

JESSE KETCHUM, SR., OF TORONTO.



THE following account of the life of this old and eminent citizen of Toronto and latterly of the city of Buffalo is taken from the lecture of Charles Durand of Toronto, Barrister, delivered recently before the Historical Society of the York Pioneers:

It is a pleasure to me to write a sketch of the life of this eminent and benevolent citizen, formerly so well known in Toronto, and latterly equally well known in the city of Buffalo, where he died in 1867.

It is moreover peculiarly a pleasure to write this sketch of him, because he was a personal acquaintance and at times a client in Toronto. It has become within the present and two past generations the habit, praiseworthy in a high degree, for many men blessed with a superabundance of worldly property in England, the United States and Canada to give in their lifetime often and by their wills—large portions of the property with which God has blessed them to charitable and benevolent institutions. Such was the case with Mr. Ketchum. He was one of the earliest settlers in Toronto, having come there about the year 1800, and opened the business of a tanner on Yonge street, one of the prominent streets. It was then called the town of York. He was born at a village in the State of New York called Spencertown, in Columbia County, on the 31st March 1782—of, it is said, Welsh ancestry—and was of humble origin and his parents poor. Nevertheless he always exhibited great energy and industry, and ingratiated himself with all he came in contact with. At an early age his father placed him in the employment of a tanner in his native town where he remained until he thoroughly learned his trade, and he then as a pioneer entered Canada, carrying his energy and business habits to the village of York.

He is said to have lost his mother at a very early age, being only six years old. He remained with the tanner at Spencertown until he was nineteen. His tannery at Toronto was one of the best known in Canada at the time and was the one patronized then by the whole large agricultural (newly settled) county of York. Many still living saw it at an early day, as far back as perhaps 1830. It was situated on the west side of Yonge street, and his premises ran back some hundreds of feet west to the Grand Opera House along Adelaide street and north up Yonge to Richmond street. His main tannery covered the ground occupied now by the Bible and Tract book store and the *News* Printing office and the site of the stores along Yonge street northward towards Queen street. Where the Tract and Bible store now stands, by digging down the remains of vats can still be found. The tanbark for many years formed the only sidewalk (and a very good one in wet weather) along the western side of Yonge street up to Richmond street. The old residents (among them Mr. Edward Murphy, jeweller), recollect very well this beautiful tan bark sidewalk.

The *Telegram* of this city has been publishing a list of old wills proved in the Surrogate court of this city, and among them is one made at a very early date by one Joseph Ketchum. Mr. Jesse Ketchum, of Orangeville, the grandson of the subject of this sketch, lately told me he believed this Joseph Ketchum to have been the father of Jesse Ketchum the elder. If so, he was a shoemaker, and died perhaps 80 years ago here. The grounds of Mr. Ketchum along Yonge and Queen streets were still larger as I shall have occasion presently to mention.

One of his brothers named Seneca, soon followed him to Canada and after living in the vicinity of Toronto (then York), at Hog's Hollow, on a farm, moved to the new locality of Orangeville, at present a fine country town of five thousand people, fifty miles north-west of Toronto, where he bought a large farm and built mills of different kinds, over fifty years ago. Here he died, and the son of the elder Ketchum (now dead too) named Jesse Ketchum (the father of the present young man of that name just mentioned) inherited Seneca's property and laid out the land into town lots.

Well, it matters little from whom we are descended so long as we conduct ourselves in the world and do acts such as my subject of this sketch did all his life, rendering his name blessed to his own and future generations. When we look back on the pages of history in England, the

United States and Canada, what a great list of human benefactors we find who have passed away, leaving legacies to their countrymen of vast amount for religious and benevolent institutions, as also of literary works and renown. Among the living, too, how many there are who are distributing their wealth and using their talents for such purposes.

In Toronto we can mention the late Senator John Macdonald, Mr. Wm. Gooderham, and among the living the Honourable Sir Donald A. Smith.

It seems to have been the aim and final resolution of Mr. Ketchum not only to live aright, to live nobly, but to make others do so and leave a line of gifts and benefactions from his properties which would for generations bless others in this great city and in Buffalo.

Before mentioning particularly these gifts, I must refer to his social and political life in Canada a little. He was a noted Reformer in his politics—not violent—but moderate and sensible, ever ready to advocate the most necessary reforms,—reforms such as the responsible government we now possess, the educational institutions with which this great country is now blessed, and temperance principles so necessary to family life and social happiness.

He was elected in the County of York as a colleague of William Lyon McKenzie in the most troublous and trying political era of Ontario, then Upper Canada, when great



political issues were agitated and when the great majority of our people were in favour of responsible government but could not obtain it from England or the then governing classes in Canada, when we wanted county councils to manage our affairs, reforms in the jury and civil laws, and to amend our marriage laws so as to allow all ministers of the gospel to marry the people of their own denominations, a privilege then refused to some, and to put in operation a noble system of education, which we now have from secularizing the clergy reserves, devoting them to educational purposes, to make all classes contented and happy. These great measures prior to 1830 he advocated in conjunction with Mr. W. L. McKenzie and other then leading reformers.

He was elected in the large County of York prior to 1830 I think twice, being one of the most popular men in the county with Mr. McKenzie. But although a politician to the extent mentioned he was an orderly, quiet man, loyal to the country of his adoption, and although here during the war of 1812-14, and during the very troublous time of the rising in rebellion at Toronto of McKenzie, Lount, Mathews, Duncombe and others, I have never heard that he acted in any other way than as a quiet, peaceable man in society even when his old colleague and many of his old County of York friends were involved in this hasty rising. But he never changed his reform principles, to which as well as his religious and temperance principles he was always firm and steadfast and lived to see these cherished principles carried out.

In 1856 at his instance, I drew a trust deed making the late Andrew T. McCord, formerly treasurer of Toronto city, and the late Mr. James J. Howard, then treasurer for the County of York, trustees to carry out his purpose con-

veying a most valuable landed property on Yonge street on which the Bible and Tract Society building and the *News* printing office now stand, the lots running back to the Grand Opera House about 200 feet deep, and along Yonge street sixty feet. He conveyed the Bible and Tract building ground by a perpetual lease amounting to a freehold at a rent of \$128 fixed, and the other lot where the *News* office stands he leased at a rent of the same amount at first, renewable, and which was renewed last year on reference to arbitrators at a rental of \$1,500 a year for twenty-one years.

The proceeds of the rent of the Bible and Tract Society House were given for the special purpose of distributing religious tracts, bibles and books, and the rent of the other lot, now renewed, was to be devoted to Sunday School literature among all the Christian churches of Toronto and the Yorkville public school forever, making no distinction as to churches. A noted trait in this gentleman's character in all things was a benevolent toleration in religion, as well as a wide view of temperance principles.

In his lifetime Mr. Ketchum was in the habit of visiting all the common schools, giving the children books. A few days ago I visited the large public school, called the Jesse Ketchum school after him, in St. Paul's ward, and was delighted to see the manner in which it was conducted, its order and commodious rooms. The head master and very efficient conductor is Mr. W. J. Hendry. There are 953 scholars taught in it by twenty-one teachers, male and female, in eighteen different rooms beautifully arranged and heated, having comfortable seats and desks for the children. In every room I saw the picture of Jesse Ketchum hung up in a gilt frame, his face looking as natural as when in life, with hoary hair and an aged but pleasant look, seeming to gaze upon the children at their lessons as it will I trust for many generations to come.

This immense and beautiful school house stands on ground given in 1856 by this generous man, for a public school, to the then village of Yorkville, a joining which he also gave one acre and one rood and dedicated it forever for a city-play ground or park for all the school children of the city of Toronto and Yorkville, thinking that in summer it would be delightful for them to assemble there (as it were in the country) and enjoy themselves in the fresh country air. Yorkville was then, it must be remembered, only a village and quite rural in its appearance. Since then, within some twenty years past, the trustees of this school have added to the grounds about three acres by purchase. In the same vicinity on Davenport Road he gave a lot about the year 1848 to the friends of temperance on which to build a hall, vested in trustees, I believe, which has been since and is now used for a temperance hall by the Sons of Temperance. These properties so given away are now worth a very large sum. He also gave for general temperance purposes about fifty years ago in the city a large plot of ground on which is what has long been known to the city as the Temperance Hall on Temperance street, a plot of great value, where temperance societies have constantly met, and where I used to meet with the Sons of Temperance in 1851. It was the meeting place of a large society called the Ontario Division of Sons, numbering nearly 400. It is difficult to estimate the moral good flowing from this gift, to the past and present generations of Toronto citizens, and here the friends of temperance are now constantly meeting.

About 1850 Mr. Ketchum, having inherited a large landed property in Buffalo, from a deceased brother, went there to reside and gave out of this property great gifts to the public and that city of a kind larger than what I have just described as given to Toronto, to which I will allude hereafter.

KNOX'S CHURCH, TORONTO.

But this list of benevolent acts would be quite incomplete were I to omit to mention his gift of over two acres for church purposes, including the site and the ground adjacent to Knox's church, near the corner of Yonge and Queen streets on which this church now stands, with the ground annexed which is now rented for the use of the church. I remember this plot of ground very well in 1836-7 from an incident personal to myself then occurring.

On this plot Mr. Ketchum built a small brick church for his son-in-law, Rev. James Harris, who was the first Presbyterian minister who stately held for that denomination a service in Toronto (or old York). He came to Canada in 1820 and was inducted into this small church and held the first service on the 18th February 1822. I recollect