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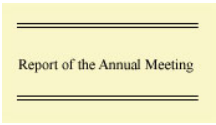

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THE EARLY METHODIST CHURCH AND THE CANADIAN POINT OF VIEW[1]

By GEORGE W. BROWN

To-morrow (May 24) in many parts of the world there is being commemorated the two-hundredth anniversary of the conversion of John Wesley. Whatever may have been the nature or explanation of the incident, historians seem agreed as to the profound effect of the influences which were let loose in English life by Wesley's career from that moment. Halévy, the brilliant French historian and observer of English life, whose work gives Methodism a place of central importance in nineteenth-century England, says, for example:

> To this movement in combination on the one hand with the old Whig political traditions, on the other with the new *ethos* produced by the industrial revolution, British Liberalism of the opening of the 19th Century owed its distinctive character. We shall witness Methodism bring under its influence first the dissenting sects, then the establishment, finally secular opinion. We shall attempt to find here the key to the problem whose solution has hitherto escaped us; for we shall explain by this movement the extraordinary stability which English society was destined to enjoy throughout a period of revolutions and crises; what we may truly term the miracle of modern England, anarchist but orderly, practical and businesslike, but religious and even pietist.[2]

The influence of Methodism in English life has been matched, in part at least, by its influence in the English-speaking communities overseas. In the United States, in Canada, and elsewhere there have been established independent Methodist churches adapted to their particular environments

[1]There is a voluminous literature on the history of Canadian Methodism, both of sources and secondary works. The best collection is that of the library of Victoria University, Toronto, where active steps are being taken to build up a full collection on the history of the churches now incorporated in the United Church of Canada. The writer is indebted to Dr. F. L. Barber, the librarian of Victoria University, for courtesies extended during the preparation of this paper, and also to Mr. R. G. Riddell of the Victoria staff for permission to consult notes made from manuscripts in the archives of the Methodist Missionary Society in London, England. As this paper has not been fully documented, the following secondary works may be mentioned here: John Carroll, *Case and His Cotemporaries, or the Canadian Itinerants Memorial*, 5 vols. (Toronto, 1867-77); George F. Playter, *The History of Methodism in Canada* (Toronto, 1862); *The Life and Times of Anson Green Written by Himself* (Toronto, 1877); Egerton Ryerson, *Canada Methodism, its Epochs and Characteristics* (Toronto, 1882), and *The Story of My Life, Being Reminiscences of Sixty Years Public Service in Canada*, edited by J. G. Hodgins (Toronto, 1883); J. E. Sanderson, *The First Century of Methodism in Canada* (Toronto, 1908-10); Alexander Sutherland, *Methodism in Canada* (London, 1903); G. G. Findlay and W. W. Holdsworth, *The History of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society*, 5 vols. (London, 1921); C. B. Sissons, *Egerton Ryerson: His Life and Letters*, I (Toronto, 1937).

[2]Élie Halévy, *A History of the English People in 1815* (London, 1924), 339. The views of historians such as Lecky and G. M. Trevelyan on the importance of the influence of Methodism are well known. Among the recent special books are the following: W. J. Warner, *The Wesleyan Movement in the Industrial Revolution* (London, 1930); E. R. Taylor, *Methodism and Politics* (Cambridge, 1935); Maximin Piette, *John Wesley in the Evolution of Protestantism* (London, 1937).

and moulded along distinctive lines by the history, the economic, social, and political characteristics of their communities. The churches in their turn have had a powerful influence in their respective communities, not only on religious thought and attitudes but on social and economic development. They have exerted a very strong, if at times not easily estimated, pressure on public policy and have frequently had a large part in determining sectional or national points of view.

In Canada this complex tangle of influences and counter-influences, gathered around the churches, has been important from the beginning—more important, one may hazard the opinion, than has been the case for example in the United States but as yet little study has been given to it. Valuable results have been gained from the emphasis that has been put on the political, and more recently on the economic, history of Canada. Equally valuable results will without doubt come from a close study of the development of Canadian institutions and among these institutions the churches rank high in importance. This paper is, however, not intended to elaborate this general theme, except by way of illustration. Its aim is the more modest one of offering some suggestions with regard to the development and influence of one Canadian church during its formative period.

In the United States the Methodist church became an independent body as a result of the revolution. John Wesley, in spite of his opposition to the American cause, was wise enough to see that American Methodism could not be kept under British tutelage and in 1784 he appointed two agents—one the famous Asbury—to direct affairs in America. The Methodist ministers in conference adopted the name of Methodist Episcopal Church and proceeded from that time to control their polity and economy in accordance with the needs of the American environment,[3] while at the same time adhering to the essential elements in Wesley's doctrine and practice. In contrast with this course of events in the United States, the process of developing in British North America a united self-governing Methodist church with its own distinctive characteristics was long drawn out, uncertain, and full of stress; and, like the development of self-government in the political sphere, it also came to fulfilment in the end only through a combination of influences which were in part indigenous and which in part emanated from Britain and from the United States. There is an evident parallelism between the achievement of self-government and dominion-wide union in the Canadian Methodist church and the achievements of responsible government, union, and expansion which culminated in Confederation and the years immediately following it. The parallelism, which is not the result of mere coincidence, becomes more striking on a close examination.

Methodism came to British North America in the last years of the eighteenth century at several different points and from several sources. In the Maritime Provinces there was for a time a close relation with the United States and Wesley appears to have thought that this would continue. About the turn of the century it became clear, however, that the association

[3]They introduced, for example, a form of episcopal government which Wesley considered impossible in England due to the peculiar relation of Methodism to the Church of England. See J. M. Buckley, *Constitutional and Parliamentary History of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York, 1912).

with the United States was inadequate and open to criticism and that help might better be obtained from the British Wesleyan church where there was a rapidly rising missionary enthusiasm. With the journey to England in 1799 of William Black, the greatest figure in the early Methodism of Nova Scotia, there began an organic connection of over half a century between the Methodism of the Maritime Provinces and the British Wesleyan church. The relationship was that of a colonial dependency to an imperial government, the function of colonial office being performed by the powerful Missionary Society of the British church. Occasionally Nova Scotian Methodists felt that they were chastened unduly by the bureaucracy of Hatton Garden,[4] but the relationship, like the political history of Nova Scotia, was on the whole a peaceable one and continued until the "Maritime union" of Methodism was brought about in 1855.

In Upper Canada the career of Methodism was in striking contrast to that in Nova Scotia. Here, in an environment of social and political animosities so relentless as to lead frequently to turbulence and finally to armed rebellion, the frontiers of British and American Methodism overlapped. The inevitable conflict was sharp and long continued and Methodism, to save itself, had to find some compromise. Under the pressure of bitter circumstance it gathered elements from both British and American sources, and during the difficult decades of the 'thirties and 'forties brought them into fusion. The story reminds one of much that is characteristic of Canadian history. By the middle of the century the Wesleyan Methodist church in Upper Canada was strong, independent, and distinctively Canadian. In the process of amalgamation which in the following generation united all the Methodist groups in British North America and extended their labours westward to the Pacific it was the Methodism of Upper Canada which became the keystone of the arch.

Methodism was first established in Upper and Lower Canada by impulses from the United States in which the Loyalist element had an important but by no means exclusive part. By 1812, societies were established in Quebec, in Montreal, at Stanstead and Durham near the American border of Lower Canada, and in Upper Canada in the Bay of Quinte and St. Lawrence region and in the Niagara Peninsula. These societies were connected with Methodist conferences in New York, but there was already recognition of their distinctive character in the sending to them of ministers who were known to be acceptable north of the border and in organizing them into Canadian districts. The War of 1812 not only revealed clearly the tendencies toward separation but intensified and enlarged them. Ministers of American citizenship assigned to the Canadian work in 1812 did not enter the colony, others already north of the border returned to the United States; the Canadian ministers held their own informal conference during the war; and Methodists loyally supported the British cause. The Methodism of Lower Canada showed, however, in its reaction to the war a striking difference from that of Upper Canada, and in this lay the prophecy of the separation and misunderstanding which was to mark most of the period until the regional union of 1855 brought a friendly and organically satisfactory settlement.

Among Upper Canadian Methodists the war was for the most part

[4]77 Hatton Garden in London was the headquarters of the British Wesleyan Missionary Society.

regarded as an unfortunate if unavoidable interlude which, once disposed of, should be prevented from unduly interfering with the friendly associations stretching across the border. Indeed the maintenance of these associations seemed essential if the work in Upper Canada's pioneer districts was to be pushed forward with true Methodist zeal. In Quebec and Montreal the situation soon proved to be very different. In Quebec the work had to be abandoned during the war. In Montreal the society was split between those who desired to maintain the American connection and those who wished to establish one with the Wesleyan Methodism of England. I shall not here hazard a guess as to the reason for this yearning towards England,—perhaps Canada's little metropolitan centre was showing a tender budding of sophistication. In any case, three months before the war commenced the British group in the Montreal society sent an appeal for a minister to the British Wesleyan conference in which they complained that the American preachers came irregularly and reluctantly; that the appointee on his arrival presented "a long account of his travels, a long string of expenses, and a long face"; and that, moreover, this connection with the United States brought Canadian Methodists into odium: "We are stigmatized as a set of Jacobins, when in fact only our spiritual guides are so. . . . We are supposed to be corrupted in the Serbonian bog of democracy, which we abhor! On these accounts we have long wished and most affectionately desired a union with you, who dwell in a country we are united to by every tie of sacred love and gratitude."[5] The appeal from Montreal proved as irresistible as if it had come from Macedonia. The British Wesleyan conference in response sent two men in 1814 and there began the long conflict between British and American Methodism in Upper Canada out of which was to emerge a Canadian church.

The appeal was in fact opportune for more reasons than one. The British Wesleyan Missionary Society had just been formed—one of several English missionary societies whose establishment in the first years of the century is significant evidence of a rising national and evangelical fervour. The Wesleyan society was in its first flush of enthusiasm. It was being urged forward by a laity rapidly growing in wealth, and felt a special obligation to support missionary enterprises in British possessions. Little wonder that the Canadas presented an intriguing problem on both religious and political grounds. The Methodist societies of Upper Canada and the leaders of the Methodist Episcopal Church were, however, alarmed at the prospect of schism, and the General Conference at Baltimore in 1816 discussed the matter fully.[6] A letter from the Wesleyan society to the conference expressed a wish for peaceful settlement but asserted the right and duty of providing missionary assistance to citizens of British colonies who requested it. So the issue was joined—partly without doubt because of antipathies revealed by the recent war—and there ensued between 1816 and 1820 four years of increasingly bitter and open rivalry. Local invitations brought Wesleyan missionaries into circuits already occupied by Methodist Episcopal ministers and several important societies were split. It became increasingly clear that the rivalry could not continue without

[5]Findlay and Holdsworth, *Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society*, I, 377.

[6]It is not without interest that the case for intervention in Canada by the British conference was presented by two delegates from Nova Scotia, one the veteran Black.

serious loss on both sides. The matter was again debated seriously at the General Conference of 1820 in Baltimore and an emissary was sent to England to urge a settlement. The American church protested against the imputation of political motives in connection with its work in Canada, and placed in its discipline a clause prescribing it as the duty of Christians and especially of ministers to be subject to the political authority of the country of their residence. In conclusion, the American conference suggested a compromise, that it should withdraw from Lower Canada and the British church from Upper Canada. The arrangement was one which seemed on the whole to fit in with the nature of the work and the wishes of the majority of Methodist adherents in the two provinces and the British conference agreed to it. Resolutions were passed and letters of instruction and admonition urging the acceptance of the arrangement were sent from both mother conferences.

> We have recognized the principle [wrote the British conference], that the Methodist body is one throughout the world and that therefore its members are bound to cordial affection and brotherly union. . . . We know that political reasons exist in many minds for supplying even Upper Canada as far as possible, with British missionaries; and however natural this feeling may be to Englishmen, and even praiseworthy when not carried too far, it will be obvious to you that this is a ground on which, as a Missionary Society, and especially as a society under the direction of a Committee which recognizes as one with itself the American Methodists, we cannot act. . . . Feel that you are one with your American brethren, embarked in the same great cause, and eminently of the same religious family, and the little difficulties of arrangement will be easily surmounted; and if any warm spirits (which is probable) rise up to trouble you, remember that you are to act upon the great principle sanctioned by the Conference, and not upon local prejudices.[7]

Truly a pious and well meant admonition but neither writers nor readers understood what was tied up in it. Canadian Methodism was destined to be a Canadian institution and not a colonial appendage of either American or British Methodism, but it was to take thirty-five years to solve "the little difficulties of arrangement" and there were to be "warm spirits" and "local" and other prejudices aplenty.

The formal tie of union with the American church was soon to be broken, and indeed the demand for separation was already apparent in 1820. Methodists in Upper Canada could not hope for relief from legal disabilities which pressed upon them, or from the imputation, however unjust, of disloyalty while the American connection remained. Restlessness showed itself within the societies and worst of all was stirred up and organized by Henry Ryan, the veteran leader who in 1805 had come with William Case from the United States. Since then they had shared the distinction and burden of Methodist leadership in the province. Ryan was an Irishman of great physical strength, boundless energy, and considerable mental agility. He had been a famous fighter in his unregenerate days, and indeed his prowess had been by no means a handicap in carrying the glad tidings of salvation up and down the frontier of Upper Canada. Ryan

[7]Ryerson, *Canadian Methodism; Its Epochs and Characteristics*, 301-3.

now took advantage of the growing desire for independence and, appealing to the laity and local preachers in particular, claimed that the Canadian ministers and American General Conference could not be trusted to bring about separation. The episode of the Ryan schism is petty if colourful, but it has significance both as an illustration of the possibilities of division which for a generation were never far from the surface and as a prophecy of the increasing importance of lay influence which during the difficulties of the next two decades was to become a distinctive development in Canadian Methodism.

The union with American Methodism was dissolved at the General Conference of 1828 with mutual goodwill but only after the strongest pressure from the Canadian delegates and the "Methodist Episcopal Church in Canada" was organized as an independent body. Its discipline and organization remained essentially those of the American church, but changes were made which showed that the Canadian church would follow its own interest in meeting the needs of the Canadian environment.

In the transition years between 1820 and 1828 the Ryan episode should not be over-emphasized. Its importance was indeed symptomatic rather than real. The truth was that Methodism in Upper Canada was beginning to find itself and in this it was exhibiting tendencies similar to those which can be seen in almost every other aspect of the colony's life. The 1820's have perhaps never had their due from Canadian historians as a decade in which beginnings were made and lines of future development laid down. In trade, transportation, internal improvements, settlement, the professions, journalism, one feels that the province was emerging from its infancy and becoming at least a husky toddler. In this characteristic development Upper Canadian Methodism, as was frequently the case at later dates, increasingly anticipated rather than followed the trend of the times. In the early years of the decade there came into its ministry the notable group of young men such as Anson Green, James Richardson, Franklin Metcalf, and the Ryerson brothers, who were to carry the burden of the next thirty years. Able, devoted, familiar with the Canadian scene and determined to yield to no one in their loyalty to it—they were the first proof that Upper Canadian Methodism could produce for itself leadership of no mean order. The sudden development of a mission to the Indians of the province was further evidence of the rise of distinctive Canadian interests. The period was one of great missionary enthusiasm in the United States and England, and Canadian Methodists seized eagerly on their own opportunity, formed their own society, and quickly developed a proprietary interest in their own problem. But it was in the arena of public debate that the new spirit and leadership won their most spectacular success. Archdeacon Strachan's famous attack in his memorial sermon to Bishop Mountain and the still more famous reply of the twenty-three-year-old Egerton Ryerson came in 1826.[8] They were followed by Strachan's journey to England to obtain a charter for a university with exclusive features, and by the circulation, while he was there, of his Ecclesiastical Chart whose erroneous statements and partisan spirit mark it as perhaps the least defensible detail of Strachan's long and distinguished career. The charges against the Methodists, and in particular the charges of disloyalty,

[8]The sermon which had been preached on July 3, 1825, appeared in printed form in April, 1826. Ryerson's reply was in the *Colonial Advocate* of May 11, 1826.

could not be disregarded. Investigation was demanded and speedily obtained. A petition with some 5,700 signatures resulted in the appointment in 1828 of a select committee of the House of Assembly which examined fifty-two witnesses and brought in a sweeping report vindicating the loyalty of the Methodists and condemning special privileges to any one religious body. Equally gratifying was the condemnation of special privileges by the committee appointed by the House of Commons in 1828 to investigate Canadian affairs. George Ryerson then in England had appeared before the committee and Lord Stanley, one of its members, had warned in a speech in the House of Lords against allowing "the evils which religious dissensions have already produced in this country and in Ireland" to creep into Canada. "It is important", he urged, "that His Majesty's Canadian subjects should not have occasion to look across the narrow boundary that separates them from the United States and see anything there to envy."

The year 1828 was one of notable success for Upper Canadian Methodism but it was clear that the real struggle was merely beginning. Powerful influences were moulding thought and shaping action throughout the English-speaking world and in Canada as in other places, new democratic impulses were bound to clash with conservative concepts of education, rank, and property, of accepted privilege and constituted authority. The scenery, the action, were different—the drama was essentially the same as that which was being played elsewhere on larger stages and with more pomp and circumstance but with perhaps after all not much more of dignity and restraint. Conservative interests were strongly entrenched in the province. They were sure to be stoutly, even bitterly, defended, and not least in matters of education and religion where the Tory view had no less a champion than the Reverend Archdeacon Strachan. Strachan believed that society should be organized on conservative lines, and that education and religion should be so controlled and directed by a privileged group as to ensure the stability of the whole social and political order. He suspected the republican and levelling tendencies of the American environment and he was determined to defend the rights and privileges of the Church of England not only for the sake of religion but on the broader ground of what he considered to be the public good. We can now see that the tide of liberalizing tendencies was running strongly against him—more strongly than either he or his opponents could realize—and his task was doubly difficult because of weaknesses in his position of which he was without doubt fully aware—in particular the ambiguous nature of the Clergy Reserves grant of 1791, and the uncertainty of essential support from England through the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel.[9] Doubtless it was the realization of such weaknesses which accounted in part for Strachan's aggressive and inflexible attitude and which led him on a few but notable occasions to overreach himself.

But if, through the perspective of a hundred years, we may view the prospects and the opposing groups of 1828 with philosophic calm, that is more than could be expected of the Methodists of Upper Canada. With evangelical intensity they were determined to have a church that was not merely technically independent but truly Canadian, and equal in zeal and

[9]Notice was given in 1832 that the grants from the S.P.G. were to be discontinued.

effectiveness to the growing needs of the colony. Its leaders must be defended against the still-repeated insinuations that they were little better than disloyal and ignorant ranters; its convictions not only on religion but on equality of civil privilege must be forcibly explained and disseminated; and its youth who were crossing to American seminaries in increasing numbers[10] must be given the opportunity for a Canadian education. So it was that the conference of 1829 determined to establish a newspaper and if possible an institution of learning. The newspaper was an immediate necessity. The slender purses of the ministers yielded a cash subscription. Egerton Ryerson was appointed editor and on November 21, 1829, there appeared the first number of the *Christian Guardian,* which was destined, during the following decade, to be the most influential and widely circulated newspaper in Upper Canada.

During the most bitterly controversial decade of Canadian history Ryerson achieved a reputation as a master of controversy, but one cannot believe after reading his editorials and personal letters that he delighted in it. He had strong vibrant qualities, intellectual and emotional, in unusual combination, and with all the warmth of an intense nature he defended those institutions and causes to which he gave his devotion. He seldom opened a controversy and indeed often restrained himself under great provocation, but if once convinced that a matter was one of essential justice or of high public policy his effort was unsparing. His invariable practice was to gather every relevant document or other bit of evidence, to master the facts, however tangled and voluminous, before making a pronouncement, and then to marshall them in a smashing statement designed to bear down his opponent by the very weight of unassailable information. He seldom gave his enemies the hostage of a mis-statement. His errors—and there were few which he had cause to regret—were those rather of judgment and arose from warmth of conviction. Personal animosities and contention for their own sake he detested. Perhaps he was at times too prone to attribute to his opponents no higher motive than party prejudice, but he made few returns in kind for the personal abuse and misrepresentation which were heaped upon him. More than once he publicly regretted that his intensity had led him too far and urged that interest in a cause should transcend personal bitterness. He harboured no resentment where the clash was one of principle but he had a relentless scorn for the opponent for whom he had lost respect. His contempt showed itself not in vituperation but in a damning analysis of words, events, and personal relationships. Governor Head at the very moment of his counter-revolutionary triumph in March, 1838, was the most illustrious victim of such a flaying.

In the long run Ryerson must be judged, however, not by his polemical encounters but by his accomplishments and fundamental concepts. In the course of his long public career he left a profound impression on Canadian education both higher and elementary; he was the most powerful personality in the formative period of the Methodist church, and he was a brilliant

[10]Most of them went to Cazenovia Seminary, Cazenovia, N.Y.; see "Historical Note" in *On the Old Ontario Strand: Victoria's Hundred Years* (Toronto, 1936). An interesting item on American influences in early Canadian education is found in the relations of Upper Canadian Methodists and their academy with schools in the United States.

editor with few equals in the early days of Canadian journalism. Perhaps no other single individual made so varied and permanent a contribution to the development of Canadian institutions and attitudes.

In temper and purpose Ryerson was essentially the builder and for him the inevitability of social progress and the doctrine of perfectability for the individual were matters of unwavering faith. It was a faith which blended the attitudes of Methodism with impulses that were running strongly in the contemporary philosophy and politics of both America and England. Ryerson was indeed a true son of the generation in which may be seen the first glow of enthusiasm and certainty which marked the dawn of the Victorian age.

In his first editorial Ryerson prophesied that the colony was on the threshold of momentous developments: "The present is a most eventful period. . . . The nature of our depending relations, the principles of our foreign intercourse, the complexion of our internal regulations, and the aspect of our literary and religious institutions are about taking the hue of a permanent character." Could he have seen in advance the events of the next two decades during which, for Canadian Methodism at least, the truth of his prophecy was to be fully vindicated his feelings would have been even more mixed than they undoubtedly were in 1829. The Methodism of Upper Canada could, he hoped, be kept one in spirit and co-operation with the two great senior branches of Methodism in England and the United States, but it must have freedom to face its own difficulties and opportunities in its own way. This problem of the mingling of diverse elements in the Canadian environment was to be the central problem in every aspect of Canadian development during the nineteenth century, and no institution was thrown against it so violently as was the Upper Canadian Methodist Church in the 1830's and '40's. Ryerson in his editorials returned repeatedly to the double theme of the oneness of Methodism throughout the world and the distinctive characteristics and needs of Methodism in Upper Canada—what, for example, was its attitude on the episcopal form of church government in which the Methodism of Britain differed from that of the United States—and, in particular, why did Canadian Methodism oppose church establishment and endowment when Wesleyan Methodism in England tolerated, perhaps favoured, them?

Methodism in Upper Canada had, it appeared, a great opportunity. Its methods, its lack of emphasis on contentious points of doctrine, its vivid appeal for the regeneration of the individual, its organization in societies with local preachers but with, at the same time, a very strong connexional tie—all these characteristics made it adaptable to Canadian conditions, and in particular to the needs of the frontier. If it could defend its views on Clergy Reserves and education while avoiding the pitfalls of political controversy—if it could be free of division within its own ranks —better still if it could get some assistance from England for its missions and its academy, it might preserve its identity. But the "ifs" were too great and within five years the first attempt at independence was to come to an end.

The British Wesleyan leaders had never been content with the arrangement of 1820 excluding them from Upper Canada. They considered that the separation of the Canadian and American churches in 1828 had

released them from their bargain. They had funds for the Indian mission,[11] they were being urged to look after the interests of British Wesleyans emigrating to Canada, and were given to understand that their return to Upper Canada would be by no means unwelcome from a political point of view in official quarters. In fact, it appears that the *Anschluss* had been in contemplation even before 1828[12] and finally in the spring of 1832, after a letter of announcement, it arrived in person—the Reverend Robert Alder with three prospective missionaries. Warfare seemed inevitable, until John Ryerson in walking up Toronto's Bay Street got the sudden inspiration that it would be better to try the almost equally grim alternative of marriage. There were no other possibilities and so the union of 1833 was brought about. The details cannot concern us here although they had in them the seeds of later difficulty. The Canadian conference was to retain control of its own affairs except the missions but was to adopt the Wesleyan name[13] and, so far as possible, the Wesleyan organization. It was to have a presiding officer appointed by the British conference and it was to contribute to the British Missionary Society which in turn would control and finance the missions in Canada.

Egerton Ryerson had shared with others, like his brother George, the fear of the control of "despotic" Englishmen over the Canadian church, but once convinced of the necessity of union, he threw his influence and the influence of the *Guardian* unreservedly into it. It was a practical measure in which the gains, he concluded, far outweighed the losses and which must be put through without wavering even if some members and adherents fell by the wayside. He was convinced that liberalizing tendencies were rising rapidly in England. He had just watched with keenest interest the struggle over the Reform Bill, and its passing was, he believed, a triumph for those forces which would ensure justice and material progress in the colonies. That the monarchy had come out decisively on the side of reform was the final answer to those who charged that the struggle against exclusive privilege in Upper Canada was disloyal. In a lighter moment, Ryerson wondered whether His Majesty read the *Guardian*. He had gone to England in the spring of '33 to conclude negotiations for the union and had carried with him a petition with twenty thousand names asking the

[11]A tremendous stimulus of missionary interest had resulted from the visit of Peter Jones who accompanied George Ryerson to England in 1831. Jones was the first Indian convert who had appeared before the English Methodist public, and his speeches excited great interest.

[12]An interesting opinion was expressed in 1826 by James Knowlan, a Wesleyan in Upper Canada, to the effect that if the Canadian Methodists were under the British Wesleyan conference, the confidence of the government in Upper Canada would be obtained: see James Knowlan to Taylor, June 16, 1826, library of the Methodist Missionary Society in London, *British North America,* incoming letters, vol. 6.

[13]"The Wesleyan Methodist Church in British North America" thus included the two Canadas, the Maritime Provinces, and Newfoundland, Upper Canada being continued as a separate conference. It must be remembered that the term Methodists, as used throughout this paper, does not include the other groups of Methodists in the province which were active although much smaller in numbers. The Ryanite group continued as an independent body for some years under the name of "The Canadian Wesleyan Methodist Church". In the 'forties it was united with the Methodist New Connexion. "The Methodist Episcopal Church of Canada" was organized in 1834 by a group who were displeased with the union with the British Wesleyans. The Methodist New Connexion, the Bible Christians, and the Primitive Methodists were extensions of the English bodies of the same names.

British government for the redress of grievances. In a confidential interview he had been able to discuss the whole Canadian situation with Lord Stanley, the colonial under-secretary, and he was certain that once misrepresentations and misunderstandings were cleared away public men could be relied on to show goodwill towards the elements seeking reasonable and peaceful reform. He had been fascinated by what he saw of English public life and of the Wesleyans—their efficiency, resources, and zeal. Union with so influential a body could not fail to produce solid advantages.

In the long run, however, the results of the union would largely depend on the impression which it created in the province. Everyone knew that it was inextricably bound up with the political[14] as well as the religious situation; but few could have suspected a demonstration of the fact so immediate and decisive as that which came with the open break between Mackenzie and Ryerson. In October, 1833, the very month in which the Canadian conference ratified the articles of union, Ryerson published in the *Guardian* the first of his famous *Impressions of England.* The description of the English parties to which he devoted the entire article was kind and tolerant to all except the Radicals. "Radicalism in England appeared to us to be but another word for Republicanism", he wrote, and Hume, the English ally of Mackenzie, he condemned by name in a stinging paragraph. The reply of Mackenzie was as nearly instantaneous as the printing press of a century ago could make it. It has been quoted more than once but I cannot forbear repetition of a few of the sentences which warrant its remembrance as a classic of Canadian political vituperation:

> The *Christian Guardian* . . . has gone over to the enemy, press, types and all, and hoisted the colours of a cruel vindictive Tory priesthood. . . . The contents of the *Guardian* of tonight tell us in language too plain, too intelligible to be misunderstood, that a deadly blow has been struck in England at the liberties of the people of Upper Canada. . . . The Americans had their Arnold and the Canadians have their Ryerson. . . . I was the dupe of a Jesuit in the garb of a Methodist Preacher, and believed Egerton that I had been in error in opposing the Union . . . but he and his new allies, the church and state gentry, shall now have me on their rear.

So began a relentless warfare of over four years.

The interest of these events lies not merely in their dramatic quality but in their significance which has not always been fully appreciated. It is impossible to believe that Ryerson wrote his *Impressions* simply to give a traveller's account. He appeared even in his confidential correspondence to be surprised at the storm raised by them, but the weight of every presumption is that their publication was as calculated as any move he ever made. From the point of view of the welfare of Methodism, he seemed to be quite right. If the union were to be preserved, and its preservation was essential to Canadian Methodism at the moment, a wedge had to be driven between the Methodists and the Anglo-Canadian radical alliance

[14]Governor Colborne's well-known attack on the Methodists with the insinuations that they were under control from the United States and that they opposed British influences in the province was made at the end of 1831. The *Christian Guardian* of December 21 contains Ryerson's rejoinder.

of Mackenzie and Hume. No shrewder or more successful means could have been found than the publication of the *Impressions*. Association with Hume was distasteful to Ryerson personally and would be a serious weakness to Canadian Methodist interests in England where Hume was cordially disliked by the Wesleyans. Ryerson's meetings with political, religious, and commercial leaders in England, had confirmed his conviction that the one thing most likely to prevent the redress of grievances was the belief in high circles that Upper Canadian Methodists were associated with republican agitation.

Mackenzie's smashing rejoinder was perhaps as instinctive as Ryerson's course of action was calculated but he undoubtedly sensed as clearly as did Ryerson the dangerous possibilities of recent events for the cause which he had at heart. Mackenzie was the leader of a frontier democracy that was growing increasingly conscious of its interests but was difficult to hold together and organize. The strength of his support was due largely, as recent writers have made clear,[15] to economic grievances against the monopoly of a commercial and landholding privileged class. This fact must, however, not be allowed to obscure another of scarcely less significance—the strength of the forces which in the 1830's cut across the lines of economic conflict—and, among these forces, no single agency was to be more powerful in the next few years than the Methodist church. Methodism made its greatest appeal to the very constituency that Mackenzie was cultivating and no opposition could be more serious to him than that of Methodism. Ryerson it should be observed had, since he began his term as editor, been careful in the *Guardian* not to commit himself to support of Mackenzie except in matters of mutual concern, but, in the popular mind, the unity of the Methodists with Mackenzie's party had been taken for granted, and the rupture created consternation in Reform ranks from one end of the province to the other.

A point of comparison between Methodism in Upper Canada and in England is, perhaps, worthy of note here. Methodism in England had promoted a spirit of harmony between the labouring and artisan classes and the rapidly growing class of commercial and industrial magnates, large numbers of whom were themselves Methodists. The Wesleyan connexion, the strongest and most conservative body of Methodists, had on this account won the special animosity of the organizers of working-class movements. Methodism in Upper Canada was, in a sense, to play the Canadian counterpart of this English role. This, indeed, was a significant point in its importance for the political and economic life of the province during the next decade. It was to be the largest, the most skilfully directed, and the most influential element among that large mass of people who wished to find a place between the extremes of High Church Toryism on the one hand and radicalism drifting into rebellion on the other; and after the Rebellion, because it occupied this middle ground, Methodism was to be an important influence in supporting the policy of Durham and his successors. The middle ground is never an enviable position in a period of crisis and

[15]See, for example, the papers read at the annual meeting of the Canadian Historical Association in 1937: D. G. Creighton, "The Economic Background of the Rebellions of 1837" in *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Aug., 1937; Fred Landon, "The Common Man in the Era of the Rebellion in Upper Canada" in the *Canadian Historical Association Report*, 1937.

violence, and it is not surprising that Upper Canadian Methodists and, in particular, their most conspicuous leader, were to find themselves in the 'thirties laid open to attack from both sides and to repeated and bitter charges of inconsistency.

The Methodist societies were severely shaken by the feud between Ryerson and Mackenzie, but, once it had come, nothing was to be lost by either party, and much might be gained, by digging the breach as wide and deep as possible. In this one matter at least there was no noticeable lack of mutual assistance. Both sides set to with a right goodwill, but on January 8, 1834, Ryerson published an editorial entitled, "Clergy Reserves —Government Pledges—Revolutionary Symptoms", which undoubtedly forced the issue. Ryerson had a few editorials which seemed to him like milestones and to which he referred repeatedly on later occasions. This was one of them. No action by the government, he asserted, could have so great an effect in allaying the dangerous discontent in the province as a settlement of the Clergy Reserves question on principles of religious and civil equality, and he pointed to the royal dispatch of November 8, 1832, as proof of the Liberal attitude of the British government. The Radical party had been silent on the Clergy Reserves during recent months because, he charged, they knew that a reasonable settlement would destroy the effectiveness of their attempts to arouse ill will against the government. He made a lengthy analysis of the beginnings of Radical agitation in the Thirteen Colonies before the American Revolution. "In New England, the malcontents said they aimed at nothing more than the preservation of their liberty", and yet they committed themselves to courses which soon led them to open revolution. Sinister evidence, pointing in the same direction, could be seen, Ryerson believed, in recent events and expressions of opinion in Upper Canada and, citing chapter and verse, he declared that there was apparent a tendency, "at least in the avowal of sentiment", away from constitutional reform towards revolution. "We believe for many reasons that affairs in this Province are approaching a crisis which will require skill in the helmsman to keep the ship from foundering, and watchfulness on the part of the Christian lest he perish in the whirlpool of party spirit."[16]

Damning proof, in Ryerson's opinion, of the truth of his suspicions came a few weeks later in the well-known "Baneful Domination" letter addressed by Hume to Mackenzie (see *Christian Guardian,* May 28, 1834). Hume spoke of a "crisis which is fast approaching in the affairs of the Canadas and which will terminate in independence and freedom from the baneful domination of the Mother Country. . . . The proceedings between 1772 and 1782 in America ought not to be forgotten; and to the honour of the Americans and for the interests of the civilized world let their conduct and the Result be ever in View." Ryerson seized on the tactical

[16]It was during these months that Ryerson put forth his most conservative views as a political theorist. He was forced by the crisis to face questions as to the nature of the authority of the state, and, in particular, as to the limits of the Christian citizen's obligation to be bound in loyalty to an existing government. Ryerson was not by temperament a theorist and he made no contribution to the solution of these perennial problems but his opinions had influence in the province and their origin and relation to English thought in particular is a matter of some interest which merits examination such as Professor R. A. MacKay has given to the political ideas of Mackenzie (*Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science,* Feb., 1937).

advantage which this astonishing indiscretion gave him and in one of his typical long editorials he hurled a defiance at those "Reformers" who were recalling with admiration the precedents of the American Revolution (*Christian Guardian,* June 4, 1834):

> Lately the King's ministers were respected and honoured; now they are insulted and abused. Lately attachment and loyalty to the British Government were professed; now *Independence* from its "baneful domination" is recommended as the motto and watchword of *reformers.* . . . In the politics and contests of party "let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth"; but in so grave a question as whether a country shall remain a monarchy or become a republic—whether it shall remain an appendage of Great Britain or become an American state—every Christian and patriot has a duty to discharge. . . . If a Wesley and a Fletcher wrote to *suppress* a revolution in America, never will I hesitate, with a zealous and devoted band of labourers, to aid zealously though feebly to *prevent* the revolution in Canada.

During these months the counter-attacks by Mackenzie and his followers were equally determined and relentless and certainly more maliciously personal. They almost brought the enterprise of the Upper Canada Academy to a standstill.[17] They tried to incite the Methodist laity against what was represented as the dictation of the conference, and they culminated in the "Seventh Report on Grievances" which charged the Methodists with the hypocrisy of receiving state aid contrary to their principles, because government grants for the Indian mission had been accepted on several occasions by the British Wesleyan Missionary Society. Conspicuous in the attacks were former prominent Methodists, in particular Peter Perry and Dr. T. D. Morrison. So it was that Upper Canadian Methodism drifted into the year of the Rebellion, bitterly contesting with the radical party on the one hand but with no assurance of the redress of their grievances on the other. Policy and inclination forced them in the face of a threat to the British connection to associate themselves with High Church Toryism. The alliance was in the very nature of things bound to be temporary.

It was the proud boast of Ryerson that not a Wesleyan Methodist could be found in the ranks of the rebels.[18] He himself had been in England for a year and a half before the Rebellion but had returned in June, 1837, in time to be threatened by the rebels, so it was said, that, if caught, he would be hanged to the nearest tree. He was in Cobourg on his way to Toronto when Governor Head was achieving an immortal military reputation in defending his beleaguered capital. Brother William was in Toronto, however, and wrote to say that early on the morning of December 5, after a night of alarms, he went to the market-place and found large

[17]The difficulties in establishing the academy and their relation with the politics of the period are treated in George W. Brown, "The Founding of Victoria College", see *On the Old Ontario Strand,* 67-95.

[18]This was perhaps a pardonable exaggeration. Doubtless, however, most of the Wesleyan Methodists who favoured the radicals to the point of participating in the Rebellion had left the church during the bitter controversy with the radicals since 1833. The situation in the other Methodist bodies especially the Methodist Episcopal church was different.

numbers of people serving out arms to large numbers of other people. There were Chief Justice Robinson, Judges Macaulay, Jones, and McLean, the attorney-general, and solicitor-general, with their muskets, cartridge boxes, and bayonets, all standing in the ranks with the commonality; and, as a final demonstration of the perilous urgency of the hour, the lieutenant-governor, "in his everyday suit", was there like a small walking arsenal in a state of complete preparedness "with one double-barrelled gun in his hand, another leaning against his breast, and a brace of pistols in his leather belt". It was an awe-inspiring sight. No wonder William wrote that it was impossible for him to describe his feelings.[19]

If the events leading up to the Rebellion were an embarrassment for the Methodists its aftermath was a calamity. The backwash of the Tory counter-revolution caught them with its full force. In particular, it revealed in unavoidable form the difference of opinion between British Wesleyan leaders and the leaders of Canadian Methodism on the question of participation in politics. Ryerson had explained the Clergy Reserves issue to the British Wesleyan Conference in 1833 and had declared that the Canadian church had no intention of touching politics except on one issue—threatened monopoly by one church in such matters as the Clergy Reserves and state support of education. This understanding had been heartily endorsed by the British conference and since then, although there had been occasional questionings as to the warmth of his arguments, Ryerson had always succeeded in carrying the Canadian conference, including its British members, with him. It was in the three years following the Rebellion that there appeared differences of opinion so irreconcilable as to force by 1840 the dissolution of the union. These were the most critical years of Canadian Methodism and, probably, of Ryerson's own career.

The early months of 1838 were marked by events of the most distressing character. The treason trials, with their savage and vindictive sentences, appalled and alarmed all but the ultra-Tories who, at the moment, were riding high in control. In particular, the Methodists quickly found themselves at odds with the government and beset once more by insinuations of disloyalty. In March a complete victory over Governor Head (who tried to withhold the grant arranged through the Colonial Office for the Methodist Academy), gave a brief satisfaction, but in May came Ryerson's generous defence of Bidwell which was used outrageously as a proof that he sympathized with the rebels. Worst of all, it appeared that advantage was being taken of the reactionary panic in the public mind to push through a solution of the Clergy Reserves question entirely opposed to the principles for which the Methodists had fought with all their might for over a decade. For weeks Methodist leaders were depressed by the problem as to whether they should accept defeat in silence or should attack the scheme and give renewed impetus to the charges of disloyalty. Finally it was decided by a small group that a stand must be made and as usual Ryerson's pen was to be the spearpoint of the counter-attack. He was induced to resume, in June, 1838, the editorship of the *Guardian* and he began an unrelenting campaign on the Clergy Reserves issue.

It was this campaign which, as the event proved, led directly to the disruption of the union with the British Wesleyans for it soon became clear that the leaders of the Missionary Society in London were not averse to a

[19]Ryerson, *The Story of My Life*, 177.

settlement along the very lines that Ryerson was opposing. To Ryerson, this attitude seemed an unpardonable breach of faith at the very moment of the Canadian church's greatest need. To the Wesleyans, Ryerson seemed to be giving final proof of his incurable determination to embroil his church in politics. Ryerson won a sweeping vote of confidence from the conference of 1839 but he was depressed by the unceasing party strife and thought seriously at one point of leaving the province. As the months passed, the British Wesleyan leaders became convinced that Ryerson was the chief obstacle to an acceptance of their policy by the Canadian church and that he must be got out of the way. The particular incidents, through which they were able to bring against him charges of exceeding his authority and misusing his editorial powers, need not concern us here. It is sufficient to say that the conference which met in Toronto in June, 1840, found itself faced with what was in effect an ultimatum from the British conference that Ryerson should be dismissed as editor and his policy rejected. It was the ultimatum of men who lived three thousand miles from the Canadian scene and who failed to appreciate the Canadian problem. The conference was dismayed but it refused to capitulate, and Egerton with his brother William was delegated to go to England in the hope of making satisfactory explanations. Their mission is a story in itself but the result can be stated in a word. The British conference, so ran a sentence from its resolutions, "cannot safely be identified in views and responsibility with any body, however respected, over whose public proceedings it is denied the right and power of exerting any efficient influences". Such was the message which the returned delegates brought back to a conference specially summoned in October—a message addressed by implication not to a partner but to a colonial inferior. The alternatives were clear—surrender or defiance of the threat that the union would be broken. By a large majority, but more in regret than resentment, the Canadian conference determined to go its own way. Egerton made on this occasion perhaps the greatest forensic effort of his long career. In a speech of over five hours he not only defended the policy pursued by himself and the conference but in closing urged the right of Canadians to settle their own problems in their own way. His words were at once a notable appeal for unity in a province torn by dissension and an illuminating comment—one of the most striking in the historical sources of the period—on the Canadian attitude towards the British connection (*Christian Guardian,* November 11, 1840):

> The state of society in this Province is known to consist of a population congregated from various parts of the British Empire, and to a limited extent, in some places, of natives of the United States, who have preferred this country to the neighbouring republic. The use of the word *British* in a local and restricted sense as applying almost exclusively to natives of Great Britain is as untrue and as antipatriotic as it is unchristian to attempt to excite the sectional feelings which such an illegitimate use of the term is intended and calculated to create. Can any Christian English settler in this Province be a party to or countenance the inculcation of a feeling which will *brand* his own Canadian-born children? Is not a person born in Canada as much a British-born subject as a person born in any other part of the

> British Empire? And is not a Conference of British subjects assembled in Canada as much a British Conference as one assembled in England? From whatever part of Great Britain or Ireland a man may emigrate, when he settles in Canada, are not all his interests Canadian? Is it not in Canada, then, that his all becomes invested and involved? And is it in Canada or in Hatton Garden that his interests are likely to be most deeply felt and best consulted? It is a matter of thankfulness to know that the great majority of the old country members of this Conference, and the old country members of our Church generally, judge and feel as rational men and as Christians on this subject. *CANADA* is their *HOME* in whatever part of the world they may have been born; and any attempt to excite feelings from the *place of their birth* against those who have been born in the *place of their adopted residence,* is unpatriotic, unchristian and unnatural.

Ryerson in 1837 had been damned by the rebels as an ultra-imperialist, and in 1838 by the Tories as a potential rebel. It was not by chance that in 1840 he described so vividly what I have chosen to call the Canadian point of view. It was a point of view that has since then become a commonplace of Canadian thought.

After two decades of growth and turmoil, during which it had found subservience to the United States, subservience to England, and independence all impossible, Upper Canadian Methodism was in 1840 once more started on an independent course. It was, without question, in a far stronger position than that of a decade earlier. Its loyalty and its claim to a place of respect as a Canadian institution could no longer be questioned. The work of Durham which had been a rebuke to extremists, both Tory and Radical, had in a very real sense been a vindication of the Methodist attitude. Sydenham had been quick to see the significance of Methodist support for his plea that there should be cessation of party strife and promotion of constructive effort. He treated Ryerson with special marks of confidence and on the day before his death, as one of his last official acts, he signed the bill which gave to the Methodist Academy its new charter and its new name of Victoria University.

Upper Canadian Methodism had good reason to face the future with confidence, but the renewed rivalry in the province with the British Wesleyans was none the less deplorable. Union on terms of British coercion was not to be endured but, in the interest of both parties, union on terms of self-respecting partnership was essential. There was indeed much in the situation which suggests the problem of imperial relations and responsible government faced by Elgin with brilliant insight at the end of the decade. It is to the credit of John Ryerson and one or two others that they saw the necessity of reconciliation almost from the beginning. They worked for it with determination and in 1847 gained their end. The reunion was, however, more than a mere reconciliation. The leaders of the British conference were generous enough to admit the error of their attempted domination in 1840, and the change in 1847 was in reality, therefore, an admission by the British conference of the principle of responsible government for the Canadian church—an admission which, like its counterpart in the political field, came not through a change in form—for the

articles of union were much what they had been previously—but through the more significant change of a new spirit and emphasis.

The union of 1847 was a prelude to wider developments. The British conference was, by this time, finding its obligations in British North America too onerous, not only in the Maritime Provinces and Lower Canada, but in the Hudson Bay territory where it had undertaken missionary work a few years earlier. By the beginning of the 'fifties British Wesleyan leaders were growing increasingly anxious to be relieved of their burdens, but this could only be accomplished if Methodism in British North America could be made to stand on its own feet. So it was that in 1855 two regional unions were effected, the one in the Maritime Provinces, the other in the Canadas. They were initiated by the British Wesleyan leaders and their completion, like the accomplishment of Confederation in 1867, was due in no small measure to pressure exerted from England. In 1855, also, the Canadian church took over the mission in the Hudson Bay territory and, in 1859, began work on the Pacific coast. Thus the tendency towards amalgamation and expansion which was soon to show itself in the emergence of the Canadian Dominion, was already in the 'fifties plainly evident in the Methodist church. By the end of the decade there could be seen clearly in prospect a united Methodism which within a generation was to include in the scope of its efforts the entire area of British North America.

Discussion. Mr. Landon said that the scientific study of religious movements in Canada had hardly been touched, and that Mr. Brown's paper was one of a few exceptions. The history of Methodism in Upper Canada illustrates the conflict between British and North American influences. The origins of Methodism in Upper Canada were in the United States, whence came also the methods—such as the camp meeting and the itinerant preachers. From England came the more conservative Wesleyan church, which was wealthier and had more reverence for Wesley. Wesley forsook toryism in religion but not in politics. There were secessions from the Wesleyans, forming other organizations, which found their way to Canada. Methodism in Canada was more like these dissenting bodies than the British Wesleyan church itself.

Mr. Landon said he had grave doubts as to Ryerson's statement that there were no Methodists amongst the rebels of 1837, because religious divisions were not the same as political ones. All the churches denied that their members were implicated in the Rebellion. Comments by the author which are relevant to this point are found in note 13, page 88, and note 18, page 92.