A Sketch of Baptist History in the County of Digby, N. S., for the Last Fifty Years.

(Read at the Jubilee of Rev. J. C. Morse, Jan. 21, 1891, by Rev. J. H. SAUNDERS.

"Looking backward," in the light of history and Christian experience, and looking forward by the eye of faith and prophesy, are both joyous and profitable exercises of the Christian pilgrim.

The backward look must naturally lead on an occasion like this. To consider all the way in which the Lord has led us is the happy duty of this hour. We are here to bear witness to the fact that a covenant keeping God is our Lord. We meet to day to celebrate, in a fitting way, the jubilee of our venerable and beloved brother's pastorate with this people; an occasion that finds but few parallels in the history of the churches of Christ in these Maritime Provinces, or even in the Christian world. Dear Bro. Morse, we come with sincere Christian greetings to meet you and your dear family and the churches over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseer, to assist you in rearing a memorial of more enduring material than stone, with the inscription "Ebenezer" upon it. To our adorable Saviour we unitedly sing in this hour of holy joy,

"Here we raise our Ebenezer,
Hither by Thine help we've come."

and as we look forward, we sing,

"And we hope by Thy good pleasure,
Safely to arrive at home."

This half century has rolled up to this commemorative day for many of us who saw its first days, more than tongue can express or pen record of trials and triumphs, of joyous light and gloomy darkness, of weariness and watchings and wrestlings in our Christian experiences; and of the waxing and wanings of the cause we love, and as we unroll its history we can also read of running without weariness, of walking without fainting, of seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, of the mighty stepping of the holy One in His sanctuary, when our Zion's spring-time came and the singing of the redeemed was heard in our land. On the scroll of fifty years, too, is written so much of social, secular and religious associations of the highest type. Many of these long since ended by the going before of our loved ones to the better land. Yet how delightfully sweet are the memories we cherish of the times "when our children" and kindred dear "were about us;" how very much of real happiness has association with these holy ones contributed when all else in the past was so disturbing and unsatisfying. Are these departed dear ones looking down upon us to-day? Are they waiting and watching for us over there? We shall know all about it very soon. But we are more especially called upon just now to scan the history of our churches in this county for the last fifty years. And in doing so it will be well for us to preface this sketch with a brief review of earlier times noted in Baptist annals.

DIM FOOTPRINTS

of Baptists are seen in the early history of these Maritime Provinces. As early as 1763, scrappy records are found of their existence and doings. Not, however, till a much later date did they secure a permanent habitation and name in this country. The first associational organization was devised nearly 100 years ago. In 1810 the one association of these three provinces reported nine churches in Nova Scotia, and five in New Brunswick, with 924 members, and 10 ordained ministers. The yearly records from this time forward indicate a continuous advance in orderly church work, and an increase in the membership of the body. This association was divided and the New Brunswick association was formed in 1822.

At the meeting of the Nova Scotia association in Onslow, fifty years ago, 6,398 members were reported. Three hundred and five had been received by baptism in the churches of this province during this associational year.

A careful student of the history of Baptists will learn that revivals of religion are a prominent characteristic of this body. At times it is seen that quite long periods of declension and spiritual darkness intervene. In these dark periods dissentions and divisions are multiplied. The faith of the faithful is tried. The skill and courage of the leaders and laborers in the churches are taxed, tested and cultured. Foundation principles are sought for and built upon. Divine help is appreciated, sought for and found, and when the church touches some high point of fellowship with her risen Lord, and becomes a participant in His power, the revival wave returns and the church rejoices in accessions from the ranks of the unsaved. In addition to multiplied local revivals of religion in which the wonder working Jehovah is present to bless and save, our Baptist churches have enjoyed religious awakenings of a more general character, in which this holy influence has moved and moulded the public sentiment over larger areas. Perhaps the most notable of these events in Nova Scotia, and her sister provinces, are recorded first among the old Newlights or early Baptists in 1806, when very large numbers turned to the Lord. Again in 1828, a revival of religion so extensive and powerful prevailed as to mark a new epoch in Baptist history. Many years had been spent by our fathers in the ministry in laying foundations and in perfecting church organization, all of which was a fitting preparation to revival power. The young converts brought in found suitable church homes already provided for them. This period was famous for the accession of an unusual number of young men, of more than ordinary ability, to the Baptist ministry. The ranks of the fathers enfeebled by long service, were now made stronger than ever before, both intellectually and religiously. The reports of the churches to the association of 1829 showed that there had been added by baptism 358. This was a very large gain, as their entire membership was now only 2,255. In these days the temperance cause, and our educational work, were planted and firmly rooted in our Baptist churches.

Again in 1838, 1841 and 1842 the churches of Nova Scotia enjoyed a general awakening. In 1842, 1,113 baptisms were reported. In 1843 the church records show that 1,201 were baptized. These were days of the right hand of the Most High. The fruitage of these revivals was true to the pentecostal model, and again rich in its increase of our ministry. Strong servants of sin were converted and gave themselves to the ministry of the Word. Among these converts was the Rev. John Chipman Morse, who, in the true apostolic line can say, "When it was the good pleasure of God, who separated me and called me, by His grace to reveal His Son in me that I might preach Him among the people, immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood; neither went I up to Wolfville, to the school of the prophets, but I went away to Digby Neck, where I arrived and preached my first sermon on the 12th day of April, 1841. The text chosen was Rev. 2: 17, "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving him that receiveth it." A text that our venerable brother, after fifty years' study and service, would doubtless now find quite sufficient as a theme for one sermon. The preaching of the young man was acceptable. The old fathers and mothers of the church received him as the called and commissioned of the Lord, as their future pastor. They welcomed him to their homes, they gave him their hearts' best affection, and after much prayerful consideration, a unanimous call to the pastorate. This call was accepted, and the young man with his family came to Digby Neck to *stay*. In due time

THE ORDINATION OF THE REV. JOHN CHIPMAN MORSE

was called for. In the *Christian Messenger* of April 29, 1842, I find this communication, in which we are all interested here to-day:—

Messrs. Editors:—I have just returned from Digby Neck, to which place I was called to assist in the ordination of brother John Chipman Morse, licentiate from the 1st Aylesford church. Bro. M. is a grand-son of the late Thomas Handley Chipman.

The delegates met at the meeting-house of the 1st Baptist church, on the 30th of March, when the candidate preached to very general satisfaction. The church then requested that he might be set over them as their pastor, and with the congregation, who appeared equally interested, promised to afford him such a measure of pecuniary support as should save him from the necessity of entangling himself in the affairs of this life. After which the candidate related his Christian experience, his call to the ministry, and what appeared to him the pointings of Providence in reference to his settlement in that place. The council after prayerful deliberation advised to proceed with the ordination, which took place on the following day, when a very appropriate and deeply impressive sermon was preached by Elder Samuel Bancroft, from 1 Tim. 4 chapter, last verse, "Take heed, etc." Elder C. Randall asked the questions; Elder W. Jackson offered the ordaining prayer; Elder H. Saunders gave the charge; Elder S. Bancroft gave the right hand of fellowship, and Elder C. Randall made the concluding prayer. Nearly the whole inhabitants of the place were present on the occasion, and the exercises were very solemn.

The churches of Digby Neck have suffered much for want of ministerial help since the death of their late esteemed pastor, Elder Peter Crandall, to whose memory they are about erecting a tombstone. A good degree of union now prevails among them, and there are favorable appearances of a revival of religion. Some have already professed faith in Christ, and it is expected will soon be baptized. We trust that the labors of our young brother may be abundantly useful in that portion of the Lord's vineyard.

Yours respectfully,
CHARLES RANDALL.

Weymouth, April 1, 1842.

P. S.—The revival is still going forward in this place. I have baptized 32 persons since I last wrote, and there are others that will soon come forward. Bro. Morse has baptized eight persons since his ordination. C. R.

THE BAPTIST MINISTRY OF DIGBY COUNTY.

The ministry must have a prominent place in the history of any church, as it ever has a foremost place in all its activities and experiences. It is fitting on this occasion to mention, though briefly, the Baptist ministry of the county. The conviction that this is a staff of men appointed by Jehovah Himself, to do His own appointed work, in His own appointed way in Digby Co., in the times appointed by the Father before the worlds were, will vastly magnify the smallest incidents of their lives and labors, and intensify our appreciation of their services.

To begin with the churches of Digby Neck; but few can boast of pastorates of so great proportions. Remarkable are they indeed for their *length*, and quite as noted for their *breadth* and *depth*. Peter Crandall and J. C. Morse have here served since 1809.

One hundred years ago the Baptist name was quite unknown in this county. The first to bear the Baptist standard in this fair township was the late Enoch Towner. His first services here were in 1797. This visit was also his first itinerancy in the ministry. Under the labors of Fathers James Manning and Joseph Dimock, in the county of Annapolis, he had recently been converted. Impelled by his new born love he began immediately to preach the gospel to the dark and destitute ones, then so numerous in this province. Though quite advanced in life ere he was rescued from the services of sin, and with but few opportunities for mental culture, he yet had an endowment of qualifications, physical, mental and moral, which, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, made him a very efficient minister of the gospel for the people to whom he was sent. Thus qualified and exercised in spirit, he came to the township of Digby preaching Jesus, and his preaching was in demonstration of the Spirit and with power.

It is not in our power in this day fully to realize the religious condition of this county as it was in 1797, when Father Towner first missioned it. "Probably there was not a Baptist in it." There was not a place of worship except a few owned and occupied by the Episcopalians and Roman Catholics. The population was small, poor and scattered. As he preached the gospel from house to house and held religious services in private dwellings, many persons were solemnly impressed and converted. The strange preacher was everywhere greeted with obloquy and defamation from the enemies of the truth, his preaching was misrepresented, his motives and his character were calumniated. His converts were also made to share in his persecutions and ill-repute; yet the work of the Lord prospered. Souls were won to the Saviour in large numbers, as he went from settlement to settlement.

In 1799, Elder Towner, accompanied by seven brethren from this county, (John Roop, of Digby, Benjamin Sabean, David Shook, and Willoughby Sabean, of Sissiboo, and Peter Harris, Morris Peters, and Martin Blackford, of Digby Neck), proceeded to Granville, and were formally organized into a Baptist church. A meeting of the fathers to consider the propriety of organizing an association of the churches already formed was being held at this time in Granville; and here Enoch Towner was ordained as pastor of the Sissaboo church, consisting of the seven brethren already named, and having the whole county as its territory. At this time an attempt was even made to deny to the Baptist ministers of this province the civil privileges of clergymen. On the 14th of June, 1800, Elder Towner united in marriage Jacob Cornwall and Sarah Titus, (whose descendants are here to-day). For daring to perform this rite of matrimony Mr. Towner was prosecuted at the instigation of the rector of Digby. At great expense and labor he was obliged to appear before the court in Halifax. Nova Scotia could not at this time boast of even one lawyer of the Baptist faith. Episcopacy monopolized all public offices, and threw the thirty-nine articles around the only college in the province. Father Towner, however, by the help of friends, was able to secure the services of an attorney who was true to his client and the cause of equal civil privileges for all religious bodies. A verdict adverse to the prosecution was secured. We as Baptist ministers have ever since had the privilege of performing the rite of marriage, and the prospects are that we shall still enjoy this service.

For seven years Mr. Towner labored with this church. His circuit extended over the whole township—some fifty miles in extent. His faithful people came from the most distant points to attend the conferences of the church at Weymouth. Four miles now is considered a greater distance than forty was then to travel for such purposes. To fill their places in the house of the Lord was the purpose and the joy of these early saints of Digby County.

In 1806, Father Towner visited Argyle, in Yarmouth Co.—a great revival was the result. His acceptance of this pastorate left the County of Digby destitute of all ministerial labor in connection with the Baptists. After a ten years' pastorate in Argyle he returned to Weymouth and served this church for nine years. A three years' pastorate at Westport closed his services on earth. He died in June, 1828.

ELDER PETER CRANDALL

was the successor of Elder Towner in the pastorate of the Sissaboo church. His public ministry commenced in this province in A. D. 1800, when he was thirty years of age. In 1809, he made his first visit to the township of Digby, where for nearly thirty years he preached the gospel, and shepherded the flocks of the elect. His messages of mercy were attended with the Spirit's power, and an extensive revival of religion was then enjoyed. About seventy converts were baptized at Westport and Freeport.

Father Crandall was the first Baptist minister that ever proclaimed the gospel in the town of Digby, shortly after his settlement on Digby Neck. This he had to do in the face of strong opposition. The Baptists were the sect everywhere spoken against in these times. It was not easy to find a place in which to preach, so strong were the prejudices of the people against him. At length Mrs. McDormand, a widow, friendly to religion, opened her house, and invited him to preach therein. But he was not allowed to proceed with religious services undisturbed. A riotous mob surrounded the premises, stoned the house, and threatened the preacher with violence. Andrew Snodgrass, a worthy magistrate of the town, dispersed the rioters, so that Mr. Crandall finished his religious services without further molestation. What may be regarded as approaching a coincidence is the fact that the Baptist church of Digby now own the homestead lot of this same Mr. Snodgrass, and on it stands their beautiful new church building, and their parsonage is hard by where this worthy gentleman resided. This circumstance is a pleasing fulfilment of the promise, "If any man serve me, him will my Father honor."

AN ACCOUNT OF PETER CRANDALL'S FIRST VISIT TO WESTPORT, 1809.

In the extract of a letter from the Rev. David Merril of Maine to the American *Baptist Magazine* in August, 1810, we learn what were the conditions of Father Crandall's services in Westport, the extreme western end of his field of labor. Mr. Merril writes: "Last autumn or winter Bro. Peter Crandall visited Briar Island and preached to as many of the shy islanders as he could collect within hearing of his voice. He was threatened with death if he ventured to preach on this island again. However he loved their salvation more than he feared their threatenings; he ventured; the people collected. He spoke and the Lord spoke too. At a late hour the assembly was dismissed. He retired, but ere soft sleep had closed his eyes a messenger requested he would visit a house distressed. Without gainsaying, he arose and followed him. Whilst on his way, in the first house he passed he discovered a light; it came into his mind to call and see how they did. He found them an household distressed for sins committed and salvation infinitely needed. He saw their anguish, manifestly such as all must feel or die forever; and observing their exercises such as he judged not expedient to be interrupted, retired in silence. The next house he found and left in a similar condition. Going a little further he heard a person in the field manifesting by his sighs and groans bitterness of spirit. Mr. Crandall turned aside and in silent wonder beheld, and left the sin sick man. He was soon at the house whence they had sent for him. Here he found a company sorely oppressed with their load of sin, burdened by it, and longing to be free. Here he broke silence and pointed dying sinners to a loving Saviour. On this never-to-be-forgotten island, in sixteen of the eighteen families which reside on it, were thirty-three hopefully born from above." This revival reached the main, and nearly a hundred were baptized. These sketches will indicate the spiritual condition of the people from Digby to Westport at the beginning of Father Crandall's pastorate.

The Digby Neck church was separated from the Sissaboo church, Dec. 5, 1809. The ministry of Father Crandall continued for a period of 29 years; when, on April 2nd, 1838, he died in the triumphs of faith. There were revivals quite frequently in connection with his labors; 1812, '18 and '31 were memorable occasions because of the abundant outpouring of the Spirit. In 1836 the 2nd Digby Neck church was organized. During Father Crandall's last illness and the interim between his death and the settlement of Bro. Morse, this church was supplied by the services of Rev. H. Saunders and others who occasionally visited them. Great changes came over this county during the ministry of these servants of Jehovah. The Lord wrought wondrously by them. They suffered much toil and anxiety, and their lives were rich in enjoyment. As wise master-builders they laid the foundation, and we their successors have since been rearing upon it a super-structure to the glory of God and the best interests of this county.

As we have before recorded, the Rev. J. C. Morse, the successor of Rev. Peter Crandall in the pastorate of these churches of Digby Neck, commenced his labors here fifty years ago, and having obtained help of God, he continues unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come; how that the Christ must suffer, and how that He first by the resurrection of the dead should proclaim light, both to the people and to the Gentiles. The second pastorate of these churches is not yet ended, though the end is not far distant. As there was light on the end of the first, so will there be light at the end of the second pastorate.

A LIST OF BRO. MORSE'S CONTEMPORARIES

in the Baptist pastorates of Digby county forms an interesting chapter in this review. The settled pastors in 1841 were the Rev. H. Saunders, at Hillsburg; Rev. C. Randall, at Weymouth—his pastorate extending from Hillgrove to New Tusket, a distance of 30 miles—this continued for some 45 years. Rev. W. Jackson at Westport, and the Rev. Samuel Bancroft then missionary at Digby. The successors of these Fathers in the ministry make quite a long list.

The Weymouth church has been served by Revs. J. W. Bancroft, W. Spencer, J. A. Stubbert, Licentiates Palmer and Whitman, and the present pastor, Rev. J. Rowe.

The New Tusket church, by Revs. J. D. Skinner, A. J. Cogswell, W. Spencer and now by J. Rowe.

The St. Mary's Bay church, by Revs. L. B. Gates, A. Cogswell, W. L. Parker, G. H. Goudy, A. L. Powell, P. R. Foster and the present pastor, W. A. J. Bleakney.

The Hillgrove church, by Revs. R. W. Cunningham, A. H. Munro, L. B. Gates, James Spencer, J. M. Parker, W. L. Parker, W. A. J. Bleakney.

The 2nd Hillsburgh church, Revs. J. B. Cogswell, R. W. Cunningham, O. Parker, J. A. Moore, Jas. Spencer, J. F. Tooker. A. Martell, Jos. Jones, A. Cogswell, J. H. Saunders, L. B. Gates, W. L. Parker, J. L. Read.

1st Hillsburgh church, Revs. J. B. Cogswell, O. Parker, J. A. Moore, A. Martell, G. D. Cox, J. H. Robbins, J. A. McLane, W. E. Hall, J. L. M. Young and D. F. Simpson.

Digby church, Revs. R. W. Cunningham. A. H. Munro, Jas. Spencer, J. F. Tooker, A. Martell, Jos. Jones, D. W. Crandall, J. M. Parker, J. H. Saunders, J. S. Brown, W. H. Richan.

Freeport and Tiverton churches, Revs. P. F. Murray, J. E. Balcom, A. Achilles, W. Hall, J. A. Moore, J. H. Hughes, W. L. Parker, L. M. Weeks, J. F. Kempton, R. H. Bishop, G. H. Goudy, and J. W. Tingley. This church was organized in 1835.

Westport church. This church was organized in 1828, Rev. Samuel Bancroft was the first pastor. Previous to this fathers Crandall and Turner had labored here. Rev. W. Jackson commenced his pastorate in 1836. His successors in the pastorate were Revs. P. F. Murray, W. H. Coldwell, John Miller, S. Richardson, J. A. Moore, J. H. Hughes, W. Rideout, L. B. Gates, A. E. Ingram, S. McC. Black, J. H. Saunders and C. C. Burgess.

The Acadian French Mission church was served by Rev. M. Normandy.

By this list it is seen that Bro. Morse has been associated with some sixty brother ministers in the pastorate of this municipality during his one pastorate; and his prospects are now favorable to his continuing his present relations to his people, when his present coadjutors have left for other charges.

THEN AND NOW.

In 1799 the first Baptist church of this county was organized, with *seven* members. The church rolls of the twelve churches occupying the same territory now show a membership of 2,270 members. In their first days they worshipped in a few private dwellings. Of the 40 houses of worship now in this district, the Baptists own 25 of them; and among these are found the largest and best appointed.

In the beginning of this century the Baptists had but one minister. To-day they have as many as all of the other religious bodies put together, and in nothing, as able ministers of the New Testament, are they inferior to their fellow pastors.

The influential position held by Baptists in the commonwealth is seen in the large majority of municipal councillors of this faith from time to time elected by the people. In official and professional circles they now occupy honorable places, where in their earlier days they were unknown.

THE CAUSE OF THIS SUCCESS

is not far to seek. The Baptists have cultured righteous principles and builded upon them. They have labored for the best interests of the commonwealth. And this labor has best been done along the line of their own church work.

So it is they have always been found foremost in the temperance cause, as well as in all the educational enterprises of the day. In the realm of higher education they have by their denominational policy settled this question for this province, and set an example that others are now following with advantage.

The spirit of missions into which a true Baptist is born when "born from above," is no small factor of their success. This spirit has grown with their growth, and in these churches was never so strong as now, as their recent benevolent contributions testify. Loyalty to Christ and obedience to His commands, with love and good-will to all peoples, has kept them steadily at their appointed work, and these principles have gained in power in our churches with the increase of their intelligence.

"Men come and go, but the church lives and God's work will go on. Christ is in the world, ever present with His people, and all power is in His hands. Oh! for a place—any place which the Master may assign—in the harvest field! Our work seems poor and our efforts mean. We shall soon drop out of sight, but the work will go on."

"Whereunto we have already attained, by that same rule let us walk."

Christian Union.

Christian union is of two kinds: union with Christ, and union with one another: out of which arise communion with both.

1. *Union with Christ.* Christ is God-man, and the assumption of human nature by the second Person in the Trinity and what was accomplished by Him as Mediator, provided a way for a union to be formed between Him and the church. The one was a preparation for the other. The church is His body, He is the soul. The regeneration by the Holy Spirit makes this union real, "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles." Thus there is a real, spiritual indissoluble union between God and His people. Faith is the bond of this union.

2. *Union with one another.* This latter is as real as the former. I am the Vine, ye are the branches; and the Holy Spirit is the sap permeating the whole. Things that are united to the same thing, are united to one another; therefore in solving the problem of Christian union it does not so much require a basis of union as the recognition of the one that already exists. If this were done, the doctrinal differences, methinks, would not be much of a barrier to organic union. There is a real union between all Christians, whether in heaven or on earth.

One army of the living God,
To His command we bow,
Part of the host has crossed the flood,
And part is crossing now.

There is one body and one Spirit; even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, through all, and in you all. We are members of His body, and of His flesh and of His bones. If Christians had always kept the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace, and the ordinances as the Lord delivered them, there probably never would have been separation, and so always union.

This spiritual union, I believe, still exists. Sight says: We are separated; faith says: We are one—one body, and that body is the Church of Christ. His prayer is, "that they all may be one." What follows? That the *world* may believe that the Father sent Him. Not probable that that union has reference to heaven, but earth; for it is that the *world* may believe He was sent. If a want of this prevents the world from believing in Christ, union is very much to be desired. It is as well to recognize this union one time as another; therefore let us have piety enough to agree to differ till we can agree and not differ. Error exists somewhere; it is not in the Bible. May we have Christian charity enough to discuss our doctrinal differences in a way to ascertain where the truth lies. Let us not forget that he who is conquered by truth is conqueror in the end, that error enslaves the mind, and that the prejudices of education prevent us from beholding the truth. The primitive Christians recognized the existence of union among all believers by saying, "When we aid our brethren, we aid ourselves." "I command you that ye love one another." They that dwell in love, dwell in God, and God dwells in them. What a powerful underlying principle is here. If it was the actuating power that governed all Christians how it would recommend the religion of Jesus; and how soon the world would believe the Divinity of that religion, we cannot guess.

Love is the golden chain that binds
The happy hosts above,
And he's an heir of heaven who finds
His bosom glow with love.

But while we thus advocate the recognition of the fact that we are one as Christians, and insist upon our practice being in accordance with this principle, we do not ignore another fact that may be of nearly, if not equal importance, viz., that this union ought to be founded on the belief, reception and practice of all the truth of Divine revelation. I want to say here, that love of, and adherence to truth, should not be termed bigotry. The love of truth should go hand in hand with the love of the brethren. The truth is what makes free, the truth is what sanctifies. The belief of falsehood ruined our parents in Eden and their posterity, and continues to hold millions in spiritual bondage. God's truth is the antidote, and in proportion as we cordially receive and practice it, we are made free, and *vice versa*. Preaching Calvinism may make Calvinists; preaching Arminianism may make Arminians; preaching Christ and His unadulterated truth makes Christians. How necessary that the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, be believed and practiced, and that in the love of it and all the brethren.

W. MCGREGOR.

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