

## ACTS OF CIVIL STATUS PERFORMED BY METHODIST MINISTERS.

### I.—HISTORY OF LEGISLATION.

The first proposal to authorize Methodist ministers in Lower Canada to keep a register of Acts of Civil Status—that is, a legal record of Births, Marriages and Burials—was made in 1825. The Journals of the Legislature shew that the Bill, introduced for the purpose, passed the third reading before the Legislative Assembly, but, in the Legislative Council it was so amended as to nullify its design. The Bill, as it returned from the Council, was amended so as to include the following provisions: A Wesleyan Methodist minister, upon giving his bond in the sum of £200, for the faithful discharge of his duty, might obtain from the Governor-General a license conveying the desired authority. He was required to appear before a Justice of the Peace, accompanied by "seven respectable heads of families" of his own denomination. He was obliged to shew that in connection with his "Chapel or Meeting-house" he had forty families. He was to be permitted to marry only those of his own "sect," and both parties must have been members of his Society during the previous six months. Trammelled with these amendments, the Bill was rejected on its return to the Legislative Assembly. Thus, for a time, justice was defeated by partial legislation in favor of a certain religious body whose very nomenclature is conspicuous in the amendments proposed. Pagnuelo, in his (ultramontane) work on *La Liberté Religieuse en Canada*, is severe in his condemnation of Anglican prejudices, to which he attributes the defeat of the Bill. In 1826, the attempt was renewed to secure the passage of the Bill in a reasonable form, but this also failed, largely through the opposition of Chief Justice Sewell, whose objections are entered in the Journals of the House, and are characterized by remarkable intolerance.

At length, in 1829, the privilege was secured, by 9 George IV. c. 76, which provided that a Wesleyan Methodist minister should be furnished with a license from the Governor-General to solemnize marriage, etc., his petition being simply accompanied with a certificate of ordination, and a certificate of standing from two other recognized Wesleyan Methodist ministers in the Province. This Bill passed both Houses of the Legislature, but was reserved for royal assent, which was given by H. M. King William IV., Jan. 18th, 1831. This legislation relates to the British Wesleyan Methodist body, as it existed in this Province before its Union with the Canada Conference in 1854.\*

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\* In Upper Canada, by 11 George IV. c. 36, assented to on March 2nd, 1831, by William IV., "Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists, Independents, Methodists, Mennonites, Tunkers and Mormons" were authorized to celebrate marriage.