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ILLINOIS HISTORICAL SURVEY

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A
NARRATIVE
OF THE
EVENTS CONNECTED WITH THE
ELECTION OF
AN ASSISTANT BISHOP,
FOR ILLINOIS.

~~~~~  
BY A PRESBYTER OF THE DIOCESE.  
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A NARRATIVE, &c.

THE FALSE statements, made concerning the election of an Assistant Bishop for Illinois, during the last session of the General Convention, have been industriously kept before the public in the columns of the so-called "True Catholic" and Utica "Gospel Messenger."

The charges of exercising an "undue" or "an unlawful influence" to procure the election of a particular individual, of even "commanding" the clergy on their "*canonical obedience*" to vote for him; of "endeavoring to remove a Parish Minister, to make provision for his maintenance;" of holding out the private resources of the person proposed, as a reason why he should be chosen, which was denominated a "simoniacal contract," form the chief burden (so far as Bishop Chase is concerned) of those representations which were made in the House of Deputies, with the view to prevent the confirmation of the canonical election of the Rev. James B. Britton, to be assistant Bishop of Illinois. These charges were also accompanied with such reflections on the Bishop's manner, as to leave the impression that he acted, not only unjustly, but with the most undignified weakness.

Most, if not all the above representations had their origin in a communication made by Rev. Mr. Giddinge, not originally his own, but which he adopted, prefacing it with the declaration that there had been no election! On the other hand, Rev. Messrs. Kelly and Samuel Chase, of Illinois, gave a very different account of the facts concern-

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ing the election—utterly denied the exercise of any *undue* influence or command upon canonical obedience—and would, had they been as willingly and patiently heard as those who spoke on the opposite side of the question, have produced, it is believed, a different result;* while the arguments of Dr. Hawks and others, went to show, that had even the Bishop distinctly asserted that if the person mentioned by him were not elected, he would withdraw the proposition for the election of an assistant Bishop, he could not be considered as exercising an unlawful influence over the election.

Those who looked calmly on, and read the proceedings of the convention, it was thought, could see that sufficient was said in the debate sustaining the course of Bishop Chase, to counteract the ill impression which might have been made if the assertions of Mr. Giddinge and the comments upon them had gone forth uncontradicted at the time. But the charge of dictation has been allowed since the Convention, to pass current.

Several of the church periodicals have sought to create the impression that Bishop Chase had endeavored by an unheard of stretch of power to “appoint his successor.” The editor of the *Gospel Messenger of Utica, N. Y.*, seeking to enlighten his readers concerning English Church matters, says in reference to the election of Dr. Hampden to the See of Hereford: “*The Conge*

*It is but just here to state that the Rev. Mr. K. asserted that he had important matter to communicate, but could not obtain the floor; and the reported debates show that the Rev. S. Chase was interrupted in the most important part of his speech, by a member rising to a point of order! Did this show a desire to elicit truth?

d'lire, is the permission of the crown to the chapter of the Diocese to elect, but the crown (i. e. just now Victoria) with her permission to elect, nominates, as did the Bishop of Illinois, an individual, not permitting the election of any other."

In the "True Catholic" it is said "that it was proved in the House of Deputies, that the Bishop had commanded his clergy, on their canonical obedience, to vote for a particular individual;" and his *alleged* refusal to concur in the election if his nominee was not chosen, is courteously designated in the same periodical as a "threat"—
"a mere *brutum fulmen*."

These expressions so unbecoming the clerical character, (even supposing the case as bed as represented,) indicate a spirit which I cannot hope to allay, but only to avoid, while discharging what I regard as a duty: to make a plain statement of facts concerning the election, as one fully cognisant of them, independent of the previous testimony of others.

It is hoped that the mere assertions of anonymous writers, or the judgment of reviewers of the debates, coupled with such epithets as used above towards a Christian Bishop, will not form the sole rule of judgment, with those who desire to discover the truth.

The "Communication" alluded to in the journal of the Illinois Convention of 1847, renewing the request for an assistant Bishop, was made on *Tuesday*. This fact has been brought forward to show, that it was not mentioned in the address on Monday, in order to spring the matter upon

the Convention the last day of its session. In answer to this it may be sufficient to say, that it is known, that the opening of the Illinois Convention is always on Sunday, and that the members are supposed to be bound, if not providentially prevented, to be present on that day, to partake of the Holy Communion together. Now, the two Rev. objectors, (Rev. Mr. Giddings and Louderback,) were at St. Louis on Sunday, (having passed by the town of Alton, where the Convention met); and who can say what *protests* would have been made, if the matter had been brought forward in the address, which they had not heard, and the convention had acted on it Monday morning when they were not present!

Before the meeting of the convention on Tuesday morning, the Bishop desired two of the leading clerical members to confer with him, as to the expediency of electing an assistant Bishop; and anticipating the opposition which has since arisen on the part of two or three, asked if they would say candidly, whether they would agree in the choice of a person whom he would name, and endeavor to procure unanimity in his election.

It was remarked by one of the gentlemen—"It depends upon the man;" and he thought that the Convention would prefer a person out of the Diocese. The Bishop then said he did not have reference to any person within the Diocese, and then mentioned Mr. Britton, and what he knew of him—his popular talents, his successful ministry, &c. It was said by the gentlemen, that all they knew of Mr. Britton was favorable, and if nothing

should alter their opinion, they would cheerfully vote for him. He had the reputation of being a sound and moderate churchman. It was also remarked that Mr. Giddinge, who was formerly intimate with him, had said casually, that he "regarded him as the best parish minister he ever knew."

The conference ended by the Rev. gentlemen agreeing to nominate and support Mr. B. in Convention. When the hour came for assembling, the Bishop said prayers in a solemn manner, and requesting those not members of the Convention to retire,* and the doors to be closed, he said he had a communication to make. Then in a tender and feeling manner he alluded to his past labors in the cause of the Redeemer, in conjunction with his beloved clergy;—the inability on account of his age and increasing infirmities, of a continuation of these, as formerly in a measure equal to the demand of the increasing Diocese. He then signified his desire for the election of an assistant Bishop: and from proceeding to describe the qualifications in his opinion, necessary to secure usefulness, he was led to go beyond his previous intention, and mentioned Mr. Britton's name, as one whom he thought would be mutually acceptable; and further, begged them when they came to act on his proposition of choosing an assistant Bishop, if they could not agree upon Mr. B., to drop the matter for the present, and let it remain as before.

*The honorary members from St. Louis, probably supposed that parliamentary usage justified them in remaining, though this request was twice repeated!

'There was no commanding upon canonical obedience, or any expressions which could be so interpreted. The absurdity of the thing would at once have been apparent.*

It was simply a request with which they could comply or dissent, as they might see fit.

So far from the Bishop's course being thought to

*During a speech by Judge Chambers, of Md. in the House of Deputies, a curious cross-questioning colloquy occurred concerning this language. Rev. Mr. Kelly, of Illinois, rises to declare that he "certainly did not hear any command from the Bishop on that occasion."

Rev. Mr. Griswold, of St. Louis, "had the authority of the delegate from Springfield, Ill., and a letter from another gentleman who was present at the election, to confirm his assertion, that the Bishop had "commanded" them. Rev. Mr. Dresser, [THE DELEGATE FROM SPRINGFIELD, ILL.] asserts in reply, "That he had no recollection of the Bishop having used the language attributed to him, but the impression made on his mind was, that the Bishop's remark was, that unless Mr. Britton were elected, he did not wish them to elect any one. There was, he dared to say, some reference to canonical obedience, but he did not recollect the precise import of what was said on that subject." When Mr. Griswold is questioned in his turn, as one present and assisting, replies, "that it struck him, that such language was used, but he did not now recollect in what connection." But in order to elicit something more to the point, the phrase is varied, and Mr. Giddinge inquires whether the Bishop did not say something about "magnifying his office." Yes! it might have been answered, and so did St. Paul; but in what connection he used the terms is a "matter of no small importance." I cannot admit, as did Rev. Mr. Kelly, that the Bishop said that if the Convention did not elect Mr. Britton, they *should* not elect any one. I prefer to take Mr. Kelly's *first* statement of the expressions used, in which he agrees with the statements of Rev. Samuel Chase, and Dresser, and is sustained by the fact, that the Bishop *desired* the Convention if they could not agree on Mr. Britton, not to elect any one.

The expressions "command on canonical obedience," &c., all admit did occur, but no one but Mr. Giddinge asserted that they were used in reference to the election, and he, owing to his deafness, may have easily misunderstood their application. It will be recollected by the members of the Illinois Convention, that upon the debate, which occurred Tuesday afternoon, concerning the repeal of a canon for the trial of a clergyman, Bishop Chase said words to this effect: "That if that canon were not repealed, he would not so long as he lived, bring a trial under it, or require the clergy on their *canonical obedience* to attend it, and in doing so he thought he *magnified* his office."

imply *dictation*, the openness and candor, and if I may add, affection, with which he spoke, seemed rather to disarm all opposition. The mention of the fact that Mr. Britton was unknown to him by sight, showed to all that he had no preference purely personal to gratify.

And on the whole, the manner and matter of his "communication" left the impression that the peace of the church would be secured, the feelings of the Bishop respected, and the good of the Diocese promoted, by agreeing in the election of the person named.

Let it be further noted, that the remarks made by the Bishop, were before the reading of the journal, of the proceedings of the day previous. After which, upon proceeding to business, the question came up "Shall we go into the election of an assistant Bishop?" It was at this stage of the business that an informal proposition to postpone indefinitely was made, but was not sustained.

Pending its discussion, the Bishop walked across the chancel with some appearance of agitation, but with none of those violent gesticulations with which that action has been colored.—The expediency of the election was then discussed, by considering how the assistant Bishop should be supported, &c. It was then that the Bishop made known the offer of Rev. Mr. Kellogg, of the Rectorship of St. James', Chicago, (it was supposed that his vestry were also agreed.) It was entirely voluntary and unsolicited.*

*The letter in which this offer was made was addressed to Bishop Chase, without reference to the choice of any particular in-

It was agreed that the Diocese should provide for his travelling expenses. When the expediency of the measure was fully discussed, then the question was called up for a vote. During the debate which preceded this vote, was the proper opportunity for the expression of opinion, concerning dictation, and if such had been observed in the Bishop's manner, or in the proposition made by him, I pity the individual who had not the consciousness to affirm, and if it pressed upon his conscience, to resist it, in the *proper time and place*.

A vote, *if*, in the negative would have quietly decided the matter, had the majority thought either that the Bishop's course was improper, or unnecessary; and since, on the other hand, the question was decided in the affirmative, we may justly infer that *the sense of the Convention was taken on these three issues*—that *the course of the Bishop in proposing the matter was proper; that the election was expedient; and that the person named was not objectionable.*

The election took place in the afternoon, after the other business had been dispatched in good feeling and quietness. The Rev. J. B. Britton was nominated by the clergy; the balloting made according to canon, and ere the Convention ad-

dividual, and had been in his possession several months. It is most positively denied that any mention was made by Bishop Chase of relinquishing his missionary salary, previous to the election of Mr. Britton, nor was there any allusion made by him as to Mr. Britton's private resources, for of these he was entirely ignorant. The fact that this latter charge was taken up and argued upon at length by the Rev. Mr. Giddings, as if the office had been offered for sale to the highest bidder, must certainly weaken his position with such as know the facts.

journed, every person entitled to a seat, had signed his testimonials.

After all the business of the convention had been transacted, the Rev. Mr. Worthington, (a clergyman in deacon's orders,) rose to state his reasons why the mode of proceeding should not be used as a precedent; *prefacing his remarks with an express disclaimer, of any wish to reflect upon the Bishop's manner*, but only expressing his opinion, that the naming of the individual proposed to be elected Bishop, should in all cases originate with the clergy, over whom he was to preside. It was evident he did not distinguish between an Assistant and a Diocesan Bishop. In the former case the existing Bishop is as much concerned as any of the clergy are. It would be incongruous, indeed, if the person so chosen should disagree with him under whose direction he is to act, according to the sixth canon of 1839.*

It is not an inevitable case that the assistant Bishop is to be the *successor* of the Diocesan, and as long as they both live, it is evident there ought to be the strictest harmony of feeling, to which harmony of sentiment strongly tends. The clergy can, by letters dismissory, dissolve their connection with the Bishop and Diocese at any time, but the connection of the Bishop with his Assistant, is like that of man and wife — "For better or worse," "Till death do them part." It was but reasonable, then, that the wishes of the Diocesan should be expressed, and but just and kind, they should be respected; when after all, the Convention had the matter entirely in their hands, either

* "The assistant Bishop shall perform such Episcopal duties and exercise such Episcopal authority in the Diocese, as the Bishop shall assign him."

to refuse the election altogether or to substitute another.*

This expression of the opinion of Rev. Mr. W. (which is, I hope, open to correction) has been tortured into a protest against *dictation*; whereas it was made in the kindest manner and with the express disclaimer of any such intent.

In due time the matter is brought before the General Convention. There with surprising consistency, he whose name appears first† on that document which affirms so solemnly before Almighty God, that there is no impediment known to the consecration of the Bishop elect, is the first to declare there has been no election, (a very formidable impediment, one would suppose to consecration!) Nor is the Rev. gentleman's position inconsistent alone with his own solemn act, but he also calls in question the sincerity of his constituents, for they, and he with them, had affirmed that the Rev. J. B. Britton was "duly nominated" and "duly elected."‡

Though he does not pretend that any new matter had come up afterwards, yet he states in General Convention, "that within ten hours after signing the testimonials of the Bishop elect, he was convinced that he had acted improperly," and when in New York, (some three months afterwards!) he addressed a note to the chairman of the committee on consecrations, requesting that his name might be taken off that paper! Notwithstanding all this, (I speak advisedly,) some time after the *ten hours*, the Rev. gentleman "addressed a letter to the Bishop elect, giving his reasons for opposing his election, and for signing his testi-

*Would not, for instance, the election in this case have been valid, and insisted upon if *the other person* for whom one vote was cast, had received the support of the majority?

†A precedence which he seemed at the time emulous to obtain!

‡See Illinois Journal, pp. 10.

monials, and offering if he would make Quincy his residence, to resign his parish in his favor, he being invited to take charge of St. Pauls, St. Louis." It is certainly not my place to reconcile such inconsistencies. I leave to the Diocese of Illinois the task of freeing herself, at the proper time, from the imputation of dishonorable submission cast upon her by one of her own representatives. The most charitable judgment I can entertain is that when the Rev. gentleman signed *that paper*, he yielded to his better feelings and better judgment, and that his subsequent course was the *real* MISTAKE.

If there was no election, why was the above offer made? If there was no "free choice" why after the election, was the parish of St. Paul's, Springfield, proposed by its representatives, coupled with the offer of \$600, per ann., to the assistant Bishop? Why were the standing committee (with whom the matter of salary was left,) authorized by common consent, to offer him \$500, to bear his travelling expenses? Every one must be conscious that in the election of a Bishop it is rarely the case that all are suited—conflicting interests, or prejudices will exist—but it has hitherto obtained as a good rule that the majority shall decide. In this case did not all sign the testimonials? and are the statements of an uneasy individual, so inconsistent with himself, which are contradicted on the spot, by equally competent witnesses, to weigh against this fact; while every insinuation against Bishop Chase—although it involves the disgrace of the Diocese, is to be listened to and believed?

If the decision of the General Convention is to be referred to as a true judgment upon the facts, it must be answered, that it was so artfully managed that a wrong impression was given concerning them, in the House of Deputies.

The small majority by which the signing of the

testimonials was defeated, shows that there was a large proportion who held just views, both of the necessity of an assistant to the Bishop of Illinois, and the validity of his election; and had these been the only points called in question, there is but little doubt that the consecration would have taken place. But when the objections on the ground that there was no necessity of an Assistant; and that the election was invalid, were losing their force upon the minds of members, through the statements of a portion of the Illinois delegation, and the able arguments of some others, the *insinuation* (for it deserves no better name,) that the Bishop elect was not qualified in point of literary attainments,* is thrown into the scale; no time is given to rebut a charge, so cruel to the Bishop elect,—cries of question! question! prevail, and the final vote is taken under these circumstances.

If we may believe the True Catholic, another motive of policy—(a pitiful policy!) “the jealousy of the *larger Dioceses*, which he says “may be dignified with the name of a principle,” had also its influence in producing that action of the highest Assembly of the Church, which reflects no honor upon the Diocese of Illinois, and aims a blow at the character of her Bishop. But we console ourselves that there is in the public mind a sense of justice, based upon facts, which partizans cannot overrule; and above all, that there is a just God, who will finally rectify all evils, and right all wrongs.

D. C.

*It was afterwards proved and admitted that the charge was false.











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