

"FIFTY YEARS' MINISTRY."

The Rev. Henry Wilkes, D.D., Professor of Theology in the Congregational College, on October 13th celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the preaching of his first sermon by delivering an address to the members of Zion Church, Montreal, founded on the following text: "But I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High." Ps. lxxvii. 10.

After a brief introduction, the reverend doctor said this text is made the motto of reminiscences of a ministry of fifty years' duration. My ministry began with the first sermon delivered to a congregation of my fellow-men, by one who had relinquished commercial pursuits, and had consecrated the remainder of his life to the Christian ministry. Having spent six years in this city in connection with the house of the late John Torrance first as a clerk, and having reached twenty-two years of age, as a partner for the last year, I left Montreal for Glasgow in the midsummer of 1828, that I might join myself to the University of that city, and to the Theological Academy of the Independents, conducted by the late Rev. Ralph Wardlaw, D.D., and Greville Ewing. In October of the same year I preached at Govan, then a village two miles from Glasgow, a sermon on the text "Therefore if any be in Christ he is a new creature, old things have passed away, behold all things have become new." 2 Cor. v. 17. It may appear to some strange that one in such a position should be urged to preach. But it so happened that I had already enjoyed good advantages of education, and withal of no little practice of public speaking in the Sunday school work of the American Presbyterian Church of this city, of which I had been a member upwards of two years. My memoranda show this preaching ministry was more continuous than I should be disposed to permit to one of my students of the present day. Shortly after I preached at Kilmarnock, Larkhall, Cambuslang, Hamilton, Helensburgh, Greenock, Alloa, Ayr and Dunfermline. The midsummer of 1829 was spent in Ireland, in company with an Irish deacon of one of your churches in Scotland, and I preached at Belfast, open fields around the last mentioned city. It was a most encouraging service. It would be of little interest to you were I further to recount the details of this form of ministerial work during the years 1830 and 1831, the summers of both of which years were spent in England and that of the last of them in efforts for the good of Canada. The result of those efforts were the obtaining the service of the late Rev. Richard Miles, who formed this Church and was its first pastor, and also the nucleus of acquiring your present College Library. In 1832, prior to leaving Glasgow for this port in the good brig "Favorite," Captain James Allan, I was solemnly set apart and ordained to the ministry with appropriate services in Dr. Wardlaw's Church, West George street. The Sundays of a voyage of five weeks were cheered and improved by divine service on the deck, there being upwards of one hundred souls on board. Captain Allan always cooperated most heartily. One of my hearers on those Sundays, then a young immigrant, told me not two months ago that he had seldom seen me since, but that he remembered well the services on board the "Favorite." After a short stay in this city, the mission I had undertaken called me westward, and kept me busily employed during the summer, lecturing, preaching, and holding public meetings. Meanwhile that dire disease, the cholera, swept away nearly one tenth the inhabitants of this city. On my return old friends were missed, while sadness and sorrow dwelt among survivors. Many years afterwards I was informed by a Christian minister that one of those disciples by the way had greatly awakened him as a youth, and led him to seek and find a Saviour. Arrangements were made for my entrance during the following summer on a stated ministry at York, now Toronto, where, instead of at Montreal, there was probability that my life work would be carried on. Had it been so, how different a narrative of experience and effort would have resulted! Much to my disappointment at the time, the scheme fell

through, and I became convinced that we must have systematic British help in order to succeed in the introduction to Canada of Congregational churches and institutions.

At length in April, 1833, this itinerant ministry came to an end, by my settlement in the Albany street Church, Edinburgh. Having thus spoken of a ministry extending from October, 1828, to April, 1833, one naturally inquires of what sort it was. The subject of the first sermon suggests the tone that pervaded them all. Men must be in Christ if they are to be saved—there is salvation in no other, "there is none other name under heaven" whereby or by whom that boon can be obtained. I do not forget that my urgency, often impassioned entreaty, in calling upon the people at once to turn unto the Lord, forsaking their rebellious attitude, brought upon me not unfrequently the rebuke of grave and reverend seniors, whose theological conceptions were rudely assailed by such appeals. Meanwhile, the Lord added His gracious testimony by giving me seals to my ministry of the time and place. I am reminded of one especially having far reaching issues. A shrewd, intelligent man was walking aimlessly in the street about ten o'clock on Sunday morning, in a town some twelve miles from Glasgow. He was in much spiritual distress of soul, and knew not which way to turn. Being accosted by a friend he was asked to attend service in the Independent chapel, where a young man from America was to officiate that day. He complied, and the day's instruction was the means of his relief; he found rest in the Saviour, and in due time joined himself to the Church, bringing with him of course his young family. That was the family in which the renowned David Livingstone, the African missionary and explorer, was then a boy, for his father was the man who on that Sunday received the blessing. I did not learn these facts until more than twenty-five years afterwards. In looking back to those early years I have only further to say that I carried with me across the Atlantic a determined opposition to all prevailing use of intoxicants, took occasion to write in the Greenock newspaper on the subject of abstinence from what was admitted to be lawful, but which was not expedient, and throughout those five years the general benevolent objects had such advocacy as I was able to give them. We are not to forget that our Divine Master went about doing good. He lived for it.

On the next period of three years as pastor in Edinburgh, Scotland, I must not dwell. I found in fellowship 140 members and left the number 240. My Bible class contained two men who have since spent their active life as missionaries in China, and are now, in old age, retired from active service. Two others, one of whom has done the same in India, and the other now occupies a prominent position as pastor in England. During this period the voluntary controversy raged, to which I was called to contribute my quota of information and argument; was editor for two of the three years of the "Denominational Magazine," coming into pleasant relations with certain Quaker friends in England, who were outspoken in a conflict for the Evangelical faith. I sailed for New York, and found myself and family in Montreal early in August, 1836. I was met on landing at the wharf from the steamer from Laprairie by a number of friends; it is doubtful if any one of them survives except Mr. Henry Vennor, with whom from that date I have been on terms of intimate friendship. Though arriving in August, I did not take charge here until the first Sunday, in October, for I had to visit leading points in Upper Canada and the townships of Lower Canada, as agent of the Colonial Mission. The design was to furnish that Society with general and local information by which they might be guided in selecting and sending out suitable ministers of Jesus Christ.

Before passing from this second epoch, let me say that one's faith was sorely tried again and again, as the present in Montreal was contrasted with the past in Edinburgh. I left a membership of 240 to find one of less than fifty; and though my hearers in the evening were numerous, they did not reach the aggregate in Edinburgh.

The period to which these memories refer extends

from October 2, 1836, to May 14, 1871, during which thirty-five years I was the sole pastor of the Church in this city, which for the first ten years met in St. Maurice street Chapel, and the remaining twenty-five years in this building. My beloved friend Rev. Richard Miles left a membership of forty-eight and an average congregation of about 100. There was a debt upon the building not very far from its value. One half the basement was leased to a merchant as cellarage; there were no galleries or vestry. The few people were of one mind and that one mind was to serve the Lord and to promote the interests of the Church. The general attendance upon the ministry grew steadily, as did the membership of the Church. The congregations in the evening frequently filled the little building, for at the time evening service in the churches was not the rule, and members of the Episcopalian and Presbyterian congregations frequented my evening ministry. The steady growth of the congregation induced the Church to occupy, in the Sunday school and week night services, the entire basement, to erect a vestry for a retiring room for the minister and for a Bible class, and then to erect galleries, thereby largely increasing the accommodation. During this latter process we united in service with our friends of the American Presbyterian Church and their then pastor, Rev. Caleb Strong. With that Church we have always had the most friendly relations, as also with that so long under the care of the late Rev. Dr. Taylor. As we prospered we paid off our indebtedness, both the original and that arising from improvements and enlargements. The progress alluded to and the need of another congregation with us minister to assist in the general work of the denomination, led to the formation of a second church under the care of Rev. J. J. Carruthers, now, and for the last thirty years, of Portland, Maine. They met for a time in a hall, and then erected a church building. This last was too expensive a movement for their number and means, and ultimately crushed the once hopeful cause. The introduction also of the Free Church of Scotland movement on the visit of the late Dr. Burns, and their choice of an eastern position in the city, naturally though innocently interfered with the progress and success of the second church enterprise. The disruption in Scotland led several families, who deeply sympathised with it, to attend my ministry for a time, and to seek communion with the church until they saw what they could do in our city to promote an object dear to them. Towards the close of our occupancy of the building in St. Maurice street, there was made a very vigorous and persistent effort by means of tracts and printed sheets circulated in offices, warehouses, and other places, especially among young men, to shake their confidence in the great facts of the Trinity, our Lord's divinity, the personality and divinity of the Holy Spirit, human depravity, our Lord's atonement and others which the Church generally regards as of a fundamental nature. Believing it the duty of some one, I announced a series of discourses on the subjects in view of the Arian and Socinian controversies. The building, seating about five hundred, was packed for nine successive Sabbath evenings with attentive listeners, among whom, be it said to their credit, were many who favored the negative theology. I shall ever bless God for the result. Many waverers were assured; and there followed the turning to the Lord of not a few who had been halting between two opinions. During all this period I was secretary of an auxiliary Bible Society, and from 1839 an active promoter and officer of the French Canadian Missionary Society. It was my custom to make an annual visit to our newly planted churches in the eastern townships, and the north-west of the city. As I drove my own sleigh and went alone, I had some rough experience amid our severe winter storms. During several weeks of one summer I was engaged at the instance of the Mission in visiting Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. At St. John I preached in churches of several denominations, and was received with remarkable kindness by, in some instances, crowded congregations. It should also be noted as a feature of the times in Montreal, that the Mercantile Library Association and the Mechanics' Institute