

1 THE REV. JAMES EVANS AND THE SOCIAL ANTAGONISMS OF THE FUR TRADE SOCIETY, 1840-1846

FRITS PANNEKOEK

In 1839 the Hudson's Bay Company invited four Methodist missionaries, James Evans, William Mason, Robert T. Rundle and George Barnley, to educate the heathen in Rupert's Land. By 1848 only Mason remained, and in 1854 he defected to the Church Missionary Society. Evans stormed out of the West accused of most "unmethodistical and unclerical" intercourse with three Indian maidens.¹ George Barnley left because of a quarrel with Chief Factor Miles over the use of the Company's mess for tea parties. Only Robert T. Rundle departed under more auspicious circumstances; he broke his arm. Yet even he was engaged in a continuing battle with Fort Edmonton's Chief Factor over the Cree translation of the Seventh Commandment.

The usual explanation for Evans's expulsion has been the dastardly opposition of the Honorable Company to the Rev. James Evans, the "honest, fearless and intelligent" superintendent of missions. The son of a troopship captain, Evans was born in Kingston-upon-Hull in 1801. After service as a seaman, apprentice grocer, and glass worker he followed his family to Canada in 1822. While teaching school near l'Original he married Mary Blithe Smith, the daughter of the local doctor. The young couple felt the hand of God at a camp meeting in 1825, and were inspired to devote themselves to the Indian missions of the Methodist Church. In 1827 Evans became a teacher at the Rice Lake Indian mission and in 1830 the missionary. From 1833 to 1837 he served at Port Credit, Ancaster, St. Catharines, St. Clair, Lake Superior and Guelph. In 1839 he was appointed superintendent of the yet unestablished missions in Rupert's Land. Until his sudden death in 1846 Evans travelled throughout the Saskatchewan, Athabasca, Nelson and Swan River districts, established the Rossville mission and perfected the Cree syllable alphabet.

These activities form the basis for the hagiographies that have elevated Evans to Methodist sainthood. His morality and anti-Company agitation have become enveloped in an aura of sanctity. Evans's biographers, Egerton R. Young and John MacLean, both Methodist missionaries, put all the blame for Evans's difficulties on Sir George Simpson, the governor of Rupert's Land and "one missionary." They claim that Simpson refused to tolerate Evans's control over the Indians, his opposition to Sunday travelling and his dislike of the liquor traffic. In order to rid

Frits Pannekoek is presently I. W. Killam Post-Doctoral Fellow at The University of Alberta. He is revising his Ph.D. thesis, "The Churches and the Social Structure in the Red River Area 1818-1870," for publication, and is also working on "Social Mobility in a Frontier Setting: Wetaskiwin 1895-1945, A Case Study."

himself of Evans, Simpson is said to have terrorized a number of Indian women into swearing that Evans had illicit relations with them. With himself as judge, Simpson then found Evans guilty! Young, in addition, finds that one of the missionaries "fell under the baneful spell of the governor" and assisted in the plot.²

Nan Shipley, a Winnipeg author of children's stories, has named the missionary — William Mason, Evans's assistant. She asserts that for reasons of personal spite, Mason fabricated the entire scandal, destroyed Evans's reputation and secured his recall. While Shipley's case is not without merit, she includes neither footnotes nor bibliography. Too often her story smacks of fiction rather than fact.³

A closer examination reveals a substantially different and infinitely more complex relationship between the Company, Mason, Evans and the events that terminated Evans's career. The Company was hardly as opposed to the missionary as MacLean, Young, and even Shipley suppose. While the Company's and the missionaries' goals differed, these goals were not in conflict. Instead, at the base of the dispute were a number of petty animosities engendered by the proximity of the mission to the fur post, and by the social pretensions of the missionary and his wife. By 1843 Evans had alienated most of the prominent fur trade clans, and allied himself with the free traders and those on the periphery of Company society. This bitter social animosity underlay the six years of bickering that culminated in the disputes over Sunday travelling and free trade. In none of these disagreements was the Company prepared to do more than reprimand Evans, and force his removal from Norway House to the Rossville Indian Village three miles distant. The Company was in fact ready to capitulate when Evans began to encourage free trade, and organized a strike of the Rossville brigade Indians. Even then Simpson secured Evans's dismissal not by conspiring to blacken the missionary's reputation, but simply by requesting the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society to recall him. The scandals of 1846 were entirely divorced from the dismissal. Simpson only attempted to use them when Evans planned to stir up anti-Company sentiment on the British missionary circuit.

The impetus for the introduction of the Methodists came from Sir George Simpson. His motives were distinct and unquestionable. He wanted to stop Indian migrations to Red River, to curtail the summer fur hunt, to relieve the Company of the expense of caring for the destitute and starving Indian, and to create a cheap and docile labor force. These goals, however, had to be achieved without resorting to the Church Missionary Society or the Catholic Church. Both were already too powerful.⁴

In 1835, the Indians at York Factory, Norway House and Cumberland House, encouraged by the prosperity of their kin at St. Peter's, Red River, migrated there. Simpson was aware that if these districts were to remain profitable, and if Red River was to be spared the inevitable Indian troubles that would follow the first famine, the migrations had to stop.

Between 1836 and 1839, the Northern Council attempted control by refusing to employ Norway House and St. Peter's Indians in the York Factory to Red River trip. Owing to the opposition of the Church Missionary Society, however, the Council was unsuccessful.⁵

Equally important in the decision to bring in the Methodists was the general condition of the fur trade in the late 1830's and early 1840's. The number of beavers had been declining since 1820. By 1830 they were in danger of extinction in the Norway House, York Factory, and Moose Fort areas. As a conservation measure, the Northern Council discouraged the hunting of cub and summer beaver. No traps were to be supplied to the Indians except in season. By 1841 the number of beaver had so decreased that the Council resolved to accept no more than half the number of beaver collected in Outfit 1839. As a further measure, ten beaver skins of goods were to be offered for every nine small pelts, usually muskrat.⁶

Equally disastrous, the silk hat was replacing the beaver hat in the 1840's. Not until the late 1850's did the trade recover with the gain in popularity of the fur coat. In order to maintain the ten percent dividend, Simpson rigorously pared costs. There was to be no mustard for the commissioned gentlemen's fish, no smoked buffalo tongues for friends in Europe, no expensive pleasure horses, and no abandoned Indian wives or destitute Indians to eat into the Company's profits. The Indian was to replace the more expensive white laborer where possible.

Simpson was convinced that under supervision, and at the proper post, the missionary could prevent the migrations, teach the Indian agriculture, and relieve the Company of the burden of feeding the starving native. As well, he could inculcate morality and render the Indian sufficiently literate to undertake some of the minor details of the Company's business. The Company also needed a good public image to minimize the number of embarrassing queries from the powerful Aborigines Protection Society. The Governor of the Company had already been called to testify before the Committee in 1836. Though nothing had come of the Inquiry, there could be a next time.⁷

Simpson, however, refused to work through the Church Missionary Society or the Catholic Church. The latter was controlled by a foreign power, the Pope, while the former had too much influence with the London Committee of the Company. If Simpson was to prevent interference, the missionaries had to be under his control. The Committee had forced modifications of Simpson's anti-missionary policy in the early 1820's and might do so again.⁸ That Simpson's motive was control is apparent in the conditions imposed on the Methodist missionaries. While their salaries were to be paid by the Wesleyan Methodist Society, travel within Rupert's Land, as well as board and lodgings were to be the responsibility of the Company. Single missionaries were to be housed in the Company's fort, and provided with a "comfortable sitting room and bedroom." They were to take their meals with the gentlemen in charge of the posts. If they were

accompanied by their families, a small house was to be provided. All missionary reports had to be communicated to the Company before they could be published in the Society's journals.⁹

The Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society was easy to control. Not only was the Rev. Dr. Alder, the principal secretary of the Society, Simpson's intimate friend, but he was sufficiently sympathetic to the Church of England to quiet the fears of the Anglican evangelicals on the London Committee. Most important, however, was the Methodist position on the relationship of church and state. Alder loathed "all unnecessary intermeddling with political affairs."¹⁰ He made it quite clear to Simpson that this applied to the fur trade:

Permit me . . . to repeat to you in writing what I have more than once stated to you in our frequent conversations on this subject, that we send out missionaries for the accomplishment of one great object, which is to promote the spiritual and everlasting welfare of the people amongst whom they are appointed to labour, and that we require them everywhere and at all times to avoid interference with political parties or secular disputes. They are . . . simply Teachers of Religion. . . . They are not permitted to engage in trade of any kind or for any purpose whatsoever.¹¹

Alder was not interested in the western missions. At best they were a personal obligation to Sir George Simpson. Alder's letters to Evans were always late and contained little but the ordinary mandatory platitudes. He was unconcerned about the conditions in Rupert's Land and chose to remain so.¹²

While Simpson may have introduced the Methodists and dictated policy, it was the commissioned Chief Factors and Traders and to a lesser extent the non-commissioned postmasters and clerks who determined Evans's success or failure. The clerk at Dunvegan and the postmaster at Fort Chipewyan were the only non-commissioned officers expressing any interest in the Wesleyans. The two hoped that Evans would end the "habitual indifference" of the Métis and Beaver Indians to "Moral and Religious instruction," and introduce agriculture. It cannot be assumed, however, that the two were representative. The postmasters and clerks at Jasper's House, Cumberland, Edmonton, Carlton, or Fort Pitt never indicated any interest. Instead they were indifferent, or thought the proceedings ridiculous.¹³

The Commissioned gentlemen, on the other hand, could hardly afford such indifference. Their income fluctuated with the trade's profits. The missionary was an investment; a dividend was expected. The Chief Traders and Factors were, however, vague as to the nature of the ultimate goal. Most supposed that it would be a limited number of permanent Christian agricultural villages, with a few itinerant missionaries inculcating the habits of industry elsewhere in the interior. All were firmly convinced that the Canadian Shield was incapable of supporting any large concentrations of population.¹⁴

The Chief Factor of Norway House, Donald Ross, was the only commissioned officer with definite views on the operation of the missions. They were for the most part in direct opposition to Simpson's. Ross was convinced that

the footing on which the Missions [were] placed was not well calculated to sustain a continued good understanding and co-operation between the Missionaries and the gentlemen in the service.¹⁵

He argued that the presence of the missionary within the Company's fort, the obligation to provide interpreters and transportation, and the constant congregating of the Indians in the fort for religious purposes, would "most certainly interfere with the business." Besides, familiarity would breed mutual contempt. The missionaries should be given somewhere between £500 and £1000 per annum by the Company and placed on their own. He further stipulated that conflicting religions should be prevented from occupying the same districts.¹⁶ Simpson ignored all but the last of Ross's recommendations.

Evans appeared to be just the missionary the Company wanted. His work on Lake Superior had placed him in close contact with the Company's servants. Relations had been most amicable. Evans had considered the commissioned officers

gentlemanly and intelligent men, thoroughly well read in History and Science, and not less versed in Scriptural Truth, and . . . endeavouring most sincerely to adorn the Gospel of Christ. . . . The gentlemen of the Company are not a whit inferior in manners, morals or intelligence to any class of men in Upper Canada.¹⁷

Evans's friendship with the officers reflected the compatibility of their views on the missions. His policies were not conducive to too rapid settlement. "Christ first to the heart, and then the after blessings of civilization and education."¹⁸ Itineracy not agriculture was the priority. When the Indian was ready for civilization as at Rossville, where a village of sorts had existed since 1828, his program emphasized moderation. Evans realized the limitations of the Shield. He envisaged a combination of the hunt and plough with the former predominating. No more than two to three hundred Indians would be settled around a manual labor school. Evans held the same attitudes of racial superiority, the same desires to inculcate industry, and the same views of morality as the Company's officers.¹⁹ A Methodist-Company alliance should have worked well. In the first few months all indications were that this would be the case.

By 1841, however, the first signs of strain were appearing, although they concerned the Rev. Robert T. Rundle, the Methodist missionary assigned to Edmonton, more than Evans. Soon after Rundle's arrival, the bickering with the commissioned gentlemen began. Rundle's first mistake had been his choice of two "capricious" half breeds, both allegedly "the most worthless of their breed in the country," as interpreters. Furthermore, Simpson complained to Evans, Rundle was

not quite so grave and serious in his manner as would be desirable in

order to give influence over the Indians & Half breed character, and is too much given to frivolous chit-chat and gossip with our clerks and others and is rather indiscreet in the expression of his opinion on the mode of management or dealing with Indians.²⁰

Rundle also had had the audacity to question the policy of closing the fort gates when the warlike plains Crees came to trade.

Evans considered the quarrel of little importance. The Chief Factor and Mr. Rundle might "be out of joint a little," but he had no doubt that "by prudence and patience" everything could be rectified. The crux of the conflict appeared to be that "Mr. Rundle is an *Englishman* and must become a *Hudson's Bay Man*."²¹ Further disputes occurred between the Chief Trader and Rundle over the Cree translation of the *Gloria Patria* and the Seventh Commandment.²² Nevertheless, by 1848 the Company's officers and Rundle were very close friends.

The Rundle affair was not without significance. First, Simpson never threatened to remove Rundle. He only encouraged Evans to reprimand him. Second, Rundle was single. While he might quarrel with the officers, the issues were petty and easily settled. No wife complicated his absorption into fur trade society. If Evans realized that the missionary must accommodate himself in some measure to the Company's wishes, he failed to heed his own advice. By 1843 he had run afoul of the fur trade's most prominent and influential families.

Central to an understanding of the bitterness of the Evans controversy is an understanding of the fur trade's social structure. Two features are important: the social position of the commissioned gentlemen, especially their wives, and the social predominance of a few closely inter-related families.

Class distinction in Rupert's Land was strong. The wife of a Chief Factor, Chief Trader, or postmaster, especially at Norway House and York Factory, was one of Rupert's Land's first ladies, irrespective of whether she was Indian, country-born, Métis, or white. Presiding over the establishment's social life, she demanded to be treated and was treated with deference and ceremony. A Methodist missionary's wife, on the other hand, held a very ambiguous position. While placed on a commissioned gentleman's allowance, she and her husband held no rank in the Company's hierarchy.

Equally important, most of the Company's gentlemen were either Presbyterian or Anglican. They might attend a Methodist service or allow a Methodist to baptize their children, but a Methodist was never more than lower class, to be suffered if he knew his station. The safest place for any Methodist cleric's wife was clearly the kitchen, not the front parlor.

Close family inter-relationships reinforced this exclusiveness. The connections of Sophia Thomas, William Mason's proud and respected country-born wife, provide the key to understanding the importance of Evans's relations with the fur trade's prominent families. Sophia's rela-

tives included the first of George Simpson's country wives, Chief Factor John Harriott of Edmonton, Letitia Hargrave the gossiping wife of Chief Factor James Hargrave, as well as Alexander Christie, Governor of Assiniboia. Equally important were the connections of the clan to less prominent fur traders. Sophia's brother, for example, had married one of George Gladman's daughters. Gladman, the accountant at York Factory, allowed nothing to pass without his scrutiny either at Norway House or York, and reported all to Duncan Finlayson, Governor of Assiniboia from 1839 to 1844. Finlayson in return wrote all to his brother-in-law, George Simpson. These relationships were well known and their internal stratifications infinite, complicated, and continually shifting. It was a Scots "Country-born clan" that Evans could hardly afford to antagonize.²³

This small closely knit society was by no means pleasant. There was little for the élite to do in the long dreary winters except gossip over the events of the summer, engage in vicious character assassinations, and guard their own social position. Every piece of gossip made its way through the family connections to Red River, York Factory, or Scotland, where it incubated and returned more virulent than ever to the interior. Feuds were frequent. It was a society in which an outsider required tact, bachelorhood, or a humble wife. Evans had none of these. By 1843 he, his wife, and daughter had managed to antagonize the Rosses, Hargraves, and Masons. As Evans's ostracism became complete, he allied himself with the malcontents and free traders on the periphery of high Company society.

The Rosses were the first to be alienated. While Mrs. Ross was kind at first, by September 1843 she and her two daughters rarely spoke to Clarissa or Mrs. Evans. Letitia Hargrave was certain that the antagonism had been caused

by Mrs. Evans and her daughter's successful rivalry over Mrs. Ross & her children. . . . They were the derision of . . . passers by for their finery and exhibition of good education and knowledge of astronomy whereas Mr. Ross & Jane did not know the names of the commonest stars.²⁴

Jane Ross could not even hold a tune and had to rely on the "ignorance of her hearers." The climax came in 1844 when Clarissa married Jane Ross's former fiancé, John MacLean, one of the fur trade's few eligible bachelors and, more important, an increasingly vehement opponent of the Hudson's Bay Company.

The alienation of the Hargraves was next. Letitia Hargrave confided to her mother that she found Mrs. Evans unpardonably arrogant.

Mrs. Evans . . . wrote me a letter that I could hardly stand from a Methodist. I replied by a middling stiff note commencing with dear Madam. I feel satisfied that she is dangerous. She had ended hers with yr affecte friend.²⁵

Mrs. Evans's greatest crime, however, was her "cool impudent" plundering of the garden at Oxford House. She left nothing but "miserable lumps of potatoes." In the uncertain north this crime was serious, especially

when Evans was so notoriously well supplied by the Company. George Gladman made certain that everyone knew that in one year alone the Evans's establishment consumed thirty 56-pound kegs of butter. Equally scandalous, Evans's Indian assistant, Peter Jacobs, was on gentleman's rations of raisins, flour, butter, currants, wine, and brandy.²⁶

It is more difficult to determine the cause of the Evans-Mason animosity. Mason's illegitimate son was hardly the source. While Dame Rumour, Letitia Hargrave, was somewhat aghast "that when Mason had a son, Mr. Evans merely reprimanded him, [but] when Mr. Mason married Miss Thomas he sent the mother a present of a dashing scarlet gown," the actual quarrel that precipitated the Mason-Evans split in August 1844 was more petty.²⁷ Donald Ross informed Simpson that it had

commenced about a calf or some wretched nonsense of that sort, and in the course of which he Evans accused Mason of some rather unclerical and unmethodistical proceedings among other things that of *kissing* his daughter.²⁸

Mason did not hesitate to retaliate. The following month Letitia complained that Mason had been at York and that he

spent the entire ten days . . . reviling Evans for telling fibs, cheating the Indians, asperging the Company & cheating him of his allowances from the Wesleyan Society.²⁹

Sophia Mason undoubtedly vented her feelings to her relatives at York and Red River.

James Hargrave alone retained some sympathy for Evans, though he eventually succumbed to pressure from Duncan Finlayson, Governor of Assiniboia, Donald Ross, and his own wife, to terminate the friendship. By 1844 the Evanses had no influential friends left in the trade.

Concurrent with these social antagonisms were disputes of varying magnitude over Miss Campbell, mission expansion, the printing press, and Sunday travel. These were, however, of a minor nature, only exacerbating existing social tensions. In all cases the Company capitulated.

From 1841 to 1844 Evans boarded Miss Campbell, the daughter of Fort Chipewyan's Chief Trader. Though Clarissa Evans found her "simple," she probably had her uses. Donald Ross sarcastically observed that Miss Campbell conveyed "to her pious friends all the floating scandal of the country past and present." Simpson claimed that the placing of young women under Evans's care would excite jealousies amongst those less fortunate, and would weaken the rule against permanent visitors at interior posts. Miss Campbell should either return to her father at Fort Chipewyan or attend the Red River school. Evans, however, ignored Simpson; Miss Campbell remained.³⁰

The printing press issue was of greater importance. Evans had requested a press as early as 1841. The Company, fearful of the impact on the Indians, hesitated to permit such a potentially dangerous device. Though ready by 1842, it was not sent until June 1845, the same month that Simpson

requested Evans's dismissal. The two events are, however, unconnected. Evans already had a crude but effective press that was printing Bibles and hymnaries. Even with Evans gone, his assistants, Mason and Steinhauer, would continue the publishing program. The obvious explanation is that either the London Committee or Simpson had capitulated.³¹

Evans had been attempting northward expansion into the Fort Simpson, Fort Chipewyan, Ile à la Crosse, and Dunvegan regions since his arrival. Simpson and the London Committee emphasized and re-emphasized that the country was unable to support the concentration of population at the missions. This belief in the limitations of the country was sincere. The Company itself had never been successful at agriculture, in spite of serious efforts. Nevertheless Evans continued to press for expansion. His motives were hardly humanitarian. He wanted to counter Catholic activities in the interior. Equally important, he wanted to place as great a distance as possible between himself and Mason. Above all he longed for a mission at Fort Simpson, near his daughter, the wife of the Chief Trader in charge of the Mackenzie district. Fort Simpson would be more congenial than the Norway House cockpit.³²

In the spring of 1844, Evans and Thomas Hassell, his assistant, left for the north. Hassell was to establish a mission at Ile à la Crosse, while Evans was to continue to the Mackenzie district to prepare for the arrival of his family the following year. Before Evans had reached Ile à la Crosse, he had killed Thomas Hassell in a hunting accident. Evans immediately returned to report the incident to Donald Ross, the Sheriff of the Northern districts.³³ There the matter rested.

The Company never opposed the voyage to the Mackenzie. Ross was of the opinion that he had little choice but to provision the excursion, for "how ever erroneous and impractical" Evans's views might be, the British or Canadian public would never listen to the Company. Evans, for his part, never successfully tested the Company's rule regarding expansion. By May and June of 1845, the next opportunity for travel into the interior, the critical issues of Sunday travelling and free trade had come to a head.³⁴

The inculcation of sabbatarianism Evans regarded as one of the more important objects of his mission. The regular contemplation of God was a necessary step to advancement and civilization. The Commissioned Gentlemen, while sympathetic, were sceptical of the ability of the harsh environment and fur trade to support over-idle Sundays.

The first indication of difficulty had come in September 1841. Evans had been stranded at Cumberland House by one of the Company's officers because he had refused to be "*driven to travel on Sundays.*" Evans appealed to Simpson. The Governor left an impression that an injunction would be issued. When none was forthcoming, Evans proceeded to assail the practice from his pulpit. By the summer of 1842, he had created "no small stir in the country," and by the end of the year, had persuaded the

Chief Factors at York and Moose Factory to abolish the occasional Sunday trip.³⁵

Chief Factor Ross of Norway House was not so bending, however, and complained to Simpson that Evans was undermining the Company's influence. Simpson composed a masterful diplomatic reprimand that left no doubt as to his disapproval. This letter of June 29, 1843, known to all of Rupert's Land, censured Evans for his past misdeeds, especially his boarding of Miss Campbell and his attacks on Sunday travel. Simpson suggested that Evans relocate at Rossville, the Indian village on Little Playgreen Island, three miles from the fort. There, Simpson suggested to Evans, "you will better be able to promote the common views of the H.B. Co. and the Wesleyan Miss. Society." Simpson's real motive was to separate the feuding Rosses and Evanses.³⁶

Evans's reply was moderate. He was certain that Simpson had "in some measure misunderstood his proposals." His only motive had been and continued to be "the introduction of the Gospel among the natives." Settlement would not be encouraged unless the country allowed. Evans appeared pleased at the removal to Rossville. Only his attitude towards Sunday travelling remained firm. It was "a decidedly injurious practice, tending to the demoralization of the people." As long as the evil existed, he would continue to assail it.³⁷

While Evans was outwardly humble, the letter had in fact tremendously vexed "the worthy divine" and his wife. Ross had "never witnessed the human face divine so thoroughly distorted by suppressed passions," as when Evans read Simpson's letter.³⁸ Evans exposed his true feelings in a lengthy epistle to his brother.

The country under the present system of trade & c. is not a congenial soil . . . for Missionary labours. . . . The state of the West India Slaves before the passing of the Emancipation Act is too good a comparison. In some of the Establishments the Sabbath is regarded, but in the greater portion such a day is scarcely known. Manual ordinary labour is performed without any regard to the observance of the Divine Command and in many instances the men are necessitated . . . to procure their wood on the Lord's day. During the voyage which the hands of every fort must make not a single sabbath can be recognized. . . . Those sacred days are desecrated by the carrying of burdens, hauling of boats, loading and unloading during the whole season. . . .

The pitiful situation of the poor poor natives is another obstacle to our successful prosecution of our duties. . . . The long continued exertions of the most vigilant agency (Scotch) to procure wealth, has so impoverished the country that it is utterly impossible for the poor Indians to procure a subsistence by the hunt. Not only must they suffer for the want of food, but such is the price of those little necessities that they are in a state of the most extreme wretchedness. . . . Scores of Indians perish annually from sheer starvation, partly from want of food & partly from want of clothing. . . .

Well with these facts in view Sir George denies us the privilege of settling them and calling their attention to agriculture, because it will effect the trade. Can we Christianize the Heathen without any reference to his temporal condition? Can we impart instruction efficiently when he has no home? Can we educate his children when they must necessarily be wandering in search of food both winter and summer?³⁹

Evans's denunciations were unjustified. The Company was not at fault for the condition of the Indians. An examination of the travel literature indicates that the condition of the Indians of the Canadian Shield was never more than wretched. Evans himself had been far from successful. The Rossville crops had failed in 1842. Rundle had not even established an agricultural mission at Pigeon Lake, though requested to do so by Simpson; Lac La Pluie had been an unmitigated disaster, and Moose held little promise. Furthermore, Evans must have been aware that the unauthorized Anglican and Catholic expansions had not been disallowed, and that the Company rarely enforced restrictions. The hostility towards Evans never originated with Simpson. Simpson only acted after a complaint from Ross, and Ross had social reasons for despising Evans.

Had Evans been accepted by the fur trade families into the upper rungs of Rupert's Land society, he would have hardly succumbed to the arguments of those on the periphery of official society, or those out of favor with the Governor. He would have been a staunch supporter of the monopoly and merely complained, as did every other commissioned gentleman and missionary, of the little Emperor's administration. Instead, Evans's connections with the free traders at Red River became increasingly frequent as the split with the officers widened. His daughter, Clarissa, rather symbolically married John MacLean, a close friend since late 1842. MacLean had a number of serious quarrels with the Company specifically over his posting to Labrador and his long failure to obtain a Chief Trader's commission. MacLean's bitter hatred of the Company manifested itself in a vicious attack on the monopoly. Among the most important of Evans's new contacts, however, were John Fraser, a free trader, and James Sinclair. The latter was at the forefront of the Red River free trade agitation and was especially hostile to the Company after the cancellation of his freighting contract in 1844. Evans's intercourse with the opponents of the monopoly increased in frequency as 1844 passed into 1845.⁴⁰

In the spring of 1845 the free trade and Sunday travel issues came to a climax. Before the April hunt, Ross had engaged seven Indians for the Red River trip. At Evans's prompting, five refused to honor their contracts if there was to be Sunday travelling. Evans informed Ross of the strike in terms hardly conducive to a friendly settlement:

The people love you Sir. They love your family. They love your very name and they are grieved at heart to deny you. They say they will put you in the boat to sleep, cover you and carry you if you wish by night rather than delay you, but on Sunday they will never yield to engage in travel.⁴¹

Ross had lost control of the Rossville Indians. The labor supply for the York Factory/Red River brigades had fallen under the control of the Methodist missionary. Ross complained that

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.⁴²

Yet, there is every indication that the Company would have capitulated had Evans continued his resistance. One year later the Norway House/York Factory brigades were reputed to be travelling on Sunday only when necessary.⁴³ Before Simpson could make a decision on the Rossville strike, however, the free-trade issue emerged.

On May 31, 1845 Ross informed Simpson that his "Reverend neighbour" had "shewn the cloven foot and unmasked himself." Evans had proposed that the Indians should retain all furs after their debts to the Company had been paid, that they should be able to ship furs to Red River, and that they should be able to offer furs to the Missionary Society.⁴⁴ Evans had also purchased trade goods at Red River to start a trading post at Rossville. As well, unknown to Ross, he had persuaded a non-commissioned servant retiring to England, to elicit the support of British newspapers for a public attack on the monopoly.⁴⁵

If Evans's activities are considered in conjunction with the active conspiracy on the part of the free traders to break the monopoly, or at least secure a favored position within it, the danger of the situation should be apparent. They were arousing the Red River Métis, the Country-born, and the Americans to oppose the monopoly. If the Company lost control of Norway House, the free traders would have access to the rich trade of the Athabasca and Saskatchewan. Any attempt to suppress a pious Protestant missionary or successful free traders could conceivably draw the displeasure of the Colonial Office. This would be dangerous, especially when Simpson was attempting to secure troops — ostensibly to counter possible American aggression, but also to suppress Red River unrest.⁴⁶

On June 16, 1845, almost immediately after hearing of Evans's efforts to break the monopoly, Simpson requested Alder to secure Evans's recall.⁴⁷ No other missionary was to be appointed. In December Alder gave his affirmative reply. A new superintendent would however be necessary. Simpson put forward an intimate friend, Rev. Dr. Richey of Canada, as absentee superintendent. The Wesleyan Society, in financial difficulty, was only too glad to approve.⁴⁸

In March 1846 Alder invited Evans to address a number of missionary rallies in England. Alder hoped that after the English tour Evans would accept the superintendency of the troubled Canadian St. Clair mission. He claimed that Evans was the only one sufficiently qualified "to defeat the machinations of those who are seeking to injure the interesting mission."⁴⁹ The real reasons behind the invitation were never revealed to Evans.

The recall had just been secured when a scandal of almost unbelievable magnitude, even for Rupert's Land, broke. Letitia Hargrave heard that "the whole village of Rossville had been converted into a seraglio." The missionary's harem had revolted.

A number of charges were levelled at Evans by the Rossville Indians. The most famous were those of Eliza, Maggy, and Ann. Eliza alleged that in the fall of 1845 "she was sent to the Garret of the mission store to fetch some moss, that Mr. Evans followed her, threw her down on the moss, lifted up her clothes, and attempted to do bad." Another, Maggy, declared that Mr. Evans "repeatedly had criminal connections with her during the period she was living in his house." Yet another, Ann, claimed that "one night Mr. Evans came into the study where she was sleeping and took . . . improper liberties with her person." Simpson, in reporting these incidents to Alder, added two others. In the course of the summer Evans apparently had slept

in the same tent with a young woman . . . no third party being present throughout the voyage from Red River to Norway House, generally occupying from five to fourteen days. . . . Secondly, he was in the habit of driving various girls of marriageable age in his cariole along lonely paths, which led to no house.⁵⁰

Anxious to refute these charges, Evans convened a church court and appointed William Mason, his hated assistant, as judge and jury. The trial itself, of which no transcript exists, was inexplicably peculiar. If Ross's comments on Evans's defence can be believed, it was weak. Of the three defence witnesses, all Indian, the first never testified at the trial, the second, it was alleged, had never been at the scene of the crime, and the testimony of the third was beyond belief. Ross's comment on the evidence of the Indian Charles, who was supposed to have been in Evans's cabin the night of Ann's rape, indicates the ludicrousness of the entire proceedings:

He [Charles] awoke, he does not know how, saw a light in the study, got up and peered through a knot hole. What aroused his curiosity and induced him to get out of bed to satisfy it he does not say — but it is not to be supposed that he would have taken that trouble, if he did not suspect that there was something else than reading or writing going on in the study.⁵¹

Charles claimed that he saw nothing.

The evidence was so contradictory that Mason could only declare Evans innocent. Evans was, however, far from satisfied that his reputation had been cleared, and continued to press the three girls for a public recantation. Ross thought Evans's actions in the weeks following the trial highly improper:

His [Evans's] attempt by promise and threats of temporal and eternal punishment to make these unfortunate women retract their evidence and perjure themselves have been carried on by himself and his emissaries without intermission to this day, and will, I am satisfied never cease till the poor creatures become wearied, frightened and disheartened, and say or do whatever he desires.⁵²

The principal plaintiff, Maggy, retracted her accusation. In the December 1846 epidemic Mason secured from her a deathbed reversal.⁵³

The scandal was more than a public airing of one of the illicit relationships that were always present in Rupert's Land. It impinged on the free trade issue. Evans demanded a Red River retrial even after he had been declared innocent. Had he succeeded, he would have precipitated a controversy of considerable proportions. William Mason's close friend, that stalwart defender of the Company's monopoly, Recorder Adam Thom, would have presided over any trial. The anti-Evans forces, Alexander Christie, Duncan Finlayson, William Mason, Donald Ross, Dr. Bunn, and Thomas Thomas, would have aligned themselves against Evans's sympathizers, the Sinclairs, Isbisters, McKays, and McDermotts. Maggy Sinclair would easily have been persuaded to confess that the scandal was a Company plot and that Mason was Ross's and Simpson's tool. Ross, however, denied the request. He felt

that no great good could arise from bringing the matter before the Red River court, the expense would be great and the stir and noise such a proceeding would create throughout the country might be detrimental whatever the result of the investigation.⁵⁴

If Mason's verdict of innocent is accepted as just, the possibility of conspiracy must be considered. There is no evidence to suggest that Simpson or Ross paid the women to incriminate Evans. Both lacked motive. Simpson had already asked Alder for Evans's recall.

Mason is an equally improbable conspirator, although the evidence points, if anywhere, in his direction. While Mason encouraged anti-Evans gossip and despised his superior, such a dastardly plot is out of character given the pious and sincere nature of his post-1854 conduct. Evans naturally thought Mason in league with the Company when Mason supported the monopoly and moderated his attack on Sunday travelling. Mason's secure niche near the top of the fur trade's social hierarchy is a more likely explanation for his support of the Company's position.

That Maggy and her friends sought to embarrass Evans is most probable. Evans had forced Maggy to marry the Indian father of her child. Like the other Rossville villagers, Maggy thought Evans's morals unduly strict, and she was probably delighted at his acute discomfort over something she regarded as inconsequential. It must be emphasized, however, that evidence is so fragmentary that no definitive judgments can be made; too much must remain conjecture.⁵⁵

While Simpson and Ross did not fabricate the scandals they did not hesitate to use them. When Evans left Norway House on June 29, 1846, he informed Ross that he would return. Simpson was not pleased. He confided to Ross the startling view that

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. . . . From some observations . . . which have come to my knowledge it strikes me . . . that Hassell's

death was not accidental but a deliberately planned murder. It is very desirable that we should know whether any intimacy existed between Evans and Hassell's wife and whether Hassell was aware of it and if the wife be 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 Hassell's death. . . . Now that 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 and king.⁵⁶

Since Ross's involvement in any inquiry would be suspect, Chief Trader Harriott, Simpson's secretary Mr. Hopkins, and Major Crofton of the Royal Warwickshire Sixth Regiment of Foot were appointed to investigate the Hassell accident of 1844 as well as the scandals. While the commissioners found no evidence that Hassell had been murdered, they were convinced that Evans was guilty of other charges. Simpson, anxious to prevent Evans's return and to discredit him on the British missionary circuit, immediately informed Alder that he had not

the slightest doubt . . . that the grave charges which . . . have been brought against Mr. Evans are unfortunately but too well founded, and . . . that no special pleadings nor the most ingenious cross examination could by any possibility overcome the leading facts.⁵⁷

Simpson's belief in Evans's guilt was probably sincere. Again there is nothing to suggest that Simpson or his minions bribed the commissioners or the witnesses. Major Crofton would not have accepted a bribe nor would the London Committee have countenanced such action.

Alder, however, chose to ignore the commission's report and listened instead to Evans's own pleadings. The Methodist secretaries closed the matter by informing Simpson that they

were and are of the opinion that the findings of Mr. Mason should be sustained which is, in every case, that the accused was *not* guilty of the crimes imputed to him by his accusers. With the evidence which was before us we could arrive at no other conclusion, as the replies which the Witnesses gave to the questions which were put to them on the cross examination show, that they either have no regard to truth, or else that they are utterly ignorant of the differences between truth and falsehood, and, therefore in either case, utterly unworthy of credit. . . . Unless Mr. Evans is to be considered as having been one of the most hardened and ungodly men that ever lived they [his pleadings] are entitled to our attention and credence.⁵⁸

There the case rested, the Indians telling one tale in Rupert's Land and Evans telling another in London. The missionary died the day after he gave his first speech in England, November 23, 1846, cleared of the charges made against him, but not of that of having had improper relations with Hassell's wife. The web of accusation and innuendo was never untangled, and cannot be now.

Yet the Norway House events were not isolated. Similar social antagonisms at Moose Factory can be documented. Though all went well

while the Rev. George Barnley was single, after his marriage to an "English lady" the atmosphere deteriorated and the social rivalry that had plagued Norway House now plagued Moose. The trifle which eventually "drove" the two back to England centered on Chief Factor Miles's refusal to permit Mrs. Barnley the use of the officers' mess for her tea parties.⁵⁹

The traditional interpretation of the Evans scandal as a struggle between commerce and Christianity, or between an evil genius and a Christian Saint must be discarded. Social antagonism, not a fundamental split over policy between the missionary society and Company, was the principal factor causing the Evans difficulties. In large part the older interpretation is a product of the tendency to examine the Hudson's Bay Company in solely commercial terms. While commerce may have been its principal *raison d'être*, it was also a civil government and to most in Rupert's Land a way of life. By the 1840's a unique society had evolved in the West. It was a society divided vertically by race, by religion, and by the military-like structure of the Company's service, but united horizontally by an intricate web of Scots, Orkney, Indian, and half-breed alliances. While the social gradations, upward mobility, and depth of class cleavage must still be determined, the Evans quarrel suggests that the stresses inherent in this society had a profound impact on the conduct and politics of the trade. Social and personal antagonism aggravated and were aggravated by the Red River free-trade turmoil of the mid 1840's. Perhaps the Sinclairs were as much social cast-offs from Company society as the Evanses. What is needed is a detailed study of the Company as a social rather than a commercial edifice.

ABBREVIATIONS

C.M.S.A.	Church Missionary Society Archives, Ottawa.
H.B.C.A.	Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Ottawa.
M.M.S.A.	Methodist Missionary Society Archives, Ottawa.
P.A.C.	Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa.
U.W.O.A.	University of Western Ontario Archives, London.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹M.M.S.A., Box 15, Letter 8, H. B. Steinhauer to Robert Alder, Dec. 15, 1845.
- ²Egerton Young, *The Apostle of the North* (Toronto, 1900), pp. 233-5; John MacLean, *James Evans* (Toronto, 1890), p. 15.
- ³Nan Shipley, *The James Evans Story* (Toronto, 1966).
- ⁴H.B.C.A., D.5/6, fo. 123d, Donald Ross to Simpson, April 19, 1841.
- ⁵*Ibid.*, B. 154/b/1, fo. 22, Ross to James Hargrave, Oct. 12, 1840; A. 12/1, fo. 258d-259d, Simpson to Committee, Aug. 10, 1832; D.4/23, fo. 116, Simpson to John Rowand, Feb. 28, 1838; E. H. Oliver, ed. *The Canadian North West: Its Early Development and Legislative Records* (Ottawa, 1915), p. 763; C.M.S.A., M.2, Rev. Wm. Cockran, Journal, Oct. 9, 1837.
- ⁶E. E. Rich, *Hudson's Bay Company 1670-1870* (Toronto, 1960), III, p. 470; Oliver, *op. cit.*, p. 831.
- ⁷H.B.C.A., D.4/59, fo. 33, Simpson to John Lee Lewes, Nov. 5, 1841.
- ⁸C.M.S.A., C.1/0, Cockran to the Secretaries, Aug. 6, 1840; M.1, Rev. John West, Report, Dec. 2, 1823.
- ⁹H.B.C.A., D.4/25, fo. 62, Simpson to Alder, Jan. 22, 1840; D.5/5, fo. 243, Alder to Simpson, Feb. 4, 1840; A.6/26, fo. 59, Committee to Duncan Finlayson, March 4, 1860.
- ¹⁰Goldwin French, *Parsons and Politics* (Toronto, 1962), p. 95.
- ¹¹H.B.C.A., D.5/5, fos. 243d, 244, Alder to Simpson, Feb. 4, 1840.

- ¹²U.W.O.A., Evans Papers, James Evans to Ephraim Evans, Aug. 2, 1842.
- ¹³*Ibid.*, William Shaw to Evans, May 1, 1842; May 2, 1843; May 12, 1843; Francis Boucher to Evans, May 6, 1842; Oliver, *op. cit.*, p. 839; U.W.C.A., Evans Papers, William Paterson McKay to Evans, Nov. 23, 1844.
- ¹⁴P.A.C., Hargrave Papers, 2815, Ross to Hargrave, July 7, 1844; H.B.C.A., D.5/6, fo. 53, Hargrave to Simpson, Oct. 20, 1844.
- ¹⁵*Ibid.*, B.154/b/1, fo. 3, Ross to Simpson, Aug. 3, 1840.
- ¹⁶*Ibid.*, D.5/7, fo. 201, Ross to Simpson, Aug. 15, 1842; *Ibid.*, D.5/8, fo. 445d, Ross to Simpson, Aug. 7, 1843.
- ¹⁷U.W.O.A., Evans Papers, James Evans to Mary Evans, May 2, 1839.
- ¹⁸Young, *op. cit.*, p. 144.
- ¹⁹U.W.O.A., Evans Papers, Evans to Rev. Joseph Stinson, Aug. 20, 1838; Evans to Ephraim Evans, Oct. 15, 1838.
- ²⁰H.B.C.A., D.5/59, fo. 14, Simpson to Roward, July 26, 1841; M.M.S.A., Box 13, Letter 56, Simpson to Evans, July 27, 1841.
- ²¹U.W.O.A., Evans Papers, Evans to Mary Evans, Dec. 8, 1841.
- ²²*Ibid.*, Rundle to Evans, May 23, 1842.
- ²³The material for fur trade genealogies is widespread. See especially the appendices and footnotes of Denis Bayley, *A Londoner in Rupert's Land* (Winnipeg, 1969), Margaret Arnett MacLeod, ed., *The Letters of Letitia Hargrave*, The Champlain Society, No. 28 (Toronto, 1947), E. E. Rich, ed., *Journal of Occurrences in the Athabasca Department*, The Champlain Society, No. 1 (Toronto, 1938), and E. E. Rich, ed., *Colin Robertson's Correspondence Book*, The Champlain Society, No. 2 (Toronto, 1938).
- ²⁴MacLeod, *op. cit.*, pp. 150-151, L. Hargrave to Dugald Mactavish, Sept. 9, 1843.
- ²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 107, L. Hargrave to Mrs. Mactavish, May 14, 1842.
- ²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 157, L. Hargrave to Mrs. Mactavish, Sept. 1, 1843.
- ²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 212, L. Hargrave to Mrs. Mactavish, Nov. 30, 1845.
- ²⁸H.B.C.A., D.5/12, fo. 174, Ross to Simpson, Aug. 15, 1844.
- ²⁹MacLeod, *op. cit.*, p. 188, L. Hargrave to Florence Mactavish, Sept. 9, 1844.
- ³⁰H.B.C.A., D.5/12, fo. 174d, Ross to Simpson, Aug. 14, 1844; U.W.O.A., Evans Papers, Clarissa Evans to James Evans, July 24, 1841; H.B.C.A., D4/29, fo. 9d, Simpson to Evans, June 23, 1843.
- ³¹*Ibid.*, D.5/6, fo. 8, Evans to Simpson, n.d., 1841; John Carroll, "James Evans," *The Canadian Methodist Magazine*, XVI, 1883, pp. 138-9; U.W.O.A., Evans Papers, Alder to Evans, Dec. 2, 1844; Alder to Evans, May 25, 1844; H.B.C.A., D.4/32, fo. 118, Simpson to Hargrave, June 14, 1845.
- ³²*Ibid.*, D.4/29, fo. 9, Simpson to Evans, June 29, 1843; D.5/12, fo. 171d, Ross to Simpson, Aug. 14, 1844; D.5/12, fo. 46, Evans to Simpson, July 19, 1844; P.A.C., Hargrave Papers, 3042, Ross to Hargrave, July 26, 1844.
- ³³*Ibid.*, 3078-3079, A statement of the unfortunate circumstances under which my valuable and most esteemed interpreter Thomas Hassell lost his life. Signed by James Evans.
- ³⁴H.B.C.A., B.154/b/1, fo. 43d, Ross to Simpson, Aug. 14, 1844.
- ³⁵U.W.O.A., Evans Papers, James to Mary Evans, Sept. 30, 1844; H.B.C.A., D.5/8, fo. 372d, Evans to Simpson, July 28, 1843; D.5/7, fo. 201d, Ross to Simpson, Aug. 15, 1842.
- ³⁶*Ibid.*, D.4/29, fo. 9-10d, Simpson to Evans, June 29, 1843.
- ³⁷*Ibid.*, D.5/8, fo. 371d-372d, Evans to Simpson, July 28, 1843.
- ³⁸*Ibid.*, D.5/8, fo. 445, Ross to Simpson, Aug. 7, 1843.
- ³⁹U.W.O.A., Evans Papers, James to Ephraim Evans, July 3, 1843.
- ⁴⁰H.B.C.A., D.5/14, fo. 229d, Ross to Simpson, Aug. 6, 1845.
- ⁴¹*Ibid.*, D.5/14, fo. 52, Evans to Ross, May 19, 1845.
- ⁴²*Ibid.*, D.5/14, 33d, Ross to Simpson, May 21, 1845.
- ⁴³*Ibid.*, D.5/17, fo. 300, Barnley to Simpson, May 29, 1846.
- ⁴⁴D.5/14, fo. 49, Ross to Simpson, May 31, 1845; M.M.S.A., Box 14, Letter 258, Evans to Simpson, n.d.; H.B.C.A., B.154/b/3, fo. 9, Evans to Ross, Oct. 12, 1845.
- ⁴⁵U.W.O.A., Evans Papers, John Fraser to Evans, Sept. 2, 1845; William Paterson McKay to Evans, n.d. (1844?).
- ⁴⁶E. E. Rich, ed. *London Correspondence Inward from Eden Colville 1849-1852*, The Hudson's Bay Record Society, No. 19 (London, 1956), pp. xl-xliv.
- ⁴⁷H.B.C.A., D.4/33, fo. 6d-7, Simpson to Alder, June 16, 1845.
- ⁴⁸*Ibid.*, D.5/34, fo. 5d, Simpson to Ross, Dec. 29, 1845.
- ⁴⁹U.W.O.A., Evans Papers, Alder to Evans, March 31, 1846.
- ⁵⁰MacLeod, *op. cit.*, p. 208, L. Hargrave to Mrs. D. Mactavish, Sept. 5, 1845; H.B.C.A., D.5/17, fo. 79d-82, Evans to Ross, Feb. 13, 1846; D.4/34, fo. 44, Simpson to Alder, August 13, 1846.
- ⁵¹*Ibid.*, D.5/17, fo. 80-82, Ross to Simpson, Feb. 14, 1846.
- ⁵²*Ibid.*, D.5/17, fo. 76, Ross to Simpson, April 5, 1846.
- ⁵³*Ibid.*, D.5/17, fo. 83d, Evans to Ross, March 31, 1846; M.M.S.A., Box 15, Letter 7, Mason to Alder, Dec. 16, 1846.

⁵⁴H.B.C.A., D.5/18, fo. 420, Alder to Simpson, Dec. 1, 1846; D.5/17, fo. 79d, Ross to Evans, Feb. 13, 1846.

⁵⁵C.M.S.A., C.1/0, Mason, Correspondence and Diaries, 1855-1869; M.M.S.A., Box 14, Letter 7, Mason to Alder, Dec. 16, 1846.

⁵⁶H.B.C.A., D.4/34, fo. 31, Simpson to Ross, July 7, 1846.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, D.4/35, fo. 44, Simpson to Alder, Aug. 13, 1846.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, D.5/8, fo. 422d, Alder to Simpson, Dec. 1, 1846.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, D.4/36, fo. 95d, Simpson to Alder, Nov. 8, 1847.

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