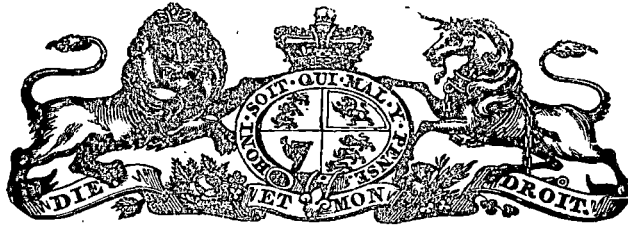


(No. 66.)



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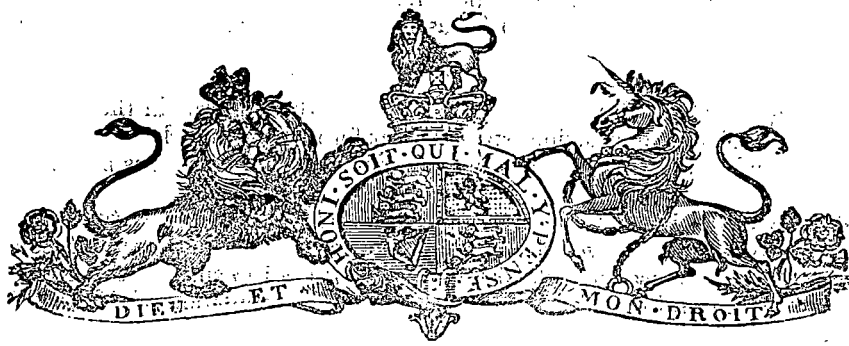
T A S M A N I A.

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH AMENDMENT BILL,
(No. 22) :

PETITION FROM MR. JOHN GELLIE.

Presented by Mr. Crowther, August 15; and ordered by the Council to be printed,
August 17, 1882.



*To the Honorable the President and Members of the Legislative Council,
in Parliament assembled.*

The Petition of the undersigned,

HUMBLY SHOWETH :

THAT I am an ordained Elder of St. Andrew's Church, Hobart, in connection with the Presbyterian Church of Tasmania, and have been such for the past twelve years, and have been actively engaged in the work of the Church for the last twenty years, and occasionally acting as a member of the Governing Body.

Your Petitioner views with great anxiety an attempt now being made to amend the Presbyterian Church Act, which proposed amendment would confer powers which, in the hands of unscrupulous administrators, will, in your Petitioner's judgment, work the utter alienation of our properties and squandering of our endowments.

Your Petitioner directs the attention of your Honorable House to the fact "that most of the present ministers of the Church are new to the Colony; knowing little of our history; some of them in utter ignorance as to how our debenture fund stands or has been used; and are led sometimes to act detrimentally to the Church's interests through improper information."

Your Petitioner would respectfully draw the attention of your Honorable House to the fact "that by 'The State Aid Commutation Act' our Church received from the State the sum of £8648 in debentures, and intended as a permanent endowment." When the Rev. John Storie was Treasurer of that fund he saved the sum of £1180 accrued interest, and invested it by a trust deed in the names of two trustees as an additional permanent endowment with the sum above named.

Your Petitioner learned some time past that not only were the trusts of the £1180 set aside and violated, and the whole sum squandered, but that the original sum of £8648 was drawn against at the Bank to the amount of at least £740, and the original sum placed as security; so that within the last six years our cash endowment has been reduced £2000. And if the trusts of our property and moneys have already been violated without the pretext of law, what may we expect under the cover of a legal enactment?

The basis of our Church government, as your Honorable House was pleased to make it in passing "The Presbyterian Church Act," is, "The Form of Presbyterian Church Government agreed on by the Assembly of Divines, at Westminster, in the year 1643," wherein is distinctly laid down "that no man is to be inducted a minister of a particular congregation if they of that congregation can show just cause of exception against him."

Your Petitioner desires to state that, in the case of the congregation of St. Andrew's, Hobart, when desiring to call a minister, this law was shamelessly violated by the Rev. James Scott being thrust upon them. That Rev. gentleman was supposed to be ministering to a large and liberal congregation at St. John's, Macquarie-street; but it was found that at the beginning of the year 1880 their Dr. balance for current expenses was £330, such sum having been since largely increased.

Your Honorable House will perceive that amalgamation was, to that Rev. gentleman and his people, of vital moment. By concealing the fact that they were largely in arrears for current expenses; by representing to the governing body "that a majority of St. Andrew's congregation desired amalgamation," a statement which could not be substantiated; by representing that a larger amount of clerical help would be provided in the shape of a second minister, which has never been carried out; by four members of St. John's congregation being permitted to speak and vote on this important question,—our rights as a congregation were ruthlessly set aside; and, since they have obtained St. Andrew's, the amount incurred in repairs has become a charge upon the property.

So far as your Petitioner can learn, the Rev. James Scott is the only member of the Governing Body moving in the matter of these additional powers. The Governing Body of the Church has not been consulted, nor, as a Governing Body, so far as your Petitioner is aware, joined in a desire for this new legislation.

Since the passing of "The Presbyterian Church Act" the Church in the city and throughout the Colony is in a more unhappy and divided state than before,—showing clearly that State legislation, when used for selfish ends, does not tend to peace and harmony in a religious body.

The Church in Macquarie-street, Hobart, has been closed for nearly two years, and is now standing as a beacon to those who would deprive their fellow men of liberty of conscience. The revenue, however, from the manse and school-house is being used to support the minister forced into St. Andrew's, and to make up his stipend. The Presbyterian population of Macquarie and Davey streets, Sandy Bay, and Battery Point are now compelled to travel to St. Andrew's, or attend an evening service at Sandy Bay, conducted, as a rule, by a layman. St. John's Church was originally built to accommodate the people living in these localities, since which time the population there has not diminished, but largely increased. St. Andrew's Church and St. John's were both built by Government and private contributions combined, and the one was never intended to be arbitrarily shut up and let as a source of revenue to maintain the other.

Your Petitioner feels that to grant the power to sell or to lease the property of St. John's for other than for what it was originally subscribed for and erected will be doing a great wrong to our body in the city; will be an outrage upon the feelings of those subscribers living; will be a great deterrent to the liberality of those who may be called upon to subscribe to similar edifices; and will act as a barrier to those who might otherwise endow, or leave substantial support to, the Church in the future.

Your Petitioner humbly prays that your Honorable House may be pleased to reject the Bill now before it.

And your Petitioner, as in duty bound, will ever pray, &c.

JOHN GELLIE.

Hobart, 14th August, 1882.