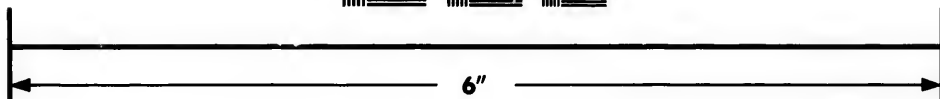
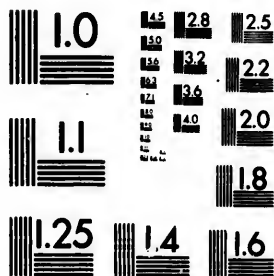


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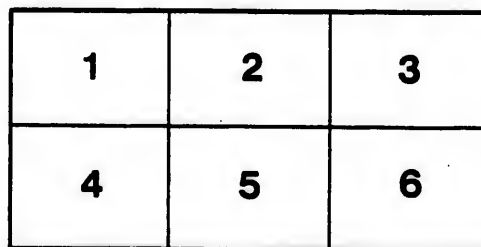
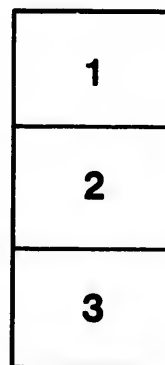
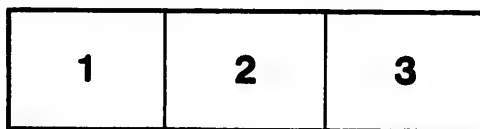
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THOUGHTS

UPON

The Clergy Reserve Question,

AS NOW AGITATED:

IN A LETTER

TO THE

HON. ROBERT BALDWIN, M.P.

HER MAJESTY'S ATTORNEY-GENERAL FOR CANADA WEST.



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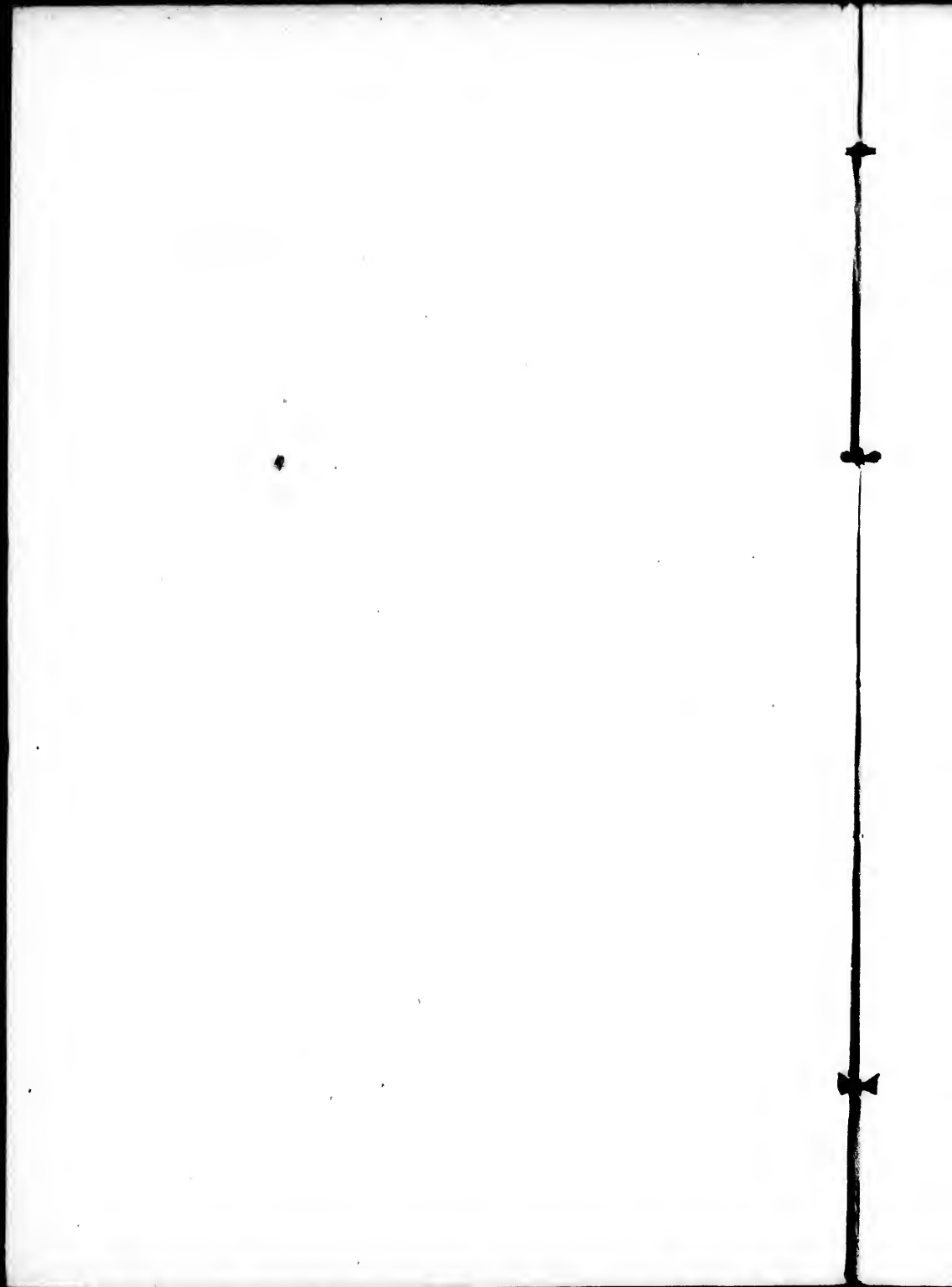
Schdeacon of York, and Rector of Cobourg.



TORONTO:

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M DCCC L.



TO THE HON. ROBERT BALDWIN, M.P.,

&c. &c. &c.

SIR,—Were we to form our opinion of the moral and Christian position of a country by what is occasionally put forth through the heat of parties, we should be forced to adopt a very disparaging estimate of the condition, in that view, of this our native Province. A little ago, the disappointments and reverses incidental to all commercial dealings,—aggravated, no doubt, in this case, by Parliamentary enactments,—drove a considerable body of our fellow-subjects into the wicked and treasonable desire of withdrawing their allegiance from the Mother Country, and annexing themselves to a foreign State. We are relieved, however, as a people, from the discredit of this proceeding, by the fact, that the movement was confined to a mere fraction of the population; and that many who participated in it did so without due thought or consideration. When this perilous and evil project came to be viewed by them in all the extent of its moral bearing,—when they duly weighed the solemnity of the contract by which they were bound to the Throne,—when they reflected with a becoming seriousness, apart from all selfish and utilitarian considerations, upon the impossibility, in a moral and religious view, of thus violating their oath, and transferring their allegiance,—we discerned, as the result, a more healthful condition of the public feeling. What was looked upon carelessly and superficially as a mere question of expediency or calculation of interest, has come now to be regarded as a matter of conscience; and, hence, let us hope, the comparative quiet which prevails upon that subject.

I shall, Sir, touch but briefly upon another topic which indicates this partial perversion of the public mind—the question of the University. The country bears the disgrace of arbitrarily excluding religion from her chief institution of learning; but I firmly believe that facts and numbers would determine, that the plan of separating religion from the principles and working of our University is approved of by only a small minority in this Province. The country, therefore, it is a relief to feel, is not morally responsible for this ungodly proceeding. I pass on to the present renewed agitation of the Clergy Reserve question.

The attempt to disturb the final enactments upon this question, so long and vehemently discussed, when those enactments were considered to effect its permanent settlement,—no honest or conscientious man will deny to be unrighteous and discreditable. The Clergy Reserves' question has now been definitively settled for ten years: it has been so regarded both here and abroad; and in all that interval, until very lately, we scarcely heard a murmur of dissatisfaction upon the subject. In the minds of all good and quiet-loving men, a relief was felt that the grounds for so much irreligious excitement were removed; its settlement was hailed as a subject for general congratulation; and all were disposed to regard their individual and natural disappointments as more than compensated by the new era of religious amity and political quiet which the settlement of that long dispute left them free to cherish. True lovers of their country, and men of real religion, can have but one opinion of those who would now disturb the public equanimity upon the late vexed question. There is a moral wickedness in seeking to deprive others of what has been secured to them by the deliberate voice of the Imperial Legislature; and certainly there is neither patriotism nor virtue in endeavouring to overturn a

law of the land, against which, either as to its principle or practical workings, no complaint can reasonably be alleged.

In the Speech of His Excellency the Governor-General a few days ago from the Throne, we have the valuable advice, "not to barter away for novelties rights dear to British subjects, nor abandon those principles of good faith, morality, and constitutional freedom, the strict adherence to which has enabled Great Britain, with God's blessing, to pass unscathed through many perils." Britain has grown great under her present system; and, if contrasted with the nations around her, she is pre-eminently a religious nation, she has become so—who will deny it?—through the influence of her Established Church. Why, then, in the words of Lord Elgin, should we barter away that tried blessing, for the novelties of the pure voluntary system—a system which would alienate every ecclesiastical endowment, and, by leaving the maintenance of religion to individual approbation or good will, deprive the nation, as such, of all religious character? And how do they adhere to "good faith and morality," who are labouring to rob the Church of England of her small patrimony in this Province,—a patrimony which, after much opposition and dispute, was finally decided to be hers by the highest tribunal in the Empire? What, too, has become of "constitutional freedom," if the heritage secured to us to-day can be wrested from us to-morrow,—if, after the best guarantee which law can give us of the possessions we hold, we are to live in perpetual doubt and distrust, and consider them at the mercy of every popular movement which malice or selfishness may stir up?

This, however, cannot yet be fastened upon us as a public disgrace; this immorality and breach of good faith has not yet become a national dishonour. Nor

do I think that, as a people, we are responsible even for the baseness of the attempt to fix it upon us ; my persuasion is that the wickedness it involves is limited to a miserable minority of our population. So far, the agitation upon the Clergy Reserves' question, whatever may have been the surreptitious dealings with it in rural places—has not extended beyond the city of Toronto ; and there no man will affirm that the advocates of the movement embrace any important share of the numbers, influence, or respectability of the population. There are against that movement the Church of England and her adherents, alone nearly one half the population of the city, the Roman Catholics, the Kirk of Scotland, and a large proportion of the Methodists. Contemplating these, and probably not a few of the other sects, as the opponents of that agitation, will any say that it speaks the voice of the citizens of Toronto ? I will venture, Sir, to affirm that the proportion of the advocates of this proceeding, in the other towns and villages of the Province, and in the rural districts especially, will be even smaller.

The country must feel the present position of the Clergy Reserves' property, as far as the Church of England is concerned, to be a grievance—one that is palpable, positive, and felt—before they will participate in the injustice which this agitation intends. They must argue strangely and inconsistently, if they can believe it to be a grievance.

You, Sir, as well as myself, know the feelings of the country upon practical religious questions as accurately as any of those who are so prominent in discussing them. We know that there is throughout the Province generally, in parts comparatively wealthy and filled with people, as well as in those remotely situated and thinly settled, an anxious desire for the

ministrations of the Church of England; and we know that this desire is not confined to the actual members of her communion, but is shared in by many who have not been reared in her tenets. They feel that this would be a public good—on general grounds a high moral boon—an accession to religious privilege. We know, too, that the great majority of places where this desire is so strongly felt and expressed, are not of themselves able to supply the maintenance of a Clergyman, even on the moderate scale which is now, as a general rule, demanded. Take away the means of supplying this deficiency—of eking out the stipend which must be furnished before a clergyman can be secured—and then we should have a grievance in reality; a grievance which, I believe, well nigh a majority of the people would be loud in denouncing.

The advocates of the contemplated spoliation will surely not affirm that there is danger of internal corruption—of a depravation of the faith and morals of the Clergy—from the provision allotted to the Church of England. The intelligent Inspector General of the Province could enlighten them upon this point, and satisfactorily prove that, with the best possible husbandry, there will not even be enough to afford £100 per annum to a Clergyman in each township of this Province from the Church of England's share of the Reserves. And what is that annual ecclesiastical revenue to a township, when at the present moment several townships require two clergymen and even more? The township in which I myself reside would very actively employ three.

We have no ground, then, for apprehending corruption, from any prospect of the exorbitant wealth of the Clergy derivable from this source. Nor need any fear be entertained by the most cautious calculators upon this subject, that the Clergy even on this small

scale of stipend shall become so independent of their flocks as to be emboldened to neglect their best interests. That apprehension will be entirely removed by the system now pursued in settling a clergyman in a parish. The people are now, in all cases where vacancies are to be supplied, required to contribute a share of the stipend of their clergyman equal to that which shall be allotted from any public provision. To secure, for example, £50 per annum from the Clergy Reserve fund to their Minister, they must contribute £50 per annum themselves, and so in advanced proportion till the amount reaches £100 on each side; and the draft upon that public Fund cannot be honoured, unless accompanied with a certificate that the corresponding contribution by the people has been actually paid.

Here then, in the system adopted by the Church of England in this Diocese, there is no room for the apprehension that we shall have an indifferent people or a negligent clergy, so far as their relation to each other in the matter of maintenance can bear upon that disposition in either. Without entering into the special merits or demerits of this system, I may be permitted to say, judging analogically, that there is enough of mutual check imposed by it to maintain the interest of the one and secure the diligence of the other.

The agitation, therefore, upon this question is causeless and unreasonable. But I shall venture upon higher ground in my defence of things as they are; though, in passing on from expediency to equity and law, I shall not be met, in these strange times, with universal sympathy. I contend, then, that our local Parliament have no constitutional right to interfere with this question: they may discuss it, and legislate upon it if they will, but they have no power given them by the constitutional Act, 31 George III,

to do so. In April 1838, in the editorial columns of *The Church* newspaper, I ventured to express myself to this effect :—

“ We would add a few words upon that clause in the Act which makes provision for the repeal or variation of the law that establishes the Clergy Reserves. We cannot upon a reperusal of this clause, repress our astonishment that, after all the discussion which has taken place upon this subject, the fact should have been overlooked or so little dwelt upon, that this power to ‘ vary or repeal ’ the law cannot possibly have been meant to apply to *past* reservations, and cannot possibly have reference to any other than *future* appropriations. The meaning of the clause is surely simply this :—A certain reservation is made in a stated proportion to the amount of lands in a country, but the time may come when it shall be found expedient either to ‘ vary ’ the amount of proportion, or to cease from making it at all ; and therefore, to meet this contingency, a provision is contained in the Act for such ‘ variation or repeal.’ For what sense or pertinency could the term ‘ vary ’ be thought to have, if it did not apply merely to the power of changing the proportion,—for example, of the *seventh* to the *tenth*, or the *twentieth*, as circumstances might require ? And considering that every title-deed issued from the Crown contains a specification of the allotment of this seventh in relation to the amount of the grant, what ‘ repeal ’—without involving contradictions and confusions innumerable—could be meant other than the power, after a certain amount of reservation had been made, of stopping all *further* appropriations ? Without pretending to advance any other view than what common sense seems to dictate upon this point, we shall venture to say, that if the meaning of this provision to “ vary or repeal ” should be submitted to the *twelve Judges of England*, they would come to the conclusion for which we contend.”

On the 13th April, 1840, the Judges of England, in giving their opinion upon the interpretation of the Clergy Reserves’ Act, expressed themselves, on the point to which I refer, as follows :—

“ MY LORDS,—In answer to the question secondly put to us, we are all of opinion that the effect of the forty-first section of the Statute is prospective only, and that the power thereby given to the Legislative Council and Assembly of either of the Provinces cannot be extended to

affect lands which have been already allotted and appropriated under former grants ; for the manifest import of the forty-first section appears to us to be limited to this, viz. : 'the varying or repealing the provisions respecting the allotment and appropriation of lands,' and not to comprehend 'the varying or repealing allotments or appropriations which have been already made under provisions of the Act whilst such provisions continued unrepealed and in full force.' The provisions of the Statute of Wills might be varied or repealed without affecting the devises of land already made under it."

The interference of our local Parliament with the Clergy Reserves already appropriated is, therefore, unauthorized and unlawful : it is opposed to, and a violation of the Charter by which a Constitution was conferred upon our Province. The question is, legally and constitutionally, out of their hands : it cannot be legislated upon here without special authority from the Queen and Parliament of the United Kingdom.

Constitutional rights and the decisions of law are still, I trust, regarded and revered by a majority amongst us. If these are to be subverted at the bidding of every popular agitation, then there is no such thing as constitutional freedom left to us. We may have the name and the shadow ; but if the present movement is to take effect, and popular caprice is to be the arbiter of our possessions, whether as individuals or corporate bodies, then we shall have bid adieu to the reality. The hollow show and bitter mockery of liberty is all that we could glory in.

But the abettors of the present movement should look to the perils of the precedent which their success, if that should ever be attained, will establish. If this robbery of ecclesiastical endowments be a passion and a principle, it will not stop with the Church of England. Should the outstretched hand of spoliation touch and rifle us, the Church of Rome may well tremble for her property in Lower Canada. Stripped

and bare and pauperized alike, the thousand and one "denominations" which overspread the land will hardly look with complacency upon the wide domains and ample revenues of the Romish priesthood. In their asserted jealousy for the purity of the clergy, who should be beyond the reach of contamination from secular possessions, they will find an argument to co-operate with more worldly influences in the effort to despoil the Church of Rome also. The cry and the agitation which envy or covetousness have originated, will soon gain strength and intensity from the religious prejudices which have never been dormant. Comparatively defenceless themselves, they will not long regard with content the unbounded means of perpetuating what is felt to be the worst form of religious error, and of adding strength and consolidation to a system which aims at the spiritual bondage of the world.

The members of the Romish communion may rely upon it, that these opponents of establishments and endowments will shew consistency in the spirit of plunder: they will be glad to indulge their favourite propensity, when it comes attended with the merit of impartiality. They have swept away the property of the Church of England; and there would be an unfairness, too palpable, in leaving the endowments of Rome untouched. In such an exception to the general spoliation, there would be something to rebuke and accuse them of injustice: for the comfort and quiet, therefore, of such consciences as such individuals can possess, they will take care to be consistent in their sacrilege.

It may be thought or hoped that the numbers and concentration of those of the Romish persuasion in Lower Canada will ward off these aggressions; that they are too powerful and compact a body to interfere with. This fact would have little weight in the

legislative action of the United Province; and if the apprehension has any real force now, it will not possess it long. Slowly it may be, but surely, the Anglican population in Lower Canada are creeping up to the numbers of that of French origin: the peculiarities and inconveniences attendant upon the tenure of property there, ecclesiastical and otherwise, have long been complained of; and the opportunity will be gladly seized of laying hands upon, and applying to secular uses, the abundant revenues of the Church of Rome. The precedent afforded in the plunder and sequestration of Protestant property would be hailed as most important; and if, in the contemplation of this wider spoliation, they could look back upon the fact, that French members of the Romish persuasion voted for the alienation to secular purposes of the endowments of the Church of England or others,—or by withholding their vote, allowed the iniquitous measure to pass,—the demand would be louder and the feeling stronger for the total destruction of their own ecclesiastical possessions. Should that fact have to be looked back upon, there is no exaggeration in saying, that the demand amongst Protestants would be well nigh universal and irresistible for dealing with them as they had dealt with us. A tempest of agitation would be speedily got up, which would not be allayed till every acre of land was wrested from their Church.

When this spoliation shall be rendered complete, there may, Sir, be a class who will pronounce this a really free and happy country! There will not, surely, be many who, in sober afterthoughts, will heartily respond to that sentiment,—that a country is to be congratulated where the Church of God has been robbed. Our land has never had peace nor quiet since agitation first commenced upon the Clergy Reserves. Divine Providence has appeared to visit

us with a continuous political strife from the first disturbance of that consecrated property; and never, perhaps, has popular defiance flung itself with more fury into the face of public men than it does now, in the full triumph and working of Responsible Government, against those whose lot it is to administer our Provincial affairs. Till restitution is made, or penitence at least is expressed by a God-fearing people for past spoliations, we may well fear that strife and heart-burning and public disquiet will be the heritage of coming generations. We may be an educated people in science, philosophy, and the arts, but without the life and light of religion, we shall have a bitter testimony to the dangers of a little learning: we shall have scepticism and infidelity rampant in the land, and with that the feuds and misery of public insubordination. With the total abandonment of the only sound ruling principle, social and personal security, already shaken, will be hopelessly gone! and law itself, as we have indications even now, will become the sport and plaything of political changes and party strife.

And for what ostensible end is this contemplated plunder of the Church of England? The avowed plea is to provide, with the Clergy Reserves, for the secular education of the people; in other words, to deprive the people of a religious education—of that which trains them for the kingdom of God's glory in heaven—that they may be more amply furnished with the instruction which is to qualify them for the common business of life!

What does this plea express upon the very face of it? What else than that a religious education is of less consequence than a secular one; that to qualify people for the privileges and rewards of the blessed Gospel, is a matter of inferior concern to the providing them with that knowledge which relates to this world

only? This is the explicit declaration of the advocates of the present measure of spoliation; and it will be the positive and understood avowal of our country, if the unhallowed measure should obtain the sanction of the Provincial Parliament. Our country would then stand before the world with the infidel declaration in her mouth, that it is of more consequence to afford her people knowledge and learning that is merely human, than to provide the means of their understanding and appreciating the mighty truths through which their souls may be saved. And the declaration of this ungodly principle will go forth sanctioned not only by making no provision for the Church of God and the truths she inculcates, but by actually robbing her of the provision that she had.

These, doubtless, notwithstanding the intrigues and misrepresentations of our political agitators, will be welcome tidings to the poor settlers of the backwoods! When they renew their cry, in the spirit of anxious Christians, "Come over and help us," when they reiterate their earnest petitions for a resident clergyman, and the ministrations of the Church, it will be harmonizing well with their right and honest feelings to tell them—"No, you must wait a weary time for that; you must have patience, until your circumstances so far improve that you can support him wholly and entirely yourselves. In the meantime we grant you a better boon. The amount that was intended for your clergyman, we have withdrawn from that object and appropriated to a higher one. It will relieve you of just so much in paying the salaries of your schoolmasters!" It will make no difference that some right-minded and honest Christian replies,— "Yes, and when the time arrives that we can afford to support a clergyman ourselves half our population will have become infidels; and the other half, perhaps, from long disuse of the ordinances of reli-

gion, will say, 'We can do without them, as we have done heretofore; we can apply our money to better purposes; let us extend our schools, and improve our roads!'"

I am aware, Sir, of the wretched and unphilosophical argument often advanced, that the people will be sure to take care of what essentially pertains to their interests, that the higher the benefit, the more vigorous will be their effort to secure it. I shall content myself with the words of Dr. Chalmers in reply to such attempts at argument—a name and authority that perhaps will be revered by some of the instigators of the present movement:—

"It is, perhaps, the best among all our more general arguments for a Religious establishment in a country, that the spontaneous demand of human beings for religion is far short of the actual interest which they have in it. This is not so with their demand for food or raiment, or any article which ministers to the necessities of our physical nature. The more destitute we are of these articles the greater is our desire after them. But the case is widely different when the appetite for any good is short of that degree in which that good is useful or necessary; and above all, when just in proportion to our want of it, is the decay of our appetite towards it. Now this is, generally speaking, the case with religious instruction, the less we have of it, the less we desire it. It is not with the aliment of the soul as it is with the aliment of the body. The latter will be sought after, the former must be offered to a people whose spiritual appetite is in a state of dormancy, and with whom it is just as necessary to create a hunger as it is to minister a positive supply. In these circumstances it were vain to wait for any original movement on the part of the receivers, it must be made on the part of the dispensers. Nor does it follow that because Government may wisely abandon to the principle of demand and supply all those interests where the desires of our nature and the necessities of our nature are adequate one to the other, she ought, therefore, to abandon all care of our interest, when the desire on the part of our species is but rare and feeble and inoperative; while the necessity is of such a deep and awful character that there is not one of the concerns of earthliness which ought for a moment to be compared with it."

In looking, Sir, at the principles and the action of the times, many melancholy thoughts are forced upon us. A provision is made for law, common law, the law of the land—that which looks, and only can look, to the outward actions of offenders—on the grandest and costliest scale. To keep persons from crime and injustice by the simple restraint of fear, we have a Judiciary staff for this United Province nearly equal in numbers, and little inferior in cost, to that which is supplied for England and Wales, with about ten times the population. But to restrain persons from crime through a higher and more effectual principle, the fear of God—to inculcate and give force to a law which influences the issues of life, and directs the motives of action—in a word, to uphold and diffuse the great, and binding, and purifying truths of religion—our country, through those who profess to speak her voice, declares explicitly that she will pay nothing; and worse, that she will, violently and against all law, withdraw the small provision which, in an age when such things were better reasoned, was allotted for the maintenance of religion.

With such dishonour to Almighty God, sanctioned by the public voice, can a country prosper? Can we, in such a condition of rebellion against the Most High, hope for bountiful harvests and commercial success,—credit abroad, or trustfulness amongst ourselves? Not, if we are to believe in the immutability of the plans and purposes of the Divine Providence. It was said of old, by the voice of the Almighty, and the solemn words have never been recalled: “Ye are cursed with a curse; for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation.”

I have the honour to be, Sir,
Your obedient, humble servant,

The Rectory, Cobourg,

A. N. BETHUNE.

May 20th, 1850.

