

# SPEECH

OF THE

## HON. JOHN ROLPH.

ON THE

### CLERGY RESERVE QUESTION,

SEPTEMBER, 1852.

(From the Quebec Gazette, Sept. 22d, 1852.)

Dr. ROLPH said—He had hoped that the hon. member for Kent would have been sufficiently inspired by the question under debate, to consider it with sobriety and truth. But under the evil spirit which had haunted him thus far through the Session, he had distilled from the Globe and kindred journals all the venom he could find; and having seemingly in some degree poisoned the mind of his honorable and patriotic friend the member for Two Mountains (Mr. Papineau,) he (the hon. member for Kent) had hoped with such an ally to annihilate the Government. Collecting from newspaper scraps all the political scandal and party virulence which the last ten years had produced, he had, without any honest discrimination of truth from falsehood, hurled the heterogeneous mass against the Government with a random and desperate chance of effecting a ministerial discomfiture. Lost to the love of liberty, civil and religious, which had ever characterized his countrymen, he had preferred the subject of personal invective, to the high and constitutional question, which is the only one for debate. But as he (Dr. Rolph) had not risen to join issue with the unworthy attacks upon the members of the party and the Government they sustain, he should take his leave, of the hon. member for the present; and while discussing the repeal of the 3 & 4 Vic., under which their constitutional power had been wrongfully stridged, he might occasionally pay his respects to him again. We once had the power, the recognized power, of legislating upon the Clergy Reserves, upon the funds arising from them, and upon their bearing on the religion and churches of the country; and over any legislation connected with the subject. This power was intimately connected with the peace, welfare, and good government of the country; for the attainment of which great ends our constitution had been bestowed upon us. This power had, however, been taken from us by the 3 & 4 Vic., ch. 78. And we, therefore, by the resolutions before the House, seek for its repeal. This course, among others open to our choice, seems, under existing circumstances, the most judicious, and promises to be the most successful. It must be borne in mind that we have not only to contend with difficulties in our domestic arena, but with distant and very perplexing obstructions in Great Britain; where, indeed, none should exist, but where, lately they have, it must be admitted, very much increased. And our efforts and appeal will be enfeebled or strengthened, defeated or consummated, according to the particular course we may pursue at this particular juncture and under the present state of the question. There is one point upon which we all agree; that the right to legislate upon the subject constitutionally, belongs to us; and cannot be rightfully withheld from us. It is possible, most assuredly, for us to take several different courses. We may determine first what we desire, and then ask for its confirmation—or we may ask the British Parliament to think and do for us in the matter, instead of thinking and doing for ourselves—or we may claim at once, as freemen, the right of free domestic legislation. If we present our views for ratification, we necessarily

provoke at this critical juncture, a discussion, a hostile discussion, upon our domestic religious differences, embracing the whole question of ecclesiastical establishments and endowments. It forces upon the British Parliament discussion and adjudication upon affairs strictly local and domestic. If we ask them to think and do for us, we surrender our constitutional power, and our discretion into the bargain—a power and a discretion which the people have delegated to us, and which we have no right to delegate to others. But if we ask for our own appropriate power upon high constitutional grounds, we ask for what they know they ought to give, and what we are entitled to receive. If the power should be unsatisfactorily exercised by us, the British Parliament are not to blame. They have done their duty by an act of constitutional justice, in placing a domestic matter at our constitutional disposal. But we ought not, as a matter of choice, to ask them to carry out a policy they may disapprove or which might needlessly expose them to parliamentary or other embarrassments, embarrassments too, which must operate directly against ourselves. They might, under their prepossession, say, do your wicked work for yourselves. It is one thing to give a man his rightful discretionary powers, for the application of which you are not responsible; it is another thing to volunteer or consent to carry out for him just what questionable matters he may choose to require. Now we do not ask them to do or confirm our work, good, bad, or indifferent; we only say, nullify our hands, and we will do it for ourselves. Again—If we ask for the repeal of the 3 & 4 Vic. cap. 78, we ask from Earl Derby what Earl Grey has already promised, instead of asking what may be refused, because it has not been, before, asked and promised. We have made a proposition. It has been substantially assented to. The right course now is to call for the embodiment of that assent in the promised measure. We shall, in that case, be entitled to the support of Earl Grey in the House of Lords, and of his late colleagues who may be in the House of Commons. To retain and deserve their support may insure a victory; to lose it, by the mistaken abandonment of a recognized course, may be certain defeat. We ask, therefore, for this act of justice, because Earl Grey has promised it, emphatically promised it. He says:—"You will further inform the House, that while Her Majesty's servants regret that a subject of so much difficulty as that of the Clergy Reserves should, after an interval of some years, have again been brought under discussion, it has appeared to them on mature deliberation, that the desire expressed by the assembly in this address ought to be acceded to, and they will accordingly be prepared to recommend to parliament that an act should be passed giving the provincial legislature full authority to make such alterations as they may think fit in the existing arrangements with regard to the Clergy Reserves, provided that existing interests are respected." In coming to this conclusion Her Majesty's government have been mainly influenced by the consideration, that great as would, in their judgment, be the advantages which would result from leaving undisturbed the existing arrangement by which a certain portion of the public lands of Canada are made available for