

## THE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF CLARKSBURG.

This church is situated in the village of Clarksburg. A generation has passed away since it was organized, and as no records or written documents of any kind have been preserved, the materials for preparing its history are few and scant. It would appear, however, that about 1820 or 1821, Reformed Presbyterians, or Covenanters, as they were popularly called, first began to have preaching in this part of the county. At that time two young men, Richard Wasson and Andrew Stormont, who had emigrated from Ireland, settled in the vicinity of what is known as Kelley's station. Whether they had been Covenanters in the land of their birth, or whether in those early days it was the nearest place of preaching, and they, being piously inclined, wished to enjoy divine ordinances in some orthodox church, does not now appear; but, however it may have been, they began to wait on the ministry of the late Rev. John Cannon, who was then the pastor of the Reformed Presbyterian congregation at New Alexandria, a town six or seven miles distant from them, in Westmoreland county.

With the membership of this congregation they seemed to have identified themselves, and wishing to disseminate the principles which they had thus espoused, they requested Mr. Cannon to preach for them in their own neighborhood; but his time being all occupied, he had no spare Sabbaths which he could give them. He did the next best thing, however, that he could do under the circumstances; he preached for them occasionally on one week day. The field proved to be a promising one, and in order to be able to cultivate it properly, he gave up two other branches of his congregation, both of which were stronger and more wealthy. He now began to preach on the Sabbath wherever he could find a place. Sometimes in the woods when the weather was favorable, and sometimes in a barn, holding one or two communions, through the kindness of Presbyterian brethren, in the church at Ebenezer. But until a church was built, he seems to have preached mostly either in the barn of the late John Coleman, whose farm, about two miles south of Clarksburg, is now occupied by his son Samuel, or in the barn or under an apple tree in the orchard of the late James Gray, about two miles north of the same village.

At some of these places the congregations were probably organized, but at what date is unknown to the writer of this sketch, as are likewise the names and the number of original members. At first the congregation, taking the name of the creek that flows through this part of the county, was called Blacklegs, but afterwards, when the town grew up where it is located, the name was changed to that of Clarksburg. In the summer of 1831 the first church was built. It was a frame structure, and erected at a cost of \$300. So soon as it was weather-boarded and roofed the congregation began to occupy it, using the sleepers for seats. When it was floored their funds were exhausted, and being unable to put in pews, without going in debt, they seated it with slabs, supported on a kind of trestle-work of logs. On these they sat and listened to the preaching of the Gospel until their financial condition improved, when, of course, they put in more comfortable and expensive seats. At this period the following names appear on the roll of membership: Robert Henry, Moses Thompson, David Henderson, Robert Henderson, Alexander Henderson, John Coleman, Robert Coleman, William Coleman, James Gray, Thomas Gailey, James Gailey, Miss Ann Gailey, John Henry, Mrs. Margaret Henry, Andrew McCreery, Samuel McCreery, Miss Jane McCreery, Daniel Euwer, Samuel Gilmore, Nancy White, John McCurdy, John Morrison, Thomas Gemmil, Miss Jane McKelvey, Mrs. Martha Smith, Nathan Douthett, Samuel Barr, Mrs. Francis Barr, John Kirkpatrick, Mrs. Kirkpatrick and Mrs. Kimbal. Many of the names have disappeared from the records of the living, and those who bore them have long been numbered with the dead, while some of their descendants have seen proper to change their ecclesiastical relations. Others of them are still found in the church and congregation of their fathers. The old building in which they worshipped stood for forty years, or until the fall of 1871, when a neat and commodious frame church was erected a few rods to the southwest of the former site, at a cost of \$3,500.

The first pastor, as already intimated, was the Rev. John Cannon, who continued to preach part of his time at Clarksburg until his death, which occurred in the winter of 1836. The congregation remained vacant, receiving occasional supplies from Presbytery, until the spring of 1843, when, in connection with another branch of the same denomination twenty-two miles distant, they extended a call to the Rev. S. O. Wylie, who became their pastor and continued in that relation until 1844, when he demitted the charge to accept a call from a congregation at Philadelphia. Three years afterwards, on in 1837, the Rev. Robert Cannon, a son of the first pastor, was ordained and installed, but in April, 1854, was released and went to the West, where he is still preaching. In 1856 the congregation secured part of the time of the Rev. A. M. Milligan, of New Alexandria, Westmoreland county, who continued their pastor until 1866, when he was transferred to Philadelphia. They then felt that they should have all the time of a pastor to themselves, and

in the summer of 1868 the extended a call to J. A. Black, a young licentiate, who, a short time before, had finished his course in the theological seminary. Mr. Black accepted the call, and on the 18<sup>th</sup> of November of that same year was ordained and installed, and at the present writing continues to be pastor. Thus during the more than half century of the existence of the congregation it has been served by five pastors in succession, all of whom, except the first, are still living and laboring in the Master's vineyard. The first elders to whom its spiritual oversight is committed were Moses Thompson and Robert Henry, both of whom died many years ago. The present officers are: Elders – Robert Henry, sr., M. P. Thompson, Alexander Gray, Thomas Caldwell, David S. Gailey and Robert Henry, jr.; Deacons – John Caldwell, John Forsythe, jr., and Nathus Oliver.

The membership of the congregation is now eighty-two. The Sabbath School, including the adult members of the Bible class, has an average attendance of from forty to fifty.

As this sketch may meet the eye of those who have no knowledge of Reformed Presbyterians, perhaps a remark or two in regard to their creed would not here be deemed out of place. In common with others who bear the Presbyterian name, they hold the Westminster Conference of Faith and the Catechisms (larger and shorter) to be the faithful exposition of all Scripture teaching in regard both to doctrine and to practice. The chief points in which they differ is the application of their principles to civil government. This, they believe, is a Divine ordinance, which is among the "all things" that have been put in subjection to the Lord Jesus Christ in his mediatorial character. They think, therefore, that civil society in its organic capacity should acknowledge God as its author and Christ as its moral governor, and administer its laws in accordance with His revealed will. They repudiate, on the one hand, the idea of making the State the mere creature of the Church, and, on the other, the notion of making the Church the creature of the State. Each, they hold, occupies the independent sphere, but each has a duty which it owes to God, and which can not be negated or ignored without incurring His displeasure. They lament that the Constitution of our country, while in many respects a noble instrument, is sadly out of harmony with the prevailing Christian sentiment of the people, inasmuch as it ignores the whole subject of the relation of a nation to God and His law, and makes no provision for our Christian usages and practices. They have, therefore, all along, labored to have it so amended as to give us an undeniable legal basis for Chaplains in Congress and other Legislative halls, and in prisons and reformatory institutions; for the appointment of national fast and thanksgiving days; and for the reading of the Bible and other religious exercises in our public schools. They point to the fact that these and kindred Christian features of our Government are assailed on the one hand by Popery, and on the other by Infidelity; and they feel that without such a basis there is imminent danger that every public religious custom and observance handed down to us from our fathers will be utterly swept away. They would, therefore, place the nation clearly and unmistakably on the side of Christ and the Christian religion, and until this is accomplished they believe that consistency with their principles requires them to occupy a position of political dissent from the Government of the United States, and to refrain from voting, holding office, or performing any act, the fair construction of which would imply identification with what they conceive to be its immoralities. They feel that they should carry this religion with them into all the affairs of life; that they should conduct themselves as Christians when acting as members of the State, no less than as members of the Church, when voting at the polls as well as when sitting in the sanctuary. While holding these views, they consider it their duty to cultivate and maintain Christian friendship with pious men of every name, and in common with their fellow citizens to labor in every legitimate way to promote the best interests of our country.