

Dr. Reid on the North-West.

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Just at this time, when the Government, and all persons who take an interest in the Red River troubles, are eagerly grasping at the smallest item of solid information concerning Red River, we take it for granted we are not surfeiting the public when we place before them the facts and views presented in a lecture delivered on Friday evening last, before the Dalhousie College Literary Class, by Dr. Reid, who has been a part of all he has seen, and is, as the Mayor said, the best informed man on the subject of the Red River in Halifax.

In opening, the Doctor described the various tribes of Indians who, at the first coming of the English, inhabited the North-West—the Swampoes, Crees, Santeaux, Assinaboines, and Sioux—and showed how strong on them was the influence of the French, who had come over long before the English. Through all the wide expanse of country which is called the North-West, wherever there was a port or village the French had given it a name, (a Saint's name we may observe, for the French were pious,) they had made themselves at home among the natives, had taken wives from among them, had conformed in some sort to their habits, and if ever in moments of sadness they looked longingly back to old France, the thoughts of the dreary wilderness journey, and a look at their "young barbarians" was enough to drive the feeling away.

The French had thus become, as it were, amalgamated with the Indians when the English came in. The English at once became favorites with the Indians, who even clung to them in subsequent quarrels, (up in the North-West, as well as in the United States, about the era of the war of independence), because the English invariably treated them with kindness, took their furs at fair prices, and gave them serviceable goods in return. Hudson's Bay was discovered in 1610; but it was not till 1670 that the Hudson's Bay Company was formed and went into operation in the fur trade. Dr. Reid gave an interesting and spirited description of the fur trade, how the Indians were scattered over the country in chase of the Buffalo and other animals, how the servants of the Company, with no other road over the endless snow than that made by the snow shoes in front of the dog train, followed the Indians wherever they thought they might be found, purchased or bartered or received, as in a contract, the furs of the animals slain, and at once started off with their dog sleds laden to the posts, whence the furs were transferred to Montreal; and how thus all over that immense country a great business was carried on with no roads, and no conveyance except dogs, and certainty of finding goods, save through the sagacity and wood craft of the voyageurs and the North-West Company's employees. The English, as well as the French, intermarried with the natives, and thus we see the origin of English and French "half-breeds;" the Scotch were accounted for by Dr. Reid in this way: Lord Selkirk having visited the country, and finding the region about Fort Garry valuable as an agricultural country, he went home to Scotland and induced a number of Scotchmen to come out, in the certainty of finding an estate as large as each man wished for nothing. But he did not tell them they would be one thousand miles from white people; and so when the Scotchmen came they were at first inclined to go back again; but were at length

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induced to stay, and staying, they also took unto themselves wives among the natives, and thus we have the Scottish half-breeds. The French North-West Company had almost the whole trade in the North-West for over a century, till the English obtained possession of the territory, and the Hudson's Bay Company began to rival them. After a long, and not always peaceable contest, the two Companies were amalgamated in 1821.

Then came an interesting description of the business habits of the country, the long six hundred mile journeys to St. Paul's, Minnesota, for goods, journeys which take two months in the performance; the extent and manners of the fur trade, and the other internal affairs of the country.

What struck the hearers most was the assurance that out in that country which we are accustomed to think half civilized, are a people who hunt the buffalo and live on the prairies and on horseback, and yet are educated and intelligent, have Schools, and Churches and Academies, and most of the home comforts of more thickly settled communities; and the only tax ever imposed on the people was a tax of 3 or 4 per cent in order to support the schools. The religions of the community were then touched upon. The Roman Catholic community is the largest, owing to the presence of the French; next come the Episcopalians, then the Presbyterians (the Scotch). The principal settlements are Prairie Portage, Red River, Oak Point, Salt Springs, and the various missions, which may easily be pointed out on a map. The Lecturer then gave his views of the present situation. The half breeds had long ago purchased from the Hudson's Bay Company farms of six rods frontage on the Red River and the Assiniboine, and running two miles back. In going down these rivers you feel as if you were going along a flooded street, for all along the houses are close together on the narrow farms. The two miles running back does not satisfy the people however; they claim also from the Company two miles still further back, calling that "hay ground." This of course is not to be tolerated if the Canadian Government are to obtain possession of the country. Out of these claims arose the present row. When the Canadian Surveyors went into the country and began running lines, the natives took alarm, thinking that these lands and privileges were to be taken from them. In vain was it explained to them that the surveys were intended only for the purpose of mapping out the country; they were suspicious, and their suspicions were fanned by the Americans, and hence the present trouble.

The Lecturer, we are pleased to hear, took the view we have always taken concerning the means of quieting the rebellion. He thought that conciliation only ought to be used, not only because the people did not understand their relations with Canada, but also because war would be extremely hazardous. He thought that the trained men of that territory who were inured to the perils of the wilderness, to the use of arms, and were in the habit of being under strict discipline, would be able, with short preparation, to resist successfully the largest force that Canada could send against them. Mr. McDougall's proposal to send a thousand men to put down the rebellion, he looked upon as wild and impracticable. The Lecturer closed with a hope that Canada would not, by any unwise means, alienate the people, and that at some not very distant day her surveyors would be able to travel from ocean to ocean undeterred by any antagonism.

The Lecture was listened to with much interest, and was loudly applauded. The Chief Justice and Mr. Justice DesBarres were present. His Worship the Mayor presided, and closed the Lecture with a witty well received speech, in which he recommended the territory as a good field for white ladies, and for the College Gazetteer, forgetting to add as a still better recommendation that Mr. Howe declares he could find any liquor in the territory.

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