

TWENTY-FOUR YEARS
OF
HAPPY PASTORATE
LAKE FOREST

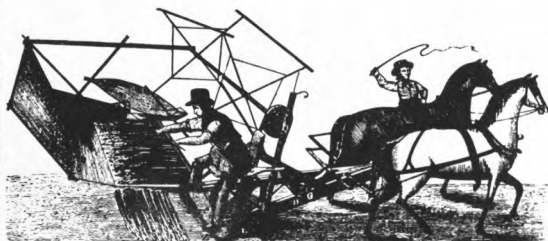
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A Pastorate
of
Twenty-Four Years
Lake Forest
Illinois

A GRATEFUL REVIEW
OF HIS
HAPPY PASTORATE
OF THE
Presbyterian Church
LAKE FOREST, ILLINOIS

AS PRESENTED ON
The Twenty-Fourth Anniversary
Of That Pastorate

SEPTEMBER 10, 1905.

BY
JAMES G. K. McCLURE
PASTOR

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A Pastorate of Twenty-Four Years

Lake Forest, Illinois.

It was in the latter part of May, 1881, that I was in my home at Albany, N. Y., when a caller, the Rev. William Durant, pastor of the 6th Presbyterian Church of that city, was announced. Upon my talking with him, he asked, "Where are you going to preach on June 5th?" I replied, "In the 1st Church at Schenectady, N. Y." Then he said, "A Committee will probably be there to hear you, and I want you to make a good impression on them." I replied, "I am glad I did not know of this matter before, for it might have influenced me in the choice of my sermons. I have already decided what I shall preach, and I shall go ahead, without any thought of the Committee." "All right," he answered, and then he told me that the Committee would be from Lake Forest, Illinois, a little place between Chicago and Milwaukee, where he had once spent a Sunday, and where a College classmate of his was living, William H. Ferry. This mention of Lake Forest was the first mention of it that I, so far as I was aware, had ever heard.

On Sunday morning, June 5th, as I sat in the pulpit of the 1st Church, Schenectady, I looked about to see the Committee. Almost immediately I noticed a man I thought was a stranger, in the third pew from the pulpit. He turned out to be Mr. Samuel D. Ward. Though I scanned the audience carefully, I did not detect the other member of the Committee, who had placed himself at the rear of the Church among some Union College students. Fortunately I soon forgot the Committee, and entered into the service without thought of them. It was the Sunday after Roscoe Conkling and Thomas C. Platt, United States Senators from New York State, had resigned from the Senate piqued because President Garfield had appointed a Collector for the Port of New York City without consideration of their wishes. The people of New York State were thoroughly

aroused over the controversy between the President and the Senators, and the devotional services needed to take recognition of the thoughts of the people's hearts.

At the conclusion of the second service the Committee sought a conference with me. I then learned that when my name had been laid before the General Committee of the Church (Mr. Amzi Benedict, Mr. James Anderson, and Mr. Calvin Durand being the other members) through word from the Rev. Mr. Durant to Mr. Ferry, one member of the Committee had recognized it as that of a baseball player at Yale and had expressed interest, and accordingly I had been looked up. The two members of the Committee now asked me if I would come to Lake Forest and preach one Sunday as a candidate. I replied that the distance was long, and that it would be fairer both to the congregation and myself, in case I came to preach, to invite me for two or three Sundays, rather than one. They said they would return and see what could be done.

On the next day these Committeemen interviewed as many persons as they could, who lived in the general vicinity, as to my type of character. One of the persons was the Honorable Martin I. Townsend, United States Congressman from Troy, who told them "Mr. McClure is all right if he only gets waked up."

A little time later I received a letter from Lake Forest in which I was invited to spend four Sundays here. On June 25th I entered Lake Forest for the first time, and on June 26th conducted the Sunday worship. The morning service, somehow, seemed to move heavily. I was not at my ease. I went from it feeling that my mission to Lake Forest was in vain, that no one would care to see or hear me again. The evening service was pleasanter to me, but I lay down that night feeling that my journey to Lake Forest was a mistake.

During the succeeding week I had in mind a particular sermon for the ensuing Sunday, July 3rd, and was ready

to preach it, when on Saturday morning, July 2d, word came that President Garfield has been shot! Immediately I decided to lay aside the sermon I had made ready, and preach another sermon, the subject being "God's control of the events of our lives." Sunday morning the congregation came to Church ready for such thoughts as were contained in the text, "My times are in Thy hand." The service moved easily and helpfully. A certain tie of fellowship between the people and myself was now felt. That tie grew stronger in the Communion Service of the afternoon.

At the close of the service of the third Sunday evening Mr. Sylvester Lind, the Scotchman, perennial Mayor and general head of Lake Forest, met me in the aisle and said, "And have you a lady?" "Yes," I said, "I am a married man." "Well," he continued, "you may go your way back and get your lady, for I think we'll take you."

After one more Sunday, the fourth, I started back for the east. I had been most kindly entertained. Very many of the homes had invited me to be a guest at their evening meal, a meal more simple than the elaborate dinner of today. I had eaten familiarly with a goodly half of the Congregation, and in all ways I had thoroughly enjoyed myself. And still with the exception of Mr. Lind's remark, very little had been said to me as to my ever returning to Lake Forest. In previous years there had been unpleasant features in the Church life, and the sore spots were not all healed. The situation was looked upon as not particularly desirable for a new pastor, and thoughtful people were reluctant to persuade a minister to take up his work among them.

On the morning of my leaving, Mr. John V. Farwell, Jr., said to me, "I do not know whether you would like to come to Lake Forest or not. Father and I have been talking it over, and we are not going to urge you to come; but

dividuals or the families of this Congregation. The amount reported in the minutes of the General Assembly as given by this Congregation during this period is, for congregational purposes (that is, salaries, current expenses, buildings) \$224,484; and for benevolent purposes, \$510,862.81, the total being \$735,346.81.

As in my mind I review these years and ask myself what events stand out as perhaps deserving of special mention, I note first of all the erection of this present house of worship. When I first preached here the old Church was not at all presentable. All along its side walls might be seen the impression made upon the paper by the heads that had leaned against it. After my acceptance of the call, the Church was quite brightened with new paper, and looked much neater and more attractive. Still it was not a very worthy building. It had no basement. Its furnaces, placed upon the floor itself, heated the head but left the feet well nigh frozen. Again and again I have seen men with shawls over their knees, and many times I have kept my overcoat on until I stood up to preach. Besides, the seating capacity of the building was inadequate. Every one said, "There ought to be a new Church! The community has comfortable homes! It ought to have a comfortable Church!" No one, however, would start a movement to build a Church. The place at the time was in a very quiescent condition. Real estate was low and unsalable. The population was limited, and it was increasing scarcely at all.

A proposition at last was made to build a manse for the pastor's family, but this I discouraged, saying that a Church was the first need of the community. At last Mr. D. R. Holt volunteered the offer that if \$30,000 were raised for a Church and a Manse, he would give one-sixth. I was a very happy man when in his office he wrote out that statement, signed it, and gave it to me. Then it became necessary to seek subscriptions. You will pardon me if I now say that at that time there was reluctance on the part of

any individual or set of individuals to ask a single subscription of his neighbor. Accordingly it devolved upon me to solicit every subscription. Suffice it to say that every man, woman, and child who had connection with Lake Forest was asked to give, the subscriptions varying from five thousand dollars to twenty-five cents. At last \$30,000 were down on the subscription list. A Building Committee was appointed, consisting of Henry C. Durand, J. V. Farwell, D. R. Holt, Simon Reid, and E. J. Warner, who immediately assumed full responsibility for the work to be done. When the buildings were completed \$11,000 more were needed to pay every bill. That amount was likewise secured through personal solicitation, and when we gathered in this structure for its dedication, and a pipe organ was heard for the first time in Lake Forest, June 10, 1887, the entire Church property was free from all indebtedness. My family and I had entered the manse May 13, 1887, the Rev. Dr. W. A. Nichols dedicating the manse through an appropriate prayer in the presence of my family.

Immediately upon the erection of this building, new life seemed to come to Lake Forest. People began to show greater interest in the place. Harmony asserted itself in the community. Real estate became marketable, and the movement forward that has been going on ever since had its start.

A second event of my pastorate that meant much to me was my connection with the University as President pro tempore. It was on April 6, 1892, that I was elected as such. I consulted the Church officers. They allowed me to do what my heart prompted me to do. I realized what self-denying efforts had been made by the Trustees to help the University and I wished to contribute my labor of love. It proved to be more of a labor than I anticipated. There was a deficit of \$11,009 to be met. I undertook to raise it. I do not hesitate to say that the raising of that amount at that time and under the circumstances was one of the

heaviest pieces of work of my life. Five hundred thousand dollars had been raised for the University, after unsparing effort, a little time before, and the giving community seemed exhausted. I, though not a Trustee, had raised \$45,000 of that amount from all whom I could influence. The deficit, however, was at last canceled by Aug. 30, 1892, and during the months that followed the Academy, formerly located in North Hall on the College Campus, was transferred to its present grounds, and the East House, the Annie Durand Cottage, and Reid Hall were built, completed, and turned over to the University authorities. Besides, the heating plant of the College was entirely reconstructed and furnished. When in June, 1893, Dr. John H. Coulter came to be full President and the pastor of this Church was released from his pro tempore duties, the University Trustees made record that \$110,000 beyond ordinary expenses had been raised in the preceding fourteen months, and that all accounts were fully met for the fiscal year ending Aug. 30, 1893.

A third event that I feel like mentioning because it caused me so much unusual thought is the purchase of "The Old Hotel" property, the triangular piece of land lying between Deerpath, Walnut, and Washington Avenues. It had a building upon it that was disreputable in appearance and was in danger of becoming disreputable in use. The whole plot of land with its broken down and patched fence and its overgrown weeds was an eyesore at the very center of Lake Forest. It was owned by an eastern gentleman who felt that he ought to receive a large price for it, and with that exaggerated price Lake Forest people had no sympathy. It was a long and a hard pull that was undertaken when we tried to raise money enough to secure that property and clean it up. Enthusiasm for the undertaking was lacking. There came a time, however, through the generosity of some ten persons, when the property was bought. Those same persons paid assessments on it for

years, and then graciously gave it to the University. I have always hoped that on that plot of land some handsome and useful public building would be erected, the surrounding grounds being beautifully kept up, so that to all time, this noticeable spot would enhance the attractiveness of Lake Forest.

A fourth event in my pastorate must be recorded because it reveals the patience and kindness of the Congregation, to a remarkable degree. That event is my holding the Presidency of the University from 1897 to 1901.

I had a feeling that I could help a little in a new emergency, and so I undertook the duties of the permanent Presidency, again with the consent of the Church officers. Once more there was what to me was a fearful deficit, the amount this time being \$11,800.15. But I was in a more confident mood than in 1892, and it was not so very long before this deficit was canceled and the field was clear for advance. As President pro tempore in 1892-93 I had assumed no duties other than administrative; I had not attended Faculty meetings nor conducted Chapel, nor secured students. Now I assumed these additional duties. For two years I endeavored to be present at all meetings of the Faculty, and of the general student body, and I had charge of securing students. It was at the time itself a very great wonder to me that not more than twice in those two years did a funeral or other pastoral duty cross the path of those Presidential duties. It is a constant wonder to me now that two years could have been so free from a conflict of duties.

By the end of three years the Trustees and I both thought that it would be wise for me to lay aside all duties other than administrative, and provision was made for my relief. A little later Dr. D. K. Pearsons was persuaded to offer the University \$25,000 on condition that \$100,000 additional be secured. The effort to fulfill the condition immediately began. The effort involved an amount of thought

and interview that even now in the haze of distance looms large. The effort, however, did not fail. The Trustees and friends responded, and they lifted from my heart the incubus of responsibility that lay upon it by day and by night, and the \$125,000 were secured. And so when in 1901 I was allowed to resign and give place for the new President, this Congregation had made a record of goodness and patience that is remarkable. They had never questioned my motive nor distrusted my purposes. They had let me have my own way as I attempted to discharge double duties that might at any time have come into serious clash, and they had stood by me most forbearingly. I have always hoped that the Church would rejoice in the part it had in the University life during the years that saw the Alice Home, the Lois Durand Dormitory, the Lily Reid Holt Chapel, and the Arthur Somerville Reid Library erected. The detailed statement issued by the University shows that the gifts received, 1897-1901, aggregated \$313,345.02. My gratitude to the Trustees of the University for their friendship then and now is unspeakable. My gratitude to this Congregation for their confidence during those years is beyond expression.

A fifth event of which I wish to make mention is the erection of the Meeting House. Considerable history lies back of its erection. Preceding the time of my pastorate cottage prayer meetings had been held in houses adjacent to the present Meeting House lot, and Bible Classes had been taught in the old public school building. It was not, however, until 1896 that the cottage prayer meetings became regular, and it was in 1889 that an afternoon Sunday School was formally organized. The Sunday School was obliged to shift about from spot to spot in order to secure accommodations. The need of a permanent building became evident. An offer of lots was volunteered. Then we had an opportunity of obtaining the Railway Station of the Northwestern road on condition we would move it.

We did move it; we reshaped it for all kinds of worthy social and religious purposes. We named it the Meeting House, as being the building where all honorable persons could meet with one another and with God, and on May 12, 1900, we dedicated it, free of all debt and furnished. It was a great delight to me that all this was accomplished while I was still Pastor and President, and was accomplished without financial burden to any one. The building is admirably adapted for its ends, and has tended to bless the community, and to develop the vigor of our Church life.

There is still one other event to be noted in this connection, namely, the decoration of the Church, that took place in 1902. When the Church was originally built, it was a great improvement upon its predecessor and naturally commanded admiration. As time passed, however, there came a desire that the Church should be better heated and ventilated, and that it should be beautified. It was accordingly decided that about \$2,000 should be spent in improvements and proper Committees were appointed for the purpose. As a matter of fact the expense account kept growing as more and more improvements were found desirable, until over \$12,000 were expended—not counting the gift of the memorial window over the pulpit. In all this responsibility of improvements and in raising money to pay for them, the pastor had no part whatever. The time had come when others assumed all the burden and he was not asked to do a single thing that involved care and anxiety. It is true that he was summoned quite often to give an opinion as to coloring of walls, of woodwork, and of curtains; and he loves to tell that he always tried to give an opinion, but it was never followed, and the result is this beautiful interior as we see it today—to me the most worshipful and satisfactory church interior for its size and location anywhere to be found. I love this building. It is a joy to be in it, to see these memorials of so many kinds, and to let these memorials teach their own lessons. There

is more that suits me here than in any church where I preach, and its present appearance is a tribute to the unanimity, to the willingness, to the generosity and to the taste of your own good selves.

As an almost natural outcome of improving the Church, you graciously improved the manse, and in 1904 raised and expended—entirely without effort of any kind on my part—over \$3,000, in enlarging and painting the manse, and in placing new heating apparatus and plumbing in it, making it a superb home adapted in every way to the well being of a pastor's family.

So far my words have been very personal, perhaps too personal; but they have been spoken only for the sake of recording history. What shall I say about *you* during all these blessed years? I can say everything sweet and beautiful. My family have been recipients of trust and kindness from the instant of our arrival. Mrs. McClure and I, coming by ourselves, were greeted with sympathy. As our children were born, every child received a welcome. These children have known only one home, Lake Forest; only one Church, this Church. The roots of our family life are deep in the soil of this place and of this Congregation. Here we have all been nourished, sustained and cheered. Here, so long as life lasts, must center the tenderest and dearest associations of our family history. Every memory carried by us into the years will be sacred, so good have you been to us all. Ours has been a home of health: ours has been an unbroken home: ours has been a home unceasingly attended by your gracious favor. We never have had an unkindness shown us, either in word or in deed or in look. What a record of your beautiful goodness that is!

So far as we can see there could not have been a spot on earth where greater happiness would have been ours. The life of this Church has demanded the best that a pastor could give. Strong minds have been here, in men of alertness and in women of thought. The place itself has made me wish to develop intellectually and spiritually.

I have always been aware that I could level up to the requirements of my surroundings only through energy and application. Those requirements have called upon me continually to press forward.

The place itself and your patience with me have given me opportunity to attempt all of which I was capable. How marvelous that patience has been! Soon after I entered the ministry I resolved that I never would apologize for the weakness of my efforts; accordingly, you have never heard me say how ashamed I was of some of my public speaking, nor heard one word indicating my grief over some of my public services. But my silence has not been indicative of complacency. Silence has often covered agony of spirit. Against such agony I have struggled, knowing that in part it was due to morbid selfishness, and knowing that failure should lead not to depression but to new endeavor. I have not, however, been unaware how wondrously you have borne with me, and I desire to make public recognition of the fact that *you* have been my cheering and helpful developer during these years. I owe a thousand fold more to this Church than I have ever given to it, or ever can give to it. I am its debtor to all time.

May I now add that during this pastorate I have been able to be present at and conduct every Communion Service; that only one death has occurred in the active Session of the Church, that of Simon Reid; and only one death in the active Trusteeship of the Church, that of Henry C. Durand; that we have four times raised \$1,000.00, and so created the three College Scholarships, the Mary Whitney Chapin, the Wm. A. Nichols, and the Sylvester Lind College Scholarships; also the W. A. Dickinson Academy Scholarship (all four controlled by the Church); and that we have raised \$5,000.00 to permanently endow a bed in the Chicago Presbyterian Hospital, the only Church that has ever permanently endowed a bed there.

The original generation that was at the front twenty-four years ago has largely passed away. In the Lake Forest Cemetery I walk as one holding fellowship with a spiritual world, for almost all the graves speak to me of those whom I loved, and whom I still love. There are many precious graves also at Rose Hill and Graceland. That original generation was strong and helpful. It has left its impress of power here. That generation is finding a worthy successor. The men and women now at the front here are splendid illustrations of noble humanity. They do not see things through their parents' eyes, but they do see things through their parents' hearts. They may be trusted. They are doing and will do good work in human life. I am proud of them. The world expects much from them. The cause of Christ depends upon them. I am confident that they will answer to the world's expectation and that they will see to it that the Church of Christ, entrusted to them, goes forward from victory to victory. As they prove helpful to society and to God, they will deserve to last. Only the useless and harmful is allowed to run to seed in God's world. My one supreme prayer for this Church and for your homes is that here may always be a generation so virile in its helpfulness to society and to God, that it shall abide in His strength and continue powerful.

As I close these words of reminiscence I cannot forbear saying that God has been unspeakably good to me in putting me into the ministry. However reluctant I may have been to enter it I record now that I thank Him with an overflowing heart for leading me into this special form of His service. More and more I realize the world's need of the true prophet and the loving pastor. It would be a much poorer world without them. While I am well aware how far short I have fallen of what the lives of men should have received from me, I still feel that one of the richest and sweetest privileges possible to man had been mine in the joy I have had in preaching a message that has grown

dearer and dearer to me every year; and in thinking of my fellows with an affection that has become stronger and stronger all the time. Other men have had their own gladness in their life work. My gladness in the work committed to me by God, seems to me incomparably great. I have had no reason for envying any man; I have had all reasons for thanking God and wishing to help every man whom I could reach.

It is God alone who in his omniscience can pronounce upon these twenty-four years of our joyous relation. With all gratitude I look up to Him and I say, "Father, Thou hast been good to me beyond all my heart could wish. Thou hast given me sustained health, a loving home, a devoted people, and a blessed, blessed pastorate. Thou hast made my cup to overflow."

And as I say this, I also say, "Oh my God, who hast dealt with me so tenderly and hast showered Thy compassion upon me so abundantly, in Thy great mercy pardon all my infirmities, forgive all my omissions, overrule all my errors, and to this dear people evermore give peace and eternal life. Amen."

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