

THE EAGLE'S NEST;

OR,

THE MARVEL OF SEBASTIAN GEE.

A Canadian Story.

PART FIRST.—THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MARK WILFORD.

CHAPTER V.—*Continued.*

BUT while he eschewed magisterial and municipal honours of every nature and kind soever, he was by no means indifferent to honours of another description. Very dear to his heart was his proud and undisputed supremacy as Elder and Imperial Dictator of the sect to which he belonged. And here it will perhaps be advisable to give some account of that sect, whereof so frequent mention has been made in these pages.

Among the many persons who, during the fourth decade of the eighteenth century, were roused to a high degree of religious fervour by the preaching of John Wesley, was a young student of Queen's College, Oxford, whose name was John Jebus. Of humble origin, coarse manners, and somewhat unamiable temper, he was nevertheless a youth of some parts and learning, and a conscientious seeker after truth. His studies had been pursued at the expense of a wealthy patron, and with a view to the ministry of the Established Church; but Wesley's teaching combined with his own observation to convince him that the clergy had sunk into a state of lethargy and indifference too little in accordance with the spirit of genuine Christianity for him to have much in common with them. He also imbibed ideas on certain doctrinal points which would probably have insured his rejection had he applied for admission to holy orders. His zeal reached its height in the spring of the year 1738; at which time he conceived the idea of evangelizing the lower classes in his native county of Westmoreland; and, aided by a number of youthful fellow-workers who had enlisted under his banner, he organized a crusade for that purpose. He encountered the active hostility of the local clergy, for parts of his doctrine were directly subversive of theirs, and his method of inculcating it by means of preaching in the market-places, from the housetops, and in the open fields, was in their eyes an innovation upon the wholesome rule which commands that all things be done decently and in order. But, undaunted by all opposition, he steadfastly pursued his vocation, and extended the field of his operations into the adjoining counties of Lancashire and Yorkshire. His success was by no means commensurate with that which attended the efforts of Wesley; for, unlike that eminent divine, he contemned the power of the press, and restricted his efforts to oratory alone. His creed, moreover, was by no means so well adapted to popular acceptance as was that of Wesley, nor was he in any respect so able a man as his great contemporary. He achieved, however, a limited measure of success; and at his death, which took place in 1766, he left behind him about a thousand adherents, who adopted his name as well as his creed, and called themselves Jebusites. Thenceforward until the present time the body has remained, in respect of numbers, very much as he left it; neither multiplying nor decreasing to any appreciable extent.

He taught the doctrines of predestination and election in all their gloomy and uncompromising rigour. According to him, the Almighty, before the creation of the world, predestined a fixed number of persons to eternal glory and happiness, without any respect whatever to the faith or good works of the recipients themselves. The rest of the human family were with equal precision devoted to unquenchable fire—the atonement effected by the sufferings and death of Christ extending to the elect alone. All men, moreover, being born in sin and shapen in iniquity, are under the curse; and no man is either able or willing to avail himself of the promises of salvation except by the direct intervention of the Holy Spirit. So far, the teachings of John Jebus were not materially (if at all) distinguishable from those of John Calvin; but there were various other matters upon which it is

unnecessary to enlarge in these pages which were peculiar to the originator of this sect and his followers alone. That which especially made them to differ, however, from other professing Christians, was their singular mode of church government. Every congregation was presided over by five elders, selected by the members, and recruited from time to time, whenever a vacancy occurred by death or otherwise. These elders met at sunrise on the morning of the third Sunday in January of each year, and elected one of their number as Patriarch for the succeeding twelvemonth—the elders themselves being appointed for life. The elders formed the legislative, the Patriarch the executive branch of the government of the local church. From the decision of a majority of this body upon any point connected with church affairs, there was no appeal. The title of Patriarch was a sort of tacit dignity, except among the elders themselves; and it was not customary to address or speak of the holder of it as *Patriarch*, but merely as *Elder*, except on those occasions when the five met officially in solemn conclave, to discuss and arrange grave matters pertaining to the hierarchy.

Regular or paid ministers there were none. Every male member was expected to hold himself in readiness to preach when his turn came round. This rule was necessarily relaxed in favour of young members, and those upon whom no gifts of exposition had been bestowed. These latter exceptions, however, were fewer than might be supposed; for no matter how ignorant the Jebusites might be as to matters pertaining to things temporal, there were few of them whose knowledge of the Sacred Writings might not have put to shame many who had been expressly trained for the clerical calling. Ignorant, in the common acceptance of the term, they might be. Bigoted and narrow-minded, judged by any standard but their own, they certainly were. But while few of them could have given any satisfactory account of the difference between an irregular verb and an acute-angled triangle, there were fewer still who could not have discoursed by the hour upon such congenial themes as sanctification, justification, regeneration, original sin, and the like. And as for their bigotry, might they not have attested the example of many great and good men, from John Calvin and John Knox downwards?

Among the first to espouse the Jebusitical doctrines fresh from the mouth of their founder was the father of the man who afterwards became Elder Redpath, the opulent proprietor of Aspleigh Hall, whose faith thus came down to him in a direct line of descent, and who had been a prominent member of the sect from his youth. For some years before his emigration he had pondered upon the feasibility of founding a church in some distant colony; and when he had brought his scheme to maturity he had no difficulty in securing the co-operation of a sufficient number of the faithful to form the nucleus of a congregation. Having pitched their tent in the Canadian wilderness, one of the first proceedings of this little band had been to build a place of worship; the largest subscription coming, of course, from Elder Redpath himself, who also gave two acres of ground for the purpose. The chapel was a little frame building, humble and insignificant enough in appearance, but quite adequate to the requirements of the not very numerous congregation, which however continued to be periodically reinforced by arrivals from beyond sea, so that in process of time the chapel came to be well filled. Stables and sheds were built for the accommodation of the horses and wagons of those who did not live in proximity to the chapel, and were compelled to come from a distance; and a sufficient space was set apart for a graveyard, of which Giles Hartley was destined to be the first tenant.

They called their place of worship "Peartree Chapel;" not from the presence of any pear tree in the neighbourhood, but simply because their Transatlantic Bethel had been called by that name. And to this chapel, every Sunday morning, repaired a congregation, rude and unlettered, it is true, but not less remarkable than their coadjutors in England for their intimate acquaintance with the contents of the Book of Life. Unversed in almost all other literature, they were much given to regard the letter of the one Book wherewith they were familiar—sometimes rather to the exclusion of its broad spirit. *Ex. gr.* they were wont to console themselves for their educational deficiencies with that text