

CLERGY RESERVES IN CANADA.

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FORM OF PETITION.

CANADA.

To the Queen's most Excellent Majesty.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR MAJESTY,—

WE, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the clergy and laity of the United Church of England and Ireland in the Diocese of Toronto and Province of Canada, most humbly represent:

That in the year 1791, His late Majesty King George the Third, of blessed memory, caused the appropriation to be made within the province aforesaid of the lands called the Clergy Reserves, for the support and maintenance of a Protestant Clergy:

That in the year 1823 the question was first raised whether these lands pertained exclusive to the Church of England, or whether other denominations termed Protestant were meant to be included in the provisions of the Act making that appropriation:

That the discussion of this question led to much agitation and strife in this province, but that it was at length finally settled by an Act passed the 3d and 4th years of Your Majesty's reign, whereby two-thirds of the proceeds of the lands then sold, and two-thirds of one-half of the lands still unsold, were allotted to the Church of England in this diocese.

That this enactment, made in the year 1840, was universally regarded throughout the province as a definitive arrangement of this long-agitated question, and that your petitioners, though believing those lands to have been intended exclusively for the Church of England, quietly acquiesced in that division.

That from the passing of that Act up to the close of the year 1849 no discontent with the arrangement thus settled was expressed in any quarter, and that up to the present moment there has been no agitation or feeling in the province on that account.

That your petitioners, with much surprise and indignation, have observed that, during the present session of the Provincial Parliament, a series of resolutions, and an Address to Your Majesty framed upon these resolutions, has been passed, to the effect that this property for the support of religion should be alienated from that holy object, and applied to educational or other secular purposes.

That your petitioners regard with horror a public enactment which aims at the abolition of all grants and endowments for religious instruction in the province, and by the contemplated spoliation of the Church of England of the residue of her property herein, the direct and reckless violation of the faith pledged to her in the Act of the 3d and 4th years of Your Majesty's reign.

That your petitioners would regard the success of such an attempt as a national sin of the deepest dye and a grievous moral degradation, as well as a heavy blow to the influence and spread of true religion in the province.

That where religion is made to be wholly dependent upon the voluntary contributions of the people it may be supported with tolerable respectability in towns and villages of any considerable size; but that in the rural districts, where the population is comparatively poor, the means of ensuring stated instruction in the truths of the Gospel will not, in many cases, exist. This is evident from what is presented in the neighbouring United States of America, where in large tracts of country there exists no provision for the maintenance of a clergy, and where, consequently, the ministrations of religion, if at all, are only occasionally afforded. The effect of this is, the growth and spread of an infinite variety of sects, and the influence of many which propagate tenets in direct contravention of the truth and purity of Christianity. In many instances, as the result of leaving religion to the partialities and caprices of an uninstructed people, we find in that country churches and chapels erected by Unitarians, and even Universalists, who deny the existence of future punishments, amongst the most costly and best supported of all the edifices dedicated to religious worship.

Your petitioners would further represent, that the sanction by Your Majesty of a measure of the godless character just passed by our Legislative Assembly would have the inevitable effect of speedily alienating from Your Majesty's throne and royal house the loyal attachment of a large number of Your Majesty's most faithful and devoted subjects; for experience has proved, and especially the history of the Rebellion in 1837-38, that the members of the Church of England, from the principles engrafted in her polity and ritual, and impressed from childhood upon her members, were ever foremost in defence of Your Majesty's throne.

Your petitioners would also represent, with much grief and regret, that the fact of several members of the Romish communion in the Legislative Assembly voting for the alienation of the property of the Church of England, should that alienation be determined upon, will have the effect of re-opening and exasperating religious division and animosity in this province, and of creating at no distant period a movement, which it will be impossible to restrain, for alienating the ecclesiastical property held by the Romish Church in Lower Canada. If the property of the Church of England and of Protestants generally in this province is to be confiscated for public and secular purposes, it will never be borne that the lands and endowments held by a Romish priesthood should be inviolate and untouched.

Your petitioners therefore humbly pray that Your Majesty will refuse Your sanction to any measure for alienating the property of the Church of England in this diocese and province from the sacred purposes for which it was set apart; viz., for the support and maintenance of public worship and the propagation of religious knowledge.

And Your Majesty's dutiful and loyal petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.