

Carsphairn and the "Late" Minister

16th November 1892

Dumfries and Galloway Standard

A correspondent writes: At the important heritors' meeting of the parish of Carsphairn held on Monday, in the Parish Church, the following communication from Captain Clark-Kennedy of Knockgray was read by the clerk to the heritors at the meeting:

To the Clerk to Heritors of Carsphairn.

Travellers' Club, Pall Mall,
London, S.W., Nov. 11th 1892

Dear Sir, - As, to my great regret, I find it will be out of my power to attend the meeting of heritors to be held in Carsphairn Kirk, on Monday first, from the fact of important business detaining me in town, I will ask you to be good enough to read the following statement and protest, on my behalf (in my enforced absence), to the heritors assembled.

I have, of course, most carefully read and fully considered the document you forwarded me, to wit, the "Summons Augmentation at the instance of Rev. P.C. Findlay against the Heritors of Carsphairn."

I would, in the first place, observe that the document in question contains so many remarkable statements that I cannot help thinking it will have been perused with as great a degree of surprise by the general body of heritors as it was by myself.

In the second place, I fancy all of us will readily agree that to choose a time of great agricultural depression (like the present) in which to put forward a claim for a large increase in pay shows at all events that either the framer of the document is lamentably ignorant of the depressed state of the district generally, or else that the Rev. P.C. Findlay has a somewhat odd view of showing an interest in the unfortunate parish to which he was, only a few years since, appointed minister.

The "summons" is, I presume, put forward in the Rev. P.C. Findlay's name, and therefore the payment (supposing his claim to succeed) would necessarily be made to himself: at all events, we come to such a conclusion, being informed in the "summons" of nothing to the contrary.

One slightly remarkable statement is to the effect that it takes the minister "three days to accomplish the journey comfortably" from the manse to Kirkcudbright and back.

It is further stated that the minister has to be at the expense of "keeping a horse and a manservant." Also, we are told, and true enough, that "coal, meal, flour, etc., are higher than in any other parish." But if that argument applies to the minister it equally applies to us all.

It is further set forth that "the rental of the parish has greatly increased;" but the fact (which must be perfectly well known to the Rev. P.C. Findlay) that every farm which, within the last three or four years, has been to let, has experienced an immense fall in value; that fact, important as it is, is carefully kept back from this wondrous document.

It can be very easily proved that the fall in values of farms in the parish is, as I say, very heavy, and I fail to see any tangible improvement in the near future. To quote one instance alone, the three farms of Knockgray, Carminnows and Marscalloch, in this parish, were let at Whitsunday last year to the old tenants at a fall of rather over 50 per cent of the rental of the previous lease!

Is then, the present, I ask the heritors, the proper season for a minister (and especially a non-resident minister) to ask for a large increase in stipend? Is it treating the parish fairly?

How, I would ask, can the Rev. P.C. Findlay – living, as I am given to understand he does, or has at any rate recently lived in France – make any use of a horse, a man-servant, &c, in Carsphairn?

Allusion, I notice, is also made to the “support of a minister and his family.” The heritors, I believe, were unaware of the existence, in Carsphairn at all events, of any “family” appertaining to Mr Findlay!

In short, I would urge, in the strongest terms possible, upon the other heritors the necessity of the firm refusal of any such petition, which one cannot help thinking is worded in a manner not unlikely to mislead any heritors unacquainted with the local facts surrounding this case.

As regards myself, you will as clerk be good enough to note that I, on my own part, protest very strongly against the entire “summons”, and I would beg you to observe that I have had one examination made into my “titles”, with the result that I find from the decree of modification and locality by the Court of Session, in the year 1862, the teinds of my properties of Knockgray, Marscalloch, and Carminnows have been “surrendered” and converted into a money payment, whereby the stipend payable to the minister from these properties cannot now be increased by any new process of augmentation which he may raise against the heritors.

And this being the case legally as far as I am concerned, I think and hope I have made clear to you my position in the matter. I would further state that you will obligingly note that I am not to be held liable for any expenses in connection with the new “summons” of augmentation.

I need scarcely add that it is with feelings of the greatest regret I again see that the unlucky ecclesiastical troubles of one poor parish have thus been “dug up” once more by the action of one whom one would have thought was as interested as any in Carsphairn in trying to forget the past.

I shall send copies of this protest to all the local newspapers. – Believe me, dear Mr Wylie, yours faithfully,

(signed) Alex. W.M. Clark-Kennedy.

P.S. You will bear in mind that, to the great regret of many amongst us, during the long and trying period of our parish troubles a short time ago, the Established Church congregation were entirely thrown over by their own Church; the sole religious instruction that was afforded as being given, and ungrudgingly given, by the minister of the United Presbyterian Church, much to their credit and to our benefit. Therefore, these unseemly renewals of “old sores” will, to my mind, do much to assist towards the perhaps not far distant disestablishment of the Established Church of Scotland.

Much feeling appears to have been aroused in the district of the Glenkens by this ill-timed application of a non-resident minister for a considerable augmentation of stipend. We understand the Rev. Peter C. Findlay resides abroad, at present in France. Besides which the existing minister, appointed by a special arrangement to take Mr Findlay’s place, has made himself greatly liked in Carsphairn.