

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

CANADIAN PRESBYTERIAN HISTORY

No. LV.

UNITED PRESBYTERY OF UPPER CANADA.

From his first disappointment in reference to the ordination of Mr. Glenn by the "Presbytery of the Canadas," Mr. Bell had been fearful of the results of the experiment of an independent Presbyterian organization, and at the date of the informal disorganization of Synod and Presbyteries, as stated in the last article, Messrs. Smart and Boyd, at least, of his associates, had come to share his doubts and his anxieties. A connection with the Secession Church, which was at first designed, does not seem to have been now considered, probably because that body was opposed to receiving support from Government, while Mr. Bell was in receipt of a salary, and most, if not all, of his associates were anxiously hoping for aid from that quarter. Naturally they looked to a

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for relief, as Mr. Bell had done, from time to time, almost from the beginning. Under date of October 10th, 1821, he had written to Rev. Dr. Burns, of Glasgow, on the subject, and, in due time, had received "a courteous answer" suggesting that "The Presbytery of the Canadas" should petition the General Assembly at once for such union. The suggestion was not complied with, much to Mr. Bell's regret in after years. On the 14th of September, 1822, he addressed the Moderator of the Commission of the General Assembly, Edinburgh, on the same subject, in reference to which, he made the following note a few years after: "To this letter I never received an answer, which somewhat surprised me. But times are now altered. A more liberal spirit is cherished, and it is not probable that a similar communication would now remain unanswered." The extracts heretofore published from his letters, written in 1824 and 1825, indicated that his mind continued occasionally to turn in that direction, although "the bigotry and domineering disposition" of many of the Church of Scotland ministers in Canada seemed to preclude all hope. In October, 1826, Mr. Smart went to Great Britain, where he remained until July of the following year. Soon after his return (August 2nd, 1826), in a letter to Mr. Bell, he wrote as follows:

"In regard to a union or connection with the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, I think it may be obtained, as all I conversed with were favourable to the connection. But the generality of the ministers were of opinion that a general application from the Presbytery, rather than from individual ministers, ought to be made. I, therefore, think, and Mr. Boyd thinks with me, that we had better have a meeting on the subject."

The meeting proposed may have been of the old Presbytery of Brockville, which, though practically dead, had not been formally disbanded, and which had been practically *the* Presbytery and *the* Synod. It is not known that any such meeting was held, and it is probable that, upon informal consultation, it was deemed wiser not to re-open a door that would again admit the ministers of "bad reports" to Presbyterian association. As nothing came of it, it is presumed that the same insurmountable obstacles, "bigotry," etc., were still in the way. The organization *de novo* of the

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followed, but the date and place and circumstances have not been ascertained.* The names of ministers and churches were placed on its roll only on application, and without regard to former Presbyterian relations, and thus former rolls were purged of the obnoxious names upon them. The first meeting of this new Presbytery of which note has been found was held June 11th, 1827, but nothing is now known of the business transacted. Tuesday, September 25th, same year, Presbytery met in Mr. Harris' church, York, when Andrew Bell, son of Rev. Wm. Bell, was licensed to preach the gospel. Mr. Smart was not present, and the only ministers known to have been in attendance were Mr. Buchanan, of Beckwith; Mr. William Bell,

* Somewhere in Canada, in books of record, journals, old letters, or documents of some kind, left by some of the pioneer preachers or laymen, the desired information about the organization and early history of this Presbytery must be waiting the patient search of children or grandchildren, in whose possession they now are. The writer earnestly urges that such search be made at once, "all along the line;" and that the result be reported to him.

of Perth; Mr. Jenkins, of Markham; and Mr. Harris. January 23rd, 1828, a meeting was held at Brockville, when Mr. Boyd preached. The ministerial members attending appear to have been Messrs. Boyd, McDowall, W. Bell, Smart and Gemmill, the last named being of Lanark. Rev. Mr. Christmas, then pastor of the American Presbyterian Church, Montreal, was present, as was a Rev. Mr. Ambler, of whom no more is now known. At this meeting, resolutions and a letter from the

"GENERAL COMMITTEE OF PRESBYTERIANS"

in Montreal were considered; resolutions pledging the Presbytery to co-operate with the committee were adopted, and a copy directed to be forwarded to Rev. Mr. Esson, at Montreal, for the committee. This General Committee was organized in 1827 by the two churches in Montreal which were connected with the Church of Scotland, and was composed of Rev. A. Mathieson (Chairman), Rev. J. Somerville, Rev. E. Black, Rev. H. Esson and Rev. A. Gale, with thirty-seven laymen, John Boston, Esq., acting as Secretary. The avowed object was "to unite all Presbyterians in the province in one efficient body." About a month previously they had adopted a series of resolutions asserting the right of Presbyterians to a full share of the proceeds of the Clergy Reserves, and declaring it expedient to send an agent to Great Britain at once; also that "a respectful petition, to be signed as generally as possible by the Presbyterians in Upper and Lower Canada, be presented to the Imperial Parliament" on the subject. A subscription for the purpose of raising funds to defray the necessary expenses was provided for, and a sub-committee was appointed to solicit co-operation and to take any proper action to give effect to the general object of the committee. These resolutions and the proposed petition were sent to all the members of the United Presbytery, with a letter, written by one of the Montreal Committee, "urging the necessity of circulating said petition, and, at the same time, to raise money to send Home an agent to press the claims of Presbyterians in general on the favourable consideration of the Home Government." The United Presbytery officially approved the plan, as before stated, and efforts were made which secured a very large number of signatures to the petition in Upper Canada. These were sent, with money for expenses, to the committee in Montreal, the signatures being on parchment, and the petition *printed on a separate piece of paper*. This petition from Presbyterians connected with the United Presbytery, it was afterwards alleged, was never presented to the Home Government, but the names were added to the petition from the members of the Church of Scotland in Canada, the consequence being that a Royal grant was made to the latter in which the former were not permitted to participate. This result aroused considerable feeling and gave rise to some sharp correspondence between members of the Presbytery and the Montreal Committee. Before the final result of the petition was known suspicions were awakened, as it was alleged by some, through "some secret insidious agency" which was "exerted to sow dissension and discord." Under date of September 8th, 1829, Messrs. William Bell, Smart and Boyd addressed a joint letter to Rev. Mr. Esson, which was replied to, on the 28th of the same month, by Mr. Boston, Secretary, for the Committee. The following sentences are quoted from that reply:

"The unworthy motives ascribed to the Montreal committee are without foundation. Such reports are of course fabricated and circulated from sinister views, by those who are inimical to the interests of the Presbyterian body generally. One thing, however, I am directed to press on your attention—that there is yet no Presbytery nor any authority in the Province to admit you into the established Church of Scotland. Such authority must emanate from the General Assembly, and possibly an act of the Imperial Parliament may be required to extend the power of that body."

From this it would seem that the leading members of the United Synod looked upon the union of effort to obtain a grant from the Imperial Parliament, as the precursor of the long-looked-for organic union with the Church of Scotland. But difficulties, not easily overcome, met them at every turn; they were doomed to disappointment in every direction, and the receipt of government money for all the ministers of the Presbytery, as well as the union through which alone permanent pecuniary relief could be secured, was long deferred. Again the reply of the Montreal Committee says:—

"The report of a different petition or address being substituted for that to which your congregations intended their

signatures to be attached, may probably have arisen from the circumstance that after the petition from this Province [Lower Canada] was engrossed and many signatures procured to it, another was prepared for your Province, [Upper Canada] by the meeting at Cornwall, differing in some respects from ours, but not in any respect contradictory; and possibly many signatures in Upper Canada may have been attached to the petition framed there, though the individuals who signed had never seen the petition to which their names were afterwards attached. The petition from your Province owing to different causes, not necessary and too tedious to be detailed, did not reach our agent until parliament was prorogued."

Wherever the blame, the fact still remained (as stated in a petition by the United Synod to the Governor General, some eight years after,) that the petition circulated by that body was not presented, and the members of the Presbytery did not participate in the Royal grant.

SUBSEQUENT MEETINGS OF PRESBYTERY.

June 3rd or 4th 1828, a meeting appears to have been held, but no account of it has been found. There are many reasons to believe that this was "the meeting at Cornwall" at which the draft of the petition for circulation in Upper Canada was prepared. The change in phraseology was evidently designed to secure the recognition of the Presbytery, and a "share of the spoils," should union not be accomplished. July 15th 1828, Andrew Bell was "ordained for Streetsville," but only the bare fact is known. At Prescott, January 6th 1829, Mr. Robert Lyle preached, preliminary to his ordination. Mr. Wm. Bell, writing about him, said: "He has something odd in his manner, though he had been a preacher fourteen years—and even some strange expressions." January 7th, Presbytery met and transacted the business, particularly in regard to Mr. Lyle's ordination. In the afternoon, the members went to Osnabruck, where Mr. Lyle was ordained the next day. Mr. Wm. Bell "ordained and Mr. Smart addressed the people." Mr. W. Bell gives this further information: "Mr. Boyd afterwards addressed the congregation on the subject of giving the new minister a horse, with a saddle and bridle, which I thought indicate * * * * Mr. ——— [one of the "bad reports" men] had the impudence to attend, though no one invited him. He even laid his hands on the head of the minister at the ordination." June 15th 1829, Presbytery met at Perth. Mention is made of the appointment of Mr. McDowall as a missionary (for a trip through some of the eastern counties), and of an application to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, but no explanations are discovered.

PRINTED MINUTES.

The first printed minutes of Presbytery which have come to light are of a meeting held in the Presbyterian Church in York, commencing Wednesday evening, September 2nd 1829. Among the important business transacted was the organization of an auxiliary missionary society for the home district, and planning for "the establishment of a literary and theological seminary for the education of young men of piety and ability for the Gospel ministry, as soon as circumstances will permit." The ministers whose names appear in the proceedings are Messrs. Smart, Jenkins, Boyd, William Bell, McDowall, Peter Gordon (of Cobourg and Port Hope), Andrew Bell and Harris. Jesse Ketchum, Esq., of York, was elected President of the Missionary Society, with Rev. James Harris as Secretary, Mr. Drummond as Treasurer, three laymen as Vice Presidents, and eight laymen as managers. In the matter of the Seminary, Rev. Messrs. W. Bell, Boyd and Smart were appointed a committee to carry the views of the Presbytery into effect.* On the following day motions were adopted in favour of an amendment of the system of management of the district and common schools, and a committee was appointed to draft a petition to the Legislature on the subject. Mr. Duncan McMillan, a "pious young man of promising abilities," was received as a student for the ministry, his studies to be directed by the Rev. Mr. Harris, of York. The next meeting was appointed to be held at Prescott on the second Monday of January 1830.

The minutes of the session at Prescott were printed but have not been found. Mr. Smart preached from first John, iv. 14.

* Mr. W. Bell made this entry in his journal: "On the way home, at Brockville, September 11th, before we [Bell, Boyd and Smart] parted, we concluded to send a petition to the House of Assembly for land or money to establish a Seminary."