

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

PRESBYTERIAN PIONEERS.

"THE UNITED PRESBYTERY."

MR. EDITOR,—As it seems to be the desire of many at the present time to "gather up the fragments" of the early history of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, and as this desire is worthy of every encouragement, it may not be out of place to call to remembrance that there was a Church once which was for a time the largest and most conspicuous body of Presbyterians in Upper Canada, but whose name has been so long absent from the list of separate churches, owing to its having given the first example of that proclivity to union which has been so notably followed of late, that many of this generation know but little about it. And as, so far as I know, I am now the only surviving minister of that body, I may perhaps be allowed to give what little I remember of it as a small contribution to Presbyterian history. Put in attempting to do so, I labor under serious disadvantages, as I have no access to any authentic documents to guide me or even to refresh my memory, from which I must draw all that I can give upon the subject. This will account for the general character of the following statements and especially for the uncertainty of dates. The name of the body referred to was "The United Presbytery." It was composed at first of Presbyterian ministers who came from Great Britain and Ireland, with the single exception of Mr. McDowall, who was sent at an early period, when a young man, as a missionary to Upper Canada by the Dutch Reformed Church in the United States. Of him it might be said, as of some of old, that if he had been mindful of that country from which he had come he might have had opportunity to have returned, for he was a man of good culture and respectable talents. But like the patriarchs to whom I have referred, he also "desired a better country, that is an heavenly;" and as he understood the call that brought him to Canada to be for life, he continued to labor in the rugged field to which he was early called, with unflinching perseverance and rare self-denial, till, in a good old age his Master called him to his rest.

When I came to Canada in 1828 the following were the clerical members of the Presbytery, viz: Smart, of Brockville; Bell, of Perth; Boyd, of Prescott; Buchanan, of Beckwith; Lyall, of Osnabrock; McDowall, of Ernestown; Jenkins, of Markham; Harris, of York; Bell, of Toronto (Township); and King, of Nelson. These ministers, as already mentioned, came from different branches of the Presbyterian Church, but taking into serious consideration the great importance of union and co-operation in the circumstances in which they were placed, they felt it to be their duty to form themselves into a United Presbytery, for mutual encouragement and help in the difficult work which they saw opening up before them. At that time many gross errors touching some of the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel were industriously propagated through the country. The general standard of morals was very low. Drunkenness and Sabbath desecration were very common. The people in general were much like the country—wild and uncultivated—and therefore many of the finer shades of difference that keep brethren apart in more favoured lands sank into utter insignificance as compared with the spiritual destitution and exposedness to deadly error, both in faith and practice, which they saw every where around them. In this state of things it was not unnatural for them to think—judging of others by their own feelings—that they were in an exceptionally favorable position for bringing about the formation and expansion of one united Presbyterian Church for Canada, which individual ministers, from whatever section of the Church they might come, as they made their appearance from time to time on this neutral ground, might be disposed to join. They did not doubt that they would see the desirableness of union, at least up to the point of actual agreement in doctrine and practice, in the same light in which it appeared to themselves. Hence the name they adopted, "The United Presbytery." In this it may appear to some that their zeal had outrun their discretion. It must be confessed that in cherishing these hopes they overlooked some of the leading features of human nature, for at that time men and ministers held with remarkable tenacity to their own religious organizations; and perhaps, everything considered, it is as well that

they did so. Unions were very rare among religious bodies then. Disruptions were more characteristic of the times than unions. But be that as it may, the conception at that time of the practical idea of one united Presbyterian Church for Canada was a noble conception. Yea it was more. It was prophetic of the achievements of later times.

I am not able to say in what year the Presbytery was constituted, but from the appearance of things when I first became acquainted with it, I would suppose it must have been as early as 1820, or not long after that date. Some of the ministers were labouring in the country long before that. In course of time the following members were added to it, viz: George, of Scarborough; Ferguson, of West Gwillimbury; McMillan, of Caledon; Rogers, of Demorestville; Howey, of Tecumseth; Eastman, of Grimsby; McClatchy, of Clinton; Bryning, of Simcoe, and Dr. Cairns. The last named devoted nearly the whole of his ministerial life to missionary work. He died not long since at an advanced age in or near Montreal. Mr. Howey was a young man from Ireland, of deep piety and promising ministerial gifts, but he took sick and died in Tecumseth soon after he was settled there. Their hopes so far as human help was concerned rested chiefly upon accessions of ministers from the churches at home; but earnest and prayerful consultations were held with a view to the establishment of an institution for training a native ministry. The obstacle that always met them in that direction was poverty—an obstacle not easily surmounted in those days. They looked with a certain degree of suspicion on any help that might be offered from the United States, as even then the Church there was much agitated with those errors and irregularities that crept into it, and not long after culminated in the memorable disruption that took place in that Church in 1837-38. I believe that all the members of the United Presbytery were sound in doctrine, and held firmly to the Confession of Faith and to the Calvinistic system of doctrine therein contained. At least I never heard of any of them being charged with preaching anything at variance with these standards. Indeed they were charged rather with being too conservative in this respect, for which some of them suffered not a little annoyance from some that went about preaching Arminianism and other errors with a boldness characteristic of that age. Some of them were men of mark in their day. Two of them, viz: Messrs. George and Boyd had afterwards conferred upon them the honorary degree of D.D., the former from Scotland, and the latter, I believe, from Ireland. It may be easily understood that the labor, especially the physical labor, that was required of ministers by the exigencies of the country was very great and sometimes arduous; for besides cultivating their own extensive pastoral fields in which they often had to preach on week days as well as on the Sabbath, they had also, from the want of missionaries, to make frequent missionary excursions to far distant localities still destitute of the stated ministration of Gospel ordinances. These missionary journeys had always to be made on horseback. In this way missionary tours were made as far west as Sandwich. The new settlements along the shores of Lakes Simcoe and Huron were frequently thus visited, and I believe the Church is indebted in a large measure to these early visits for several of the congregations that flourish in these regions.

The vastness of the field occupied by the Presbytery forced on them the necessity of forming themselves into a Synod. It was impossible that the business of the Church could be properly conducted by one Presbytery covering the whole of Upper Canada, especially as on account of distance and expense it could not meet oftener than once a year. I attended a meeting of Presbytery at Prescott, and another at Brockville. This made it necessary that two Presbyteries at least should be formed, viz: one for the east and another for the West; and the formation of the Synod necessarily followed. I don't remember what year this step was taken, probably not more than two or three years before the end of this chapter of our history—that is in 1831 or 1832. It must be confessed that the United Presbytery was disappointed in some respects. The prospect did not brighten of their seeing as a reality their fondly cherished ideal of one united Presbyterian Church for Canada. On the contrary they saw ministers of all classes of Presbyterians as they came to the country setting up their respective standards

around them, and at the same time retaining their connection with their parent churches at home, thus securing to themselves the prestige arising from this valuable pecuniary aid and above all a constantly increasing supply of ministers from Scotland. This led many of the united body to conclude that it was in vain for them to try to maintain a position of continuous usefulness in competition with such overshadowing advantages. Besides, it was never their intention to stunt the growth of the Presbyterian tree in Canada by adding another branch to those that had existed before. The very opposite to this, as already stated, was their aim and wish. They therefore felt that they were only carrying out their original purpose though perhaps in a somewhat different manner, by joining that branch of the Church which in their opinion was likely to exert the most beneficial influence both present and prospective on the state of the country. This the most of them did, I think in 1834. Others followed afterwards though a few went in other directions. Thus ended the United Presbytery, after continuing for several years—in the midst of labors, privations and toils, the record of which is not easily believed in the present day—to sow the seed of Gospel truth broadcast throughout the country from Montreal to Sandwich. Its work as a separate body was finished, and whatever virtue it possessed mingled with other streams that still flow with increasing volume; or, to use another Bible figure, others were sent to reap what they as pioneers had sown. And should not they that sow and they that reap rejoice together. If any think that the history of the United Presbytery furnishes nothing to entitle it to an humble niche in the Temple of Fame, is it not enough if they were employed to prepare the way for other agencies by which the Great Head of the Church has been adding to His own glory by raising the standard of intellectual and moral excellence in the land, and by converting and saving sinners. Let us never forget that the divine "Joshua and He alone will build the house and bear the glory."

Thus I have given a general sketch of the history of the United Presbytery. I did not intend to do more, I am quite sensible of its defects for the want of more copious details; but I have no means within my reach from which I could construct and verify a narrative of details. With all its defects it may supply an answer to such as might curiously ask what sort of people the United Presbytery were. And others who may by diligent search find out the details, may find in it what may help them to clothe these bones with flesh and sinews and thus free it from the ghastliness of a mere skeleton. All that I ventured to aim at is to make it appear without any exaggeration, but with the affection of a child to his deceased parent, that with all its imperfection—and imperfect no doubt it was—the "United Presbytery" filled a not unimportant place in the early history of the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

D. McMILLAN.

Komoka, 6th Nov., 1878.

"GOD HATES SIN, BUT HE LOVES THE SINNER."

True, sin is odious to God; nor has He pleasure in the death of the wicked; and yet it is just as true that God points the righteous denunciations of His anger not against the abstract idea of sin, but against the person—the soul and manhood of the sinner.

The aphorism I quote is a favorite with a certain class of preachers who seem to be incapable of looking at truth except on one side of it. This is the great defect in their expositions. It amounts too often to a perversion of the Word of God. The teaching of the Holy Spirit "guides into all truth."

Such a style of discriminating between sin and the guilty one is of a very dangerous tendency. It invites the sinner to look on his sinfulness in the light of a calamity for which he is rather to be pitied than condemned—a view of the case between him and the God he has dishonored which he will eagerly grasp at, for it offers to relieve him of a tormentor that he has long and vainly striven to get rid of—the poignant sense of responsibility for his sin.

For the purpose of illustrating the idea in the aphorism, of showing how true it is, and how it contains the whole of the sinner's case, or at least the chief feature of it, the salvation of a sinner is represented as the act of "stamping out" a plague, in the way that charitable people are affected with horror and pity for the dying in the fever-stricken districts of the South. The