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The Gospel Minister's Maintenance Vindicated.

AMONG the voluminous writings of that all too little known Baptist, Benjamin Keach (1640-1704), is a small book entitled *The Gospel Minister's Maintenance Vindicated* (1689), probably the only extant copy of which is to be found in the Angus Library at Regent's Park College. This little treatise, compact both in size and in subject matter, yields an excellent example of the value of antiquarian research. It deals with a perpetually recurring question with such sanity of judgment, breadth of outlook, and intelligent conviction, that one is inclined after perusal to concur in the practice of Gladstone, who is said, whenever a new book was published, to have re-read an old one. Here then is an old book handling one of our practical religious problems for us in an altogether admirable way, if we are prepared to make allowance for the old-fashioned style of presentation.

The book had its origin, according to Crosby (*Hist.* v. 4 p. 294ff.), in the selection of Keach in 1688 by a number of ministers to write upon the subject of Ministers' Maintenance.¹ He quotes also the letter of recommendation "to the Congregations of Baptized Believers in England and Wales," which follows the title page in the book itself. This letter, signed by Hanserd Knollys, William Kiffin, William Collins, John Harris, George Barret, Richard Adams, Benjamin Keach, Isaac Lamb, Edward Man, Leonard Harrison, and Hercules Collins, bears the inscription, "London, July 30, 1681," which would, on Crosby's evidence and on other grounds, seem to be an error of the printer for 1688. In the course of the letter the earnest desire is expressed "that our Brethren, both Ministers and Members, would be pleased to get this little book, and both read and well weigh what is said therein, without prejudice . . . that it may be blessed by JEHOVAH to the great and good ends it is designed." Crosby further records that in 1689 an assembly from above 100 churches "debated whether it is the duty of every church to maintain such ministers as are set apart by them; decided in the affirmative; and declared their approbation of a certain little book,

¹ "How most Baptist pastors supported themselves we are not informed, but we may safely say that they earned their own living, and were not supported by the churches, for no accounts that survive show more than small sums paid, enough in the country to pay horse-hire, or in town to pay rent." (Whitley, *Hist.*, p. 132 of previous period.)

lately recommended by divers Elders dwelling in and about the City of London." (This recommendation "by divers Elders" appears on the title page of the book itself.) They further directed its circulation through the churches, and sent also a general epistle recommending the duty of congregations in this respect. From all this it will appear that the question of a ministry adequately equipped and maintained was of no small importance for the days of opportunity which opened with the new era of religious liberty in 1688.

In addition to the title page and the letter of recommendation already referred to, the book contains, beside the main treatise, an incomplete list of errata, an excellent summary of the main arguments of the "Vindication," and an advertisement to the reader. This, referring to the 38th Article of Religion in the Church of England Prayer Book, repudiates strongly the allegation there laid against certain Anabaptists, that they believe in a community of riches and goods among Christians, and goes on to say, "We know none called Anabaptists in England nor anywhere else, who hold that absurd or rotten principle, but do testify our dislike and abhorrence of it."

The aim of the treatise itself is, as the title page informs us, first of all to assert "a regular ministry in the churches," and to answer "the objections against a Gospel maintenance for ministers"; next, to open "the dignity, necessity, difficulty, use and excellency of the ministry of Christ"; and, finally, clearly to evince "the nature and weightiness of that sacred work and office." That the aim is achieved the following brief survey will perhaps show. The warrant for a regular ministry is found in Christ's own solemn appointment of "Apostles and Disciples to bear that part of the work with Him, which He called them to and fitted them for" (Mark iii. 13, Matt. x. 2, Luke vi. 12-13). This ministry He instituted by the choice of the Twelve and the sending forth of the Seventy; confirmed after His resurrection (Matt. xxviii. 18-20); continued through the express command of the Apostles, who "ordained them elders in every church" (Acts xiv. 23, Tit., i. 5); and finally vested in the Church herself the power and authority "to provide ministers for her own edification, in obedience to His commands, and rules given in His Word." The Church must therefore see to it that she duly appoint ministers; that she appoint only men whose qualifications are such as those named in 1 Tim. iii. 1-9; and that "when the church has had trial of the meetness and abilities of any person or persons for this work and service, they are by election and choice solemnly to set him or them apart by prayer and laying on of hands; by which a new relation ariseth of an Elder and a Church, a Pastor and a Flock," the duties of each relation be-

coming mutually binding upon them according to the laws of Christ.

While the author is desirous that every Church should show a real anxiety to have officers according to Gospel rule, and that those whom they choose as ministers should be competently qualified for their high office, his main business is, he tells us, "not only to assert the ministers' maintenance to be an institution of Christ, but also to prove it so to be, and that to withhold it from them by a Church, who is able comfortably to provide for them, is a great and crying sin, and will be attended, we fear (unless prevented by an unfeigned repentance and reformation) with severe judgment from the Holy God, who will not always bear with the ignorant, much less the wilful, neglect of His own Holy Law, contained so expressly in His Sacred Word." This forceful utterance he supplements by thirteen arguments drawn from Scripture and so definite that he doubts "whether there is any duty lies more clear and evident in Holy Scripture than this doth." Briefly put, the arguments are as under:—

1. When Jesus sent forth His Apostles to preach he indicated His will that they should not spend nor waste their own substance (Matt. x. 9-10).

2. This maintenance is not of the Apostles', nor of the Church's, but of God's appointing. "Even so hath the Lord ordained that those that preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel" (1 Cor. ix. 14). God's will and ordinance under the New Testament is as binding as under the Old. Again, the same apostle elsewhere says, "Let him that is taught in the Word communicate to Him that teacheth, in all good things," and adds the solemn warning, "Be not deceived, God is not mocked," etc. (Gal. vi. 6-7), in order "to terrify those who find out vain and false excuses to save their purses."

3. The minister is commanded to attend wholly upon his work (2 Tim. ii. 4). All his time is little enough for that great task. "His mind must no more be diverted from it by the thorny cares of a necessitous condition, than by the thoughts that accompany worldly business, though tending to his profit.

4. He must indeed be protected from the scandal, which, though often unjustly, is daily ready to attend men who follow secular employments. The minister's being in debt, or exposed to the breach of his word in the way of trading, will lay him open to the charge, "Physician, heal thyself," and so will destroy the power of his ministry over the consciences of men.

5. Equity and justice demand that the Church should provide for its ministers, as Paul shows the Corinthians (1 Cor. ix. 7, etc.), in three common examples. "Who goeth a warfare at any time at his own charge?" "Who planteth a vineyard and eateth not

the fruit thereof?" "Who feedeth a flock and eateth not of the milk of the flock?" It is not charity that is now demanded, but common equity, which would readily be conceded in the ordinary walks of life.

6. Men are chosen for the ministry, not from the lowest of the people, but from those who possess ability for business, and "who could . . . get estates as well as you if they were not devoted to a better service." Furthermore, ministers, as much as other men, must provide for their families, and unless they be properly maintained they must either neglect their full duty to Christ and the Church, or else neglect their poor families by fulfilling their ministry.

7. Ministers under the old law were provided for by the Lord; so He has ordered that they should live comfortably now under the Gospel (1 Cor. ix. 13-14). Indeed, their portion under the Law exceeded that of their brethren, but this is abrogated, and Gospel ministers have no divine right to the tenths of men's increase. Since present demands are so much less exacting than under the old Law, we should with cheerfulness discharge our duty.

8. A pastor must be hospitable, and so an example of charity and other good works. If he fail therein he loses some part of those excellent virtues in which he should shine. Churches should, therefore, make their ministers capable of giving proof of this grace.

9. The honourable discharge of this duty is one of those things which are "honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report." (Phil. iv. 8). Both virtue and praise attend it. Its due observance will give completeness to the obedience we render to Christ's ordinances; will deliver from the reproach of covetousness, and will raise the reputation of the ministry (1 Tim. v. 17-18); maintenance being undoubtedly part of the double honour due to such as labour in the Word and doctrine.

10. He argues for discharge of the duty of maintenance from the inconveniences which attend its neglect.

(a) There are some ministers who were brought up to learning, and are utterly unable to follow a secular calling. What will become of them?

(b) Such cases act as a positive deterrent to the young and gifted, who might otherwise seek to enter the ministry. Any such loss injures the Church of God.

11. Neglect of contribution to the public worship of God, and to ministers' maintenance is a robbing of God (Mal. iii. 8-10), and may bring a blast of judgment upon men's estates.

12. It is a shame to God's people to suffer the Heathens and Papists to do more to uphold idolatry, than they do to uphold the

true worship of the Living God. Divine grace should make us more bountiful than the hope of acquiring merit, which is said to be the reason for Papistical devotion.

13. The discharge of this duty will render your ministers inexcusable, if they do not faithfully discharge their duties in every respect to God and His people, and not only so, but will render you able with comfort to give up your accounts to Christ.

Further reinforcements of these arguments are to be found in the enumeration of four motives which urge the discharge of the duty of maintenance.

1. Ministers are the ambassadors of Christ. What is done to them is done to Him. Love for Him must show itself in worthy treatment of His ministers.

2. Seeing that ministers "watch for our souls as they that must give account" (Heb. xiii. 17), we ought to see that their bodily needs are well supplied, that they may be free from the blood of all men, and may give their account with joy.

3. Ministers are exposed to peculiar temptations and discouragements incidental to their work. They should therefore be strengthened and encouraged, not left to serve in wants and necessities.

4. Ministers are at liberty to forbear from working, if the Churches can provide for them and they faithfully discharge their duty.

Keach's next concern is to meet the objections and to answer the questions that arise from the consideration of his subject. In so doing he touches upon several problems which are of interest and importance to us to-day. Among them is the case of the Church which is unable adequately to support a minister. What is to be done? His answer is threefold:—

- (a) They may make known their condition to sister Churches, with a view to receiving assistance; but if none is forthcoming, and the Church is already doing its utmost for its minister, he must then be content to suffer with his people.
- (b) A plentifully blessed congregation is obliged to do more than relieve the bare necessities of its minister.
- (c) It should seriously be considered whether a people unable to provide for a ministry should constitute themselves into a Church at all.

We could wish that the dissenting bodies of those days had met in solemn conclave for discussion of, and action upon, this third point. To the failure clearly to realize the importance of the question which Keach here raises, we owe the existence of one of our most difficult practical problems to-day. Up and down our land there exist numberless little churches of this type, for whose

spiritual welfare provision has to be made. In many villages, and in some towns, there exist two, three, and sometimes more of these small causes, indifferently attended, poorly organized, spiritually defective, and incapable of making any real impression upon the life of the locality in which they are placed. To keep open these struggling churches the supply of preachers, workers and money has to be duplicated, and sometimes triplicated, without any adequate result. Four miles from the home of the present writer there is a village of just over a thousand inhabitants, which contains no less than five Nonconformist places of worship. All of them are eking out a precarious existence, and not one is able to support even a part time ministry. The deplorable result of this dissipation of forces is evident. The churches are poorly attended, and served only by local preachers of varying ability. Neither systematic Biblical and Free Church teaching, nor pastoral visitation, is possible. The Communion of the Lord's Supper is irregularly observed. Churchmembership is emasculated of its meaning. Sunday school work, because of the inevitable overlapping, is necessarily inefficient in scope and quality. By this quintriplication energy is wasted and expenditure incurred, which no business concern would tolerate for one moment. All this because the point which Keach here raises failed in the past to receive the attention it deserved. This is neither the time nor the place to suggest remedies for the present conditions; one must be content to offer the following proposition of Keach for the serious consideration of Baptist and Congregational Churches, Associations, and Moderators, with a view to some practical solution along the lines he indicates. "For a people to put themselves into a Church state is one of the most weightiest (sic) things in the world, and ought with as great care and consideration to be done; we concluding in some places where there are many churches near to each other, it would be far better for some of those small and insufficient societies to unite themselves to some other congregation; and by that means the whole of their indispensable duties and obligations that are incumbent on them would, with much more ease, be borne and answered, to the honour of Christ, reputation of the Gospel, and their own edification."

The question as to the obligation of churches to remunerate ministers who possess ample means of their own, seems to have been a burning one in Keach's day. He treats it in two different places in his book, and his answer is characteristic. "Certainly they (i.e. wealthy pastors), if of Paul's spirit, will refuse to receive anything, lest it should lessen their esteem in the ministry; 'tis left to their liberty; they may choose whether they will receive it or not. But though they may dispense with their right if they

please . . . yet cannot you dispense with your duty; you have no warrant so to do." Thus clearly does he vindicate the principle for which he has contended, even in the apparently vexed case of the wealthy pastor.

Another question, which Keach dismisses more briefly, is as to the remuneration of the occasional preacher. "May every one that preaches expect an allowance, though they preach but now and then?" Here is a problem which is receiving a certain amount of consideration to-day, especially with reference to the services of local preachers, and speakers at P.S.A.'s and Brotherhoods. The present writer has reason to believe that in some cases the practice of giving a fee to these speakers has been adopted with satisfactory results from the point of view of the churches concerned. A better standard has been achieved, and, under the remunerative system, can be demanded, than obtained under voluntary conditions. He is of opinion that much could be done along these lines, by a proper co-ordination of local preachers' associations, towards the better intellectual equipment of these brethren. If every duly recognized local preacher received even a small fee this could either be used independently, or be put into a "pool" for the purchase of books bearing directly upon his work as a preacher, which otherwise might be beyond his means to obtain. The wise oversight and advice of College Principals would ensure that only books of real and immediate value found their way into the hands of the men concerned. Keach's answer to the question is short and non-committal. "That must be left to the wisdom and consideration of the church; who ought to consider the person's circumstances, with the call he hath to preach, etc. But principally it belongs to those who are set apart to that work, whose strength and time is taken up about the great affairs of Christ and the Gospel."

As we should expect from a man who argues so ably for an adequate maintenance for the Gospel minister, Keach has an exalted ideal of the ministry. This is evident throughout the book, but seeing—as he himself says—"we have a little room, we shall add some brief hints further, to show the great charge and work of a true Gospel minister, and so conclude." The greatness of this work is shown in the facts that we are ambassadors for Christ; fellow workers with Christ, "sent to treat with poor sinners about eternal matters"; "a sweet savour of Christ in them that are saved and in them that perish," being bound by necessity to give warning to men of their wickedness, lest their blood be required at our hands. We are stewards also, both of the mysteries of God, and of the churches and the doctrine of the Gospel, in which it is required that we be faithful. Our work is at once laborious and dignified. We are planters, builders, and

labourers; we are also called fathers, angels, ambassadors, stars, and rulers. It is so difficult that a man with all his acquired parts is not sufficient in himself for its demands. The difficulties of the work lie partly in our own imperfect nature, partly in the character of our work, which is mysterious: witness the mystery of Godliness, the mystery of the Incarnation, the mystery of faith, all of which we are required to study. This work calls also for care and exactness. (Everything must be done according to the holy pattern set by Christ in the Gospel.) It demands grace and wisdom; time and diligence. (A slothful or idle person is not fit to be a minister). Difficulties arise also from the oppositions and obstructions we meet with, from our own hearts, from sin, from Satan, from the world, from persecutors. "Is it not needful then, think you, that your poor ministers be thought upon, and encouraged by you as Christ hath appointed?"

The book concludes with an exhortation to "our Fellow Labourers," which we quote in full. "Brethren, let us strive to double our diligence, and show to all (that) the sense of the greatness of our work is upon our spirits; and though we have not that encouragement from the people, that God has ordained; yet, remember we serve a good Master: besides, a necessity is laid upon us, we must preach the Gospel; and let us be contented with that state and portion we meet with in the world; 'tis our great business to approve ourselves the ministers of Christ, 'in labours, in watchings, in fastings, by pureness, by knowledge, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of Truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand, and on the left; by honour and dishonour; by evil report and good report'" (2 Cor. vi. 5-8).

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