

Bethel and Her Centennial

Throughout the past spring, there have been more or less talk of an observance of the anniversary, but as there was no one who wanted to assume the responsibility of directing the effort to that end the Young People's Society which is really the life of the congregation, took charge of the work in a decided manner and carried out the celebration most successfully. With only two weeks in which to plan and advertise there were some things overlooked and some people did not know of the occasion in time to make plans to be present. Word was received from many of the 'old timers' who desire to be with us but had not the time to prepare to come after receiving the notice. No one is more sorry for this mistake than we are, but the proportions of the affair were so much greater than anyone supposed that we were swamped with details, some of which were not properly solved.

The day was August 29, 1918. It was a perfect day; no dust—due to a shower the evening before—and plenty of sun. The roads were in the best condition of the entire summer, making the trip pleasurable to those who came in cars. The park at Bethel had been made ready and with its decorated stands, its swings for the young and the seats for the older and shade for all, there was simply nothing lacking to make the day most enjoyable.

People began to arrive about nine, and at noon there were many hundreds present, then they divided into great groups of twenty or thirty friends and partook of their basket dinners. If there were any strangers present you could not tell it, for everyone was talking and laughing and such a spirit of good fellowship was never before witnessed in our community. Old friends were meeting that in some cases had not seen each other for forty years and many who had loved ones in the cemetery saw the graves covered with ivy for the first time. We said everyone was happy but we can say too that everyone was conscious of an undercurrent of sadness. Here were the aged with faltering step and their tremulous speech greeting each other for the last time in this life, and several of them looking with a kind of expectancy toward the lot which held a lifelong companion and which in turn would soon offer them a kindly shelter. As they talked of the days when they played like the ones in the park we could not but think of the brevity of life at best.

The time, aside from the program and the lunch hour, was spent in gathering in small groups and talking of 'old times.' The parents were point out to their children where they had sat in church when they were children; where a certain historic incident had taken place; where their grandparents were buried, or some other event, showing that for the day they were living in the past again. Everywhere you came across a group you could hear the words, "Do you remember." The pleasantness of the day and social fellowships that were enjoyed left little to be desired. It would have been hard to have suggested one item for the added comfort or pleasure of the older ones who were again amid the childhood scenes.

After a good visit following the dinner hour all gathered about the speaker's car for the program. All the ex-pastors were there, save Rev. Campbell, and all were heard

from. The program was for the most part informal and consistent of popular songs by the audience; the history of the congregation by Hugh Mack; stories by those who had them to tell; short speeches of a reminiscent character; a poem for the occasion by Dr. Thompson, and the address of the day by Dr. McClure---the oldest pastor in point of service in the Presbytery.

The history was not as complete as should have been, due to lack of material at hand, but contained very interesting material which was further enlivened by a word of explanation here and there by the reader. Rev. Tinker in an extended speech, spoke of the influence the Bible had upon the English speaking people and their language on this basis, due to the fact that the Bible had been largely discarded by them, argued for the doom of the German people and their language.

Some rare stories were told, some of which ought to be recorded. One had to do with Mungo Dick who had been at Bethel often. As he was going one cold fall day to preach near where he was living, he decided that on account of the rain and cold, he would put on a pair of leather riding overalls. He started to preach when he suddenly jumped and clapped one hand to the side of his leg. Now his sermon did not call for any such gestures and the people were beginning what could be wrong with the man as he continued his strange actions. Finally he ran from the pulpit and into the churchyard, saying as he left, "The Word of God is in my heart but the Devil is in my britches." One of the elders went out to investigate and found him behind a brush pile extracting a colony of wasps from the seams of his leather britches which had been hanging in the attic all summer.

Dr. Thompson, in his happy way, read his Centennial Ode which fit into the occasion nicely. This with a little impromptu speech by John D. McCrory, of Johnstown, put into expression those most secret feelings of our hearts. Copies of the poem were called for and was this demand that led to this effort. The poem will be found in full on other pages.

The address by Dr. McClure of Blairsville, was a most excellent review of the past with a contrast of then and now. Bethel was started in the days of the wilderness with its Indians and predatory animals. In the days of the sickle and cradle; when there was the log hut and its corresponding few necessities. When the woods and fields furnished to man all his necessities of life, both in the way of clothing and food. When a few men went into the forest with a pick and bar and without the vine of a single article could erect a House of worship. In the days long before the wireless or the postal system or the telegraph or the cotton gin with a cable of the telephone or the railroad. Yes, even before Fulton had scared the natives along the banks of the Hudson with his practical demonstration of the fact that steam could be made to propel a boat, Bethel was hearing the Word of God from the lips of the transient preacher. "If the people who had lived and died prior to 1818 could have risen from their graves and have seen the hundreds of cars coming to the celebration, they would have willingly dropped back into the grave rather than have taken a chance with such a civilization, " some one suggested.

The day passed without one incident to mar its joy and success. Everyone had a good time and so many called for an annual anniversary picnic that the plan has been favorably received and so in August, 1919, we will again meet on Bethels historic ground and have our second reunion at which time a permanent organization will take place. It is desired to make this a place of meeting of all old friends for our Church and community. There is nothing of its nature in the locality and the way people responded last year makes us bold to think that it shall be a great success. There were 422 names on the register, and there were many who did not register. It is interesting to note how the names are grouped. The Campbells led the list with 44 names on the register, the Macks next with 32 and other families well represented are the Dicks, Borings and Wagners. There were cars present from Maryland, Texas, New York, Ohio, West Virginia and Pennsylvania. The Y.P.C.U. had an ice cream stand which disposed of fifty gallons of cream and the profit from the cream, which \$35.00, went toward their pledge of \$50.00 to the Frenchburg Mission.

And now the time has come to say 'goodbye.' But before we part let it be noted that the present Bethel is not far behind the ancient Bethel in spirit or in deed. She is alive and this is manifested by the fact that her mission budget has been increased 400% in the past two years and we believe that the 'grace of giving' is the true measure of the modern Churches spiritual power. The insistent call of the influence of the godly men and women of the past is getting a response from the people of today.

There has been pleasure in compiling this information even though it was rushed from the start we hoped that when in the future, the revision is made that the writer will have more time in which to arrange his material in a more interesting and attractive form. It seemed to many at the Centennial that unless an effort was soon made to collect the data relative to Bethel's early years, the sources of information would quickly pass beyond our reach. The ink with which the early records were written had almost entirely faded and the people who know much of the past story are few and will soon go to join those with whom they link us in this history. While this contains of the facts of the beginnings, yet we regret the haste and unfinished character of the booklet, but under the stress of work we send this forth hoping that it will be kindly received as an attempt to compile their information and not to compose adorned literature.