

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

PRINCE ALBERT MISSION.

MR. EDITOR,—In your issue of the 22nd ult., I observe a letter from Rev. James Sieveright, Prince Albert, which may require some notice for the sake of those of your readers who are not acquainted with the peculiarities of the writer. It purports to be a criticism of the Foreign Mission Report, which I had the honour of laying before the last General Assembly. As your readers have not seen that report, I send you a copy of it, and I hope you will publish in full that portion of it relating to Prince Albert, which excites the displeasure of Mr. Sieveright. This might almost be left as a sufficient answer to the criticism, for I think those who read the report in connection with the letter, will observe two things: (1) that, while Mr. Sieveright has thrown out insinuations and endeavoured to excite wild suspicions against the committee, he has not ventured to contradict one statement contained in the Report; and (2) that the facts stated amply warrant the very mild action taken by the Foreign Mission Committee. The bitter and unchristian spirit which prevades Mr. Sieveright's letter must be manifest to every reader. I hope I shall not imitate it; but I do not conceal from myself that it is not easy to preserve decorum of language in referring to a letter which is characterized throughout by inaccuracy of statement, so extreme as to render its assertions almost worthless. The writer appears to labour either under a natural, or a moral inability to give a fair and reliable statement of facts. It would be wearisome following Mr. Sieveright through all his inaccuracies and misstatements, as there is scarcely a paragraph in his letter which does not bristle with them. I shall, however, give specimens of this painful infirmity, which will enable the reader to judge of the whole production from which they are taken.

The occasion of Mr. Sieveright's effusion, is the fact reported to the General Assembly that the Foreign Mission Committee had, for the reasons indicated, felt it necessary to dispense with his services as missionary in charge, at Prince Albert, and the design of the letter, so far as I can gather it, is to leave the impression on the Church that a singularly wise and worthy gentleman has been treated with great harshness by the committee, and that they and their work are quite unworthy of confidence. I do not think either conclusion is warranted by the facts. Whether Mr. Sieveright has any reason to complain of the manner in which he was treated depends chiefly on two things, viz.: (1) whether he had authority to sell lots, order a second survey and do certain other acts which he did; and (2) whether, having assumed a power which did not belong to him, he manifested, in the use he made of it, common sense and a due regard for the interests of the Foreign Mission Committee on whose behalf he professed to act. No one acquainted with the facts can well answer these questions in the affirmative.

The Foreign Mission Committee which alone could authorize the sale of the Prince Albert mission property, appointed Mr. T. N. Campbell as their agent to sell the lots surveyed. Mr. Sieveright says they requested him to take "charge of their interests," a phrase which I presume he thought elastic enough to cover what he did; but, unfortunately, he is not accurate. The words employed were that he would take "a general oversight of the property and interests of the Foreign Mission Committee in that place." To keep away undesirable residents, the agent was allowed to sell no lots without the sanction of the missionary in charge. This *вето* power gave the missionary no right to sell. But Mr. Sieveright is rich in the sources of his authority, he informs us that his "appointment was twofold, made by the Foreign Mission Committee, ratified by sub-committee of the Manitoba Presbytery." This ratification is, I believe, purely mythical. A man must have a poor opinion of the intelligence of his readers who imagines they can believe that any appointment made by a committee of the General Assembly in reference to property acquired for their work, needs to be ratified by a committee of Presbytery. But this is not the only example which he has given of the exercise of a usurped power. The Foreign Mission Committee authorized a survey of lots on the front portion of the mission property, expressly limiting the number of lots to 200. This fact Mr. Sieveright has conveniently forgotten;

and, after laying out 180 lots in the first survey, he saw fit on his own authority to have 500 additional lots laid out. He certainly had no authority to appropriate the proceeds of the mission lots sold, but, without leave asked or given, he borrowed for his new church from this source \$342 which remains still unpaid.

If Mr. Sieveright in the use he made of this assumed power aimed at the best interests of the Foreign Mission cause on whose behalf he voluntarily agreed to act, he must be credited with a singular lack of judgment. No one certainly will suppose he was swayed by personal considerations. But it may happen that a man who has such abounding zeal for church building may imagine that the end amply sanctifies the means.

He sold every lot on the first survey at nominal prices with building conditions, a plan in every way fitted to secure the village to the spot where he was building his church, but scarcely fitted to help Foreign Missions inasmuch as the most valuable portion of the property was sold at an average of \$2; per lot, and no part of it reserved so as to give the mission the benefit of the enhanced price which might easily have been secured. Many of these lots have since been resold at eight or ten times the price at which they were originally given away. This sale was commenced without the sanction of the Foreign Mission Committee, and one third of the lots were sold before they knew that it had been begun. And when they intimated that they did not wish any lots sold, until a title could be given, they were told it was too late, and the sale went on.

The large mission house standing on what is probably the best business site in Prince Albert, was disposed of by *private sale* for \$700, less than half its value, and that, at a time, when nearly the whole 180 lots of the first survey were sold, and when the value of the remaining portion of the mission property lying far in the rear could not be perceptibly increased thereby. The house which had been carefully built needed repairs when I saw it, but to call it "dilapidated" is an abuse of language. It was scarcely the interest of the Foreign Mission which led Mr. Sieveright to appropriate, without leave asked or given, the \$342 already mentioned to the erection of his new church. It was not a regard to the interests of the Foreign Mission cause which led Mr. Sieveright to appropriate and sell ten acres of lots in the second survey for the erection of a manse. I am aware he informed me, and also the people of Prince Albert, that he had the authority of the Rev. Dr. Black for this proceeding. I felt that this was morally impossible, inasmuch as Dr. Black was informed by letter, that the Committee of Manitoba Presbytery was authorized "to reserve on the front a portion of land, not exceeding two acres, as Church property for the use of the congregation, and to inform the said congregation at Prince Albert that *this Committee* will be prepared to allocate to them a portion of the lot farther back, say ten acres, as soon as a proper title is obtained from the Government."

I wrote to Mr. Sieveright asking him to send me the letter to which he had referred, and he kindly sent me a letter from Dr. Black of the date he had mentioned; but, when I read it, I found that it did not contain one word which either directly or indirectly authorized the sale of the ten acres. Mr. Sieveright's statement was *inaccurate*, and the sale unauthorized. What he appropriated, moreover, was not a block of ten acres, which was what was promised, but ten acres of town lots, which with their proportion of streets, would have made more than *thirteen* acres. The Foreign Mission Committee might have cancelled this entire sale, and that of the large mission house, and, I presume, they may accept Mr. Sieveright's amiable communication, as his letter of thanks for their forbearance. He obtained, I understand, \$5,100 for these ten acres of lots, a much larger sum than he secured for four times the quantity of more valuable land, comprised in the first survey sold for the committee, and yet this gentleman whose business capacity was so great, could not retain one lot to be sold at its real value, for the benefit of the Foreign Mission. It is quite evident that he knew how to improve his position, as representative of the Foreign Mission Committee, so as to make it subsidiary to the ends which he regarded as most important. He was successful in erecting a church and I presume also a manse, both of which I am glad to see at Prince Albert, but success compassed by such means, is not of a high order, and cannot be

achieved a second time. Mr. Sieveright I observe takes exception to that clause of the Foreign Mission Report as incorrect which states that "the Committee thought it better to relieve him of duties he had made unnecessarily onerous." He wishes the world to know that he resigned. It is quite true that when he learned how his course was likely to be viewed, when he learned that the committee had peremptorily suspended all sales on the mission property, and had sent the convener out to inquire into the state of matters there, he resigned, and left his resignation behind him, and started, I presume on urgent business, for Ontario, four days before the convener reached Prince Albert. All this is the "unvarnished truth." But it is also true, that it was not by the acceptance of his resignation that he was relieved from duty, but by a letter of the convener which was submitted to the committee and its action confirmed, before the resignation was even considered. I am sorry that it is now necessary in the interests of truth to go farther and point out a few things which will show the measure of reliance which can be placed on Mr. Sieveright's attempts to discredit the committee and their work.

1. Referring to that paragraph in the report which intimates that, while in the disposal of the mission property, the interests of the Indian work must ever be paramount, that, in the event of a very large sum being realized from the Prince Albert property, it may be found possibly to aid also a college or institution for higher education, as the people there desire, Mr. Sieveright writes "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." There is just enough of truth in this statement to make it a plausible falsehood. The facts are these: When the convener and Rev. Hugh McKellar reached Prince Albert last August, they found that it was commonly reported throughout the settlement that the Foreign Mission Committee would take the proceeds of the mission property and "squander" them in India and China, and Rev. James Sieveright was freely given as the author of the rumour; and, I have good reason to know that, when he was down in Ontario last summer, he spoke freely in the same strain. This mischievous invention was in every way fitted to engender in that community bitter feelings against the committee, and even to encourage an immoral proposal which had been mooted in Prince Albert to appropriate the entire property for purely local purposes, unconnected with the Indian work. If the circulation of this rumour were due to Mr. Sieveright, it was a most inexcusable act of *perfidy* towards the committee. For in the very first letter which I wrote to him, requesting him to take a general oversight of our mission property, I referred to the portions of it which were to be given to the Presbyterian congregation, and then I added, "what shall be done with the remainder of the property is as yet undecided. It will, however, be employed, in some way for the furtherance of work among the Indians." But with this official statement in his hands, and without a line to indicate a change of purpose, Mr. Sieveright, if he did not originate this rumour, allowed it to circulate uncontradicted. I felt it necessary to check this mischievous falsehood, and accordingly, I explained to the people, at a public meeting, that it had always been the intention of the Foreign Mission Committee to devote the proceeds of the mission property to Indian work, and pointed out two things to them: (1) that, according to the deed drawn up by the General Assembly and accepted by the Government, and in accordance with whose terms they had promised to give us a patent, the property was to be held by the trustees for the use of the Indian missions of the Church, or for such uses for such other purposes as the General Assembly may by resolution direct. I showed them that in accordance with the terms of this deed the Foreign Mission Committee had no authority to appropriate the proceeds of these lands to any other than Indian work, without the express sanction of the General Assembly; (2) that the provision, which allows the General Assembly when it sees cause to direct the proceeds of these mission lands to be diverted to other purposes, was inserted at my suggestion, in order that we might be in a position to give a portion of our land to the Prince Albert congregation and others in a similar position. Mr. Sieveright gives the cheerful assurance that our mission property will not now bring us one half that was offered for it last year. Prince Albert is evidently in a bad way and its prospects have, for