

To the Members of the Church of England who signed the Address to the Bishop of Montreal of the 17th March, 1849, and others concerned in the subject of that Address.

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Dec. 13/65

MY DEAR BROTHER,

It has pleased God that, by a recent transaction connected with the Ecclesiastical affairs of this Parish, I should be placed, as must be incident to an office like mine, in an exceedingly difficult and trying position, having been called upon to decide a question, in the agitation of which some ferment of public feeling is excited, as well as some jar produced in certain more private relations of social life. And the overtures which have been made by me are represented as carrying prospective advantages of a high order, while it is conceived on the other hand that they cannot be declined without serious detriment to the interests of the Church.

If this were all which presents itself in the disposal of the question, it is needless to say that it would be a question very soon and simply settled.

The Wesleyan place of worship in the Upper Town, being about to become vacant by the transfer of the Congregation attending it, to a building now in course of erection, has passed to the hands, by purchase, of three gentlemen who propose to convert it into a Chapel of the Parish and to endow the incumbency with £150 per annum, secured upon the pew-rents, which salary it is projected to augment by the formation, from different sources, of an endowment fund.

There are many friends and well-wishers of the Church who, upon the very first aspect of such a proposal, conclude it to be one respecting the acceptance of which it is impossible, for a moment, to hesitate; and there are many others who, penetrating a little below the surface and discerning that all is not so perfectly smooth and so unexceptionably beneficial as would be judged by this exterior promise, conceive, nevertheless, that in weighing the advantages and objections attaching to the proposal, the former very clearly preponderate.

It is just this question of preponderancy upon this side or upon that, which it has rested with me to decide. However easy of decision it may appear to other minds, I can only say with reference to my own, that in the whole history of my public duties, at all times sufficiently arduous as well as solemn, I have never had imposed upon me a more perplexing or harassing responsibility than this.

My Brethren, such questions are to be approached by persons in authority as agents of God; and, without reference to fear or favor among men, without calculation of consequences from which various worldly considerations might induce them instinctively to shrink,—they must, in the best exercise of a poor fallible human judgment, but seeking, in all humility and earnestness such direction as will be vouchsafed to them from above, consult the solid and permanent good of the Church.

Standing, then, in a double relation to you as your Bishop administering this Diocese, and by an undesirable conjunction of different offices in the same person, from which I have in vain endeavoured to be relieved, as your Rector in the Parish, I feel it right both for my own sake and for yours, (although all the responsibility in the matter, is only my own) to put you in possession of those views upon the several points of the case, which have brought me to the conclusion that, however ungracious, to set it in no other light, may be the appearance of such a rejection, I ought not to close with this offer.

I. And, first, with respect to the purely general question of the character and description of this undertaking. The system of *proprietary Chapels* is, I think I may venture to say, beyond all question, a system by no means free from objection. It prevailed for a long time extensively in the great English Cities, and was encouraged, on account of obstacles existing to the multiplication of Churches and Chapels of a more regular character, to meet the advancing wants of the population, (in which, however, it left out the poor.) Nothing, in fact, is more notorious than that in England, it has been a mere system of speculation on the part of the proprietors—an much so as in the case of a rail-road, a range of shops, or a livery-stable. And although, in the present instance, no shade of a suspicion of motives like these, can possibly attach to the *individual proprietors* of the undertaking, the feature of the *system* itself remains the same. But for many years past it has been rapidly giving way at home to the far more wholesome system of District Churches and Chapels of Ease, for which new facilities have been given by the Legislature. There is some fallacy (although it may sound invidious to say so) in an argument which has been used in favor of the present project, which represents the proposed Chapel as a gift to the Church. Many gifts to the Church have been made of late years in England in the shape of Churches or Chapels entirely free, or with large and ample reservations for the poor, in localities where there was a destitution of the means of worship. But it is only in an equivocal sense that a Chapel can be so called which is placed where the Church has already a sufficiency of accommodation, and of which the revenues, the patronage and the influence are retained in the hands of the proprietors or their representatives.

There are (as is sufficiently known) actual occurrences within this Diocese which do not afford any very eminent argument in favor of the felicitous working of proprietary Chapels put under the management of Trustees—a system than which nothing more unsatisfactory in itself or more incapable of ensuring the very ends for which it is specially constituted, could, in my judgment, be devised. And in support of such an opinion, I might appeal to abundant examples both in England and in the United States of America.

II. With respect to the actual and for a long time to come, the prospective wants of the Parish, the opening of an additional Chapel within the walls of the Upper Town would practically have the character of interference much more than of relief. The returns which I have procured in detail of vacant pews and detached sittings in the Cathedral, Trinity Chapel and St. Peter's Chapel, (which last is not so remote but that residents in the Upper and Lower Town are found to attend it,) show that there is a large excess of accommodation for Church of England worshippers, above what is occupied, to be procured at very moderate rates. And the evening services in St. Matthew's Chapel and All Saints, it is well known, have been always free of all charge, to those who attend them. Meantime the Protestant population of Quebec has received so many serious checks that it has been but very slowly augmenting. The two visitations of Cholera, the two conflagrations, and the removal of the Seat of Government as well as of Military Head-Quarters, with other conspiring causes, have so counterworked the natural increase of population and the accessions from that portion of the Emigration which remains in Quebec, that, so far as evidence is yielded by the record of Baptisms, the Church of England population (although it is fully believed and sustained by the evidence of the census that the Church has not lost her proper ground,) has not increased within the last twenty years. In the ten years immediately preceding, the baptisms increased from 69 to 217. Within the walls, it is plain that the population cannot push itself out, and if any want is felt now for new Chapels within the Parish, it is quite in another direction.

Now I believe it will be found that when, in the case of another religious body in a certain city of these North American Colonies, although it be a body of which the systematic principle and the presiding influence may be called in a certain sense *democratic*, a desire was felt to build a new place of worship upon a larger scale and to import a Minister of that sort of popular talent which, at least so long as the charm of novelty should hold,—(what principles to sway, what engines to work with in the Church of Christ!)—would be calculated to attract a flourishing attendance, and when matters seemed to be all in good train