

The Church in Canada.

BISHOP MACDONELL.

(Continued.)

[NOTE.—In Part II. of this article, published in our issue of Feb. 24, for: "his father ought to have been educated in that city," read, "his father was also educated in that city," and for "generous commission in the Austrian service," read, "general's commission in the Austrian service."—EDITOR.]

III.

It has been well said that the life of Washington was the history of his country, it is equally true that the life of Bishop Macdonell from the epoch at which we have now arrived, is the history of the Church in Upper Canada.

Upon his arrival in 1804, he presented his credentials to Lt. General Hunter, then Lt. Governor of the Province, and obtained the lands stipulated for his friends according to the order of the Sign Manual. He took up his residence in the County of Glengarry, which remained his head-quarters for some 25 years. He soon discovered that very few of the emigrants who had previously arrived in the country, and had settled on lands allotted them, had procured legal tenures for their possessions. He was consequently obliged to repair to York, where, after much trouble, patent deeds for 160,000 acres of land for his new clients were obtained, and, after some further delay, patents for the lands of his own followers were also obtained.

Mr. Macdonell's next object was the building of churches and establishing of schools, for which purpose he subsequently obtained grants of money from the Home Government, but these grants were not continued for any length of time.

On his arrival, he only found three Catholic Churches in the whole Province—two wooden and one stone—and only two clergymen—one a Frenchman, who was utterly ignorant of the English language, and the other an Irishman, who left the country a short time afterwards.

For more than thirty years Mr. Macdonell's life was entirely devoted to the missions of Upper Canada. He travelled from the Province line at Coteau-du-Lac to Lake Superior, through a country, at that time, without roads or bridges, often carrying his vestments on his back, sometimes on horseback, sometimes on foot, or in the rough waggons then in use, and sometimes in Indian bark canoes, traversing the great inland lakes and descending the Rivers Ottawa and St. Lawrence, to preach the Word of God, and administer the rites of the Church to the widely-scattered Catholics, many of whom were Irish emigrants who had braved the difficulties of settling in our Canadian woods and swamps. By his zeal, his prudence, his perseverance and good sense, he saw these emigrants as they multiplied around him, placed in that sphere and position in society to which they were justly entitled.

At the time of which we write there was but one Catholic bishop in the whole of the British Dominions of North America. The entire country, from the Atlantic to the Pacific coast, formed but one diocese under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Quebec.

The small oligarchy, formed of men holding offices from the Crown, and irresponsible to the people, but who ruled Lower Canada in those days, seriously attempted to renew the tyranny of the First Charles—to suppress both the language and religion of the French settlers, and to confiscate the property of the subject, in order that they might govern the colony, irrespective of the will of the people, as expressed by their representatives.

In 1806 Mgr. Joseph Octave Plessis, the eleventh bishop of Quebec, succeeded to that See on the death of Bishop Donaut. He was a prelate of great vigour and capacity, and took the reins of ecclesiastical government with a firm hand, as a man who had long been accustomed to exercise authority. He saw at a glance the wants of

his immense diocese, and undertook to provide for them without delay. One of his first thoughts was to divide the diocese, that the vineyard might be more efficiently cultivated. In announcing the death of his predecessor to the Cardinal Prefect of the Propaganda, Mgr. Plessis expressed a hope that the Court of Rome would soon come to an understanding with the Court of St. James for the erection of a Metropolitan and some bishoprics in British North America. Meantime he petitioned the Holy See to allow him three Coadjutors: one in Montreal, one in Upper Canada, and a third in Nova Scotia, his intention being to recommend as Coadjutor for Upper Canada, Mr. Macdonell, who had already been placed among the number of his Vicars-General.

Local difficulties, the particulars of which would be too lengthy to give in a brief sketch, as this is supposed to be, joined to the disturbed state of Europe, and the war which sprung up between England and the United States, delayed the accomplishment of Bishop Plessis' desire to divide his diocese; but he had, through the Government of the Mother Country, obtained the recognition of a share of those rights of which the oligarchy composing the Executive Council of Lower Canada had attempted to deprive the Church. On the declaration of war by the United States against England, in 1811, and the invasion of Canada by American troops, Mr. Macdonell prevailed upon his countrymen to form the 2nd Glengarry Fencible Regiment, which, with two militia regiments, raised also in the eastern part of the province, contributed much to the preservation of Upper Canada. By the activity and bravery of these men, the enemies' frontier posts of Ogdensburg, St. Regis and French Mills were taken with their artillery, ammunition, and other military stores.

In 1816 Mr. Macdonell returned to England, and waited upon Mr. Addington, then Viscount Sidmouth, who introduced him to Earl Bathurst, then Colonial Secretary. Part of his mission was to induce the Home Government to favour the measure proposed by the Bishop of Quebec for the division of that diocese, in which undertaking he succeeded to a certain extent.

In July, 1817, the Holy See separated Nova Scotia from the Diocese of Quebec, and erected that Province into an Apostolical Vicariate. At the same time Lord Castlereagh induced the Court of Rome to erect two other Apostolical Vicariates, one formed of Upper Canada and the other of New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and the Magdalen Islands. Mr. Macdonell returned to Canada in 1817.

In 1816 Bishop Plessis paid his first Episcopal visit to Upper Canada. The Province had then but few villages, separated from each other by almost interminable forests. Here and there were some groups of Catholics, the most considerable being at St. Raphael's, Mr. Macdonell's homestead in Glengarry, at Kingston and at Sandwich. At this time Kingston contained 75 Catholic families, of whom 55 were Canadian and 20 Scotch and Irish. Sandwich had a Catholic population of 1,500 souls. The old parish of St. Peter on the Thames, the church of which is still standing in the midst of the Ste. Claire Flats, contained, with the settlement at Malden, about 450 souls. The two establishments just named were at that period on the confines of civilization. Beyond commenced the great solitudes of the West, known as the "Upper Country," or "Nor'-West," where many Canadians were employed in the service of the Hudson's Bay Companies. As Dr. Scadding pleasantly tells us, the Nor'-West had great attractions for the wayward youth of little York. "Whenever anything went counter to their notions, running away to the Nor'-West was always proposed; but what that process really involved, or where the Nor'-West precisely was, were things vaguely realized. A sort of savage land of Cockaigne! a region of perfect freedom among the Indians was imagined, and to reach it, Lakes Huron and Superior were to be traversed." By way of forming the nucleus of an ecclesiastical establishment in that immense district, two missionaries, Messrs. Provnecher (afterward Bishop of Juliopolis) and Dumoulin, were in May, 1818, sent to the Red River, and the result of their labours is seen to-day in the flourishing Archdiocese of St. Boniface.