

# “Grapes in the Wilderness” : the Bible Society in British North America in the Early Nineteenth Century

by Judith FINGARD \*

The spiritual refreshment which British evangelicals expected the colonists to derive from a perusal of the annual reports of the British and Foreign Bible Society — “grapes in the wilderness” as one Scots enthusiast termed them — was fully realized in the response of pious Protestants in North America.<sup>1</sup> Not only did they wish to inform themselves on the progress of the spiritual revival in Britain, but they also came to share in the bible enterprise both as beneficiaries and participants. The Bible Society, founded in London in 1804, was acknowledged by contemporaries to be one of the most important products of the English evangelical movement. Its influence soon spread to North America, independent and colonial, where the Bible Society was cherished as the “Venerable parent” by both apostate and filial sons.<sup>2</sup> The consequent establishment of auxiliary societies took place concurrently in the United States and British North America, and the British body played as important a role in encouraging the American Bible Society as it did the colonial offspring.<sup>3</sup> This parallel development is important to an understanding of the preeminence attained by English social influences in North America in the early nineteenth century. Both colonists and Americans derived their inspiration directly from the English example. While the inhabitants of the colonial northlands were fully aware of developments in organized moral, educational, and charitable reform in the United States through their reading of American periodicals, they recognized nothing specifically American to emulate; rather they shared Brother Jonathan’s experiences under the guidance of a common parent.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gilfillan to McGregor, 15 Dec. 1815, Maritime Conference Archives of the United Church of Canada, Halifax (hereafter MCA), McGregor Correspondence, CVIII. In some communities public readings from the reports were common. See *New Brunswick Courier*, 6 Sept. 1823.

<sup>2</sup> H. O. DWIGHT, *The Centennial History of the American Bible Society* (New York, 1916) I, pp. 7-10.

<sup>3</sup> Bible Society encouragement included significant financial grants to new auxiliaries, in the case of British North America £200 to each. See Teignmouth to Strachan, 25 Apr. 1813, Archives of the British and Foreign Bible Society, London (hereafter BFBS), Correspondence Book No. 5, p. 164. For grants to bible societies in the United States, DWIGHT, *op. cit.*, pp. 34-53 *passim*.

<sup>4</sup> Letters of McGregor, 6 Sept. 1819 and 26 Nov. 1822, MCA, McGregor Scrapbook, pp. 11, 13; Hyde to Burder, 24 Dec. 1813, Archives of the Congregational Council for World Mission, London, incorporating the former London Missionary Society (hereafter CCWM), Correspondence, Continent of America, 1799-1836, Folder 1, No. 17; Purkis to LMS, 24 Sept. 1830, *ibid.*, Folder 9, No. 70.

As far as British North America in particular is concerned, the early history of the Bible Society in the colonial environment illustrates not only this predominance of British social influences, but also the importance of voluntary associations in the social life of developing communities. While the Bible Society represented only one of many expressions of the moral and humanitarian reformation of the period, its continuous existence makes it a more useful measure of voluntary activities than the many local societies with ameliorative aims, most of which enjoyed a relatively short life-span.<sup>5</sup> Introduced through the activities of the military transients and the Protestant clergy, the Bible Society aroused intense colonial interest in its early days because of the spiritual and educational benefits it brought. Like other colonial organizations, however, the Bible Society experienced a decline of interest and financial support once it had outgrown its novelty and fulfilled its immediate objectives. Moreover, the opposition it provoked from the Catholic church, the church of England, and colonial supporters of purely local projects constituted formidable threats to its existence during the formative period. Despite these difficulties, the Bible Society survived because it was an affiliate of a successful British organization which continued to value its colonial associates. Ultimately its imperial connections transformed it into an established colonial institution, capable of exerting both beneficial and prejudicial influences on the society of British North America. It is the early history of the organization, during which these trends emerge, and culminating in its decline and successful revival in the 1820's, which constitutes the chronological scope of this essay.

The aim of the Bible Society was to distribute at low prices editions of the bible and new testament unaccompanied by sectarian propaganda. The inhabitants of many colonial communities, who lacked the ready cash to buy copies of the scriptures and in any case found it impossible to obtain them through their local merchants, welcomed the facilities provided by the Bible Society.<sup>6</sup> At the same time nothing could be better designed to undermine the traffic in shoddy editions by nefarious American peddlars.<sup>7</sup> The society initially made its mark in British North America, however, through its concomitant policy of providing copies of the bible in non-English languages. If editions in English were sometimes scarce, French and German versions and gospels in Indian dialects had previously been unobtainable.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> An example is described in G. E. HART, "The Halifax Poor Man's Friend Society, 1820-27, An Early Social Experiment", *Canadian Historical Review*, XXXIV, 1953, 109-23.

<sup>6</sup> On the lack of bibles in the shops see Graham to Hughes, 25 Aug. 1812, BFBS, Correspondence Book No. 5, p. 49; Vicars to Seeley, 9 June 1815, and MacKay to Secretary, 1 Aug. 1817, BFBS, Home Correspondence.

<sup>7</sup> For W. L. Mackenzie's account of this trafficking see *Colonial Advocate*, 25 July and 9 Aug. 1827.

<sup>8</sup> Orth to Committee, 8 June 1817, and De Putron to Marsden, 28 Oct. 1817, Archives of the Methodist Missionary Society, London (hereafter MMS), North America Correspondence, Box 1; *Kingston Chronicle*, 7 Apr. 1820.

But more important, it was the determination of Scottish settlers to secure Gaelic bibles that particularly encouraged the parent society to include British North America within the ever-widening orbit of its activities.<sup>9</sup> The other major reason why the Bible Society was initially welcomed in the colonies can be found in the appeal that its universal Christian objectives made to settlers living in an environment which knew only too well the disadvantages of religious privilege. Dissenters and evangelical Anglicans were proud to be able to share the non-sectarian aims of a respected British society which drew its support from a broad spectrum of the upper and middle classes of England and could therefore disregard with impunity the monopolies of the church of England.

Though the parent society was prepared to take an interest in British North America, the initiative for establishing local societies had to be stimulated on the spot, and not surprisingly, it was recent visitors from Britain who provided that impetus. One major group of agents for the Bible Society in North America comprised officers of the army, navy, and merchant marine stationed in or visiting the principal settled areas of the colonies. Since this was the period when the upper echelons of the British forces were considerably influenced by the English evangelical movement, officers often volunteered to act as itinerant agents of the Bible Society. A supply of scriptures and annual reports of the Bible Society were essential items in the evangelical officer's baggage. In the early 1810's, Halifax and Nova Scotia generally were well served by Captain A. Landers, a Methodist sea captain,<sup>10</sup> Captain Walter Bromley, retired paymaster of the 23rd Regiment,<sup>11</sup> Artillery Captain Edward Sabine,<sup>12</sup> and Lieutenant-Colonel T. F. Addison, military secretary to the humanitarian Lieutenant-Governor John Sherbrooke.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, the great scarcity of bibles at St. John's in 1815 led Lieutenant Richard Vicars of the Royal Engineers to direct the attention of the society to that benighted town. He also suggested that the official visits by naval ships to the outports of Newfoundland during the summer months would provide an ideal opportunity for a wide distribution

<sup>9</sup> Tarn to McGregor, 28 Sept. 1810, BFBS, Correspondence Book No. 4, pp. 30-31. G. PATTERSON, *Memoir of the Rev. James MacGregor, D.D.* (Philadelphia, 1859), pp. 380-1. Likewise the Edinburgh Bible Society interested itself for this reason. *17th Report*, 1826, p. 55.

<sup>10</sup> In 1812 Landers' ship was captured by the Americans and bibles destined for Halifax came into the possession of the Massachusetts Bible Society which later reimbursed the parent society. Black to Tarn, 9 Nov. 1812 and 8 Nov. 1813, BFBS, Home Correspondence. Subsequently Landers was the most prominent Methodist supporter at Yarmouth. Miller to Secretary, 16 Apr. 1822, MMS, North America Correspondence, Box 3.

<sup>11</sup> Bromley to Collins, 9 Nov. 1813 and n.d., BFBS, Home Correspondence.

<sup>12</sup> Sabine to Tarn, 24 July 1813, *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Until he went to Quebec with Sherbrooke, Addison was secretary of the Nova Scotia Bible Society. Addison to Tarn, 30 Apr. 1814, and Robson to Tarn, 24 Jan. 1817, BFBS, Home Correspondence.

of scriptures from the Bible Society.<sup>14</sup> In Cape Breton, General George Ainslie, last lieutenant-governor of the colony, was the principal distributing agent of bibles in the late 1810's.<sup>15</sup> Towards the end of the decade the spiritual needs of Fredericton, the seat of government in New Brunswick, attracted the attention of both a senior and a junior officer in the 74th Regiment. Colonel Sir Robert Le Poer Trench, a subscriber of the parent society, urged that copies of the scriptures should be sent to the town "as the people of this place & neighbourhood are much in want of them, & we can at all times (in the event of leaving this station) distribute them elsewhere".<sup>16</sup> When the Fredericton Auxiliary Bible Society was formed in 1820,<sup>17</sup> Ensign John McClintock became its first secretary. Five years later Lieutenant George Gawler of the 52nd Regiment, an evangelical Anglican and subscriber to the St. Stephen Branch, was instrumental in establishing the Charlotte County Auxiliary Bible Society at St. Andrews, New Brunswick. Since this was an area subject to sectarian disputes, "I was careful to explain my motives", he confided to Secretary Jackson of the parent society, "observing that being by temporal profession a pilgrim upon the earth I had no local prejudices and that I only desired the good of the Bible Society."<sup>18</sup> Similarly in the Canadas, military officers promoted the objects of the Bible Society. George Connolly, ensign in the 99th Regiment, distributed bibles in Montreal and inspired the formation of the Niagara Bible Society from his post at Fort George in Upper Canada.<sup>19</sup> In the 1820's Lieutenant George West of the Royal Engineers served as an equally zealous agent of the British and Foreign Bible and School Societies at Quebec.<sup>20</sup>

The other principal promoters of the Bible Society consisted of people of Scottish background, particularly Presbyterian clergymen in the Maritimes, and Congregational and Presbyterian missionaries in the Canadas, some of whom were attached to the London Missionary Society which was itself closely allied to the Bible and Religious Tract Societies. James McGregor and Hugh Graham, two well-informed ministers of the Presbyterian Secessionist church, actively promoted the Bible Society in the Presbyterian rural

<sup>14</sup> Vicars to Seeley, 9 June 1815, BFBS, Home Correspondence. After the failure of the attempt to establish an auxiliary at St. John's, Vicars became an active member of the SPCK. *Royal Gazette and Newfoundland Advertiser*, 12 Nov. 1816. Vicars was not however a convert to narrow sectarianism. He wholeheartedly supported Congregational and Methodist societies in Newfoundland and suppressed the distribution of anti-Methodist tracts on the SPCK lists. Vicars to Burder, 30 Sept. 1816, CCWM, Correspondence, Continent of America, 1799-1836, Folder 2, No. 41; Cubit to Committee, 20 Dec. 1817, MMS, North America Correspondence, Box 1.

<sup>15</sup> Ainslie to Teignmouth, 13 Mar. 1817, BFBS, Home Correspondence.

<sup>16</sup> Trench to Steinkopff, Nov. 1818, *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> McClintock to Tarn, 28 Mar. 1820, *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Gawler to Jackson, 9 Feb. 1825, BFBS, Foreign Correspondence, 1825 (94); Gawler to McColl, 5 Jan. 1825, MCA, McColl Papers III; McColl to Committee, 30 June 1825, MMS, North America Correspondence, Box 4.

<sup>19</sup> Connolly to Lady Grey, 15 July 1817, and to Tarn, 1 July 1819, BFBS, Home Correspondence.

<sup>20</sup> West to Steinkopff, 17 Sept. 1823, BFBS, Foreign Correspondence, 1823 (216).

areas of northeastern Nova Scotia. In neighbouring New Brunswick Presbyterian clergy such as George Burns at Saint John and Alexander MacLean at St. Andrews served as the key non-military supporters of the Bible Society.<sup>21</sup> A most attractive agent for the society in New Brunswick during this period was Mrs. M. MacDonald, a Glaswegian settled at Miramichi, who pioneered both militant canvassing in the countryside and independent female participation. Meanwhile, the society's activities at Quebec were fostered by the Presbyterian cum Congregational minister — initially Francis Dick and later George Spratt until he became converted to the church of England.<sup>22</sup> Methodist and Baptist clergymen soon joined the ranks of the society, along with pious laymen drawn from all the Protestant churches but especially Methodist and Presbyterian members of the colonial bourgeoisie.<sup>23</sup>

The general but by no means universal practice was for local enthusiasts to form colonial auxiliaries and affiliated branches of the Bible Society.<sup>24</sup> The society thereby became widely supported and readily accepted into the conservative milieu of the provinces. Certainly, colonists from Britain liked to imitate British developments and mould their society to mirror the example set by the venerated mother country. The colonial press encouraged this emulation by printing frequent reports of meetings of the London society and its auxiliaries.<sup>25</sup> Because bible societies were seen to be fashionable in England, they attracted the figurehead patronage of colonial governors, officials, and the commercial élite. The active members of local societies, usually drawn from a slightly lower rung on the social ladder, welcomed this upper-class support, because it boosted subscriptions and, more important, encouraged the wider acceptance of a new institution in a society noted for its careful preservation of the *status quo*. For this reason Nova Scotians regarded the much respected Sir John Sherbrooke as an exemplary friend to bible, tract, and school societies,<sup>26</sup> and in New Brunswick Alexander MacLean greeted as a favourable omen the patronage given by Lieutenant-Governor Howard Douglas to the auxiliary at St. Andrews, because “This will have the effect of making our Society respectable.”<sup>27</sup> Conversely, the failure of the governor in Newfoundland to head the list of patrons of

<sup>21</sup> McGregor was secretary of the Pictou Bible Society; Graham was secretary of the Truro Bible Society; Burns was president of the New Brunswick Bible Society at Saint John; MacLean was secretary of the Charlotte County Bible Society.

<sup>22</sup> Dick was a Presbyterian minister sent to Quebec by the Churches of Christ in Edinburgh and Leith; Spratt was a Congregational missionary of the LMS.

<sup>23</sup> In Halifax an excellent example is provided by the three Methodist merchants John A. Barry, John Starr, and Martin Gay Black.

<sup>24</sup> Bennett to Bunting, 9 June 1817, MMS, North America Correspondence, Box 1.

<sup>25</sup> *Kingston Gazette*, 18 Jan. 1817; *New Brunswick Courier*, 18 and 25 Sept., and 2 Oct. 1819.

<sup>26</sup> Black to Tarn, 8 Nov. 1813, BFBS, Home Correspondence; *Acadian Recorder*, 4 Dec. 1813; Bromley to Burder, 21 June 1816, CCWM, Correspondence, Continent of America, 1799-1836, Folder 5, No. 8.

<sup>27</sup> MacLean to Jackson, 11 Feb. 1825, BFBS, Foreign Correspondence, 1825 (94).

the proposed auxiliary in St. John's apparently led the Anglican, Methodist, and Congregational clergymen there to abandon their projected society.<sup>28</sup>

In many instances the novelty of ladies' associations helped to attract the subscriptions of reticent contributors. Mrs. MacDonald would have been willing to enlist the aid of male associates to collect contributions in the scattered settlements of the Miramichi River, but had to forgo this assistance. "To send a man of any kind, will not answer", she explained to Secretary C. F. Roenneberg in 1822, "— they take it as an affront, when they hear that some of the ladies call, in general, for the don[atio]ns or sub[scriptio]ns."<sup>29</sup> Besides the novelty of active female participation, the Bible Society was one of the earlier associations to provide women with scope for public service. Though the women of the Miramichi were in general too absorbed in domestic and pioneering routine to match Mrs. MacDonald's devotion to the cause, the more leisured ladies of urban and older settled communities began to surmount the frustrations of their circumscribed opportunities through meticulous attention to bible distribution, missionary collections, inspection of charity schools, and similar activities.<sup>30</sup>

Most important for its success in the 1810's, public-spirited colonists supported the Bible Society because they believed it could fill a spiritual and educational void through the wide distribution of scriptures. The paucity of regular church services in small communities and the lack of elementary schools invested the bible with important cultural possibilities. According to David Rowland, Anglican missionary at St. John's, the isolated outports of Newfoundland needed copies of the bible because the people were "in a deplorable Situation, destitute of the means of grace & literally as Sheep without a Shepherd".<sup>31</sup> For this reason, Lieutenant Vicars regarded the attention of the Bible Society to Newfoundland as "an Act of true Philanthropy".<sup>32</sup> Similarly Lieutenant-Governor Ainslie was acutely aware of the educational value of the scriptures amongst the Highlanders in Cape Breton. Apart from the several hundred people in Sydney and Arichat,

... the remaining part of the population live on lots of land, which they clear of wood, and are bringing under cultivation, of these at least three thousand are Scottish Highlanders, mostly young, under the age of 12: who are precluded from receiving Instructions by the great distance most of them are from a Schoolmaster as well as the severity of the Winter, which very

<sup>28</sup> Enclosure, Vicars to Tarn, 26 Sept. 1816, BFBS, Home Correspondence; Cubit to Committee, 20 Dec. 1817, MMS, North America Correspondence, Box 1. Sabine reported the failure could be attributed to economic distress in the colony. Sabine to Burder, 31 July 1817, CCWM, Correspondence, Continent of America, 1799-1836, Folder 2, No. 43.

<sup>29</sup> Mrs. MacDonald to Roenneberg, 7 Aug. 1822. BFBS, Foreign Correspondence, 1822 (162).

<sup>30</sup> Mrs. MacDonald to Roenneberg, 21 Nov. 1822, *ibid.*, 1823 (10); *Kingston Chronicle*, 11 Jan. 1822. By 1826 the Montreal Auxiliary Bible Society had ladies associations in 25 districts. Lunn to Morley, 23 Nov. 1826, MMS, North America Correspondence, Box 5.

<sup>31</sup> Rowland to Owen, 22 Dec. 1812, BFBS, Home Correspondence.

<sup>32</sup> Vicars to Seeley, 9 June 1815, *ibid.*

frequently prevents any communication. Thus situated . . . bibles might be distributed with much benefit, among the heads of families, who would convey to their children instruction by the only mode which at present is open to them.<sup>33</sup>

On the mainland of Nova Scotia, in the north-central area of the province, the eccentric but well-meaning Anglican clergyman, Henry Hayden, discerned a critical need for bibles amongst the new settlers. He claimed that “a copy of the scriptures Judiciously distributed is a treasure of great value to the poor Emigrant who has many miles to travel to hear the Word of God and perhaps none of the family can attend divine service *regularly* as they generally want good cloathing and the Winters here are *intensely cold*.”<sup>34</sup>

The story was the same in Upper Canada. Active supporters of the Bible Society there solicited large supplies of scriptures from the secretary in London, to be distributed amongst the settlers, “Either for Love, or Money, or both”.<sup>35</sup> Robert MacKay explained that in the spiritually destitute Midland District, “the Inhabitants though disposed to attend public Worship, are often disappointed, and obliged to spend their Sabbath at home. Books suitable for reading on those Days are therefore peculiarly needed by many Families, and none can be so proper as the Bible itself.”<sup>36</sup> Without doubt, the bible, in a variety of languages, acted as the ‘reader’ of British North America, both in and out of the classroom.

Although the widening influence of the Bible Society did not necessarily depend on the formation of local associations, beginning in 1810, auxiliaries of the Bible Society and their branches proliferated throughout the urban centres and country towns of the British American colonies, spreading from the more culturally advanced Nova Scotia to Lower Canada in 1812, Upper Canada in 1816, Prince Edward Island in 1817, New Brunswick in 1819, the Red River colony in 1820, and Cape Breton in 1824. Such a rapid expansion proved difficult to sustain, and branches in rural areas such as the Annapolis valley often had an ephemeral existence, as did those in areas like Charlottetown which lacked a mature social structure, or like Quebec where sufficient English middle class influence was wanting.

Generally the auxiliaries resolved to contribute towards both local and foreign objectives. It was the small and scattered hamlets dotting the colonial countryside which provided the older, more settled areas with the scope for local missionary activity. Wherever possible in these cases the local associations decided against indiscriminate and gratuitous distribution, and instead sold their consignments of scriptures to their members, returning

<sup>33</sup> Ainslie to Teignmouth, 13 Mar. 1817, *ibid*.

<sup>34</sup> Hayden to Teignmouth, 25 July 1823, BFBS, Foreign Correspondence, 1823 (212). The Edinburgh Bible Society equipped many poor emigrants leaving Scotland with copies of the sacred scriptures. 9th Report, 1818, p. 178.

<sup>35</sup> Brick to Tarn, 12 June 1818, BFBS, Home Correspondence.

<sup>36</sup> MacKay to Secretary, 1 Aug. 1817, *ibid*.

the proceeds to the parent society, and depending on the members to give their purchased copies to the poor.<sup>37</sup> Domestic missionary aims were not restricted to the quantitative ambition of placing a copy of the bible in every home for the altruistic purpose of kindling the flame of true religion. Indeed, some colonial promoters openly espoused a political aim for the Bible Society: it might contribute towards keeping the colonies British and loyal to the imperial connection.<sup>38</sup> "In a political light", Ainslie remarked in reference to the provision of Gaelic bibles by the society, "it is of much advantage, by keeping up, by means of their language, a love for the Mother Country, which remains with a Highlander longer than any nation, with whom I have ever had intercourse, in three quarters of the Globe."<sup>39</sup>

Whatever the reason, this concern for supplying isolated, less fortunate settlements with sacred scriptures represented only one facet of the missionary aims of the local bible associations. In addition to the satisfying of local needs, the Bible Society awakened in the colonists an interest in the evangelicizing of distant, heathen lands. Some of the colonial societies displayed a sympathetic attitude to those wider aims from an early date. It was accepted policy of the parent society that half of the subscriptions from auxiliaries overseas would be transferred to its general fund and the other half returned to the auxiliaries in the form of copies of the scriptures for sale in the local communities. While this was general practice, the auxiliary in the smug commercial port of Liverpool relinquished three-quarters of its subscriptions to the parent society in 1818 "as the demand for the Holy Scriptures in this County, is not now so great as it was before the formation of Bible Societies in Nova Scotia, and *this* Society is unwilling to weaken the Funds of the Parent Society and obstruct its great design in sending the Word of God to the Heathen, & those who have not enjoyed the light of the Gospel like this Colony".<sup>40</sup> The following year the same auxiliary resolved to contribute its total subscription of £50 to the society "by requiring no returns [bibles], it being our earnest wish that our little Funds should go to aid the supplying the wants of those who are more destitute of the Word of Life".<sup>41</sup> More notable was the bible society at the sophisticated little town of Fredericton, founded with the express intention of remitting the total subscriptions and donations for the use of the parent society, "The design of the Association being merely to cast in its mite to the funds of the Bible Society for its general purposes."<sup>42</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Payzant, Barry, and Grieve to Tarn, 6 Jan. 1818, *ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> British school systems were encouraged also for this reason. G. W. SPRAGGE, "Monitorial Schools in the Canadas, 1810-1845", unpublished D.Paed. thesis, University of Toronto, 1935, p. 276. Bible Society supporters were keen to encourage the Wesleyan Missionary Society to retain its interest in Upper Canada for the same reason. Lamprey to Wilberforce, 1 Jan. 1821, MMS, North America Correspondence, Box 3; Lunn to Taylor, 3 Feb. 1824, *ibid.*, Box 4.

<sup>39</sup> Ainslie to Teignmouth, 13 Mar. 1817, BFBS, Home Correspondence.

<sup>40</sup> Payzant, Barry, and Grieve to Tarn, 6 Jan. 1818, *ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Barry to Thornton, 5 Apr. 1819, *ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> McClintock to Tarn, 28 Mar. 1820, *ibid.*



Though the colonists' desire to contribute to the spread of the bible to the four quarters of the globe characterized the foreign objectives of local associations, the other aim of the Bible Society in the colonies, and particularly in Lower Canada, was to reach the Roman Catholics. On the surface, the concern of the Bible Society's supporters to include Catholics within the orbit of bible distribution was not a rabid Protestant scheme designed to encourage conversion. Liberal-minded Protestants placed learning above proselytism, and, in the case of the French Catholics, language above assimilation. Accordingly scriptures were made available in the version by Isaac Le Maistre de Sacy which was approved by some Roman Catholic bishops and priests. As the secretary of the Miramichi Ladies Bible Association suggested with respect to Catholics in 1825, “surely it is much better to have the word of God, even in their own Version, than not have it at all”.<sup>43</sup>

Nevertheless an undistorted impression of the Protestant attitude towards Catholics cannot be gained solely from Bible Society sources. The members of these associations often had more than one axe to grind, and few bible societies in the major communities in the 1820's were unaccompanied by branches of the Religious Tract Society (1799), whose more controversial aim was to distribute vast quantities of Protestant propaganda. In the first year of its operations, the Auxiliary Religious Tract Society of Montreal circulated 6000 tracts throughout the surrounding countryside, the majority of which can be assumed to have been anti-Catholic in character.<sup>44</sup> Clergyman of every denomination reported the distribution of French “tracts” along with the scriptures.<sup>45</sup> Ten years before any local auxiliaries of the Tract Society were formed, the influence of the parent society was strongly felt in Nova Scotia, where in 1812 McGregor received in one shipment 5000 Gaelic and 1100 English tracts, which included sermons, homilies, and practical religious instruction. Indeed, he claimed that the first regularly-organized Bible Society, that in Truro, was “partly a Bible, and partly a Tract Society”. “As to the utility of tracts”, he reported with a clear appreciation of their purposes, “I can give no accounts of conversions occasioned by them; but I have no doubt of their great utility.”<sup>46</sup> In the early part of the century, the narrower, and ever present sectarian approach was never directed exclusively against Catholics. While it foreshadowed Protestant-Catholic antagonisms, clergymen in this generation could not resist the temptation to disseminate their own sectarian doctrines whether to Catholics or Protestants of another denomination. When, for example, one of the Methodist missionaries in Newfoundland supplied schools with editions of

<sup>43</sup> Mrs. Thomson to Jackson, 25 Dec. 1824, BFBS, Foreign Correspondence, 1825 (51).

<sup>44</sup> *Montreal Herald*, 19 Oct. 1822.

<sup>45</sup> For example, Lusher to Taylor, 12 July 1819, MMS, North America Correspondence, Box 2.

<sup>46</sup> PATTERSON, *op. cit.*, pp. 396-7.

scriptures from the Bible Society, he automatically accompanied the gift with Methodist catechisms.<sup>47</sup>

In the light of these activities, the aims of some individual agents and auxiliaries were not therefore as “unexceptionable” as might be supposed. In any case, Protestants knew the reason for the objection entertained by the Catholic church to the distribution of scriptures in the vernacular; the fact that this knowledge did not diminish Protestant activity is in itself evidence of an anti-Catholic approach. Under the convenient umbrella of the Bible Society, members could adopt one of two approaches to the Catholic population: they either worked through the Catholic priests or they did not. John Lamprey, Anglican secretary of the auxiliary at Kingston, chose the former course, claiming that otherwise “it could not answer any good purpose to distribute them for the Priests whenever they find them will take them away. So that I have decided on giving them only thro’ the medium of Priests.”<sup>48</sup> Lamprey met with some success in his endeavours. The bishop of Rosina (*in partibus infidelium*), Alexander Macdonell, the first Catholic bishop in Upper Canada, did not find the French and Gaelic versions distributed by the society especially obnoxious, and one of the priests in Kingston was reported not only to have approved of the books and circulated them amongst his adherents, but “what is far better — he exhorts his Hearers to *read* them . . .”<sup>49</sup> The Kingston Auxiliary was primarily interested in combatting the “religious turpitude” of the lower orders of poor Irish immigrants and introducing them to the greater freedom of choice characteristic of the colonial environment.

Bound in the shackles of an overbearing superstition, imposed upon them by the unhappy policy of their Priesthood, the radiant beams of the ever blessed Gospel have never shone upon them, its bright pages have never been opened to their view, and the most entertaining, the most instructive history in the world, is only known to them by the partial recital of its purport. It must then be a delightful task to seek out from time to time, such objects of your [Bible Society] benevolence, and we may with confidence look for the happiest results. Freed from the restraints imposed upon them in their own country, here, as accountable beings, they may read and decide for themselves.<sup>50</sup>

Cooperation between Protestants and Catholics was difficult to achieve in Quebec, the metropolitan centre of the colonies, a situation already thoroughly aggravated by the neurotic anti-Catholicism of Jacob Mountain, the Anglican bishop. In order to attain their objectives, supporters of the Bible Society appear to have distributed the scriptures directly to the Cath-

<sup>47</sup> Burt to Watson, 1 Mar. 1822, MMS, North America Correspondence, Box 3.

<sup>48</sup> Lamprey to Tarn, 21 Feb. 1820, BFBS, Home Correspondence.

<sup>49</sup> Lamprey to Tarn, 12 Jan. and 8 May 1820, *ibid.*; Le Mothe to Lamprey, 7 Mar. 1821, enclosed in Lamprey to Tarn, 12 Aug. 1820, BFBS, Foreign Correspondence, 1821 (42d). The Pictou Auxiliary extended its efforts to French Catholics in Cape Breton, Prince Edward Island, and the Magdalene Islands, through the agency of the priests. Extract Dawson to Ker, 10 Nov. 1823, enclosed in Ker to Hughes, 16 Jan. 1824, BFBS, Foreign Correspondence, 1824 (9).

<sup>50</sup> *Kingston Chronicle*, 7 Apr. 1820.

olic laity which naturally led to accounts of the priests burning the books.<sup>51</sup> George Spratt claimed to have secured the approval of the Catholic priests for editions of the British and Foreign Bible Society — a doubtful achievement, but one which he grandly interpreted as portending the downfall and ruin of popery.<sup>52</sup> Chances for the success of the venture were not improved when John de Putron, a French-speaking Methodist missionary, took it upon himself to serve as Bible Society agent amongst the *Canadiens*.<sup>53</sup> De Putron was manifestly interested in converting French Canadians to Protestantism, and he significantly remarked that this objective might one day be achieved through a conscientious distribution of the scriptures and “other useful books”.<sup>54</sup> Nothing contributed more to accusations of sectarianism levelled against the Bible Society by its opponents than the central involvement of evangelical Protestant clergymen as colporteurs.

Though Quebec displayed signs of controversy, Montreal represented a more aggressive, commercial community where the Bible Society’s agents were determined to seek a return on their investment in French scriptures. Here, however, the Catholic priesthood was also more enterprising, and, sensing a need to provide an alternative, they countered the initial attempts of the Bible Society to distribute French testaments by taking the copies out of circulation and producing selections from the Vulgate for the members of their congregations who were partial to reading.<sup>55</sup> After the formation of the Montreal Auxiliary in 1820, the distribution of the De Sacy version, according to Bible Society sources, reached 1000 copies a year, many circulated by the priests themselves.<sup>56</sup> William Lunn, the Methodist secretary, attributed this success in part to the novelty of bible reading even amongst the priests. A rural curé in Lower Canada confessed to him in 1824 that “he had *never before seen a New Testament complete*, but merely a part of one of the Evangelists, published in Montreal by the *Seminaire*”.<sup>57</sup> Bible reading, in its own way, thus contributed to the thirst for knowledge, so much a part of the intellectual awakening in the colonies at this time. Indeed, some members of the Montreal Auxiliary claimed that their slow progress amongst the French Catholics could be attributed more to the difficulty of arousing interest in bibles amongst an illiterate population than to the opposition of the priests: “that portion of our population appears to be almost inaccessible, as perhaps we do not exaggerate the general destitution of education when we say that not more than one in a hundred

<sup>51</sup> Spratt to Tarn, 22 May 1813, BFBS, Home Correspondence; De Putron to Committee, Nov. 1816, *Methodist Magazine*, XL, 1817, 392.

<sup>52</sup> Spratt to Tracey, 20 May 1814, CCWM, Correspondence, Continent of America, 1799-1836, Folder 8, No. 49.

<sup>53</sup> De Putron to Tarn, 12 June 1820, BFBS, Home Correspondence.

<sup>54</sup> De Putron to [Secretary], 1 Aug. 1820, MMS, North America Correspondence, Box 2.

<sup>55</sup> Easton to Tarn, 3 Nov. 1815, BFBS, Home Correspondence.

<sup>56</sup> Lunn to Roenneberg, 2 July 1823, BFBS, Foreign Correspondence, 1823 (167).

<sup>57</sup> Lunn to Roenneberg, 12 June 1824, *ibid.*, 1824 (125).

is able to read".<sup>58</sup> In these circumstances it is hardly surprising that French laymen, like their English counterparts, were willing to support the charitable efforts of the British and Canadian School Society — colonial offspring of the sister society of the Bible Society — as a means of combatting the general problem of colonial illiteracy.<sup>59</sup>

Though the Montreal Auxiliary, therefore, tended to work through the priests, its members did not allow themselves to be deterred by the opposition of the Catholic bishop. In 1825 the redoubtable bishop of Telmesse (Montreal) J. J. Lartigue declared on authority that De Sacy's new testament was an invention of the Jansenists and refused, on the basis of the recent papal encyclical *Ubi Primum*, to approve of the work of the Bible Society. For this reason, Lunn and his committee decided to bypass the bishop and give a copy of the scriptures to each of the seventy-five Catholic priests in their district, trusting that some parish leaders would want to enlighten their parishioners for purposes of increasing literacy as much as overcoming spiritual destitution.<sup>60</sup>

In fact, the principal objections raised by Catholic bishops to the aims and activities of the Bible Society were shared by Anglican bishops in the colonies and based on the unalterable opinion of high-church establishmentarians that the scriptures were of limited or distorted value unless accompanied by the church's teachings and interpretations — in the case of the Catholics, the writings of the Fathers, in the case of Anglicans, the Book of Common Prayer. Because the antipathies of the past and circumstances of the present dictated that the Bible Society should necessarily assume a Protestant character, the failure of the church of England to support the non-denominational organization constituted the most significant divisive force affecting the fortunes of the Bible Society. In the colonies the lack of official Anglican support reflected precedents already established in England.

Because they dealt with religious matters, bible societies were inherently objects of sectarian controversy. At the beginning Anglicans joined the non-sectarian branches and the emergence of a united front, irrespective of denominational affiliations, offered a pleasing prospect to many colonists. As one observer commented on the Bible Society at Ernest Town (Bath):

To see Christians of all the various sects, whose differences have, in former times, kindled the flames of persecution and war now exerting themselves in one grand object of benevolence, as brethren of the same family, has a tendency to make men of all denominations think more of the essential principles of their common faith and less of their sectarian peculiarities,

<sup>58</sup> Burns and Christmas to Jackson, 16 Nov. 1824, *ibid.*, 1824(225); on illiteracy see also DWIGHT, *op. cit.*, p. 63; Lusher to Secretaries, 2 June 1818, MMS, North America Correspondence, Box 1.

<sup>59</sup> SPRAGGE, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

<sup>60</sup> Lunn to [BFBS], 10 Aug. 1825, BFBS, Foreign Correspondence, 1825 (90-92). For the papal stand on the Bible Society, see *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, II, p. 545.

to soften their asperities, to subdue their prejudices, to wear away their bigotry and intolerance and diffuse evangelical candour and charity. It is the happiest scheme ever devised, since the introduction of Christianity, to liberalize and harmonize the Christian world.<sup>61</sup>

Nevertheless, Anglican goodwill and cooperation did not last. The tendency of the Anglican hierarchy in the colonies to emulate the English high-church opposition to everything emanating from Exeter Hall soon produced the same hostile spirit towards the British and Foreign Bible Society in the colonies as in the mother country, and contributed to the polarization of parties within the church of England.<sup>62</sup> When John Inglis warned the Anglicans of Nova Scotia not to participate in the Bible Society, that society's Pictou stalwart, James McGregor, predicted that many churchmen “will not obey that warning, because their hearts are full of sympathy for the poor Christians in Europe, who cannot procure a Bible, and for the poor heathen, who know not that there is a Bible, and they contribute, ‘according as God hath prospered them’. Many others will choose to follow the dictates of their spiritual guides, and leave their fellow creatures, without making any effort for their relief.”<sup>63</sup>

Churchmen of independent outlook had to decide whether they would support the Bible Society as well as the district committees of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge established to distribute Anglican sectarian literature. Laymen were often able to patronize both, and thus combine loyalty to their church with the maintenance of amicable relations with non-Anglicans at an unofficial level.<sup>64</sup> Nor did this Anglican support for the Bible Society simply represent local expediency. One Anglican controversialist who subscribed to the Bible Society considered it a superior moral institution to the narrowly sectarian SPCK, because he believed that the church liturgy should not “be elevated to a higher distinction than the self-interpreting energies of the Holy Scriptures . . . although the Book of Common Prayer may be useful, it is not a *sine qua non*”. He felt that the official pressure exerted on members of the church of England to patronize the SPCK was “totally Anti-Protestant”.<sup>65</sup>

Though the laity could support whatever societies they wished, the clergy were confronted with a dilemma. In the diocese of Nova Scotia, where church establishment was the most successful, ministers were under indict-

<sup>61</sup> *Kingston Gazette*, 30 June 1818; MacKay to Secretary, 1 Aug. 1817, BFBS, Home Correspondence. For a favourable view of the principles of the Bible Society, see also *New Brunswick Courier*, 23 Jan. 1819.

<sup>62</sup> Graham to Tarn, 8 Aug. 1814, BFBS, Home Correspondence.

<sup>63</sup> PATTERSON, *op. cit.*, p. 387; *Acadian Recorder*, 11 Dec. 1813.

<sup>64</sup> The violent opposition of official Anglicanism to the Bible Society meant that church of England contributors often wished to remain anonymous and therefore non-Anglican societies found it more difficult to achieve the desired respectability necessary to their survival almost as much as local financial support. Pope to Mally, 9 Jan. 1828, MMS, North America Correspondence, Box 6.

<sup>65</sup> SUTARAP, *Montreal Herald*, 8 Jan. 1825.

ment not to cooperate with the non-sectarian societies.<sup>66</sup> Although the bishop of Quebec did not make a similar pronouncement on the issue, he personally opposed the Bible Society.<sup>67</sup> Apart from these episcopal pressures, many church of England clergymen who had displayed an initial enthusiasm for the British and Foreign Bible Society were forced to complete a *volte-face* when district committees of the SPCK were formed in the colonies. This was the case with David Rowland, minister at St. John's, who had begun to correspond with the parent bible society in 1812. Two years later a district committee of the SPCK was established in Newfoundland and Rowland dissolved his brief association with the rival, non-sectarian body in 1816.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, George Spratt, who was instrumental in creating a largely Congregational branch of the Bible Society at Quebec in 1812, took orders in the church of England ten years later, and, believing that his salary depended on the bounty of the SPCK (which does not say much for the reputation of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel), he severed his connections with the Bible Society and looked forward to establishing a district committee of the SPCK in his Upper Canadian mission.<sup>69</sup> Dependence on the SPG, and that society's demand in 1821 that its missionaries confine their distribution of religious literature to those editions on the catalogues of the SPG and SPCK, decisively influenced the position adopted by the local Anglican clergy.<sup>70</sup> The leader of the Miramichi Female Bible Association reported to a secretary of the Bible Society in 1822 that the local Anglican minister, Samuel Bacon, dared not "further the views of our Society on account of *that*, which mostly supports him" — and this despite the fact that Bacon's brother in London was an articulate supporter of the Bible Society.<sup>71</sup>

An entirely different situation obtained in the Hudson's Bay territories where the minister of the Church Missionary Society, John West, free from SPG or local episcopal control and a member of the parent bible society, established an auxiliary at the Red River settlement in 1820.<sup>72</sup> West sub-

<sup>66</sup> John Inglis to the Inhabitants of Nova Scotia, 24 Nov. 1813, *Acadian Recorder*, 11 Dec. 1813.

<sup>67</sup> West to Jackson, 15 Nov. 1824, BFBS, Foreign Correspondence, 1825 (18). Mountain was noted for his hostility to dissenters in general. Osgood to Burder, 14 Feb. 1814, CCWM, Correspondence, Continent of America, 1799-1836, Folder 8, No. 56. His son, rector at Quebec, preached against the Bible Society. See West to Tarn, 11 June 1824, BFBS, Foreign Correspondence, 1824 (123).

<sup>68</sup> Rowland to Tarn, 22 Aug. 1816, BFBS, Home Correspondence; *Royal Gazette and Newfoundland Advertiser*, 29 Sept. 1814 and 21 Dec. 1815.

<sup>69</sup> *Twentieth Report* of the London Missionary Society, 1814, p. 518; Spratt to Tarn, 22 May 1813 and 28 Aug. 1822, BFBS, Home Correspondence.

<sup>70</sup> SPG Minutes, 16 Feb. 1821, Archives of the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, London (hereafter SPG) Journal 33, p. 37, and 20 Feb. 1824, SPG Journal 34, pp. 315-16. John Inglis, for one, certainly suggested the SPG regulation restraining missionaries from distributing literature not on the catalogue of the SPCK. Inglis to Stanser, 8 Jan. 1821, SPG C/CAN/NS.9, No. 26.

<sup>71</sup> Mrs. MacDonald to Roenneberg, 7 Aug. 1822, BFBS, Foreign Correspondence, 1822 (162). For an example of strong opposition to official Anglican attitude to the Bible Society by a SPG missionary, see Hayden to Teignmouth, 25 July 1823, *ibid.*, 1823 (212), and Hayden to Brandram, 2 Sept. 1825, *ibid.*, 1825 (212).

<sup>72</sup> West to Committee, 18 May 1820, BFBS, Home Correspondence.

sequently undertook a visitation of the auxiliaries throughout British North America on behalf of the British and Foreign Bible Society. During his tour West received no support from Anglican ministers.

It is painful to remark that no Missionary from the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel stood with me on the platform at any public meeting, to advocate the cause of the British and Foreign Bible Society in either of the British provinces, or gave his testimony publicly in favour of the Institution; nor does the Bishop of Nova Scotia, or the Bishop of Quebec, patronise or encourage the formation of Bible Societies or Associations in their respective dioceses.<sup>73</sup>

West's claim is revealing, because it indicates how effectively the SPG and the bishops had by the mid 1820's enforced conformity on the clergy. Resident agents of the Bible Society in the Canadas also regretted "that a large majority of the Clergy of the Church of England in both Provinces, is prejudiced against the Bible Society, and indeed will not unite with members of other churches to effect any benevolent object".<sup>74</sup>

The Bible Society did, however, initially arouse more direct Anglican clerical support in Upper Canada than elsewhere. The first Bible Society, at Niagara, had as its chairman the local SPG missionary, Robert Addison, and it was noted for "the liberality of its plan" and its attention to the needs of the township schools.<sup>75</sup> Even John Strachan, the bigoted rector of York, became an early sympathizer of the British and Foreign Bible Society, though he objected to the society entrusting its agency in the Canadas to a Presbyterian Seceder, Francis Dick, rather than to a leading Anglican or Kirk clergyman.<sup>76</sup> At that period before the establishment of local auxiliaries, Strachan refrained from forming a connection with the parent bible society, claiming that "No Clergyman enjoying the Societys [SPG's] Benevolence can with Propriety become a Subscriber to any Bible Society which excludes the Common Prayer book".<sup>77</sup> In 1816, immediately following the inauguration of the non-sectarian auxiliary at Niagara, he Society which excludes the Common Prayer book."<sup>77</sup> In 1816, immediately auxiliary at Kingston. This hybrid agency was designed to secure the best of both worlds by attracting members of all denominations, but earmarking one quarter of the subscriptions for the purchase and distribution of Anglican prayer books.<sup>78</sup> Local non-Anglicans, however, were not impressed with the scheme. One observer thought the plan invidious and that the Anglicans ought to be content with their clergy reserves "without wishing to tax the

<sup>73</sup> Journal of a Mission from the British and Foreign Bible Society to the Provinces of British North America, by the Rev. John West, BFBS, 25th Annual Report, 1829, p. 100.

<sup>74</sup> Lunn to Jackson, 23 Feb. 1825, BFBS, Foreign Correspondence, 1825 (90).

<sup>75</sup> *Montreal Herald*, 28 Dec. 1816; SECEDER, *Kingston Gazette*, 8 Feb. 1817.

<sup>76</sup> Strachan to Teignmouth, 1 Nov. 1812, G. W. SPRAGGE (ed.), *The John Strachan Letter Book, 1812-1834* (Toronto, 1946), pp. 24-25.

<sup>77</sup> Strachan to Mountain, 10 Nov. 1817, *ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>78</sup> Address by Strachan to subscribers and contributors to the Bible and Common Prayer Book Society of Upper Canada, 3 Dec. 1816, *Montreal Herald*, 18 Jan. 1817.

liberality of dissenters, towards the promotion of episcopal prayer book". Although the pioneer bible society in Upper Canada at Niagara also eventually adopted Strachan's system, fearing that it would otherwise lose the interest of "the civil, ecclesiastical, military and naval authorities of the Province", the Midland District Auxiliary Bible Society at Ernest Town was formed in opposition to this anglicanizing tendency and tried to maintain a non-sectarian character until it was gobbled up by the Kingston Auxiliary in 1825.<sup>79</sup> Strachan's scheme proved to be unworkable; in 1820 the York and Kingston societies dissolved, each splitting into a branch of the SPCK and a branch of the Bible Society. Both the SPCK in London and the Anglican bishop of Quebec pressed for an unadulterated district committee of the SPCK, and Lieutenant-Governor Maitland believed that the objects of the two organizations were more likely to be achieved through division than unity.<sup>80</sup> Interestingly enough, the Anglican clergymen in the two towns openly supported both auxiliaries and continued to do so in Kingston despite more vigilant Anglicanism under Bishop Charles Stewart.<sup>81</sup> But the Upper Canadian bible societies suffered a marked decline in the mid 1820's as a result of continued Anglican exclusivism and a lack of British Wesleyan influence.

Few communities were indeed sufficiently populous or wealthy to support two societies with somewhat similar aims.<sup>82</sup> Non-Anglican societies suffered more in these circumstances, because the Anglican bodies continued to receive substantial financial assistance from England. Moreover, promoters of auxiliaries of the Bible Society often reported that in those areas where they had been preceded by the formation of branches of the SPCK such as Saint John, the contributions of the "more opulent citizens" had already been monopolized.<sup>83</sup> Sometimes benevolent undertakings fell prey to prevalent social habits, as in 1818 when the lieutenant-governor of Cape Breton attributed the failure of an earlier projected bible society at Sydney

<sup>79</sup> A DISSENER, *Kingston Gazette*, 1 Feb. 1817; SECEDER, *ibid.*, 8 Feb. 1817; A FREE THINKER, *ibid.*, 15 Feb. 1817; and *ibid.*, 8 Mar. 1817; MacKay to Secretary, 1 Aug. 1817, BFBS, Home Correspondence. At Ernest Town a democratic approach was described by Anglican clergyman, John Wilson, who would have preferred affiliation with the SPCK, "but the dissenters outvoted the few churchmen and excluded the prayer book". Letter of Wilson, 1 May 1817, SPG Journal 31, p. 279; *Kingston Chronicle*, 4 and 11 Feb. 1825.

<sup>80</sup> *Kingston Chronicle*, 21 and 28 Jan., and 7 Apr. 1820; Lamprey to Tarn, 12 Jan. 1820, BFBS, Home Correspondence; 11th Report of the Edinburgh Bible Society, 1820, p. 105.

<sup>81</sup> *Upper Canada Gazette and Weekly Register*, 5 June 1823. Kingston's leading church of England clergyman, G. O. Stuart, was still on the committee of the Kingston Auxiliary in 1825. *Kingston Chronicle*, 11 Feb. 1825.

<sup>82</sup> In Newfoundland, with three sectarian societies functioning in the 1810's — auxiliaries of the SPCK, MMS, and LMS — it was the LMS, the Congregational church being the weakest of the three, that found such competition threatened its existence. Hyde to Burder, 25 July 1814, CCWM, Correspondence, Continent of America, 1799-1836, Folder 1, No. 20; Hyde to Hardcastle, 4 Oct. 1815, *ibid.*, Folder 2, No. 29.

<sup>83</sup> Burns to Teignmouth, 20 Jan. 1820, BFBS, Home Correspondence.



to "the cheapness of ardent Spirits, and the facilities afforded to barter them [bibles] for Rum".<sup>84</sup>

Despite the rivalry for support and subscriptions, a degree of sympathy and cooperation existed between liberal Anglicans and dissenters in the promotion of enterprises that would benefit society at large. This fellow-feeling prevented the emergence of a united Anglican front which high churchmen tried to create by their vociferous campaign to discredit the non-sectarian organizations.<sup>85</sup> What the colonists could not control, however, was the high-church interference of the English hierarchy in colonial affairs. The archbishop of Canterbury, Charles Manners Sutton, did not hesitate to caution the colonial secretary, Earl Bathurst, against supporting evangelical or unofficial Anglican societies. The high-church primate also gave his unsolicited advice to colonial governors concerning the moral and educational societies in their jurisdictions which should be patronized by the representative of the temporal head of the church.<sup>86</sup> In the end, however, the Anglican hierarchy found it impossible to stem the emergence of an evangelical wing within the colonial church, and evangelical clergymen were beginning by the end of the 1820's to display a modicum of ecumenism by unobtrusively lending their moral support to the Bible Society.<sup>87</sup>

In the 1820's a periodic decline, typical in the course of most voluntary associations, affected the auxiliaries in British North America of the British and Foreign Bible Society. This decline in interest and support for the Bible Society illustrates other significant features of colonial society. By the early 1820's branches in British North America seemed to be conspicuous more for their collapse than their continued proliferation.<sup>88</sup> The concurrent inability of the auxiliaries to maintain their early, zealous levels of annual subscriptions was explained variously by local spokesmen. Few individuals pleaded that colonial society suffered sufficiently from poverty to explain the regrettable situation. George Baker, secretary to the Midland District auxiliary, complained of real distress in Upper Canada, but in his attempt to account for the lack of contributions he touched on the more vital problem concerning the lack of hard cash which the colonies suffered as primary producers. "In a country abounding with poor and in which few, very few are beyond want", Baker speculated, "and where a scarcity of money is always felt, it is not strange that a Society depending entirely for its support on principles of benevolence, should in a degree fail for want of its accustomed supplies."<sup>89</sup>

<sup>84</sup> Ainslie to Teignmouth, 20 May 1818, *ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> Graham to Tarn, 8 Aug. 1814, *ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> Manners Sutton to Bathurst, 7 and 9 Apr. 1818, Bathurst Papers, British Museum Loan 57/11, Nos. 1303, 1305; Dalhousie to Manners Sutton, 7 Nov. 1816, Public Archives of Canada, Dalhousie Papers, Letter Book, 1816-24.

<sup>87</sup> Paterson to Brandram, 14 Mar. 1829, BFBS, Foreign Correspondence, 1829 (2) 11.

<sup>88</sup> Robson to Tarn, 21 Mar. 1822, BFBS, Home Correspondence.

<sup>89</sup> Baker to Tarn, 25 June 1825, BFBS, Foreign Correspondence, 1825 (147).

It was usual in Nova Scotia, an area particularly hard hit by the post-war depression, to plead shortage of specie and generally to deny the existence of abject poverty. In 1817 Hugh Graham of the Truro Auxiliary ascribed the drop in contributions to the unusually severe deficiency of cash, owing to crop failures. "The country is already exceedingly drained of Money", he explained. "Far from Town Market we have no proper circulation of Cash. At times we may have considerable Sums. By & by after a long while we have none at all. Penny a week Societies those least burthen-some & most productive Institutions are impracticable in our circumstances partly owing to the scattered population & partly to absolute want of pence. Yet the Paupers are very few. People in general have considerable Property And they trade with one another in the way of barter."<sup>90</sup> James McGregor living in a similiar area of Nova Scotia corroborated Graham's statement "that money is scarcely to be found in our bounds and that the most willing among us, is not able to pay his subscription". Nonetheless, McGregor and others like him felt guilty about this situation and tried to make amends by relieving the parent society of the expense of correspondence with the auxiliaries — a suggestion which naturally aroused rather than mollified the concern in London.<sup>91</sup> In the face of such information from overseas the parent society usually suggested the formation of penny-a-week societies to enable members to maintain the level of subscriptions without unduly feeling the pinch. The early success of this scheme in some areas indicated the sagacity of the policy and it became a common feature of the colonial bible societies and other voluntary associations. At Liverpool in 1822, where money too was said to be scarce, the auxiliary's executive claimed to have preserved their society through the gradual payment plan provided by penny-a-week collections.<sup>92</sup>

Apart from a shortage of cash a lack of zeal on the part of the subscribers was blamed for the decline in contributions. This was one of the explanations advanced by the Presbyterian Secessionist minister, James Robson, secretary of the Nova Scotia Bible Society. "The pressure of the times, which is very severe in this Province, may in part account for the smallness of our contributions; but more, I am afraid, must be ascribed to the chilling influence of indifference to the best of causes. Several of our branch Societies contribute very little, and some nothing at all to our funds, of late."<sup>93</sup> The treasurer of the Montreal Auxiliary similarly explained when he remitted what he considered to be an insufficient sum in 1824, "there is not that zeal displayed in the interests of the Society which ought to prevail, & which we should be most happy to see realized."<sup>94</sup> In their references to this indifference to benevolent undertaking, Robson and Ban-

<sup>90</sup> Graham to Tarn, 22 Apr. 1817, BFBS, Home Correspondence.

<sup>91</sup> McGregor to Tarn, 9 Nov. 1821, *ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> Barry to Thornton, 18 Feb. 1822, BFBS, Foreign Correspondence, 1822 (23).

<sup>93</sup> Robson to Tarn, 26 Mar. 1821, BFBS, Home Correspondence.

<sup>94</sup> Bancroft to Tarn, 17 Apr. 1824, *ibid.*

croft in fact touched on one of the major characteristics of the colonial mentality. Colonists much preferred to be the recipients of benevolent and paternal aid from England than to exert themselves to develop their own charitable and humanitarian potentialities. While the Bible Society was not strictly a charity, its universal aims were singularly missionary in character, and the ability and desire to support foreign missions was a sure indication of the growth of a maturing, responsible, albeit culturally chauvinistic, people. But such responses were not encouraged in the colonial environment, and unfortunately for the development of a mature Canada, the colonial mentality constituted a pervasive and debilitating portion of its heritage.

It is also manifest from the fortunes of the Bible Society in this period, as well as those of other voluntary and charitable or educational ventures, that social leadership was lacking in the colonies. Military officers and clergymen, so often responsible for setting these enterprises on foot, tended to come and go, especially those ministers who were themselves employees of English missionary societies. James McGregor's partisan nineteenth-century biographer claimed that the whole business of the Pictou Auxiliary devolved upon McGregor.

In fact it used to be said, that he was the Society. He was clerk and kept any minutes that were kept, — he was secretary and conducted all the correspondence, — he was acting treasurer, receiving the money collected and making all the remittances, — he was distributing agent, and in his own quarter salesman, and often he acted as collector. Besides by his fervent addresses throughout the church, he awakened the liberality of the people.<sup>95</sup>

The tendency of nineteenth-century writers to emphasize the importance of the individual was not inappropriate when applied to leadership in colonial society. Small communities where the majority of settlers were preoccupied with first-generation exploitation of the land also felt very severely the loss of any financially successful, middle-class leader who had reached the point where he was prepared to devote some of his interest, energy, and money to social improvement. The death of Edward Mortimer in 1819, for example, an indisputable leader of Pictou in the 1810's, represented a great loss to the local bible society.<sup>96</sup> The secretary of the Nova Scotia Bible Society aptly summarized this situation in 1824. "It very generally occurs with us that much depends upon the individual exertions of one or two of the Officers of each Society, and when deprived of their services by death, removal, or other causes, their decreased income has immediately indicated how much was to be effected, by well directed zeal and sincerity in the cause."<sup>97</sup>

At the same time, the limited money, interest, and social entrepreneurship available were more willingly directed towards distinctly local charitable

<sup>95</sup> PATTERSON, *op. cit.*, p. 385.

<sup>96</sup> McGregor to Tarn, 9 Nov. 1821, BFBS, Home Correspondence.

<sup>97</sup> Nutting to Brandram, 23 June 1824, BFBS, Foreign Correspondence, 1824 (120).

projects rather than to distant, missionary objectives, such as those represented by the Bible Society. In communities where local improvements were needed, therefore, inhabitants accorded the Bible Society a low priority. Examples abound to elucidate this tendency. The formation of the auxiliary in Montreal was postponed because of the devotion of public charity to the relief of immigrants.<sup>98</sup> Similarly, the citizens of Kingston gave priority to the temporal relief of immigrants through the agency of the Compassionate Society.<sup>99</sup> Many local improvements proved to be as ephemeral as the interest shown in various voluntary associations. But the parochial and diffused nature of colonial society encouraged people to place community above empire. The comments of the shrewd James McGregor are most explicit and revealing on this point. In 1824 he sketched the situation for the benefit of Secretary Steinkopff.

We have also several other objects of importance to advance; as an academy [Pictou Academy] to provide gospel Ministers for this and the neighbouring Provinces; a Domestic Missionary Society for aiding weak, scattered and destitute settlements in obtaining the preaching of the gospel, and sabbath school Societies are beginning among us; and we cannot make people to see the propriety of dividing their little mites among the four objects. Hence I am sorry to say the Bible Society is neglected.<sup>100</sup>

Similarly, as McGregor's comments indicate, denominationalism continued to foster exclusively sectarian societies. The local auxiliaries of the Methodist Missionary Society, mushrooming during this period, provide a good example of this trend. While Methodists tended to be steadfast and active supporters of the Bible Society, they were most vitally concerned with their own sectarian auxiliaries. A rare exception was missionary Duncan McColl, himself an individualistic Methodist, who in his old age as president of the St. Stephen Branch Bible Society felt that the local means were not available to support both Bible Society and Methodist Missionary Society, and on the basis of his own personal preference chose the former.<sup>101</sup>

Bible Society supporters in Nova Scotia, where the venture received its earliest widespread colonial support, seemed to have been acutely aware of the decline in their enterprise well before the parent society took cognizance of it. They blamed their own remissness. Correspondents in the secular press of Halifax in the 1820's argued that the activities of the Bible Society were insufficiently advertised. The papers carried inadequate information and, as one commentator pointed out, the bitter controversy of the early 1810's was to be preferred to a complete hiatus: "indeed we would much rather that they should ring with its merits and demerits, than nothing should be said about it at all".<sup>102</sup> Societies in Nova Scotia were encouraged

<sup>98</sup> Lunn to Tarn, 22 Apr. 1820, BFBS, Home Correspondence.

<sup>99</sup> *Kingston Chronicle*, 7 and 21 Jan. 1820.

<sup>100</sup> McGregor to Steinkopff, 9 July 1824, BFBS, Foreign Correspondence, 1824 (138).

<sup>101</sup> McColl to Committee, 13 Oct. 1824, MMS, North America Correspondence, Box 4.

<sup>102</sup> *Philanthropist*, 17 Feb. 1825.

to look to the more zealous example of their brethren in the more recent New Brunswick field, where ladies' associations and annual subscription sermons by leading clergymen maintained a higher level of interest in the bible.<sup>103</sup> A correspondent from Pictou — possibly McGregor or James Dawson — writing in the *Acadian Recorder* deplored the decline in the enthusiasm for circulating the scriptures and maintained that their moral influence "always terminates in prudent industry and good economy". The indifference to the Bible Society's annual general meetings was unfavourably compared to the public excitement exhibited in meetings of the assembly, the agricultural society, and school societies. In his comments on the abundance of zeal for schemes adopted solely "for the internal improvement of the country", this correspondent criticized the lead taken by the provincial clergy.

Will it be alleged that Bible Societies are of inferior importance, or that they possess no attraction! . . . Happily we have many pious and intelligent clergymen, men who do much to promote the moral improvement of the country; yet without adverting to any denomination, may be generally charged with a deficiency of duty, as it respects Bible Societies. While some of these devote much of their time in prosecuting agricultural measures, they apparently overlook the interest of Bible associations, and are seemingly reluctant to remind the public of their inestimable advantages.<sup>104</sup>

Another newspaper correspondent explained the decline of the Nova Scotia Bible Society in allegorical terms.

The bright day is often succeeded by a long night of darkness, and the Sun himself is subject to an Eclipse: The most prosperous Institution may suffer a reverse of fortune. Some of its best friends have left the Colony, and some of them have been overshadowed with that "night in which no man can work" . . . the citizens of Halifax have never yet received this Institution in a light suitable to its excellence and importance . . . A few active and influential persons in Halifax would be of essential service to the cause in general, and could not fail to impart fresh vigour to the *Branch Societies*, some of which are in a languishing condition; their holy fires are not altogether extinguished, yet, for want of trimming, the light is scarcely discernible.<sup>105</sup>

In the 1820's, however, there were special circumstances connected with the British and Foreign Bible Society which led to colonial as well as international suspicion and disenchantment, and which from the London viewpoint appeared to be contributing to the demise of the society's enterprise in British North America. In the first place, a growing bureaucracy was spawned by the very success of the Bible Society — its geographical expansion, its numerous translations, and its widely-read publicity, including the well-beloved reports (described by McGregor as delicious morsels).<sup>106</sup>

<sup>103</sup> GIVE, *Acadian Recorder*, 7 Apr. 1821; McGregor gave many addresses on the Bible Society. PATTERSON, *op. cit.*, ch. XVIII.

<sup>104</sup> OBSERVATOR, *Acadian Recorder*, 26 May 1821.

<sup>105</sup> *Halifax Journal*, 8 Apr. 1822.

<sup>106</sup> Letter of McGregor, 6 Oct. 1814, MCA, McGregor Scrapbook, p. 6.

The volume of its correspondence resembled that of a department of state rather than of a missionary society. The society's central committee also appeared to be growing opulent and, as a result, charges of corruption and financial gain became rife. Because the three-man secretariat was composed of leading evangelical clergymen noted for their piety and activism, these charges made a greater impact than was usual in an age of jobbery and sinecures. The disquiet produced in the auxiliaries overseas is hinted at in a letter from Thaddeus Osgood to Secretary Tarn in 1819. Osgood had been warned by an earlier supporter of the Bible Society that the parent was no longer worthy of respect. "I heard him say that he believed the directors of the Bible Society were putting a great part of the public money into their own pockets and riding in their carriages at the expense of others. And he told me, what I did not believe, respecting your salary; that you had a Salary of £700." As a result, Osgood, though still trusting, wanted to know firsthand from the 'managers' of the society what their salaries were.<sup>107</sup> By the mid 1820's, when colonists were worried about the integrity of the society for other reasons, they still wanted to be reassured that the great benevolence of the secretaries would be rewarded in heaven, not out of their contributions for the universal distribution of the scriptures.

The other cause of colonial suspicion of the long-respected parent society centered round the circulation of the Apocrypha in certain Bible Society editions of the scriptures. The work's spurious nature was particularly obnoxious to calvinist denominations. Indeed, the Apocrypha controversy of the 1820's — one of several in the Bible Society's history — caused the secession of the Scottish auxiliaries from BFBS affiliation and the eventual formation of their own national bible society.<sup>108</sup> Thomas McCulloch, who was in Scotland at the time, was initially impressed by the accusations against the Bible Society and advised McGregor that "If the Pictou people therefore send money the Scottish Society have doubtless the best claim."<sup>109</sup> As it happened, the British American auxiliaries remained loyal to the Bible Society in spite of much Scottish immigrant participation and a full acquaintance with developments in Scotland.<sup>110</sup> The expatriate Scotsman placed his contribution to international evangelism before the retention of his ties with his north British homeland. The parent society, however, wanted reassurance of this colonial loyalty, and already concerned over the pattern of decline of its enterprise in the colonies, sent out a commission to review and report on the situation. As we have seen, the one-man commission of inquiry was entrusted to the indefatigable John West, the pioneer CMS missionary in the west and the key commissioner in the recent inquiry into

<sup>107</sup> Osgood to Tarn, 23 Nov. 1819, BFBS, Home Correspondence.

<sup>108</sup> On the Apocrypha controversy, see G. BROWNE, *The History of the British and Foreign Bible Society* (London, 1859) I, pp. 94-109.

<sup>109</sup> McCulloch to McGregor, 6 Apr. 1826, MCA, McGregor Scrapbook, p. 18. A correspondent in Upper Canada believed that the Edinburgh Bible Society deserved the gratitude and support of colonists for forcing the reform of the parent society. *Kingston Chronicle*, 20 Sept. 1828.

<sup>110</sup> *Colonial Patriot*, 8 Oct. 1828.

the New England Company's Indian charity in New Brunswick.<sup>111</sup> West, back in England from the colonies two years, felt certain that the Apocrypha controversy was largely responsible for colonial disquiet.

I fear, that much unkindly feeling exists in the Provinces, which has no doubt been awakened f[ro]m the *North* [Scotland], from whence a numerous Emigrant Population has proceeded, and *where* so much has been said, I think, in an unkindly, uncharitable, and captious manner.

This being the case, I should consider the Mission, as one of an arduous nature — having for its object, the general promotion of a better feeling among the existing Bible Societies in the Colonies, — as well as to enlarge their spheres of usefulness in the circulation of the S[acred] S[criptures] — together with the promotion of new Societies where it might be found practicable.<sup>112</sup>

West's subsequent report to the society outlined his visits to the major auxiliaries and the branches which lay on his route in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and the Canadas.<sup>113</sup> He found a certain amount of unrest over the Apocrypha issue in the preponderantly Scottish auxiliaries of St. Andrews, Saint John, Pictou, and Montreal. The charges of misapplication of the society's funds had also made their impression and he attempted to answer these.<sup>114</sup> He was able, however, to quell the dissatisfaction, revive some of the dying societies, especially by promoting ladies associations which often came to underpin missionary exertions in the colonies,<sup>115</sup> and encourage the establishment of some additional branches. Moreover, he emphasized the wider horizons involved in the bible enterprise: an approach which was beginning to stir the imagination of colonists. West discovered that in Upper Canada, where the auxiliaries had been based on an unusual amount of interdenominational cooperation, the societies had all but succumbed to official Anglican pressure. In other words, Anglican infiltration of the bible societies appeared to have wrecked the enterprise more readily than the almost complete ostracization of bible societies in their formative stages by Anglican clergy in the Maritimes and Lower Canada.<sup>116</sup>

The surviving and reactivated societies seemed to have been grateful for West's mission. According to Dawson at Pictou, it gave “a New Impulse to the Bible Cause among us”.<sup>117</sup> In Halifax, where the Nova Scotia Auxiliary Bible Society had been suffering from the hostility of John Inglis, espe-

<sup>111</sup> A second BFBS commission in 1830 by James Thomson was confined to the Canadas and was principally a follow up to West's fairly brief visit. Thomson undertook a more extensive visit in 1838. E. C. WOODLEY, *The Bible in Canada* (Toronto, 1953), pp. 33-39.

<sup>112</sup> West to Brandram, 7 Feb. 1828, BFBS, Home Correspondence.

<sup>113</sup> West's Journal, BFBS, 25th *Annual Report*, 1829, pp. 95-101.

<sup>114</sup> *Colonial Patriot*, 6 Aug. 1828.

<sup>115</sup> Fletcher to Jackson, 8 Nov. 1828, BFBS, Foreign Correspondence, 1828 (4); *Kingston Chronicle*, 12 Jan. 1827.

<sup>116</sup> Occasional exceptions besides the above mentioned case of Hayden occur, such as the case of Thomson at St. Stephen. McColl to Committee, 8 Oct. 1822, MMS, North America Correspondence, Box 3.

<sup>117</sup> Dawson to Brandram, n.d., BFBS, Foreign Correspondence, 1828 (3) 91.

cially since his succession to the Nova Scotian bishopric in 1825, West's visit was instrumental "in awakening the friends of the Society to a more lively sense of the importance of the cause, and in removing prejudices from the minds of many".<sup>118</sup> Indeed, the tendency of the provincial bible society to receive proportionately more support from the outports than from affluent Haligonians was checked by the establishment of a Halifax branch of the auxiliary specifically to capture a larger number of subscribers from amongst the uncharitable town dwellers for which Halifax was well known.<sup>119</sup>

In Upper Canada, the Anglican stranglehold was also broken in 1828 with the formation of a completely new auxiliary bible society at York encouraged by West and helped especially by the Methodists.<sup>120</sup> Its foundation established the Bible Society as an accepted element in the community with the support of respectable reformers, led by John Rolph, the Baldwins, and the Ryersons. At that time, one of its church of England supporters unwittingly condemned former Anglican interference by emphasizing the shame implicit in the failure of the earlier auxiliary.<sup>121</sup> The fact that colonial praise of the bible enterprise could now be heard from the frontier capital of York seemed to indicate the permanency as well as the loyalty of the organization. Upper Canadians were proud to point out that:

The parent institution is the fountain head, to which we shall form one of many tributary streams. It already overflows, diffusing a sacred and fructifying influence over the most barren of heathen lands. By daily accessions from newly formed auxiliary societies, the fountain will grow more copious, and become to the pagan nations of the earth "a well of living water sprung up to everlasting life".<sup>122</sup>

Veneration of the Bible Society reinforced respect for the mother country and encouraged a new appreciation for English piety. William Ryerson even suggested that England was indebted for her glory and her happiness "to her Bibles. England is a great and happy nation, because she is a Christian nation — and while like the sun in the heavens she extends her blessing and her charities to almost every part of the earth, she stands like a polar star to the nations, to which they look for all that is wise and just, in polity, and pure in religion."<sup>123</sup>

It cannot be claimed that West's mission saved the bible societies in British North America since not all were on the verge of collapse. The societies nonetheless responded to the cultural imperialism which West's "*Biblical Tour*" represented with a renewed evangelical zeal that tended to

<sup>118</sup> Nutting to Brandram, 12 Aug. 1828, *ibid.*, 1828 (3) 73. Similar reports emanated from Saint John and Fredericton. Paterson to Jackson, 21 July 1828, *ibid.*, 1828 (3) 60; Taylor to Jackson, 2 July 1812, *ibid.*, 1828 (2) 183.

<sup>119</sup> *Acadian Recorder*, 23 Aug. 1828.

<sup>120</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 13 Nov. 1828.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 Nov. 1828.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 Dec. 1828.



make them both more secure and more aggressive.<sup>124</sup> On the one hand they became more determined to withstand the continued Anglican attack on their interdenominational enterprise; but at the same time they became more crusadingly Protestant in their dissemination of scriptures amongst the Catholics. The secretary at Quebec indicated in 1829 that his auxiliary was achieving its goal when he reported that “two Canadians have been lately discovered who have been converted from Popery by reading our Bibles, under the blessing of the Holy Ghost, without any real Instructors”.<sup>125</sup>

By the 1820's the enduring features of the Bible Society in British North America had been clearly established. Like all voluntary associations with ameliorative aims, auxiliaries of the Bible Society provided colonists with the experience of working together and developing an awareness of an identity of interest and a sense of community. The Bible Society contributed to the establishment of common ground for Protestants insofar as individuals, particularly laymen, allowed an ecumenical spirit to take precedence over denominational particularism.<sup>126</sup> Nonetheless, because of disapproval expressed by official spokesmen of the church of England and the overriding sectarianism of the age, the Bible Society contributed more towards breaking down divisions within individual denominations such as Presbyterians than towards directly fostering cooperation on a corporate interdenominational basis.<sup>127</sup> Moreover, the creation of intercolonial contacts and communications had to precede the organization of any voluntary association on a 'national' scale.

Since the Bible Society was a product and perpetuator of evangelicism, its long-term influence in the colonies tended to be moralistic. It provided, for example, a positive support to sabbatarianism. This trend was inherent in the enterprise. As early as 1822, Secretary Lunn reported from Montreal that in the township of Shefford “much good has been done, the inhabitants, who formerly employed the Sabbath in hunting, shooting, quarrelling &c now meet together to read the Scriptures, and send their children to the Sunday schools which have been very lately established”.<sup>128</sup> The Methodist missionary in St. John's believed that the formation of an auxiliary in Newfoundland “might be useful in checking the crying sin of St. John's — Sabbath breaking”.<sup>129</sup>

<sup>124</sup> CHRISTIANUS, *New Brunswick Courier*, 16 Aug. 1828.

<sup>125</sup> Bourne to Jackson, 4 June 1829, BFBS, Foreign Correspondence, 1829 (2) 143.

<sup>126</sup> D. H. YODER, “Christian Unity in Nineteenth-Century America”, in R. ROUSE and S. C. NEILL (eds.), *A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517-1948* (2nd. edn., Philadelphia, 1967), pp. 235-6.

<sup>127</sup> Graham to his brother Peter, 21 July 1815, Public Archives of Nova Scotia, Hugh Graham Correspondence.

<sup>128</sup> Lunn to Roenneberg, 29 June 1822, BFBS, Foreign Correspondence, 1822 (122).

<sup>129</sup> Cubit to Committee, 21 Dec. 1817, MMS, North America Correspondence, Box 1.

The Bible Society also became a useful partner to charity schools, particularly those organized on the monitorial system: day schools and Sunday schools where children and apprentices were taught to read the bible, using cheap editions of the scriptures provided by the Bible Society and the Sunday School Union.<sup>130</sup> Preoccupation with the merits of bible reading awakened in the middle classes a desire to cure colonial illiteracy. For what good were bibles as a moral and spiritual force if the lower classes could not read them? This consideration was reflected in the comment of one contemporary that, "The grand design of all charitable institutions is to hold up the Bible as the fountain from which the Water of Life issues and it should be the object of all Sunday School Associations to convey this Water to every thirsty soul."<sup>131</sup>

Not only did the Bible Society complement other moralistic societies, but it also indirectly encouraged support for local benevolent associations.<sup>132</sup> It was the members of bible societies who represented the more charitable sector of the population. Once their own bible enterprise had become in effect a colonial institution, they turned their attention as a group, as they had previously done as individuals, towards satisfying more specifically local needs.<sup>133</sup> The old and highly respectable Pictou Bible Society, for example, promoted in 1828 the formation of the Pictou Indian Civilization Society, which had as its objectives both the economic and moral amelioration of the local Micmacs.<sup>134</sup> Because of their charitable disposition and their active participation in the community, members of the Bible Society therefore felt justified in claiming by the late 1820's "that wherever Bible Societies and Associations have been carried into full operation, the *temporal* wants of the poor have received greater attention".<sup>135</sup> Given the context of benevolence combined with piety, the great popularity of the Bible Society, and the benefit of hindsight by the 1820's, William Ryerson was not being merely overdramatic when he argued that, while other societies "are evidently doing much to promote the present and eternal happiness of many, they are dependent on the Bible Society for their lustre, and their usefulness. For what can the missionary society, or any other society do

<sup>130</sup> The Sunday School Union encouraged schools in the Canadas, particularly those of the Wesleyans and of Thaddeus Osgood, and in New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland. *The Annual Report of the Sunday School Union for the Year ending May 1, 1824*, p. 6. Anglican National schools were supplied by the SPCK.

<sup>131</sup> *Kingston Chronicle*, 5 Nov. 1824.

<sup>132</sup> See McGregor's list of "Benefits of the Bible Society", PATTERSON, *op. cit.*, pp. 388-9.

<sup>133</sup> See letter pleading for charitable societies to meet the temporal needs of immigrants in addition to those for the soul — bible, missionary, and tract societies. *Kingston Gazette*, 11 Nov. 1817.

<sup>134</sup> *Colonial Patriot*, 14 Mar. 1828. Codner claimed that he was shamed into establishing the Newfoundland School Society by a speech given by Lord Liverpool at a meeting of the Margate Auxiliary Bible Society. *Society for Educating the Poor of Newfoundland* (London, 1823), p. 13.

<sup>135</sup> *Acadian Recorder*, 23 Aug. 1828.

without the Bible, and how can they all be supplied with the blessed book but through the Bible Society ?”<sup>136</sup>

At the same time, it was also the members of the Bible Society who were potentially capable of becoming manifestly anti-Catholic. To Roman Catholics in Europe and America, the Bible Society was always an instrument of Protestant aggression. They invariably interpreted the distribution of bibles as a Protestant crusade against the Roman church.<sup>137</sup> Members of colonial bible societies were not satisfied to incur the displeasure of local bishops and priests solely for the purpose of circulating unauthorized versions of the scriptures. In the late 1830's the French Canadian Missionary Society grew out of the Bible Society to satisfy its erstwhile proselytizing aims.<sup>138</sup> In addition, the concurrent interest of colonial bible societies in education, no matter how sincerely non-sectarian it seemed,<sup>139</sup> was essentially evangelistic and aroused fears amongst Catholics that Protestants were bent on conversion. For ethnic and political reasons, venal anti-Catholicism in British North America seldom reached the same pornographic and mass hysterical proportions that it did in the nativist movement in the United States.<sup>140</sup> Nevertheless, whatever the extent of anti-Catholicism, the legacies of the Bible Society, particularly the emphasis on bible reading in schools and the direction of anti-Catholic evangelism primarily against the French Canadians, contributed in the long run to controversies over separate schools and deteriorating relations between Anglophones and Francophones in Canada.<sup>141</sup>

<sup>136</sup> *Colonial Advocate*, 4 Dec. 1828.

<sup>137</sup> K. S. LATOURETTE, *History of the Expansion of Christianity* (London, 1947) IV, p. 132.

<sup>138</sup> WOODLEY, *op. cit.*, pp. 39-40; W. GREGG, *Short History of the Presbyterian Church in the Dominion of Canada* (Toronto, 1893), pp. 138-9; P. VILLARD, *Up to the Light: the Story of French Protestantism in Canada* (Toronto, 1928), pp. 35-36; H. H. WALSH, *The Christian Church in Canada* (Toronto, 1956), pp. 222-3.

<sup>139</sup> See *Colonial Patriot*, 22 Feb. 1828.

<sup>140</sup> Many insights on American anti-Catholicism and the contribution of the American Bible Society to it are contained in R. A. BILLINGTON, *The Protestant Crusade 1800-1860: a Study of the Origins of American Nativism* (New York, 1938). E. R. NORMAN, *The Conscience of the State in North America* (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 89-103 should be perused with caution on account of the gross factual errors and the weakness of the comparative synthesis.

<sup>141</sup> Anti-Catholicism in mid nineteenth-century British North America is described in N. G. SMITH, "Religious Tensions in Pre-Confederation Politics", *Canadian Journal of Theology*, IX, 1963, 248-62.