

**Lang explains** – *Empire*, 13 October 1864

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, PYRMONT

TO THE EDITOR OF THE EMPIRE

Sir - As the Presbyterian Church for the congregation of the Rev. R.S. Paterson, in Harris-street, Pymont, will be opened for Divine service on Sabbath next, I beg you will allow me to state the following particulars in regard to the origin and character of this effort for the spiritual welfare and advancement of our colonial metropolis.

Foreseeing in 1842 the future importance of Pymont and Balmain, I purchased a suitable allotment for a Presbyterian Church, and had a neat, commodious weatherboard building erected for the purpose in each of these localities. The ground and buildings cost me between £700 and £800; and the ordinances of the Presbyterian Church, were dispensed in both till I left for England on the first of July, 1846.

I recollect having had to pay the late Rev. Simon Handt, an ordained minister of the German Reformed or Presbyterian Church, then living at Balmain, and the Rev. Thomas Atkins, a missionary from India, at the rate of £100 a year each, for their services.

On my return in 1850, Divine service was kept up regularly both at Pymont and Balmain, during 1850 and 1851, principally by young men whom I had brought out as candidates for the ministry. And in 1852 and 1853 when I was again in England, the Rev. John Gibson officiated both at Pymont and Balmain, receiving assistance from a society which my family had formed for the purpose. The Rev. W. Ridley, also (who acknowledges, in his lecture on the aborigines, having received from my congregation £50 a year for three years in aid of his missionary labours among the black natives), officiated again and again, both at Pymont and Balmain.

I had, unfortunately, been obliged in 1853 to mortgage the properties I had for a debt incurred in bringing out German missionaries to Moreton Bay; and during my absence that mortgage being unexpectedly foreclosed, both properties were sold.

They happened to fall into the hands of the Hon S.D. Gordon, requested by a friend of mine in Sydney to purchase them. I was in hopes to redeem them; but as Mr. Gordon gave me to understand that in the event of a general union of the Presbyterians, he would make a present of them to the Presbyterian Church, I was reconciled to the pecuniary loss. With the concurrence of Mr. Gordon, the church at Pymont, which during 1855 and 1856, was occupied as a private school during the week, was used at my instance for Divine service on Sabbath for a twelvemonth, by the Rev. John McIlrea, from the North of Ireland for whose support my congregation contributed £75. Mr. McIlrea, left the colony unexpectedly for Van Diemen's Land early in 1856.

For several years thereafter, during my famous prosecution by the Synod of Australia, which the Privy Council terminated in my favour in 1862, the church at Pymont remained in abeyance; but in June 1858, Rev. James Martin was licensed to preach the gospel by the Synod of New South Wales. I suggested, with the approval of certain Presbyterians at Pymont, that Mr. Martin should be stationed in that locality to form a Presbyterian congregation.

With this view I called on Mr. Harrison, Mr. Gordon's chief clerk and offered to lease the old building in Mount-street, Pymont, which I erected in 1842 at reasonable rental for one or two years, on condition that the rent be expended in repairs of the building, which was then in a state of great dilapidation.

Mr. Harrison told me that as I was the first applicant I should of course have the first offer, although he could not decide the matter without consulting Mr. Gordon's man of business. On calling a second time, however, on Mr. Harrison, the building had been leased to the Rev. Dr. Steel and Mr. Dean, the builder, for a school. I felt mortified at the place being thus taken over my head, but I said nothing. Mr. Martin proceeded to the Manning River.

In June last, the Rev. R.S. Paterson, of the United Presbyterian Church, Burray, in the Orkney Islands, arrived at my instance per the ship Millwall, to be settled as a Presbyterian minister wherever Divine Providence might order his lot, but determined, like the Rev. Mr. Gordon, of Balmain, to stand aloof from the present sections of the Presbyterian body, till the union, which he was prepared to join should be effected. It was expected that Mr. Paterson would be settled at Queanbeyan; but as his arrival had been delayed, through the Millwall's having been dismasted, the Presbyterians of Queanbeyan made a different arrangement on the eve of his arrival. In these circumstances Mr. Paterson happened to preach for two or three Sabbaths in the Scots church, and certain Presbyterians of Pymont were so pleased with his ministerial gifts and abilities, that they invited him to settle among them as their minister, and engaged to contribute, as Divine Providence should enable them, for his maintenance, and support. The call to Mr. Paterson, which he accepted, was signed by ninety-seven of the Presbyterians of Pymont, and additional names have since been added.

In these circumstances, I wrote to Mr. Gordon, requesting that, as the old church in Mount-street, Pymont was used only as a school, during the week, the Rev. Paterson might be allowed the use of it as a place of worship on Sabbath, to enable him to form a Presbyterian congregation.

Mr. Gordon expressed his cordial approval, adding, however, that as the place had been leased during his absence, it could not be effected without the concurrence of the lessees, the Rev. Dr. Steel and Mr. Dean; I wrote accordingly making the same proposal to Dr. Steel.

I received for answer that Mr. Paterson could not be allowed the use of the church in Mount-street, that he should go to Yass, or any other place in the interior, and; that he was making arrangements for ministerial services, I presume through his missionary, Mr. Hossack at Pymont.

This was treating both myself and those for whom I was acting in rather a cavalier manner. Ignoring my exertions and sacrifices for the establishment of Divine ordinances at Pymont for twenty years past, it was virtually placing me on the superannuation list, and telling me that I had nothing further to do with the settlement of ministers in or near Sydney, and must leave all that to my betters.

It was interfering also in rather an unwarrantable manner, with the rights and privileges of the Presbyterian people. Some of the signers of Mr. Paterson's call were the oldest resident Presbyterians in Pymont, and they had surely a right to decide whether they were in future to have the services of an able, popular, and experienced minister residing in their midst, and capable of performing all ministerial functions, or to put up with the occasional services of Dr. Steel's catechist, till he and his friends should be of opinion that the time had come for settling another Free Church minister in that locality.

As it was, therefore, out of the question to adopt the Rev. Dr. Steel's suggestion, in regard to Mr. Paterson, a suitable allotment of ground for the erection of a Presbyterian church was procured on the Ultimo Estate, and a plain substantial weatherboard building has been erected, in which Mr. Paterson will endeavour to form a Presbyterian congregation. When that congregation becomes numerous and wealthy a stone building can be erected. In the meantime the debt will not be formidable.

The necessity for a Presbyterian church at Pymont, for the comparatively numerous Presbyterian population, must be evident to any person. The distance from the different places of worship in Sydney is considerable. Besides the expense for a mechanic's family, in crossing the bridge to and fro twice on Sabbath is so considerable - half crown in some cases - that the children are sent to Sabbath-schools and places of worship of other denominations, and in all probability lost to the Presbyterian Church.

Some members of our communion in that locality attend the Rev. Mr. Dougal's church; others to the Rev. Mr. Thomson of Phillip-street; others again to Dr. Steel's, and others to mine; and it will doubtless be of great importance to the welfare and advancement of our apostolic in that vicinity to have all these members of our body united in future under one able and zealous minister, and in one church and congregation. If Dr. Steel has an abler and better man than Mr. Paterson to propose for the office, let him do so; but if not, why refuse to strengthen the hands of the only fit and proper person to be had? There are papers in circulation in the Presbyterian

churches of Sydney, recommending united prayer for union. No man has a right to pray for anything, without working for it also; and in this union movement, I have too often seen all the praying in one direction, and all the working in another.

The church now erecting for the congregation of the Rev. Mr. Paterson, is a neat, commodious weatherboard building, accommodating about three hundred persons, and will be opened for Divine service on Sabbath, the 16th instant. It will cost altogether about £100.

Dr. Steel and his friends expended about seventy pounds, which I presume will be deducted from the rent during the lease, in repairing the old church and fitting it up for a non-vested school, under the National Board; from which the present teacher and his two assistants have Government salaries to the amount of £160 altogether, for their services in that capacity, the number of pupils being about a hundred and thirty. The public are, therefore, indebted to Dr. Steel and his friends for their services in establishing this school; but the permanent settlement of a Presbyterian minister in the district is something very different, and requires much greater sacrifices and exertions, although both objects may surely be pursued simultaneously and harmoniously.

I am, Sir,

JOHN DUNMORE LANG.  
Sydney, 12th October.