

Messenger and Visitor

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Beginnings and Results.

The Men Who Laid Foundations.

The completion by the Baptist people of these Provinces of a century of life and work as a denomination is certainly a matter of sufficient importance to justify its being given some special recognition in connection with the meeting of our Associations during the present summer. It was within the bounds of the present Western Association of Nova Scotia, which met on Saturday last at Middleton, that the old-time Association of the Baptist churches of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick was organized. That historic event took place at Granville, Annapolis county, in June of the year 1800. It was at that time for the people of this country in many respects, a time of beginnings. The country was new and sparsely settled, with few highways and with none of the means of speedy communication which this wonderful century has developed. Those were the times of the log-house and its broad-mouthed fireplace, lighted in the long winter evenings by means of the pine knot and the tallow dip; and when the jealously guarded fire upon the hearth went out, it must be replenished from a neighbor's hearth, or recovered by means of flint and steel and tinder box, for the day of the lucifer match was not yet. Traveling was by horseback or by snow-shoe in the winter, or by boat or canoe along the natural waterways. These conditions indeed continued more or less general for sometime into the present century, so that the memory of men still living reaches back to them, and the men who have seen those old days and have lived on with us into these days of railways, steamships, electric, bicycles, automobiles, telegraphs and telephones, electric lights and all that legion of inventions and innovations that have crowded in upon us during these later years, must find their minds constantly filled with wonder at the changes which a life time has permitted them to witness.

With our denomination, as with other religious bodies in these Provinces, the closing years of the eighteenth century and the opening years of the nineteenth marked a time of beginnings. The ferment of the Newlight and the Wesleyan evangelism had powerfully moved the people, opinions had been gradually crystalizing and beliefs obtaining definition along what were to be permanent denominational lines. Regular Baptist churches had been taking shape, and the denomination as such in these Provinces may be said to have had its birth with the Association organized at Granville in 1800. It was, of course, in a worldly sense, a day of small things for the Baptists, when the representatives from less than a dozen churches, come together in that first association. In numbers, in wealth, in education or worldly influence, they certainly did not represent a great deal. But in the matter of principle,—in their claim on behalf of the individual believer for free, conscientious action, in their faith and trust in God, in their confidence in the gospel of Christ as the power of God unto salvation to every repentant sinner, and in their fearless appeal to the word of God as final authority, they represented that which their adversaries have not been able to gainsay or resist. And in those men of rugged, native strength, mighty in prayer and in the Scriptures, whom God gave to be the pioneer leaders of our Baptist churches, there was represented a power that was not to be despised.

It is a wholesome thing for us at this day to cherish the memory of those men of the days gone by, to whom we owe so large a debt. To those who know anything of the early Baptist history of these provinces, certain names are very familiar. There were the Hardings, the Mannings, the Chipmans, the Dimocks, the Crandalls,—all household words in every Baptist family. There are also such names as Ainsley, Burton, Estabrook and others, which are prominently connected with our early his-

tory. Many of these men did their work principally in the early part of the century, which is now closing. They were men of faith and men of power. Not of course all equal in ability; each had his peculiar gift which he used faithfully and with good effect in the service of his Master. Some of them possessed in a greater measure than did others the evangelistic spirit, and the power to move the hearts of men. Some went everywhere preaching the Word, while others confined their labors to a more limited sphere. Some gave themselves wholly to the work of the gospel ministry, while others both preached, and labored with their hands, that they might obtain the necessary support for their families and preach the gospel without price to those who were able to offer them little compensation. Some were men of remarkable gifts of speech. Such were Joseph Crandall, and still more, Theodore Harding, whose natural gifts of oratory must have been of the highest order. Some, like Thomas Ainsley, possessed great power as evangelists. Some were strong thinkers and wise to build. Chief in this class was Edward Manning, whom Dr. Bill describes as a man born to rule, fitted to occupy the chair of a President or the throne of a King. Some like James Manning and Harris Harding, were men of a profoundly devotional spirit, and others, like John Burton and Joseph Dimock, were men whose lives were beautiful through trust in God and loving service to their fellowmen. Taken altogether, these Baptist fathers of ours were remarkable men, and we have reason, if not for pride, yet certainly for profound gratitude, that such men were raised up to be the standard-bearers of the truth, the leaders of our churches in that important period when the foundations of our denominational history were being laid. Very likely we are somewhat inclined to idealize these men and their work. It is quite true that they had their limitations, their failings and their faults. But they deserve to be called men of God. Religion was to them the thing of supreme significance. What they were and what they accomplished is not to be explained apart from the Divine Spirit which gave them light and power. The Word of God was to them as a fire in their bones. They felt themselves commissioned of God to speak, and they could no more be silent concerning the condemnation of sinners and the redemption purchased by the blood of Christ, than could the Lord's prophets of old. They were healthy men, vigorous in body as in mind, living much in the open air, unhurt by luxurious habits, accustomed to plain living and high thinking. Some of them were sons,—not only by natural descent, but intellectually and spiritually, of the old New England Puritans, and the iron of the Puritan theology was in their blood.—And some came of Scotch and Scotch-Irish ancestry—brainy, indomitable men, robust and vigorous in all their faculties. Such men having been laid hold of by the word of truth and the Spirit of God, and having passed through such religious conviction and conversion as men can know only under the breaking hammer and the consuming fire of a Calvinistic theology, were fitted, as no college and no theological seminary could fit them, to be the pioneers of the Baptist faith in these provinces.

Those sturdy fathers of the denomination were men of broad sympathies and of large and noble purpose. They did not permit themselves to be cramped and belittled by interests merely personal and sectional. Their thoughts were generous. They laid foundations deep and broad. The spirit of missions was in their hearts, and so far as they could, they went everywhere preaching the Word, restrained by no provincial or even national boundaries. They believed in education and in all that goes to fit men for more effective service in the cause of God and humanity. They lived long enough to rejoice in at least some of the fruits of their labors. They saw the element of religious life around them crystalizing into regular forms under the influence of their ministry. Churches on the mixed communion plan gave place to regular Baptist churches, and these churches were regularly organized into Associations. They saw denominational schools established, for though lacking scholastic training themselves, they were large minded enough to be able to appreciate the advantages of education. Such advantages they were determined that those who were to come after them should enjoy. And because a narrow sectarianism then excluded Baptists from the benefits of higher education in these

Provinces, our fathers resolved that the Baptists of this land should possess institutions of learning of their own. Accordingly, though few in numbers and poor in respect to worldly wealth, the Baptists of that day by much self-sacrifice established Horton Academy in 1828, the Seminary at Fredericton in 1836, and Acadia College in 1838. Some of the fathers lived to see the union of the Baptist churches of the three Provinces for missionary, educational and other Christian work in one Convention; and having seen this abundant fruitage of their labors, they departed in faith, having great reason to rejoice in all that God had wrought for them and through their faithful efforts in His service.

"The little one" of a century ago which met in that first Association at Granville, consisting of a very few churches, mostly in Western Nova Scotia, and a very few hundred members, has become in 1900 a host, comprising more than 400 churches and reporting more than 50,000 church members. Their missionary interests have broadened and strengthened with the progress of the years, until these interests are now concerned, not only with our own Maritime Provinces, but with Quebec, the wide Northwest and with the Telugu land of India where, during the last quarter of a century, our churches have founded and fostered what is now a most hopeful missionary enterprise. Our educational work, too, from humble beginnings has grown to large proportions, its influence upon the denomination for good has been incalculable, and the Baptists of these Provinces are today able to offer to their young people educational advantages which they do not blush to compare with any to be obtained elsewhere in the country.

While we rejoice in the blessings which we have received and the healthful growth which the denomination has enjoyed, it is well for us to recall the time of beginnings, to praise God for his constant favor, and to be grateful for those men of God who, in faith and prayer and in much self-denying labor, laid the foundations for that in which we rejoice today. It will be well, too, if we shall emulate their virtues, and, by the exercise of like faith and prayer and self-denying effort, prove that those whom we call "Fathers" were indeed our spiritual kith and kin.

Editorial Notes

—"The most interesting feature of the Newton Anniversary, was the presence and address of Dr. Alvah Hovey," says the Watchman, and adds with truth, "For the half century he has been at Newton he has been one of the most conspicuous and formative influences."

—Among American Congregationalists it would be impossible to mention three men so distinguished as Dr. Edwards A. Park, Dr. Richard Salter Storrs and Dr. A. J. F. Behrends, who have all passed away during the past few weeks. They were all preachers of remarkable power. Dr. Park was also recognized as one of the ablest theologians of his day. He had reached a very advanced age, having entered his ninety-second year. In his earlier life, Dr. Park's theology was considered to be of a very advanced type, and he was denounced in some quarters for holding semi-Unitarian views, but the currents of "progressive theology" carried his younger contemporaries so far past him, that in his later years he came to be spoken of as the Nestor of Orthodoxy. Dr. Park exercised a strong influence upon the theological thought of his day, especially in New England. He was a profound thinker, an eloquent speaker, and withal possessed an abounding vein of humor which enabled him to enliven a disquisition upon some hard theological subject with apt and mirth-provoking stories. It is true, as the Outlook remarks, that Dr. Park so outlived his generation as in some degree to outlive the celebrity which was justly his in the fulness of his powers. On the whole it seems a happy thing if a man is permitted to depart as Dr. Storrs has done, just after having put off the harness of active service, or, like Dr. Behrends, to be called away in the ripe and mellow prime of a fruitful ministry, before the feebleness and loss of power which very advanced age must bring have begun to be felt.

—The twenty-sixth annual session of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian church of Canada is now in session in Halifax. The Moderator for the year is the Rev. Principal Pollok, D. D., of the Presbyterian College of Halifax, who was chosen by the unanimous vote of the Assembly to preside over its deliberations. Dr. Pollok has given able and faithful service to his church, both in the pastorate and during the past 25 years, in connection with the theological work of the denomination in that Eastern Province. His election as Moderator is a fitting recognition of his long and eminent services. The

people of Halifax present opportunity and public means so much ability represented. show that the during the year Fund, amount year's contribu to one stateme are 2942 cong with a total ch crease of 106.0 members for contains anoth and seems to in the member take it is not characterized as sented.

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