

THE GOSPEL AMONG THE GOLD SEEKERS.

BY REV. E. W. STAPLEFORD.

THE prospectors and miners who roam the mountains of British Columbia are unique characters. For the most part they come from our best homes, "way back East." They go



ENTRANCE TO A YMIR MINE, BRITISH COLUMBIA.

West, not because necessity compels them, but because they are bubbling over with spirit and energy, and are eager to play a large part in the drama of life. They are noble, generous and brave, for only a brave man would face the dangers of the mountains. The prospector is a great benefactor to his race, and does much for the world. He is the scout of progress—a solitary sentinel on the outposts of civilization. Some day cities will spring up where his camp-fire once smouldered, steamboats will plough the streams where he once pulled his rude dugout, and great railways will follow his trails. In the great play of life where courage, fortitude and honest endeavor are the parts most commended, the prospector plays his part, and plays it well.

It is among this class of men that some of our Methodist missionaries are working to-day. Remembering the "Go ye" of our Master, and the dictum of Wesley, "The world is my parish," our Mission Board sends out men to follow the blazes of the prospector, that the foundation stones of new communities might be laid in righteousness. To give our readers some idea of the work of these missionaries we would transfer you in thought to the town of Ymir, a mining camp nestled in the mountains of the Kootenays. Ymir is the centre of a rich mining country, and is a typical camp, with its general stores where mining supplies of all kinds can be obtained, its full quota of saloons, and its houses or shacks where the prospectors "back."

A vacant building is rented from a saloon keeper, at a reasonable rate, "for the good of the cause," as he expressed it, and fitted up for service. The gen-

tle sex form a very small minority in mining camps, but a half dozen noble, devoted women in the town formed themselves into a "Ladies Aid," and worked faithfully to make the movement a success.

On Sunday evenings the missionary visits the saloons to invite the men out to service. The saloons are generally full of men, for in a small mining town the saloon is the only public resort and the only place of entertainment, and the little, dingy, cheerless shacks of the men are poor substitutes for a home. At first the men are surprised to see a minister mingling with them in the saloon. "You're a fellow," says one old prospector. "You'll do for the Rocky Mountain trade." "Have a drink with us, parson," says another, and, turning to the bartender, orders him to pour out his best wine. "No, thank you, boys," said the missionary, "I never drink before preaching; but come out to the service, hearty singing, and it will do you good." Some of the men said they had not been to service for ten years, others for fifteen years, but many promised to attend, and a good congregation was soon gathered.

During the week the missionary is busy holding services in the mountains at different mines, for there are seven preaching appointments. As the mission is sixty miles in diameter, there is considerable travelling to be done, either by boat, or in the saddle, or on foot. Service was usually held in the bunk houses or in the dining-rooms of hotels. The hotel keepers were always kind and courteous, sometimes closing the bar-room during service so as to be able to attend themselves. But here among the miners as among every class of men everywhere, the saloon, the brothel and Sabbath desecration are man's worst enemies. When the preacher would talk to the saloon keeper about his business, the man behind the bar would say, "You're right, parson, it's a bad business I know, but the law allows me to sell whiskey just as it allows you to preach."

At one of the mines there lived a few families in which there were seven children who were receiving no education. So the missionary turned school-master, and the manager's office was converted into a school-room and named the Wesleyan Academy. Besides ordinary studies, the Sabbath-school lessons formed part of the curriculum, thus forming a happy combination of secular and religious education. Copies of the *Ouvard*, *Sunbeam* and *Pleasant Hours*, came directly from our Book Room in Toronto, and were eagerly read by these boys and girls of the mountains.

Carrying the Gospel from mine to mine is interesting and enjoyable work. But not having a regular church, a settled congregation, one misses the fellowship of the class-meeting. The miners are whole-souled, and put as much heart in a hand-shake as any class of men, but the mountain preacher misses the spiritual kinship which is expressed in the term "brother" in older lands. In fact your missionary had been on his field nearly a year before the term brother had been applied to him by any of his flock, and as the circumstance was rather unique we will mention it. It was a hot day last July and we had just finished a ride of twelve miles from the Second Relief Mine and drew up to the hotel in the town of Erie. The hotel was managed by a good lady, a widow, who had long been in the business and whose hospitality was known in every mountain and glen in the Kootenays. The lady met the missionary at the door and welcomed him to her house, saying in tones full of sympathy and solicitation, "You look so hot and tired, won't you have a glass of beer, Brother



A PROSPECTOR'S SHACK.

The second from the left is Rev. Mr. Stapleford, the "Sky Pilot."

—." The word "brother" went home to the minister's heart, for it reminded him of the good days when he was a probationer on the circuit back East. The sympathetic tones of the lady also appealed to him, for it recalled the good mothers in Israel who used to take such an interest in his welfare, but remembering the pledge he took when a boy in

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