

Letter from the Rev. Egerton Ryerson, of the Methodist Church, to the Chairman.

York, Feb. 9th, 1831.

Sir,

The accompanying statements may appear at first thought unnecessarily minute, and tedious; but as the circumstances apparently alluded to in the Petition have been represented as enveloped in inexplicable mystery, I thought I could not place them plainly before the honorable committee, without detailing them with some degree of minuteness—and in some parts I fear, I have even now been too brief to do justice to a numerous religious community.

I beg leave to offer one word of explanation on the difference between a *General* and *Annual* Conference—terms which frequently occur in the accompanying statements. The former meets once in four years and possesses *Legislative* powers,—the latter meets *annually*, and possesses *Executive* powers only. The jurisdiction of an *Annual* conference is confined within a certain prescribed territory—the jurisdiction of the *General* conference extends over the whole connexion or church. An *Annual* conference consists of ministers who have been received into the connexion within its boundaries. The *General* conference is composed of delegates from all the annual conferences, elected by them, one for every fourteen of their members.

In the accompanying table of ministers, I have taken no notice of what are called *Local Preachers*. They are about 120 in number and are generally settled residents in the country.

From the very kind manner in which I was received by the honorable committee, I have been emboldened to state the whole case with the utmost freedom.

I have the honor to be

Sir,

Your most obt. humble servant,

EGERTON RYERSON.

To C. A. HAGERMAN, Esq. }
Chairman of the Committee, }
&c. &c. &c. }

This Petition refers to several subjects, on each of which I will with pleasure give such information as I possess, agreeably to the request of the honorable committee.

The Petitioners in the first place, complain of "the daily and increasing influence of a foreign Priesthood."

"A Foreign Priesthood," I take to be intended to mean, a body of ministers who have either emigrated from the dominions of a foreign Government, or are under a foreign jurisdiction—or are depending upon foreign resources for their subsistence—or are under the controul of a foreign interest by more than one of these circumstances.

I know of no priesthood in this province that may be considered foreign in any of these respects unless it be the Roman Catholic priesthood, which, according to the best of my knowledge of the polity of that church, is mediately under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Pope of Rome.

As far as it relates to the priesthood with which I have the happiness to be immediately connected, it is not according to my belief, foreign in any of the above significations of that term.

In regard to the place of the birth of the ministers of the Methodist Church, the annexed table, the statements of which have been collected from authentic sources, will shew that there are at present, fifty-seven Methodist Itinerant Ministers in Upper Canada—that forty-eight of these fifty seven have been born in the British dominions; that six out of the remaining nine, who were born in the United States, have taken the oath of allegiance to the British Government; and that most of these have been residents in this Province a considerable number of years. In this table five superannuated or worn-out preachers are not included. Two of these were born in the British dominions and three in the United States; but they have taken the oath of allegiance to the British Government, and have resided in this Province from ten to fifteen years.

As it respects the Methodist Ministers in Upper Canada being under a foreign jurisdiction, I would observe, that this was never any other than an *Ecclesiastical* jurisdiction, and I believe never, in the slightest degree, alienated the affections of the Methodist Ministers or people in Canada from the British Government,—as is manifest from the loyalty and faithfulness with which they assisted in defending this Province against the invasions of the United States Government during the late war—This Ecclesiastical jurisdiction however, ceased in a great degree to be exercised in the year 1824, when the Methodist Societies in Canada were organized under the control of a distinct conference, and ceased to exist in 1828, when they were constituted into a distinct and independant church, entitled, "The Methodist Episcopal Church in Canada."

In order that the Committee may be able to appreciate the correctness of this statement, and understand the whole subject to which it refers, I will here take the liberty to mention briefly the circumstances which gave rise to and were connected with the termination of this Ecclesiastical jurisdiction, which the Conference in the United States formerly exercised over the body of Methodists in Upper Canada.

The first Methodist Itinerant preachers visited this Province in about the year 1790 or 1791, and came here in the character and capacity of Missionaries. They organized societies, and soon formed regular circuits. After the first year or two, these Missionaries derived their principal if not their whole support from their scattered flocks in the Province. The number of preachers increased in proportion to the demand for their labours—