

A CENTURY OF METHODISM

ALTHOUGH there were five Methodist Missions established in Nfld. prior to 1815, it was not till that year that St. John's was entered by the British Conference, on the list of Missions which then formed the Methodist District of Newfoundland. The Conference had requested in 1814 that "special attention" should be paid to St. John's, but though the few laymen resident there had done their best, as investigation now shows, the year was lost in negotiating matters (first) with the Conference about a Minister, and (second) with the British Government about a grant of land for a church. In 1815 Rev. James Hickson was selected and appointed to come to St. John's, and his brother, Rev. Thomas Hickson, to Bonavista. But passages were often very tedious in those days, and as the two missing Missionaries did not arrive when expected, the Rev. John Pickavant, of Port de Grave, was ordered by his Chairman to proceed to St. John's at once instead. This he did he tells us in October, 1815. The missing Missionaries on arrival later were sent to Bonavista and Blackhead.

Greatly encouraged by Mr. Pickavant's presence, the little band of Methodists set heartily to work, but soon had to face another set back. Their neat little wooden chapel which they had built on the site now occupied by Gower Street Church, was lost in the fire of Feb. 12, 1816, before it was quite completed. This fire was most disastrous for the whole city, and so it was a poor time for a small and struggling congregation to think of rebuilding. However, help came. The Rev. David Rowland, M.A., then Rector of the Cathedral Parish of St. John's, very generously offered the homeless congregation the free use of the Parish School for worship until they should be able to rebuild. The offer was most gratefully accepted. This building in which Methodism began, was afterwards known as the

"Penny-a-Week School," and stood until the fire of 1892 on part of the site now occupied by the Bp. Spencer College. This very useful school had been started some years before by several philanthropic merchants* of those bygone days, who supported and managed it for many years afterwards until it passed into the hands of the C.C.C.S.

In the summer of 1816 Mr. Pickavant went to England to collect funds to rebuild the chapel. He was assisted in this by Rev. George Smith (see his portrait amongst our pioneer worthies) who was then settled in England after his labours in this Colony. Their appeal met with the noble response of £2017.5.7 stg. Part of this sum was given to help the Carbonar Methodists who had accidentally lost their church in a fire about that time.

Immediately on Mr. Pickavant's return to St. John's work began on the new church. The foundation was laid in Sept., 1816. After prayer by Rev. Sampson Busby, Rev. Mr. Ellis, Chairman of the District, laid the stone. Mr. Cubitt preached, and Messrs. Ellis and Pickavant concluded the religious exercises. Governor, Vice-Admiral Pickmore, was present as a spectator, along with his private secretary. He was then quite a stranger to the place and people, for he had only arrived on the Saturday previous to that day—Wednesday. This Chapel was completed and opened by Rev. Mr. Cubitt on Christmas Day, 1816.

This very plain unpretentious building escaped the fires of '17 and '46, and remained in full use from 1816 to 1857. The Chapel was about 50 x 80 feet long, and had a small Sunday School entered by some steps going down in the rear. (Our readers may see a sketch of it amongst the views of churches. The wall and fence on the

*Then known as "The Society for the Improvement of the Condition of the Poor."