

Report of Synod's Deputy to Canada

*By Rev Neil Cameron
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Moderator and Brethren,—

At the November meeting of our Synod last year a petition came before us, signed by forty-nine individuals representing people in several districts in the Province of Ontario, Canada, praying the Synod (1) to receive them as a part of our mission field, and (2) to send one of our ministers to dispense the ordinances of the Gospel among them. In that petition they stated that they were homologating our ecclesiastical position as a Church. The two prayers of that petition were granted by our Synod. At that meeting the Rev. J. R. Mackay magnanimously volunteered to go as our first deputy to them, and a committee was set apart to see his pulpit supplied during his absence. But in the inscrutable providence of God our worthy brother passed through severe bodily and mental trials during the winter, so that in the month of March he made it known that he could not go. In these circumstances, and being urged by Mr. Mackay and some of the rest of my brethren, I volunteered to go. To this I was urged the more in my own mind, because my bowels yearned over our dear fellow-countrymen there who proved so faithful, and who were scattered like sheep having no shepherd. At the meeting of our Synod last July I was deputed to go, and you very considerately sent our worthy brother, Mr. Allan M'Lachlan, one of our elders, along with me as an assessor. At the same time a resolution was passed unanimously by the Synod authorising the treasurer of the Church to defray out of the Organisation Fund such of our expenses as might not be met by our friends in Canada. A committee was also appointed to supply St. Jude's pulpit during my absence. The time you gave me was eight Sabbaths for work among them, and the four needed on the voyages going and coming back. Immediately we began to prepare for the journey, and by the good hand of the Lord with us we arrived at Seaforth on the 5th of August,

and our worthy friend, Mr. Daniel Clark, met us there—the first we saw of our friends and also the last, as he never parted with us till we came away.

Here it may be necessary to point out a few facts to show cause why our beloved friends there should hold a position separate from the Presbyterian Church in Canada. You all know there have been two unions consummated among the Presbyterians of Canada. The first, in 1861, between the Free Church and the United Presbyterian Church. In this union Arminianism was placed, at least, on an equal platform with Calvinism. This of itself would have been a just cause of separation. But that was not the only cause. In the basis of that union the original position of the Free Church with respect to the Headship of Christ over the Church and the nations was dropped. The only clue to it was some vague statement about the spiritual independence of the Church; that is, the Church united on a voluntary basis. The prerogatives of Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords were entirely ignored. This caused the people both at Lochalsh and at the North Line of Kincardine to keep out of the union, *minus* their ministers. The people in the south, at East Williams, were better off, because their minister—the Rev. Lachlan Macpherson, a native of Strathdearn, Inverness-shire—refused to enter the union. When he understood that two congregations in the north held the same position, he went to visit them, and held meetings among them. But his former brethren in the ministry, who entered the union, hearing of this charged him with sowing divisions among the people, and this had the effect of causing him not to go north any more till the next union in 1875. So our poor friends in the north were left to shift the best way they could. This did not discourage them. They built two churches—one at each place—and continued to hold religious meetings with their own worthy and godly elders. The ministers continued to plead with Mr. Macpherson to give in and join the Union Church, and at last, after being out for several years, he entered the union under a protest. No sooner did he yield than his conscience began to upbraid him, so that he lost his peace and became a miserable man, as he confessed to a friend

afterwards. We have no doubt but he was a faithful minister of Christ and a godly man.

In the year 1875 a union was consummated between the Presbyterian Church of Canada in connection with the Church of Scotland, the Canada Presbyterian Church, the Presbyterian Church of the Lower Provinces, and the Presbyterian Church of the Maritime Provinces in connection with the Church of Scotland. In the basis of this union there is no mention of the Headship of Christ except a reference in the preamble. In the union of 1861 the Catechisms were, along with the Confession, declared to be in the Constitution of the Church; but in the union they were thrown out. Along with this there was a resolution binding office-bearers to approve of the "practice presently followed in congregations." This bound men to approve of hymns and instrumental music. The Rev. John Ross of Brucefield (a native of Dornoch, Sutherland), tabled a protest against this union, and along with the Rev. Lachlan Macpherson, Messrs. Donald Fraser and George Forrest, two of their own elders, formed themselves into a Presbytery. They considered it to be worse than sacrilege, for the sake of union with men, to abandon such fundamental doctrines and principles. They bound themselves and those who might adhere to them anew to the original Constitution of the Free Church of Scotland. Our worthy friends at Lochalsh and Kincardine hearing of this sent a deputation to Brucefield to ascertain the real position taken up, and, if satisfied, to join them. Being satisfied, they at once joined them, and besought them to take these congregations under their ministerial care, which they did. These two godly ministers (but especially Mr. Ross, as Mr. Macpherson was getting too frail for much travelling) did their utmost to break the Word of Life and dispense the ordinances of the Gospel among the people till they entered into the rest that remains for the people of God. Mr. Macpherson died in the year 1886 and Mr. Ross in 1887. The people were then left without ministers, but they continued to hold meetings with their elders. It may be dutiful to notice here the hardships to which all the unions known to us, whether in Scotland or Canada, have put those who value God's

truth above human amalgamations consummated at the expense of losing the great doctrines and principles of the Word of God. This was really the case in Canada. Our people there are not schismatics, neither do they undervalue a Gospel ministry; but they loved the crown rights of the Lord Jesus, the doctrines of grace, and the spiritual worship of His true Church too dearly to abandon them at the caprice of graceless men. Therefore, there are godly, intelligent, faithful, and humble men and women in Ontario who have not darkened the doors of any of the Union Churches for the last forty one years. This is true consistency in upholding a testimony for Christ's truth in the world, and it ought to put others to shame who are not so consistent in far less trying circumstances.

For the sake of perspicuity it may be useful to state that our people in Canada are situated almost in a straight line along the eastern shore of Lake Huron, but a few miles inland. Brucefield, where we began our duties there, is intermediate, being about 51 miles south of Lochalsh, 64 miles south of the North Line of Kincardine, and East Williams 40 miles to the south of it, the people we visited at Mornington being say 40 miles as the crow flies east of Brucefield. At Brucefield we held services the second Sabbath of August, began the services in connection with the solemn ordinance of the Lord's Supper on the following Thursday, and held services all the usual days as at home (except that we held a prayer meeting instead of the question meeting on Friday). The congregations were very small numerically, but there were a few of the salt of the earth among them. There are two elders in this small congregation, Messrs. George Forrest and Daniel Clark, who act as missionaries throughout all the congregations. These two men are intelligent, stedfast, and of undoubted piety. An opportunity was given to the congregation to elect new elders, and they unanimously elected a Mr. Baird, a teacher and a man of good reputation. (He, along with Mr. Forrest, hold the services there.) He, however, finding it difficult to decide whether he ought to accept or refuse, desired that further steps should be postponed for a year, which was granted. Then we proceeded north to Lochalsh, and held services there on the fourth

Sabbath. As stated above, they have got a commodious church of their own in this place, capable of holding about 250. There was a good congregation present, the church being more than two-thirds full. There was one elder in the congregation. He is about 87 years of age, but is wonderfully strong for that age. He, at the first along with others, but latterly almost alone, presided at the meetings on Sabbath and week-days. He is a man of a vigorous, intelligent, and most firm mind, but above all a man of true piety. As at Brucefield, the session gave the congregation an opportunity of electing new elders. They unanimously elected two men of good report among all the Lord's people there—Messrs. Alexander Mackenzie and William Matheson. An intimation was given that the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper would be celebrated in that congregation on the first Sabbath of September. That week we went north thirteen miles, to the North Line of Kincardine and held services there on the last Sabbath of August. Our people have got a church of their own in this place also, capable of holding about 200. At the Gaelic service the church was about half full; at the English it was fairly well filled. We came back to Lochalsh that week, and began the services on Thursday in connection with the Communion. The people attended exceedingly well during all the services from Thursday till Monday. On Sabbath the church was nearly full of sedate, attentive, intelligent, and respectable looking people. Some travelled long distances in order to be present. Gaelic had to be preached at Lochalsh as well as at Kincardine every day, as some of the older people understood it better than English. On Monday the two men who were elected for the eldership were ordained. (I should have mentioned that there is an elder—a Mr. Morrison—a very intelligent, unassuming, and godly man, in the congregation at the North Line of Kincardine, and that he, along with two or three other godly men, keep meetings there.) There were also six baptisms at Lochalsh.

This brought our duties in the north to an end, and we proceeded that week to East Williams, staying two nights with our beloved and very hospitable friend, Mr. Forrest, and his worthy companion, at Brucefield. At East Williams there is a beautiful and commodious

church, capable of holding about 250. The second Sabbath of September services were held there both in Gaelic and English. The Church at both services was fairly well filled. On all the days of the Communion, the people attended wonderfully well, but on Sabbath there was a large congregation, the church being quite full. They have got two elders in that congregation, one a Mr. Archibald McLeish. We were much struck with the simple sincerity and deep piety of this man. He, along with a few godly men, keep the meetings there. The other elder, a Mr. Menzies, lives some distance from the church, and, on account of old age, is very seldom able to be present. He is also a man of good report among the people. A painful bereavement—the death of one of his sons—caused him to be absent at the Communion table. We desire to express our deep sympathy with him. The people—a goodly number of them—had to come long distances to the place of worship, and Mr. McLeish is about twelve miles from the church. We then turned our face towards the east, to visit our friends at Mornington. The services were held there in the house of our host—a Mr. Macdonald, and a worthy man. There were a goodly number present at the two English services held. There are a few pious men in that place who keep the meetings in Mr. Macdonald's house, over which he worthily presides. The people there were not represented in the petition laid before the Synod last year, but so far as I could judge they hold exactly the same position, doctrines, and principles held by this Church. This brought our duties in Canada to an end.

The most of the people we met were from the Highlands of Scotland originally. The most of them left Scotland either in the years 1847 or 1849. Argyllshire, Inverness-shire, Ross-shire, and Sutherlandshire were the counties from which almost the whole of them emigrated. There are a few English-speaking people from the southern counties. We were much encouraged by the brotherly love and unanimity which reigns among them. There are a goodly number of truly God-fearing men and women among them, and among the young there are a few, however few, who seem to be seeking the way to Zion.

The ministers whose memories seem indelibly stamped in the minds of those who were of age before they left Scotland are the Rev. Mr. Macleod, of Rogart, especially during the three years he resided at Lochalsh, and the Rev. Mr. Sage, of Resolis. Many of the pulpit utterances of these two eminent servants of Christ are as fresh in the memories of some of the old men and women there as if they had heard them yesterday.

In every place visited by us we were received with open arms. It is impossible to over-estimate their kindness to us, and though we were willing to get back to our beloved friends in Scotland, when our duties were accomplished, we must confess that parting with our dear people there was to us like cutting off a hand or a foot. We can never forget them, and, indeed, we don't desire to forget them. We hope that one of our ministers will volunteer to go next May to preach the blessed Gospel of Christ among them, as they need our pity seeing they are scattered like sheep having no shepherd. We hope Mr. Mackay, as he was unable to go this year, will now volunteer to go, and we are certain that he will not be sorry. They are a part of our Church, they are our brethren and sisters in the flesh, and a goodly number of them are beloved in the Lord.

One other thing I beg to mention and I am done. It is about our expenses. They gave me a draft for £82 sterling. This settled our travelling expenses, which came to £58 5s. and the expenses connected with pulpit supply during my absence, which came to £22 16s., leaving a balance to their account of 19s. Thus they freed this Synod from all expenses.

It may be added, for the information of all our dear people there, that the Rev. J. R. Mackay has volunteered to visit them next year about the end of May. Let it be made a matter of prayer both at home and in Ontario that the Lord may give him health of body, and freedom spiritually, to carry this into effect.