

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

CANADIAN PRESBYTERIAN HISTORY.

No. I.

BY H. S. MCCOLLUM.

CHURCH AND PRESBYTERY OF STAMFORD.

The writer, having become greatly interested in the study of the origin and progress of Presbyterianism on the Niagara Peninsula and adjacent Canadian territory, proposes to prepare a series of papers on the subject for publication in the PRESBYTERIAN. And, as a child's education is begun by teaching him the alphabet, so he deems it proper to devote his first paper to the first Presbyterian congregation ever gathered within the territory described, (if not the first in all Ontario), and to its ecclesiastical connections.

The early settlers in this portion of the country, whether coming directly from the British isles, or, after the "American Revolution," leaving the new "Republic" because of their continuous loyalty to the crown, were mostly of Presbyterian stock, and brought with them a sincere and abiding love for the Church of their ancestors. We find, therefore, that, long before ministers could be had to preach the word, congregations were gathered, and comfortable log churches marked the centres of Presbyterian influence. If the hardy pioneers could not enjoy all "the ordinances," they could set up tabernacles in the wilderness, and come together, on each returning Sabbath for prayer and praise. The congregation at Stamford, thus originating, dates the first gathering together for religious worship back to 1785, from about which time, for many years, it was necessarily a kind of Independent Presbyterian Society. The first Presbyterian preaching of which record has been preserved was in 1794. In October of that year, the Rev. John Dunn, a licentiate of the Presbytery of Glasgow, came over from Albany, N.Y., where he had been officiating, for some time to a Presbyterian congregation. He labored for two years in Stamford and Niagara, and then abruptly left the ministry for more congenial pursuits. He engaged in trade at Niagara, and, in 1803, while in pursuit of traffic, the vessel on which he sailed—the "Speedy," carrying ten guns—was lost on Lake Ontario, with all on board. The original church building, erected before the year 1800, was put up by general contribution, but, the Presbyterians largely predominating, it was to be especially a "Presbyterian meeting house." There is no evidence of the congregation being supplied with preaching, after Mr. Dunn left, until 1801, when Rev. D. W. Eastman, a licentiate of the Presbytery of Morristown, New Jersey, came with his family, and for a year or more, resided at Stamford. He began at once to preach for the Stamford people on stated Sabbaths, and continued to do so until the second American war, sometime in 1814, compelled a discontinuance. In 1804, Rev. Jno. Burns, a Scotch Secession minister, arrived, and also resided, for a time, at Stamford. He preached at Stamford, at Niagara, and at the "German meeting house," near Thorold, alternating at Stamford with Mr. Eastman until the war, and, even then, the clash of arms did not drive either of these faithful ministers entirely away. As opportunity afforded, they ministered to the suffering and the afflicted, and preached the Gospel whenever they could be heard. During portions of the war, especially after the battle of Lundy's Lane, the siege of Fort Erie, and the battle of Chippewa, the church building was occupied as a sort of barracks or hospital, and regular preaching services were necessarily intermitted. Neither Mr. Eastman nor Mr. Burns preached regularly at Stamford after the war, and it is not known how the church was supplied for several years.

In May, 1822, the Associate Synod, meeting in the State of New York, appointed Messrs. Beveridge, Hanna, and Alexander Bullions to itinerate in Canada three months each or thereabout, the expenses incurred by said mission to be defrayed by the Synod. The occasion of this action was a letter received by Dr. Bullions, from a Mr. Orr, living in Thorold township, not far from Stamford, requesting the Doctor "or some other of the brethren, to take Upper Canada on their way to the Synod of Pittsburg," and suggesting that "he wished the services of some brother to preach and administer the ordinance of baptism in his family." The letter created an impression of greater destitution than really existed, and, when, a few weeks after their appointment, Messrs. Beveridge and Hanna arrived,

they were surprised to find a small congregation, worshipping in a comfortable church building and enjoying the services of a "hired preacher" named Wright, who had been with them several years. After an interview with a "Mr. McMeekin" and Mr. Orr, it was arranged that Mr. Hanna remain and supply the pulpit the next Sabbath, and that Mr. Beveridge should push on to a Scotch settlement at Dumfries.

Dr. Bullions came afterwards to Canada, and, in the latter part of 1822, or early in 1823, the Stamford congregation was formally connected by him with the "Associate Synod of North America," and placed under the care of the Associate Presbytery of Albany. In 1824, Rev. David Goodwillie (father of Rev. D. H. Goodwillie, a subsequent pastor), preached for a time in Stamford, by appointment of Synod. At that time, the Governor-General of Canada resided at "the cottage," about a mile north of the village, and he and his family attended upon Mr. Goodwillie's ministry. Whether this attendance was a matter of convenience or principle, is not known; but it is certain that the representative of the crown heard the Gospel faithfully preached. In 1825, Rev. John Russell (afterwards Dr. Russell), was sent by Presbytery as an ordained missionary to supply at Stamford, and in November of that year, he was regularly inducted as the first settled pastor of the congregation. Dr. Russell ministered also to a church at Port Robinson, which had been organized by Dr. Bullions and was associated with Stamford, holding the pastorate of the two congregations acceptably until he was stricken down by death on the 3rd day of May, 1854, in the 58th year of his age and the 28th of his ministry. He possessed intellectual abilities of a high order, preaching with a rare unction, and especially excelling in the gift of prayer. He was known and beloved through all the surrounding country. He was for many years the only minister of the Associate Church in Canada, and was chiefly instrumental, in 1836, in the formation of the Associate Presbytery of Stamford, as an offshoot from the Presbytery of Albany.

Rev. D. H. Goodwillie, a licentiate of the Associate Presbytery of Shenango, was ordained and installed as Dr. Russell's successor, on the 27th of September, 1855. He was a native of New Bedford, in the State of Pennsylvania (where his father was pastor of Liberty congregation fifty years), a graduate of Jefferson College, Pennsylvania, and of the Associate Seminary at Cannonsburg. He was much beloved by his people, and respected by the community at large. He resigned in May, 1861.

In 1862, the congregations of Stamford and Port Robinson, which had been separate since the death of Dr. Russell, were again united, and in January, 1863, Rev. James Magill was inducted pastor of both. He was a native of Scotland, but, by education and citizenship, an American. His ministry covered a period of nearly eleven years, closing by his resignation, September 9th, 1873. At this date the Stamford congregation was much divided and depleted in numbers; and the congregation at Port Robinson, becoming discouraged, withdrew from the U. P. Presbytery of Stamford, and joined the Presbytery of Hamilton, of the Canada Presbyterian Church, carrying with them the church property, and permanently severing the union between the two congregations.

The present pastor at Stamford, the Rev. Robert Acheson, was installed on the 24th day of November, 1874. He is a native of County Armagh, Ireland; studied in the University of Glasgow; came to the United States in 1856; was ordained and installed pastor of the Associate Presbyterian Church at Galena, Illinois, in 1857, and of the United Presbyterian Church at Galt, Ontario, in 1858. The latter position he held for fifteen years, and then spent over a year in Ireland for the health of his family, before resuming pastoral labor. Since his induction at Stamford, the congregation has become united, and it has increased from a membership of fifty-five to about eighty. It is now in a prosperous and influential condition, with a good attendance upon services.

The first church edifice, substantially and honestly built, had, in its day, few equals in this region, either for beauty of architecture or location. It stood until 1871, as a monument of the past and as a memorial of God's protecting care over his people in a wilderness country, and through the perils of war. In that year it was removed to make way for the present building, which is a model of neatness and comfort.

Three men are now in the active work of the ministry who were, either in whole or in part, brought up

in this congregation, viz: Rev. J. L. Robinson, Rev. David Nivin, and Rev. J. M. Goodwillie, all now pastors of churches in connection with the Presbyterian Church in Canada. Being the oldest in this part, the Stamford congregation is, in no sense an innovation or an intruder among the Presbyterian Churches in Canada, although the Church to which it belongs is under another form of civil government, "across the lines." And such has been its almost constant prosperity that its members, looking back on its past history, may well exclaim: "The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad."

PROGRESS OF THE MISSIONARIES.

Mr. Beveridge graphically describes his journey from Stamford, through Ancaster and Dundas, to Dumfries, where he found a settlement of about twelve families, who had been there five years without having heard a Christian sermon; but they had formed themselves into a society for prayer and conference, which met regularly on the Sabbath, and was well attended. Before he left, having given their assent to the standards of the Associate Church, they were received into communion, and about twenty of their children were baptised. "This was the beginning of the large and flourishing congregation at Galt." Dr. Hanna having arrived from Stamford, he and Mr. Beveridge returned as far as Dundas, and then took the direct road towards Toronto, to a certain point where they "turned to the north along what was called a concession line," and at length reached the residence of a Mr. Laidlaw, sixteen miles from the main road, in Esquesing. In that neighborhood they found another Scotch settlement, with a small society, and "a Burgher minister engaged in dispensing the sacrament of the Supper." This man was "no better than he should be," but quite to the contrary, "like too many who were itinerating through the country at that time, proved to be a worthless character," spending the money received for his services in a drunken spree "at the first public house on the road." The experience of the people with this "Burgher minister," and their Christian conference with "two missionaries from the States," led, soon after, to the organization of an Associate Presbyterian Church, which has developed into the present prosperous church at Milton.

THE PRESBYTERY.

Six congregations are now under the care of the U. P. Presbytery of Stamford, viz: Stamford, Galt, Milton, Telfer, Walton, and Chesley.

The first minister regularly settled at Galt was Rev. James Strang, from the Secession Church of Scotland, who closed a most successful pastorate of twenty four years, by death, in 1857. Rev. Robert Acheson, now of Stamford, followed, with fifteen years of equally successful labor; during which time, the congregation erected a new stone church and manse, at a cost of about \$12,000, which had all been paid when he resigned in 1873. Rev. William H. Andrew is the present pastor, and the congregation was never in a more prosperous condition.

The congregation at Milton (formerly called Esquesing), in the county of Halton, originating as before stated, came into its present ecclesiastical relations about the same time as Galt. The present pastor, Rev. John Gillespie, has been settled there for over twenty-five years, and during his ministry, the congregation, which has never been large, but is substantial, have erected a beautiful brick church and manse. The latter is one of the finest houses in the county; and has about fifty acres attached as a glebe—all free of debt. Pastor and people are much attached, and there is no more united or prosperous congregation in that region.

The congregation of Telfer, formerly called London, is small, and has suffered much for the want of a settled pastor. They erected a handsome frame church a few years since, and have also a manse and some land.

The congregation of Walton, in the county of Huron, is some fifteen or twenty years old, and was the first Presbyterian organization in that locality. They have a good frame church and an excellent brick manse, with thirty acres of land as a glebe—all nearly free from debt. As a congregation, it has also suffered much from change of pastors, and is at present vacant.

The congregation of Chesley, county of Bruce, was organized in 1875, and the pastor, Rev. Wm. Findley, D.D., was settled in 1876. A brick church and manse have been erected and paid for, and the infant congregation is prospering wonderfully.