

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

CANADIAN PRESBYTERIAN HISTORY.
No. III.

BY H. S. McCULLUM, OF ST. CATHARINES.

FRAGMENTARY ITEMS.

The difficulties in the way of the earnest seeker after historical facts are coming to be appreciated by the compiler of these papers, and the enthusiasm with which he set about the work of gathering up fragments of Presbyterian history in Canada has very considerably abated. In many cases, his letters of inquiry, addressed to pastors or church officers, remain unanswered, and many of the answers received are worthless because of apparent inaccuracies which a little careful study of existing records would have avoided. Some seem to think the writer engaged in a pecuniary speculation, and that, figuratively speaking, "there's millions in it," which should be divided with them. Of course, he has no claims upon the time or attention of pastors or people, but he would be glad if they appreciated, as he does, the importance of gathering up the scattered links of the pioneer history of our Church before they shall be wholly lost. The materials for several very interesting papers relating to early Presbyterian preaching on the Niagara Peninsula, are almost ready for use, waiting only for a few facts which could easily be furnished at any time, but are not yet forthcoming. In the meantime, the writer has concluded to give a few fragmentary items, scattered over larger territory, not so much to impart as to seek information from the localities referred to.

THE MIDLAND DISTRICT.

The "Upper Canada Midland District Missionary Society" held its first anniversary meeting on the 3rd day of July, 1829. It had been organized a year previously, but, "on account of unforeseen difficulties, nothing had then been done." On the fourth of July, being the day following the first anniversary, one of the directors wrote to his uncle residing in Kinderhook, N.Y., saying that he had been authorized, by resolution of the Society, "to engage a missionary immediately, if practicable," and requesting paternal assistance. He said the missionary must be active, of good talents, zealous in the cause of religion, and professing the doctrines of Calvinism as taught in the Dutch Reformed or Presbyterian Churches. "Indeed," writes the director, "you will know the kind of missionary we want better when I tell you that he will have to itinerate through the district, containing five counties and about thirty thousand inhabitants." The low state of the Society's funds is alluded to, but the writer says he is authorized to offer the sum of three hundred dollars as remuneration for the first year's service, and that there will be "no expense for board, as he will be gladly received into our houses gratuitously."

This letter was laid before the officer of the American Home Missionary Society, in New York, and, in answer to the appeal, J. L. Howard, a student about to graduate from the Presbyterian Theological Seminary at Auburn, N.Y., and Rev. J. B. Preston, also, it is believed, an Auburn graduate, were commissioned, under date of April 20th, 1830, to the Midland District, Upper Canada, "location to be assigned by the Midland District Home Missionary Society." Mr. Howard, however, died on the day appointed for his ordination, and Rev. John Alexander of Peruville, Tompkins County, N.Y., "fulfilled nine months of his commission." Mr. Preston labored chiefly at Earnesttown and Camden. From the former place, he wrote, under date of September 10th, 1830: "The field is large enough for three missionaries. In thirteen weeks, I have preached forty sermons and attended weekly conference and prayer meetings." In the towns visited, he found three organized churches, with houses of worship, but no meetings, "the people having forgotten to assemble themselves together for the purpose of worshipping God on the week-day or the Sabbath." He reported eight important places in the field, which, he said, was about forty miles square, and in which there were "no Presbyterian brethren with whom to counsel and advise." In February, 1831, he reported "feeble churches revived, strengthened, and enlarged by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit"—the town of Camden having, for two months, enjoyed "a refreshing from the presence of the Lord," thirty-five falling below the number of converts "in both societies." He spoke of the Sabbath School and

Temperance work as receiving attention. Mr. Preston seems to have remained less than two years, and to have had no immediate successor. His field was nearly the same as that first occupied by Rev. Robert McDowall, who, as a missionary of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church in the United States, organized a church at Earnesttown, in 1798. It was still a mission field, many of the churches planted in the wilderness having died out because it had been impossible to secure pastors either from "the Old Country" or from the United States.

SIDNEY AND BELLEVILLE.

A good work was done, for a few years, commencing in June, 1833, at Sidney and Belleville, by Rev. D. R. Dixon and his successor, Rev. Richard Kay. From Sidney, U.C., March 3rd, 1835, Mr. Dixon wrote: "In the front of this town, near the head of the Bay of Quinte, and about seven or eight miles west of Belleville, are two beautiful houses of public worship, about a mile distant from each other—one for the English Church, the other Presbyterian. The latter is unfinished, but comfortably fitted up for meetings during the summer," but neither of them were used "except that, occasionally, in the English Church the clergyman from Belleville officiated once on a Sabbath." In the latter part of August, 1833, a protracted meeting was commenced in Sidney, "which lasted ten days and was prosperous in its results. A church was organized which included a number that were before professors and living mostly in Belleville, consisting of about thirty members." Referring to the revival meetings, he wrote: "The doctrines exhibited on this occasion were the entire depravity of human nature, consisting not in the want of capacity but of disposition in man to do his duty; the justice of God's sentence of condemnation; the fullness of the atonement, laying a foundation for the sincere offer of pardon and salvation to all men, and availing only for those that believe; the immediate duty of every sinner to accept salvation, and the guilt of those that refuse; regeneration by the special agency of the Holy Spirit, according to God's eternal purpose of grace and mercy to the children of men; the covenant faithfulness of Christ in preserving His saints in such a manner as to make them feel their responsibility and the need of putting forth the utmost efforts to obtain salvation, and the glory of God in the final adjudication of the saints to eternal life, and the wicked to eternal death." Rev. Ralph Robinson of Richland, Oswego County, N.Y., was the chief preacher at these meetings, being relieved only by Rev. John Smith of Kingston, and Rev. M. Bennet, Methodist, who preached one sermon each.

Another protracted meeting was held, commencing about the first of March, 1835, "under the lead of Rev. Charles Jones, a youth of about twenty-five years, who had been preaching about six months at the head of the lake." The immediate, unconditional surrender of the heart to God was urged upon the sinner as his imperative duty, while the agency of the Holy Spirit was magnified and implored, as the producer of all that is good and holy in man. A church was formed, probably following this series of meetings, at Belleville, "a flourishing village of about fifteen hundred inhabitants." This was evidently an "American Church," (as was the one at Sidney) and, not the first Presbyterian organization in the place, as Rev. James Ketcham, sent out by the Presbytery of Edinburgh, commenced a successful ministry there in 1831, and Rev. Mr. McDowall organized a church at Sidney, about the year 1806. Mr. Jones is believed to be still living, and hope is entertained of obtaining valuable information from him, as he was pastor at Sidney for several years, subsequent to his labors there as an evangelist.

AMERICAN CHURCH AT KINGSTON.

As early as 1817, there were "American Presbyterians" in Kingston who proved to be quite as stubborn as their Scotch neighbors. In October of that year, Rev. William Bell, then recently arrived at Perth, visited Kingston for the purpose of trying to reconcile these two parties of Presbyterians, etc., who were desirous of getting a minister, but who were disputing as to whether he should be obtained from the Church of Scotland or the United States." He had a tedious journey, mostly on foot, through the wilderness, and found the two parties irreconcilable. The Scotch organized, under the pastorate of Rev. John Barclay, from Fifeshire, in 1821, and an American Presbyterian Church was formed in 1825, which was "connected

with a Presbytery in the state of New York." In 1828, this church consisted of about forty resident members, who were "anxious to obtain a clergyman of devoted piety, talents, and prudence," who should "be prepared to encounter difficulties and discouragements, and possess much zeal and patience, and manifest unremitting fidelity to his Master's service." The number of members of the society who could contribute towards a pastor's support was small, but such as were able engaged to pay three hundred dollars a year.

OAKVILLE AND THE "NEW PURCHASE."

In April, 1833, a Presbyterian Church, with eleven members, was organized at Oakville, by Rev. Edwards Marsh, then of Hamilton, and associates, and, soon after, it came under the care of the "Niagara Presbytery of Upper Canada," which had its first meeting in May of that year. In December, Rev. Samuel Sessions came from Drummondville and began laboring at "Oakville and vicinity." In a recent letter, this veteran pioneer, who is now, at the age of seventy-three, resting from his labors, at St. Johns, in the state of Michigan, says: "I went to Oakville, and then roved all through the 'New Purchase.' In Nassagua [or probably Nassagaweya], I was entertained over Saturday night at a house a mile and a half from the place of meeting. It rained heavily all night and poured all the forenoon of the Sabbath, and, with the snow three feet deep, it was all I could do to get through with horse and cutter. I had been there but a short time when in came the lady who had entertained me over night, with her babe only nine days old, to have it baptised. She came on foot. The same day a company of young ladies walked seven miles in the snow and rain to go to the meeting. Do you think it was hard work to preach to such hearers? In the summer, it was common to see men come sweating out of the woods, from a distance of twelve miles to get to the meeting." He describes his first advent to a place where very considerable results followed his labors, as follows: "At one place where I made it my home, I could study astronomy through the barks that covered the house, and one morning I found myself several inches under snow, in my bed, which was composed of a pile of clover chaff, in one corner, covered with a blanket. I went from this room at the hour of worship, the first Sabbath, to the school house, where I found about forty men and women, each with a lighted pipe, and the room was blue with smoke." Mr. Sessions gives many interesting and some tear-inducing incidents, of his two years labors in that region, which will be used in future publications. Besides Oakville, churches were organized about that time through the agency of ministers connected with the Niagara Presbytery, in Eramosa and Erin, each of which has an intensely interesting formative history; and congregations were gathered for worship in two neighborhoods of Esquesing, in another part of Erin and at Nassagaweya.

"AMERICAN" LABORERS IN CANADA.

The early labors of American Presbyterians and the early organization of so-called American Presbyterian Churches, have excited a large and important influence upon the planting and growth of Presbyterianism in Canadian soil. And yet, except as regards Mr. McDowall and his associate missionaries, sent over, from 1798 to 1810, by the Reformed Dutch Church (one of whom organized the first Presbyterian Church in Toronto), and the continued existence of an American Presbyterian Church in Montreal, but little seems to be known about them, even by the most intelligent Presbyterian writers. The so-called "American Churches" which remain Presbyterian, except the one at Montreal, having naturally drifted into connection with the Presbyterian Church in Canada, and the one Presbytery which was composed mainly of ministers from the States, with the three missionary societies which were supported chiefly by such "American Churches," having, long since, been disbanded, and their records lost, the difficulties in the way of obtaining accurate information in regard to them are very great, and increase daily, as the "living witnesses" are called to their reward. The fragmentary items which are given in this article relate entirely to such "American" pioneer work, within comparatively a small portion of the territory that was reached and blessed by it. It is hoped that their perusal will stimulate readers of THE PRESBYTERIAN residing in the neighborhood of such early labors, to assist in gathering up all the fragments, that they may be so put together as