

Pastor and People.

Written for THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN

WELCOME TO A PASTOR

BY GEORGE W. ARMSTRONG.

Servant of Christ we welcome thee,
Ambassador of heaven above;
Bearer of messages of peace,
Of faith and hope and purest love.

Thy glory be the cross of Christ,
Sign to a lost and ruined race,
That God's redemption deep and vast
Bestows on men rich, sovereign grace.

Exalting Christ thy chief employ,
Man's pattern and his sacrifice;
Walk in the paths His feet have trod,
Struggling 'gainst sin, and wrong, and vice.

His works and teachings imitate;
Speak words of truth and soberness;
Stand strong in God, nor fear to fight
For purity and righteousness.

Thus shall thy ministry of grace,
Be crowned with honour and success;
And men shall be reclaimed from sin
And the great name of Christ confess
London.

Written for THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN

THE LATE REV. THOS. ALEXANDER, M.A.

BY THE REV. WM. COCHRANE, D.D.

It was with feelings of relief and thankfulness that we recently heard of the removal of this aged servant of God to another and a better world. For more than a year past he had been in a state of great helplessness. He had reached his ninety-first year. His powers both of body and mind had failed, and he needed to be waited on and cared for even as a little child. He had no relatives of his own to minister to him in his old age; and the services which he required were received from the hands of strangers. One could not help wondering that the old veteran, disabled and broken by his long warfare, should be kept waiting so long outside, before getting admittance to the palace of the King. He seemed like one whom the Master had overlooked and quite forgotten to call. But at last the call came.

Mr. Alexander has, for not a few years, been the Father of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. No one in our Church, perhaps no one in any Protestant Church in the Dominion at this time, had been so long in the office of the ministry. It seems only fair that more than a mere passing notice should be taken of his life and work.

He was born in Aberdeen, Scotland, on August 23rd, 1805. After attending the grammar school there, he (when only fourteen years of age) obtained by competition a bursary or scholarship at Marischal College; and passed through the arts' course, graduating as M.A. in 1824. He attended the divinity classes, also, at Aberdeen; and was licensed to preach the gospel by the Dundee Presbytery on 15th December, 1830. His death occurred on 19th December last; so that for over sixty-five years he had been a minister of the Presbyterian Church. It is interesting to see the Licence granted to him by the Church. It is written on stamped paper; and beneath the crown has the inscription "Two Pounds"; so that a fee, equal to ten dollars, seems to have been then exacted by the Government, before allowing a candidate to enter on the work of preaching the gospel in the Established Church of Scotland. Mr. Alexander preached his first sermon at Monteth on December 26th, 1830, on the theme of which for sixty years he never wearied. "Jesus Christ and Him Crucified."

After preaching, as occasion offered, for over three years without prospect of settlement (these were the days of patronage), Mr. Alexander offered his services to the Colonial Committee, and was appointed as a missionary to Upper Canada. He was married to Miss Soutar, of Perth, on 17th

July, 1834; and, four days after, the young couple sailed from Dundee, reaching Montreal in September.

The congregation at Cobourg was then vacant. The Cobourg people, hearing of Mr. Alexander's arrival, invited him to give them supply. Mr. and Mrs. Alexander on their way up had a narrow escape from drowning in the Bay of Quinte in which Mr. Miller had perished a few months before.

A call was very soon extended by the Cobourg congregation to Mr. Alexander to become their pastor. The document is also among the papers he has left behind, and bears date 5th December, 1834. It is worthy of note that among the subscribers not even one woman's name is to be found. Men, to the number of sixty-three, and men only, seem to have been allowed to sign the call. To those acquainted with the past history of the district, it is interesting to read the names of men whose grandchildren and great grandchildren are now full grown men and women, and scattered far and wide. Beside the names of Jeffrey, Burnet, Pringle, McCallum, etc., it is touching to see the name of "Walter Riddell," who yet survives, and is, we believe, an honoured elder in the church of Cobourg still.

Mr. Alexander, after his settlement, labored with untiring energy, preaching and visiting not only in Cobourg, but in the whole country around. Stations formed by him afterwards developed into flourishing congregations. At first, we believe, that he and that devout man of God, the Rev. Mr. Roger, of Peterborough, were the only Presbyterian ministers between Kingston and Toronto. The Rev. W. Reid—now the venerated Clerk of Assembly—was settled in Grafton in 1838; and for over eight years was Mr. Alexander's nearest ministerial neighbor. They were much attached to each other, and were often associated in long and sometimes perilous journeys, while carrying on their ministerial and missionary work. It was very delightful forty or fifty years after to hear those who had been pioneers in the service of the Church, and who had grown grey in that service, tell of their early experiences and adventures. Mr. Alexander had much to tell, not only of himself and his early neighbors in Canada, but of men whose praise is in all the churches, and has spread over all the world.

All who knew Mr. Alexander testify to his earnest evangelical spirit, and his faithful discharge of all the duties of the ministry. He was a very popular and effective preacher. He prepared his sermons with great care, and delivered them in a ringing voice, and with great animation. He was not troubled with the nervousness which so fetters and obscures the powers of many; and was always able to "put his best foot foremost." He was endowed with a remarkably healthy and vigorous constitution. No amount of labor could suppress his abounding vitality. Even after long protracted and exhausting labors and journeyings, such was the recuperative force within him that he was easily and soon refreshed. We never heard him complain of feeling "Mondayish" after the Sabbath's work. When he was nearly seventy years of age we have heard him say, that, except for an occasional passing headache, he had never, in his own person, known what sickness was; or spent a day in bed, on that account, all his life. Even at that time he would leap from his buggy to the ground, without touching the step, with a bound as nimble and elastic as that of a boy at school. He thought nothing of riding on horseback twenty miles to a soiree or missionary meeting, and back again the same way next morning. Endowed with such mental and physical powers, and possessed of an eager desire to do all the good in his power, one can easily understand how unsparing of himself he would be in the early days of his ministry. One who had been engaged as a servant in his house, still remembers vividly how Mr. Alexander and Mr. Reid would often return from their long journeys on horseback over

the shocking roads, with top-boots and great coats all splashed with mud; which it was her painful duty afterwards to remove. It should be specially noted that in these early days—and, indeed, all through his ministry—Mr. Alexander gave unusual attention to the instruction of the young. His Bible-classes are still remembered gratefully in every place where he labored; and his lively manner and buoyant spirit combined with his earnest fervour to give him a wonderful influence over the young people in his charge.

After thirteen years of faithful labor in Cobourg, Mr. Alexander, with his wife and family of three sons, returned to Scotland. There he spent the next ten years of his life preaching in various congregations of the Free Church; especially in Towie and Leochel-Cushnie, in Aberdeenshire, where he was settled for seven years.

He returned to Canada in 1857, and was soon called to Percy and Campbellford; where he continued as actively as ever, making full proof of his ministry, till 1872. Indeed, many of the younger ministers, who were then his neighbors, felt themselves outstripped and rebuked by his active diligence and insensibility to fatigue. He was then, as all through his life, fond of a good horse, and an admirable driver. The sight of the old man with his white hair, his keen eye, and jubilant expression, sitting, as erect as a soldier, on his high seated buggy, and holding in, with tight rein, his fiery horse as it rattled along, formed a picture which still stands out vividly in the memory of those who knew him; and often reminded us of the description which dear John Brown gives of his father, in the inimitable sketch attached to the memoir by Dr. Cairns. While in Percy, Mrs. Alexander met with two severe and painful accidents; by being thrown from her carriage while out driving. She was nursed with most tender and chivalrous devotion by her husband; and though she lost the sight of one eye, and was never able to move about as freely as before, she regained for several years a fair measure of health and strength.

In 1872, Mr. Alexander was called to Mount Pleasant, in the Presbytery of Paris, where, until his final retirement from the active duties of the ministry in 1884, he laboured with all the vigor and earnestness of earlier days. It was just such a charge as suited him in many ways: not large but at the same time sufficient to tax his energies, and among a people simple in their tastes, who valued plain gospel preaching and showed much sympathy for him in his unwearied efforts to promote their spiritual good. The place was also only five miles distant from Brantford, and frequent visits to the larger place served to relieve the routine and quietness of country or village life. He was anything but a recluse, and loved Christian society, nor was he averse to a hearty laugh in the company of friends, when they met to call up memories of old times, in Scotland or Western Canada. Indeed, until a year ago or so, when he began to lose all interest in the outside world, he was one of the most cheerful, sunshiny Christians that could be found. He never murmured at his lot or complained of the dealings of God's providence. The burden of four score years and ten sat lightly upon him and he never seemed to realise that he was growing old or unequal to perform labour that appalled young men.

To the pastoral care of his congregation at Mount Pleasant, there was added the long and severe illness of Mrs. Alexander, who from the time of his settlement there until her death, was almost wholly confined to her room or bed. His fond attention to her was very marked, and nothing that affection could provide was withheld. After her death he had erected over her remains a neat marble monument, with date and place of her birth and death. There his remains also now lie, side by side with her, who was the sharer of his joys and sorrows for over half a century, awaiting the same

glorious resurrection. The stone now has added to it another name—their reunion is complete.

While pastor at Mount Pleasant, Mr. Alexander had another church erected at Bishopgate, Burford, where a few of his congregation resided. The distance to Mount Pleasant he felt was too great, and so he preferred to go to them, Sabbath after Sabbath, although his separate charge and a travel of sixteen miles every Lord's day, added considerably to his labors. Whether this was a wise step was to many of his friends and co-Presbyters a question which there was room for difference of opinion. But he was so determined and sanguine of results that the Presbytery assented to his proposal, and it is only fair to say that the little band of Presbyterians that he drew around him have proved their attachment to our Church.

In 1884, when he had reached the age of eighty-three, he realized that his day of constant work was done, and after resigning his charge, and boarding for a time at Mount Pleasant, he removed to Brantford. His last days were spent happily there among old and new found friends, for as he had little else to do, he gave a good deal of time to visiting in homes, where he was always welcome. No figure on the streets of Brantford was more familiar than his to old and young, by all of whom he was respected and revered. After resigning his charge at Mount Pleasant he made another visit of three months to Scotland, and for a time entertained the idea of remaining in his native land. But finally he determined to spend his last days in Canada where he had so many friends.

In Brantford he was a regular attendant at Zion Church, and at sacramental seasons took part with the pastor in the solemn ordinance, but latterly he could do nothing more than pronounce the benediction. His mind gradually weakened, and not unfrequently at religious meetings, when he felt wearied, and did not, perhaps, comprehend fully the nature of the business, he would stand up and bluntly tell the presiding chairman or speaker that "it was time to go home." He was greatly delighted to meet with the General Assembly in 1893, and see once more such old and tried friends as Dr. Reid. It carried him back fifty years, when he was an interested and by no means silent member of Church courts, and held his own views and opinions firmly against all comers.

For the past two years he was hardly out of his home, or, indeed, his room. If he ventured farther alone he was apt to lose his way, and liable to accident. He lived almost wholly in the past, the little consciousness that remained being of people he had known in early days. At times he spoke of his wife and mother, not realizing that they were dead. He was going after them to Toronto, or somewhere else, to bring them to Brantford. Even the Saviour whom he had loved and served so long became an indistinct person. On a kind lady friend speaking to him a few weeks before his death of the wonderful love that the Lord Jesus Christ had for him, and of the assurance that He would never leave him, he replied: "That must be a very fine person that you speak about; I would like much to make his acquaintance." Up to the last he was ministered to by loving hands, and his every want supplied. The help given by the Aged and Infirm Minister's Fund and timely gifts of friends in Brantford and elsewhere, enabled those interested in his welfare, to provide for his increasing necessities and helplessness. Finally, on the morning of the 19th December he peacefully slept away, to possess again the intelligence and consciousness that had been lost to him for so many months, and begin the higher studies and praise of the heavenly world.

On the Saturday following, his remains were taken from Brantford to Mount Pleasant, the services at the house and grave being conducted by Dr. Cochrane. Three members of Zion Church, Brantford, and three from Mount Pleasant congregation acted as pall bearers. Within sight of the church where his voice was heard for so many years, and surrounded by graves at whose mouths he stood speaking words of comfort to mourners, all that is mortal of this aged man of God now rests until the sound of the trumpet, when he shall be clothed with immortality.

* For the portion of this sketch relating to Mr. Alexander's earlier ministry in Cobourg and the surrounding district Dr. Cochrane desires to acknowledge his indebtedness to Rev. Wm. McWilliam, LL.B.