

John Johnson

L E T T E R S

OF

REV. J. B. SCOULLER, D. D.,

TO THE

United Presbyterian Congregation

OF

ARGYLE, N. Y.

Published by the Congregation.

PITTSBURGH:

PRESS OF MURDOCH, KERR & CO., 53 NINTH STREET.

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A LETTER

Addressed to the Argyle Congregation by Rev. J. B. Scouller at the time of his release from its Pastoral care.

TO THE "ARGYLE CONGREGATION":

After a pastoral supervision of ten years, lacking one month, I am unwilling to have the relation which has so long bound us, broken without a parting word; and as the scene would be too painful and embarrassing for my shattered nervous system to do this in person, I am left to the only alternative of doing it by letter.

On the first of May, 1852, when I commenced my ministry here, the roll of membership numbered 419, of these 70 have died and 96 have been dismissed, leaving 253 of the original membership still here. During my pastorate, 281 have been added to the membership of this church, of these 200 were upon the profession of their faith and 81 by certificate. Of these new members, 25 have already died and 56 have been dismissed, leaving 200 of this class still connected with the church. Out of a present membership of 453, only 253 were members ten years ago, making a change of almost one-half during this short period. Baptism has been administered during my incumbency to 38 adults and 228 infants; I have also officiated at 92 marriages and 244 funerals. Such are the fruits of my pastorate here as reduced to figures, and I trust they supply evidence that my labors have not been in vain in the Lord; and I trust, also, that the past experience and the present comfort of the souls of very many in this congregation, bear pleasing testimony to the earnest hope and confiding belief that the God who giveth the increase has owned my ministry here for the conviction of sinners and for the comforting and edifying of saints. While your minister, I have tried in all fidelity, and with considerable labor to myself, to expound the Scriptures in course, believing such to be the true and most profitable way of preaching the truth as revealed by the Spirit. The morning service of almost every Sabbath has been devoted to this special exercise, and I have reason to know that a clear and comprehensive understanding of the Scriptures has been very much promoted thereby, amongst the mass of this congregation. In this work I commenced during the month of May, 1852, with the epistle to the Philippians, and continuing ever since, have gone through with the remaining part of the New Testament; and returning to the gospels, have de-

livered 126 lectures upon them ; (according to Robinson's Harmony) tracing the history of Jesus down to the day before the instituting of the Lord's Supper, when he had finished his public ministry and had left the temple forever, and was devoting his few remaining hours to intimate personal intercourse and communion with his particular friends. Here I am constrained by the orderings of divine Providence to drop the history of our blessed Saviour ; but I trust that, as his intimate friends, the communion and fellowship of his gracious Spirit may abide with you forever. In addition to " Bible Class " instruction and prayer-meetings, lectures and the discussion of miscellaneous subjects embracing almost every topic suitable for the Sabbath and the pulpit, I have preached regular and extended courses of sermons upon the ten commandments ; upon prayer ; upon the sacraments of the Church ; upon the doctrines of the Church, and upon Christian experience. I mention these things to remind you how intimate has been our connection for the past ten years, during all of which your interests have been my care, and your joys and sorrows, my joys and sorrows. But the figures above show how rapidly and silently the work of change is going on in your midst, and the time has come, in the providence of God, when another must care for your souls and be the confidant of your weeping and your rejoicing. I have been led to this step, not from any love of change, nor from any dissatisfaction in reference to my labors or the people of my charge, for in all these things I am content ; but solely from a sense of duty that I may remove myself from a position which I am no longer able to fill, and that you may have the opportunity of procuring another pastor of sufficient vigor to care properly for your interests. You have known and marked the gradual prostration of my physical powers for the last three or four years, and you have also been cognizant of the fact, that I have used every means suggested by medical skill, however painful or costly, for my restoration and with but very limited success ; and as my troubles arise largely from an affection of the throat and derangement of the nervous system, I am fully convinced that there is no hope of permanent cure or relief without an entire abandonment of public speaking for years. In first resolving upon my resignation, I was not influenced by any plans or arrangements for my own future, but left that to the God, whom I have long tried to serve, and gave myself exclusively to the discharge of a present important, though painful duty ; and however painful it may be, as painful it certainly is, to be banished from the pulpit for years, perhaps forever ; while yet in the prime and strength of manhood, at the close of the twentieth year of my

ministry, and ere I have seen the forty-second anniversary of my birth; yet my gracious Master wills it, and it should be, and I trust it is, my pleasure, cheerfully and promptly, to bow to his sovereignty. In my trials, I have the comfort of knowing that the wealth of agency treasured up with Christ is inexhaustible; so that the Church will never miss me, and the cause which I have dearly loved will prosper and triumph, although I may fall in the fight; and, as for myself, I have but little solicitude in reference to the future, for I know that the God whom I serve is able and willing to give me a place of service and provide for me according to what he sees will be most for my good and his glory, and therewith I am content. Hitherto he hath made me to abound, and I dare trust the future to him. For ten years I have tried to preach the gospel amongst you, in all plainness and fidelity, seeking to please no man, and never shrinking from an honest expression of my sentiments, either from the pulpit or in official or social intercourse,—yet it is a matter of thankfulness that, in departing from you, I leave no enmities or broken friendships behind. I part with all in peace and friendliness, and know no reason why a visit at any future time should not be a matter of unmixed pleasure, unless it be the absence of familiar faces, for I dare not hope to see you all again in the flesh. Considering the great size of the congregation, and the great diversity of character which it contains, and the many events which have occurred, it is to me a matter of the most profound thankfulness that unbroken peace and concord have continued between us to the end, so that we part as we ought to part, after having borne the relation of pastor and people for ten years.

I would embrace this opportunity of publicly returning my thanks to the congregation for their uniform kindness to me, and I feel that this public acknowledgement is particularly called for, because, in the latter part of my pastorate, my physical prostration and the consequent imperfect performance of my pastoral and ministerial duties have often drawn largely upon your patience and forbearance; and yet I rejoice to say that your patience has not given way, but that sympathizing words and kind actions have been fully and generously accorded me. We part, but it is only for a little season; for one half of my ministry has been spent in your service, and we will meet again in eternity to read the record. The relation of pastor and people is broken, so far as present and future responsibilities are concerned, but in fruits and consequences it can never be dissolved. They have gone already to the judgment-bar, and are no longer subject to our control. It has been my pleasure to minister to the spiritual comfort

and edification of very many of you, both in sickness and in health, and I would fondly hope that the recollection of such intimate relations and services may be kindly cherished, for they shall certainly never be forgotten by me. There are also not a few of you over whom it has been my privilege to rejoice as the seals of my ministry. Toward all such, whether present or absent, I could not and would not entertain any other feelings than those of parental solicitude; and when such praise God for his grace in bringing them into the possession of his love, I trust that kindly thoughts may arise of him who, in the providence of God, was honored as the instrument of their conversion. There are among you some—alas! that there should be so many—with whom my ministry has been barren of all apparent good. To all such I would simply say, I have labored for your good and prayed for your reconciliation to God; and if your present position out of Christ and strangers to the covenant of promise is in any way owing to my failure of duty, I ask pardon of God and your souls, and pray that another may be privileged to reap where I could not. From your memories I cannot well be excluded, for the long death-roll shows that I have been with most of you in the tender hour of your bereavements; but it is from your prayers that I ask not to be excluded. Thousands of times have I led you to the throne of grace, and I trust I shall meet with you there still. But time passes and eternity presses. Farewell! and “may the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

Argyle, March 27, 1862.

JAMES B. SCULLER.

A LETTER

From Dr. Scouller to the Argyle Congregation read on the day of the Installation of Rev. T. B. Turnbull, January 31, 1884.

DEARLY BELOVED:

Although a stranger personally to many of you, yet I feel that a word from me would not be out of place on this occasion. Almost twenty-three years have come and gone since my official relation with you ceased as a congregation, but having not been allowed, in the providence of God, to form any new pastoral connection, I still feel, and have always felt, as if the bond between us has been broken

only in letter and not in spirit and reality. And why should it not thus linger on? I have not yet rendered my account to God for my labors in your midst, and it is therefore my interest to still watch the results of my own planting and watering, although one and another, and now a third, have succeeded to my place as pastor and taken the crook of office.

I can say with much feeling, "the fathers, where are they?" Of the five or six hundred who waited Sabbath after Sabbath upon my ministry how many are here no more? The faces which were so familiar to me, where are they now? Many, very many, are gone, and those that remain are greatly changed by the friction of passing years with their trials and griefs. Of my twelve elders only one now lives, and he by reason of more strength has seen fourscore years. So great has been the change, that if present in person, I would see so many unknown faces as to be forced to feel that I was a stranger where once I was a stranger to none. These facts teach their own lesson, and admonish us that we are all hastening on and hastening away; and that what we have to do should be done promptly and diligently, for we may have no to-morrow to bring up the failures of to-day.

I presume there are many here who have outgrown my recollection that still remember me with more or less distinctness. They were the children of my charge and have now taken the places of their parents and are bearing the brunt of battle. I stood by your cradles, and to many of you have applied the water of baptism, in the name of the Triune God. By the couches of the father and mother of not a few of you I have knelt when the spirit was in the struggle to pass away, and have heard you voice your grief in sighs. I have known your youthful joys and sorrows, and rejoice now to know that in riper years you have made your father's God to be your God, and have cast in your lot with the children of the covenant. I charge you to be strong in the Lord, and to lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset you, and run with patience the race that is set before you.

There still linger among you not a few whom I delight to claim as my children, sons and daughters given me of the Lord, for whose welfare, temporal as well as spiritual, I feel a parent's solicitude. I look forward with much anticipated joy to that day when earth and heaven shall pass away, when I shall be permitted to present you before the judgment throne as the fruit of my labor and the seals of my ministry. My interest in you has not ceased and cannot cease, for our most delightful companionship still lies in the future. I beg

of you to impart to me that great and precious joy "to hear that my children walk in the truth."

I share with you in your anxiety as to the kind of pastor that from time to time becomes your leader. He builds upon foundations which I laid, and waters where I planted, and gathers harvests where I cultivated. We are co-laborers, for he shares in the fruits of my husbandry, and I am still enriched by his culture. I sincerely hope and pray that the Lord is this day giving you one who will preach to you the gospel of the kingdom. Not an expurgated gospel, not the fragments of the gospel, nor the dreams or speculations of men, but a whole gospel, in all its parts, that which looks Godward as well as that which looks manward. And that he will shepherd the flock with watchful love and tender carefulness.

But remember, he will be very much the kind of pastor that you make him. The pulpit has a very strong moulding influence upon the pews, so also have the pews a powerful reflex influence upon the pulpit. By irregular and listless attendance you can discourage your pastor, by indifference or unfriendliness you can dishearten him, and in a variety of ways you can sadden his life so that he cannot gather up his energies and labor diligently, lovingly, efficiently and successfully. And in so doing you not only wrong him and grieve him, but also wrong and injure yourselves, for you rob yourselves of that which would make you rich and which you can ill afford to lose.

But I anticipate nothing of this kind. The change would be too great. When I remember your respectful and reverent attendance in other days, your uniform kindness and tender forbearance for many shortcomings, I feel assured that you will wait diligently upon his ministry, co-operate heartily with him in every good work, and strengthen his hands and gladden his heart by confidence, sympathy and kindness.

Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and may the God of love and peace work in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Newville, Pa., Dec. 25, 1884.

JAMES B. SCOLLER.

