

OLIVE TREES

A Monthly Journal devoted to Missionary Work in the Reformed Presbyterian Church, U. S. A.

No.

DECEMBER, 1899.

12.

QUESTIONS OF THE HOUR.

THE SOCIAL STATUS OF THE NEGRO.

Rev. R. J. McIsaac, Selma, Ala.

There are many questions for which it is not difficult to find a solution in theory, but the difficulty arises when it is sought to apply this ready-made solution to actual conditions. Men theorize on the principles of "abstract right," forgetting that there is no such thing as "abstract right," and that the right is simply that which is best in given circumstances. In this way much talent has been wasted and much effort misdirected in dealing with the problems arising from the presence of so large a colored population in our own country. We have been wont to start out with the doctrine of the brotherhood of man and the broad assertions of the Declaration of Independence, and from these premises we at once, in theory, elevate the negro to a position of social and political equality with the whites. But in this conclusion which seems to be arrived at so logically some very important things have been wholly overlooked. No account has been taken of the fact that political control, as at present exercised by the people of enlightened nations, is the product of more than a thousand years of experiment and education in self-government; that it is a privilege which only a small proportion of the people in the world can yet exercise with profit to themselves, and that the

negro, both in his native land of Africa and in this country during the period of slavery, has had no training that would fit him for taking his place in the governing body of the nation.

Neither has any account been taken of the gradual evolution of our social life. The habits and customs of society are not something that can be taken up and laid aside like a garment. They have grown up with the gradual advancement which has been made by those who for ages have been under the leavening influence of Christian civilization. The social condition of the Anglo-Saxon doubtless falls far short of perfection, but such as it is, it is the outgrowth of a long process of development, and it is not reasonable to suppose that this same condition could be arrived at at once by a people who but recently, and that under rather unfavorable conditions, have come out of the lowest state of barbarism.

Our social life is not something that can be analyzed or defined, something that can be reduced to a series of rules which could soon be learned and complied with, but it is the spirit of our civilization, the application to our every-day life of the refinement of thought and sentiment that distinguishes Christian civilization from any which had previously existed in the world. It is something that has been, and probably only can be, arrived at gradually, and a close study might show many factors in its

MONOGRAPHS.

MISSIONARIES OF THE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH TO THE LOWER PROVINCES OF CANADA.

ROBERT MILLER STEWART.

The decision of Mr. LAWSON (see *OLIVE TREES*, p. 306) in 1846 to settle in South Stream, N. B., while it lessened the demands of outlying districts in that province on the time and energies of Mr. Stavely, left Mr. Sommerville in Nova Scotia still without any help except occasional visits at communion season of the two brethren in New Brunswick. Nearing the age of fifty and having labored diligently and alone for more than fifteen years, failure to furnish him with an assistant was likely to imperil the interests of the Mission. In the report of the Reformed Presbyterian Home and Foreign Missionary Society presented to the Synod in Ireland at its meeting in 1848 the Directors made the following reference to his isolated position: "Though he has frequently and earnestly sought to have at least one fellow-laborer sent into his part of the Provinces, we are grieved to have to report that as yet we have been unable, through the want of a suitable instrumentality, to comply with his earnest solicitation. . . . Even at a low calculation, we have no doubt that at least three or four licentiates, having the disposition and ability to labor through love to Christ and souls, would obtain settlements in the Canadas, which, if not at first, would in a very short time be self-sustaining. Ought not the Church to consider with much greater attention the claims of the British Colonies? And should not we betake ourselves, in the spirit of self-denial and prayerful exertion, to devise means for supplying, as far as in our power, the wants of our destitute

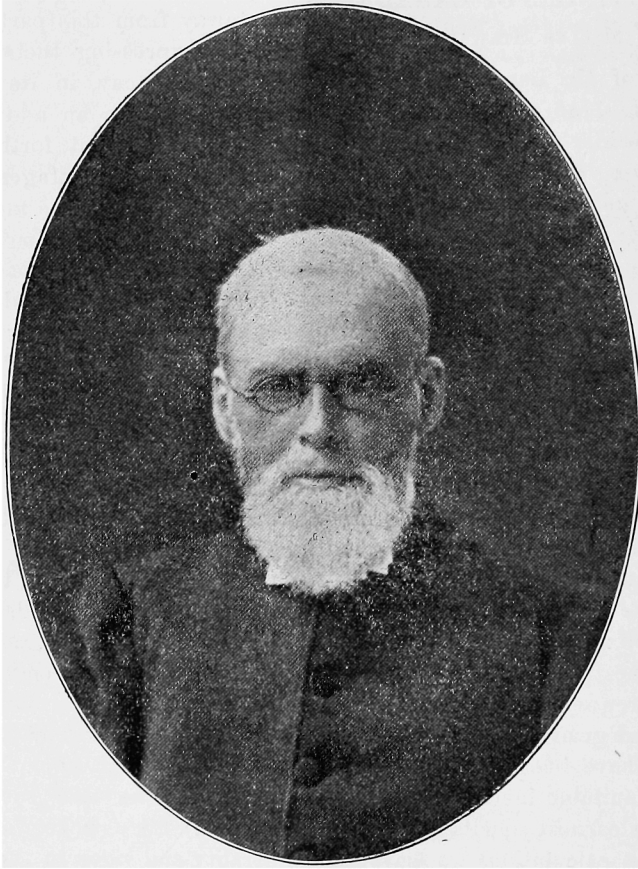
brethren, and for gathering in multitudes of other wanderers to the fold of the great Shepherd? . . . The Directors cannot pass away from this part of their report without expressing their earnest concern that Synod may, in its wisdom, devise means by which an additional supply of agents may be sent forth without delay, that thus the advantages which we have already gained may be improved, and that a large field, in many parts of it white to the harvest, may be reaped."

In the report presented to the Synod of 1849, I find the following paragraph in regard to the work in the Colonies: "While we sympathize with our beloved missionaries in all their labors and trials, we regard it as their duty and ours still further to attempt to diffuse the principles of the Covenanted Reformation throughout those interesting regions. It seems probable that at no distant period the Colonies shall become separate and independent nations; and it is evidently of great importance at present to pervade them at every part with the leaven of the Reformation. Our Church would be highly honored by being called to a work of this kind. To an enterprise so valuable we have to some extent responded. Let us go forward with increased liberality and vigor in the same direction, and future generations, sitting under the goodly vine, will rejoice in these exertions." The report also announced "with peculiar gratification" the selection and appointment of Robert Miller Stewart, licentiate, and that arrangements had been made for his early departure to his field of labor.

Mr. Stewart was born in Ballynaloob, Country Antrim, Ireland, April 5, 1819. His parents, William and Elizabeth Beggs Stewart, were humble but godly people, who gave him a careful religious training.

His early studies were pursued at an Academy on the island of Rathlin, and while attending that institution he studied Irish under a missionary who was laboring there in connection with the London Mis-

the winter of 1839, and completed the full course of four years at the Belfast Academical Institution in 1845. On the testimony of J. R. Young and other professors he was "most diligent and was conspicuous



R. Stewart

sionary Society, winning the first prize of the Society for proficiency in that language. Subsequently, under the direction of his pastor, Rev. William Toland, he was a pupil in Bryce's Academy, Belfast, during

for good conduct and regularity of attendance." During the closing years of his literary course he also attended a class for the Critical Reading of the Sacred Originals, Sacred Geography, Christian Evi-

dences, and Inquiry on Missions, under Dr. Thomas Houston, who testified that he "made most gratifying progress, and his department was uniformly becoming his profession."

Like the other missionaries in the Province, Mr. Stewart studied theology at Paisley, Scotland, under the distinguished Dr. Andrew Symington, from whom he received the following certificate: "He entered into the business of the class with much spirit, executed the prescribed exercises with promising success, and conducted himself as became his profession." On February 3, 1847, he was licensed to preach the gospel by the Northern Presbytery of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, and July 12, 1849, he was set apart to the work of the ministry by a Commission of Synod. The sermon was preached by the eminent Dr. W. J. Stavely, from the words, "Stand-fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free," to a large audience in College Street, South Belfast. The certificate of his ordination closes with these words: "He leaves the land of his nativity enjoying the esteem of his brethren in the ministry of reconciliation, and accompanied with their prayers that the pleasure of the Lord may prosper in his hands."

Previous to his designation as a missionary to the Lower Provinces of Canada, and a few months after his licensure, Mr. Stewart went to Connaught to establish an Irish mission, a service for which his knowledge of the Irish language gave him special fitness. On the 20th of October, 1848, he left for his field of labor, and soon afterwards selected, as centre of operations, Balmullet, a post town of six or eight hundred inhabitants in the western extremity of County Mayo. Four schools were opened in and in the vicinity of the town, with an average attendance of from 150 to 200 pupils, and in addition to the

regular supervision of these schools he was required to preach, visit from house to house, and distribute copies of the Holy Scriptures. In a district where the people were almost exclusively Romanist, and, as may be supposed, extremely ignorant and immoral, he labored for nearly a year. Interesting extracts might be made from his reports to the Convener of the Committee, showing the fierce opposition that he experienced in the work of evangelization from the priesthood, and the eagerness of the people to have their children enjoy the advantages of the Protestant schools. But this would be aside from the purpose of this sketch.

Soon after his ordination Mr. Stewart sailed for America on the ship Unicorn, and reached St. John, N. B., October 1, 1849, after a pleasant passage of twenty-three days. As Mr. Stavely reported to the Board of Directors at the close of that month, "he was very cordially received in all the places which he has visited, and has already learned from personal observation that there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed." In the early part of the winter he labored in different localities in New Brunswick and then crossed the Bay of Fundy to Nova Scotia, where he remained for five months, or till the close of spring in 1850. In the summer, acting on the suggestion of the Directors in Ireland, and with the concurrence of the New Brunswick and Nova Scotia Presbytery, he paid a visit to Upper Canada, now Ontario, to see whether it would be practicable to extend missionary operations to members of the Covenanter Church, emigrants from Britain, who had settled in remote parts of Canada, and other professed Presbyterians who were at that time in great spiritual destitution. But on the return of Mr. Stewart it was agreed that the force of laborers was too small and the pecuniary resources of the Mission

altogether inadequate to attempt any work in that direction. He then determined to accept the pastorate of the little Reformed Presbyterian Congregation in Wilmot, N.S., and his name was added to the roll of Presbytery in October, 1851. This arrangement seems to have given very general satisfaction, as two ministers were thus assigned to each of the Lower Provinces, and they were so located that regular meetings for conference were possible. The *Monitor and Missionary Chronicle* for November, 1851, contains the following sentences in reference to this matter from a letter written to a friend in Ireland by Mr. John Boyd, who was then an active and valuable member or adherent of the Reformed Presbyterian Congregation in St. John, but who in later years connected himself with one of the Presbyterian Churches, was appointed a Senator in the Dominion of Canada, and at the time of his death was Governor of the Province of New Brunswick: "I am greatly obligated by the arrangement of the Presbytery, and as much with their manner of doing it. Selfish advantage or local interests have had nothing to do with their deliberation, but the great question for which all sought an answer seemed to be, Where am I to be most useful? I think that their prayers were answered by the Head of the Church, for, as far as human foresight can reach, I see in the present arrangement, if supported by the Home Church, the beginning of a new era in the history of the Church in these provinces."

In Wilmot Mr. Stewart was actively engaged in pastoral work for nearly twenty-seven years, or until September, 1878, when at his request the pastoral relation was dissolved, preaching for the first two years in a schoolhouse and afterwards in the Malvern Square Church, to a small congregation that reported to the Synod of 1880 thirty communicants.

The Presbytery of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia had become a constituent part of the American Synod June 2, 1879; and after his retirement from pastoral work in Nova Scotia Mr. Stewart supplied vacant pulpits in the United States. But after awhile, unable to secure regular preaching, he returned home and accepted appointments in connection with the Presbyterian Church of the Maritime Provinces. "One winter," according to the *Presbyterian Witness* of Halifax, "he rendered very acceptable service at Bay of Islands, Newfoundland. He gave useful service in many other places, and was greatly esteemed and beloved wherever he labored." Towards the close of his life Mr. Stewart became very infirm, and at least for three years did not attempt any public work. Last summer, less than two months before his departure, I had the privilege of talking and praying with him, and he bore himself as one who realized that the end was not far away. On Friday, September 29, 1899, the summons came. At Glen Fern Cottage, where he went to live on his marriage, November 7, 1855, to Margaret, daughter of the late Mr. Daniel Morrison, a highly esteemed elder in the Wilmot Congregation, and where he had brought up a family of ten children, seven sons and three daughters, he died, his own the first death in that beautiful home on the bank of the Annapolis River during the long period of forty-four years. In a private letter, his son-in-law, Rev. Ralph C. Strathie, of Truro, N. S., who was there when the change came, writes: "Just ten days before his death he took to his bed, not through choice, but through sheer inability to rise. It was only his own strong will that had kept him about so long. Through these ten days he lingered on till about eleven o'clock Friday night, when his spirit passed away very quietly and gently." After a simple funeral service at the house on

Monday, by Rev. Thomas McFall, pastor of the Cornwallis Congregation, his remains were laid away in the cemetery adjoining the church at Malvern Square, where he preached so many years.

There were peculiarities in Mr. Stewart's style of pulpit address that were open to criticism. But his sermons were always instructive and full of the marrow of gospel truth, revealing an intimate acquaintance

mating views of the close and endearing relationship existing between Christ and His Church. In a brief, but appreciative notice of his life-work, the *Outlook*, of Middleton, N. S., says, editorially: "He preached the gospel faithfully, and, although himself a minister of the Covenantant Church, he was full of sympathy with every other branch of Christ's Church, and was as widely known and as highly



GLEN FERN COTTAGE—LATE RESIDENCE OF MR. STEWART.

with the Scriptures and familiarity with the theology of the Erskines and other eminent divines who lived and wrote at that period in the history of the Church of Scotland. On Communion Sabbaths he almost invariably selected his text from the Song of Solomon, and following the old and popular, but, as it seems to me, mistaken interpretation of that treatise, he was able to present to his people most ani-

respected outside his own small flock as within it "

Brethren in the ministry are passing away from the scene of earthly service, and each removal is the voice of the Master to us who are yet in health and in harness, "Be at no uncertainty as to your state before God and be satisfied with nothing less than the clear seal of the Spirit that you are Christ's and living for His glory."