



COPY OF A LETTER

ADDRESSED TO R. J. WILMOT HORTON, ESQUIRE;

BY THE REVEREND DOCTOR STRACHAN,

ARCH-DEACON OF YORK, UPPER CANADA,

Dated 16th May, 1827 :

RESPECTING THE STATE OF THE CHURCH IN THAT PROVINCE.

R. J. WILMOT HORTON.

Colonial Department, Downing Street, May 22nd, 1827.

19 Bury Street, St. James's, May 16th, 1827.

SIR:—

I TAKE the liberty of inclosing, for the information of Lord Goderich, an Ecclesiastical Chart of the Province of Upper Canada, which I believe to be correct for the present year, 1827, and from which it appears that the Church of England has made considerable progress, and is rapidly increasing.

The people are coming forward in all directions, offering to assist in building churches, and soliciting with the greatest anxiety the establishment of a settled minister. Indeed the prospect of obtaining a respectable clergyman unites neighbourhoods together; and when one is sent of a mild conciliatory disposition, he is sure in any settlement in which he may be placed, to form the respectable part of the inhabitants into an increasing congregation. There are in the province 150 Townships, containing from 40 to 500 families, in each of which a clergyman may be most usefully employed; and double this number will be required in less than 12 years.

When contrasted with other denominations, the Church of England need not be ashamed of the progress she has made.—Till 1818, there was only one clergyman in Upper Canada, a member of the Church of Scotland. This gentleman brought up his two sons in the Church of England, of which they are now parish priests. After his death the congregation was split in three divisions, which, with another collected at Kingston in 1822, count four congregations in all, which are in communion with the Kirk of Scotland. Two are at present vacant, and of the two Scotch Clergymen now in the province, one has applied for holy orders in the Church of England.

The teachers of the different denominations, with the exception of the two ministers of the Church of Scotland, 4 congregationalists, and a respectable English Missionary who presides of a Wesleyan Methodist meeting at Kingston, are for the most part from the United States, where they gather their knowledge and form their sentiments. In the Methodist teachers are subject to the orders of the Conference of the United States of America; and it is manifest that the Colonial Government neither has, nor can have any other control over them or prevent them from gradually rendering a large portion of the population by their influence and instructions, hostile to our institutions both civil and religious, than by increasing the number of the Established Clergy. Two assertions have been made respecting the Church of England in Upper Canada, which, if correct, ought certainly to have considerable influence. First, that the clergymen have no congregations. Now, I affirm, from personal knowledge, that in 58 places where regular or occasional service is performed, numerous and respectable congregations assemble. The second assertion is, that in the House of Assembly, consisting of 41 members, only two belong to the Church of England; now the fact is that 18 out of the 41 profess to belong to the Church of England, for the truth of which I pledge myself, and can, if necessary, furnish the names; the remaining 23 are of various denominations, but certainly not more than 3 or 4 Scotch Presbyterians.

The Church of England in Canada was supported for many years, out of the very limited and fluctuating revenue of the venerable society for promoting the Gospel in foreign parts, which did its utmost to increase the number of the Clergy; but its means were so inadequate to the demand, that it was at length obliged to solicit the aid of Government to continue and extend its efforts;—accordingly a small sum in aid of its funds has been for some years voted by the Imperial Parliament, of which Upper Canada receives a portion. How inefficient this aid is to supply the increasing necessities of the colony, has been sufficiently shewn; for the tendency of the population is towards the Church of England, and nothing but the want of moderate support prevents her from spreading over the whole Province.

But it may be asked why do not the Clergy Reserves afford a remedy. To make the answer to this question intelligible, a few remarks are necessary.

By the 31st of Geo. 3d chap. 31. 1-7 of the land in Upper Canada is reserved for the maintenance of a Protestant Clergy, the operation of which provision offers at this time the following results:—The number of Townships actually surveyed, may be taken at 240, averaging 95,000, acres, one seventh of which, 9,428, equal 47 reserved lots of 200 acres each; consequently the number of such lots in 240 Townships, is about 11,000, containing 2,150,000 acres.

But as these lands partake of the quality of those around them, many lots will be found, from various causes, unfit for cultivation, so that the number eligible for settlement cannot be taken at more than 9,000, containing 1,800,000. That this provision will at no time be ample for the support of a religious establishment, sufficient for the population of Upper Canada when fully settled, will sufficiently appear from the fact, that the whole surface of the colony does not exceed 31 millions of acres, of which not more than 23 are capable of cultivation, one seventh of this containing 3,760,000 acres, or 18,800 reserved lots of 200 acres each will ultimately constitute the whole property set apart for the maintenance of a Protestant Clergy. Now judging from what takes place in the United States, each lot will not produce in a century an average rent of 20*l*. per annum, making a total of £376,000, which divided among 2,000 Clergymen, a very small number for a country nearly as large as England, gives only £188 to each.

Hitherto the reserved lands have been inefficient from causes now very obvious though not perhaps anticipated by the distinguished statesman, who advised the apportionment.

The causes are:—1st. The great encouragement given by Government, to settlers of good character, by bestowing on them land on payment of a trifling fee.

2. The gratuitous grants of land made to such persons as retained their loyalty during the American revolutionary war, and to officers, soldiers and sailors who served in the late war in Europe and America.

3. The preference given by the colonists to land in fee simple to leases, even where the latter are more advantageous.

4. The difficulty in collecting rents, from the smallness of the amount charged on each lot and from being scattered over the whole Province.

So long as applicants can get lands of the best quality and in the most convenient situation for nothing or a mere trifle, the natural consequence is, that the rent of lands upon lease is almost nominal.

In regard to the gross rental of the leased lots, it amounts to about £1200 per annum, and was for a long time swallowed up by the expense of making out the leases necessary to convey the title to the applicant, and though this item of expense has been removed, it is still reduced by the and per centage of the Sheriffs, who are employed to collect it, from persons scattered over a surface of nearly 40,000 square miles; so that the net sum actually paid over to the treasurer does not much exceed £400 per annum.

These things pressing forcibly on the minds of the Lord Bishop of Quebec and his Clergy, and on the Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada, and his Council induced them to seek the power of selling the Clergy Reserves to a limited extent, as well as leasing them, leaving the proceeds to be disposed of as provided for in the 31st Geo. 3d chap. 31. and this is the object of the Bill before Parliament.

From this measure they look for many important advantages.

1. A large portion of the country now in a manner locked up, would be made free.

2. The Lessees would be more punctual in paying their rents for fear of losing any claim to renewal or advantageous purchase.

3. The means would be afforded of multiplying Clergymen, to any number that might be required.

4. The popular objection against the Reserves as a barrier to improvement and internal communication, would in a great degree be removed.

5. The Imperial Parliament would in a few years be relieved from the annual grant in aid of the society for propagating the Gospel in foreign parts, in as far as respects Upper Canada.

6. Two or three hundred Clergymen living in Upper Canada, in the midst of their congregations, and receiving the greater portion of their income from funds deposited in this country, must attach still more intimately the population of the colony to the parent state. Their influence would gradually spread; they would infuse into the inhabitants a tone and feeling entirely English, and acquiring by degrees the direction of education which the Clergy of England have always possessed, the very first feelings, sentiments, and opinions of the youth, must become British.