

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

CANADIAN PRESBYTERIAN HISTORY.
No. II.

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SECOND CONGREGATION IN WESTERN CANADA.

The first settlements on the Peninsula were in the township of Niagara, immediately after the American Revolution; and the town of Niagara was the first capital of Upper Canada, and for many years the chief commercial point on the Lakes. There, under protection of the guns of Fort Niagara opposite, which was still held by the British, all the sessions of the first Parliament of the Province were held; and there the settlers from the surrounding country congregated to dispose of their produce and to purchase family stores. It is not known that religious services were held in that vicinity, on this side the river, previous to the arrival of Rev. Mr. Addison, a missionary of the Church of England, who began to officiate about 1790, and acted as Chaplain to the first Parliament. In 1794,

Rev. JOHN DUNN, a licentiate of the Presbytery of Glasgow, came, by way of Albany, N.Y., and, on the 30th September in that year, "a meeting of a number of the people" was held at Hind's Hotel, at which "it was resolved to have a place dedicated solely to divine purposes; that a Presbyterian church should be erected in the town of Newark, and that subscriptions for that purpose be immediately set on foot, as well as one for the supply of a clergyman of the same persuasion." John Young (merchant) was chairman of the meeting, and Ralfe Clench, secretary. A Board of Trustees was appointed, composed of John Young, Ralfe Clench, Andrew Heron, Alexander Gardiner, Robert Ker, William McClelland and Alexander Hemphill. The congregational records commence from this date, and Mr. Dunn was at once engaged to preach half the time, at an annual salary of one hundred pounds, Newark currency. *This was the beginning of the second Presbyterian congregation formed in Canada west of Glengarry.* Mr. Dunn's labors were not successful, and, at the end of two years, he retired from the ministry to engage in business pursuits, for which he was better adapted. It is not known that the congregation were again supplied until August, 1802, when

Rev. JOHN YOUNG, a native of Scotland, and then recently pastor of St. Gabriel's Church, Montreal, came, at a salary of one hundred pounds, Halifax currency, but did not remain long. In 1804, Government made a grant of four acres of land, upon which was erected, soon after, a frame church, 52 by 22 feet in size, with a tall steeple, at a cost of six hundred and twenty-five pounds. About this time,

Rev. JOHN BURNS, a minister of the Secession Church, who had recently settled with his family at Stamford, commenced supplying the congregation at stated intervals, preaching also at Stamford and to neighborhood gatherings in the vicinity. Mr. Burns was a native of Edinburgh, Scotland, where he was educated, ordained and married, the latter interesting event occurring on the 26th day of August, 1803, just before his departure for Canada. He came over in the same vessel with Rev. Robert Easton, who settled at Montreal, and his attachment to whom was manifested by naming for him his first born son, the late Judge Robert Easton Burns, of Toronto. Mr. Burns spent several months visiting friends in the neighborhood of Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, and arrived at Stamford in 1804. Some time in 1806, although continuing his ministrations at Stamford, he removed his family to Niagara, where they remained until the breaking out of the "second American war." His arrangements with the Niagara congregation seem, for a time, to have been somewhat indefinite, both as to the amount of service to be rendered and of compensation for it. In 1808, however, a certain portion of the pew rents were assigned to him, by vote of the congregation, in consideration of his preaching for them every third Sabbath. In 1809, he offered to give one-half his time, or preach every second Sabbath. And, under some such arrangement, he continued his labors until 1812, when the church building was surrendered to Dr. A. S. Thorn, staff-surgeon, and became the general hospital of the British army on the frontier. Then, of course, regular religious services were necessarily discontinued, and, the inconvenient proximity of the enemy's guns, in the fort across the river,

being very suggestive of danger, Mr. Burns moved his family back to Stamford, as to a city of refuge. In the summer of 1813, the church was deliberately burned by the American army, the reason being assigned that, being converted into an army hospital, it could not any longer be considered a church, and that the lofty spire afforded the British troops too good a view of the American camp and fortifications. Soon after, under circumstances not now known, Mr. Burns was taken prisoner and carried over to Fort Niagara. There, fortunately, he found Major John Leonard, of the American army, with whom he had enjoyed an agreeable acquaintance and warm friendship in time of peace, and for whom he had named his second son, some five years before. Through the influence of this friend, the inconvenience and hardships of a prisoner's life were greatly modified. He was allowed to rove at will about the fort, and, by invitation of the commandant, he preached to the garrison every Sabbath for six or eight months, and until he was liberated and permitted to join his family. He immediately resumed preaching at Stamford, and began systematic labors for the spiritual good and personal comfort of the soldiers in hospital and on duty along the frontier. A sermon on "True Patriotism" preached by him in the church at Stamford, June 3rd, 1814, was printed in pamphlet, at Montreal, by Nahum Mower. It was on "the day appointed by his Honor the President, etc., etc., of Upper Canada, for a Provincial Thanksgiving." The text was taken from Proverbs xxiv. 21. "My son, fear thou the Lord and the King,—and meddle not with them that are given to change." The battle of Lundy's Lane, and other warlike demonstrations in the immediate vicinity, caused the church building at Stamford, also, to be taken for hospital use, and his regular labors with that congregation were brought to a close.

In 1815, after the cessation of hostilities, a cheap building was erected in Niagara for public worship, and Mr. Burns resumed his labors there, dividing his time with the Presbyterian congregation then worshipping in the "old German Meeting House" in Thorold township, where he had frequently ministered during the war. His family, however, from necessity, remained at Stamford until May, 1818, when he completed the erection in Niagara of a family residence which is now occupied by his daughter, Mrs. Campbell, and her only surviving sister. He also took charge of the Government District School in Niagara, which he continued to teach until the beginning of his last sickness. The late Hon. William Hamilton Merritt was one of his pupils. His relations to the Niagara church terminated some time in 1821, the commercial glory of the old town having departed, and the congregation having become so reduced as to be unable to maintain regular services. It is not to their discredit, under the circumstances, to say that, for his last year's services, he received scarcely five pounds currency; for it is supposed they did what they could. He did not long survive his withdrawal. Called to officiate at a wedding in Queenston, he was caught, on his return, in a blinding snow-storm, so severe as to entirely obscure the track, and he travelled around, lost in the woods near the town, several hours, and at length reached home exhausted and benumbed with cold. Pleurisy followed, and, after an illness of only three days, he "fell asleep" on the 22nd day of February, 1822, in the fifty-third year of his age. His wife survived him about two-and-a-half years.

Mr. Burns was an earnest, scholarly, and effective preacher, a cheerful, warm-hearted companion, and a true friend. The sacrifices and trials and privations of his eighteen years of missionary life and labors, in war and in peace, were not in vain; and they are worthy of especial historic notice because he was the second Presbyterian minister to permanently settle west of Belleville, and probably, the third in all Canada who entered upon pioneer missionary labors, without pecuniary aid from any society, committee, presbytery, Church or individual. He left home and country, at his own charges, because his Master required laborers in this wilderness colony, and he loved to be about his Master's business. He was the father of six children, three of whom—the two daughters at Niagara and Thomas Burns, Esq., the efficient and popular police magistrate of St. Catharines—still survive.

PRESBYTERY OF BROCKVILLE.

Up to this time there had been no regular Church organization and no official connection with any Presbyterian court; but, as in many other places, with a

Board of Trustees in charge of temporalities, there had been only a sort of independent Presbyterian society. After Mr. Burns' withdrawal, however, realizing the need of ecclesiastical sympathy and aid, a meeting held on the 3rd day of July, 1821, at which "the situation of the Presbyterian congregations being taken into consideration," it was resolved: 1st. "That it is the opinion of those present that the congregation should be formed into a Church in the proper sense of the word, and that application be made to the Canada Presbytery to take us under their protection." 2nd. "That we whose names are hereunto annexed consider ourselves as members of this congregation, and are anxious to be more closely connected according to the established rules of the Presbyterian Church;" and 3rd. "That we attempt to raise a sum sufficient to induce Rev. Mr. Burns to become our pastor." On the 18th of the same month, another meeting was held, at which the Rev. Mr. Smart, of Brockville, was "requested to accept the office of commissioner to meet the Presbytery of Brockville at their next meeting, and to attend all the sittings, etc., and to vote and determine in all matters that may come before said Presbytery, according to the word of God and the standards of the Presbyterian Church of the Canadas, and as he will be answerable, and that the said Mr. Smart report to us as soon as convenient. At the same meeting a petition was drawn up and signed by James Muirhead and fifteen others, asking to be taken under the care and inspection of Presbytery, and that such members be appointed as may be necessary to organize and establish the congregation and Church, and promising all due respect and obedience. On the 25th December of the same year, the following persons were unanimously chosen elders, viz.: Andrew Heron, W. D. Miller, John Crooks, John Wagstaff, John Grier, and John Munro, senior. The death of Mr. Burns, in February, 1822, prevented the consummation of the desired arrangement to make him the first pastor of the organized Church and congregation, and soon thereafter

MR. THOMAS CREEN, a licensed "preacher under the inspection of the Presbytery," was placed over the charge, and succeeded Mr. Burns, also, as teacher of the District School. He soon, however, fell into the snare so skilfully set in early days for young ministers of other denominations by the Episcopal Bishop of Quebec, and, tempted by the pomp and fascinations of the English Church, and perhaps by the £200 per annum promised by the "Society for the propagation of the gospel in foreign parts," he abandoned the Presbyterian connection, after a few months' service. On the 3th day of January, 1823, he was solemnly deposed of his authority to preach the gospel, and his license withdrawn, by vote of Presbytery in session at Brockville, after "having taken into consideration the circumstances of the congregation at Niagara, and investigated the conduct of Mr. Creen," which was declared to be "marked by a total want of fixed Christian and ministerial principles." On the 25th day of December following he was married, as a layman, but afterwards, in due time, he received Episcopal ordination and became rector at Niagara. This unfortunate experience seems to have effectually concluded the relation between the Niagara congregation and the Presbytery of Brockville, and, except a brief period, when "a

MR. JOHNSON, also from Ireland," officiated, the Church seems to have been without pastoral care for several years.

CHURCH OF SCOTLAND.

Under date of July 1st, 1824, a patent for the four acres of land which the congregation had occupied about thirty years under a grant from the "Land Board," was issued by the Government to James Muirhead, Hon. William Dickson, Israel Swaze, John Grier and Andrew Heron, "upon trust for the use and benefit of a Presbyterian congregation in the said town of Niagara, in communion with the Church of Scotland." And in February, 1825, "the trustees appointed by the Government to superintend the temporalities of the Presbyterian Church in the town of Niagara, Upper Canada," made application to the Glasgow Colonial Society for "an ordained missionary or missionaries of the Church of Scotland" for service in Niagara and in neighboring places. "But, before the Directors [of the Society] had it in their power to carry on a regular correspondence with that settlement, the

Rev. THOMAS FRASER, formerly a minister of the Relief congregation at Dalkeith, and with regard to