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SUSTENTATION OF THE MINISTRY.

Toronto, 20th May, 1848.

Mr. Ed. Ron.—The question of the support of the gospel ministry in unwedded Churches is likely to occupy much attention in all communities. Dr. Vauquian, of London, has devoted a very able article to it in the British Quarterly. The Edinburgh Witness has taken up the subject; and the Montreal Witness looks upon it as the grand question of the day—in so far as anticipated evils are concerned. The Synod of our Church, at its approaching meeting, must discuss the matter at length; and it occurs to me that a few remarks on our Sustentation Fund Scheme might, with some advantage, be submitted to your readers.

I am very certain that all the members of our church are at one as to the desirableness of a fund, to be raised by voluntary contribution, for the sustentation of the gospel ministry; but whether this shall be literally a common fund, out of which every minister shall be paid, or one out of which shall be supplemented all stipends below a certain value; or whether a scheme analogous to that of the Free Church of Scotland shall be preferred: on these matters there may be differences of sentiment.—Each plan has its advantages. A proportional scale of support for the ministry in different localities is desirable; extremes in the measure of support are to be avoided, if possible; and every pastor ought to be placed above anxieties about the bread of himself and his family. On the other hand, talent and assiduity in the ministerial office, as in every other, should not pass unrewarded, even in this world; the flock should always be led to take a deep interest in their own concerns; and their affections to a faithful pastor ought not to be carelessly tampered with, or rudely restrained. The two things we should aim at, should be—a competency—and regular payments; any scheme that secures these will suit us very well.

One great objection to the Sustentation Scheme of our Church, has been the claim it seems to involve of an entire surrender of the property and assets of the congregation to the Church Courts, and to be managed by a body responsible not to the congregation, but to the Courts of the Church. Deacons may be of great service in managing, but before our people generally give up the management of temporalities to them, they will demand an annual election, and a direct control; and both of these are inconsistent with the nature of the diocese. Indeed, I do not see the desirableness of confounding the temporal and the spiritual jurisdiction in the case of finance, any more than I can see it in such a case as that which originated the disruption in Scotland.

On this ground also, the proposed "trust deed" has been rejected by the congregation of Knox's Church here,—and justly. Indeed, I am inclined to hope that the omission of a clause, guarding against the apparently ambitious scheme of Synodical management, was entirely accidental. At any rate the Synod will, I am sure, with one voice, repudiate such a claim.

Another great cause of offence, was the principle of arrangement adopted and announced as to the allocation of seats. I do not quote the particulars, as I wish rather to promote a harmonious adjustment. They are to be found in the "Regulations for managing the secular affairs of Congregations," printed in the Record for December, 1844. Now, although these may be considered as simply recommendations, still they indicate what was supposed to be the mind of the Church; and an affectionate people will always give to the mind of the Church or its Courts a respectful deference. It is, therefore, not enough to say that as these are merely recommendations they may be adopted by our people, or not, as they please, but mean them to be adopted; and the permission to pass them over, is always to be understood as coupled with

a desire that they should not be passed over. The objection to these rules did not lie against their compulsory character, but rather against the principle involved in them, whether compulsory or not, a principle which our people—wisely as I think—repudiated. Why, then, not repeal them at once?

An element of feebleness and inefficiency was from the beginning introduced into the scheme by the "N. B." appended to the regulations of Nov. 1844, and which form the standing laws of the Sustentation Board. It runs thus, "It is distinctly to be understood (and if deemed advisable may be expressly stated, that in making the above declaration as to the amount which they intend to contribute to the Sustentation fund, congregations do not come under any positive obligation. They will neither be held absolutely bound to contribute up to the full amount declared, nor understood purposely to restrict themselves within it, but expected, while making an effort, at least to fulfil their declared intention—just to contribute more or less in proportion to their ability." Assuredly if any congregation choose to give above their obligation, there is no law to prevent it, and they will be entitled to the cordial thanks of all concerned; but it always appeared to me that if a congregation is required to make an election at all, adherence rigidly to that election is essential to the working of the scheme. Perhaps the commission calculated on the deficiencies of one class of congregation being at the end of the year covered by the supplementary grants of others; and this may be a very good idea; but then it changes the whole character of the scheme—reducing it from that of a well compacted scheme of mutual assurance, to that of a mere eleemosynary arrangement.—Moreover, in case of a failure in this (perhaps reasonable) expectation, on what party was the loss to fall? The scheme seems to make no provision for this.

I would respectfully suggest that perhaps the greatest bar in the way of a comfortable adjustment of this matter, has been thrown up by the actings or rather the non-actings of the Synod and the Board themselves. Within a few weeks of the first promulgation of the scheme in the Record for December, 1844, the large and influential congregation of Knox's Church, Toronto, met, and by a succession of strong and very ably drawn resolutions, opposed the scheme both in its principle and in its details. It appears, also, that the powerful congregation of Galt, and under the able ministry of the excellent minister, who had a principal part in drawing up the scheme in all its parts, did not accede to the scheme. Moreover, the members who met in communion, both at Hamilton and Toronto, prior to the Synod of 1845, (at Cobourg,) were greatly divided about it. These considerations should have led to an impression that surely there must be something wrong in or about the scheme; and whatever the objections may have been, they ought to have been most seriously taken up by the Sustentation Board, and some modification of the scheme proposed by them. This does not appear to have been done, and meanwhile the Synod met at Cobourg, in June, 1845. After various private conferences and public discussions, the Synod (minutes p. 58) found that a "majority of congregations had approved of a common fund, and of the plan of distribution"; but that "great diversity of opinion exists with regard to the other arrangements suggested by the commission." The Synod recommended the "principle" and "the plan" accordingly, but left it to the discretion of congregations "to act in the matter as they may deem expedient." All "matters of detail" also were left to the discretion of congregations; and even as to the "arrangements" that had been approved and sanctioned by the Synod, the commission were appointed to "revise" them; and the Board were empowered to employ an agent, "if they saw fit." It does not appear that anything was done either by the commission or by the Board; and matters continued as before till the meeting of Synod, at Hamilton, in June, 1846. The report of the Board was then read and approved; but an overture from Montreal brought up the whole subject for discussion. After full debate, and on the report and recommendation of a Committee specially ap-

pointed to prepare a draft of deliverance on the subject, they had unanimously agreed, without any interference with the existing Sustentation scheme, to return the overture to the Sustentation Board, with instruction to them to take the whole subject of the sustentation of the ministry into consideration, to call for reports of Presbyteries on the subject, and report their reasons thereon at the next meeting of Synod;" (min. p. 81) various other instructions were given to the Board, all of which, I believe, were attended to; but the primary and most important one remains still, I rather think, untouched. So anxious was I to have this important matter of the "whole subject of the sustentation of the ministry" taken up by the Board, that I remained in Hamilton specially for the purpose of attending the first meeting after the Synod, when I brought the Synod's report before them; but found, to my surprise, that the members of the Board did not look on this matter as at all requiring their first attention, and therefore declined to hold any action upon it. As I was not a member of the Board, I could not make any motion on the subject; but expressed a hope that so soon as the Board resolved to take up the matter, I might have notice of it, that I might attend if I thought proper. My whole soul was set upon the subject of the sustentation of the ministry, and it would have given me great pleasure to have assisted the Board to the best of my ability. It does not appear, however, that "the whole subject of the sustentation of the ministry" has been as yet taken up by them *de novo*; and by a mere oversight, I believe, the names of all the Ministers who had been members of the Board, were left out of the new commission—mine, of course, among the rest. Thus did matters stand until the Synod met at Kingston, in June last, when the usual approval of the report was moved and carried, and two regulations of a minor character adopted. But a report from the Board on the "whole subject of the sustentation of the ministry" does not seem to have been submitted.—I was not present at the Synod; but I can find nothing in the printed minutes, or in the Record, regarding it.

I do not wish to attach blame to any party in this matter. Perhaps we are all to blame more or less; and yet may I not hint that perhaps there may have lurked in the minds of the excellent men who form the Sustentation Board, somewhat of an overweening attachment to their own private scheme, leading to a strong reluctance to any proposed organic change? I am not asserting any thing positively on the matter; but clearly am I convinced that until the original scheme of 1844 is set aside, by the same authority that created or recommended it, no progress in the way of an amicable and judicious settlement will be made.

By the last report of the Board, (13th Jan., 1848) it would appear that the proceedings of the Board are nearly at a stand, and a Committee has by them been appointed to prepare a statement for the Synod. Thus the matter will be brought up for discussion, and I rather think that the discussion will not turn upon the "anomalous position" of the scheme, as being acted on only by minority of the church; but rather upon the merits of the whole case. If the scheme had been such as to approve itself heartily to the mind of the Synod, I do not see why it has not been zealously adopted by all parties interested. Let us, however, hope that all the members will come forward to the discussion, unprejudiced either for or against existing arrangements.

I am very clear that if the Presbyterian Church of Canada shall stand forth to our people as the unflinching advocate of a high-toned discipline—an effective system of theological preparatory education for the ministry—and a sacred conservation of the rights and privileges of her attached members—there will be no want on the part of any congregation, either of ability or of will, to help her on to a vigorous and healthful "Sustentation."

I am, Mr. Editor,

Sincerely yours,

ROB. BURNS.