

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

LESSONS LEARNED DURING VACATION.

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Text: "Send thou men, that they may search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel." "And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it."—Numb. xiii. 2, 30.

I thank this congregation for the generosity which enabled me to leave home and to travel during the last four weeks; I thank specially the elders, Sabbath school teachers, and Christian workers, for the energy with which they have pushed forward every department of the congregation's work; and I thank God for the blessings vouchsafed the congregation during my absence. And now I trust that you, as well as myself, may be benefited by the lessons I have learned during my vacation. These four weeks have been good useful weeks to me—useful in giving me larger views of the world, and of human life and destiny; useful in strengthening conviction in the power of the truth; and useful in stimulating to greater earnestness in doing life's work.

Merely reading of Manitoba's millions of acres, and the thousands of emigrants going thither, gives but a faint idea of the extent of that land. When in Winnipeg, I heard a gentleman from this congregation, who is engaged there in the wholesale grocery business, ask a customer how long it would take him to get home with the provisions he had just purchased. The customer replied, "I will take the C. P. R. to Brandon (133 miles from Winnipeg); then if the weather is favourable, and my oxen hold out, I will get home in fifty days!" This may give some little idea of the country.

I recall the feeling which kept growing on my heart as travelling, for the most part with railway speed, I yet day by day looked out on the great wide land, caught glimpses of the vast boundless plains, and reflected that, so far as I had come, there extended still the mighty plains, and man busy battling to subdue it—building railroads, erecting telegraphs, constructing bridges, and calling towns and cities into existence as if by magic.

The Norwegian "dug-out," the farmer's shanty, the traveller's canvas-tent, and the great trains of emigrant cars moving westward, all on the former haunts of the bison and the wolf, filled me with a new sense of the wonderful career for man opening up in that part of our Dominion. To me this was the world in its onward movement, and with its forward look. The very problem of our future seemed working itself out under my eyes. All this filled me with a strange interest. It set me looking beyond the lines of material conquest. It led me to think of the deeper character and spiritual destiny of this new nation that is now being formed by a great migration from the world's old centres of population. I could not but ask myself, Is man to be only materially or even intellectually richer in the great future of our country? What is to be the religious outgrowth of this new and vigorous life? Shall not this vast Dominion, reaching from the Atlantic to the Pacific, become, in a high and holy sense, His whose dominion shall extend from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth? Why should we fear? The Sovereign Lord of all has it in His keeping. Such a revelation makes earth, sea, and sky full of the serried armies of God. I can see the King coming in His glory. I can hear the tramp of legions. The years are time-beats only, and the centuries hours in that Divine event to which the whole creation moves. The day is at hand when, not from this Dominion only, but from the great round globe as it revolves on its axis, there shall go up one universal shout of praise, "Hallelujah! for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth!" Does not such a reflection give us larger and higher views of the world and of human life and destiny?

No fitter emblem of eternity does the material world afford than those illimitable western plains. And often is the devout mind led to think not only of the eternity of God, but of His power, His goodness, His glory. Think of these great wheat fields, extending as far as the eye can reach, waving in the breeze, rejoicing in the light of heaven, and ripening for man's food. What a rich provision our God makes for us! All His creatures wait upon Him; He gives them their meat in due season; what He gives them they gather;

He opens His hand, and they are filled with good. And what beautiful illustrations of God's glory do we sometimes see on these western prairies! Last Sabbath I preached and dispensed the Lord's Supper in a school-house in Dakota. Just in front of us there were thirty acres of prairie thickly covered with wild roses, the lilies trying to find room among the rose-bushes to receive the sunshine and exhibit their beauty. Imagine thirty acres of roses, lilies, and other prairie flowers all in full bloom, and the whole forming one great and beautiful bouquet. I saw it just after a slight rain, and the pearly drops still bedecked the flowers. The air around was redolent with sweet fragrance, even as if all sweet and precious incense had been poured out as one great libation to the God of heaven, on that beautiful Sabbath morn. I have travelled in Florida, the land of flowers; I have seen Dunrobin and its flower gardens, and I have visited a number of the more noted public gardens in Scotland; but for simple, artless, yet sweet and charming effect, I have never seen anything to excel what I witnessed last Lord's day in front of the little log school-house at Kensington, Dakota. And as my brother, myself, and about forty others of various denominations, sat down at the table of the Lord and enjoyed the simple memorials of Jesus' love, I thought of my dear Saviour as the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the Valley; and my mind went out to the glowing language of the evangelical prophet, when, looking forward to the latter-day glory of the Church the exclaims: "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose."

But my late experiences have also given me clearer and stronger convictions of the power of the truth as the great means for accomplishing God's glorious purposes in our world. Brethren, during these weeks I have mingled not only with the ordinary nationalities found in all our cities, such as English, Irish, Scotch, American, and Canadian, but also with French, Germans, Swedes, Norwegians, Icelanders, Chinese, Jews, and Indians; I have preached to small congregations of twelve or twenty persons, and to the large congregations of 1,500 persons; I have conversed with the rude and unlettered, and with the cultivated and refined; and I stand here to-night to declare my conviction, strong as my very being, that for the feeding and nourishing, the elevating and the refining, the reforming and regenerating of this new life in the west, there is nothing like the simple old story of Jesus and His love. It puts no difference between Jew and Gentile; it oversteps all boundaries of country, race, character, or condition, and addresses itself to the whole world. It speaks to the high and to the low, to the rude and unlettered, and to the educated and refined. The heart may be dull and almost insensible to every other high and noble appeal, but the amazing intelligence of the love of Jesus can make it thrill with excited gratitude. The solemn revelations of eternity can awaken the terror, can fire the hopes of the coarsest and most degraded soul. The unspeakable beauty and tenderness of our Lord's character can bring tears to the eyes that never wept before. The authority of His law commands the assent of the most corrupt conscience, and brings the hardest heart in fear and shame to the feet of Jesus.

There are those who, with fancied airs of superiority, treat Christianity as an effete system, and twit us who still love to preach and work in the name of Jesus as keeping up a hollow and worn-out conventionality. They point to the profanity, the drunkenness, the licentiousness of such cities as Winnipeg, and they say, "There is your Christian city! Where is the power of your religion now?" That there is in that city an awful amount of profanity and licentiousness cannot be denied, but we reply to our accusers: These sins exist, not because men are Christian, but because so many, like you, refuse to become such. Let men accept the religion of Jesus, and then their lives, like His, will become pure and holy and sweet and good. "But," continues the objector, "how is it that the Church is powerless to stem this flood of impurity and ungodliness?" Again I reply to the objector: The Church is weak, not because the truth in the hand of God's Spirit has lost any of its former power, but because so many, like you, inside and outside the Church, are prayerless, careless, and inconsistent; throwing cold water on the Church's zeal, putting impediments into the path of her progress, and frustrating the energies of her bravest soldiers.

My friends, let us not be deceived by mere surface appearances. Is the real life, even of this new and phenomenal city of the west, the low, degraded, and ungodly thing it is sometimes represented to be? No; I am persuaded it is not. What the objector points to is but the scum—the froth. The real, the true, the deep life—that which constitutes the salt of society—is not the first thing to strike the superficial observer on the street; it does not appear in the popular wrangling of political partisans, nor in the sensational tales and police reports of newspapers, but it exists in the hearts of God's people; it is nourished in the closet; it sweetens, refines, beautifies the home; it is seen in the prayer meeting, in the Sabbath assembly, and in all the business transactions, the engagements and enjoyments of those who possess it. [Several illustrations were given by the preacher, showing that there are many pious, God-fearing people in Winnipeg.]

Yes, my friends, this blessed Book has lost none of its power. It is still the support of the aged, the guide of the young, the consolation of the sick, and the hope of the dying. Yet some men, more cruel than the wretch that robs you of your daily bread, would deprive you of this heavenly treasure. But will you, can you part with it? No; a thousand times no.

"Let the world account me poor;
Having this, I ask no more."

Living or dying, in Woodstock or in Winnipeg, this is what we want; this is what all men want. And the great multitudes from the various nations of Europe that are now pouring into our North-West must be followed by our missionaries and brought or kept under the power of the Truth, or they will in time become thoroughly infidel, or pools of corruption, exhaling deadly miasma, that will at no distant day prostrate the energies of the whole nation.

Finally, I trust that during these weeks I have been stimulated to greater earnestness in doing life's work. On the 4th of July, that great American day, as I was waiting for several hours in the magnificent station-house at St. Paul witnessing a constant, unbroken stream of people passing to and fro, and listening to the booming of cannon, the crackling of guns, the ringing of bells, and all the noisy demonstrations which are thought by some to be necessary for the exhibition of loyalty and independence, I thought with myself what an eager, busy, exciting world this is, and I longed for "a lodge in some vast wilderness." And frequently, as I worked my way through the Main street of Winnipeg, and saw the crowds hustling and jostling one another in their eagerness to secure some temporal objects, I felt rebuked, as a minister of the Lord Jesus, for my comparative indifference in doing a work infinitely more important than the acquisition of earthly riches. I said, "What! will the emigrant, the farmer, the merchant, the grocer, the liquor seller, the lawyer, the real estate agent, be so diligent in pursuing, each his own purpose, good or bad as that purpose may be, and shall I, redeemed by the blood of Christ, and called to work for eternity in winning souls for Jesus,—shall I be lukewarm or indifferent?" When I saw the inconveniences and hardships endured, and cheerfully endured, by multitudes for the purpose of acquiring a competence or affluence for after days, I asked myself "What do I endure in doing the Lord's work? What sacrifices am I making?" The picture of John Knox came to my mind, who left his bed on a cold night to pray for his country, and when importuned by his wife to return, replied out of a full heart, "Woman, how can I sleep and my country not saved? O, God, give me Scotland or I die!" Would to God that all the ministers and all the people of all our churches were baptized with the spirit of the noble Scottish Reformer!—rather that they were baptized with the Spirit of Him whose whole life, from the cradle to the grave, was one continued sacrifice for the good of others.

Rise, my hearers—rise from doting on the things of time and sense. Death will soon come; then whose shall those things be? Look upwards, look forward. Live for God, and for the good that you can do. I have returned home, determined by the grace of God to labour more diligently in the work of saving souls. Will you not give me your hand, and before God enter into a solemn covenant to aid me by your prayers and your active co-operation?

Especially are we called upon to interest ourselves more deeply in the work of our Church in the North-West. The providence of God has taken that great