

Contributed

"PLAY FAIR!"

Rev. M. B. Lambdin.

It's the only right way to play the game of life; whether it be in the arena of business, politics, athletics, or what not, and even in the domain of the Church.

Taking advantage, then, of the virile ring of this familiar and up-to-date phrasing, it may serve a worthy purpose to cite the attention of our beloved Church to a matter in which this fine principle of fair play has gone too long already by sad default. A serious neglect, we hold, that should have prompt attention and immediate correction.

To come at once to the point in question: We mean the routine way in which those of our ministers who have reached the sunset period of their lives, in its three score years and ten, are tied down to follow, in seeking assistance from the relief funds of the Church, by reason of their lack of the necessities of life. Adequate or inadequate, as the case may be in the relief afforded, this source of help is only available through the agency of "Rule 7" of the Manual, under which the Executive Committee of Ministerial Relief functions in looking after the interests of this class of men in the ministry of our Church.

As it is pretty nigh certain that the great body of our membership are in entire ignorance of such a thing as "Rule 7," it may not be amiss to reproduce it in its substantial entirety.

It reads as follows: "Every honorably retired minister over seventy years of age, who is in need and who has served our Church for a period in the aggregate not less than thirty years, shall be entitled by such service to draw from the Executive Committee of Ministerial Relief an annual sum for his support without the necessity of being annually recommended therefor by the Presbytery. When such a minister shall certify to the Presbytery the fact and the amount of his need, it shall be the duty of the Stated Clerk to forward the application to the Committee, with his endorsement thereon as to the years of service such minister has rendered; his field, or fields, of labor, with the term of service in each. . . . It shall then be the duty of the Committee to pay such annual amount so long as the applicant shall live, if able to do so with the funds in hand. . . ."

The intent of "Rule 7," as is clearly evident, is to safeguard these aged servants of the Lord against future want, and to assure them of a measurable degree of support and comfort during the few remaining years of their lives, and to prevent their being thrown out upon the cold charity of an indifferent world.

While the spirit of "Rule 7" is admittedly sympathetic and praiseworthy, we beg leave to submit, that the manner in which its provisions are carried out are open to grave objections, by reason of a gratuitous infliction of a species of self-depreciation and painful humiliation on the part of those who come under its operation.

This is a severe indictment, we are fully aware, and may arouse strenuous denial. Before, however, we present the facts to support the charge, let me make a partial break at the outset of our analytic dissection of "Rule 7," and the way in which its provisions are carried out, in the blunt remark—read Prov. 14:20 in point—that no one, neither you nor I, would enjoy being rated as a "pauper" or tagged as "a down and out." And, yet, virtually, that is just what "Rule 7" lists the aged

"Beneficiary," who is driven by his "needs" to apply at the door of the Ministerial Relief Committee for a hoped-for dole or hand out.

You hesitate to believe the statement? I am not surprised that you do. Really, it seems incredible that the Southern Presbyterian Church should permit the lives of their aged ministers, who happen to be without independent means for their support, to end up their days in such a shabby fashion. But let us face the facts as I detail them.

At the very start, "Rule 7" prescribes that, "He shall certify to the Presbytery the fact and the amount of his need."

"He shall," however reluctant and heart lacerating for the "Beneficiary" to do, "He shall!" Nolens volens. No choice in the excruciating demand.

And he is compelled to register, or confess, himself a "pauper," a veritable "down and out" among his ministerial brethren—a specialized mendicant class—by putting his name to a printed application blank, that doesn't demand a high-powered intellectual perceptive faculty to grasp the full force and meaning of.

This enforced statement is further supplemented and confirmed by a physician this time, filled out "on the dotted lines" at the bottom of the application sheet, that he has subjected the Rev. Mr. Blank to a physical examination—just as a veterinary surgeon would examine a poor, old, worn-out work animal, whose enfeebled strength is no longer able to stand the severe strain of cart or plow—and that he finds the aforesaid minister incapacitated for the discharge of the work of the ministry by reason of certain ailments and disabilities. As though this varied mental and physical-racking process was not enough to eviscerate every fragmentary element of self-respect yet remaining in the breast of the unhappy victim who has been caught in the dragnets of "Rule 7" and the application blank, the appeal for "help" must be ventilated upon the open floor of Presbytery, the story of which is well-nigh certain to be carried back to their homes as choice bits of gossip by the delegates and visitors to Presbytery.

Having run the gauntlet of a formal vote in his favor by the court and attested by the Stated Clerk, the application is then forwarded to the Committee of Ministerial Relief to be further thrashed out.

This is the conventional, red-tape process laid down by "Rule 7," as it is worked under the application blank. And if all this doesn't dub the applicant for the relief funds of the Church a self-confessed "pauper," a ministerial old-age "down and out," I'd like some one to "speak right out in meetin'" and tell us just what it does mean. And it puts many a minister on the rolls of the Assembly minutes, though young and active at present, in the spotlight as a potential beggar, should he happen, in the coming days when out of the pastorate, to be caught between the grinding cogs of "Rule 7." What do you think of it? And how would you, "gentle reader," like to be put through such a gruelling (crueling) mill?

Honestly, now, do you think it squares in with the spirit of "play fair" toward these venerable servants of the Master, who have given the very best of their lives in long years of self-denying labors for the Church?

And don't you think that they are worthy of better treatment?

What is fair play, after all, in its essential nature, but a practiced interpretation and application of the fundamental plan of Christ, "Whatsoever ye would that man should you to you, do ye even so to them."

We have a conviction, and we are going to share it with you, too, that this cruel and un-

necessary way in which the provisions of "Rule 7" have been carried out, is going to be "scrapped," and the sooner the better.

For there is an awakening sentiment abroad in the Church like "the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees," that registers a newer and a finer regime of "play fair!" towards these honored ambassadors of of the Lord, in a humane, gracious and graceful way.

It has its start in the several overtures that went up to the General Assembly of last year on the subject, "Great Bodies Move Slowly." And we know how hard it is to break away suddenly from the traditions and age-enerusted customs of the past. But the Assembly did make a break in its arrow point of a new direction, as it changed the term "Honorably Retired Ministers" into "The Ministers' Roll of Honor."

So far, so good. Additional overtures will go up to the coming Assembly, to meet in Charleston, W. Va., in May, asking it to complete the recast of "Rule 7" to the effect that when a minister has reached the age of seventy years, and has given at least thirty years of service to the Church in the aggregate, his name shall be placed upon the "Honor Roll" of the Church, and automatically, solely and entirely by reason of that act, and without any further action there or thereafter, and without being compelled to sign application blanks as heretofore, but entirely upon the clear-cut and self-respecting ground of a right, not of a need, in return for faithful service rendered to the Church, he be entitled to annuity or allowance, to the extent of the resources of the treasury of the Ministerial Relief Committee, just as it is done by the government, the various corporations and business institutions of the land, a personal right for personal service rendered.

This is what this article champions in the way of "fair play." Don't you agree with it? By the way, why not drop relief and substitute service, so as to change the name of the Committee into "Committee of Christian Education and Ministerial Service Funds?"

Montgomery, W. Va.

A WISE PLAN.

By Rev. C. F. Rankin.

I am aware that an effort is being made to have the Presbyteries send up overtures to the next General Assembly, to instruct the Executive Committee of Ministerial Relief to place all ministers on the "Ministerial Roll of Honor," that is those who have reached the age of seventy, with thirty years of service in our Church, on the list of beneficiaries of this fund, to the full extent of the resources of the Treasury of the Ministerial Relief Committee. This is to be done without the formality of the minister's signing even an application blank, or making an appeal for help upon the plea of need, but solely and simply by reason of the prescribed service rendered to the Church.

It is claimed by those asking for such an overture, as is revealed by such a communication before me, that the present method of placing an old minister on the beneficiary list of this fund, where the minister has to make application with a statement of his need, endorsed by a physician, and approved by his Presbytery, is cumbered with too much "red tape," and is a needless and cruel laceration to a refined and sensitive nature, and should give place to a more humane and self-respecting method. I have never known of such a case.

I appreciate the motives of any one who would seek in any way to protect the feelings