

**The Right Rev. Edmund Burke, D.D.,  
"Apostle of Upper Canada",  
Bishop of Zion,  
First Vicar Apostolic of Nova Scotia  
1753 -1820**

BY

THE REV. BROTHER ALFRED, F.S.C., LL.D.

In the autumn of 1794 there arrived in the newly-formed province of Upper Canada,<sup>1</sup> a zealous and learned Irish priest who was to play a large part in laying the foundations of the church in what is today the province of Ontario. He came from the city of Quebec to the "Upper Country", under orders from Bishop Hubert and at the urgent request of General John Graves Simcoe, Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada, and of Lord Dorchester, Governor General. This priest was Father Edmund Burke, later first Vicar Apostolic of Nova Scotia, Bishop of Zion, in partibus, with residence in Halifax. He came with the powers of Vicar General for the whole of Upper Canada.

Writing on September 15, 1794, to Father Dufaûx,<sup>2</sup> missionary of the Church of the Assumption (Sandwich), regarding Father Burke, Bishop Hubert said: « Father Burke is a sociable character, a man of edifying conversation and above all recommendable for his profound science. I send him with the powers of Vicar General. »<sup>3</sup> The same day, to Father Frechette,<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The province of Upper Canada was set up by the Canada Act, or Constitutional Act, passed by the British Parliament in 1791.

<sup>2</sup> Father François Xavier Dufaûx, Sulpician, was the son of Joseph Dufaûx, contractor, who, in 1750, built Fort Rouille at Toronto, on the site marked today by the Monument in Exhibition Park. He was born in Montreal in 1752, was ordained in 1778, was Grand Vicaire at Sandwich in 1785 where he died September 12, 1796. C. TANGUAY, *Répertoire Général du Clergé Canadien* (Quebec: 1868), p. 128.

<sup>3</sup> « Registre de Lettres des Eveques de Quebec », Vol. II, p. 150, 151.

<sup>4</sup> Father Pierre Frechette, born at Quebec, Feb. 2, 1752, ordained December 18, 1784. In 1796 he was curé of Beloeil and St. Hilaire, where he died Jan. 3,

at St. Ann's Church, Detroit, Bishop Hubert wrote: « Father Burke is a man of merit with whom, I hope, you will be well pleased. » In 1792 Bishop Hubert had written the Congregation of the Propaganda regarding Father Burke : « He is prudent, learned, sound of faith and correct in morals; he has taught with much applause the Course of philosophy in our seminary; he is deeply versed in the scriptures, in theology and in Canon Law. »

The following letter, written by Lieutenant Governor Simcoe and addressed to Father Burke in 1796, regarding the latter's transfer to Upper Canada, two years before, is of interest:

Quebec, Sept. 5, 1796

Sir ;

In answer to your application, I most readily beg to transmit to you the following extract of my communication to Lord Dorchester of the first of August 1794.

« It may be worthy of your Lordship's (Dorchester) consideration whether some trusty loyal clergyman might not be of use in the settlement of the River au Raisin to counteract any improper opinions and transactions, if such a person may be found in Lower Canada. »<sup>5</sup>

In consequence, Lord Dorchester was pleased to send you to the Raisin River and during the time you resided there I have every reason to be perfectly satisfied with the representations made to me of your loyalty to His Majesty and of the zeal you manifested for his interests and I shall be extremely happy if this testimony of my approbation can render you any service.

I am, with great truth and regard, Sir,

Your most obedient and humble servant,

J- G. Simcoe

Father Burke was the first English-speaking priest to labor in Upper Canada west of Glengarry.<sup>6</sup> A man of noble stature<sup>7</sup> and great physical

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1816. *Clergé Canadien*, p. 134.

<sup>5</sup> *Michigan Pioneer*, Volume 25, p. 130.

<sup>6</sup> Father Roderick Macdonell (Leek) was at St. Regis and in Glengarry in 1786 and Father Alexander Scotus Macdonell founded St. Raphael's parish, Glengarry, in 1786, where he died in 1803. Father Fitzsimmons, a Franciscan, former Chaplain of the North West Company, succeeded him. Father

strength, he was well suited for the arduous life in the forest and for long journeys by land and water, often over mere Indian trails, through the unbroken wilderness<sup>8</sup> to the farthest Catholic Missions. At the time of his arrival and for the seven years that followed, he was the only priest between Glengarry on the east and Sandwich on the west, a distance of some 500 miles. For eight years he had sought permission from Bishop Hubert of Quebec to answer the voice which rang through his soul, clear as a trumpet blast, calling him to the Upper Canadian Missions. Providence granted his request and answered his prayers, through the intervention of Carleton and Simcoe. Luckily he has left us in many interesting letters the story of his missionary labors. In them we see the spirit of faith and zeal which inspired his every endeavour. His exposition of the needs and spiritual desolation of the neglected Catholics, French, Scotch and Irish, who at the time inhabited Kingston, York, Niagara, etc., and above all the deplorable state of the many Catholic soldiers who guarded the military posts of that day in Upper Canada, is startling and enlightening. By every means in his power, by letters and by messengers to the Bishops of Quebec, Hubert and Denaut; by repeated visits of his own to Quebec and Montreal in search of missionaries; and by appeals to the Sulpician Community, he sought to secure a remedy for the evils which had grown and multiplied in the centers of new life in the awakening west, particularly in localities frequented by fur traders, rum runners, and coureurs-de-bois, as was the case at Miami and Detroit. His appeals for help were generally made in vain, his calls remained unanswered by the ecclesiastical authorities at Quebec, perhaps on account of the unsettled and precarious condition of religious matters in the Lower Province at the time where English rule threatened to supplant the Catholic religion by a Protestant state church. Ultimately, however, by repeated letters to the Propaganda in Rome, and to powerful friends in Europe, and in particular to Archbishop Troy of Dublin, the real condition of the Church in Upper Canada became known and a remedy was applied. Father Burke did not reap in Upper Canada the fruit of the seed which he had sown. He was called to another field of labor. His ideas, however, prevailed and exactly a quarter of a century after he left Upper Canada, Rome appointed, to the newly-founded See of

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Alexander Macdonell, later the first bishop of Upper Canada, arrived in 1803.

<sup>7</sup> Father Burke is described as « a tall man with a bright eye and grave intellectual face.»

<sup>8</sup> In 1792 there were in all Upper Canada 20,000 souls, apart from the Indians.

Kingston,<sup>9</sup> a prelate who would carry out fully the plans laid down by Ontario's first English-speaking missionary.

The province of Upper Canada to which Father Burke came in 1794 was little more than an immense forest still in the primeval state. In some districts the plough of the Loyalist had broken the virgin soil but the Indian was as yet the master of the domain and the fur trade was the most lucrative of occupations. The boundaries of the province were more extensive than they are today; they were however far from settled. It was only in 1796 that Fort Niagara on the East side of the river and the city of Detroit were detached from Upper Canada and finally and definitely surrendered to the United States. Settlements had been developing along the St. Lawrence and the Great Lakes, the advance followed the waterway. Kingston was a village of about 100 houses, some of brick or stone, but mostly of wood. It was a military post and a ship-building centre. It had no Catholic Church and no priest.<sup>10</sup> Niagara (Newark), the Niagara on the Lake of our day, which was laid out in 1791, contained some 70 houses, a court house, a prison, and a building where the legislative assembly met. The houses were mostly of wood. Navy Hall, the residence of Governor Simcoe, was a rather primitive and improvised Government house. L'Assumption (Sandwich) was founded in 1744. A church for the Huron Indians was built there in 1748. At Riviere à la Tranche (Thames River), that is, at the beginnings of the London of today, there were, in 1794, some 20 or 30 houses. Threats of invasion by the United States were ever in the air and every man was a soldier. British regulars kept guard at Fort George and at the village of York (Toronto), which Simcoe had just founded,<sup>11</sup> while detachments of the Royal Canadian Regiment of Foot, a

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<sup>9</sup> The bulls appointing Father Alexander Macdonell bishop of Resina and Vicar Apostolic of Upper Canada were issued by Pius VII, on January 12, 1819. He was consecrated by Bishop Plessis in the chapel of the Ursuline Convent, Quebec, December 31, 1820. The Episcopal ring which was put on his finger was sent him by King George IV. On Feb. 14th., 1826, Leo XII erected Upper Canada into a diocese with Bishop Macdonell as first bishop under the title of Regiopolis or Kingston.

<sup>10</sup> Help came slowly to the Catholics of Kingston. In the spring of 1807, writes Father Alexander Macdonell, later bishop, they had as yet no church. In 1808 Father Macdonell laid the foundation of a Church in Kingston. *Ecclesiastical Archives, Quebec, « Haut Canada, »* Vol. III, p. 14.

<sup>11</sup> In August, 1793, with all the ceremony possible in the wilderness, Simcoe founded York - The survey of the harbor had been made that year by Lieut. Joseph Bouchette. The first survey of Toronto and its environs was made in 1788 by Alexander Aitkin, Deputy Provincial Surveyor. *Toronto During the French Regime*, by PERCY J. ROBINSON, p. 185.

battalion organized by the Catholic officer Colonel John Macdonell,<sup>12</sup> were stationed at Kingston, Chippewa, Fort George, Fort Erie, etc. Of the Royal Canadian Regiment of Foot, the majority of the officers and men were Catholics and they were without spiritual help of any kind- To them the arrival of Father Burke was a signal blessing.

Edmund Burke was born in Maryborough, Queen's County, Ireland, in the year 1753. At that time the penal laws, which set a price on the head of a Catholic teacher, were still in force, and the education of Catholic children in Ireland was beset with many difficulties. Classes were held in the open, behind the hedges, while a sentinel stood on guard to warn of the approach of the red-coat English soldiers. Young Burke was, therefore, sent at an early age to Paris where he soon distinguished himself in philosophy and mathematics and won high honors in his university course. Having returned to Ireland, he was, while yet young, appointed parish priest of the town of Kildare. Divisions and dissensions having arisen in the diocese over the succession to the episcopal See, and Father Burke having espoused the cause of one of the aspirants,<sup>13</sup> incurred the ill will of influential parties around him. Life under such conditions was most disagreeable to him and his efforts for good were neutralized, so he turned his eyes towards America, where, he knew, many priests were needed. On the advice of his friend Archbishop Carpenter of Dublin, he decided to go to Canada. Bishop D'Esglis was at the time bishop of Quebec and Abbé Hussey was his agent in London. Assisted by the latter, Father Burke arrived in Quebec in the summer of 1786. He was then 33 years of age.

At that time European priests were not well received by the government in Quebec. The idea of an Anglican State Church for Canada was still in the minds in many of the officials and it was pushed forward by the Rt. Rev. Dr. Mountain, who arrived as Anglican Bishop in 1793. French priests were not wanted in the colony and even English, Irish or Scotch priests were not allowed to preach without the special permission of the governor. The authority of the Catholic bishop of Quebec was in many ways uncertain, and the penal laws were still on the Statute books. Anti-Catholic prejudice was strong, despite the outstanding loyalty of Bishop Briand and his clergy during the siege of Quebec by the Americans, in the winter of 1775, under General Montgomery and Benedict Arnold. It may be pertinent to remark,

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<sup>12</sup> Colonel John Macdonell was speaker of the first Assembly of Upper Canada held in Newark in October, 1792. He had a most distinguished military career against the American Revolutionists, 1775-1783. He died in Quebec City, November 21, 1809. His remains repose at the foot of the north-western wall of the Quebec basilica.

<sup>13</sup> Cornelius O'Brien, Archbishop of Halifax, *Memoirs of Rt. Rev. Edmund Burke, Bishop of Zion, First Vicar Apostolic of Nova Scotia* (Ottawa : 1894), p. 2.

however, that following the early horrors of the French Revolution a decided change began to take place in the minds of the civil authorities at Quebec, as well as amongst the English people at home, towards the persecuted Catholic priesthood, and from 1791 onward priests from France found a ready haven of safety on the banks of the St. Lawrence. After 1793 all priests were welcome in Quebec and plans were made to bring to Canada, at the expense of the British Government, hundreds or thousands of them who were, at the time, penniless refugees in England.

On his arrival in Quebec, in the summer of 1786, Father Burke was appointed professor of philosophy and mathematics in the seminary, a position which he held for several years. His scholarship soon attracted wide attention and his lectures delighted his pupils. Despite his success, he was not content. He preferred the teaching of the Catechism, as he himself says, to the giving of lectures in Astronomy. The Governor General would not allow him to give a public instruction on any religious subject in the city of Quebec and to add to his difficulties, the bishop would not allow him to leave the town. For long periods he chafed in forced idleness at the seminary. Writing to Archbishop Troy of Dublin on October 20, 1790, he says:

« There is a vast extent of country north of the Lakes, beginning at Lake Ontario and running westward to Lake Minitti, and thence to the Pacific Ocean, possessed or claimed by England, in which, although there are a great number of posts and several Indian villages, whose inhabitants are Catholics, there is not, nor has there been a single missionary since the conquest of this province. There is not on earth a country where missionaries are more wanted. Let me, therefore, request that you will, My Lord, graciously write to the Cardinal Prefect of the Propaganda, to obtain a Mission for me in that region; and as the sacrament of confirmation was never administered to these poor Catholics, a power of administering the sacrament would be of infinite use, if His Holiness would think fit to grant it. »<sup>14</sup>

In the meantime he made himself at home as best he could and began to familiarize himself with life in general outside the seminary and conditions in the new British colony. His scientific mind was attracted to the investigation of what his new surroundings presented to him. The splendor and secrets of the great Northern forests around him were of peculiar interest. Writing again to Dr. Troy, Archbishop of Dublin, on Oct- 24, 1789, he says « I send, this day, to Dr. Hussey, London, a small box containing some essence of spruce balsam of Canada, and an extract of a medicinal tree which bears some resemblance to the spruce- I send enclosed printed directions for making spruce beer. The extract is a powerful antiscorbutic and purifier of the blood. The virtues of the balsam of Canada are well known. »

In 1791 Father Burke was relieved of his duties at the seminary and appointed parish priest of St. Peter and St. Lawrence on the Island of Orleans

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<sup>14</sup> Ecclesiastical Archives, Halifax, quoted in *Memoirs of Bishop Burke*, p. 9.

where he remained for three years. About this time the unfortunate religious conditions which existed amongst the inhabitants around Fort Miami, 40 miles west of Detroit, Upper Canada, attracted the attention of Lieut. Governor Simcoe and, as already mentioned, in answer to his appeal for a missionary, Father Burke was ordered in September, 1794, to proceed to Upper Canada. He embarked immediately for the west. On October 4th he had reached Kingston, where he remained for eleven days. He found there a number of Catholics without church or priest.<sup>15</sup> He made arrangements for Father Macdonell of the Indian mission of St. Regis, on Lake St. Francis, to visit them twice a year. On October 23rd we meet him at Niagara where he had a most satisfactory audience with Lieut. Governor Simcoe.<sup>16</sup> On Dec. 13th he was in Detroit, where he found Father F. X. Dufaix, Sulpician, who, he says, had been unjustly accused of being hostile to the government. By Feb. 2nd, 1795, he had reached the Raisin River or Fort Miami, today the site of Maumee City, Ohio. That was his destination. There 100 French Canadian families were located. Writing to Bishop Hubert shortly after his arrival, he describes the sad state of religion in that distant part of his diocese and the difficulties which faced him: « There is a small Chapel, » he says, « already built but the people are in revolt against their missionary Father Frechette. The Huron Indians have become infidels. Two missionaries are needed at once. » Besides the Huron Indians, he found many Ottawas, Chippewas and Poutawatomis. He began immediately the study of the Huron and Ottawa languages. He found the former very difficult and declared: « I think that it is the devil who invented the Huron language. »<sup>17</sup> Under very specific orders from Lieut. Governor Simcoe he undertook to stop the sale of rum to the Indians. In this he was successful for he declared: « On my arrival everyone<sup>18</sup> sold liquor; now not one is selling it. » His efforts, however, aroused much opposition. Politics, too, played an evil part, for emissaries of General Wayne, the American Commander to the south, were continually endeavouring to excite the Indians to revolt. « My life is in continual<sup>19</sup> danger, » he says. « I am obliged to keep two Christian Indians well armed who sleep in my room together with a hardy Canadian. I never walk out but in company and always armed. Yet I have the consolation to see people make their Easter Communion who had been absent for 20 or 30 years back. » In the meantime he had completed the building of a presbytery at Raisin River.

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<sup>15</sup> Quebec Archives. Nouvelle Ecosse, « Lettres de Msgr. Edmund Burke », III.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> « C'est le démon, je crois, qui a inventé la langue huronne. »

<sup>18</sup> *Memoirs of Bishop Burke*, p. 19.

<sup>19</sup> « François Navarre, the two Lascelles and McDougall almost succeeded in cutting my throat. It is a special Providence that saved my life. »

Thus the months from February to May, 1795, wore along at Miami. In May he was in Detroit. It was there he learned from Simcoe that Britain had agreed to hand over Fort Niagara, Detroit and Michillimackinac to the Americans the following year.<sup>20</sup> He immediately wrote to Bishop Hubert that he did not wish to remain under Yankee rule. « I cannot accept the mission at Detroit, » he said, « for your Lordship can readily understand that such a step would give grave displeasure to the government from whom I have received every mark of good will and would engender a well-founded distrust of all clergymen which might have regrettable consequences for the future. »<sup>21</sup> On Aug. 28, 1795, he again writes from Detroit to Bishop Hubert asking for two missionaries as the Poutowatomis at Michillimackinac want him to go up to baptize their children. He is planning, too, for the Upper Canadian Missions in general, for he adds: « We must get land (for church purposes) at Niagara and Kingston, for there are several Catholics scattered in these districts. »<sup>22</sup> He kept his eyes, too, on the legislation passed by the Provincial parliament which met annually at Niagara (Newark), for he tells the bishop, « I must go to Niagara for the session of the legislature to see that no laws are passed detrimental to the interests of the Church. I shall see Governor Simcoe regarding that. »

Father Burke spent the months from May, 1795, to the middle of July, 1796, at Detroit visiting at regular intervals the Miami mission. At Detroit he catechised the Hurons, some of whom returned to the faith, and he baptized 60 Huron<sup>23</sup> children under 7 years of age. At L'Assumption he found that Father Dufaux had a school in operation taught by a lady and that he was desirous of starting a college for his young men. In order to induce the bishop to send missionaries to help him, he wrote on October 5, 1795: « At Kingston the minister, Mr. Stuart, performs all the functions of a Catholic priest except the celebration of Mass. This bothers me to death so I recommend to your pastoral vigilance that young city as a location for an important mission. »

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<sup>20</sup> With the transfer of the territory west of the lake to the United States, the missions at Miami and Detroit passed under the jurisdiction of Bishop Carroll of Baltimore and a Father Le Vadou was sent to take charge.

<sup>21</sup> *Memoirs of Bishop Burke*, p. 25.

<sup>22</sup> Rev. Alexander Macdonell writing to the Bishop of Quebec on May 10, 1806, estimates the number of Catholic families in the various Upper Canadian Missions as follows: Johnstown district (Cornwall) 23; Kingston 78; Bay of Quinte 29; York and neighborhood 37. Several, he adds, have not had the opportunity of coming to the sacraments since 1779. (Ecclesiastical Archives, Quebec, « Haut Canada » III, p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> Quebec Archives, Nouvelle Ecosse, « Lettres de Msgr. Edmund Burke, » III, p. 22.



As the bishops of Quebec had never visited the neglected Catholics of the western missions, Father Burke, on June, 7, 1796, wrote Bishop Hubert asking for power to give confirmation, if neither the bishop nor his coadjutor could come to Detroit which mission was now 100 years old. He asked for the holy oils and the holy chrism. Through Archbishop Troy of Dublin he received in 1796, a papal rescript empowering him to confer the sacrament of confirmation, if the bishop of Quebec would agree thereto.

In July, 1796, he decided to go to Quebec on one of His Majesty's boats which offered him a free passage. He wished to see the Bishop and Lord Dorchester and he was anxious to induce the Sulpician Fathers of Montreal to take up the work of the Upper-Canadian Missions. In this latter endeavour he was successful. The Sulpician Fathers only waited the permission of the bishop. Final arrangements to send the Sulpician Fathers to his aid were, however, never made and Father Burke was left to struggle on alone. In August he was in Montreal pressing his case and on September 26th, writing from Soulanges, on his return trip to Upper Canada, he tells his Lordship of Quebec: « Father Brassier, in the name of the seminary of Montreal, has proposed to me to establish missions in Upper Canada with the consent of your Lordship and he adds that the seminary is disposed to make all the sacrifices necessary for that purpose even to the extent of bringing priests from Europe and giving me one to help me in my own mission. »<sup>24</sup>

On October 3rd, 1796, he reached Kingston again and on the 25th of the same month he was at Chippewa. In a letter written from Chippewa he tells the bishop that he had secured land from the Governor, for church purposes, in Niagara and York.<sup>25</sup> He proceeded to L'Assumption via Fort Erie and on November 2nd wrote from the former place to Bishop Hubert « If your Lordship will be pleased to send me two Sulpicians, according to the plan I proposed, I shall open a school at once. » No Sulpicians were to come. His hopes for a school were for the present blasted.

In September, 1798, Father Burke again visited Niagara. There he found many soldiers at Fort George, under the command of Col. John Macdonell.

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<sup>24</sup> Quebec Archives, Nouvelle Ecosse, « Lettres de Msgr. Edmund Burke, » III, p. 36.

<sup>25</sup> A map of the new village of York, projected in lots containing an acre, drawn by Assistant Surveyor General Smith, was submitted to the Executive Council on June 10, 1797, and signed and approved by the Government Administrator Peter Russell on that same date. A lot on that map, on the north west corner of John and Market St. (Wellington) bears the name of « Rev. Mr. Burke. » A few lots on the map besides that of Father Burke bear Catholic names: Sheriff Macdonell, Hon. James Baby, Commodore Bouchette, Alex. Macdonell, Allan Macdonell, Antoine Desjardins, Louis Tournier and Matthew Tully.

They had no Catholic religious services, as the chaplain, Father Duval, never reported for duty. In order to keep the Catholic soldiers out of the public houses and save them from drunkenness, Col. Macdonell had ordered them to attend the Anglican services held at the Fort. This greatly incensed Father Burke who explained to Macdonell the iniquity of the order and insisted that the practice be stopped.

He wrote immediately to Bishop Plessis, coadjutor of Quebec as follows: « We must not permit four companies, in which three quarters of the officers and men are Catholics, to frequent the Protestant Church. The same state of affairs exists at Kingston where the soldiers and sailors are absolutely without spiritual help of any kind. I beg you, my dear coadjutor, to send Father Duval to his duty or some one to replace him » This appeal, too, went unanswered.

In December, 1798, a colony of French<sup>26</sup> émigrés, some 40 in number, with servants and tradesmen, arrived in Upper Canada. They were noblemen, officers of the French army, all Catholics, who in the great revolution of 1789 had risked all they had in the cause of their king, Louis XVI. They came from England, where they had been in exile, protected by the British government. They were led by a French military officer of great wealth and rare ability, the Count de Puisaye. In the winter of 1798 the Upper-Canadian government located them on Yonge Street, some 20 miles north of York, at Oak Ridges. They called their settlement Windham after the British Secretary of War who had befriended them. These Catholic settlers had penetrated the northern forests without a priest, although they had asked Bishop Denaut for one and despite the fact that there were at the time in Quebec two priests, Fathers Desjardins and Rimbault, who had been sent out expressly by the British Government, at government expense, to make all arrangements for the reception and location of the Emigrés in Canada. The comte de Puisaye wrote Bishop Denaut several times asking for a chaplain. The bishop promised to send a missionary but help never came. Writing from Longueuil, P. Q., on Nov. 3, 1798, to Father Burke at Niagara, Bishop Denaut spoke as follows:

« The comte<sup>27</sup> de Puisaye wished to bring with him a priest, who would be attached to his new colony, but I could not give him one just now and I assured him that you would be all devoted to him and his people. » The new colony on Yonge Street was, therefore, obliged to depend, in spiritual matters, on the occasional ministrations of Father Burke. We do not know how often he was able to visit them, but on Feb. 24, 1800, he was in York<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> See *Report of the Canadian Catholic Historical Association, 1939-40* « The Windham or Oak Ridges Settlement of French Royalists Refugees in York County, Upper Canada, 1793, » by the Rev. Brother ALFRED, F.S.C., LL.D.

<sup>27</sup> *Registre de Lettres des Evêques de Québec, Vol. IV, p. 10-*.

<sup>28</sup> In the council chamber at York, April 22, 1800, was read the petition of the Rev. Edmund Burke that lot No. 6, on corner of Duke and George Streets, may

and he wrote his Bishop:<sup>29</sup> « Tomorrow I go to Windham to see the French settlers who are there. » At Windham, the Comte de Puisaye had built a church, a presbytery and a school. This log church, built by Puisaye, was the first Church ever erected in the County of York. His school was, too, the first school built in the County. Father Burke likely spent some time at Windham, encouraging the exiled Frenchmen who were greatly dissatisfied with their lot and with the kind of land that the government had given them. Puisaye himself had refused to take out patents on the lots granted him on Yonge Street. He withdrew to Niagara and bought a beautiful site overlooking the Great Gorge,<sup>30</sup> leaving his properties at Windham to the care of the Comte de Chalus. He kept, however, in close touch with his colony and with Father Burke, and he frequently wrote the Bishop of Quebec, describing his progress or his reverses and asking for a priest. Little by little the colonists fell into despair and abandoned their properties. Puisaye himself returned to England in 1805.

In May, 1801, Father Burke was again in Kingston on his way to Montreal. Difficulties had arisen with Colonel John Macdonell and the heart of the great Missionary was sad. Providentially as it were, he received at Kingston a letter from Bishop Denaut, appointing him parish priest of St. Augustine, P. Q.

Father Burke, however, was not to enjoy the quiet and repose of St. Augustine's. Difficulties of administration had arisen in Halifax between the Catholic people and the missionary in charge, so in 1801 Father Burke was sent to take over the mission. Halifax was to be the scene of his labors until

the Lord, 19 years later, in 1820, called him to his eternal reward. The city of Halifax was founded in 1749. For almost 150 years before that foundation, Catholic missions existed continuously in Acadia, despite the effort of the

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be granted to His Majesty's Catholic subjects for the purpose of erecting a house of public worship thereon. Recommended that the lot herein mentioned be considered as appropriated for the site of a R.C. Chapel. » Extracts from the Minutes of the Council Office, April 23, 1800. Alexander Macdonell, Confidential clerk. This is the lot on which, for many years, the De La Salle school was operated under the direction of the Christian Brothers. Ecclesiastical Archives, Quebec, Haut Canada, Vol. VI, p. 2.

<sup>29</sup> Letters of Bishop Burke, Ecclesiastical Archives, Quebec, Nouvelle Ecosse, III, p. 48.

<sup>30</sup> That property is lot No. 19 on the River Road which leads down from Queenston Heights to Fort George. The house and property is owned today (1941) by Willis K. Jackson of Buffalo, N.Y. Mrs Rosetta Burback and her daughter Katheryn, two Catholic ladies, occupy the Puisaye home. Half of the original house stands today after 140 years in a perfect state of preservation.

Puritan New Englanders to destroy them. The church of Nova Scotia is, as Archbishop O'Brien remarks, in his *Memoirs of Bishop Burke*, the oldest in Canada. It antedates Quebec by a decade of years.<sup>31</sup>

In 1604 Father Nicholas Aubry, who came to Acadia with De Monte, said Mass<sup>32</sup> at St. Croix Island and at Port Royal, the Annapolis of today. In 1610 Father Jessé Fléché was preaching to the Micmacs and soon the whole tribe of some 3000 souls was converted. This was five years before the Recollet, Le Caron, preached to the Hurons on Georgian Bay.

In 1755 came the dispersion of the Acadians, so vividly described by Longfellow in his « *Evangeline* ». The French race was gone, Grand Pré was a smoking ruin, but Catholics of another race and another language were to carry down in Nova Scotia the faith to future generations and build up in old Acadia and in the capital city of Halifax a militant and vigorous Catholicity which, triumphing over all opposition, endures to this day.

In this work of religious development in Nova Scotia, Father Edmund Burke played an important role. New experiences, however, awaited him. The New England fanatics, who had come in to replace the despoiled and dispossessed Acadians, as well as the U.E. Loyalists who followed later, brought with them to Nova Scotia their intense hatred of the Catholic Church which soon took the form of proscriptive and persecuting laws. This was something which Father Burke had not before met, in America, for never in the early days in Upper Canada where he had labored, nor in more recent times in the Province of Ontario, were our Statute books disgraced by a penal code. That glory belongs to the province of Nova Scotia. There the descendants of the Mayflower colonists who had become experts at home at burning witches and at cutting off the ears of innocent and inoffensive Quakers, turned their venomous fangs on the Irish Catholics, new arrivals in the country. They set up a bigoted regime under which Catholics could not become teachers, could not hold land and could not be elected members of Parliament. Let us hear the story.

In 1758 the government at Halifax passed an act to « confirm titles on land » which said : « Provided that no papist hereafter shall have any right or title to hold, possess or enjoy any lands or tenements, other than by virtue of any grant or grants from the crown, but that all deeds or wills hereafter

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<sup>31</sup> The first missionaries to Quebec were the Recollet Fathers: Dery Jamet, Jean Dolbeau, Joseph Le Caron and Pacifique Du Plessis. They came in 1615. Le Caron said the first Mass in Ontario that year.

<sup>32</sup> *Early Missionary Footprints in Acadia*, by the Rev. CHARLES J. McLAUGHLIN, p. 7.

made, conveying lands or tenements to any papist, shall be utterly null and void.»<sup>33</sup>

This was followed by « An act to suppress Popery n which decreed «Every popish person exercising any ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and every popish priest shall depart out of this province on or before the 25th of March, 1759.<sup>34</sup> Disobedience to this law brought perpetual imprisonment. It was further decreed that persons harboring, relieving, or concealing any popish priest should be fined £50 and be adjudged to be set in the pillory.

In 1766, just 35 years before the arrival of Father Burke in Halifax, an Act was passed which was intended to destroy all Catholic Education. It decreed as follows : If any popish recusant, papist or person professing the popish religion, shall be so presumptions as to set up any school within the province, and be detected therein, such offender shall, for every such offence, suffer three month's imprisonment without bail or mainprise and shall pay fine to the king of £10. This in a province where Catholic schools had existed for 100 years!!!

Despite these enactments, Irish Catholics poured into the country. In 1760 there were already hundreds of them in Halifax alone. Then, too, there were hundreds of Catholic soldiers and sailors from His Majesty's forces, for Halifax had become the Gibraltar of America. Mass for a time had to be said in secret, in secluded places, or in barns. Father Bailly, who had been working amongst the Indians after the dispersion, said Mass for the newly arrived Irish Catholics, who at the time had no priest of their own. Writing in 1771, Father Bailly says: « All this opposition comes from the Presbyterians and the people of New England. Last<sup>35</sup> winter I said Mass for three weeks in this town when suddenly I had to seek a secluded spot six miles from the town to celebrate on Sunday. » The spirit of Calvin was still alive! This state of affairs, however, could not last long in a new country. Puritanism and the bigotry of Bishop Inglis, the Anglican prelate, met a crushing defeat when the Irish Catholics of Halifax, in a body, demanded their rights from Governor Hamond.<sup>36</sup> The obnoxious and unjust Statutes regarding the « holding of land », and « public worship », etc., were, in 1783, repealed and a new era began for the Church in Nova Scotia. The following year the Halifax Cathedral was begun on the spot where St. Mary's Cathedral stands today. In

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<sup>33</sup> *Laws of Nova Scotia*, Vol. I, as quoted by Archbishop O'Brien.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> *Memoirs of Bishop Burke*, p. 57.

<sup>36</sup> The leaders of the movement were: William Meany, John Cody, James Kavanagh, John Mullowny and John Murphy.

1785, Reverend James Jones, a Capuchin father from Cork, arrived<sup>37</sup> as pastor. He was the first Irish priest to labor in Nova Scotia. For 15 years he carried on the work of the Ministry. His burden was heavy as the bishop of Quebec declared himself unable to send him any help even for the French missions.

With the arrival of Father Burke in Halifax on Oct. 2, 1801, new life was infused into the Church. He set to work immediately. In a few months dissensions were gone and peace reigned, so much so that the parishioners could write Bishop Denaut: « with pleasure we inform your Lordship, that through the Mercy<sup>38</sup> of God, all dissensions are gone away, peace and harmony are restored. »

One of the first enterprises undertaken by Father Burke was the erection of a Catholic school. This work was most strenuously opposed by Bishop Inglis, who induced the governor to withhold his consent for a time. Inglis would, too, exclude from the public schools all non-conformists and Roman Catholics, and thus deny them any education whatever. He made, too, a violent public attack on the « superstitions of popery » and the « profligacy of the Clergy. » His calumnies were quickly refuted by Bishop Burke in a pamphlet of over 200 pages.

In 1815 Bishop Plessis, the successor of Bishop Denaut, visited Halifax. He was greatly edified by the faith and piety of the Catholic people and in his report said : « When one reflects that out of about 600 Communicants there are not ten who had neglected the sacrament in Lent; when one sees them as diligent in attending Mass on week days as they were during the bishop's stay amongst them; when one is witness of the eagerness with which they besieged the confessionals, to the extent of keeping two or three priests busy during entire mornings; when one finds the sacristy full of children who come every day to catechism, nothing more is needed to convince one that the spirit of religion is as fervent here as in any Christian community in the diocese of Quebec. » Father Burke's labors had borne fruit.

On July 16, 1815, Father Burke sailed for Ireland after an absence of nearly 30 years. He was in London in September and in December we meet him in Rome where he wrote a long document to the Cardinal Prefect of the Propaganda regarding the state of religion in British North America. In it he recommended the erection of two more dioceses in Lower Canada, one in Montreal and another in Three Rivers. He also suggested a Prefect Apostolic

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<sup>37</sup> Father Jones found at Halifax an Acadian priest, Father Joseph Mathurna Bourg, who had been appointed by Bishop Briand. A small church had been erected in 1784, and a residence for a priest was completed in 1786. *Early Missionary Footprints in Acadia*, p. 20, by the Rev. Chas. J. McLaughlin.

<sup>38</sup> This letter was signed by Michal Tobin, C. Connor, John Maguire, Peter Lynch and Patrick O'Brien.

for Kingston, Upper Canada, and another for the Maritime provinces. In July, 1816, he was back in Halifax.

Rome responded quickly to the recommendations which Father Burke had made when in the Eternal City. On Dec. 11, 1815, Nova Scotia was cut off from the diocese of Quebec and created a Vicariate Apostolic and Father Burke, with the consent of the Bishop of Quebec, was, on May 19, 1817, appointed a Vicar with Episcopal character. The new Vicariate was to be immediately subject to the Holy See and Father Burke was named Titular bishop of Zion and Vicar Apostolic of Nova Scotia. He was consecrated in Quebec by Bishop Plessis on July 5, 1818. He was then in his 66th year.

Bishop Burke now set to work with redoubled energy. He soon had several young men studying theology. He opened immediately a school for girls, the Catholic women of the parish procuring funds to pay the teachers. In 1820 there were 193 girls in attendance. A school for boys came next, taught by his nephew, Father Carroll, and two ecclesiastics. The attendance in September, 1820, was already 100. In 1819 he made a visitation of his vast diocese, travelling hundreds of miles by stage coach or over the water ways of the country.

Overburdened and sinking under the weight of his labors, Bishop Burke looked about for a Coadjutor. He chose a Father McGuire, who, however, refused the honor.

In the spring of 1820 he began the construction of a new Cathedral, St. Mary's. There were at the time 2000 Catholics in Halifax, and the building of a cut-stone church 106' x 66' was a big undertaking. The church was, however, finished in a couple of years. It was later enlarged and embellished by Bishop Connolly.

The two short years of Bishop Burke's Episcopate were crowded with works of zeal. His health, however, was ever weakening. For 34 years he had labored in Canada. He had spent 7 years on the missions in the wilds of Upper Canada and 19 years in Nova Scotia.

In the fall of 1820 he felt that his end was near. Having set his affairs in order, he turned his thoughts exclusively to the things of Eternity. On Wednesday, November 29th, he asked his attendants to lift him from his bed and place him on the floor. In this position he gave up his soul to God. His remains were laid to rest in the Church-yard of St. Peter's, as the first church in Halifax was called. In May, 1846, they were transferred by Bishop Connolly to a more suitable resting place in the new cemetery.

After the death of Bishop Burke, Bishop Plessis of Quebec tried to induce Rome to suppress the new Vicariate of Nova Scotia. He wished to place it again under the jurisdiction of Quebec. To this, Rome would not agree, but the appointment of a successor to Bishop Burke was delayed for seven years.

At last on June 24th, 1827, the Rt. Rev- Wm. Fraser was consecrated bishop and named second Vicar Apostolic of Nova Scotia.

In Upper Canada, the Ontario of today, the name of Bishop Burke is unknown. It has passed into oblivion. The diocese of Toronto, however, has a very special reason to remember him. He said, no doubt, the first Mass in the village of York, and to him, Toronto diocese owes its first bishop. It was he who, when Vicar Apostolic of Nova Scotia, residing in Halifax, encouraged Michael Power, then a boy of 12 years, in his desire to become a priest, and had him sent to the Sulpician College in Montreal to be educated for the Church. A nephew of Bishop Burke, Father John Carroll,<sup>39</sup> labored for many years in Toronto. He arrived in 1843 and was named Vicar General by Bishop Power. Following the death of the bishop on Oct. 1, 1847, Father Carroll was for some time administrator of the diocese.

London, too, should remember Bishop Burke. He was its first missionary and he visited the site of the city in 1795. Writing the bishop of Quebec on the 28th of August that year he says: « There are also several new hamlets with a dozen, twenty or thirty houses, at Rivière à la Tranche (Thames River), Huron River and the mines to which a priest should be sent from time to time, to keep alive the faith and administer the sacraments. »<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Father Carroll died in Chicago in 1889. Father Edmund Burke Lawler, who resided for years at 435 Jarvis Street, Toronto, was also a nephew of Bishop Burke; he died March 19, 1905.

<sup>40</sup> *Memoirs of Bishop Burke*, p. 22.