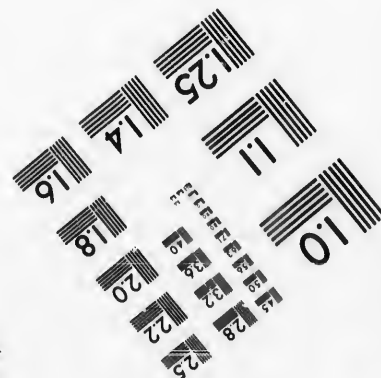
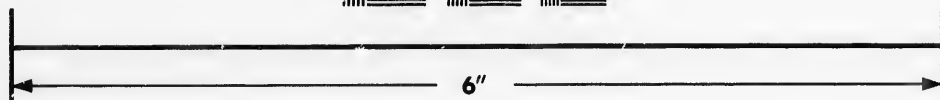
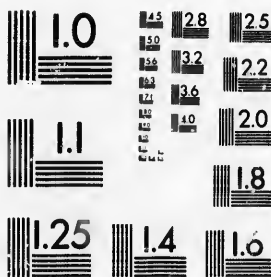


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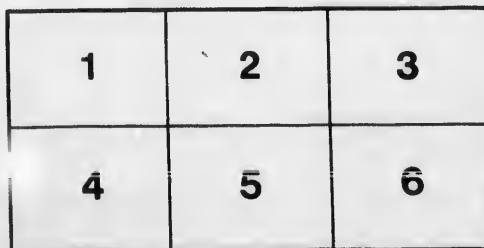
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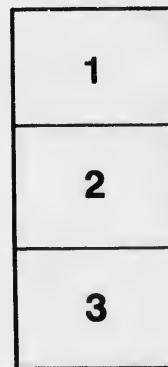
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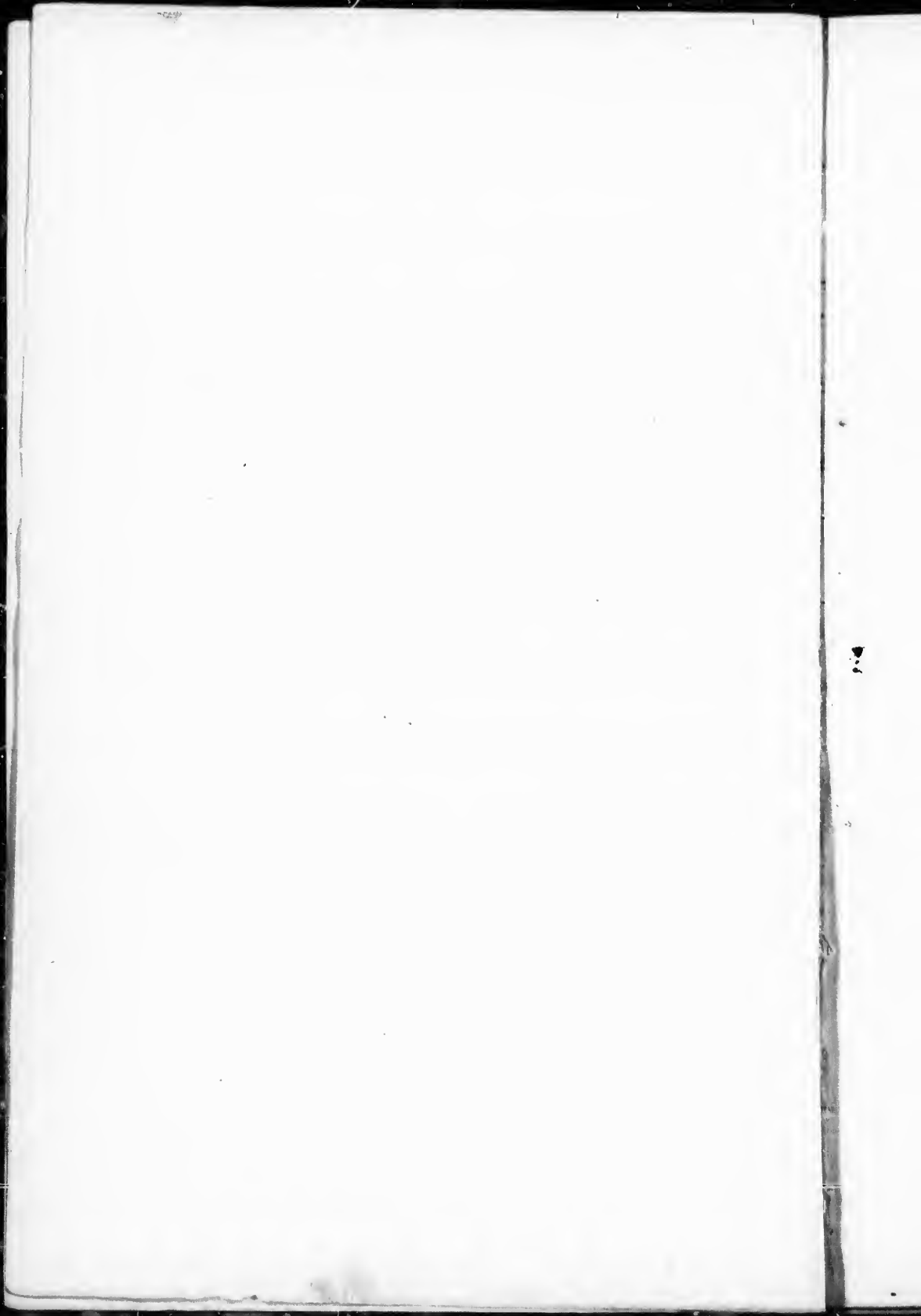
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# Petition

OF THE

MERCHANTS, TRADERS, AND OTHER  
INHABITANTS

OF

ST. JOHN'S, NEWFOUNDLAND.

TO

HER MOST EXCELLENT MAJESTY.

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1837.

TB 75669



APR 22 1941

**TO THE QUEEN'S MOST EXCELLENT  
MAJESTY.**

The Petition of the undersigned  
Merchants, Traders, and other in-  
habitants of St. John's, in the Island  
of Newfoundland,

**HUMBLY SHEWETH :**

That we have witnessed with extreme regret, the exertions which, for a length of time, have been made by a few individuals in this town to introduce discord and anarchy into the Colony — to paralyze the moral influence of our Courts of Justice, as well as the authority of the subordinate Magistracy ; and by a system of intimidation to acquire for themselves an irresponsible control over the public affairs of the Island.

We have hitherto forbore noticing the various false and calumnious statements contained in a series of Petitions which have, from time to time, been forwarded by them from this Colony to his late Majesty's Government, as well as to the House of Commons, in the belief that allegations which were known here to be so utterly devoid of truth,



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and so gross and incredible in their character, might safely be allowed to pass unnoticed by us. But we find that these misrepresentations, however they may be despised here, yet, from constant reiteration, they are acquiring a degree of credence elsewhere; and, convinced that the best interests of the Colony, and the safety of Persons and Property, would be endangered by further silence, we deem it necessary, in support and defence of our dearest rights, not only to lay before your Majesty, as succinctly as possible, our own positive testimony of the absence of every just ground for the shameless allegations contained in those Petitions, but also to express our earnest hope that your Majesty will extend the relief prayed for by this Petition, and adopt such measures as will emancipate this Colony from the thralldom to which otherwise it must permanently be subjected. Of these Petitions, we beg leave to draw your Majesty's attention particularly to one addressed to your Majesty's revered predecessor, despatched from this Island in the month of March last, which not only holds out, in language far from equivocal, threats of personal violence, but contains charges of so serious a nature against the characters of the Mercantile body of this town, the Chief Justice, and the Grand and Special Jurors, that to allow them to pass unnoticed would be culpable. We now give to those charges the most unqualified contradiction, and we advisedly designate them as foul and impudent calumnies notoriously devoid of truth.

In this Island, the population of which may be estimated at 75,000, of whom about one half are Protestants, and the other half Roman Catholics, it may be proper to remind your Majesty that

there are no legal distinctions affecting any class of your Majesty's subjects; and were the Roman Catholics permitted to follow the impulse of their own minds, and to act individually as their own wishes might prompt them, there would be no cause for apprehending that they would differ from their neighbours in matters of a civil nature. But it unfortunately happens that their Clergy have acquired a thoroughly despotic and absolute control over a very large proportion of the lower orders of their creed, by which means they are enabled to concentrate and direct the efforts of the body against each member individually to an extent that would scarcely be credited by any who do not witness their conduct, and in a way that is altogether destructive of the civil and religious liberties of the people at large.

To this cause, we submit, may be directly traced the evils of which we now complain; and as all authority rests in a great measure upon the power which those who exercise it possess of enforcing their mandates, we trust our observations will not be regarded as out of place if we state to your Majesty some of the means used by the Roman Catholic Priests, for coercing those who evince any disinclination to comply with their wishes.

In the first place they denounce them from the altar, as persons hostile to their Priests, and as opposed to the authority of their Church, and then warn their congregations not to deal or hold any intercourse with them, designating them commonly as "Mad Dogs"—a term by which it is understood that the individuals to whom it is applied, have not adopted the political views of

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their Priests—and are therefore to be regarded as if excommunicated; and being thus branded, they are to a very considerable, and in some instances to a ruinous, extent, injured in their business;—are constantly exposed to much personal insult, and not unfrequently ill-treated in the open streets by the lower orders of their own creed, who deem it a meritorious service thus to carry into effect the denunciations of their Priests.

But besides these temporal annoyances, they are constantly subjected to every kind of neglect and contumely, their Clergy often contemptuously refusing to perform any clerical duty for them, their wives or families. Those offices of their Church which are regarded as most sacred, are refused often with insult and abusive language; and others are performed in such a manner as to render the very performance painful in the extreme to persons possessed of common feeling. Since the general election of last Autumn, their Clergy have refused to hear confessions—to grant absolution—to visit the sick—to administer extreme unction, or the eucharist—to perform the office of churching women—to attend funerals, and even to bury the dead, when the parties have been what they call “Mad Dogs,” or the wives, children, or parents of such persons. These punishments were threatened before the elections of last autumn; since which period, electors who had firmness enough to act with independence have been visited with their rigid infliction. Several have been interdicted from attending the Chapels, and when, notwithstanding such interdict, a sense of religious duty has led them there, the Mass has been suspended until they have gone out, or, declining to retire, have been forcibly turned out.

Your Majesty will hence perceive that the Priests do not only possess, but also exercise the power of inflicting the most oppressive and grievous punishments, which are visited on parties guilty of no fault, without trial, and without redress; and it has consequently happened that many worthy persons have found themselves compelled to yield to their will with nothing less than ruin to their worldly prospects; or starvation to their families, as the alternative. A power thus concentrated is brought to bear upon the people with so terrible an effect, that it cannot be matter of wonder that five-sixths of the Roman Catholic population are at the feet of their priests.

By this system of intimidation the Roman Catholic clergy have not only succeeded in procuring the return of persons to serve as members of the House of Assembly who are entirely subservient to their will, and subject to their control (to which we shall presently more particularly allude); but what is still more alarming, they have systematically interfered with the due administration of justice, in such a manner as materially to weaken its moral effect. Delinquents who were of their party have, when convicted; been taken under their especial protection, and held up to the world as persons oppressed and persecuted on account of their political opinions, and as martyrs in the cause of liberty, and the defence of their creed—by which means they have endeavoured to create in the minds of their deluded followers the most inveterate prejudices against those to whom the administration of Justice is intrusted. In this unholy attempt to establish in themselves an authority superior to the laws, they have omitted no oppor-

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tunity, and neglected no means within their reach to bring the Judges, Magistrates, and officers of Justice into contempt, and to excite popular feeling against them. More particularly have they and the few factious and needy individuals who are associated with them, been unceasing in their attacks, and untiring in their exertions to bring odium upon the present Chief Justice of the Colony, Mr. BOULTON, and at any sacrifice to procure his removal from the office which he so ably and impartially fills.

To accomplish this end the vilest slander, the most despicable insinuations, and the most malicious calumnies have been resorted to, more particularly through the medium of a newspaper published in this town, under the name of the "*Newfoundland Patriot*," the conductors of which are notoriously under the control of the Roman Catholic priesthood. In order to give plausibility to their proceedings, and to obtain for them the attention of your Majesty's government, a principal expedient resorted to, has been that of petitions which are got up by them with a facility almost incredible to those who are unacquainted with the domination which the Roman Catholic clergy exercise over their flocks. The manner in which signatures are procured to these petitions is by exhibiting blank sheets of paper at the Chapel doors, where all who enter, whether men or boys, are made to subscribe their names, or have them written down for them; and to this they are obliged to submit, knowing that otherwise they will be visited with the displeasure of their clergy.

These sheets are afterwards appended to the Petitions, with the contents of which but few of

the subscribers are acquainted; and it is thus that the most shameless allegations, devoid of every particle of truth, and intended to bring the judicial character of Mr. BOULTON into contempt, are brought under the notice of government as expressing the public sentiments of the people of Newfoundland.

In seeking the cause of this malignity displayed towards the Chief Justice, we solemnly declare to your Majesty that we can discover none, except it may be in the apprehension that his inflexible administration of justice, unawed by their power or their threats, is calculated to divest the Priests and their adherents of their undue ascendancy, and to subject them in common with your Majesty's other subjects to the supremacy of the law. We take this public opportunity of expressing our full confidence in the integrity and ability of Mr. Boulton, and our entire satisfaction with the firm, judicious, and impartial manner in which he has discharged his duties, We have also no hesitation in asserting that notwithstanding the infamous attempts to create distrust in his official conduct, the public confidence in him remains unshaken, and we should lament as a public calamity any circumstance that might cause his removal or retirement from the Bench of this Colony, which would thereby suffer a loss not easily repaired.

And here, we would respectfully suggest to your Majesty that this community is almost exclusively a commercial one—that the Merchant and Fisherman have but one common interest, and are bound together by one tie of mutual dependance—that those differences of public opinion which exist in older and larger countries, have

been hitherto unknown amongst us. Who, then, we would respectfully ask, are most interested in the due and impartial administration of Justice? Your Majesty's Petitioners, many of whom have a large stake in the country, upon whom hundreds depend for their daily bread; or the Roman Catholic Priests with their adherents—men who, generally speaking, have nothing to lose, but who might hope to extend their political influence by bringing the constitutional authorities into contempt.

We further crave leave to represent to your Majesty a few circumstances worthy of serious consideration, as connected with the Charter by which his late Gracious Majesty was pleased to establish a Local Legislature in this Island.

By this Charter the sole qualification prescribed for an elector is that of his being the occupier for one year, of a tenement however mean and valueless—a franchise so extensive that it amounts almost to universal suffrage. On the other hand, no qualification whatever is prescribed for Candidates, beyond that of being the occupier of a dwelling, no matter of what description, for two years—a defect we have ample cause at present deeply to deplore, for the Roman Catholic Clergy quickly perceiving how useful an engine the House of Assembly might be made in their hands, have not failed to exercise in the manner beforementioned, the power they possess over this description of persons, in securing the return of a majority of members of their own nomination.

It is thus that the parties returned are nearly all persons of little or no stake in the country, who

are not in point of ability, character, or standing in society, at all qualified for the office in which they find themselves placed; consequently by no means such as the electors themselves, if left to the uncontrolled exercise of their franchise, would have chosen.—Their only qualification, in fact, being a blind subserviency to the dictates and wishes of the Roman Catholic priesthood.

We feel confident in affirming that in the districts of St. John and Conception Bay, which return seven out of the fifteen members of the Assembly, and where the illegal influence of which we complain is so powerful, a large majority of the electors were, and are, opposed to the candidates who have been returned by the means beforementioned, and the result of the elections would, we doubt not, have been very different could the electors, in attending the hustings, have been assured of protection from violence and outrage, and secured from the subsequent persecution and punishment with which they were solemnly threatened, and which they well knew would have been so unmercifully inflicted upon them.

Nor is it the least among the evils resulting from this baneful system, that in other districts where the Roman Catholic clergy possess little or no direct influence, such a hopelessness of any thing like a fair representation throughout has been engendered, and such a conviction of the uselessness of sending independent members to meet a majority thus produced, that in the last election instances occurred in which persons were returned as members without opposition, whose pretensions were really ludicrous, and who, under any other circumstances, would have received no countenance whatever.



From a House thus constituted, whose members are by no means the representatives of the colony, and among whom are the most active agents, as well as the most passive creatures of the priests, little can be expected to the satisfaction of the community. We forbear entering into a detail of their proceedings during the present session (characterized as they are by the same feelings of partisanship, the same political depravity and persecution which influenced their conduct out of doors); or of giving a description of the low and abusive language with which the more prominent members, by pretence of their privilege of speech, are in the daily practice of assailing the Governor, the Judges, and other officers of the government. The numerous and useless offices connected with the House of Assembly which they have created for the sake of patronage—the prodigal manner in which they have endeavoured to squander the revenues of the Colony to support themselves and their adherents, and the invidious distinctions and provisions which they have made in several instances for the purpose of prejudicing individuals against whom they entertain personal dislike, indicate with painful certainty their determination to exercise all the power they possess, or are permitted to arrogate, in extending their influence, and inflicting injury on those who presume to differ from them.

That any of your Majesty's colonies should in this, the 19th century, be reduced to such a state of priestly tyranny as that to which we are subjected, may well excite your Majesty's astonishment, and our statements might possibly be attributed to prejudice or an exaggerated fear, did not evidence of their correctness exist in

the office of your Majesty's principal Secretary of State for the Colonies, whence documents in abundance may be obtained to support them.

We deem it incumbent upon us now to bring under the especial notice of your Majesty the important fact that the Magistrates, Constables, and other subordinate functionaries in this Colony are entirely dependent upon the annual grant of the House of Assembly for the payment of their salaries. A ready method is thus afforded of controlling their independence, if not of corrupting their integrity, by diminishing or withholding, or perhaps increasing, their respective stipends, in proportion as they are supposed to be more or less favourable or adverse to the authority of the priests and their partisans; and we lament to add that the determination to exercise this influence has been manifested in the votes of the present session.

Great, however, and insupportable as are the evils to which we are thus subjected, we yet trust that an adequate remedy may be found in the wisdom of your Majesty's ministers, and we do humbly and earnestly pray for the adoption of such measures as will effectually redress the grievances which we thus presume to bring under your Majesty's notice. We beseech your Majesty that among other steps for that purpose, means may be taken to secure to all your Majesty's subjects in this Island, the free and uncontrolled exercise of their civil and religious rights,—to protect the Judges and officers of Justice in the fearless administration of the laws; and also to make permanent provision for Magistrates, Constables, and others connected with the Police, thereby rendering them independent of popular

control, and amenable only to the executive branch of your Majesty's government for the faithful discharge of their duties.

That your Majesty may have a long, prosperous, and happy reign, is the heartfelt wish and sincere prayer of your Majesty's dutiful and loyal subjects.

December, 1837.

