

### III.—THE FIRST SERVICE.

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

"The Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands."—Acts vii:48.

"Temples of stone will pass away, but that which will endure forever is worship in spirit and in truth."—Hamerton.

LEAR 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 nor 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 mosquitoes 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 stump of which, sawed off straight, accommodated the big Bible and sufficed for a pulpit. On the trunk, drawn by oxen to one side, sat mother and her ten children. Other trees, stripped of their branches and hauled in front of the stump, seated the congregation. At the appointed hour father arose, spoke a few words of greeting and gave out a familiar psalm. John Cram, a talented musician, led the

singing, which was devotional and inspiring. Two of my sisters were superior vocalists, whose sweet voices swelled the melodious strains, and the whole assemblage helped. Only the good old tunes, like Old Hundred, Martin, Bangor, St. David and Dundee, were used at father's services. Can we doubt that the praises of Beckwith's first congregation ascended high above the trees, even to the throne of the Omnipotent?

"Praise God from whom all blessings flow,  
Praise Him all creatures here below,  
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host,  
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost."

Standing with bowed heads, the attitude of deepest reverence, the people heard a fervent prayer. Another psalm and an exposition of the chapter of scripture followed. The sermon, unfolding the plan of salvation so clearly "that he may rue who readeth it," entreated those out of Christ to "make their calling and election sure." The entire service was in English, with which a few of the oldest folks were not on very intimate terms. After a short intermission, to eat their simple repast and drink at the nearest well, the worshippers gathered again for Gaelic services. Aged men and women shed tears of joy to hear the gospel once more in the language of their native glen—the language some Highlanders firmly believe "the devils don't understand and the angels praise God in." It proved a notable Sabbath in the history of Beckwith. Late in the afternoon all returned home, much refreshed in spirit, to spend the evening in godly conversation, studying the Bible and catechising the young. Worldly topics and worldly cares were laid aside on Sunday, which was truly regarded as the Lord's Day. Visiting was unheard of, nor was the fourth commandment pronounced out-of-date. In their estimation, "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy" imposed a moral obligation and meant precisely what it said. Would that this righteous opinion prevailed everywhere!

Nowadays many sneer at the strict observance of the Sabbath in former times. They deride Puritan narrowness, boast of their own broad views, and affect pity for "bigots tied down to the Bible and catechism" under rigid notions that make Sunday a horror. What are the facts? We were taught to think Sunday the best day of the seven. Far from proving wearisome, it was always restful and edifying. Everything was prepared on Saturday, that the least work possible should be done on the Sabbath. Instead of lying in bed later than on week-days, we arose an hour earlier to learn a chapter in the Bible before breakfast. Sickness alone prevented us from attending both forenoon and afternoon services. Wolves, bad roads and long dis-

tances rendered evening service impracticable. A flake or two of snow, a drop of rain, a black cloud, a speck of dust, a little extra heat or a touch of cold would not keep us from church. Fair-weather Christianity, sure to shrink in the wash, had no place in the Beckwith brand of piety. We got our Bibles in the evening to compare passages, repeat what we had committed and answer questions father would ask. Usually a half-hour's singing preceded family worship, which fitly closed the hallowed day. These delightful exercises, full of sweetness and profit, it is a pleasure to recall. Hallowed Sabbaths laid the foundation of many a sterling character, equipped thoroughly for usefulness here and felicity hereafter. How much they miss who vainly seek in Sunday newspapers, Sunday amusements, Sunday excursions and trashy literature the solid satisfaction of a well-spent Sabbath!

In this connection a reference to the first Gaelic sermon preached at Perth will be appropriate. Rev. William Bell, the first settled minister in Lanark county, came to Perth in 1817. A dozen log-houses in the woods, occupied mainly by officers of the war of 1812, comprised the embryo town. The earliest settlers arrived in 1816, three years prior to the first settlement in Beckwith. Mr. Bell, then and for forty years pastor of the Presbyterian church, wrote to father to assist him at the communion, on the second Sabbath of June, 1824. Father and mother walked to Perth, crossing a swamp a mile long on logs set endwise and not always within easy reach. Had there been any horses in the township they could not have traveled on such roads in summer. At the service on Saturday Mr. Bell announced that Mr. Buchanan would dispense the sacrament in Gaelic. The communion, an ordinance observed with peculiar solemnity by Scotch Presbyterians, attracted a large congregation on Sunday. Groups of people on foot, with here and there a man or woman on horseback, thronged the roads leading to Perth. The church could not hold them and scores stood around the door and the open windows. Father preached in the morning from the words: "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." He then served the first table in Gaelic and Mr. Bell served the others. At that period communicants left their pews and sat at long tables—rough boards covered with white cotton—in the aisles to receive the sacrament. The ministers would address each set, which was called "fencing the tables," and hand the bread and wine to the elders to distribute to the members. After another short address, those at the tables would return to their seats to make room for the next lot, continuing in this way until all had communed who wished. Everything was "done decently and in order," with no unseemly haste, communion services generally lasting several hours. Usually five or six tables were served at Perth and four or five in Beckwith, in a man-

ner that impressed the most careless spectator with the devoutness of those who obeyed the command of the Master: "This do in remembrance of Me."

Gaelic service in the afternoon drew a host of people eager to hear, for the first time at Perth, if not in Canada, the Word in their beloved vernacular. Mr. Bell not knowing Gaelic, father conducted the entire service, which opened by singing the ever-dear One Hundredth Psalm—"Togadh gach tìr ard-ìslach ghlavidh, do Dia Jehobah mor."

He preached with great effectiveness from the text: "All power is given unto Me in heaven and on earth." The discourse extolled the Saviour of the world, who shed His blood to redeem our lost race. Tears flowed down the furrowed cheeks of hoary listeners, to whom the service and the language brought back vividly the scenes of their youth in Scotland. Heads white with the snow no July sun could melt bent low to weep silently. Every heart was stirred and every eye moist. The



BECKWITH COMMUNION CUPS.\*

story of redeeming love and triumph had lost none of its wondrous power and beauty. When he had pronounced the benediction, hundreds pressed forward to clasp father's hand and beg him to come again. Although three-quarters of a century have passed away since that glorious day, and although he who spoke and all the adults who heard have crumbled into dust, its influence still remains and a few fond hearts cherish lovingly their early recollections of "The Gaelic Sermon."

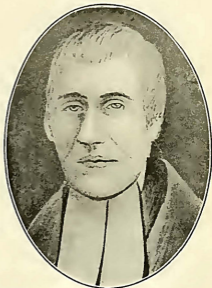
Rev. William Bell, for forty years a forceful personality in Lanark county, ministered to the first church until his death in 1857. Two sons, George and Andrew, filled Presbyterian pulpits many years. James, registrar of the county for a generation, lived in Perth



REV. WILLIAM BELL'S CHURCH.

[\*These communion cups, procured by my grandfather in Montreal and engraved "G. B., B., 1822," (George Buchanan, Beckwith, 1822,) were the first and only ones ever used by him in his Beckwith services. After his death and the removal of the family, the cups lay for years unknown and neglected in the attic of James McArthur, whose father was one of the early elders. His son, James B. McArthur, preserved them carefully and kindly gave me one during my recent visit to Beckwith.—John J. McLaurin.]

to a good old age. Ebenezer taught school in North Elmsley, later cultivated a farm on Ottay Lake, and finally settled in the West. He is the last of the family, while Mrs. Maria Campbell, a widowed granddaughter of the revered minister, is now perhaps the only descendant of Rev. William Bell in or about Perth. Mrs. Bell lived to be over ninety. The old frame church, a quaint structure, was burned by a base incendiary in 1867, after standing idle a decade. St. Andrew's congregation was organized in 1826 and reared a stone edifice in 1832. Rev. Thomas Wilson, a gifted, earnest minister, was its first pastor. He returned to Scotland eventually, dying there in 1877. The late Rev. Dr. Bain succeeded Mr. Wilson in 1846, remaining until his death in 1881. Two years ago the building was completely remodeled. Rev. Alexander H. Scott is now in charge. At the Disruption a large number left the Old



REV WILLIAM BELL.  
From an old print.



MRS. (REV.) WILLIAM BELL,  
When 85 years old.

Kirk, built Knox church and called Rev. James B. Duncan to the pastorate. Mr. Duncan, unquestionably the greatest preacher ever located at Perth, stayed eighteen years, building up one of the most influential congregations in the province. This year (1900) he celebrated his jubilee.

A little incident will illustrate the strictness of some of the godly pioneers. An elder was to drive Mr. Duncan to an appointment in North Elmsley minister exclaimed: "This is on a bright Sunday afternoon. The beautiful weather for the country." The elder turned upon him

sharply and rejoined: "Dinna ye ken this is the Sawbath, when ye mauna crack about the weather an' sic warldly things?" Mr. Duncan, a born wit, enjoyed the rebuke and did nothing but quote scripture the rest of the journey.



REV. JAMES B. DUNCAN.  
First pastor of Knox Church, Perth,  
now retired and living at Galt.

Rev. James B. Duncan once asked Rev. Solomon Mylne, the sedate minister of the Old Kirk in Smith's Falls: "When do you expect to see Deacon Blank again?" "Never," was the solemn answer, "the Deacon is in heaven!" The full humor of the remark, wholly unconscious on the part of the staid preacher, did not strike the questioner until he returned home and told the incident to his wife. Mr. Mylne long since joined the departed deacon in the Celestial City.

Rev. Father Lamothe celebrated the first mass in Perth in 1820, doing missionary work through Lanark county a year or two. Father John McDonnell, who came in 1823 and built a frame church, was the first resident priest. Father McDonnell lived to be

upwards of ninety, closing his long and useful life in Glengarry county. He had hosts of friends among Protestants, who liked him for his candor, his independence and his eccentricities. Once he read from the pulpit a list of contributors to the fund for some important church-enterprise. Each member who gave liberally he commended warmly by name. Those whose subscriptions he deemed not in proportion to their means received a broad hint to this effect: "It's nae sae muckle as it nicht be." As his name and subscription were announced, each Protestant on the list was praised in the peculiar fashion: "Verra gude, indeed, for a heretic!" Then singling out some member of his flock who had been rather close, he would exclaim: "Eh, mon, are ye nae ashamed o' yersel to rin behind a heretic?"

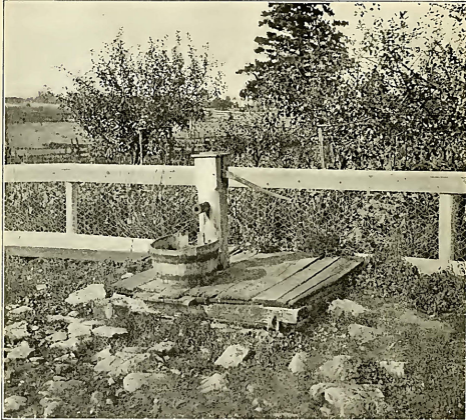
Thus the work began and grew, the good seed was sown and the feeble twig became a giant tree. The full extent of the harvest will be revealed only when "the Books are opened and every man shall be judged according to the deeds he hath done, whether they be good or evil."

Bytown, now Ottawa, was named in honor of Colonel By, constructor of the Rideau Canal.

Abel Russell Ward cut the first tree and built the first house in Smith's Falls, and two years afterwards erected what was known for years as Ward's mill. Born in New York State in 1796, he came to Smith's Falls in 1824, and married Lavinia Merrick, daughter of the founder of Merrickville, in 1826.

The Presbyterians, Episcopalians and Methodists conducted a Union Sunday-School in the old court-house at Perth. The ministers were on friendly terms, although the people divided into cliques and factions, which had little social intercourse with each other. Once the aristocrats, who believed themselves head and shoulders above the ordinary run of humanity, had to do their statute labor on the streets, owing to the scarcity of workmen, much to the edification of the community. John Adams, who attained four-score and ten, taught singing-school most efficiently. Congregational singing was the style in church and Perth ranked high in this feature of worship. Folks dressed neatly on Sundays. My mind recalls perfectly the looks of the principal men and women who lived in Perth seventy or more years ago. Pretty girls were by no means scarce. Sometimes an imported dude, with a silk tile and a come-in-at-the-waist coat, would strike the town and try in vain to score a hit. Three barefooted boys, Malcolm, John and Alexander Cameron, were particularly clever and ambitious. All became eminent, notwithstanding John died in the bloom of what promised to be a remarkable career in medical practice. Malcolm Cameron's public service is a part of the history of the province. The rum-demon was not absent, not a few promising youths going down to the drunkard's grave and the drunkard's eternal doom.

Going on his pony one day to visit a person dangerously ill, father met a large wedding-party from the Irish settlement, in a back township. All were on horseback, each steed bearing a young man and woman, and the meeting occurred in a swamp. The first couple greeted father, the youth enquiring: "Plaise, sur, I make bould to ask if yez be the clargyman?" Told that he was, the speaker said he and his fair companion were on their road to his home to be married, in the presence of a number of friends. Father told them to go and he would return as soon as possible. The young man demurred, saying it would inevitably bring bad luck to go in one direction while the minister went in another. Father then proposed that the whole party accompany him to the nearest house. This was not accepted, the prospective bridegroom declaring that for either the minister or the party to turn back would be an evil omen. At length it was arranged that the pair should dismount and stand on a little knoll barely large enough to hold them. The mud was knee-deep except on this small plot, rising like an oasis in the desert. The couple clasped hands tightly to prevent slipping off, the guests drew their horses around the green spot, father reined his pony in front and performed the ceremony sitting in the saddle. The happy groom handed him ten shillings, with the pleasant remark in his purest brogue: "Shure, an' it's th' iligant job yez done intoirely, an' it's meself an' the colleen that's obliged to yez fer evermore." It was a novel marriage scene, rivalling that at which Dean Swift, wakened at two o'clock in the morning, tied the knot standing at an upper window, the couple looking up from the street below in a pelting shower.



#### SITE OF THE BUCHANAN HOMESTEAD IN BECKWITH.

[Selecting for his abode Lot 14, 6th Concession, Beckwith, 200 acres of rocky and swampy land near the centre of the township, Rev. George Buchanan lived there from 1822 until his death in 1835. Sheltered for a year in a rude cabin, afterwards used for his school, he then built the two-story dwelling of hewed logs destined to be his last home on earth. Excepting myself, none of the family has been on the spot for sixty years. It was my privilege to revisit the hallowed scene on October 17th, 1905, taking with me a photographer from Carleton Place and securing this and other views. Of the buildings grandfather erected no trace is left. The well he had dug, now supplied with a pump, alone remains in front of the site of the once pleasant habitation. Fruit-trees and grass cover the ground, and an industrious farmer has resided for forty years in a stone house not ten yards off. Faithful memory was busy and thoughts of tender associations crowded thickly. To attempt to describe my feelings would be a hopeless task. "For the fashion of this world passeth away" and "we are such stuff as dreams are made on."—John J. McLaurin.]