

A Boy-Preacher, Indeed.

BY REV. D. W. SNIDER.

IN Vol. I, page 74, of the "Cyclopedia of Methodism in Canada," to which we shall increasingly recognize our indebtedness to the patience and industry of Dr. Cornish, I notice the following simple and pathetic record:

BYRNE, ALEX. STURGEON.

1848 C. Yonge Street.
49 R. on T. London.
50 Toronto East.
Died Feb. 11th, 1851, aged 18 years and 8 months.

When our veteran Dr. Griffin was in his second year of ministry, and before your sainted father, Bro. Crews, or Dr. Dewart had entered the ranks, and while Dr. Wakefield in his ruddy, beardless manhood was still at the plough-handles, this youthful preacher had passed, from the martyrdom of the damp bed of the itinerant, in the royal robes of his sanctified service into the upper glory.

My interest was aroused in this case recently by a book which was placed in my hands by a young-hearted supernatant minister (several of whom there are, God bless them!) the Rev. J. W. German. The book is by the late Rev. John Carroll, and is called "The Stripling Preacher." It is the life of the hero of this article, and contains also some fifty-nine sermons or sermon-sketches which were delivered in London and Toronto by the boy-preacher before the nineteenth century reached its full meridian.

I think our Epworth Leagues might turn catholic long enough to make this

young, valiant, brilliant, marvellous, saintly soldier of Jesus Christ their patron saint, viz., Alexander Sturgeon Byrne.

Though I never knew of the existence of "the boy-preacher, indeed," until recently, as doubtless very few in Canadian Methodism to-day know him, yet upon opening the little book I found at once that it had been my privilege, as a boy, many times to hear his father preach while, in the early '70's of last century and in the eighth decade of his years, he supplied the pulpit of Wellington Street Church, Brantford. This fact quickened interest.

Claudius Byrne, the father of our hero, was a dear old specimen of an Irishman. Short, stocky, clear-skinned, with little or no beard, hair fine as silk and white as snow, his cravat made up of the winding-sheet variety, with an insinuating brogue to his hesitating speech, and twinkling eyes under heavy eyebrows, accentuating piquant utterances of truth which chained the attention—such, I remember him.

He came from Ireland, an ordained minister of the Irish Conference, with his family, including Alexander, in 1848. Let Dr. Potts and his Irish confreres twist the gleeful tongue of remembrance about the names of the places which Claudius Byrne served in the Home Conference: Downpatrick, Sligo, Tandragee, Londonderry, Carrickfergus, Enniskillen, Dungannon.

It is to be regretted that Alexander S. Byrne would not have his picture taken. We cannot look upon his face and study out the traits of his character that he was developing in his maturing manhood. He does not appear to have been thoughtful of fame at all. Not only did he not furnish his portrait for the gratification of his admirers and friends, but he also left behind the most meagre and laconic record of his life. Dr. Carroll found a detached piece of paper about four inches square among the books and manuscripts of the young preacher. On this paper was written the following

items, the piers upon which others were to throw the spans that made up his bridge of life, not even telling us when the first was laid, viz., his birth, at Dungannon, County Tyrone, June 20 1832. He begins, perhaps more correctly, after all, with his second birth:

"Justified in Dundalk, County Louth, Ireland, on 15th Feb., 1846." Converted, therefore, when scarcely fourteen years of age.

"Appointed Leader, by Dungannon Quarterly Meeting, Monday, 21st Sep., 1846." Becomes, therefore, a class-leader when little more than fourteen years of age.

"Preached before the Rev. J. C. Bass, at Mr. J. Thompson's, Mully-Crannon, Dungannon circuit, from Eph. v. 14."

"Recommended to the District Meeting, Monday, 20th March, 1848." Licensed, therefore, as a preacher to be received into the ranks of the itinerancy when only fifteen years old.

"Left Ireland on Thursday, 13th July, 1848."

"Embarked" (likely from some point in England) "for America on Friday, 21st July, 1848."

"Landed in New York, Friday, 25th of August, 1848."

He does not tell us that he preached in New York and

made a profound impression, and was urged, with his father, to remain in the States; but he did, and he was. The next in the succession of laconic entries in this unpretentious diary of events full of the meaning of life's history, is:

"Arrived in Toronto, Thursday, 15th Sep., 1848."

"Saturday, 15th Nov., 1848, appointed to supply the place of the Rev. Lewis Warner, on the Yonge Street circuit." He enters, therefore, upon the work of the ministry

in Canada when a few months past sixteen years of age, having placed in his charge one of the most important circuits at that time in Canadian Methodism.

From Yonge Street circuit, having been received on trial, and having preached at Conference services in Hamilton, he was sent to be the colleague of the Rev. John Carroll, D.D., at "London town." It was at that time the head of a circuit of thirty-five miles in length. The two preachers alternated, taking each two weeks in town and two weeks out. The popularity of "the stripling preacher," now seventeen years of age, was immense, reminding his superintendent, who loved him as a father, when he took the difference of population into account, "of the multitudes who flocked to hear the lamented Summerfield in New York. Each service added to the high esteem of the people, and for that year, at least, it was not wise to secure any other help for such services as called for the crowd. This was evinced by the fact that the announcement of his name for any special service would procure for us a larger congregation and collection than the services of any living man we could get, however celebrated."

But none but God knew what the Irish lad suffered that year during those weeks when his duties took him to the outlying settlements. Timid, as a horseman, he took his arduous bush-rides in mortal terror, also, of being attacked and devoured by wolves. It was upon one of these journeys that he became the victim of a damp bed, which was the originating cause of his early death.

After a year of most fruitful service, about which his honored superintendent cannot say too much, he was appointed by Conference to Toronto City East circuit, where he is to be listened to with admiration and wonder and growing profit by as cultured a congregation as Canadian Methodism could afford. He makes his home with the editor of the *Guardian*, the Rev. G. R. Sanderson, who is also

The Perennial Revival.

THE great, present, pressing need is that all our pastors and people should give more earnest attention to the development and cultivation and encouragement of a style of religious life that shall be constantly aggressive, and ever alert in the work of leading souls to the Lord Jesus Christ. If this condition, so much to be desired, shall be realized, the idea must be forever abandoned that professional or non-professional evangelists are a necessity. And yet I would not in the most distant manner venture even to suggest that there are many evangelists who are not doing most excellent service; but pastors and people must come to understand that they are not an absolute necessity. The substantial, persistent revival that flourishes alike in summer's heat and winter's cold is not the creation of a mere human evangelist. Such a revival is the work of the Holy Ghost.—
Bishop Malan.