

A little later I had the opportunity, when collecting geological facts for my "Acadian Geology" to visit Mr. Geddie, at his home, and to study in his company some of the red sand stone cliffs of that part of Prince Edward Island, as well as the great sand dunes which stretch along its northern coast. We traversed them for long distances, examining their structure and mode of growth, and inquiring as to their history and changes since the coast was first occupied by settlers. In a figure of one of these dunes in "Acadian Geology" Geddie appears in miniature on the top, as if in the act of preaching to the waves dashing in on the shore.

I had an opportunity at this time of seeing something of his pastoral work, and also of learning the steps he was taking to interest the congregations of Prince Edward Island in Foreign Missions.

He had begun by forming a missionary society in his own congregation, and then urging his brother ministers to take similar steps. At first they contented themselves with collecting small sums for the London Missionary Society; but gradually the idea grew of an independent effort in the cause. This culminated in 1843, in an overture introduced into the Synod by Dr. Keir, the senior member of the Presbytery, to the effect that it was expedient for the Church to maintain a mission of its own abroad.

The Presbytery of Prince Edward Island certainly embraced some of the most earnest and spiritually minded men in the church; but its bold action in the matter of missions was, I have no doubt, due to the initiative of Mr. Geddie, and was greatly in advance of the ideas and information of the other Presbyteries of the Synod. By them the proposal was received but coldly. It was, however, sent to the presbyteries to consider, and report to the Synod of the following year, 1844.

At this meeting, though only one presbytery cordially approved the movement, the Synod agreed, by a small majority, to appoint a Board of Foreign Missions, and to circulate among the congregations copies of a memorial drawn up by Mr. Geddie, and presented to the Synod by the Island Presbytery in support of its movement. It was characteristic of the position of the matter that the Board consisted principally of the members of the Presbytery of Prince Edward Island itself, with a few members from the two other presbyteries.

The Board, however, did not let the matter rest, but proceeded to collect and to circulate information, and to appeal to the congregations for pledges of support; the result being that before the next meeting of the Synod all of the congregations of Prince Edward Island, and twenty of those on the mainland, had promised sufficient contributions to warrant the Board to ask authority to advertise for one missionary and to select and recommend a field of labor.

At this meeting, a few other gentlemen from the mainland, supposed to be favorable to the measure, were added to the Board, and it was among these that I became a member of it,—a position, however, which other engagements and long absences from home prevented me from occupying, except for a few years.

The proposal made in 1843 had been preceded by a number of articles written by Mr. Geddie, and, published in a journal which at that time was the organ of the church. These may have produced some effect on the members generally; but there was still much doubt and uncertainty, and some opposition, arising partly from want of correct information, and partly from a conviction of the inability of the Church to maintain a foreign mission.

This was natural, when it is considered that the whole body represented in the Synod numbered at the utmost only thirty-five congregations, with a little over five thousand members, that most of the congregations were poor, many of them in debt, and some in arrears of their minister's stipends. There were also many still poorer outlying districts which could be provided for only with difficulty. Geddie, however, and those who sympathized with him, urged the duty of doing something to fulfill the great commission to evangelize the world, in faith that our action in this direction would bring greater blessing on ourselves.

The missionary fields open at the time and their various drawbacks and attractions are referred to at length in Dr. Patterson's Life of Geddie, and need not be discussed here. It is sufficient to say that the duty laid upon the Board of Foreign Missions was a difficult and anxious one.

After much correspondence, consultation, and prayer, it was, however, finally decided at a meeting held in Pictou, in September, 1845, to recommend a mission to Western Polynesia, and especially to New Caledonia or the New Hebrides; and this being decided, Mr. Geddie at once offered his services as our first missionary, an offer which was unanimously and cordially accepted.

This decision, however, at once developed a new phase of opposition of a specially unpleasant character. It was now discovered by opponents of the mission, that not only was the whole scheme chimerical, but that Geddie, owing to his delicate frame and his want of any imposing appearance or great popular gifts, was the most unsuitable man in the world. This kind of opposition appeared even in the Synod when the matter came up for discussion.

Geddie took all this in a calm and Christian spirit. He acknowledged that, like an earlier missionary, he might be said to be "in bodily presence weak and in speech contemptible;" and nothing could please him better than to give way to a better man, or that a Barnabas having the necessary qualities and the confidence of every