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MEMORIAL SERVICES FOR VICTIMS OF 1916 FIRE

Name of Nushka Changed to Val Gagne in Honour of Heroic Priest. Great Gathering Of District, July 29th.

Thursday, July 29th was the fourth anniversary of the disastrous bush fire of 1916 that caused such serious loss of life and property in the North Land. The day was given special observance at the little town of Nushka, or Val Gagne, as it is now known in honour of the noble priest, Rev. Father Wilfrid Gagne, who gave his life in July, 1916, in heroic attempt to minister to his flock in the great disaster that came upon them.

On Thursday last there was a great gathering of priests and people from all over the North Land to do honour to the sacred memory of Rev. Father Gagne and to pay tribute of remembrance and affection to the others who had died in the great fire of 1916. There were many hundreds there at Val Gagne for the impressive services. There were visitors from Timmins, Iroquois Falls, Cochrane, Cobalt, New Liskeard, Haileybury, and from practically every other centre in this North Land.

The services were held in the open air. In a large open field a beautiful altar had been erected with a noble background of the North Land's own evergreens. Before this pastoral altar Rev. Father Lagreval, of Charlton, celebrated requiem high mass for the repose of the souls of those dying in the 1916 fire. Rev. Father Beauregard, of Timmins, who had known Father Gagne at college, was deacon, and Rev. Fr. Langlais, of Barraute, who had been a companion at the Seminary at Montreal, acted as sub-deacon. After Mass a procession was formed and the large congregation proceeded to the cemetery where Rev. Father Gorman, of Cobalt, preached eloquently in English, and Rev. Fr. Moutlet, under whom Rev. Fr. Gagne had served at Guégués, addressed the assembly in French. The monument to Rev. Fr. Gagne was blessed, this ceremony being directed by Rev. Fr. Larocque, of Cochrane, the large gathering kneeling throughout this part of the impressive ceremony.

The monument to Rev. Fr. Gagne, is a plain stone of grey granite, surmounted by a cross. On the simple but impressive shaft appear the inscriptions:—In Latin—"The Good Shepherd gives his life for the sheep. St. John X: 11." In French—"To the memory of Father Wilfrid Gagne, parish priest of this parish, a victim of his devotion in the great conflagration of July 29, 1916. The Clergy of Haileybury." The monument is erected in the cemetery on the hill behind the little village. Rev. Father Gagne was born at Nicolet, Quebec, and at the time of his death he was only about 27 years of age. He spent the greater part of his life at Manchester, New Hampshire, and came from that city to labour in the priesthood of his church in Canada. For a short time he was assistant priest at La Tuque and at St. Bruno de Guégués, from the latter place going to what was then the village of Nushka, a thriving little village, the centre of a growing agricultural settlement. He had only been at Nushka a few weeks when the disastrous fire scourged the district. He was returning from the annual retreat of the priests of the diocese at North Cobalt, and train officials and passengers begged him to remain on the train as Nushka was then in serious danger. "My duty lies with my people, whatever may come," was the reply of Rev. Father

Gagne, as he left Train No. 47 at Nushka Station. He went in among his flock and in the hours of trial and death he was a good ministering spirit carrying hope and consolation and rendering assistance to those who were in the shadow of death from the burning bush. Many perished in the fire of 1916, and Nushka was one of the districts suffering most seriously from the disastrous fire. In the Nushka district there was much mourning and much sorrow, and none were more deeply grieved than Rev. Father Gagne who had so nobly given his life in the simple doing of his duty as he saw it. His dead body, badly burned, was recovered some days after the fire had passed in the basement of Lalonde's store at Nushka where he had apparently gone in his work of rescue help and mercy, and where he had been overcome at last by the smoke and flames.

In his inspiring address on Thursday Rev. Father Gorman, of Cobalt, paid eloquent tribute to Rev. Father Gagne. "Greater love hath no man than this," he quoted, "that he lay down his life for his friends." Rev. Father Gagne had set a wonderful example of earnest and noble service for this day and generation that thought too selfishly and followed too often wrong ideals and ignoble aims. Rev. Father Moutlet in words of thrilling eloquence also pointed the lesson of the noble life and the glorious death of Rev. Father Gagne who had stood so well the tests of highest Christian valor and unselfish service of his fellows.

The services on Thursday impressed all with their beauty and solemnity. From passing trains crowds watched the greater crowds at the ceremonies at Val Gagne. Many strangers were tempted to join the gathering, and some who found it possible did so and were glad indeed that they did. The day was one long to be remembered. The village was beautifully decorated for the day and everything possible was done for the accommodation of all who attended.

In honour of Father Gagne's ministry and death the name of Nushka has been changed to Val Gagne, the Postmaster-General authorizing this change in the name of the post office, and the T. & N. O. also expressing their interest of changing the name of the station to correspond.

While the first and perhaps the chief features of Thursday at Val Gagne were the memorial services for the victims of the fire of 1916 and the blessing of the monument to Father Gagne, the day, as Father Gorman phrased it, was not one of all sorrow, but there was hope and joy mingled with the sorrowful remembrances. From the brave lives of men and women like those of the pioneers commemorated on this occasion, the North Land would grow to strength and greatness. With the remembrances of those who had passed there must also be the memory of what they had accomplished and what their lives would inspire in the way of further progress and advancement.

There were parties all day visiting the various parts of the district and viewing the agricultural development that was evident.

LO! THE POOR INDIAN IS UP-TO-DATE EVEN TO SLANG.

Toronto and other outside newspapers have been featuring a story to the effect that the Indians of the far north of Ontario and of Northwestern Quebec, lying north of Lake Abitibi and the Transcontinental, have been awestruck and terror-stricken by a giant hydroplane in the service of the Abitibi Power & Paper Co. "You can tell the world," one of the Indians informs The Advance, "that the paleface newspapers are black-hearted fabricators. Us, afraid of hydroplanes? Humph! Nothing doing! The Indians are too used to seeing the white men going up in the air to be bothered by any little hydroplane. Why we are not afraid of a threshing machine, an Ingersoll watch or a Ford automobile. The Indians are not afraid of noise nor are we alarmed or mystified by machinery. We use wheel barrows and phonographs regularly now ourselves. These paleface newspapers should quit kidding themselves and their readers."

City newspapers, of course, know all about the Indians of the North,—just as they know that the farmer of the North, south, east and west is a rube who wears whiskers on his face and hayseeds in his hair, and buys gold bucks and says "By Heck!" and "Be Gum!" The Indians reading the city newspapers laugh over it all, just as the farmer does, unless he is too busy motoring or taking in grand opera to take time to read the papers. The Indians get their motor rides in canoes and launches, while they enjoy grand opera on the gramophone,—"canned grand opera" they called it.

CONUNDRUM

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