



THE
HISTORY OF METHODISM

WITHIN THE BOUNDS OF THE

ERIE ANNUAL CONFERENCE

OF THE

METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH.

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"Bright visions of the golden past
Fly back on wings of love to me."

VOLUME I.

New York:
PUBLISHED FOR THE AUTHOR,
BY CARLTON AND PORTER, 200 MULBERRY-STREET.
1865.

Roberts, with one or two others, soon returned to Ligonier for a new supply, and being detained much longer than was expected, their provisions in the settlement became entirely exhausted, and all except Mr. R. R. Roberts left the settlement, and he remained there three weeks living on squirrels' meat and salt, until he became so emaciated that he could endure it no longer, and started on foot for French Creek. But when about five miles from his cabin he unexpectedly met his brother, Thomas Roberts, accompanied by his sister, Elizabeth Roberts, returning well supplied with provisions. The meeting, as the reader can easily imagine, was a truly joyful one, causing them all, and especially the kind-hearted Elizabeth, to weep freely. And when Miss Elizabeth Roberts became the mistress of the log-cabin at Shenango, there was not another female residing within twenty miles of the place. But her industrious habits, generous disposition, and dignified Christian deportment soon secured to her the confidence and esteem of all who knew her, and gave her an influence for good long and widely felt in the Shenango settlement. When any were afflicted or in want Elizabeth Roberts had a heart that could sympathize and a hand ready to furnish relief to the extent of her ability. "She openeth her mouth with wisdom, and in her tongue is the law of kindness." Prov. xxxi, 26.

SECTION II.

THE CONTINUED IMPROVEMENT OF THE COUNTRY,
AND THE INTRODUCTION OF METHODISM FROM
1798 TO 1802.

"I venerate the man whose heart is warm,
Whose hands are pure, whose doctrine and whose life,
Coincident, exhibit lucid proof
That he is honest in the sacred cause.
To such I render more than mere respect,
Whose actions say that they respect themselves."

1798.

THE year 1798 witnessed a degree of healthful improvement in the settlement of the country very encouraging to those persons who had evinced the fortitude to make permanent investments in the soil, and to risk their lives in the wilderness. Settlements were commenced this year in Newburgh, Euclid, Burton, Vernon, and in a few other towns in Ohio. The hardships endured by the people in some of these new settlements were terrible, and have imposed on us a debt of gratitude of incalculable dimensions, who are now living in the midst of luxuries upon the very soil they rendered rich and beautiful by their sacrifices and toil. Up to this time most of the provisions used in the Shenango settlement had to be brought from Meadville, Pa., in packs carried by the men on their backs, a distance of more than twenty miles, and paying at the rate of two dollars a bushel for corn, and other things in proportion. But

during the fall of this year a blind path was opened from Pittsburgh through Butler and Mercer Counties to Meadville, making it much easier to get supplies from Pittsburgh on pack-horses than to bring it, as they had previously done in canoes, up the Alleghany river and French Creek to Meadville, and then the remainder of the way on their backs. Mr. R. S. Reed, of Erie, Pa., commenced his fortune by transporting provisions on pack-horses from Buffalo, N. Y., to Erie, Pa., a distance of more than a hundred miles, along a rough path upon the lake shore.

During the summer and fall of this year every person in Cleveland, Ohio, was sick, either with fever and ague or bilious fever, diseases with which this section was troubled for several years, but which have gradually disappeared as the country has become improved.

In the spring of this year the parents of Mr. R. R. Roberts moved from their old homestead in Ligonier, Westmoreland County, Pa., to Shenango, Pa., where all their children were now living. They were also soon followed by several of their neighbors, among them were the Stevensons, Walkers, M'Lanes, Dumars, who were regular members of the Methodist Episcopal Church. About the same time Rev. JACOB GURWELL, a native of Ireland, and a local preacher in the Methodist Episcopal Church, of moderate talents, but an excellent Christian man, together with Rev. THOMAS M'CLELLAND, also an Irishman, and a local preacher of very respectable preaching talents, settled in the same neighborhood.

These two local preachers commenced preaching the Gospel in rude log-cabins and in groves, and wherever a little group could be convened, and some time in the summer of 1798 they formed a class consisting of such persons as had brought letters of membership with them, appointing Robert R. Roberts leader; this being the first class, and he the first leader, within the present bounds of the Erie Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. It is said that Mr. Roberts was so extremely timid that he could not be prevailed upon to speak to the class in the ordinary way for several months after his appointment; but eventually he overcame this embarrassment so far as to become a very acceptable class-leader. We are here furnished with another instance of the great value of that class of men holding the relation of local preachers to the Methodist Episcopal Church. Relying upon no particular charge for their support, but laboring with their hands for the maintenance of their families, their love to the Master, and the desire to do good, leads them out frequently into new and destitute settlements, where they can break the bread of life to the destitute. It was in this way Methodism was first planted upon this continent by Philip Embury and Robert Strawbridge, both local preachers from Ireland. We shall have occasion frequently to refer to this class of pioneer laborers in breaking up the ground in advance of our regular itinerant ministry. True, after the country becomes densely populated, and the work well supplied with the regular ministry, the services of the local ministry is not in as great demand as

formerly; yet these results are to some extent unavoidable, and should never be allowed to engender strife among brethren.

The reader will doubtless be pleased to see in this place a list of the names of the persons who composed this nucleus of Methodism in the Erie Conference. They were Robert R. Roberts, leader; Rev. Thomas M'Clelland and wife, James Stevenson and wife, William Sindsig and wife, Lewis Roberts and wife, John Honnel and wife, John M'Granehan and wife, William M'Granehan and wife, John Caughey and wife, John Rogers and wife, William M'Lean and wife, William Steward, and Nancy Wilson, twenty-four in all. Emigration continued to flow in, and especially members of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the settlement extended to the south, so that another class was soon formed, which was called the "south class," composed of the following members: George M'Fetridge and wife, Thomas Dumars and wife, James Dumars and wife, John Waters and wife, Rev. Jacob Gurwell and wife, Probson Gibbins and wife, Thomas Jolly and wife, James Walker and wife, Morris Dunlavy and wife, William Gurwell and wife, to which was added in 1802 John Leech and wife, twenty-two in all. The local preachers above referred to took the entire watchcare of these classes, supplying them regularly with preaching for several years before the regular itinerant ministry reached them. They also found their way occasionally into new settlements, and carried the bread of life to hundreds that must have perished without it before other ministers could reach them. Thus was the

"wilderness and the solitary place made glad by them, and the desert did rejoice and blossom as the rose."

1799.

The year 1799 furnishes a few interesting facts connected with the natural and religious improvement of the country. This year a company formed in Connecticut came on under the supervision of Mr. Nathaniel Church, and surveyed the ground where Canfield, the seat of Mahoning County, now stands; and Mr. Judson Canfield, from whom the place was named, in company with Mr. Elijah Wadsworth, moved their families from the East, and commenced the settlement of the place. Also in the spring of this year Mr. Lewis Day and son, and Mr. Lewis Ely and family, moved from the State of Connecticut, where both Mr. Day and Mr. Ely had belonged to the Methodist Episcopal Church, and settled in the town of Deerfield, Portage County, Ohio, being the first emigrants that ever came to the Western Reserve in a wagon.

Settlements were commenced this year in Warren, seat of Trumbull County, and in Ravenna, seat of Portage County, Ohio; also in the towns of Hudson, Mentor, Mantua, Chester, Willoughby, Windsor, Austinburg, and Harpersfield, in Ohio, and one on Elk Creek, and another in Springfield, called Lexington, Erie County, Pennsylvania. The Western Reserve was now pretty well dotted over with new settlements, but there were but a few families in a place, and a long distance apart, without roads