

CANADIAN METHODISM: ITS EPOCHS AND CHARACTERISTICS.

By the Rev. Dr. Ryerson. ESSAY II.—BENEVOLENT ORIGIN AND CHARACTER OF CANADIAN METHODISM—EARLY AGENCY AND AGENTS.—THEIR SACRIFICES AND LABORS.

Canadian Methodism is no less remarkable for its benevolent than for its local origin. Benevolence itself is among the first of the God-like virtues—pitying the destitute, helping the distressed, upholding those that fall, and raising up those that are bowed down. And that benevolence never shines with a purer lustre than when it voluntarily suffers wholly for the sake of others—accompanies the lonely emigrant into the wilderness, and cheers the first months of his isolation, privations and labours, by warming and illuminating his bark covered log cottage with the beams of the Sun of Righteousness and the angel songs of devotion and praise. If the indigenous industry of the new settlers felled the first tree of the forest, erected the first shanty, turned the first sod, made the first enclosure, planted and gathered the first crop; so did the first Methodist preachers follow in the footsteps of the first emigrants, traversing the same wildernesses, braving the same privations and hardships, and like emigrants themselves, without extraneous support. Losee himself, the first itinerant minister from the United States, during his first journey through an almost interminable forest from the Lake Champlain to the Bay of Quinte, came "a warfare at his own temporal charges," and therefore endured the severe hardships of ordinary emigrants. And thus travelled and endured Losee's colleagues and successors—the Dunhams, the Coleman's, the Woodseys, the Keelers, the Gates, the Jewells, the Sawyers, the Bangs, and others of that epoch of Methodism in Canada—especially Upper Canada. Through long roads, or rather roadless deserts, they came to the Canadian wilderness settlements in the faith and spirit of the first Gospel Mission established by the Saviour, (Matt. x. 9-10,) provided with "neither gold, nor silver, nor scrip, nor two coats," resting with assurance and dignified confidence that now, as in ancient days, "the workman is worthy of his meat."

The ample provision which is made nowadays to defray the travelling expenses and provide for the support of missionaries to near and distant fields of labor, was not known in the first days of Methodist Mission work in Canada, any more than in the most unimproved times of travel and support thereought to be a corresponding missionary zeal, activity and consecration. The identity of sympathy of the first preachers with the first settlers in their tools and wants, invested the Divine messenger with vast power for good in behalf of the people to whom he ministered. Perhaps there is no one element of moral influence more powerful in the formation of the character of a people than blending with their earliest forest homes the domestic and public services of religion and the associations of Christian friendship. The educated and uneducated alike feel the power of such an influence, which pervades the primitive dwelling and descends from generation to generation. We have no doubt that the energetic, many and Christian character which at all times, in war as well as in peace, has distinguished the people of Upper Canada, is the fact that their first homes echoed to the practical doctrines and morals of the Gospel; and though the first generation of settlers were far from being all religious, they were not infidel—they feared God and honoured the king—there was no infidelity among them; and though some of them took God's name in vain, and remembered not the Sabbath day to keep it holy, yet the skeptics and the scorers who would bring religion into contempt by attacking the motives of its ministers and professors, have ever been compelled to admit that it was not the skeptic or the scorner that first pitted the moral destitution of the early settlers in Canada, and amid great exposures and dangers, traversed forests, and rivers, and lakes, to assuage the sorrows, encourage the hopes, and guide the morals of the first adventurers; but it was those who had experienced the Gospel as the power of God unto salvation, had imbibed the benevolent spirit of Jesus Christ, and were animated by His love.

If the character and labors of the first preachers of Christianity demonstrated the divinity of the religion they preached; the first Methodist preachers in Canada, by their self-denials, purity of life and austere, and extraordinary labours demonstrated the divinity of their mission, and produced in the public mind the conviction that they were actuated by higher than human power, while their ministrations were instrumental in creating hundreds of happy homes, and the fruits of righteousness in the lives of thousands of individuals. We would give a few examples of the self-sacrifice and hardships of these volunteer apostles of Methodism to the first loyalist emigrants in Canada.

Losee's first visit to Canada in 1790 was spontaneous—by permission, not by appointment. In 1791 he was appointed the primary missionary to the Bay of Quinte. "Losee having taken part with the loyalist during the American Revolution, and having acquaintances in Canada, was not the less acceptable on that account; and a pretty extensive Circuit was soon formed, where he preached during the year. The people were soon aroused to the subject of religion, and conversions occurred in various townships, so that 165 members were reported at the close of the year."*

"James Coleman volunteered and was sent to Canada in 1791. On his route to and in his travels in the Provinces, he endured the severest privations. While passing up the Mohawk river he was obliged to go on shore fifteen nights in succession, and kindle a fire to keep off the wild beasts; and his food failing, he was reduced to a cracker per day."†

Under date of 1801, Dr. Bangs, in his "History of the Methodist Episcopal Church," thus states the manner in which the earliest Methodist preachers prosecuted their work in Upper Canada:—

"Upper Canada was at that time but sparsely populated; so that in riding from one appointment to another, the preachers sometimes had to pass through wildernesses from ten to sixty miles distance, and had either to encamp in the woods or sleep in an Indian tent; and sometimes, in visiting the newly settled places, they have carried provender for their horses over night, when they would tie them to a tree to prevent their straying in the woods; while the preachers themselves had to preach, eat, and sleep in the same room, looking at the curling smoke ascending through an opening in the roof of the log-cabin, which had not yet the convenience of even a chimney.

"But in the midst of the labours and privations they seemed to be compensated in beholding the blessed effects of their evangelic efforts, and the cordiality and high gratification with which they were received and treated, more especially by those whose hearts God had touched by His Spirit. For though the people were in the wilderness, and many of them poor, they seemed to be ripe for the Gospel; and it was no less gratifying to its messengers than it was pleasurable to its recipients to behold its blessed effects upon the hearts and lives of such as 'believed with the heart unto righteousness.' While those who resisted the truth often manifested their enmity by persecuting those who proclaimed it, such as did 'receive it in the love of it,' evinced their affection and gratitude to those who published it by making it a welcome to their habitations and entertaining them in the best manner they could. For these self-denying labours and sacrifices of these early Methodist preachers, thousands of immortal beings in Canada will doubtless praise God in that day when He shall come to make up his jewels."‡

Those statements of Dr. Bangs were in great part, the result of his own personal observation and experience, as will appear hereafter when we give some account of his labors in Canada, from 1801 to 1808. But contemporaneous with the labors of Dr. Bangs, and extending half a century beyond them, were those of the venerable Wm. Case, "Father of Indian Missions in Canada." Mr. Case says: "In June, 1805, I was admitted as an itinerant preacher in the New York Conference, then in session at Ashgrove; and having volunteered for Canada, I was appointed with Henry Ryan, to the Bay of Quinte Circuit." (Jubilee Sermon, p. 54.) "In 1806 I lost my health by hard toils in the swamps of Canada, and for three months my strength was wasting away by fever ague. I now thought I should receive an appointment suited to my feeble state; but, contrary to my expectations, my appointment was to the mountains of Ulster Circuit (N. Y. State). I felt it as a disappointment, and thought I never could ascend those lofty mountains, nor endure the toils of a circuit three hundred and thirty miles round. But submitting all to God, I went forward; and I have reason to believe that it was the very circuit the best suited to my feeble state; for such was the purity of the water and salubrity of the atmosphere, that immediately I began to recover. My health was again established; so that at the next Conference I again offered myself for Canada."§

* Rev. Wm. Chase's Jubilee Sermon, delivered in London in 1856, p. 4. † Dr. Stevens' Life and Times of Dr. Bangs, p. 41. ‡ History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Vol. II, pp. 124, 125. § Jubilee Sermon, pp. 57, 58.

Mr. Case gives the following graphic account of the manner of his entrance into Canada, after the acceptance of his second office of himself for the Canadian wilderness work:—

"In 1808, on my arrival at Black Rock, the embargo prohibited the transport of property across the line. At first I was perplexed, and knew not what to do. So I went to the key-hole, and fell on my face in prayer. I asked the Lord, as I was engaged in His work, to open my way to fulfil my mission to Canada. Having counted all to God, I returned to my lodgings at the inn, when a stranger suddenly said, 'I should not wonder if the missionary should jump into the boat, take his horse by the bridle, and let him swim round the embargo, I did so; my horse swam the Niagara, and I landed safely in Canada.'—Id., pp. 68, 66."

In a summary review of his fifty years' perils, sufferings, and labours in Canada, Mr. Case employs the following expressive and touching words:—

"Five times have I been laid low by fevers, bilious and typhus; and although with no home of my own, I was provided for among strangers, who watched at my bedside for weeks together, faithfully administering to my recovery. The Lord reward them in 'that day.' Sometimes in those afflictions, but more afterwards, I found they 'yielded the peaceable fruits of righteousness;' and then how sweetly I could sing—

Off hath the sea crossed thy power, Thou, Lord, hast lifted up my head, Sudden, I found Thee near to save— The fever owned Thy touch, and fled.

"In my labours it has been my lot to be much on the waters. Once I was shipwrecked on Lake Ontario; five times have I been through the ice with my horse on bays, rivers and lakes of Canada. Through all these dangers the Lord in His providence delivered me, and then I have sung with delight—

Off hath the sea crossed thy power, And given back at Thy command; It could not Lord my life devour, Safe in the hollow of Thy hand.

"The Christian minister in any perplexity has abundant sources for relief; as that of the Church, his experience, the Bible, and his God. If the first fall, he is sure of relief from the last. 'In all thy ways acknowledge God, and He shall direct thy paths.' Prov. iii. 6.

I should not omit to notice here the brief visit to Canada of the apostolic Asbury, in 1811 though reduced by extreme bodily fatigue and suffering [inflammatory rheumatism in his right foot and leg]. "He had," says Mr. Case, "until this period, appointed the first and only missionaries to this country, and had long and ardently desired to visit the people for whom he had taken so deep an interest, and where the work of the Lord had been so great and so extended. In his way from the New England Conference, he crossed the Green Mountains, Lake Champlain, the swamps of the Chateauguay woods to St. Regis; then across the St. Lawrence to Cornwall. The first place on this shore at which he stopped was the venerable and pious Evan Royce's, in one of the oldest Methodist societies in the Province. Thence he proceeded along the banks of the St. Lawrence, preaching at sundry places; in some of which he found members from Europe, and from the first societies in the city of New York. After preaching in Kingston, and one or two places adjacent, he crossed from Kingston to Sackett's Harbour, his way to the Genesee Conference in Paris. From Bishop Asbury's Journal we learn his feelings and views of Canada. He says: 'Our ride has brought us through one of the finest countries I have ever seen: the timber of noble growth; the cattle well-looking; crops abundant on a most fruitful soil. To the people my soul is much united.'"

We now turn to Dr. Bangs, whose statements on the condition of the country and the labours of the preachers we quoted, page 124, at the beginning of the century, remarking that his statements were, in great part, the result of his own personal observation and experience. Dr. Bangs came to Canada in 1799 as a surveyor, but for want of constant employment in his profession he taught school. In 1800 he was awakened and converted through the instrumentality of the Revs. James Coleman and Joseph Sawyer, in the neighbourhood of St. David's, near Queenstown, and commenced in 1801 as an itinerant preacher under the direction of the presiding elder of the district, Joseph Jewell. He was therefore a Canadian preacher; and he spent the first seven years of his laborious ministerial life in Canada, after which he entered the work in the United States, where his biographer says, he was "destined to do more important services to the Church than any other man recorded in its history, save Asbury."

Autobiographical and other accounts of many of these preachers have been published; we will add an illustration from a paper which has never been published—the Journal of the late Rev. John Ryerson during the first six years of his ministry, before his marriage, from 1820 to 1826—his whole ministry extending over a period of fifty-seven years, in the course of which lengthened period he filled, with diligence, ability, and success the highest positions in the Church of which he was confessedly the ablest legislator. The writer, as did also the Rev. Dr. Harper, pressed, him in his latter years, to write out his reminiscences of his earlier years and his views on the principal questions of Church agitation, discussion and action during the previous half century, and the origin of the benevolent institutions of the Church. He did so, and in 1877 placed the result in the writer's hands, for his use and disposal. These papers, or extracts from them, may some day see the light. Among the various documents and papers thus placed at the writer's disposal is the Journal referred to, of the first six years of Mr. Ryerson's itinerant labours. Only a few sentences in regard to each year can here be given. Mr. Ryerson says:—

"My itinerant ministry commenced on the Long Point Circuit [his native

circuit], which extended from Port Dover to Port Talbot, along the shore of Lake Erie, and some distance into the interior of the second row of townships.

"My colleague and myself had twenty-five appointments, at each of which we preached every two weeks. We always met the class after preaching. This year I received nothing by way of support, except what I ate and drank, and money enough to keep my horse shod. I received no salary or presents, but worked hard—with what success I know not. At the close of the year I was sent by Elder Case to the Ancaster Circuit, during the absence of the preachers at Conference, and was appointed to the same circuit the following year—1821-1822. The Ancaster Circuit extended over the area of country (nine-tenths of which was a wilderness) now embraced in the Hamilton District. We had twenty-eight appointments. On about half the Sabbaths, we preached three times each; on the other half, twice each Sabbath. We always met the class after preaching, and, between us, visited most of the families each time around the circuit. Our plan was in crossing each other's track, to meet every fortnight, when we talked over all that we had done, and especially the families we had visited. Then he who followed would try and see the families not called upon by his colleague in his previous." Mr. Ryerson then narrates the means employed to obtain subscriptions for building the first old King Street chapel, then near Hamilton; the giving of the Land by the late Colonel Lamb, of the English Church; the opening of the chapel (then the most commodious in Upper Canada) by Messrs. Case and Ryan; the absence of any town now called Hamilton, more than half the site of which was then owned by Methodists—the names and property of each given—but one village (that of Ancaster, of fifteen or sixteen houses all told) in that whole region of country. Mr. Ryerson proceeds:—"My support was sixty-five dollars; besides, I lost my horse, and had to buy another, which cost seventy dollars; and although part of it at sum was raised by subscriptions on the circuit, yet the balance which had to be provided for took away most of my salary, and left me, at the close of the year, very poor, and quite destitute of suitable clothes."

"At the close of the year I was sent by my Presiding Elder to supply York during the Conference, which was held in the State of New York, after which the Rev. F. Reed, stationed minister, remaining some time to visit his relations and friends, I was detained in York for five weeks. When I arrived on the Niagara Circuit, to which I had been appointed at the Conference, the leading members were much dissatisfied at my detention; but still they did not attach any blame to me. "I had for my superior agent this year that good man and true, the Rev. Ezra A. Smith. This was my last year of holding a subordinate position on a circuit or station—ever after being either Superintendent of a circuit or station, or Presiding Elder or Chairman of a District, and subsequently a member of the Stationing Committee for more than thirty years; eight years of which I was co-delegate.

"The Niagara Circuit at that time embraced the whole of the Niagara peninsula east of Hamilton, except the township of Bertie." Here follows a description of the state and extent of the country; the successful measures adopted to build a commodious church in the small village of St. Catharines, aided liberally by the old loyalist officers, who had been colleagues with Mr. Ryerson's uncle and father as officers in the British army during the American Revolution, and earned a sort of relationship with him; revivals of religion in different parts of the circuit, and the accession of members who, with their descendants, have remained faithful and useful for more than half a century. He says:—"I left the circuit with regret, and the society of my kind Superintendent. I felt as if I were going from home."

"In 1823 I was appointed in charge, or as Superintendent, of the Yonge Street Circuit, with the late Rev. William Slater as my colleague, than whom a more honourable and upright man never lived; we were fellow-labourers two years—the second year on the Bay of Quinte Circuit; and when he died three years afterwards, I mourned for him as a brother indeed. The Yonge Street Circuit was more laborious and harder to work than any one I had yet travelled; but my faithful and devoted colleague was a help-mate to me indeed. His never-failing cheerfulness and untiring industry was a source of great comfort and encouragement to me. Our circuit extended from York (including the town) to Lake Simcoe, embracing the series of townships west of Yonge Street to Holland Landing, thence along the shore twelve miles, through woods without a house to North Gwillimbury, thence through Whitechurch, Markham, Pickering, Whitby, and Darlington, as far as Major Wilmot's, some miles east of where Bowmanville now stands. Major Wilmot fitted up a large room in his tannery for our services; for though neither he nor Mrs. Wilmot were members of our Church, yet were they very

friendly, and treated me with the kindness of parents.

"In those days an unmarried preacher had no home except that of the ladying who, in reply to the question as to where was his home, said, 'I live, and my home is all along shore.' This 'all-along-shore' home was my lot during the first six years of my ministry, in single life. Yet I usually had some place on the Circuit where I left my few clothes, books, etc., and which I designated by the endearing name of home. On the Yonge Street Circuit, this was the house of Mr. William P. Patrick, with whom and his friendly and pious wife, and most amiable family, I passed many pleasant and happy hours. Mr. Patrick was a most devoted and generous man—a scientific and beautiful singer, whose sweetness of voice and melody thrilled through my whole being when I have heard him sing 'Rock of Ages,' 'Lo! He comes with clouds descending,' and on New Year, 'Come let us anew,' etc. Mr. Ryerson describes at some length the devout habits and kindness of Mr. Patrick and his lovely household; his perils, escapes, etc., in travelling around the Circuit. He says:—

"At our first Canada Conference held at Hallowell (Pictou), 1824, I was appointed to the Bay of Quinte Circuit, embracing the town of Kingston, as well as the whole of the Bay of Quinte country, north of the Bay, to the head of it. This Bay of Quinte Circuit was the most extensive and laborious of any on which I had travelled, and many circumstances connected with its state at that time added greatly to the onerousness and painfulness of the work." [At the Conference of 1823, delegates were elected to the American General Conference, and, for the first time, Mr. Ryan was not elected, but Mr. Wyatt Chamberlain, who was travelling the Bay of Quinte Circuit, was elected to the General Conference instead of Mr. Ryan. He, to punish Mr. Chamberlain for his temerity, sought to injure him as much as possible on his circuit—sent a bill-rent local preacher to beard and oppose him at his appointments—resulting in dividing most of the congregations, loss of the class-papers and scattering of the classes. Mr. Ryan himself disturbed the troubled waters still more by professing to forbid Mr. Chamberlain from preaching, and seeking to get himself elected to the General Conference by a convention of local preachers and hymen. Suel was the state of things on the Bay of Quinte Circuit when Messrs. Ryerson and Slater were appointed to its oversight and management in 1824. Mr. Ryerson says:—

"At each appointment there were more or less friendly of both parties, the consequence of which was that the whole Circuit was thrown into a state of confusion, and torn to pieces from one end to the other. I arrived there about two weeks before my colleague, Mr. Case, my Presiding Elder, informed me at Hallowell that a good deal of uneasiness existed on the Circuit, but what he said did not convey to me the idea of a tithe of the sad state of things there; he, however, urged me to go on the Circuit as soon as possible. So I did not return,—I cannot say to my home, for I had none,—but I did not return to my late Circuit to get my few books and clothes, which were sent to me. Immediately after the Conference closed, I crossed the bay to Adolphus-town, preached at two places, and met the classes, if classes they could be called; for there was not an organized class on the Circuit; not a class-paper (we had no printed class-books in those days) to be found; so we had no means from any Church record of ascertaining the membership. By whom, or for what purpose, the class papers and Church records were destroyed or taken away, I could never find out. The party strife and heart-burnings were dreadful and painful in the extreme. The different parties asked, and sometimes tried to get us preachers on their side; but this we studiously avoided, and especially where the differences had degenerated into personal feeling and family strifes. This was the case in many instances.

"Mr. Slater and I had the misfortune of being young men; it was with both of us the fifth year of our ministry, and neither of us had been ordained Deacons. This authorized us to baptize and assist in administering the Lord's Supper, but not to consecrate the elements. This impediment was very embarrassing to us, as the Circuit was very large, and Mr. Case was able to visit us only four times during the year; and part of the Quarterly Meetings were held in Kingston, where few of the country members were able to go. But in our extra quarterly meetings and sacramental services we were greatly aided by the assistance of old Mr. Dunham, who with Mr. Losee were, under God, the founders of Methodism in the Bay of Quinte country. The good old, but rather eccentric man and able minister, was always ready to help us in time of need; although he sometimes declined preaching for me, which I always requested, much preferring to hear him than to preach myself. We young men of that day did not think ourselves

wiser and more... I have... in the mind... against us... in this of... who were... and they... shall one... Circuit, so... difficult to... thought the... positions... which were... both appet... and painfu... were appo... seem to b... became litt... than so that... when I cam... that by my... have know... and soul w... come of me... We had... and I want... Circuit... preachers... to be appo... the name... we know... from those... the case of... Circuit was... meeting the... to his or h... down the... themselves... got the name... Leaders, and... with us. A... pared class... The entire n... on the Circ... amounted to... During the... preachers b... revivals to... ment, and a... The followi... full revival... Circuit, but... extent of t... the progress... fessed to be... which remain... "About the... of the member... was called, an... the Switzer... me to meet"... building a mee... which was t... called the Sw... Church. Th... worship was n... until after I... subsequently, dur... siding Elders... District. I h... ings and pre... this house, a... hundreds exp... refreshing fro... Lord: How n... old and well... Switzers, Mil... in the Love... and moving t... piness, and p... the dark and... bygone days... "During the... horseback tw... miles, preach... sermons, and... 'sermons; receiv... salary one hu... more; no pres... Then I was all... penses, which... five or six doll... "At the Fir... (1825), where... Bishop Held... the Perth Circ... and the Rev... to the Missio... standing that... our labours, w... "A number... the Niagara C... to be appo... Mr. Case was... upon my you... He spoke to m... him that I had... with the regu... to the Niagar... to go where the... or Conference... might be show... "Mr. Bolton... of September, s... our field of l... eight days' ride... we arrived at o... year, much fat... cast down on... least of tempora... had much diffi... for our horses... culty in obtain... selves. Indeed... Perth were few... poor. I stoppe... he and his wife... made what they... on the floor, in... for me, which, b... poor and very