

## WORK IN THE BACKWOODS.

By Rev. C. A. FRENCH.

(For OUR MISSION NEWS.)

**W**HO in Canada does not know *the backwoods*? We hear of them from travellers, land surveyors, lumbermen, hunters, etc., etc., but one has to reside in the depths of the forest to understand the real meaning of the term. I feel confident there are hundreds of thousands of people within our fair Dominion who have very peculiar ideas of this kind of life. I hope they may never have to rough it as I have done, should they come "far back," but I do think the day is not very distant when the pine, the maple, and the birch in many and many a township, must give way before the settler's axe. Already we see signs of the coming invasion all around us. In no diocese upon this continent is there so much of the wooden country as in Algoma. From one end to the other—from Bracebridge to Port Arthur, and from the St. Mary River to the Height of Land—it is brush, brush, brush! Among the trees, along the rivers, close to hundreds of small lakes are settlements springing up, and within these settlements are some of the finest specimens of humanity, "toiling on," trying hard to gain an honest livelihood. To these settlers we are bound to give the Gospel of peace. How can this be done? By itinerating from place to place and making known the Word of Life.

In 1882 I crossed the Atlantic and made my way to the district of Parry Sound. My brother at that time was employed by the Georgian Bay Consolidated Lumber Company, so I joined him for the winter, and with axe in hand, went into the lumber camp. I was a clergyman of the Church of England; I was educated in London, England; I had been chaplain in one of our Cathedral cities, but I wanted to be a missionary, and the experience of my first winter in Canada was more to me than anything else I have had ever since. I had a two-fold insight into things as they are. First I saw that there was a work to be done here which is shamefully neglected,—a work similar to that carried on by my friends Mrs. Elizabeth Garnett (sister of the Dean of Denver) and by Wm. Robertson, Esq., of Ripon. Secondly, I found that the Church in Canada is still more than half asleep. There are in the Diocese of Algoma, year after year, thousands upon thousands of men from all parts of Britain, Canada and the United States, who are left to their own sweet wills, and to the evil bent of their fallen nature as if we had no right to minister to them. At Byng Inlet, at Spanish River, at The Serpent, we have no clergyman, and this, too, I think, applies to Musquash and other places. Why is it that we thus treat the lumbering classes? Because Canada is dead. Because there is no life in us. During this winter of 1882-3 I passed in and out among hundreds of men, try-

ing to exert an influence for good. Did I succeed? Possibly I did! All I know is this, that afterwards many of them called upon me to baptize their children, to hold services at the settlements, etc., etc. I do think more might be done in this direction if we had only a few additional men and the means to support them.

In 1883 the Bishop sent me to Huntsville in Muskoka. Here I labored for a time until I was almost completely broken down by worry and over work. On going to Huntsville I found no church, no parsonage, no place to make a grave for our dead. Amid many and great difficulties I kept the congregations in this mission together, after walking fifteen miles upon a Sunday and preaching three times. With my own hands I burned and logged about an acre of land of the cemetery ground, which had before been secured by the influence of Rev. W. M. Tooke from John Scarlett, Esq., now of Nipissing. I could not get a church erected, nor would I be allowed a parsonage, but during my stay Church Hall was put into good repair, a vestry attached, and the mission left in a satisfactory condition. Then I moved north again. Here I opened the first school in eight or ten townships, and taught there for eighteen months, holding services over an area of about 40 miles. I was very happy in this work. I was the first to lay the foundation of the church and of the school in these wild parts. There is something in this. To look upon the first blade in the early May is productive of joyous expectation in the heart of the farmer, and this was my feeling. I had pioneered. What would result therefrom? I was in 1883 called to fill a vacancy in the Shingwauk Home. My own school found a teacher, but the Bishop could not send even a deacon to carry on the iteration. What is the result? The ground is lost to the church, but I do hope not to Christ, for the Methodists have stepped in and taken over the whole. Are we not ashamed? If not, we ought to be. I am a churchman, and I have seen what we can do in England. The same can be done in Canada if we only rise as one man to meet the occasion, and serve our God aright. We missionaries in Algoma to-day can break ground. We are not afraid to cross lakes, follow trails, and to feel the mosquito bite in doing this, but unsupported from without we cannot hold the people to us. We are too few. We want help. Although I believe there is a great deal of good in the Presbyterian and Methodist systems, I don't think them the Church in the sense in which I think we are of the Church, and I don't want to see divers kinds of organizations all over the land, when Christ founded one Church. This is the great weakness in Canada. I am an Evangelical. I am not ashamed of the name, but I do love my Church above and beyond any other body on earth, and I believe if she were only half alive to-day, we would find that there would be less drunkenness in our midst, less profanity amongst the young, and a greater depth of spiritual life. Would to God we had the zeal of