

## ST. JOHN'S MISSION, GRAND RAPIDS, SASKATCHEWAN.



HIS mission stands at the mouth of the great Saskatchewan River and at the northwest corner of Lake Winnipeg, and is the last station in the north-eastern portion of the diocese of Saskatchewan. There has been a permanent mission here for nearly twenty years. The mission houses—plain log buildings—were erected by the first missionary in charge, who did an excellent work in every way.

The Indians on this reserve belong to the Swampy tribe of the great Cree nation and originally came from Red River, where most of them were baptized and instructed in the truths of our Church by those indefatigable pioneer missionaries, Archdeacon Cochrane and the Rev. Mr. Jones. Our old chief was one of Archdeacon Hunter's right-hand men; he also made all the mortar used in building the stone church on St. Peter's reserve, diocese of Rupert's Land. It is very interesting to hear him give an account of the church and her workers in the days when heathenism reigned in all its glory. As a result of the early training which most of our old people received, they can read the Bible and Prayer Book both in English and Cree, and some of them almost know the gospels by heart, and a good portion of our beloved liturgy.

Our old chief, who is blind and infirm with age, can always be heard above the others in the responses. A short time ago this same old man was nearly killed by falling from his bed whilst in a standing position. We all thought he had received his deathblow, but I am glad to say he is much better, though far from being well. The Sunday following the accident was Holy Communion Sunday, and, although he could hardly walk or hold up his head, he was there to partake of the Holy Eucharist, and I have no doubt the help and comfort he sought were vouchsafed him.

Many people tell us that an Indian is only good when he is dead, but I think the above instance proves that there are some good live Indians to be found.

Another encouraging feature of our work is that all the Indians, when at home, are most regular in their attendance at church, and join very heartily in the services. In this I think they would shame many congregations who have received Christian civilization.

Besides the regular Sunday services we have one on Wednesdays and saints' days which is very well attended, and our desire and prayer is that the teaching inculcated from week to week will make us realize more and more the words "grow in grace," for without this growth all our work for Christ and His Church will be in vain.

We have a very good Sunday-school; there

are forty scholars on the register. Old and young come, and, judging from the number and good attendance, this necessary and most important branch of church work is highly appreciated by all. Mrs. Pritchard has a Bible class for adults, and some of them are making very good progress in reading. The junior classes are taken by some of our young men and women, who seem to take a great interest in teaching their little brothers and sisters.

The language of these Indians is Swampy Cree, a dialect of the great Plain Cree, but the difference between them is very slight, so that when one is learnt the other is easily understood. The Swampies turn "y" into "n" in a great many words, whilst their Plain Cree brethren give it the "y" sound; e.g., the Swampy word for "all" is "kakinow," but the Plain Crees turn the "n" into "y," and pronounce it thus, "kakiyow." It has been well said that the Cree language is a very perfect one, and affords a very interesting study to students of philology. To any one learning the language the "verb" is most intricate and exhaustive, and once mastered in its many inflections the student is then master of the language.

Whilst we are deeply thankful and appreciate every encouragement and blessing in our work, yet I cannot but tell you of the difficulties in our path. The people here under my charge are about 150 in number, and are composed of pure Indians and half-breeds.

There is very little land on this reserve suitable for farming, as the whole country is forest, lake, and marsh; therefore you will not be surprised when I tell you that the Indians are most indifferent to the cultivation of the soil. Some, I am pleased to say, do make an effort to improve the land at their disposal. A few days ago one of my people, in conversation with me, said that some of his friends only thought of farming when they saw others with a plentiful supply of vegetables when they had none. I thought at the time that he hit the right nail on the head.

The district of Grand Rapids is indeed blessed with an abundant supply of food; indeed the fish supply is illimitable, and the whitefish, in particular, has a world-wide reputation. There are also in the vicinity large numbers of moose, deer, and partridges, so that the Indians, had they the thrift of the white-man, could always have plenty to eat, but I am sorry to say that with all this food, and the work which they get from time to time from the fish companies who are located here, yet many of them are often in a state of destitution. As we live on the confines of civilization, articles of clothing and consumption are necessarily at a premium. Such being the case, the Indian, being paid for his labor in trade, has to suffer from exorbitant prices.

With regard to your question as to the really