

An Historical Sketch.

BY WILLIAM GALBRAITH.

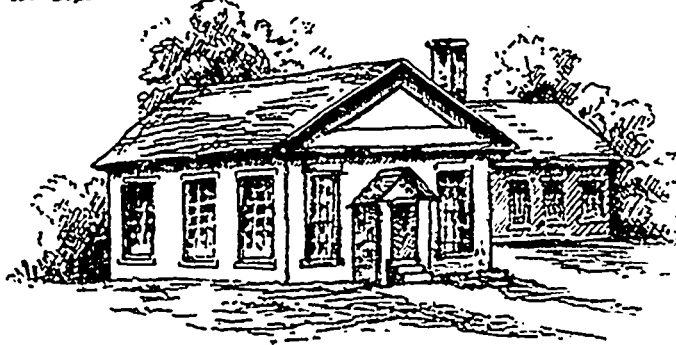
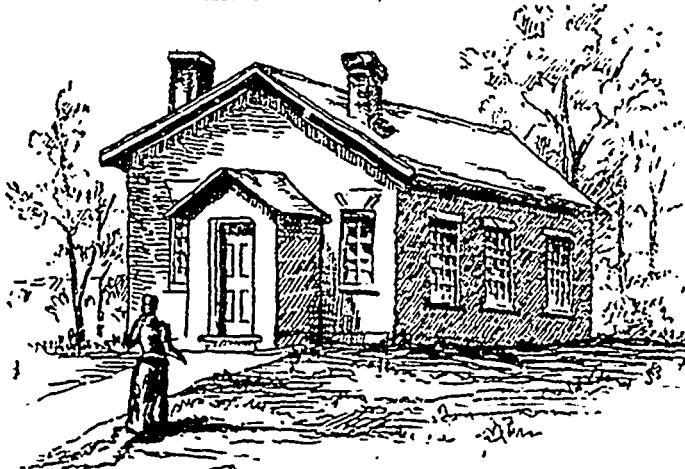
It is somewhat difficult after the lapse of so many years, and at this distance from the scene of its occurrence, to understand why the Disruption which took place in the Church of Scotland in the month of May, 1843, and which resulted in the formation and establishment of the Free Church of Scotland, should have been repeated in this new country the following year. Certain it is that the causes which led up to the Disruption did not exist in Canada. No doubt the sympathies of a large number of Presbyterians in this country were with their brethren in the old land and led them to follow their example, but, be that as it may, in 1844 a Disruption on a small scale as compared with that in Scotland, took place in Canada. Toronto, then, as now, being well to the front in every religious movement, taking the lead. Consequently a number of the members of St. Andrew's church, then in connection with the Church of Scotland, felt it to be their duty to come out from that connection and form a new congregation to be in connection with the Free Church of Scotland. Steps were at once taken to effect this object, but a proposition having meantime been made to them by the Presbyterian Church of York, a sort of independent Presbyterian Church, to which the late Rev. Jas. Harris had faithfully ministered for twenty-four years, and whose place of worship then occupied the site on which Knox church building now stands. A union was happily effected under the name of Knox church, of which Mr. Harris, although retired from active service as a pastor, continued a member and office-bearer until his death which took place in 1873.

The congregation thus formed in July 1844 set about getting a pastor, and their choice fell upon Rev. Dr. Burns, of Paisley, Scotland, one who had taken a most active part during the "Ten Year's Conflict" which culminated in the Disruption and who had visited this country, as a deputy from the Free Church in its interests and whose stirring addresses which are still remembered by some among us, no doubt, contributed largely to the same results here.

He accepted the call extended by the newly formed congregation and was inducted into the charge on May 23rd, 1845, exactly two years after the great event which took place in Scotland.

Between the time of its formation and the induction of Dr. Burns as pastor, the congregation had been ministered to by some distinguished men, among whom Rev. Alex. King, of Glasgow, Scotland, afterward Professor of Divinity at Halifax, N.S., deserves mention. Two years after the induction of Dr. Burns the church building was destroyed by fire. With characteristic energy and zeal, the congregation at once set about re-building, and in Sept. 1848 the present still handsome and substantial building was opened with appropriate services. The collections were large on the occasion of the opening of the handsome new church and among the contributions laid on the plate were a small gold ring and brooch, not of very great value but tending to show that somebody's heart was in the cause and led them to do what they could. These articles came into my possession as treasurer

KNOX CHURCH, 1821.



KNOX CHURCH, 1841, BURNED 1847.



REV. JAS. HARRIS.

of the congregation from 1868 to '76, and were handed over to my successor and are probably still in existence. Not much is on record regarding the congregation during Dr. Burns' pastorate, it seems to have gone on in quiet conservative way, undisturbed by questions about organs, hymns, higher criticism or any other innovations which some years later caused a stir.

In 1856 Dr. Burns resigned, having been appointed to a Professors chair in Knox College. Of his abundant and arduous labors in the cause of the church and college to which it may be truly said his whole life in Canada was devoted, it is not necessary here to treat as these have been well set forth in "Life and Times of Dr. Burns" published some years ago and which has been read by multitudes. Suffice it to say that his labors were not by any means confined to Knox church and congregation, but were freely given to the church as a whole and to the college as well. One can scarcely visit a district of Canada where he is not spoken of with the greatest respect and esteem for his work's sake.

The vacancy lasted for over two years. The congregation would have none but a minister from Scotland and after several calls had been given and declined success at length crowned their efforts. On September 16th 1858, the late highly esteemed Dr. Topp of Edinburgh was inducted pastor. The congregation flourished under his ministry which was characterized by great faithfulness and by rare good sense and sound judgment.

In 1867 the scriptural office of Deacon was revived in the congregation. So far as we are aware, no other Presbyterian congregation in Canada up to that time had deacons, an office which is by no means general in the Presbyterian Church of Canada to-day. Many still present with us will remember the stiff battles that were fought over this matter, and how in the end the pastor gained the victory without anybody having been badly hurt.

In 1871 the congregation undertook the erection of a mission chapel in Duchess street, where most excellent work has been done ever since. Nothing ever done by this congregation has been more blessed than the establishment and carrying on of Duchess street mission. It is still in a most prosperous condition and is carried on by a band of most faithful and efficient workers, whose labors are a blessing to many in the neighborhood.

In 1874 the present extension and commodious school buildings were erected at a cost of over \$17,000, a wonderful advance from the old basement of the church in which the Sabbath school and all other meetings were held up to that time.

Soon after this the organ question began to be agitated and to give trouble to many who looked upon all such innovations with grave suspicion as to their origin. The question was brought up and discussed at each annual meeting with varying results until in 1879 a substantial majority declared in favor of the introduction of an organ, however, before any steps were taken towards this end the pastor called the office-bearers together, and although quite