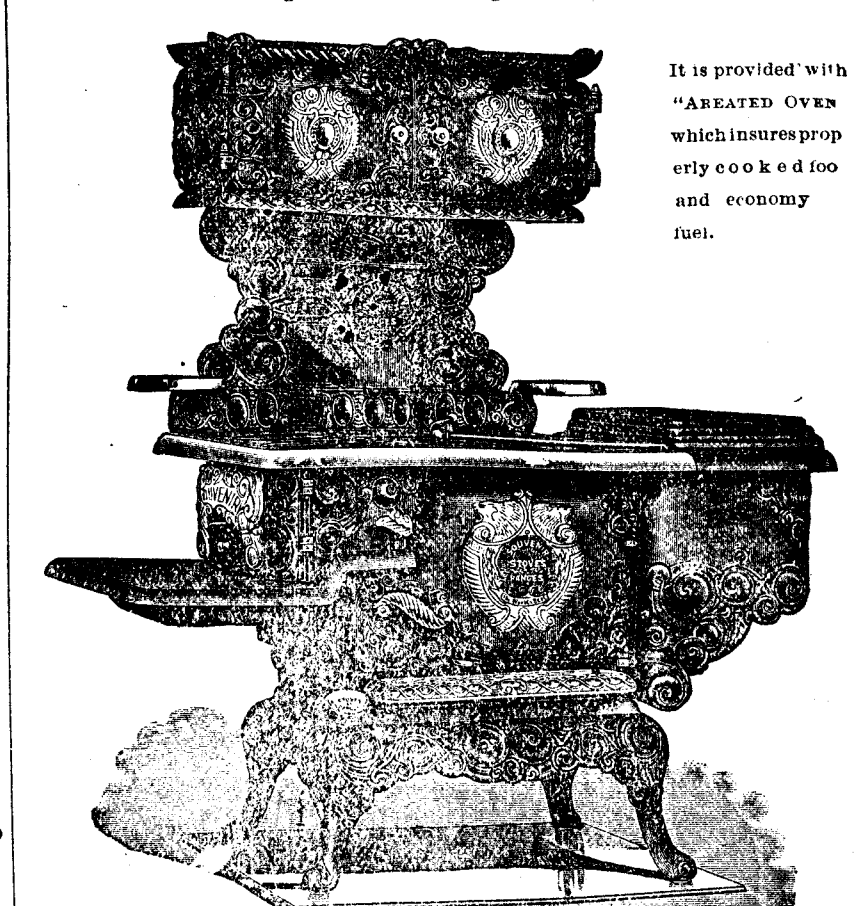
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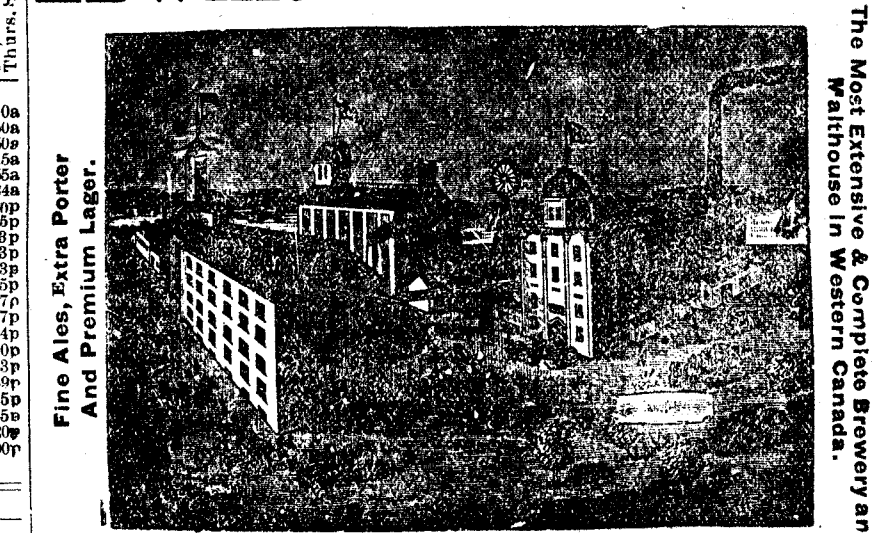
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