

ANTI-CLERGY RESERVES COMMITTEE, TORONTO.

We publish the Resolutions and Address passed by the Toronto Anti-Clergy Reserve Committee, and invite the earnest attention of our readers to the suggestions set forth. This question, the basis of Canada, seems not unlikely to get the go-by from the Cabinet during next session of Parliament, notwithstanding all past professions and pledges. Or, if it be taken up in good earnest, there is another feature which we believe it will assume—a worse one than ever—and that is, a division scheme, not a secularization or abolition of the Reserves, but their extension to all denominations. There will be a strong attempt made to equalize their distribution among the churches. Not that the Cabinet will propose such a scheme, but we much mistake if a strong party in Parliament will not be found to propose it. This is the danger we have to dread, for were that scheme accomplished, it would be a much greater social evil than the present disposition of them. In next number we hope to be able to give another address from the Committee on this phase of the subject; and, in the meantime, would urge electors to see that their representatives are right in this matter.—

1st. That this question having been the fruitful cause of the most alarming civil and social commotions among our population, and having brought the Province once to the verge of revolution, every interest of society demands its immediate and final settlement.

2nd. That the indication proceeding from the Executive, of an intention to delay final action upon this question until a new Parliament shall have been elected, is, in the opinion of this meeting unwarrantable and dangerous, as well as a violation of public faith calculated to destroy all confidence in the integrity of the Government.

3rd. That no just reason can be adduced for deferring final action upon the question at the approaching session of the present Parliament. That during thirty years public opinion in Upper Canada has been unequivocally expressed by every successive Assembly in favor of secularization.—That, generally, the members of the present House from Western Canada, were elected with a special eye to the final commutation of such a measure.—That the present administration have unequivocally pledged themselves to stand or fall by a measure for entire secularization, the alienation of the funds from every sectarian purpose and influence, to objects of a purely secular character, at the earliest possible period.—That every impediment heretofore allowed for delay has now been removed by the passing of the late Imperial Act, and that therefore duty, the interests of truth, justice, and peace, as well as the safety of the Government, demand immediate, sincere, and vigorous action for the removal of this long stereotyped wrong.

4th. That there being now considerable probability of the rise of new questions so strongly exciting to the public mind as to divert the attention of electors from points affecting religious liberty,—this fact constitutes an additional reason for pressing the question of the Clergy Reserves to an immediate decision.

5th. That the perpetuation of the Rectories, established by fraud, is a deep disgrace to the Government of the country. That the professed attempt on the part of the Administration to abolish them through Chancery—the Province paying the costs on both sides—is calculated, in the opinion of this meeting, to retard their suppression, and to incur an enormous and needless bill of costs. That duty to the community demands their immediate abolition.

The following address was unanimously adopted:—

To the Friends of Religious Liberty in Canada.

The period is rapidly approaching when the Legislature shall again meet, and when by its action we shall for all future time possess the semblance or reality of religious freedom. The authority to settle the long agitated and exciting question of the Clergy Reserves has at length been conceded by the Imperial Act of last session, and public expectation has naturally been raised, that immediate action would be taken by the Provincial Legislature to redress this old grievance by an Act of thorough secularization. From indications recently given by the Administration, it is probable, however, that the country, after a warfare of thirty years, is to be again doomed to disappointment, by an unwarrantable postponement of a final settlement, until a new Parliament shall assemble. Such a course, if pursued, cannot fail, under the present circumstances of the country, to lead to a most exasperating political conflict, dangerous alike to the peace of the community, as well as to the triumph of the principles of religious liberty.

Every consideration which justice, duty, or patriotism could suggest, demands the instant removal of this social wrong. The Secretary for the Colonies so far back as 1831, in a despatch to the Government of Upper Canada gives the following emphatic testimony in relation to the evils arising from the existence of this mistaken provision for the support of religion in the Province:—

“His Majesty’s Government have advised the abandonment of the Reserves, for the simple reason that, after an experience of forty years, they have been found not to answer the expectations entertained at the time the system was established, but have entailed a heavy burden upon the Province.”

The lamented Earl of Durham, Governor General of British North America, in his report on the affairs of Canada in 1839, thus refers to the same subject:—“The question as to the application of this property must now be settled, if it is intended that the Province is to be free from violent and protracted agitations. . . . And I know of no mode of doing this, but by repealing all provisions in Imperial Acts, that relate to the application of the Clergy Reserves, and the fund arising from them, leaving the disposal of the funds to the local Legislature, and acquiescing in whatever decision it may adopt.”

Lord Ashburton, then, when a Colonial General, thus addressed Lord John Russell upon the question in 1839.—“There is no subject of such vital importance to the peace and tranquillity of this Province as the question of the Clergy Reserves. . . . The records of the Colonial Office will afford ample evidence of the total effect upon public affairs in Upper Canada, of the course in which this matter has now for some years past been pursued. . . . The course which has not had the opportunity of ascertaining upon the spot the workings of this question, can scarcely entertain any impression that the course pursued for the space of all the time in the Province, the never failing watchword at the hearth, the principal spring of discord, strife and hatred.”

These decided opinions from the highest and best sources, in 1831, 1839, and 1853, give authority to the Colonists, that that wrong would be speedily redressed. The sequel, however, has proved that no counsel however wise, no remonstrance however strong, no danger however alarming, no majority however great and united, have been able, as yet, in the end of 1853, to secure a righteous settlement of the question. And, as if to aggravate the injustice of the past, and to darken our hopes for the future—to lacerate and deepen the wounds we have already received—now that the whole question is committed to our own hands, to a Parliament specially elected to secure a final settlement, and in an Administration solemnly pledged to stand or fall by an early measure of complete secularization—delay is again suggested, a renewed conflict is proposed—and to meet public opinion—but to give a less opportunity of victory to the enemy of our liberties. The issue of this renewed conflict, whether for good or evil, will, in all probability, be permanent, and it may be determined by the amount of vigilance, firmness and skill with which you now apply your principles. Every means will be employed to defeat at this last stage your long cherished purpose. Other great questions will be proposed upon the public attention to lessen the importance of the one before us; while your leaders in Parliament will be pressed to make compromises to leave the semblance without the reality of religious liberty. It is all-important, therefore, that at such a crisis of the cause, all its friends, as well as its official advocates, should co-operate to secure its final triumph.

The object now sought by our opponents is a partition of the funds among the religious denominations for clerical, school, or other purposes—a mode of settlement which we deem worse than the present arrangement. It would involve a public support of truth and error, or rather a public indifference to both—a measure in which no consistent advocate of the voluntary support of religion could ever cooperate or acquiesce. No appropriation of the Reserves will be satisfactory to the community but such as would ensure general interests free from every ecclesiastical influence; and we request your patient attention to all plans by which clerical encroachments may be reached through educational grants.

While it is the duty of the Legislature to select the means and objects of an entire secularization, we may suggest some of a general or benevolent character to which this large fund could be advantageously applied for the good of the people in general—namely, for the erection and support of public asylums for the blind, for the deaf and dumb, for juvenile delinquents, or otherwise for municipal purposes, or the liquidation of the provincial debt. In the struggle to evade your demands, it is probable that delay will be pertinaciously sought to give opportunity to your antagonists to renew and consolidate their plans of resistance in view of elections, or the re-casting of parties; and in order also, if possible to increase the number of claimants upon the Reserve fund.

Further discussion with respect to public opinion upon this question, may be regarded as useless. From 1826 to 1839, the Legislative Assembly of Upper Canada recorded its verdict in favor of secularization for “educational or general purposes,” no less than fourteen times: the last election only reiterated the sentiment in a strongly. Delay therefore, while dangerous, must now be regarded as a symptom of reluctance and disaffection on the part of our rulers. The path of duty is now plain; the resolutions of our Parliament, having been sanctioned by the Imperial Government, should at once be converted into a Bill, and pressed with all fidelity and earnestness upon the Legislature.

Among the dangers to which the cause of religious liberty is at present exposed, is that of division among ourselves upon other subjects. We, therefore, most earnestly entreat the advocates of the Maine Law, of railway improvement, or of projects of a local character—to see that none of these shall prove a means of destroying our hopes of establishing entire religious equality amongst us, and with it unity and peace.

It should also be borne in mind that the coming session of Parliament will perhaps immediately precede a general election, and therefore is one in which representatives will be anxious, as experience has shown, to satisfy their constituents. See, therefore, that your repre-