

RECOLLECTIONS OF DR. GEDDIE AND THE EARLY HISTORY OF HIS MISSION.

BY SIR WILLIAM DAWSON.

On the 30th of November, 1896, it is fifty years since Mr. and Mrs. Geddie sailed from Halifax, on their adventurous voyage, as the first foreign missionaries of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. It is true the jubilee of the Mission was celebrated in Nova Scotia, two years ago; but that was based on the first action of the Synod of Nova Scotia in the matter in 1844. The few survivors of those actively concerned in the initiation of the work are more disposed to think of the day when they bade good-bye to their dear friends, scarce hoping to see them again in this life.

Geddie, though five years my senior, was a friend and fellow-student in the old Pictou Academy, then under the able management of the late Dr. Thomas McCulloch, a man whose services to the cause of education were beyond all praise, and bear good fruit to this day.

Geddie was of small stature and slender frame, but wiry and active, with sharply defined features, dark, expressive eyes, and an eager earnest expression,—a boy that any thoughtful person who saw him for the first time would be sure to look twice at. He was diligent and careful and of a kindly disposition, but not brilliant; and his most prominent gift in the eyes of his young friends was that of constructiveness, in the making of ingenious toys and the building of play-houses. To those of us who were younger it was a pleasure to be introduced to a tiny house he had constructed, and which was fitted up with ingenious contrivances in its furniture, and was adorned with many prints, drawings and curiosities.

Neither he nor I gave much time to the sports of our companions. He delighted to employ his leisure in working out mechanical devices, and I in exploring the shores and woods for specimens of natural history, in which, however, he also took an interest, which was in so far a bond of union.

Geddie came of a Godly stock. Both his father and mother were not only earnest Christians but spiritually minded and wide in their sympathies. John Geddie, senior, had in Scotland been a member of the Independent or Congregational Church, though in Pictou, where that body had no congregation, he connected himself with the Presbyterian Church, and was for many years an elder, in which capacity his gift in prayer, both in the homes of the sick and sorrowing and in the weekly prayer-meeting, was conspicuous.

In Scotland, he had been interested in Foreign Missions, especially those of the London Missionary Society, and in Nova Scotia, he continued to read missionary literature and to keep himself informed on the subject.

Young Geddie was thus trained in a missionary atmosphere, and accustomed to look with admiration on the heroes of missionary enterprise. Under these influences also he became early impressed with religious convictions, and made a profession of faith at the age of nineteen.

Not long after, he entered the Seminary of the Presbyterian Church, then recently established, and which at that time had to contend against a prevalent prejudice which regarded the home manufacture of a Christian ministry as an unwise innovation. Even as a theological student Geddie was fired with zeal for Foreign Mission work, and seems to have been the originator of a missionary prayer meeting among his fellow-students.

When, in 1837, he was licensed as a preacher, he would gladly have gone to the foreign field; but there was no opening in connection with his own Church, and he disliked the idea of serving under other bodies or missionary societies abroad. In the meantime, therefore, he accepted a call to the congregation of "Cavendish and New London" in Prince Edward Island.

This high-sounding name represented a stretch of fine agricultural country extending for about thirty miles along the north coast of that Province, and inhabited by a somewhat homogeneous population of intelligent and well-to-do Presbyterians of English origin. He was inducted there as minister in 1838.

In the following year he married Charlotte, daughter of the late Dr. Alexander McDonald, of Antigonish, in Eastern Nova Scotia. He had, I believe, made her acquaintance when resident there some time previously as teacher. Belonging to one of the best families in the county, she had the graces of a fine personal appearance and good manner, and was known in her social circle as a woman of eminent piety and zealous in every good work. She was content to bury herself in the quiet duties of a country manse, or go afar off to the heathen, as the Lord might indicate; and I have been informed that before their engagement this was understood to be her determination.

I had the pleasure of accompanying Mr. Geddie to Antigonish to claim his bride, and felt that he had secured a helpmeet for any good or great work. It proved so in the sequel, and I doubt whether, without her advice and encouragement, her husband could have succeeded as he did in the great object of his life. In many difficult and dangerous positions she proved herself a woman of resource, judgment and courage, and was most devoted and untiring in her exertions for the benefit of the barbarous people among whom they labored long, and especially of their women children. At the time of her marriage, however, the immediate prospect was she should occupy the quiet position of minister's wife in New London.