

REPRESENTATIVE MEN OF CANADIAN METHODISM

Asbury and Coke, Pioneer Bishops

LITERARY TOPIC FOR MAY. LESSON: 1 TIM. 3.

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HE who neglects history cannot read Providence. The deeper meaning of events is hidden from him. He remains always a child. All history has value for the man who would know the world in which he lives and the forces at work in society. To understand the present we must probe the past. "History is philosophy teaching by example." History reveals God's method of working in the world. The history of the Church in its development along varied lines, is a proof of the manifold workings of Providence in the religious development of mankind. It proves that God raises up men in every age for the special tasks that arise out of the needs of the age. These we call "Epoch-making men," because they mould the age in which they live. They shape it. They stamp it with a different character from that which it would have had if they had not lived. From time to time such men have appeared. History gives us the record of their deeds.

In a former series of articles we traced the course of Church history by singling out the men who turned the tide

names of *Asbury* and *Coke* are placed first in the series, not because they were the first to preach Methodist doctrines and form Methodist societies on this continent, nor because they belong, strictly speaking, to the Canadian Church. They belong to American Methodism. But Canadian Methodism in its earlier history is so closely linked up with Methodism in the United States that the two branches cannot be entirely separated.

These men are given a first place because they organized the Methodist Episcopal Church, by amalgamating the scattered Methodist Societies of the United States. They gave these societies a constitution. They made Methodism in America "a Church." The Methodist Episcopal Church of Canada was for a time a branch of the American Church and, even after its connection with the Church in the United States was severed, it continued to have a separate existence until all the Methodist bodies in Canada were merged into one in the Union of 1883.

Methodist preaching was first heard in America when Wesley's colleague, Whitefield, toured the colonies and prepared the way for the lay evangelists who formed the first societies. But Methodism was in the air. "The forces of the great movement flew across the wide Atlantic like burning sparks blown by the wind." This new field in which Methodism was to win its greatest triumphs, was both like and unlike the field in which Wesley worked with such marked success. The character of the population in many parts was similar to that of the great industrial centres of England and Wales. These new settlements were rough, and the institutions of civilized life were only partly established; but, unlike the British field, the population was sparse and widely scattered. New York and Philadelphia, two of the most populous cities on the American Continent to-day, were then mere towns. "Social life was in its crudest form; industrial life was only beginning to stir; the very institutions of religion, over large areas had yet to be created." The growing of Indian corn and tobacco was regarded as the supreme business of the settlers. Religion and education in the newer settlements were as yet pushed very much into the background. Even in the older settlements, where the government had been, under the Puritan settlers, almost a theocracy, religion had declined until it had ceased to be a power making for righteousness. The time was favorable to the new movement. The fields were ripe unto the harvest, and Methodism, under God, had raised up men for this great field.

It was long disputed whether Methodism began first in New York or in Maryland. It is now conceded that priority must be given to the New York society. To a little group of Irish Palatines, of whom we shall have more to say later, belongs the honor of giving Methodism a foothold in America. Whoever visits New York should go to old John Street Church, built on the site of Philip Embury's chapel, erected in 1768. This is now a sort of shrine for pilgrims, a museum of Methodism. Here many of the relics are kept that link up the present with the past and remind us of the men into whose labors we have entered. The names of Barbara Heck, Philip Embury and Captain Webb, will always be remembered while American Methodism endures.

Almost simultaneously with the work of Embury and Webb in New York, Methodist preaching began in Maryland, where Robert Strawbridge, an Irish carpenter from Drumsha, exercised his gifts and found fruit of his labor. Even as early as 1768 an appeal reached the English Conference for help for Maryland, where many were being awakened by the preaching of Strawbridge. An urgent appeal came also from New York, and at the Conference of 1769, two men offered themselves for America. These men were Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmoor. With these men was sent a gift of £50 to aid the infant societies in the New World. The British press spoke scornfully of this new scheme of the



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of events into new channels and under God made history. These we gathered widely from the whole field of Church history, narrowing down, first to the Western Church, then to the Protestant Church, and closing with the great founder of that branch of Protestantism known as the Methodist Church.

We now propose to deal with Canadian Methodism and to trace it through the century and a half of its history, by grouping the leading events of that history around the names of the men who did the most to mould its character. The