THE SCOURGE OF 1847

By IDELL ROGERS.

The alarm which is being felt in different towns and cities of Canada over the Spanish influenza, from which have already occurred (associated with complications) a number of deaths, has led the older residents to dig into memory's storehouse for reminiscences of those occasions when Canada was visited by some scourge or serious infectious disease. Perhaps none of these were more fatal in results than the plague of '47. Mr. Bernard McAllister, one of the oldest residents of Cobourg, and a gentleman who is highly esteemed, states that during that year, the occasion of the famine in Ireland, many immigrants from Erin's green isle settled in different parts of Ontario, and that there were many deaths from fever. Mr. McAllister says: "I mind that year well. I was about twelve years old at the time. Father Timlin (then priest at St. Michael's Parish, Cobourg) asked my father to let me stay with him, and I could go to school and serve Mass for him every morning, and do chores and messages. I was with him for about two years. I got too big to be an altar boy, and was able to work with my father making and mending pumps. I have recollections of that dreadful time, when so many thousands of the Irish died, martyrs.

Bishop a Victim.

"Bishop Power, the first Catholic Bishop of Toronto, was a victim. He took the disease while looking after the poor Irish who were dying with the fever. They called it 'ship fever.' Whatever it was, thousands died. I recollect going with Father Timlin to Port Hope on Sunday, where he said Mass. After Mass he went to the immigrant sheds and heard confessions, and prepared some for death. On the way home he called at James Moran's and baptized one of his children. Father Timlin did not break his fast until he got home that evening about 6 o'clock. His mission was then from Pickering on the west to *Colborne on the east, and as far* north as Rice Lake. At that time there were a great many immigrants at Cobourg, as there was an agent, A. B. Hawke. A great many died there. One, Frank Conlin, father of the late Nicholas Conlin, died, and all were afraid to go to his house. My father and George Butler, a carter, went in and put him in the coffin and carried him out. The house was on Ontario street, in Cobourg, east of the churchyard where they buried him. They carried the coffin *across* the fields, over two fences—it was about 12 o'clock at night. I held the light for Father Timlin while he read the burial service, and held the holy water vessel."

Father Buries His Child.

"But what affected me most of all that I had witnessed in that dreadful time happened one day in July. Father Timlin was away making a sick call when a man came. He had on his back a trunk. It was tied with a rope and was an old-fashioned one, covered with some animal's hide with the hair on, fastened with brass nails. He started to dig a grave and I showed him where to dig it. He was an immigrant, and was weak from sickness and want, and had to rest often. So I helped him to dig the grave. When it was ready he knelt down beside the trunk and opened it, and there was the corpse of a beautiful boy, about four years old. He kissed the boy, and it touched my heart to see him cry, and what made me feel it more the dead boy was about the size and age of my brother, Andrew, at that time. I cannot forget it. I saw a great many of the immigrants buried there. I have helped to make coffins and graves for many of them. The souls of all of these, I hope, are in heaven."

Governor-General Was a Passenger.

Reminiscences such as these naturally call up other things, and Mr. McAllister tells with interest and zest of the old stage coach days, before the Grand Trunk Railway was built through Canada.

A well-known man of that period was Mr. Weller of Cobourg, he says, who ran a line of mail stages between Montreal and Hamilton, with the head office at Coburg, where also was a large repair and blacksmith shop. This was no small affair, when we know that at every fourteen or fifteen miles there was a relay of horses. It was a four-horse coach, with at least four horses every fifteen miles, and with men to feed them and have them in readiness, all the way from Hamilton to Montreal. "I have heard some little things about Mr. Weller," he says. "Often some travelers who were out of funds would ask Mr. Weller for a pass. He would refuse, scold, but would tell the agent or bookkeeper in the office to issue the pass. He seldom ultimately refused.

"Upon one occasion the Governor-General (I do not mind which)—it might have been Lord Bagot or Lord Simcoe—but there was an important measure before the House of Lords, and the Governor-General wished to be there. There were no railroads then, and navigation on the lakes was closed. The ship would sail for England in three or four days. The next ship would be too late. The Governor-General appealed to Mr. Weller to drive him to Montreal to catch the ship. Mr. Weller made the arrangements with a relay of four horses at every station. He drove himself and did not leave the seat all the way, but kept the four horses on the gallop and got there in time to get the ship before it sailed. Mr. Weller continued the service up to 1856, when the Grand Trunk Railway was completed and *opened* for traffic between Hamilton and Montreal."

All Marched Together.

"When I was a boy," Mr. McAllister further relates, "there were three national societies—St. George's, St. Andrew's and St. Patrick's. The St. George's carried a white flag with a red cross, the St. Andrew's a blue flag with the thistle, and the St. Patrick's a green flag with harp and shamrock. The three societies turned *out in procession* together on their patron's day headed by a brass band. The St. Andrew's had a Highland piper, W. Milne, with James Cuthbert on the one side and A. Fraser on the other side, all three dressed in full Highland costume. The two men on each side of the piper carried broadswords. After some time these processions died out, and St. George's and St. Andrew's celebrated with a dinner. Then again, after some time the temperance *men of* St. Andrew's got control and had things changed to a temperance dinner on St. Andrew's day, which caused some of the old Scotchmen to feel that 'the pride of every Gael was humbled by such a mawkish meal.'

"There was a young Irishman named Kelley who was studying law in Hon. G. S Boulton's office. He was at the dinner and saw how disgusted some of the old men felt, so he commemorated the advent of temperance *reform in Cobourg* by a memorable poem, two stanzas of which were:

A Temperance Poem.

"Hoot auld carl! Twal for ye greet—
Ye ne'er sat down to sic a treat,
O' weakly Congo, coffee, cakes,
An' sic like stuff as Tam Pratt bakes—
An' nuts and figs an' plums sae dry
The verra swine wad pass em by,
An' speeches that were dryer yet,
Wi' nought one's droughty gab to wet.
No sparklin' wine brent out o' France
To make the lassies' blue een dance.
No Tup's head there, no haggis braw,
The like o' it ye never saw.
Aye, Sandy, lad, ye weel may say
Things change, when on St. Andrew's Day
Auld Scotia's sons disgraced their name,
An' robbed their country o' her fame;
Preferrin' tea to whiskey toddy,
Like some puir feckless woman body—
It gars me blush wi' verra shame—
'Twas well the auld man stayed at hame."