

HISTORICAL SKETCHES.

NO. 16.—THE DIOCESE OF NIAGARA.

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SYNOD OF NIAGARA

(Continued.)

FROM 1827 down till the year 1839, when Upper Canada was formed into a separate diocese, with Toronto as the residence of the bishop, the population of this province increased very rapidly. Emigrants from the British Isles poured into the province at the rate of about 25,000 a year. The Church was unable to keep pace with the population, her means being narrow, her clergy few in number, and lay-readers, catechists, etc., being but little used. The consequence was that a lamentable proportion of our people were destitute of any provision for their religious wants, another large proportion very insufficiently provided, and almost all the rest served by a clergy who could only meet the demands made upon them by strained efforts, which affected their usefulness in other points. There were four sources from which assistance was looked for, viz: The Imperial Government; the Canadian Government; the Church Societies in England; and the voluntary contributions of our people here. In 1833 the government of Earl Grey announced their intention of gradually withdrawing the grant made to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel for the support of clergymen in North America. The first source, therefore, began to fail when it was most required. The Canadian Government proved to be a broken reed. The Clergy Reserve controversy began during this period, and was not finally settled till 1854. In 1791, when it was determined to form Upper Canada into a separate province, and supply to its inhabitants an exact transcript of the British Constitution in Church and State, it was expressly provided that one-seventh of all the crown lands of the province should be reserved for the support and maintenance of a Protestant clergy. For half a century the lands were wholly unproductive, but their value increased with the general advance of the country and the claim of the clergy was disputed. The term "Protestant clergy" proved a source of debate; although there was no misunderstanding when the act was passed. The Presbyterian ministers were Protestants, and as the Kirk is established in Scotland, they claimed a share. For the sake of peace, their claim was granted; but after another ten years other claimants entered the field, and in 1854 the whole of the lands were devoted to education and secular purposes, the life interests of the clergy being provided for, and by a system of commutation the Church received a large share of money.

It may be mentioned here that Governor Sir John Colborne, with the advice of his council, erected, in January, 1836, fifty-seven rectories, assigning to each a glebe of about 400 acres. Unhappily, the requirements of the law were only sat-

isfied in forty-four of these rectories; and through some informality the remaining thirteen were never legally constituted. Of these forty-four rectories ten are in the Diocese of Niagara, viz: Ancaster, Grantham, Grimsby, Guelph, Louth, Niagara, Stamford, Thorold, Waterloo and Wellington Square. With very few exceptions they were of little value for many years, and to-day but one in Niagara Diocese affords an income sufficient for the support of the clergyman.

The third source, the Church Societies in England, were comparatively feeble in resources, and their attention and funds were divided. The two Societies, the first handmaids of the Church, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel and the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, continued their nursing care, the one in supporting nearly all the clergy in the country, besides granting many special donations; the other in bestowing Bibles, Prayer-Books, tracts and books. To the fostering care of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel we must ascribe, under God, much of the prosperity of the Church in Canada. Her extension would, humanly speaking, have been a matter of impossibility for many years had we not been favored with the aid which the Society, out of its then small income, so cheerfully afforded us.

The last source of help, the voluntary contributions of our people here, was, during this period, of little account for extending the ministrations of the Church to the destitute districts. They were asked chiefly for parochial objects.

"The loss and detriment," says an earnest Church writer, "which the Church of England has sustained by neglecting to make the required spiritual provisions for her emigrant children in the first years of their settlement are altogether past computation; and great, it must be admitted, has been her sin in allowing the flock which was given her to stray from the fold for lack of shepherds to feed and tend them. There can be little doubt that if a bishop and a competent body of clergymen had been in the province during this period the great body of the Puritans and Non-Conformists would have been induced to return to the Church, from which they were not separated by any fundamental difference of belief." The population of the country was scattered, and but few emigrants had the means of contributing for several years after their arrival towards the support of a clergyman. Want of unity in religious matters greatly added to the Church's difficulties. A variety of sects existed everywhere, each desirous of having a minister or preacher of its own persuasion. Their machinery was cheap and easily supplied. Local preachers and lay agencies of all kinds were utilized where ministers could not be obtained. Members of the Church, finding themselves in a state of destitution with regard to religious instruction by their own church, were induced to connect themselves with some of the sects, by whom their minds were gradually led to think unfavorably of the Church, which had the will, but