

## OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

### PRINCE ALBERT MISSION.

MR. EDITOR,—Permit me to offer a brief criticism on the published Report of Foreign Mission Committee on Prince Albert Mission. On my appointment to Home Mission work three years ago, the Foreign Mission Committee requested me to do them the favour of taking charge of their interests. I most reluctantly consented. The appointment was a two-fold one, made by the Foreign Mission Committee also ratified by sub-committee of Manitoba Presbytery. In the instructions of both there was a clause, "no lot can be sold without sanction of the missionary in charge," the latter added "in these important matters much will depend on your discretion." After a considerable expenditure of effort, familiar only to those who know the difficulty of getting work completed in what was then a frontier settlement, 180 lots were surveyed and placed on the market at prices agreed to by both committees. One said "sell," the other in great trepidation wrote "Don't sell." After this trifling difficulty was surmounted both united in one harmonious agreement, "go on selling." The agent of the mission was unfortunately absent for several months at the very time when it was largely to be determined if there is to be a town at all there. The mission property has no superior advantages contrasted with the properties on the river front a mile on either side. To prevent the certain loss delay would have entailed, in virtue of the power conferred, the missionary in charge sold a portion of the 180 lots, handing over the proceeds to the agent on his return who also received the benefits of the commission. That may or may not have been an irregular proceeding. Its practical result was to increase the value of the property. Most certainly it conferred no personal advantage on the missionary in charge, who from first to last never owned a lot. The prices realized for these lots were the highest ever paid here with building conditions attached. Another supposed irregularity was the sale of the old mission house. That staunch friend of Prince Albert, the late Dr. Black, informed me on leaving for Prince Albert, that half the building had been fitted up for a manse. On my arrival I found it rented. The ex-convener was indeed large hearted enough to offer me the use of the building. As it would have cost more to put it in repairs than it was worth, and the repairs would have been a contribution to the Foreign Mission it was deemed prudent to decline the offer. My predecessor had collected the rents, I was expected to do the same. The agent would have nothing to do with the matter. An exorbitant rent was charged, enough to pay for the building in three years. A most impressive sermon by a religious corporation, on the text, "Beware of covetousness." The building was dilapidated, the class of tenants from the poor accommodation offered not always the most desirable, disorderly scenes not unfrequent, the collection of rents was becoming more irksome and difficult. The easiest and most profitable way out of the difficulty seemed to be the sale of a building that had not for years been used for mission purposes. The ex-convener was written to. As he mantled himself in silence, regarded as consent, after a valuation by two competent men, the building was sold, and as a result, the only banking institution in the place secured to the mission property. The whole of the rentals and proceeds of sale without abatement were placed in the Foreign Mission treasury. The third supposed irregularity was the proceeding with a second survey. I am not aware that I received any written instructions either as to the amount of property to be surveyed or mode of survey. As the first 180 lots were sold more rapidly than the most sanguine anticipated, and the neighbouring proprietors were enlarging the area of their survey, and especially as an opportunity offered itself of having the work done at little more than half the usual rates, it was deemed most for the advantage of the mission property that it should be placed in the same position as other properties, so that if a favourable opportunity occurred for its sale, and it did occur soon after, advantage might be taken of it. Copies of the survey were sent to both committees. The convener of sub-committee wrote in commendation. With the exception of the ten acres claimed by the Presbyterian congregation of this place, and three lots sold at a higher rate than they would have

brought before or since, none of the five hundred in the second survey were sold. Previous to any survey the Foreign Mission had promised two acres for a church site and ten acres further back for glebe. The selection of the church site was not made on the river front, as the ex-convener states it was—the site offered by Foreign Mission—but four blocks back, land not half so valuable, with the view of inducing building off the river front. That gentleman is most zealous in his hunt after irregularities, why does he not mention that one?

Then the Presbyterian cause here was at its lowest ebb. I have no doubt most of the people believed I had come to preside at its funeral. In the expressive phrase of a western youth, "Presbyterianism in this settlement is below par." An old weather-beaten, cold, leaky building, which fortunately the people did not own, was the place of worship. Even "abounding zeal" could not gather a congregation there. The only alternative was build or become extinct. After a month's effort I succeeded in obtaining what I regarded as a reliable Building Committee. A plan was got, estimates called for and agreed to. When it came to the actual signing of the contract the courage of the committee vanished, and, most irregular proceeding, the missionary in charge had the audacity to sign the contract and accept the whole responsibility of the completion and payment even of a "neat brick church." That building, however, was never intended by its projector to be anything more than the lecture hall of a main building not yet erected. Three years ago the ex-convener gave the assurance that the Minister of the Interior had given a written pledge that the patent of the property would be issued "immediately," the sub-committee re-iterated "immediately." In undertaking the responsibility of church erection, the missionary in charge expected if he succeeded in getting the greater part of the cost in Prince Albert or from friends, a small amount, \$400, might be obtained on mortgage of the property. No deed was given. Three years have elapsed and there are no deeds yet. The absence of a legal title made borrowing impossible. To obtain time for action, the missionary in charge succeeded in persuading the workmen to accept in part payment \$280 worth of lots at regular rates and conditions. The fact was duly reported to the sub-Committee in a communication which stated, if any objection was made to the temporary loan to be paid so soon as a title was given, the missionary in charge would get the money elsewhere. No objection was ever offered. By that transaction the Foreign Mission gained the active co-operation of several of the best workmen in the settlement in the erection of buildings on the property.

The great supposed crowning irregularity was the sale of the ten acres claimed by the congregation of Prince Albert. At the time of the survey of the lots land had no commercial value. The missionary in charge who unfortunately was compelled almost alone to represent the Presbyterian interests of the place, when the offer of the Foreign Mission was accepted, understood that the ten acres could be obtained anywhere outside of the 180 lots, which extended nearly a quarter of a mile from the river front and are the only really valuable portion of the property. Had he not understood that, he doubtless would have persuaded the people to reject the Foreign Mission offer and accept the more liberal proposal of land owners animated simply by the carnal desire of increasing the value of their property. As part of a resolute policy to secure as soon as possible a vigorous self-sustaining charge, a manse was found to be a requisite. The low salary paid compared with the high cost of living, made a dwelling for the minister an essential requisite of self-support. The Foreign Mission were selling their lots without a patent, and placing the money in their treasury. It was imagined that they should have as much interest in the Presbyterian congregation of the place, the only one in the territory, as to permit it to follow their good example. Regular action was an impossibility. Until the congregation had the deed the Presbytery could not sanction a sale. To bring matters to a crisis, to obtain a decision either one way or another, ninety lots or ten acres, part about a quarter of a mile from the river and part three quarters of a mile were sold at rates not obtainable before or since. It was a matter of indifference then to the congregation whether their property was one or three quarters of a mile from the river—surely that was "further back." That happy period has now passed away. Had the Foreign Mission Committee man-

ifested the slightest desire to help on the real practical work of the Church here, instead of obstructing it as far as they could, the whole matter could easily have been amicably arranged. Most conciliatory are their ways to win over the community to Presbyterian principles. An official declaration announces the sale of the graveyard, claimed by the congregation, with the dead bodies still interred. That may be a most regular proceeding. If persisted in, the law courts will doubtless have an opportunity of deciding whether even a Foreign Mission Committee can make merchandise out of the bodies of their fellow-men. The ex-convener is pleased in his overflowing generosity to say: "The Committee thought it better to relieve him—the missionary in charge—of duties he had made unnecessarily onerous." What is the simple, unvarnished truth? Weary of the mean and contracted spirit of the Foreign Mission Committee, and their lack of business knowledge, the missionary in charge, before the visit of the ex-convener to Prince Albert, tendered his resignation of a position he had accepted most unwillingly. The work was onerous, not unnecessarily so, if it was to be done. It was done not only without worldly reward, but at a considerable outlay of time and money. The ex-convener is most consistent. He solemnly assured the Prince Albert people a pledge had been given to the Government that the whole proceeds would be spent on Indian missions. In singular harmony with that declaration, he hints in his report, if his magnificent dreams are only realized, if he has made the discovery of a veritable rich, nay, unfailing, gold mine, it may be possible a few nuggets may be given for an institution for higher education. The brilliant dreams as to increased value of the "wisely administered" property are simple illusions—prairie mirages. Were it offered for sale to-day, those most competent to judge declare it would not bring one-half the sum offered a year ago. The Foreign Mission Committee can only be novices in real estate business in the North-West. When they have had a little more experience in the fluctuations of the market, they will doubtless be able to decide when to sell and when not to sell. It will be well for them if theirs is not the fate of many a western speculator, who was offered an ample price for land, and at last accepted a rate far inferior. Reference is made in the Report to an "Indian Mission," I suppose in Prince Albert. Nothing is clearer than that no pure Indian mission—that is, distinct from the white settlers and English speaking half-breeds, who would scarcely deem it a compliment to be classed as Indians—ever existed. What is the voice of the communion rolls for the first ten years, when the Indian department was most flourishing? Sixteen Cree Indians, more than one-half members of the Episcopal Church, Red River; fifteen white members; ten from Kildonan; only two from Ontario; thirty-four half-breeds, three-fourths from Episcopal Church, Red River. The missionaries were called "foreign." Official documents prove lucidly the nature of the work. Gradually the Indian and half-breed elements, with scarcely an exception, dropped off the roll or returned to the Episcopal Church, leaving as the residuum, a weak Home Mission station. No Indian ever resided in Prince Albert, ever owned a lot and erected a house. After a troubled existence of fourteen years, and from its incongruous elements it could not fail to be troubled, for two years the Indian Mission presented the wonderful spectacle of no separate organization, no communion roll, and scarcely a member. Its main existence was in the printed report, in many respects so apocryphal as to lead one cognizant of the whole fact to say, "If that is the report the Foreign Mission issues, I'll have no faith in their reports from India and China." At last it emerged with an organization in a reserve seventy miles from Prince Albert, with sixteen adult Indians baptized, and twelve members on its communion roll. That reserve was previously occupied by a sister Church, that resenting the invasion of what it claimed as its territory, is animated with the firm resolve to maintain services for the Indians still attached to its communion. Apparently the result has been as predicted by an official of the Hudson Bay Company—a triangular fight between the Presbyterian, Episcopal and Roman Catholic missionaries. When a mission allows itself to be extinguished it is no " nefarious and wicked deed," as the ex-convener supposes, to propose, as the missionary in charge did, and the proposition was endorsed by the sub-committee of the Manitoba Presbytery, that the proceeds