

REPRESENTATIVE MEN OF CANADIAN METHODISM

II. Coughlan, Black and Garretson, Apostles to the Maritime Provinces

LITERARY TOPIC FOR JUNE—READ MATT. X.

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ENGLAND'S oldest colony, Newfoundland, was the first field of Methodist missionary labor. The early history of this bold, bleak island is wrapped in obscurity. It was first linked up with European life at the end of the 15th century. On the 24th of June, 1497, John Cabot, sailing an English ship landed upon the island. The Portuguese navigator, Gaspar de Cortereal, visited it in 1500, and, as early as 1502 regular fisheries were established upon its shores by the Portuguese, Biscayans and French. Sir Humphrey Gilbert, with his ill-fated expedition, arrived in St. John's harbor in August, 1583, and formally took possession of the island in the name of Queen Elizabeth. The history of the island, dur-

had lapsed into a state bordering on heathenism. The Sabbath was unknown, marriage was a matter of convenience for which no legal or churchly sanction was sought. Brutality and profanity were frightfully common. Drinking, dancing and gambling were the chief recreations of these rough fisher folk. The traders who came to buy their fish and sell them supplies were no better morally. The two Anglican clergymen stationed at St. John's and Trinity had never visited these neglected people.

Into this community Coughlan came in 1765, and began at once to preach the Gospel. His doctrines and methods were those of John Wesley, although at this time he was not connected with Methodism. After a year of faithful work he could see no results. But he must have done the people good, for we find them petitioning the "Society for the Propagation of the Gospel," to have Mr. Coughlan appointed a missionary among them. On his appointment Coughlan returned to England to receive ordination at the hands of an Anglican bishop. In the fall of 1767 he returned to the island and took up the work with fresh energy and zeal. His knowledge of the Celtic tongue enabled him to draw many of the Irish Romanists to his meetings, but the results were still discouraging, and the earnest missionary was about to leave "the poor, desolate land where he was spending his strength for naught," when a wonderful revival broke out in the settlements around Conception Bay.

The news soon spread to other parts of the island that Harbor Grace and Carbonear had gone mad, and people came from miles away out of curiosity; but in many cases "those who came to scoff remained to pray." A marked difference at once came over these fisher folk. Sabbath breaking, drinking and gambling largely ceased, and Sundays and week nights were given up to religious services. Coughlan, although an Anglican clergyman, continued to follow Wesley's plan. He organized his converts into classes, visited from house to house, and tried to lead the people to the higher and richer experiences of the Christian life. John Wesley now wrote, encouraging the missionary in his work, and he needed encouragement, for it was not a summer holiday outing to be a missionary in Newfoundland a century and a half ago. We can hardly appreciate Coughlan's courage and self-denial at this distance. To him travel by boat was "one continued martyrdom"; while, in winter, travel by land was equally irksome. Many a morning he found himself under a blanket of snow that had sifted in through the cracks in the cabin where he slept; and often his boots had to be thawed out before he could draw them on. But he would have cared for none of these things had it not been for the persecutions he had to endure. Attacks of all kinds were made upon him and his work. In time both his mind and his body gave way under the hardships to which he was exposed. He returned to England in 1773, and twelve years later died of paralysis. A letter of Mr. Wesley's referring to this period of Coughlan's life says: "The last time I saw Mr. Coughlan he was ill in body, but was in a blessed state of mind. He was utterly broken in pieces, full of tears and contrition for his past unfaithfulness. Not long after I went out of town God removed him to a better place."

While Coughlan lacked some of the qualities that go to make a true apostle, he did genuine pioneer work and laid the foundation of a future church that was destined to become a great spiritual force in the rocky, island colony. To-day the place of Methodism in Newfoundland may be estimated by the statistics presented at the Conference of 1914, when 12,921 members were reported, a Sunday school force of 24,772, with an Epworth League membership of 2,256, distributed among 44 societies. Quite one-fifth of the entire population of 237,531 are Methodists.

In the same year that Cabot came to Newfoundland, he



SUNRISE ON A CITY STREET.

"The Call of the Morning." (See page 123.)

ing the 17th and part of the 18th century is little more than a record of feuds between English and French fishermen, until, by the Treaty of Utrecht (1713), the island was ceded wholly to England.

In 1765 there came to Newfoundland an Irishman, named Laurence Coughlan. He had been a Wesleyan itinerant for ten years before crossing the Atlantic. The object of his visit is unknown; but, finding 5,000 fishermen without a minister of the Gospel among them, this warm-hearted Irishman began preaching to them. He was not commissioned by any church, nor appointed by any human authority, but that did not deter him. The moral and religious condition of the people was the call he heard, and the love of Christ constraining him was his commission.

About eighty per cent. of the fishermen around Conception Bay, where Coughlan began his work, were English; the remainder were Irish Roman Catholics. Through neglect they