

R. B. Seeley

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE SYNOD OF THE PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH OF CANADA IN CONNECTION WITH THE CHURCH  
OF SCOTLAND, AND ESPECIALLY TO THE MEMBERS AND  
ADHERENTS OF ST. ANDREW'S CHURCH, (CHURCH OF  
SCOTLAND,) MONTREAL.

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The following Circular is in vindication of the undersigned, against a slur on his character, made by his Minister, on the floor of Synod, on the fourth of November last past, at Toronto.

The undersigned, a member of St. Andrew's Church, Montreal, it will be remembered, was ordained an Elder of that Church, together with other members thereof, amongst whom was James Johnston, Esquire, merchant, of this city, sometime during the month of January, eighteen hundred and seventy-one.

Matters moved along quietly and smoothly, in connection with the prosecution of Church affairs, until the month of April following, or thereabouts, when certain changes were asked for by some members of Session, who represented that a number of the congregation desired an alteration in the mode of worship, viz.: — From sitting to standing at singing, and from standing to kneeling at prayer. This idea was the cause of the first disturbance of the peace in St. Andrew's Church (Kirk Session) from the time Mr. Lang became Minister of the Church. Mr. Johnston being an out-and-out Kirk man, sorely resisted the resolution for such changes, and continued to do so until he resigned in May, eighteen hundred and seventy-three.

The undersigned freely admits, that in a great many instances, during the discussion of Session matters, Mr. Johnston's conduct was not what one could term courteous, or

otherwise evincing a Christian spirit ; but, on the other hand, he oftentimes had severe provocation ; and having a desire to maintain the old maxims of the Mother Church, it was tantalizing to him to see men evidently doing their utmost to do away with the old principles and forms of the Church that he had so much regard and affection for.

Under these circumstances, a great amount of leniency must be extended to our old friend, who, after all, is by no means the man that some members of the Session term him.

I admit that I have condemned him, and have often been sorely vexed in my heart at his actions ; and it is, doubtless, generally known that I seconded the resolution for his six months' suspension from the office of the Eldership ;—I have to remark that I entered the Session an inexperienced man in Church matters—but I felt that I would early grapple with the work, having co-workers enrolled, some of whom were men of a great amount of experience. But, before I was long there, I soon found that I, with older—yea, much older men than myself—was misled by parties, who, either from want of knowing better, or otherwise purposely, did, as, for instance, in the case of the suspension, what I was informed was quite legal ; and no one caring about moving the resolution, Mr. Reekie moved, and I seconded it. We did so, seeing that the others were evidently dubious about it—even those very men who said it was all perfectly correct. Anyhow, the seconding of the said resolution was *the first false step I made* in Sessional matters, which was so widely and sorely condemned by members of our own and other congregations, both in this city and elsewhere.

However, to get at the purport of this Circular, I need not dilate any further in regard to what took place at subsequent meetings of Session — suffice it to say, that at a meeting of Presbytery, held in St. Paul's Church, in the month of May, 1873, Mr. Johnston, at the instance of members of the Session, and at the request made him by several of his friends in the Presbytery, resigned, upon condition that the minutes relating to the controversy between himself and

the Session should be forthwith deleted. He was assured that such would be the case by certain members of the Church Court, amongst whom was the ruling Elder of St. Andrew's Kirk Session, who stated, as I learn, that, although he had no authority to make such a promise, yet he had every reason to believe the Session would ratify anything he did. Mr. Johnston thereupon signed the resignation, with the distinct understanding that the minutes would be deleted forthwith without fail.

At a subsequent meeting of the Kirk session, the representative Elder reported what had taken place, which was ratified *but not minuted*. The resignation was read and accepted, Mr. Lang, the moderator, requesting that he be allowed to name myself with two others, whom, if I remember right, were Messrs. Hunter and Morris, for the purpose of carrying out such deletion.

This Committee, for some reason evidently, was not entered on the Minute Book. I must not neglect to mention that Mr. Johnston had entered an action against a member of the congregation some months previously for certain grievances done himself and family, and it was mentioned at the meeting of Kirk session lastly referred to, by a member of the session, that as Mr. Johnston had been let off so easily, we had better call on him to desist in the prosecution of his action against the member referred to. My reply was that we might as well take forcible possession of Mr. Johnston's house and order him out as to dictate to him what he should do in regard to said action.

The matter here dropped, and nothing more was said concerning it.

The summer of 1873 passed over, and no minutes were deleted. Mr. Johnston met me about ten days before the meeting of Presbytery, which took place the first week in November following, and asked if the minutes were deleted. I had to plead guilty, for I had never given the matter a particle of attention, and apologized for my negligence. He was kind enough to say that, as he intended to call up the minute-book in Presbytery to ascertain if good faith had been kept

towards him, he would not like me to feel any way out of place or discomfited, and that if I would see to it at once, it would show that I had endeavored to do my duty. I immediately left him and went to the office of the Session Clerk, Mr. Hunter, but he refused me any information, which I thought was a very strange line of conduct towards a co-worker in the session, and one who could have demanded the production of the books. Failing there, I wrote the Presbytery clerk to ascertain the exact position of matters; but he was evidently tainted with the same disease, and I derived no more information from him than from the session clerk. Feeling somewhat discouraged, but determined that I would not be foiled in the performance of my duty, I repaired to the residence of a friend to seek his counsel in the matter. When I related to him the unsuccessful attempts I had made to ascertain whether or not good faith had been kept towards Mr. Johnston, and also their replies to my inquiries, he was simply horrified. Our coversation, however, ended with an advice to me to write my minister and call upon him, in the interests of peace and the welfare of his congregation, to have the said minutes deleted. Considering the advice most excellent and kind, I immediately wrote as follows:—

[COPY.]

"MONTREAL, 29th Oct., 1874.

"DEAR MR. LANG,—

"As the usual quarterly meeting of Presbytery is near at hand, I wish to remind you of the condition in regard to Mr. Johnston's resignation, which was, that all records of the Johnston Controversy should be deleted from the Minute Book, and if you remember right, I with two others were a Committee appointed to see that it was done; the other day I was asked if it was done; my reply was that I could not say, never having attended to seeing that it was done. I was then informed that the books would be called up before Presbytery the very first thing; my next move was to see Mr. Hunter, Session Clerk, and when I asked him about it, his reply was, 'I will not answer any questions,' which I consider was rather a little too much of a saucy answer for one Brother Elder to give to another, and afterwards said that he would not do it, that he had received no orders, and he then went on railing about Johnston. Now, Mr. Lang, although I think no more of Mr. Johnston than you do, still as a sacred promise was made and a covenant made that such

"minutes should be struck off, let us have it done and not have any further reproaches cast upon us. I have heard that it has been said that there was no Committee appointed to see to it being done. I say there was, and it was an addition to a motion of my own made at your suggestion that I and two others should be a Committee for such purpose, and if it is not in the minutes, it should be.

"I simply wish to do my duty, and can assure you, my dear Mr. Lang, that I will not be foiled in doing so by any one, much less by Mr. Hunter, therefore, I beg of you to have it attended to before then. Mr. Hunter and you will get along better than he and I, for we are both high strung, and he knows he can't bully me as he did Johnston. I would be sorry indeed to have our Session censured on account of failure of duty.

"Yours ever,

(Signed,) "H. BRODIE.

"Rev. G. Lang."

Mr. Lang afterwards called at my Office to see me, but being unfortunate in not finding me in, he sat down and penned the following letter at my desk:—

(The letter bears no date, but was written on the thirtieth or thirty-first of October, 1873.)

[COPY.]

"3 o'clock.

"MY DEAR MR. BRODIE,—

"I called to tell you how deeply I feel for you in your worry and vexation, knowing as I do what such means. You are perfectly right as to the deletion, and I have spoken of it more than once. But the difficulty is, as to how that is to be rightly effected. Mr. Morris says, that the law would regard it as sufficient to make a declaration that such and such minutes from page so and so to page so and so are deleted. I would like to have seen you to explain, which I can't do fully by letter, all my feelings and position regarding Session matters. I was staying off all meetings of a business kind till after the Communion in the hopes that we may have peace then. Meanwhile, Mr. Morris promised me last night that he would see Mr. Hunter and get the work of which you write forwarded and done.

"Ever yours,

"Very sincerely,

(Signed,) "GAVIN LANG."

At the meeting of Presbytery in November, 1873, a letter from Mr. Johnston was read asking whether the session had carried out the agreement to which the Presbytery were a party. It was then denied that the session had made any promise, and at a very thin diet of the Presbytery, as I learn,

a resolution was carried, moved by Mr. Lang, that the enquiry asked for be not made. Mr. Campbell being a party to the arrangement with Mr. Johnston, felt that injustice was done him, and appealed to the Synod. Things thus remained in *statu quo* for some time, until the matter was afterwards brought up in session by Mr. Morris, who said he thought the minutes ought to be deleted. Bear in mind, this was at a meeting in February, 1874, a few days previous to the ordination of the last six elders who entered the session, and Mr. Morris' object was to have the business of the old session done before the ordination of the new elders, hence his anxiety to have the so much talked of minutes deleted, and I feel confident if a promise had not been made to that effect, Mr. Morris would not have bothered his head about the matter; however, it was at this meeting of session that the whole cause of delay in deleting leaked out. Mr. Hunter kicked against deletion, and said, "if you delete these minutes, the legs of my evidence are knocked from under me in my case with Johnston, which is not yet disposed of." The minister himself seemed evidently against deleting, notwithstanding his letter as above; another plea of excuse was that Johnston had not fulfilled his part of the programme, because he was still prosecuting a member of session, and also the trustees of the Church. I say Johnston has fulfilled his part to the letter. Johnston, as before stated, said, "I will resign the eldership; you'll delete forthwith." This was the understanding and nothing more. Johnston, as before stated, has carried out his part in full; the session have failed to fulfil theirs. However, the matter dropped, no action was taken, things remained as they were, and for all I know, the minutes may be still in force till this day.

At the meeting of Synod held in the city of Ottawa, in June last, Mr. Campbell took up the case on behalf of Johnston, and, as I am informed, Mr. Lang denied fully before the Committee of Errors and Appeals that any promise was made, and declared that no such Committee existed as one for deleting the minutes, no matter who was Mr. Campbell's informant to the contrary.

Hearing of this gross denial of truth, I made up my mind that I would attend the Synod in Toronto, which was held in November following, as I felt somewhat interested in it, and having armed Mr. Campbell with a copy of Mr. Lang's letter to me, I started for Toronto a day or two afterwards. Mr. Campbell brought on his appeal case while I was in the Church Court, and argued it at full length, referring during the course of his argument to the information received. Mr. Lang rose and thundered out a reply, and stated that he knew who Mr. Campbell's informant was: it was a Mr. Brodie, a member of his session, who was laboring under a misapprehension of facts; but that, notwithstanding what Mr. Brodie's information was, he declared most solemnly that no such committee for deletion ever existed, and that no such promise was ever made, and challenged Mr. Campbell for proof. Mr. Campbell then rose to read the copy of Mr. Lang's letter to me, but Mr. Lang in a violent manner protested and declared it a breach of etiquette, to introduce any private communication. Mr. Morris also objected that this letter was not in the evidence before the court.

Mr. Campbell folded up the letter and put it into his pocket, thus leaving me in the awkward situation of violating a private correspondence, and of seeming to furnish false information regarding the session. What was I to think of the man who could strive to fix upon an elder who had always supported him (Mr. Lang) until he thought it proper to depart from doing what was right in this case, the imputation of violating private correspondence and misrepresenting the action of his minister and brother elders, and could say that I was mistaken or laboring under a misapprehension of facts, when I had his (Mr. Lang's) letter in my possession? How could I be expected to sit under his ministry longer? I say, and every right minded person who reads that communication will also say, that it was in no sense a private one, as it was an official letter written in answer to my question, which was a public one. Thus I was made the scape-goat. My feelings at that season of turmoil and excitement may be more easily imagined than described. Not being a member of

the Church Court, I had to sit and listen to it all, which was anything but pleasant. After all, perhaps it was just as well that I had no voice in the Court, for I might have given Mr. Lang and his friend who spoke so lightly of me somewhat more of my opinion of them than they would probably have been willing to have heard.

In conclusion, therefore, I have only to add that my reasons for thus stating the foregoing facts are strictly in vindication of my own character and in the interest of morality and religion, to explain a wrong done me by a man calling himself a servant of God, and who was at that time my minister, and is no other than the Rev. Gavin Lang. I leave you to judge calmly and deliberately, from the foregoing letter and facts, whether I am or am not guilty of what the Rev. Gavin Lang, on the floor of the Synod, attributed to me.

This circular or pamphlet I had intended bringing out long ere this, but for the reason of severe illness entering my family early in November last, extending over a period of three months, which exclusively occupied my thoughts and time.

Yours respectfully,

HUGH BRODIE.

MONTREAL, 1st April, 1875.