

No. 1.
The Right Hon.
C. P. Thomson
to
Lord J. Russell,
22d January 1840.

Address was agreed to in the House of Assembly when the Bill was sent back from the Council by a very much larger Majority.

Under ordinary Circumstances, a Measure thus agreed to by large Majorities of both Branches of the Legislature, would, I am satisfied, need no additional Argument to procure its ready Acceptance; but the peculiar Position in which every Act of the Provincial Legislature upon this Subject is placed, under the Provisions of the Act of 1791, subjecting it to Rejection, by an Address to the Crown from either House of Parliament, leads me to think that I should not discharge my Duty if I did not offer some Observations upon it.

This Bill proceeds on the Principle of devoting the Revenue derivable from the Lands when sold exclusively to religious Instruction or religious Purposes. It secures to the Churches of England and Scotland One Half of the future Proceeds of the Land, subject to no Variation and to no Contingency. It distributes the Remainder for the Support of religious Instruction amongst the different Persuasions of Christians recognized by the Laws of the Province, in proportion to the Population of each Sect, to be ascertained at fixed Periods; and it relieves the Executive from any Discretion with regard to the Distribution amongst these different Bodies. Whatever is now paid by the Crown to the Church of England, to the Church of Scotland, or to any other religious Denomination, and to which its Faith is pledged, remains a first Charge upon the Fund, and must be first satisfied.

I will not conceal, however, from your Lordship, that even to this Bill, thus proceeding on the Principle of so general Distribution amongst different religious Persuasions, nearly insuperable Objections have been and are entertained in this Province. For many Years past the Representatives of the People have uniformly refused to assent to an Appropriation of this Fund for religious Purposes at all, and have steadily maintained its Distribution to educational or general State Purposes; and it is only the strong Desire which is entertained of coming now to a Settlement which has led many, who formerly advocated these Opinions with Success, now to withdraw their Opposition, and to assent to this Measure. But I can safely say, that so far as this Province is concerned their Assent can never again be looked for. I entertain no Doubt that the Course taken by many Members of the Assembly in their conscientious and most laudable Desire to put this Question at rest will occasion great Opposition to their Return at the next Election; and I am satisfied that, in a future Assembly, if the Matter were unfortunately again brought before it, it would not be possible to obtain any such Terms for the Established Church, or for religious Instruction.

In reality the Fund, respecting which this violent Contention exists, offers little to divide. It must under any Circumstances be many Years, supposing the Lands to be sold, before the Interest accruing from the Sales will do more than discharge the Claims which must necessarily be first provided for, and which are now borne by the casual and territorial Revenues, and therefore an Appropriation for Purposes of Education would be of no immediate Assistance to that important Object. But, at the same Time, the Topic is too exciting not to be invariably used as a Means of political and party Agitation. One Seventh of the whole Lands of the Province are declared to be unjustly withheld from the Control of the People; and all those Feelings of extreme Jealousy of any Establishment, or of any Connexion between the State and Religion, which prevail in this Province, with a Warmth of which in England we have no Idea, are constantly roused and brought to bear in order to disturb Tranquillity.

It has been therefore with no little Pain that I have found those who oppose this Measure, upon these Grounds, assisted by some few Members of the Church of England, who of course entertain Views directly opposed to this; for indeed I can most conscientiously affirm, that in the Advantages which it holds out, more particularly to the Church of England, it far exceeds what I could have anticipated. That this is felt to be true your Lordship may easily learn from the avowed Support which the Bill has met with from the great Majority of Members of the Church of England in the Assembly, as well as from the Fact of its being carried by a still greater Number in the Legislative Council.

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