

The Church in Canada.

Under this heading will be collected and preserved all obtainable data bearing upon the history and growth of the Church in Canada. Contributions are invited from those having in their possession any material that might properly come for publication in this department.

BISHOP GILLIS.

CAREER OF AN EMINENT CANADIAN.

I.

In the interesting series of papers which the venerable Chevalier Macdonell has contributed to this REVIEW, sketching the life and labours of his great namesake, the first Bishop of Kingston, there has been presented to us the career of a Scotchman whom Providence raised up to accomplish a great work for the Church in Upper Canada, at a time when she was sorely in need of valiant sons to champion her cause amidst a people, the vast majority of whom were not only strangers to her, but even regarded her with mingled feelings of distrust and aversion. By the gift of this one man alone Canada contracted a deep debt of gratitude to the older land, but it may be doubted whether she has not, in some measure at least, repaid it by her gift in turn to Scotland of the great and holy Bishop Gillis, who proved to be the instrument in God's hands of restoring to her that conventual life which, before the "Reformation" came to rob her of the priceless gift of faith and to pass like a blight over the land, had been her chiefest glory.

Although the life of Bishop Gillis really belongs to Scottish history, yet it is not devoid of interest to Canadians, since it was in the city of Montreal that he first saw the light and it was under the fostering care of the Sulpicians that were first developed the germs of his vocation, destined in after years to bear such abundant fruit in the services of the Church and of his adopted land.

The celebration of the Golden Jubilee of St. Margaret's Convent, Edinburgh, a year or two ago, was not unnaturally deemed a fitting occasion for the compilation of a history of that institution, so closely intertwined as it is with the career of Bishop Gillis, and also of much that is of greatest moment in the external life of the Church in Scotland within the past fifty years. The volume* was completed and given to the world a short time ago. To Scotch Catholics it is a work of absorbing interest and genuine consolation, as evidencing the wonderful growth of the faith in their unhappy country within recent years. Heresy had so long reigned in almost undisputed possession, and had to all appearances worked itself into the very lives of the people, that to attempt to dislodge it seemed vain in the extreme. And on the other hand, when Bishop Gillis began his work in Edinburgh more than half a century ago, the Church was so obscure and poverty-stricken, Catholics so few in numbers, and priests so scarce as to be unable to minister even to the wants of the few souls that owned their sway, that could he have looked into the future, and in the long vista of fifty years, beheld the strength and vigor of the Church as it exists now, he would have been sorely tempted to believe himself the victim of a strange hallucination.

James Gillis was born in the City of Montreal, on April 7th, 1802. His father was a Scotchman who, early in life, left his native land, and having, by his industry and frugality, acquired a considerable fortune, settled in Montreal. James was his only son, and from his earliest youth was the object of the unceasing care and affection of his father, who sought to instil into his mind the highest Catholic principles, love of God and of His Church, and uprightness in all his dealings with his fellow-man. That he was eminently successful in his endeavours it is only necessary to glance at his son's long career in the service of the Church, to be well assured. When only four years of age, James narrowly escaped being burned to death through the house adjoining his father's taking fire and being completely destroyed. But Providence had

work for him to do, and his time was not yet come. While still quite young, he was placed under the care of the Sulpician Fathers, who had been sent to Canada by M. Olier, founder of their congregation. The French Government gave them feudal superiority of the Island of Montreal, and one of their earliest ventures was to found a College, in which many a youth, destined to rise to distinction in the service of his country, was educated and trained in the fear of God. Among them are such well-known names as Mondelet, M'Cord, Bruneau and Hippolyte Guy, all eminent at the Bar; the Hon. Charles de St. Ours, Conseiller Législatif, and "Son Homeur," Edouard Raymond Fabre, Maire of Montreal, father of Monseigneur Fabre, the present Archbishop of that city. These were all contemporaries of Bishop Gillis, who, even during his early school days, gave unmistakable evidence of possessing those great qualities which were to raise him to a high position in the Church of God. He acquired great proficiency in the French language, and was conspicuous among his companions for his piety and attachment to the Sulpicians. It was his great delight to construct and decorate miniature altars, and to induce his companions to join with him in performing religious functions and exercises of piety, a trait so often met with in the boyhood of the Saints. In 1816, James being then 14 years old, Mr. Gillis disposed of his property in Montreal and returned to Scotland to spend the remaining years of his life. He settled in the village of Fochabers, where he died some years afterwards, fortified by all the consolations of the religion he had faithfully adhered to during his life. Mrs. Gillis, who was a Protestant Episcopalian, survived him many years, but her son had the consolation of receiving her into the Church some time before her death, which occurred in 1851. She became quite blind in her old age. In 1817 James entered the Seminary of Aquhortes, to prepare himself for the priesthood, having always had a strong predilection for the ecclesiastical state, and believing himself called of God to devote his life to the service of religion. The Superior of the Seminary at that time was Rev. James Kyle, afterwards Vicar-Apostolic of the Northern District of Scotland, and he took a great interest in young Gillis, who, indeed, endeared himself by his amiable qualities to all with whom he came in contact during the whole of his long life. On the 3rd of December he left Aquhortes, and going to Paris entered the Seminary of St. Nicholas, then the classical institution of the diocese of Paris. Here the knowledge of the French language which he had acquired in Montreal, stood him in good stead, and enabled him to make rapid advancement in his studies. He gained many honours in almost every department, but especially in the school of rhetoric, and under skilful tutors was developed and perfected the natural gift of eloquence with which he adorned the pulpit during his subsequent career. As at Aquhortes, so in Paris, he was greatly beloved by his superiors and fellow-students, and when his course was completed and he was to leave Paris to enter upon his life's work, he was addressed by them in a farewell ode, composed by one of their number. Among his companions was the late Mgr. Surat, Vicar-General of the late Cardinal Morlot, Archbishop of Paris, and one of the Martyrs of the Commune in 1871, and also that great light of the modern French Church, the late Mgr. Dupanloup, Bishop of Orleans, both of whom held him in the highest esteem.

Mr. Gillis left St. Nicholas in October, 1823, and entered the Seminary of Issy, a house belonging to the Sulpicians, to complete his studies in philosophy and theology, but his health, never very strong, gave way, and he was obliged to return to Scotland. This was in April, 1826. In Autumn of the same year he resumed his studies under Bishop Scott in Glasgow, and in June 9th, 1827, he was ordained priest at his old College at Aquhortes, by Bishop Patterson. In February, 1828, Father Gillis went to Edinburgh and placed himself under the jurisdiction of Bishop Patterson, who had succeeded to the Vicariate-Apostolic of the Eastern District on the death of Bishop Cameron; but his health continuing very delicate, he was precluded from at once entering upon the arduous

*History of St. Margaret's Convent, Edinburgh. Edinburgh and London: John Chisholm. 1886