

The Apostle of the Hebrides

A Story of the First Foreign Mission Enterprise of the Presbyterians of Canada.—(BY ROBERT McCONNELL, OTTAWA.)

On a lonely isle in the South Pacific ocean there is to be seen a memorial tablet on which are engraved the words: "When he landed in 1848 there were no Christians here; when he left in 1872 there were no heathen." The historic island referred to in these remarkable words in Anetium in the New Hebrides; the man of whom they were spoken was Rev. John Geddie, the first missionary to the heathen sent out by the Presbyterians of Canada; the period covered by the history of the labors which had so wonderful a result was twenty-four years. To the Presbyterian church of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island belongs the honor of launching the foreign mission enterprise which has developed so wonderfully, and which has inspired the loyal Presbyterians of the Maritime Provinces with a missionary zeal which is not excelled in any part of this Canada of ours.

The history of that mission enterprise in many respects is a marvel, if we take into account the time—60 years ago; the limited resources of the comparatively small church which undertook it; and the tremendous obstacles which had to be overcome in carrying it out.

At that time the Presbyterian church of Nova Scotia numbered about 5,000 members, comprising three presbyteries—Truro, Pictou and Prince Edward Island. A historian of that period tells us that "ministers were few in number and poorly supported, congregations were widely scattered, and home work, educational and evangelistic, was urgent." It need not therefore be matter of surprise that a considerable number of the ministers and elders comprising the synod hesitated and moved forward with fear and trepidation, while a number opposed the enterprise as being beyond the resources of so small and financially weak a church; for when the final vote was taken, authorizing the board of foreign missions—appointed by the Synod in 1844—to proceed, select a field and call a missionary, the motion was carried by a bare majority of one in a synod composed of twenty ministers and fifteen elders and which had only \$1,000 in its treasury with which to launch the enterprise. We can readily understand that 1845 must have been an anxious time, humbly speaking, for both pastors and people. But having put their hands to the plow they never faltered or looked back. To them the Master's command—"Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature,"—was imperative; and in all the succeeding years that historic act has given energy and courage to the Presbyterians of the Maritime Provinces and inspired the Presbyterians of other parts of Canada to imitate their example. They now form an integral part of the Presbyterian church of Canada which shares in the honor of the inauguration of the first foreign mission enterprise by the Presbyterians of this country. The men who took part in launching that missionary enterprise have all passed away to their reward. They never regretted what they did. They rallied round their mission as those are doing who stepped into their places and closed up the ranks. The enterprise with its one missionary, has developed into missions to the East Indians in Trinidad and British Guiana, to Central India, to Formosa, to China, to Korea, and to the Indians and Chinese in Canada. The mission to the New Hebrides is sustained by the Maritime provinces, Australia and New Zealand,

to Trinidad, British Guiana and Korea, by the Presbyterians of the Maritime provinces. In 1845 the Presbyterian church of Nova Scotia was able to raise a foreign mission fund of \$1,000. To-day the Presbyterian church of the Maritime provinces is raising about \$90,000 to sustain its mission enterprises.

It will be seen that 1845 was an epoch-making year in Canadian Presbyterianism.

First Missionary.

Rev. John Geddie, the first foreign missionary of the Presbyterian church of Nova Scotia was necessarily the central figure, the hero, of this enterprise. He gave up the comforts of civilized life in the home land, bade farewell to friends and relatives and a deeply attached pastorate, and, humanly speaking, took his life in his hand in order that he might carry the Gospel message to uncivilized and barbarous people dwelling in the region and shadow of moral and spiritual darkness and death. Of him it might in some sense be said, as was said of Abraham, when he responded to God's call to go into the land of Canaan, "he went out not knowing whither he went."

A jubilee volume published in Halifax in 1894 gives the following particulars respecting this heroic missionary:

"John Geddie, whose name, like that of John Williams, is forever associated with the New Hebrides mission, was born at Banff, Scotland, April 10, 1815. When John was but a year old his parents moved to Pictou, Nova Scotia. He was an only son, and during a severe illness his parents devoted their little babe to work as a missionary among the heathen. The parental vow was kept a profound secret till after the son had entered upon his chosen career. The boy was educated at Pictou—in the Grammar school, the Pictou Academy and the theological classes taught by Dr. McCulloch. He was licensed to preach May 2nd., 1837. Before he had completed his course he had solemnly made up his mind to devote his life to mission work among the heathen. A relative in London had for years sent to young Geddie's father the publications of the London Missionary Society, with their fascinating narratives of Gospel triumphs in the South Seas. These narratives and the biographies of the missionaries had turned his attention to a most inviting field. He entertained the hope, as soon as he was licensed, that the Presbyterian church of Nova Scotia, of which he was a minister, would undertake a mission of her own and commission him to the work.

If this plan failed he would feel free to offer his services to some other church or society. He accepted a call to New London and Cavendish in P. E. Island and was ordained March 3, 1838. He entered upon his work with ardor and testified afterwards that the more his mind was engaged on foreign missions, his interest in home missions, instead of being lessened, was intensified. In 1836 he was married to Charlotte, daughter of Dr. Alexander Macdonald, Antigonish. He informed her before their marriage of his views with regard to foreign missions, and they were solemnly engaged, should the Lord open the way, to go forth together to make known the Gospel to the heathen. He formed missionary societies in the Prince Edward Island Presbytery, and urged in season and out of season the claims of those who had never heard of the Lord Jesus. In 1843, having secured the sympathy of

the Prince Edward Island presbytery, he laid the matter before the whole body through the press. An overture from his presbytery was presented to the Synod in July, 1843. The overture was sent to presbyteries "for consideration," with instructions to "report thereon to Synod at its next meeting."

Planning the Enterprise.

This was the first step in the movement which resulted in the Synod appointing a Board of Foreign Missions at its meeting in July, 1844. How critical was the situation may be seen from a few facts which may be stated. Of the three presbyteries which composed the Synod, Truro approved of the project so far as to recommend the Synod to ascertain from the congregations the extent to which they were prepared to support the enterprise. Pictou presbytery, strange to say, disapproved. P. E. Island presbytery recommended the Synod to proceed. By a vote of twenty (20) to fourteen (14) the Synod decided to proceed and appointed the Board of Foreign Missions. This was the second step and a very important one it was. That Board of Foreign Missions has ever since been an important factor in the foreign mission work of the Presbyterian church of the Maritime provinces.

The third step was taken in the following year, 1845, when the Board reported \$1,000 in the treasury and the Synod, by a majority of one, authorized the Synod to select a field and call a missionary. Rev. John Geddie was chosen the first missionary and New Caledonia was chosen as the field, though afterward Anetium was selected. Mr. Geddie at once set to work to prepare for his life work in the distant island which became his home for twenty-four years. The Rubicon had thus been crossed and from that day down to the present Dr. Geddie and Anetium have been household words in the homes of the Presbyterian people of the Maritime provinces, and the example thus set by (at that time) a small and financially weak denomination has proved a potent influence all over Canada.

A Long and Tedious Voyage.

The designation services—the first in the history of Presbyterianism in Canada—took place at Pictou, N.S., November 3rd., 1846. They travelled by coach 113 miles to Halifax, thence by sailing vessel to Boston, the voyage occupying eight days. There they secured passage on a Newbury port whaling vessel which brought them to the Sandwich Islands after a voyage of 170 days, some weeks of which, while getting round Cape Horn, were stormy and perilous. They had sailed over 19,000 miles.

At Honolulu they were the guests of the American Board's missionaries. From the Sandwich Islands they sailed to Samoa, where they were cared for by the London Missionary Society's agents, the voyage occupying thirty-eight days. From Samoa they sailed in the John Williams, accompanied by the Rev. Thomas Powell, for the New Hebrides, and settled in Anetium, July 1848.

The voyage, it will be seen, occupied one year and seven months. We can form no conception of the toil and weariness and danger involved in such a long, stormy and dangerous voyage. Now, the New Hebrides can be reached from Pictou, N.S., in less than three months, in the enjoyment of comforts and luxuries, besides speed and safety, to which our first missionary was a complete stranger. He was just as truly the "Apostle of the New Hebrides," as Paul was the "Apostle of the Gentiles," or McKay the "Apostle of Formosa."

Mr. and Mrs. Geddie were accompanied from Samoa by Mr. Thomas Powell, who proposed laboring with them, but after two years' work he was compelled by ill health to retire and that at a