

British Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Activities in the Hudson's Bay Company Territory, 1840-1854

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The first Methodist missionaries in the North-West were British Wesleyans. They came out to the west in 1840 about the time of the break-up of the union which had been brought about in 1833 between the Canadian Methodists and their British Wesleyan brethren. There is no time here to go into the details¹ of the union or its demise and it will be sufficient to note that the British Conference was quite determined to maintain control of Indian work in Canada West.²

It was at the urging of Sir George Simpson, Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company, that missionaries were sent out to the far west in 1840. He approached Dr. Alder, one of the four powerful secretaries of the Missionary Committee of Wesleyan Methodism, and Alder brought his proposal to the Committee.³ Three men were sent out from England (having been guaranteed support by the Company) to be directed, while in their respective territories, by an experienced Indian missionary worker, the Rev. James Evans.

Before proceeding further with the missionaries themselves, it is necessary to look at the organization or church of which they were a part. The British Wesleyan Methodist church was the largest and most powerful body of the followers of John Wesley. They stood before all else for their "discipline" and their organization. There were always tendencies toward fragmentation in Wesley's followers, even from the earliest days of the movement. Wesley himself kept all dissenters in line by frequent purges. After his death the whole movement was naturally prey to tendencies inherent in the character of Methodism such as the great power of individual conviction under the influence of Divine Grace which made it difficult for all to accept precise rules of procedure. The clash between inspiration and discipline might be viewed as the very core of all types of Methodism. What made the movement unique was not simply that it unleashed a great flow of spiritual power but that it attempted in the simplistic manner of the Eighteenth Century to provide precise measurement and even control of that power. Naturally, many

¹ A general account of this union and its failure may be found in Townsend, Workman & Eayers, *A New History of Methodism* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1909), II, 218 (henceforth, T.W.E.).

² Microfilm Reel A251, Methodist Missionary Society Committee Minutes, extracts, July 1814-July 1851 (henceforth MR A251).

³ *Ibid.*, 114-132.

found that the Divine turmoil in their breasts could not be subdued by the rigid rules of a Conference or District Meeting; and these went their own way, often to found the many Methodist splinter groups. The British Wesleyans, however, remained true to their founder in that they always felt that those who would not submit should leave or be removed. Many chose to leave and the worst division was to come in 1849. Nevertheless, the Wesleyans remained the largest and most powerful body of Methodists in Britain.⁴

They paid a heavy price for this success. Methodism rested on two foundations, spiritual renewal and an intense discipline to channel and control this power. The Wesleyans emphasized the one and lost the other. Their discipline remained but their power, in a spiritual sense, disappeared. By the 1840's they had become respectable and a predominantly middle-class body. They had ceased to appeal to the lowest level of English society and their leaders were conservative in every sense. In fact, they seemed to want to rid themselves of any sort of revolutionary stigma, either spiritual or political.⁵ From the 1830's their instructions to their missionaries in their far-flung foreign fields made it clear that Wesleyan Methodists were to support any type of government that they might encounter so long as it was established when they got there. They were not to meddle or criticize in any form whatever but were to go about their business, making enemies of no one.⁶

But what was their business? They were supposed to do *something*. The original Methodist theory was that each itinerant missionary or preacher was to attempt to kindle a real spiritual awakening through the usual Methodist institutions of the "watch night" or "Class-meeting" and then keep this fire burning by setting up a Methodist organization. For example, if some were "awakened" by preaching, class meetings would be set up where these would be encouraged each week by a leader who exhorted them. Close records would be kept of individual progress and these forwarded to immediate supervisors. If there were enough people to warrant a regular preacher, a "circuit" would be set up for a routine of regular services and the preacher would report back to the District Meeting which would report back to the Conference and so on. Up to the 1830's, exact records were kept which seem ludicrous to us today. For example, the exact "state in Grace" of each person in each class meeting everywhere in the world was recorded and published in the yearly reports. You might learn, for example, in an obscure village in Antigua, that the local class meeting contained three in a state of Grace, four that had backslid and one that "lingered in the way."⁷ The whole organization, even after the 1830's, was held together by a vast number of published reports from every level which recorded numbers, spiritual activity and

⁴ T.W.E., *op. cit.*, 437-440.

⁵ J.L. & Barbara Hammond, *The Bleak Age* (London: Penguin, 1934), 143.

⁶ Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, *Report of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society* (London, 1839), see "Instruction," XI.

⁷ *Ibid.*, see 1829-1835 for examples.

all financial matters. The spiritual activity was recorded in a much vaguer and more general fashion after the 1830's.⁸

The conservative character of the Missionary Committee (a four-man, all-powerful body that in practice directed all Wesleyan missionary work)⁹ is evident in the instructions given to one of the three missionaries sent from England, the Rev. William Mason:

Avoid the appearance of evil. Be swift to hear, slow to speak, slower still to wrath. Be cautious in forming opinions of the character of others and still more in expressing these opinions. A fool uttereth all that is in his mind, but a wise man keepeth it till afterwards. Identify yourself with no parties. Strive to promote peace. Be the friend of all, the enemy of none. Show all due respect to lawful authority. Treat your superiors with due respect. Act toward your inferiors with kindness and condescension ...¹⁰

This was sound advice from Dr. Alder if only in view of the fact that the four missionaries were completely in the hands of the "Honourable Company." They were to act as Chaplains at the Company posts where they were stationed; the Company took them there in the first place and they would then depend on the Company for all transportation including their final return to England. The Company would feed them, provide them with all medicines, all assistants and interpreters and accommodation. The Committee would merely give them 6:15 British pounds sterling per quarter with 1:10 extra for washing and stationery. Each man was to be stationed at a Company post with responsibility for other posts in the area.¹¹ Rev. James Evans would be at Norway House, Rev. William Mason would be at Lac-la-Pluie but was (for example) responsible for Rat Portage, Fort Alexander, Osnaburg House and Lac-le-Seul. Rev. George Barnley would be at Moose Factory and Rev. Robert Rundle would be at Edmonton House. It might almost seem that these men had merely been taken on the staff of the great Company. This was probably Sir George Simpson's intention.

Although the men at the top of the Wesleyan organization were bureaucrats of a distinctly non-enthusiastic type,¹² they still used all the peculiar Methodist jargon which had been originally coined to describe (and perhaps even to help control) the great spiritual outpouring of the original Wesleyan revival. In fact, most Methodists used this kind of language even after the whole movement had

⁸ See later examples of the above.

⁹ See W. H. Brooks, *The Changing Character of Maritime Wesleyan Methodism 1855-1883*, unpublished M.A. thesis, Mount Allison University, 1965, 18 and 57.

¹⁰ Quoted in J.S. Woodsworth, *Thirty Years in the Canadian North-West* (Toronto, 1917), 24.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 23

¹² W. H. Brooks, *op. cit.*, 57.

long since lost its sense of spiritual urgency.¹³ Dr. Alder, in his letter to Rev. William Mason, closed his instruction in typical fashion:

May he give you the souls of many of the aborigines for your hire and seal of your ministry. When He shall appear may you and they appear like Him and be presented before the presence of His glory with exceeding great joy. Such are the prayers of my colleagues and myself
Most truly yours in the Gospel of Christ.¹⁴

R. Alder.

The rest of the story may be told quickly in outline: the three missionaries from England came out to the Territory with Rev. Evans “superintending” them from Norway House. Rev. James Evans, originally from Hull, England, had done work among the Indians in Canada West at Rice Lake. He brought Mrs. Evans with him. Rev. Mason also brought his wife and took up his station. The other two, Rundle and Barnley, were not married. Rev. James Evans invented his famous Cree Syllabic in order that the Indian language might be written and printed. He made many heroic journeys into the North and was recalled in 1845 on a morals charge involving Indian girls under his care and with further hints of the possibility of his being responsible for the murder of an Indian helper. He died in 1846 and the matter was dropped. Rev. Mason was involved in pressing the charges against him. Rev. Barnley petitioned the Committee to be allowed to return from Moose Factory to England to choose a wife. This he was allowed to do, finally, but his wife could not stand the country. As a result, he went back to England to stay. Robert Terril Rundle made heroic journeys over his vast territory and returned to England in 1848 to get some help, which was not forthcoming; so he did not return. Rev. William Mason was the only one left, and, in 1854, when he was informed that the missions would be taken over by the newly independent Canada Conference, he joined the Church of England’s cause in Rupert’s Land and remained in their service. These four men were assisted by two native missionaries who had been converted in the Canada West missions; two Ojibway Indians, Peter Jones and Henry B. Stienhauer. The older one, Peter Jones, returned to Canada to die “a victim of strong drink” on the reserve where he had been converted. He achieved temporary fame by visiting England twice and meeting Queen Victoria. Stienhauer remained at his post at White Fish Lake through the transfer of 1854 and went on to win a degree from Victoria College, Toronto, and to reach ordination. His two sons also graduated from Victoria. Stienhauer had some role in events leading up to the Riel Affair of 1870.¹⁵

There is one other man who should perhaps be mentioned to indicate the

¹³ *Ibid.*, 124.

¹⁴ Woodsworth, *op. cit.*, 24.

¹⁵ The foregoing is based on material used in the first chapter of my forthcoming doctoral dissertation.

scope of Wesleyan activity as he appears to have worked within the sphere of influence of the Hudson's Bay Company. This was the Rev. Thomas Hurlburt, who was stationed "north of Lake Superior." After the 1840 division he found himself under the jurisdiction of the Missionary Committee, but without direct supervision, as Evans considered him out of his territory. In short, he was left in control of himself and the Lake Superior mission. He found the Indians destitute because of a shortage of game and discovered that they were existing on rabbits, eating even the contents of their intestines! He was working on an Indian grammar and gaining some insight by reading the work of Henry B. Schoolcraft, the American Indian agent.¹⁶ Hurlburt was to take over the Hudson's Bay Territory Missions in 1855 as Superintendent for the Canada Conference. His descendants still live in Winnipeg.

The foregoing should give some idea of the strength and extent of the British Wesleyan effort in the Territory between 1840 and 1854. I would like to focus, however, on three aspects of the Wesleyan Mission work in those years: the problem of Indian conversion, relations with Roman Catholics and relations with the Hudson's Bay Company.

The first of these, the matter of Indian conversion, is too complex to examine in every detail in this paper. It is only possible to outline the approach used by these missionaries in general fashion. Unlike Roman Catholicism, Methodism had a relatively short history, and was, as mentioned before, a distinctly Eighteenth-Century creation. Much more could be said about this latter fact which would take us far beyond the range of this discussion. It might be suggested, for example, that Methodism was a product of the peculiar time sense of the century of its birth and that it rose with the same tide that brought cheap printed tracts to large numbers of the newly literate.¹⁷ Methodism had never faced a long period where its survival depended on bringing some type of Christian message to barbarians. The Roman Catholic church in its long history had faced this and many other problems which had, in total, given that institution much useful experience. The Methodists could only bring Eighteenth-Century Methodism, Victorian respectability or all the trappings of a print-based institutionalism to the Indian. The truth was that they were never absolutely clear as to what they were doing in the North-West.

The Methodists shared the advantage that other missionaries and Europeans had when they contacted the Indians for the first time. Before meeting the white man, the Indian's cosmology was evidently adequate for his problems and environment. The cultural shock resulting from meeting a superior technology immediately dated the Indian's religion and his "world view." Thus, Indians were at least partly open to conversion to any European faith because, with increasing

¹⁶ MR A270, Box 13, Reel 13, Canada 1841-1842. Hurlburt to Dr. Alder, March 2, 1841 and May 1841; also Hurlburt to Secretaries, June 29, 1841.

¹⁷ See, for example, H. A. Innis, *The Bias of Communication* (University of Toronto Press, 1951), 142-155.

contact with the white man, their own faith was increasingly obsolete and, also, because, at a very elementary level, they needed European products and could sometimes get these from missionaries. The attitude of the Indian is aptly illustrated in one of William Mason's letters to the secretaries where he reported the words of one of his early converts:

He said that the rest of the Indians did not know anything more than what they beheld. "I see" says he, "the world and water, the sun, moon and stars, anything more we know nothing about" i.e. their knowledge was bounded by sight, a confession which has been frequently made to me by the Indians since my residence among them...¹⁸

What was involved in the process of "conversion"? It is difficult to say what it meant to all four missionaries. Rundle kept a journal which is mostly a travel diary and uninformative in many ways. Evans wrote little except on every practical issues. Mason wrote far too much in the form of traditional jargon which presents a grave problem for the historian. What, for example, are we to make of twenty or thirty pages of this sort of thing, written with an eye to publication in one of the innumerable Methodist reports:

...many and great have been the interpositions of mercy and grace which I have experienced since my departure from England, four times has my room been saved from being totally destroyed by fire: several times have I been rescued from a watery grave, and once I had been lost in the woods for eight long hours; and such have been the dangers to which I have been exposed while a wanderer in the wild uncultivated forests of North America, but still I can sing
"O what are all my sufferings here
If Lord Thou count me meet ... etc."¹⁹

Barnley, at least, tried to get the Wesleyan "unextinguishable flame" burning in the traditional manner among the aborigines. True to the antecedents of his church, he looked for the precise signs of spiritual power after setting up the "correct" circumstances. The fire did not seem to burn easily:

The power of the Lord was present to wound in several of our services. I have seen persons start up in a state of deep and uncontrollable emotion, and hastily leave the room in which they were congregated.

A fear lest I should ascribe that to be the agency of the awakening spirit of God which was only the effect of a heated and confined air on

¹⁸ MR A270, *op. cit.*; Mason to Secretaries, August 11, 1841.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, June 9, 1841.

the constitutions so constantly accustomed to the pure air of Heaven was the consideration which alone restrained me on those occasions from converting the service to a prayer meeting immediately ...²⁰

Once, only, did he have the courage to proceed but “ due to the lack of efficient auxiliaries failed to secure those glorious results which so often follow employment of similar means of Grace at home.”²¹

If the blessings of the Spirit could not be obtained in this fashion, what else could be done? Barnley felt that a concrete memory aid was necessary to be successful in communicating Christian doctrine to the Indian:

The plan of introducing the native to commit to memory the most important summaries of Divine Truth – the Decalogue and the Lord’s Prayer by ranging them in a series and assigning one sentence to each person consecutively ‘till the whole is disposed of... has been ... pursued with enlarged success. And I have further introduced a Mnemonical stick which appears to render material aid to those whose opportunities for learning are much limited. I send you one of them as a specimen. The small notches indicating the number of persons required to repeat each Commandment. The larger ones the number of precepts in the whole. They learn to associate each notch with the remembrance of the person who uttered the words signified by it, and thus acquire the entire moral law with as much rapidity as frequently to awaken a feeling of surprise both in me and themselves ...²²

Perhaps the most potent weapon in the Methodist armoury was the invention of the Cree Syllabic by Rev. James Evans. Evans had been working on a written version of Indian language while he was in Canada West and he continued his experiments at Norway House. He finally persuaded the Committee to accept his invention and, after many delays, a press was sent out to print tracts for the Indians in their own language.²³ Barnley was also working on an Indian printed alphabet and attempted to print it, but, although he pressed his invention on the Committee, only Evans’ system was accepted.²⁴ Sir George Simpson did not let Evans bring out a printing press at once and seems to have limited printing operations to the single press. Evans took the means for turning out new type back to England with

²⁰ MR A271, Methodist Mission Reel 14, Box 14, Canada 1842-1848, Barnley to Committee, August 1843.

²¹ Idem.

²² Idem.

²³ MR A251, *op. cit.*, 305.

²⁴ MR A271, *op. cit.*; Barnley to Committee, August 1843.

him in 1846, and, as the cast type then in use wore out, little more was done.²⁵ It appears, however, that this was a new and powerful method of gaining converts. Evans felt it was the only way that the superior resources of the Roman Catholics could be countered and that it was really the only way that the Methodists could achieve any lasting success.²⁶ An illustration of the powerful effect of the printed word on the Indian is to be found in one of Barnley's accounts of an Indian heresy that sprang up at York and Severn House.²⁷ Some Indians came in contact with some printed fragments from Evans' press. These appear to have been hymns. According to Barnley, as these were read, "the mysteries of the Indian magic sank rapidly in public estimation." Although the Indians did not have any more information about the new faith other than two hymn fragments, they began to move away from their old beliefs. Two Indians withdrew from the group at this point and spent some time in the wilderness by themselves. When they returned, they presented themselves to their colleagues in terms of the limited information in the hymns: One went by the name "Jesus Christ" and the other called himself "Light." They had designed a complete cosmology illustrated by a large diagram showing the condition of Heaven and Hell and the way to each. Heaven was pictured as a distinctly Indian paradise where fat deer waited patiently to be killed and all the usual Indian pleasures were there in large measure. Destruction was promised to all who resisted the new faith and all were obliged to call each other "brother" and "sister." The killing of all their dogs was taken as a token of the acceptance of the new faith. The forces of orthodoxy became acquainted with all this when Indians began to send missionaries of this new religion to other posts and the Methodists reprimanded all concerned for their crude superstitions. The Methodist view was that the two individuals who initiated the movement had set the whole thing up for personal gain.²⁸

Finally, in the matter of Indian conversion, there appears to have been some sort of model Indian village set up at Norway House where an attempt was made to train Indian women and to introduce some sort of cottage industry²⁹ which would take the place of the declining fur trade and also benefit the Hudson's Bay Company. This was under the supervision of James Evans and later William Mason and Stienhauer. From the Methodist point of view it provided an opportunity for "civilizing" the Indian by introducing such things as Victorian moral standards and Sabbatarianism, this last being a particularly sore point in the relationship between the Methodists and the Company. It also gave James Evans an opportunity to try to introduce the Methodist system of self-support. In this case it involved tapping the fur trade by collecting some furs from the Indians to sell at Red River in the place of the usual Methodist money collection. Little came of

²⁵ MR A272, Reel 15, Box 15, Canada 1846-1848.

²⁶ MR A271, *op. cit.*; Evans to Simpson, June 10, 1845.

²⁷ *Ibid.*; Barnley to Committee, August 1843.

²⁸ *Idem.*

²⁹ MR A272, *op. cit.*; Evans to Secretaries, March 3, 1846.

this.³⁰

The Roman Catholic missionaries in the North-West at this time were regarded as the bitter rivals of the Methodists. The Methodists regarded them as unmitigated evil, almost as bad as a purely pagan influence. Their conversion practices were transparent. For example, according to the Methodists, the priests sometimes used a large coloured picture of Heaven and Hell with all the Catholics being admitted to the former while the Protestants and all those Indians who adhered to them went down to horrible destruction.³¹

In August 1841, William Mason wrote to the Committee to report on the activities of his “Romish” competition in the Rainy Lake-Rat Portage area. Speaking of the local priest, he noted:

I am not surprized at the success he meets with, when he comes loaded with Pemican, Tongues, Flour and Tobacco which he gives to the Indians and their superstitious ceremonies are so similar to heathen ceremonies that I wonder they do not make more nominal converts than they do, an appeal to the senses is more easily felt than an appeal to the understanding...³²

On another occasion he mentioned that no less than three priests had come into his territory and every house had a bottle of Holy Water “supposedly come from the Jordan.” Rev. William Mason summed up the Methodist view when he wrote: “What advantage or profit do the poor, ignorant Indians obtain in exchanging their wooden idols for a brass or silver one and the noise of a drum for a bell and beads?”³³

At distant Edmonton House, Robert Rundle felt that Roman Catholic work among the Blackfeet was at best nominal conversion and at worst superstition. He felt that Catholic influence posed a grave threat to the Indians of the plains and continually begged the Committee to send him some help.³⁴ Finally, he went home to beg them in person. Barnley found that a Roman Catholic factor at a post where he was stationed was a grave disadvantage and he even attempted to convert a member of a Roman Catholic family.³⁵ Evans felt, as mentioned before, that the Methodists, in light of the fact that the Committee was not sending out any more men or resources, could never compete with the Catholic menace, but that the printing press, if allowed full scope, would even the odds. It only remains to be

³⁰ MR A271, *op. cit.*

³¹ MR A270, *op. cit.*; Mason to Secretaries, August 11, 1841.

³² *Idem*

³³ *Ibid.*; Mason to Secretaries, September 2, 1841.

³⁴ *Ibid.*; Rundle to Secretaries, May 31, 1841. Also see MR A271, Rundle to Secretaries, May 24, 1843.

³⁵ *Ibid.*; Barnley to Committee and Secretaries, July 7, 1841.

said that the Methodists felt that the full support of the Company in terms of providing the missionaries with goods to give the Indians and thus increase Methodist influence would help their position considerably. This was not to be, however, because, as early as 1843, the Company, in the person of Sir George Simpson, had begun to have grave doubts about the value of the whole Methodist operation.³⁶ It seems clear, from reading all the letters exchanged between Simpson, the missionaries and the Committee, that the Governor saw the Methodist missions as convenient adjuncts of the Company and as a means of consolidating Company influence among Indians when the fur trade ceased to be an all-pervasive force. He seems to have expected the missionaries to obey in the same manner as Company servants. The Committee in London does not appear to have really disagreed with him in this matter as he always remained on the most cordial terms with the Wesleyan Committee and that body always discouraged too much initiative on the part of the missionaries. Two of the missionaries, at least, seem to have been cast in a heroic mold in the manner of early British Methodists: Robert Rundle consistently went where the spirit led in spite of official criticism. His work seems to have been effective and long lasting.³⁷ James Evans conflicted violently with Sir George Simpson on the question of working on the Sabbath and on the much more general question of who should control the missions. In this latter case, Evans felt he could move any missionary to any post at will. Simpson, while making a show of being obliging to please the Committee, as all letters were copied and sent to England, could easily obstruct Evans by instructing his officials to refuse to provide accommodation and supplies for the missionary. Evans was bent on consolidation and expansion and, if the Company proved to be an obstacle, then he would find ways to make the missions self-supporting.

By 1844, Simpson felt that the mission cause should be permanently checked. In a letter to Chief Factor Ross at Rossville, the village near Norway House, in December of 1844, Simpson wrote:

... both the Governor & Committee and Dr. Alder (the principal organ of communication in reference to the American missions) concur in the opinion with the Council, that it is both necessary and proper to check the zeal of the resident missionaries, & to limit the establishment to such a number as it may be expedient to maintain, with a due regard to the circumstances and convenience both of the Fur Trade and the Wesleyan Society ...

I am glad that Mr. Evans' unauthorized demands for passages and other facilities to establish missions at Isle à la Crosse & elsewhere were not complied with ... in some instances I am sorry to say that Mr. Evans' arguments have had an undue influence on the minds of some of our

³⁶ See, for example, MR A271, Simpson to Evans, July 7, 1843.

³⁷ See the *Journal of Robert Terril Rundle*, MSS, Glenbow Foundation.

gent'n, inducing deviations from established usages ...³⁸

Evans' "undue influence" was the real problem. On May 20, 1845, Ross wrote to Governor Simpson informing him that Evans had persuaded the Indian boat crew (that Ross usually used to take boats to Red River) to refuse to make the journey unless Ross promised them that they would not have to travel on Sunday. Ross saw this as a direct challenge to the authority of the Company. He saw it as "the beginning of a system of combination, which, if continued, may in all probability produce the most disastrous results..."³⁹ Evans' influence would make the Indians unmanageable:

Whilst the Indians are left to exercise their own free will, they come forward and offer their services to perform their usual duties; the moment Mr. Evans gets hold of them, his threats of temporal and everlasting punishment, and promises of employment, pay, supplies, the prospect of a better market for their furs and other advantages, induce them to break their solemn engagements ...⁴⁰

Ross then went on to describe the situation with regard to the Indians in almost "sociological" detail:

The minds of the Indians here, are as yet, but in a state of transition in regard to religious knowledge and religious principles, whatever statements may be made to contrary; their ancient faith together with its various obligations they have laid aside and those rules of conduct prescribed by the Christian Religion, are not yet sufficiently developed or fixed to keep them going on the right path, of legal obligations they know little or nothing...⁴¹

In short, the supremacy of the Company, based on a delicate system which was blended with the Indian and his environment, was being undermined not only by free traders at Red River but also by the Superintendent of Methodist Missions. The next day Ross wrote another letter to his chief to inform him that Evans' design was to challenge the Company. His first move was to embarrass them by causing the Indians to stop work and travel on Sunday and the second would be to take a share of the actual trade itself.

I am aware that if Mr. Evans' career be not speedily checked, the

³⁸ Hudson's Bay Company Archives (Henceforth HBC Arch.), D 4-66 fo. 67.

³⁹ HBC Arch. D 5/14 fo. 32 ff; Ross to Simpson, May 20, 1845.

⁴⁰ Idem.

⁴¹ Idem.

trade of this valuable section of the country will soon be lost to the Company – a number of the best Beaverskins have during the winter been cut for caps and other purposes by the Indians, most of which are as a matter of course intended for Sales to passants and presents to friends in the Settlement, and in all possibility some clandestine trade in whole Skins will also be going on in course of this Summer, and indeed at all times in the future, various circumstances seem to indicate that part, at least of Mr. Evans object in visiting Red River at present is to make preparatory arrangements in regard to the hunts and supplies of the Indians, unless you yield to all his wishes ...⁴²

Shortly after this, the scandal involving Rev. James Evans broke and he was obliged to return to England to defend himself before the Conference. After Evans had left, the Company gradually withdrew support from the remaining missionaries. Some had bitter cause for complaint as the Company forced them to pay for many small items that had once been supplied free of charge.⁴³ The bitter hostility of Sir George Simpson toward the missions is evident in a letter that he wrote to Ross on July 7, 1846. I have quoted the bulk of it to indicate the *actual* attitude of Simpson which was not always evident in his official letters to Evans and the Wesleyan Committee:

My Dear Sir,

With reference to another letter under this date respecting Mr. Evans, you must all have been very much delighted when that worthy took his departure [the sources conflict here]: but in case he may keep his promise of visiting you at the expiration of two years, I think it is well we should be prepared to speak to him seriously on the subject of Hassell's death. In reporting the case to me sometime after it had occurred, I think there was a hint thrown out of suspicions existing somewhere that the poor man lost his life by foul means; but it made no impression on me at the time, from the belief that it was an idle Indian rumour. From some of the observations of Mason's however, before leaving Red River, which have come to my knowledge, it strikes me as well as Mr. Thom & Christie, that Hassell's death was not accidental but a deliberately planned murder. It is very desirable we should know whether intimacy existed between Evans and Hassal's wife & whether Hassal was aware of it: if the wife is still alive and within reach, I think you should get someone to question her closely respecting the intimacy, when it commenced and how long it continued after Hassal's death. If you think that Mason has any suspicions on the subject and that they appear at all well grounded, it would be well you should encourage him

⁴² *Ibid.*; Ross to Simpson, May 21, 1845.

⁴³ See, for example, MR A272, op. cit.; Jacobs to Secretaries, July 21, 1848.

to come here and confer with me, previous to my departure, on the subject of missions generally, without letting him suppose the point so particularly in view. It would also be well that Henry Stienhauer the local preacher should come along with him as one of his crew.

Now that Mr. Evans is off, we must not allow his successor, whoever he may be, to play the Bishop at Norway House, where you alone must be prophet, priest & king-Mason merely acting under your advice. By having him in your hands, he may be useful to the trade and may unquestionably better carry out the views of the Society than by acting on his own judgement & discretion in which I have little confidence: you must endeavour to render the mission as little burdensome as possible. Should Mason come to Red River, it must be his own act & at the expense of the mission, in fact we must relieve ourselves as far as possible from all outlay connected with that establishment. The extra pay to Evans' crew, provisions, etc. must all be charged to the Society, as, although the Company undertook to convey the missionaries up from Canada free of charge, they never contemplated that they would have sent such a worthless character as Evans, whom they would be under the necessity of recalling so soon.⁴⁴

The following month, Governor Simpson addressed a letter to the Governor and Committee of the Hudson's Bay Company in London. He told them that Evans had encouraged free trade among the Norway House Indians but that Mason, who was now in charge of the mission there, appeared to favour the Company:

I am in hopes that we shall now be able to bring the Norway House Indians back to their former habits of trade; but should they persevere in sending their furs to Red River, we shall take steps to break up the settlement at Norway House where an Indian village has been formed, the population of which amounts to 300 or 400 souls; & when dispersed over the country, as they were formerly, they will become more dependent upon us ...⁴⁵

The Wesleyan Missions could not survive in Rupert's Land without the support of the Hudson's Bay Company. By 1846, the Company had decided barely to tolerate them. Thus, the whole Wesleyan cause was doomed to failure and the Canadian Conference of Methodism was able to take over an almost deserted territory by 1855.

⁴⁴ HBC Arch. 4/68 fo. 125d; Simpson to Ross, July 7, 1846.

⁴⁵ HBC Arch. D 4/68 fo. 172.172d; Simpson to Governor and Committee, August 23, 1846.

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