

The Conference of 1892 sent me to take charge of McDougall Memorial Church in the city of Winnipeg, situated on Main Street North. This Church had been started under the pastorate of Rev. Enos Langford, and his successor, Rev. Mr. Stafford had enlarged and beautified it, but returned east before it was properly organized. The board had gone rather beyond its means in providing Church accomodation for the work-a-day people of the north end and it was a hard struggle to keep things moving. Congregations were fair, but collections were small, and Church life resolved itself into a strained effort to keep the doors open. Mr. J. W. Cockburn, Mr. J. L. Wells and Mr. J. Lamb were the men who fought like heroes to keep things going, but in spite of every effort, the minister's salary suffered, and expenses were reduced to the lowest possible point. After two years, it was thought desirable to have the pulpit supplied by students from Wesley College in the interests of economy and Messrs. Switzer and Morgan divided this duty between them.

At this time I was held in reserve for the purpose of taking charge of the Brandon Industrial School when it should be ready for occupation. My name must appear as being in charge of some station, so I was put down for Norway House but was permitted to live in the city. I was still in charge of the Winnipeg District, so much of the year 1894 was spent in supervising the Indian work north and in watchful interest over the new buildings being erected at Brandon.

The year 1895 found me at Brandon with the duty before me of organizing an industrial school for Indian children. It goes without saying that this was no ordinary task even for one who has had some experience in this class of work, but for one who was without knowledge of institutional management it was difficult in the extreme.

The first duty was to get a staff together. Mr. Todd was the

farmer and Mr. Jarvis was his assistant. Miss Huston was the matron and Miss ..... was engaged as cook. Miss Mitchell was employed as seamstress. Mr. Quackenbush was engaged as carpenter. Mr. Stewart from the Indian Office Regina was sent as the accountant. These appointments were all made by the Department of Indian Affairs. It was my duty to set them to work and supervise them. This arrangement was not altogether satisfactory because they owed no distinct loyalty to me or to the Church which I represented. They felt secure because they were politically assigned to their positions, and the power of dismissal for cause did not rest with me.

The farm was in very poor shape. The ground had not been cultivated for some time and most of it was soured bottom land covered with chameleons and lizards. This had to be broken up and fenced. There was no house for the principal and his family. Windmills had to be erected. Sewage had to be disposed of. There was any amount of work to be done. Cows had to be bought to secure a milk supply. A light driver was necessary to run for the mail and to make purchases and to transport the members of the staff who had business in the city which was three miles distant.

The all important matter was to secure the pupils. Our recruiting field was Lake Winnipeg and Norway House. I left the officers in charge and crossed Lake Winnipeg in search of pupils. An item in the Free Press newspaper under date of July 6, 1895, was to this effect: 'Rev. John Semmens arrived from Norway House with 38 Indian children for the new Brandon Industrial Institute.'

This item does not convey to the reader any idea of how hard it was to secure parental consent in so many cases, neither does it show the difficulties in the way of transporting and feeding and



protecting such a crowd of youngsters of both sexes. There was no cabin on the steamer and no bunks for us to sleep in. We were sheltered in the freight hold, boys on one side, girls on the other, with a tarpaulin between. I spent day and night with them to prevent any sense of loneliness, to guard their conduct towards each other, to meet their small wants, especially at night, and to prevent quarrelling and homesickness. In fine weather this was not too difficult, but when we sailed over rough seas in the hours of darkness it was quite another matter. However, nothing happened to disturb us and the children were safely landed in the school. Then work began in dead earnest.

The admitting physician, Dr. Fraser, passed all the children except one, a girl of about fourteen, who was supposed to have rales in her lungs. It was necessary to take her back to her home. On my return from this undesirable journey, I picked up two or three more, all of whom were passed as physically fit. I thought it fortunate that in picking up children from a large number of homes and campfires it should happen that only one was rejected.

In order that I should have a fuller knowledge of how to conduct the institution, the Department generously permitted me to visit the Elkhorn and Qu'Appelle schools and met my expense while doing so. I frankly acknowledge my indebtedness to Principal Wilson of Elkhorn and Father Hulanord of Qu'Appelle, who gave me much excellent advice based upon their long experience. Returning home, I was able to discharge my duties in a more efficient manner for having come into close touch with the practical work of other schools.

Inspector McGibbon visited us in his official capacity and put my accountant in the way of following out his system of book-keeping. We adhered rigidly to all instructions given and all entries were made

according to direction. The accountant was familiar with this method of procedure through his work in the Regina office, and never a thought entered my mind that it was not an approved method of book-keeping inasmuch as it was ordered by a duly certified Indian inspector of the Indian Department.

In the summer of 1896, I again went north for more children so as to have the full number of one hundred on the roll of the school. It was necessary to have our full count of students because with a less number the income was not sufficient to meet the expenditures. The same staff could as easily manage one hundred as fifty, and the heating would be the same whether the pupils were many or few. We could only draw for the number enrolled and in regular attendance, so more pupils must be obtained. No one but the principal could be found who would or could undertake the long and arduous journey with prospect of success. His familiarity with the conditions of travel and his acquaintance with the parents and guardians of the children made it most advisable that he alone should undertake this task. This had its unfortunate side, for the officers left in charge were not always wise or kind in their dealings with the children so that disagreements and misunderstandings arose which had serious consequences of a wide reaching character.

On our arrival at Norway House, it became apparent that something had happened. Stories had been circulated detrimental to recruiting. The missionary resident there had originated an active opposition for personal reasons. This action had been threatened and was therefore anticipated, but instead of discouraging us it nerved us to make a more extended canvass in the regions beyond. On we went to Oxford House and God's Lake, returning in due time with about twenty



children. A few more joined us at Norway House, so that our school roll went up to 70 all told. Few can know the difficulties encountered on this trip. Many stormy lakes had to be crossed and the portages were numerous and swampy. The weather was adverse and the mosquitoes intolerable. It was a difficult matter to feed and care for so many in a wilderness where no one lived who could help us with supplies of provisions. The girls were housed in a large tent but the boys slept in the open. Thomas Belton, a fine Indian, rowed the big skiff while the children did their full share of the paddling. My own son Frank accompanied me and proved to be of great service to the party.

The arrival of these children at points within the bounds of civilization was to them an event of absorbing interest. Many, for the first time, saw horses, oxen, sheep, pigs, bicycles, street cars, and last of all locomotives and express trains. Then followed the sights of the great city of Winnipeg with its wondrous activities and crowds of people. Excitement indeed was the order of the day. It required a firm hand and much watchful care to keep them under control.

When we arrived at the school at Brandon, astonishment knew no bounds. The thought of such a palatial building becoming their future home was to their minds quite overwhelming. It must be said that no single child cried with homesickness on the whole journey. They never lacked a meal when meal time came. They were always under shelter in the time of storm. There was no misconduct while en route. Not one was ailing on our arrival. These fell readily into the ways of the school, and when they had been supplied with new clothes, they were considered to be a fine lot of children.

From time to time sickness came, involving us in days of weariness followed by nights of anxious waiting and watching. It was

sad beyond measure when we had to bury a pupil so far away from home and friends. Distress keen and trying was felt when in hours of extreme illness the dear children longed for their dusky mothers and their humble wigwam homes.

Meantime improvements went on apace. A carpenter's shop had been built. A residence for the principal and his family had been erected. Roads had been made and trees planted until the place assumed a prosperous aspect. The farm had been fenced. Fresh land had been broken. A new barn was under way. Outwardly we were winning success, gradually but surely, and our hopes for the future were considered to be well based.

Then the clouds came. Mrs. Semmens and certain members of the staff came into a condition of misunderstanding which so invaded our social relations that happiness became impossible.

To make matters worse, Mrs. Semmens met with a serious accident while driving her own horse in Brandon. Someone breaking a colt to harness on Rosser Avenue collided with the lady's buggy, and in trying to escape, she sustained an injury to the base of the spine. This induced temporary paralysis of the left side, and her illness continued long.

The Brandon School had been started as a government institution, and we were superintended from the Indian office in Regina. After a time, it was considered that it should be transferred to the Methodist Church. This had been originally intended, but it was considered that until the organization was complete the government should bear all the expense of management. As soon as this was reasonably accomplished, the change was effected. I was asked to state the lowest possible figure at which the institution could be conducted,



and replied that thirty five cents per child per day was the best offer that could be made. The per capita grant allowed by the Department of Indian Affairs at that time was \$ 110.00 per year. Inasmuch as we had not yet secured our full quota of pupils, it was difficult to keep things moving without financial loss. 80 pupils at \$ 110.00 only gave us \$ 8,800.00. The full number allowed (100) would have increased the income to \$ 11,000.00, and expense would be but slightly increased by this addition. This disadvantage to the management can easily be recognized.

In order to remedy this, some Sioux children from Griswold were admitted. Another trip was made to the north and 17 more pupils were brought in. This gave us the desired number, but the writer was not privileged to draw the amount of revenue thus won. A letter from the Missionary Society informed me that my offer of 35 cents per pupil per day was considered too high, and that another offer had been received, reducing the prospective cost to 30 cents per pupil per day. I was asked to agree to accept this proposition,, and finding this impossible, my resignation was sent in. I had filled the school with pupils, had put the farm in good shape, had increased the stock from one cow to thirty head of cattle and horses, had gathered one crop of wheat and planted another one over a large area, had constructed a number of buildings, had provided sufficient farm machinery, had erected three wind mills, one for pumping water, one for clearing the sewage and one for chopping feed. After all this, it seemed a small thing that the Church should quarrell with me over 5 cents of difference on each pupil's cost per day. I had given my best service, was much interested in my work, and had been successful in many ways, and severance from my position was a hard and from my standpoint an

undeserved blow which was most keenly felt.

Through my personal influence with Hon. David Laird, Indian Commissioner and Hon. Clifford Sifton, Superintendent of Indian Affairs, the per capita grant was increased from \$ 110.00 a year to \$ 120.00 per year, but while this was very gratifying to me, the writer was not permitted to enjoy the advantage gained. What was even worse than the non-enjoyment of this was the fact that Dr. Alexander Sutherland, the Missionary Secretary, claimed the credit of having secured the advance. When written to in regard to the matter, he failed to reply to my letter, but in a later personal interview he admitted that the facts were in my favour, yet maintained that anything accomplished by his subordinates would in reality be his own achievement. This, in view of the fact that he had on several occasions been turned down at Ottawa did not seem to me to be good logic.

Dr. Sutherland was a man of strong animosities. I twitted him once on the amount he spent on meals on the dining car and on beds in the pullmans while he opposed the right of the man doing frontier work to have any luxuries whatever. Dr. James woodworth was his great friend and ally, and he made himself very busy keeping headquarters posted in evil report. Some men are so constituted that they overlook the good and emphasize the unfavourable. At any rate, both men were on my track, and neither manifested the charity which thinketh no evil.

My successor, Rev. Thompson Ferrier, began his work with very great advantage. He had 100 pupils. He had considerable stock. He had all necessary buildings. His per capita grant was \$ 120.00 per year. He had a trained lot of pupils. He had a staff familiar with their duties. He had an adequate equipment. He had a growing wheat crop. He entered into other men's labours. He had no long journeys to make to hunt up



pupils. He demanded and secured the right to make his own appointments, and to buy or not buy just where and when he pleased. Small wonder that he succeeded from the start - but let it be said that he did not keep within his limit of 30 cents per child per day. In 1900 ( See Report Department of Indian Affairs) the expenditure was at the rate of \$ 124.00 per capita or 34 and a fraction cents per head per day. In the report of 1906, the cost had risen to \$ 155.00 per capita. Without in any way desiring to magnify the case, it becomes clear that there may be a difference between what one thinks he can do and what he really does do when tried in the fire of practice. However, in the meantime, the supplanting scheme had worked, and that was success for those who were interested.

No one in the Methodist ministry at that time could have filled that school as it was filled. The location at Brandon was not well thought of by the chiefs on the recruiting field and this prejudice had to be met. No single agent has ever brought in 38 new pupils out of a new field at one time so far as I have been able to learn. Yet the Church authorities never at any time gave me special notice or thanked me for my effort on their behalf. My four years were years of organization and therefore years of greatest possible expense. My heart was in the work, and I desired to make a life work of it, and every year's experience would have made me more efficient. To say that I was treated with a lack of consideration is to put the case too mildly.

In the year 1899, I was sent to the town of Portage La Prairie, and became the chairman of the Portage La-Prairie District as well. I went to my station with no great pleasure. There had been serious Church disturbances in the recent past, and all who spoke to me