

PRESBYTERIANISM IN COBOURG

(From the COBOURG WORLD, Friday, December 14, 1894.)

A sermon preached in the Presbyterian Church, Cobourg, by the Rev. J.HAY, B.A.; B.D., Sabbath morning, December 9th, 1894.

Value of history-- First Presbyterian Minister in Ontario-- Early places of worship prior to the erection of the Stone Church.-- The Rev. Matthew Miller, M.A.-- St. Andrew's Church opened July, 1834.-- Noted Preachers-- A very important meeting re Clergy Reserves--Rev. Thomas Alexander-- Old Communion Roll -- Ladies' Association of 1848-- Successive Pastorates-- Office bearers-- Changes during 60 years-- and some lessons therefrom.

Scripture Lessons Psalm 89:1-19 ; Deut. 32:1-14 ; Eph. 4:11-16;
Psalm 120, Par. 2, Hymn 20; 319.

Text --"Remember the former things of old." --Isaiah 46-9.

It is my purpose this morning to give an account of this congregation, from the earliest obtainable records, to the days familiar to most of the people. The uses of history are of the very highest order. The present grows out of, and reflects the past, as it, itself, must influence the future.

The history of any individual congregation may not be a matter of much concern to contemporary congregations, but it is a subject of much interest to the present members, and can be in any case, full of practical lessons to the student of human life and action.

The last address of Moses to the twelve tribes dwells largely on the last forty years of their career. He says, Deut. 8 : 2- "Ye shall remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, and to know what was in thine heart, whether thou would'st keep his commandments or no." and again, Deut. 32 : 7. "Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations." Isaiah, the most profound and sublime of all the prophets, enjoins upon Israel to "Remember the former things of old." A true knowledge of the past increases our faith in the continued goodness of God, teaches us charity to all and enables us to see many things in the light of their results, thus enabling us in our judgments "to the better judge."

The first systematic effort to send Presbyterian ministers to Upper Canada, was made by the Dutch Reformed Church of the United States. In 1798 the Rev. Robert McDowell was sent by the Presbytery of Albany, as a missionary to this province. His parish extended from Elizabethtown, now Brockville, in the east, to York, now Toronto, in the west. He preached and organized congregations in different places, and in 1800 accepted a call from the congregations of Adolphustown, Earnestown, and Fredricksburgh on the Bay of Quinte, where he laboured until his death in 1841, leaving behind him the memory of a faithful minister of the Gospel. For many years he was the only minister in central Canada, and AS METHODIST MINISTERS WERE NOT ALLOWED TO CELEBRATE MARRIAGES, Mr. McDowell, it is said, celebrated 1,000 marriages prior to 1836 for those who were not members of the English Church.

The first Presbyterian service in this vicinity was held in the house of Mr. Eldridge Stanton, father of the late Oliver Stanton, who died in 1888. Mr. Stanton came to Canada in 1894 from the United States and settled near Cobourg, on land part of which is now known as the Boggs Farm. (Lot # 9, Concession I- Purchased in 1803 from Daniel Tubbs, 200 Acres) There was no regular minister, but as occasion offered, when someone of the few ministers and missionaries passed from settlement to settlement through the almost unbroken forest, service was held in the largest and most central homes of the early settlers. As Mr. Stanton died in 1812, we can trace Presbyterian services to a time previous to that date.

Early in the century the first court house was used as a place of worship. (Court House erected in 1806-1807 at Elgin and Burnham Sts, Cobourg) Here, about 1826, the Rev. J. Jenkins, who came to Canada in 1817, and became minister of Markham, Ontario, in connection with the U.P. synod of Upper Canada, dispensed the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. In 1827, Mr. Jenkins ordained as Elders, the late Hon. Andrew Jeffrey, and the late John Wallace in an inn at Port Hope. Shortly afterwards, the Rev. Abner Wright, ordained Mr. John Lindsay to the eldership. Meetings for public worship were also held in Mr. WILLIAM WELLER's waggon shop, at the corner of Orange and George Streets. This was a large room, being used as a waggon shop, for Mr. Weller controlled the stage line running from Kingston to Toronto. At other times services were held in Mr. Clench's Cabinet Shop, which stood south of where the present market house now stands.

The first settled pastor was the Rev. Matthew Millar, M.A. He was sent out as one of the first missionaries of the Kirk of Scotland, and was inducted over the united congregations of Cobourg and Colborne, in June, 1833. We can hardly understand the hardships the first ministers had to face sixty years ago. Service was held every sabbath at both places, but in the morning this Sabbath and in the evening the next. The journey of sixteen miles was made either on horseback or on foot, as no buggies, much less bicycles could run in those days.

There were only sixteen ministers in upper Canada at that time, and only thirty-six in Lower Canada. Any one who can remember the old time communion season, when two or three visiting clergymen were a necessity to help in the services, will understand how, with the few ministers in the Province, Mr. Millar was called to Perth, Lanark County, to assist at the Communion. While on his return, crossing the Bay of Quinte, on the ice, he was drowned on the 15th of February, 1834. He was found by some boys skating over the place a few days afterwards. His remains were first interred in Belleville, and when it became known who he was, his remains were brought to Cobourg, and buried where the pulpit stood in St. Andrew's Church. The funeral sermon was preached in Wesleyan Methodist Church, by the late Rev. J.M. Rogers, of Peterborough, placed there in October of 1833.

In a book called "A REtrospect of thirty-six Years' residence in Canada West," by John Carruthers, Catechist, there is the following entry: "Friday July 20, 1832, I travelled through the Quaker Settlement on my way to West Guillimbury, there I met the Rev. M. Millar, one of the first missionaries from Home, sent out by the Kirk of Scotland, and I have no doubt but that he was especially intended to do much missionary labor in the forest before becoming the pastor of a congregation. On the same afternoon the Rev. Mr. Miller preached from Matthew, 5 : 9, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God." The word was heard with gladness. He

was a good preacher and his heart was in his work.

Early in the '30's the necessity of a church building was felt so strongly that plans were set on foot to erect a building. The ground for the building, and burial plot was given either by the late Sheriff Ruttan, or the late Hon. Mr. Burnham. -- one gave the ground, and the other gave a sum of money to assist in building the church. (Located on the east side of William Street and south of University Avenue.) The contract was let to Mr. John Fraser, and Messers Burnett. Mr. Black superintended the work of the building. The church was opened for public worship on July, 1834, by the Rev. Jas. Ketchum, of Belleville, who preached from Ex. III : 2-3. "The bush burning but not consumed." As the congregation increased, the gallery was put in, in the winter of 1844, and re-opened for public worship, by the late Rev. D. Burns, of Paisely, Scotland.

From this time until December 14, 1862, when the present building was opened for public worship, the old church was the one place of Presbyterian service, a period of 28½ years. Within its walls, from time to time, were heard men, whose names are widely known in both continents, and indeed, some of them throughout modern Christendom. Alexander Duff, and W.C Burns, the famous missionaries, Alexander Somerville, of Glasgow, the noted evangelist. Wm. Arnott, the author of "Laws from Heaven for Life on Earth", and "Notes on the Parables." James Begg, John Bonar, McNaughton of Paisely, McMillan and King, of Glasgow, McGillivray, Dr. Willis, and Dr. Burns of Toronto, and C.C. Campbell, Principal of Aberdeen College. Besides the following ministers of Canada, Alexander, McLeod, Laing, Rintoul, Esson, Bayne, Gordon, Graham, Ketchum, Stark, Hamilton, Rogers, Reid, Ross, Young, Ingles, Irvine, Ure, Scott, Leithh, Topp, Duncan, Steele, Douglas of Cavan, Waters, Thompson, George McLaren, Willis, Dr. Fraser, late of London, Cassie of Port Hope, the Thorntons, father and son, and many others. Besides these, of other churches, there were Dr. Roaf and Mr. Burpee of the Congregational Church. Dr. Nelles and W.L. Taylor of the Methodist Church, and its walls have resounded to the eloquence of the famous temperance orator, John B. Gough.

In the year 1836 or 1837, the most important meeting of Presbyterians that up to that time had been held in the Province, was convened in the old Stone Church. There were delegations from nearly all the Presbyterian congregations in Upper Canada, met together to consider what steps should be taken to maintain the claims of the Presbyterians to a share of the "Clergy Reserves", as the Church of England was making exclusive claims to these "Reserves." The Hon. William Morris of Perth was chairman, while Hugh Scobie, publisher of the British Colonist, was secretary. The meeting sent the Hon. Mr. Morris to Britain to lay before the Government the claims of the Presbyterians of Canada West. His mission was successful in as much as the judges to whom the House of Lords referred the matter, decided through Chief Justice Tindall that the term "Protestant Clergy," included other clergy than those of the Church of England.

After the death of Mr. Millar, the congregation chose the Rev. Thomas Alexander, and at the same time separated from Colborne, and organized into a single charge. Mr. Alexander was sent out fresh from the college in Scotland, and preached his first sermon in Cobourg, in the new church, in 1834, November. In due time he was ordained and inducted on March 12th, 1835, at a salary of \$400.00 at first, and remained with the congregation until June, 1847, being over twelve years pastor of this congregation. Some years ago, Mr. Alexander returned and held services in the old church. It is very interesting to read

over the names of those who formed the first communion of the Cobourg congregation. The following were the members of session :-- John Lindsay, Andrew Jeffrey, Asaph Stewart, Samuel Campbell, Allan McIntosh, and Andrew Milne, the last four having been ordained by Mr. Alexander, November 25, 1832. The old communion roll is a notable book. Its first forty-six pages contain the Confession of Faith -- then the list of ruling elders I have just named, and a list of 139 names of those who sat down at the first communion. Of those who sat down that Sabbath, Feb. 28th, 1836, all but two have passed beyond. These two are the Rev. Thomas Alexander, of Mohawk, Ontario, and Mrs. A. Alcorn of Chatham. And of the 180 names of those who formed the second communion, October 9th, 1836, there are only two still on the roll, viz : Mrs. Wm. Burnet, Sr., and Mr. Walter Riddell. To many of those who were young -- then, the words will come to mind,

"Old memories gather round us,

Old forms go trooping past."

And to us all it is well to remember the former things of old."

Time would fail me to enumerate the names of those who formed the congregation in 1836. Many of them were men who took high places in the service of their country, and all, we trust, tried to serve their day and generation in a way to leave much for us to learn from their lives and character. Sometimes when one considers the solid, honest, God-fearing men and women of the past generation, a comparison arises not flattering in every sense to the younger generation of to-day. They believed, and said less. We are apt to believe less and say more. To show that the women of the congregation were active then as well as now, I will take the liberty of reading over the names of "the Ladies Association of the Presbyterian Church, Cobourg for Promoting Christian Missions," in the year 1848 :-- Mrs. Morgan, treasurer, Mrs. Brodie, depository, Mrs. Hudspeth, secretary. Committee :-- Mrs. Jeffrey, Mrs. Milne, Mrs. Scott, Mrs. Weller, Mrs. Helliwell, Mrs. McCa-llum, Mrs. Pratt, Mrs. Glover, Mrs. Waddell, Mrs. D. Burnet, Mrs. Lauder, Mrs. Butler, Mrs. Hossack, Mrs. Hutton, Mrs. Lochead, Mrs. McLellan.

The division that took place in the Kirk of Scotland in 1843, was, as some think, unfortunately carried across the Atlantic, and the majority of the Cobourg Congregation cast in their lot with the Free Church of Scotland. Litigation never aids spiritual life, and no doubt many could see the sad effects of that division, which indeed had reason for the step in the old land. At least one of the sad results in Cobourg was, so it is said, that the church was never free of debt. The lesson for us is, a divided congregation has not much power to pay debt, compared to the same congregation standing to-gether as a unit.

After Mr. Alexander left, Dr. Ormiston, then a student in Victoria, gave repeated supply during the vacancy.

The third pastor was the Rev. D. McLeod of Gourrock, Scotland. Coming to Canada in 1849, he was called and inducted in the Cobourg Congregation in January 1850. He remained the pastor for about ten years, when his health failing, he returned to Scotland and lived only a few years after his return. Two of Mr. McLeod's sons, well known to many older members of the congregation are esteemed ministers of the Presbyterian Church in Canada,-- The Rev. D.D. McLeod of Barrie, and the Rev P. McF. McLeod of Victoria, B.C.

The fourth pastor was the Rev. J. Laing, M.A., Now Dr. Laing of Dundas, Ontario. Mr. Laing was called from Scarborough, and accepted the call, his induction took place on the 10th of November, 1859. Mr. Laing's pastorate extended from that time until December, 1871-- a period of twelve years. During Mr. Laing's term, the congregation feeling the need of increased accomodation, in 1862, erected this commodious building, which was opened for the public worship on December 14, 1862.. Some changes have been made since that time, in the gallery, the pulpit and the pews, but many can recall to mind the new church as it came from one contractor's hands 32 years ago. Many a one has said, while meeting a stranger in the basement, "here" I sat in the infant class, and "there" years afterwards, I attended the pastor's Bible class. In 1871, Dr. Laing was, by order of the synod, removed from Cobourg, with a view to canvass for the Knox College Endowment. The following year, October, 1872, the Rev. J.M. Douglas of Uxbridge and Leaskdale was inducted into the congregation at Cobourg. Mr. Douglas remained until June, 1876, when he offered himself as missionary to India, and by order of the General assembly he was designated to the foreign field in the fall of 1876, having been pastor for about four years. The sixth pastor was the Rev. Jas. Ballantyne, formerly missionary in Jamaica, and also since leaving Canada. Mr. Ballantyne was inducted on the 15th of November, 1876, and remained in charge until April, 1881, when he was called to Paris, Ontario. The seventh pastor was the Rev. D.L. McCrae, formerly of Woodlands, and now of Collingwood, Ontario, who was inducted July 5th, 1882, and remained in charge until December 1888, a period of about six and one half years. On July 30th, 1889, the present incumbent was inducted into the charge of the congregation.

Of the eight ministers the Rev. Mr. Millar, and the Mr. McLeod are dead, the Rev Mr. Alexander has long since retired, and is still living at an advanced age, the remaining five are still in active service.

During these past 60 years, there have been 30 elders, of whom 12 only are now living, viz :- Messers Roper, Linton, Hagerman, Henderson, Wm. Jeffrey, and the seven members of the present session.

Of all who have acted as managers, the great majority have passed away. Ministers, elders, managers, and members have ceased from earth, to live, we hope, for ever in the service of the church of the firstborn in heaven. They fitted their places, in many instances so well, that many thought we never should see their like again. But still the church lives on, and shall live as long as it abides faithfully in Him who hath called it to Himself, and named it by His name, which liveth and abideth for ever.

When we recall the former days, what changes we may note in the ordinary service of a Sabbath. The psalms are now supplemented by the hymns, and the tuning fork has grown into the organ. The preaching of to-day as compared with the preaching of the past, might afford much matter for contemplation. And no doubt the present preaching would be much better did it more frequently remember the former days. What changes too in the country-- social, moral and religious. From a dense forest with a few thousand inhabitants, separated by reason of bad means of communication, we have now a cultivated, well-peopled land, with railroads, bridges, telegraph, telephone, and all the advantages of the marvelous advance of the last 60 years in science and commerce. We see, too, the great changes in the ecclesiastical field. From being a much divided people-- Burghers, Antiburghers, Seceders, U.P's, Free Church and Established Kirk. We have the united, vigorous and

progressive Presbyterian church in Canada, with nearly 1,000 ministers and missionaries, about 300,000 members, and an annual income of \$2,000,000. Instead of the King's Bush of Huron and Bruce being an unknown land, we have pushed our western frontier across the Rockies and have laved our feet in the quiet Pacific. Instead of seeking our ministers from the mother land, we have the six colleges of Halifax, Morin, Montreal, Queen's, Knox and Manitoba, all earnestly devoted to training young men for the ministry at home and the great open fields abroad.

We have seen these sixty years work marvels in the political arena. Responsible government by the people for the people. We have seen the discontented, disunited Canadas, along with the Maritime Provinces and the territories of the west, united on one great confederation, and let us hope that some of us may live to see the day when our people in all Canada will be amalgamated and consolidated with the high aim of serving God, and keeping the nation a unit, pure and undivided, and an integral part of the great British Empire. For our church and sister churches let us act as we sing "peace be within thy walls and prosperity within thy palaces." May the memory of the past inspire us to do our part in hastening on the day of the son of Man, when all the churches shall be one in Him, and all nations arise and own Him Lord and King. Amen.

Copied By : Percy L. Climo
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The following announcement also appeared in the December 14, 1894 issue of the COBOURG WORLD :

THE CHURCHES

Presbyterian

The Rev. Dr. Gregg, of Knox College, Toronto, will conduct the anniversary services in the Cobourg Presbyterian Church next Sabbath, December 16, morning and evening. A special offering will be given in aid of the building fund of the church. On Monday evening, the anniversary social will be held, supper served from 6 to 8 o'clock in the basement. The chair will be taken at 8 o'clock and a good musical and literary programme will be rendered by a large efficient choir and by Rev. Dr. Laing of Dundas, Mr. Wm. Kerr, Q.C., and others. Tickets, 25 cents; family tickets three for 50 cents, five for 75 cents. The Public are cordially invited to all these services, commemorating the 60th anniversary of the Presbyterian church in Cobourg.
