



ROMAN CATHOLIC MISSIONARIES.

Rev. Father Husson Replies to Statements Made Regarding Their Work in the Lesser Slave Lake and Peace River Settlements.

The following passage appeared in a long correspondence to the *Free Press* (March 11th) from the Smoky and Peace River Missions, signed "W. S. C." We give the text in full to show the animus of the contemptible cur whom Father Husson so effectively holds up by the tail. "W. S. C." makes believe also to attack the Protestant missionary in those parts, but this is only a blind, a bid for a reputation of impartiality. The Protestant missionary in those parts cannot very well be energetic when, counting his own family, he has not six persons in his flock. As practically all the residents are Catholics of unimpeachable morals, there is no bigotry and intolerance except in the fertile brain of "W. C. S." Thislanderous trifler, whose only merit is that he can write not (always grammatically, however, as appears from the sentence in which we have italicized the very much mixed pronouns) and intrigue with a few turbulent spirits, cuts a very sorry figure alongside of the manly self-devotion of Father Husson, a real French gentleman who never handled a broadaxe or a saw till he came to this country.

We have corrected the many misprints in the *Free Press* version of Father Husson's letter. Some of these are so obvious that one is tempted to suspect some bigoted underling in the printing office of having purposely invented them.

Extract of a Letter from "W. C. S."

"I would advise steps to be taken in order that the distribution [of seed corn] be carried out fairly, and not as it was done, I am informed some years since, when the supply was placed in the hands of Roman Catholic priests to give out as necessary. It is said very few received the help to which they were entitled, and that eventually when a couple of traders in the locality offered to sow it, reap, and subsequently thresh and grind it for the benefit of the community their offer was refused; and it was then sown by the Catholic mission, but no one has been known to participate in the results of the harvest which followed. Religion in this part of the country is indeed far from what it should be, when one considers that there is a people who, not so many years ago, were steeped in ignorance, and cruelty, and yet even then believed in the Great and Good Spirit. The very corn that they take to the Catholic mission to be ground must wait their convenience, and they deduct whatever proportion they choose, merely telling the Indian or breed that 'his share is ready for him.' The women especially are greatly under their influence, which is only maintained by threats of God's anger, and holding over them the terrors of the church should they question the will of the priests on earth. I have heard instance after instance of this from the individuals themselves, but will only cite two of them. In one case a woman was practically ruined on the death of her husband, by the priest insisting on her giving him the few horses left as a fee for masses being said. In another a man took corn to be

ground, but 'the white men were passing the mission every day and the priest had no time to grind,' with the result that this poor fellow had to buy flour (at \$10 a sack) from the priest, whilst his own wheat was lying in the mission barns. Can it be wondered at if the native is distrustful of the white men coming amongst them in larger numbers? The Protestant mission is equally culpable, though in a different manner, for the general complaint is that for years past there has been 'no energy.' There has been no regular church, and though one has been started, it is a mere shell, without windows, floor, or fittings, and this although there is an acknowledged desire among the people for both a proper church and also for a Protestant school. The service is held in the missionary's room, but to the uneducated native mind throughout the world, it is not 'proper worship' unless held in a special place set apart for the purpose alone. Probably the saddest sight is to see the numbers of people visiting the missionary, with a view to get that help which he is so powerless to give, and yet knowing that the priest has the power, but lacks the desire to aid. That he has the means is evidenced by the fact that labor costs the Roman Catholic mission nothing whatever, as it is performed by lay brothers, and as they were selling hay at \$30 and \$40 per ton, flour at \$10 (which cost very little for freight as it was brought from Edmonton by their own boat), it is evident that at least 200 per cent. profit was the result. I am sure that those Catholics who support these missions, will agree with me (and I write only from a humanitarian point of view) that it is the duty of the clergy to help those in need, and

not to lay themselves out solely as large profit making establishments. That profit, is the great desideratum, it is impossible to deny truthfully, indeed a large part of the business done is in the purchase and sale of horses, and many a Klondiker has parted with them, to the priest, for a few dollars only, whilst many others have bought them again, from fifteen dollars and upwards. I could cite instances of big profits under this head also, but the principle I am objecting to, is the combination of religion and trade, by missionaries, no matter of what denomination they may be. Bigotry and intolerance, I fear, is very prevalent, and as the people clearly see that such is the case they naturally take advantage of the strife between the two religions, and scheme to make all they can as a consequence."

Rev. Father Husson's Reply.

To the Editor of the *Free Press*:

SIR,—I reached this city just in time to read in your valuable paper a letter from a special correspondent (*Free Press*, March 11.) in regard to the settlements around Lesser Slave Lake, Smoky River and Peace River. That letter contains such gross misrepresentations and so many wicked hints on the work of the missionaries in those regions that it will startle any impartial reader at first sight, and indeed it has created a sensation wherever it has been read, for questions of all kinds were put to me about it everywhere. Your correspondent, who signs himself "W. C. S.," is very bold and forward in his assertions. But I hope I shall be able to satisfy him before I am done. Although I can handle a broadaxe better than a pen I hope to be able to re-establish the facts which he has distorted.

Let me introduce myself to you and to him and sign my name in full at the bottom of this letter. I am the Catholic priest who twelve years ago laid the foundation of that Smoky River Mission he talks so much about. When I arrived there the Indians, or, rather, the half-breeds, of that vicinity, were living by the chase and had never tried tilling their fertile soil. At first I used to visit them from another mission from time to time, but after they had sent a petition to our Bishop, in order to obtain a resident priest, I was appointed to that post. Game was scarcer in those days than now, so I persuaded most of the half-breeds to take each a claim round the mission, and in order to encourage them, I built with my own hands several houses, broke new land for them, and many a year gave them, from the nearest Mission, seeds in the spring, and all without any remuneration whatever. A few years ago, owing to the exceptionally dry season, we had no crop, and I applied to the Indian Department for a grant of wheat for seed in the spring. My petition was taken into consideration and we received forty bushels. This corn was carried at the expense of the government as far as Slave Lake and the Mission freighted it ninety miles further at its own expense, the work being superintended by our Bishop himself. Some of the Indians, it is true, could not be notified in time to take advantage of this gift that same season, but a provision was made for them

the following year. Meanwhile, when I had parted with all this grain consigned to me personally, I wrote a faithful account of the way in which it was distributed. This account is now in the office of the Indian Department and can be made public if necessary.

Well, Mr. Editor, compare my version of the whole transaction with that of your correspondent and tell me frankly if the treatment we have received at his hands is fair.

If "W. C. S." has been only a few months in that far northern region what can he know about the religion of the people? Still he says without flinching that "Religion in that part of the country is indeed far from what it should be." I deny first flatly that the Indians have been steeped in ignorance and cruelty for half a century back; and my experience of twenty-five years, besides that of my predecessors and fellow laborers, is surely worth that of your friend who does not count so many months.

Three years ago we put up a wind mill. It has not as yet given us satisfaction, because the millstones are too heavy for the power—aermotor sails of 16 feet diameter. The mill was bought at the expense of the Mission, nobody else ever helped us to get it, so the Mission is the sole owner of it. Wind has not been put at our disposal, so that we must take our chances, so must the Indians. But to insinuate that, through craft, the missionary refuses to grind the grain of an Indian, in order to be able to sell the produce of the Mission at a profit of 200 per cent., is as false as it is malignant. Flour has been sold by the Mission \$2 per hundred pounds less than by the Hudson's Bay Co., or by any other trader at Smoky River, oats 25 per cent less than at Lesser Slave Lake or any post thereabouts. Hay at the Mission was sold at not half the price suggested in your correspondent's letter, and I must remind you, by the way, that hay is very scarce around the Mission. Teams have to travel 25 miles every day to fetch it home, and that in an open prairie, where the ever-drifting snow exposes us to have no trail either going or coming back.

In the near future the government is to take some steps in regard to a treaty with the Indians of the north. I am confident that they will not find them a lower class of people than anywhere else in the Territories. And as for freedom in regard to religion, no tribunal of the inquisition will be found anywhere. As to morals our Indians would compare most favorably with any community of whites in the world. They have very little to do with strangers and with Klondikers in particular, and praises have been lavished by men of all creeds on their honesty and good behavior.

Your correspondent says also that freight and labor costs us nothing, as it is performed by lay brothers. There is not an Indian round our settlements that would not laugh at such simplicity. Let me ask Mr. "W. C. S." which is easier, to get the work done by men hired for money or to do the work with his own hands? Well, with the assistance of one or two lay brothers, I have done all the outside and inside work on the ten large buildings that constitute the Mission. I have hewn

all the logs therefor; I have whipsawed more than 100,000 feet of lumber, and shaved with my own hands over 100,000 shingles. So, "labor costs the Roman Catholic Mission nothing whatever." Do the same and you will see by experience what it costs.

Moreover, Mr. "W. C. S." since this is the only name we can bestow on you, freight also costs us something. A common York boat is valued at \$300. That boat does not go from Lesser Slave Lake to Athabasca Landing and back on the mere impulsion of an order of ours. We do not yet perform such miracles, and I presume you do not believe in miracles, especially those that might be counter-signed by a Catholic missionary. We have to man our boats with eight or nine men each, the same as other people, and pay the Indians for their work. The Hudson's Bay Co. choose to give their freight, this winter, at the rate of \$4 per hundred from Edmonton to Lesser Slave Lake, rather than take their chances in the summer. Freight from that post to our Mission is \$2 per hundred. Now, if flour is, say, \$3 at Edmonton, and we have to pay \$6 for freight, I do not know what objection your correspondent can have to our selling flour at Smoky River at the rate of \$10 per hundred, especially when the Hudson's Bay Co. sell it at \$12.

Your correspondent expresses the wish of seeing a good Protestant school established in the vicinity. First he will have to import there Protestant families, for outside of a few Klondikers, belated last season, who have no families, you can hardly find a child that belongs to a Protestant family, all the Indians being Catholics. If your correspondent is "writing only from a humanitarian point of view," why did he not inquire by himself rather than allow himself to be grossly misled by others? If he had called at the Catholic Mission like the gentleman he thinks he is, he would have seen a flourishing school with eighteen boarders besides day scholars under the superintendence of the Sisters of Providence from Montreal. He could have convinced himself that these Indians taken only lately from the wilds have made astonishing progress both in the English and French languages, thanks to the devotedness and the unremitting zeal of these ladies, who can never be sufficiently praised. This school has been opened at the sole expense of the Mission, no provision having been made by the Territorial government in its favor. So there are there now 18 children clothed, fed, lodged and taught entirely through the exertions of the missionaries. When "W. C. S." reads this I feel sure he will be awfully sorry to have missed such a sight.

I feel almost sorry to have to spoil that delectable tit-bit about the woman who "was practically ruined at the death of her husband by the priest insisting on her giving him the few horses left as a fee for masses being said." But the facts give the lie to the correspondent's story. A poor Indian whose wife was very ill came and planted his tepee quite close to the Mission. We supplied both of them with provisions and the sick woman with medicine gratis, during two or three months. Before her