

III.—THE FIRST SERVICE.

"The groves were God's first temples."—RYANT.

Clear and bright and beautiful, meet "emblem of eternal rest," was our first Sabbath in Beckwith. Word had been sent to every family that service would be held in the forenoon. From far and near a large audience gathered to hear the first sermon ever preached in the township. Men, women and children trudged many miles to be present. Debarred for months and years from public worship, they would not neglect the precious opportunity. It needed no cathedral-chime or loud-tongued bell to summon them to the sacred spot. They may have been homely in garb and appearance, for hard toil and scanty fare are not aids to fine looks, but they were sincere worshippers. Their serious, reverent demeanor befitted the day and the event. All heard the message gladly, fixing their gaze upon the minister, and giving him close attention. None slept, or yawned, or seemed tired, although sitting on logs with neither backs for support nor cushions for ease. No watches were pulled out to "time the speaker" and note if he got through in twenty minutes. The era of lopped-off prayers, curtailed sermon and one hour service had not been introduced. Black flies and mosquitos swarmed in myriads seeking to devour the multitude. Notwithstanding these drawbacks it was a solemn memorable occasion, tenderly remembered and spoken of long after two-thirds of the congregation had "joined the general assembly and church of the first-born" in glory.

Of course, the service was in the open air. "The groves were God's first temples," and the persecuted covenanters traveled far to worship "under the blue canopy." A church, or place adapted to the purpose, had not been erected in Beckwith. A huge tree was cut down, the