

No. 6.

COPY of a LETTER from the Bishop of QUEBEC to his Grace the Duke of NEWCASTLE.

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Bishop of Quebec
to the Duke of
Newcastle.
12th Feb. 1853.

My Lord Duke,

15, Grosvenor Street, 12th February 1853.

I AM impelled to solicit the Attention of your Grace to some Representations upon the Subject of the Clergy Reserves in Canada, a Subject for which I am less fully prepared than I could desire, because when I left Canada in the Beginning of last Month the Intelligence had not reached that Country of the Change in the Ministry at home, and the Views of the late Ministry upon the Subject in question are known to have been declared in a Manner which superseded the Necessity of any Endeavours to avert the now threatened Confiscation of Church Property.

In the Situation to which, in the Providence of God, I have been called, the Guardianship of the temporal Interests of the Church within the Limits of my Jurisdiction must be considered as comprehended in the Duties imposed upon me; and having been brought home by other Objects of Importance to the Church, I am in a Manner put forward by Circumstances as the Representative in this Country of Church Interests in Canada at this Crisis,—a Crisis so pregnant with alarming Consequences that I shall be pardoned, I trust, if I speak freely what I feel.

I have, however, in the successive Attacks which have been made upon the Church Property in Canada been again and again engaged in the Endeavour to repel those Attacks; and I may venture, perhaps, to refer your Grace to the more recent of certain Representations and Remonstrances submitted by myself to Her Majesty's Government, which are among the documents contained in your Office. I refer in part to a Letter which I addressed to your Grace's Predecessor, Sir J. Pakington, on the 22d of October 1852,* in which the Subject of the Clergy Reserves is incidentally touched upon, but more particularly to the Copies which accompanied my Letter of two Documents relating to that Subject, the first being the Petition of the Bishop, Clergy, and Laity of the Diocese of Quebec, transmitted for Presentation to the Imperial Parliament about the End of 1850, and the other, a Memorial which I addressed to his Excellency Lord Elgin shortly before I had occasion to address myself to Sir John. Those Two Documents will be found, in my Apprehension, to exhibit in a sufficiently condensed Compass the main Points and the real Merits of the Case.

* Page 20 of Papers
relative to "Clergy
Reserves," presented
to Parliament by Her
Majesty's Command,
11th February 1853.

It is not at any great Length, therefore, that I purpose now to obtrude my Observations upon your Grace; but, under your Permission, I shall proceed to give forth, without Disguise, the Depth of my own Convictions upon certain Features of this solemn Subject, in which the Interests of our holy Religion are for all Perpetuity involved.

First, then, I find it impossible to regard the Secularization of the Clergy Reserves as otherwise than stamped with a sacrilegious Character. I do not see how it can be denied to be the Alienation of a Property given to God; and it is well worthy of Remembrance that in republican America the Endowments of the Church of England have been held sacred; they were preserved to her in One noted Instance through the very Convulsions of that Revolution which separated the Colonies from the Mother Country (and the Circumstance was the more marked because the Church was exposed to particular Odium on account of the characteristic Loyalty of her Members); they were restored to her in another Instance by the Decision of the Courts of the United States after a long Space of Years, in which they had been taken possession of and held as Townlands in the Absence at the Time of any Episcopalian Claimants of the Property. (I speak here of the Church of England as continued in the American Church.) These Facts are not unobserved in Canada, nor is it possible to suppose that they are without their Influence upon the Affection of some of the Colonists towards the British Government when the Confiscation of their Church Property is threatened under actual British Rule.

2. It appears to me at least deserving of Inquiry, and it is an Inquiry of the most serious Character possible which thus presents itself, whether the Royal Sanction could be given to the projected Measure of Confiscation without violating the Coronation Oath. If, as I apprehend to be the correct View of the Case, and as is assumed in the Use, within the Colonies, of the Forms of Ordination, the Colonial Bishops and Clergy, made by the Royal Letters Patent to belong to the Archiepiscopal Province of Canterbury, are Bishops and Clergy of the Realm of England, then it is not necessary to say that they are protected by that Oath against any Invasion or Infraction of their existing Rights, Privileges, and Endowments, of whatever kind.

3. The Disposal of this Question involves the Question of the Maintenance of Public Faith. The Act 3 & 4 Vict. c. 78. was regarded and held by all Parties, and was accepted by the Parties interested, as a final Settlement of the long-agitated Questions respecting the Reserves,—a Settlement, it is also to be remembered, which was anterior to the Establishment of responsible Government within the Colony. It has been distinctly recognised as final in the formal Language of the Provincial Legislature; and if the conclusive Arrangements of that Act can now be disturbed, and its Provisions can be overset, it would be difficult to show how any Rights or Interests in the Province can be safe.

My Lord Duke, these are of themselves Considerations which, if I am not guilty of Presumption in saying so, call for the Exercise of the Maxim, "Be just, and fear not;" and if the Government of this great Country had long ago had the Firmness to apply this Principle to the Question, all injurious Disturbance in connexion with the Clergy Reserves