

JAMES ROBERTSON, THE GREAT SUPERINTENDENT

Few men in Western Canada have risen in the space of about twenty years to such distinction and admiration as Rev. James Robertson, D.D.—the First Superintendent of Missions in the Presbyterian Church in Canada. A Scottish lad, he belonged to a family which emigrated to Canada.

At the age of twenty-four, after teaching a country school for several years in Western Ontario, he entered Toronto University in 1863. He was a hard student and in the third year of his arts course entered Theology in Princeton, U. S. Coming back to Canada, he was settled in the county parish of Norwich, Ontario, but in 1873 was induced to go out as a missionary to Manitoba, and was settled in Knox church, Winnipeg, in 1874. There he rose to the high requirements made upon him of being a city pastor and the receiving agent for hundreds and thousands of immigrants coming by way of the Red River to Manitoba. He financed and pretty largely single-handed built the second Knox church in Winnipeg.

In 1881 he was appointed Superintendent of Missions for Western Canada. There were few railways in those early days and the Superintendent did his work by long and laborious drives, both in summer and winter. On the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway, his work increased until at last it covered the supervision of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, and even a part of Ontario of to-day. Rev. Dr. Bryce, the first lecturer appointed by the General Assembly under the new "James Robertson Memorial Fund", lecturing in Westminster Hall said:

The great superintendent's visits to

Western localities were very heartening and the most remarkable feature as the years went by was that his speech and power of oratory became more and more effective. From his wide experience he gained material and skill in addressing audiences most effectively. His power of using personal narrative and wide variety of experience gave him a great hold on the people. His work was most difficult—it was unending. His correspondence was enormous and one man's work in itself.* * *

"His visits to the colleges were systematically made in order to obtain missionaries. Grievances and objections were asked for—and they were numerous—but the superintendent could meet every case. The superintendent was bold, direct and generally successful in overcoming opposition. With his argument there was also a spice of humor and hard-headed sense that counted for much. With all his firmness and his severe financial logic there was a genuine brotherliness and sympathy that led him to do numerous kind and generous acts which were known only to a few. It was the left hand not knowing what the right hand did. His passing away became the life of toil he had lived. He had in 1901 fallen on the street and been badly bruised, and under his doctor's orders took to bed. He was enjoined to give up all his work but he could not do it. His physician on visiting him found him dictating and answering letters with the aid of his daughter. The missionary prophet could not stop. While dictating a letter on January 4th, 1902 he stops—makes utterance like a tired child to his faithful wife standing over him "I'm done out!" Then he slept away. "This was tragic, but it was in some sense appropriate to the man."