



HERBERT RENWICK.
[A PIONEER SETTLER.]

The Renwicks, of Clarke, came to Canada in 1833. Herbert Renwick, of Beattock, the head of the family, had been a substantial yeoman of Covenanting stock and Covenanting character, dwelling near Moffat, Dumfriesshire. The social discontent of the period it was that seems to have moved him to leave his old home; and he decided to go to Canada because there, in a land where the settler might, he was told, obtain fertile acres for the asking, he expected to be able to provide for his growing family better than was possible in Scotland. So in the spring of seventy years ago he and his good wife, Sara Wightman, disposed of all their heavy furniture, packed their carpets, bedding, and clothing, their china and silver, their fire-irons and fender, the works of the family clock,—uncased and stowed like a dead thing—candlesticks, cooking utensils, saddles, and spinning-

wheel; gathered about them their eight children and the two dogs; and set off to Annan, whence they crossed Solway Firth in a coal sloop to Maryport and took passage on the two-masted brig "Argus" of Newfoundland for Quebec. After an uneventful voyage of sixty-five days, the "Argus" reached Grosse Isle, and her arrival was signalled by tossing up red and white balls, doubtless in accordance with a code. The health officers at Grosse Isle seem to have been rather uncivil, and the proximity of a party of light-fingered Irish immigrants in quarantine caused the passengers of the "Argus" further inconvenience. Indeed, so averse were our proud Scots folk to occupying a portion of the same poor quarters as their fellows from the Emerald Isle, that they preferred to camp on the rocks with their outspread washing for two whole nights. After a detention of some sixty hours they proceeded to Quebec and landed there, going later to Montreal. Thence a number of the steerage passengers departed for Bytown, now Ottawa, there to embark on slow-moving Durham boats that would convey them to Lake Ontario by way of the Rideau Canal. Possibly the Renwicks' baggage accompanied them. However, as William, the eldest boy of the family, though as yet not seventeen, was not well at the time, his father decided to proceed westward, for on taking that direction he was determined by the more pleasant and expeditious means of stage and steamer up the valley of the St. Lawrence.

The party at last brought up at Cobourg; the house where they lodged at Hull's Corners, north of the town, yet stands in good repair. Cobourg in those days must have possessed for the remoter settlers something of the glamour of a rural metropolis. Not only was it on the stage line from Montreal to York, and in regular communication with

* Read before the West Durham Old Boys' Association.

the latter place by steamboat, but it had schools and churches and was the seat of a new Wesleyan College, founded in 1830.

Leaving their family safely ensconced at Hull's Corners, Herbert Renwick and his son William set out on foot to prospect in the country to the westward, where unoccupied farms could probably be had nearer to the lake front than in other parts, Clarke having been settled less early, it is said, than neighboring townships, owing to the more broken character of its surface. At some spot between Port Hope and Newtonville the pedestrians fell in with two clergymen sitting on a log. These gentlemen proved to be Reverend Messrs. Thornton and Proudfoot, United Presbyterian missionaries, then on their way to "congregate" Port Hope, that is, to form a congregation there. By them our two wayfarers were directed to one who usually had a number of farms for sale, Mr. William McIntosh, father of Dr. McIntosh, now of Newcastle. The immigrants seem to have been disillusioned by this time regarding the current methods of granting public lands to settlers. They found that there was an intermediary, the Canada Company, which shared with the labourer the generosity of nature and the Crown. However, "Beattock," as his friends used to call him, from the name of his Scottish farm, was not deterred from settling in Clarke because land there had to be bought, for he had with him ready money. The possession of coin of the realm was a considerable advantage in those days, when most people paid in kind, and "Beattock" did not fail to recognize the fact. They say that he so regularly inquired, when bargaining for a purchase, what the lowest price was for cash, that he won for himself the nickname of "Cash" Renwick. That, however, is by the way. To return to the travellers, they obeyed the directions of their new-found friends, and at length, after passing through Newtonville and Crandell's Corners, the embryonic Newcastle, they arrived at McIntosh's store and house just beyond the town line in Darlington, next to a farm afterwards owned by the then seven-year-old Walter Renwick. Mr. McIntosh, accompanied by Mr. R. Fairbairn, father of the present postmaster of Bowmanville, and others drove the homie-seekers out in a waggon to see a farm in the fourth concession of Clarke. On the way, the party passed through the Butterfield settlement on the third line near the crossroads now known as Tricky's Corners. The land hereabout seems to have been owned at one time by a man named Butterfield. It had been acquired the previous spring by a little colony of English Methodists that included the Bellwoods, Middletons, Blackburns, and Hills. Mr. Bellwood invited all in to have a cup of tea, and it is significant of the lonesomeness that oppressed the heart of the leader of our little Dumfriesshire band that this simple act of hospitality roused in him a feeling of unfading gratitude. In after years, the proximity of this little English community meant much to him and to his whole family. For the property of one hundred acres in extent that Renwick was then going out to inspect proved so satisfactory that it was purchased on the sixth of September, from one Eleazar Baldwin, yeoman, of Clarke, for three hundred pounds, Upper Canada currency. Baldwin had received the deed of it from the Canada Company only nine days before, in consideration of the sum of fifty-six pounds, five shillings. The improvements on the place had, doubtless, been made by him already.

The two prospectors, after having thus selected their farm, returned to bring up the rest of the family. In Port Hope, they hired one team of horses and bought another—the first, I have heard it said, ever owned in Clarke—and all mounted waggons to go to the new home. The road was dry and good, but to the older pilgrims it must have been a gloomy way. Virgin forest clothed both sides of the track, being broken only here and there by the five, ten, or twenty-acre clearing about the log house and outbuildings of some earlier immigrant. There was no Orono in those days and no road to it. At the top of the hill, just north of where Mr. Peter Stalker's house now stands, the blazed trail swerved to the north-west,

crossed the creek below by the rudest of log bridges, climbed out of the little valley of the stream, and ended with the family's journey. The farm to which they had come, and to which was given the name of "Hopetown" in remembrance of the benevolent Earl, who owned the distant Beattock, consisted of one hundred acres, as stated above, and lay at the corner of the fourth line and the first side-road west of the present highway from Newcastle to Orono. The clearing comprised two or three good-sized fields and on it were a log cabin and a frame barn. The former consisted of one room with an overhead loft and a "lean-to." The fire-place was of stone, but there was a great hole in the back wall. The chimney was made of clay and sticks. Before winter the fire-place was repaired and three more rooms were built. From Baldwin, besides cows, sheep, and pigs, oxen had been purchased. With—and against—these the older boys strove, and learned to plough the soil and to pull the stumps. The trees with which they had to contend were maple, beech, ironwood, and basswood. A very few pines grew in the neighborhood, and there were also in the swamps, I surmise, some cedars. The settlers lived, however, in a hardwood bush. And dense it was. On the farm to the east dwelt a family named Perkins, but it was months before the Renwicks were aware of their presence. Mrs. Renwick afterwards said the first smoke she perceived rising from that near-by chimney was the pleasantest sight she ever saw. But she and her older daughters can have had little time for repining. For the country housewife's duties in those days included not merely sweeping and dusting and cooking, and darning and mending, but baking, carding, spinning, knitting, weaving, tailoring, and the making of not butter only, but cheese and soap and candles and a variety of things more. Where the family got its footwear at this time I do not know. Later, it was the custom to have a cobbler call and make boots for the whole household before he departed again. Out-of-doors, the men, except when tilling the soil and tending the stock, were laying the giants of the forest low, burning their carcasses, and, in season, boiling their blood to sugar.

The little ones of the family and their dogs, meanwhile, enjoyed their new experiences intensely. A favorite resort for wee Walter and Elizabeth was Sabine's sawmill, off to the south of their home on the creek above mentioned. Mr. Sabine was a man of kindly disposition, and spent many a spare hour making wooden dolls for his visitors.

But before long the children found themselves under the necessity of spending a large part of each day in school. To reach the little log school-house, they had to walk two miles or so through the bush to what later became Tricky's Corners. On the south-eastern corner it was that Mr. Thompson, a Yorkshire friend of the Bellwoods, with whom he lived and at whose home he died, held sway over some twenty or thirty scholars. The dominie impressed himself upon my grand-aunt Elizabeth as a man of very superior character. The incapacity of growing age compelled him to retire from his school in 1845 or a little later.

Sunday-school was conducted in the school-house weekly by the Blackburns. At this earliest period—1833—there was no church—no Presbyterian church at any rate—for the Renwicks to attend. Soon, however, fortnightly services were begun by the Rev. John Cassie,* of Port Hope, in Newtonville. In 1837, the congregation of Newtonville obtained a pastor of its own in the person of Rev. George Lawrence, the first Presbyterian minister in that district, if not in the whole country, to receive a regular call from the people of the community. Nevertheless, according to the rules of the Church, Mr. Lawrence had first to spend a probationary year with his backwoods parishioners as a missionary. For this twelvemonth he lived with Herbert Renwick, whose house was a kind of lay-manse always. Some time between 1838 and 1841 a second congregation was established, and

* Rev. Dr. Gregg, in his History of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, refers to Mr. Cassie thus: Mr. Cassie was a native of Peterhead, Aberdeenshire. He was ordained a Missionary to Canada in 1834, and was inducted to the charge at Port Hope in 1835. He preached once a fortnight in the Township of Clarke.

to this body Mr. Lawrence ministered for many years. His church was erected on the fifth line, near Mount Tom, on property belonging to Mr. Thomas Waddell. The old graveyard still exists, though unused. Before their church buildings were erected, both congregations mentioned met in convenient barns. Mr. Lawrence, it may be mentioned, was a farmer as well as a pastor, and worked the property now occupied by Mr. James Hunter, of the fifth concession.

But to return to the Renwick family—on the thirtieth of September, 1835, Mr. Renwick acquired the Perkins farm next him on payment of two hundred and fifty pounds. Perkins himself had not held the title of this farm for more than a few days, though he had lived on the place longer. The former owner was George Ball, Esq., of Niagara, who disposed of his property to Perkins for a fifth of what the latter received for it. On this new farm, which was named "Rosebank," was constructed the house that yet stands at Renwick's Corners, on the road to Orono.

Soon after the removal thither came a time of anxiety, the period of MacKenzie's uprising. William Renwick, as member of a Port Hope squadron of cavalry, was called out for service; and as every seventh man capable of bearing arms was being drafted, it appeared as if the next son, John, might have to turn out too. He and six others, however, had their names withdrawn from the ballot by hiring a man to go instead of whichever of them the lot might have fallen upon.

Every man in those days, I believe, had to join the militia, and on one day each summer all the men of Clarke would muster for drill under Captain Allen Wilmott. Nobody seems to have known much about soldiering, however, and "training day" was an occasion rather of merrymaking than of service.

Thus the years moved on, bringing increasing prosperity with advancing age. In 1841, William Renwick was married to Catherine Gairdner, a Lanarkshire lass, and moved into a new house—the one still standing—at "Hopetown." This house was not finished, however, at the time of the nuptials, and the bridal pair spent their honeymoon in a neat log cottage often used by other young couples for a like purpose. This cottage was built nearer Orono than the "Rosebank" house, probably by Mr. Ed. Billings, for his son.

The year of the marriage of the youngest member of the family, Elizabeth, to the late Edmund MacNachtan, of Newcastle and Cobourg, was signalized by the introduction of a new element of pleasure into the lives of the men of the neighbourhood. Where are Scotsmen, water, and winter, there is curling. In 1850 Mr. John Dickson, grandfather of Mr. W. B. McMurrich, of Toronto, produced a pair of stones. On the model of these hardwood blocks were turned, and the brooms were soon swinging merrily on Sabine's pond. Later, curling was also enjoyed higher up the stream across the Orono-Newcastle road on Tricky's pond, evidences of the existence of which may still be seen beside the spot where that famous scion of Vulcan is fabled with hammer and lathe to have made everything under the sun.

Even after this pond was let away and the smith had kindled his fire by the next road south, bonspiels were still held down at Bond Head.

But such were the sports of the younger generation, whose story I do not mean here to record. The aged Herbert Renwick found a less arduous, if equally exciting, pleasure in long-winded and strenuous religious discussions in-doors with "Preacher" Hill, of the third. He and his wife finally passed away ripe in years.