

Rev. Dr. W. A. Scott, A Southern Sympathizer

By JOHN B. ASTLES

THE REV. WILLIAM ANDERSON SCOTT, D.D., a Southerner, born in Tennessee, and for a time pastor of a Presbyterian church in New Orleans, came to San Francisco in 1854 when he accepted a call to the Calvary Presbyterian Church. He was recognized by many of his contemporaries as one of the most capable speakers in the nation; his congregation held him in high esteem, but his continued defense of the South's position forced his members to accept his resignation.

Dr. Scott's fellow ministers did not share his views, and their differences of opinion had reached a climax at the regular semi-annual meeting of the Presbytery of California held in St. Paul's Presbyterian Church, San Francisco, September 11, 1861. At this meeting the Rev. A. W. Loomis, a missionary to the Chinese in California, presented a paper to the Presbytery on the state of the country. This paper, containing four resolutions, was a presentation of Union views. The resolutions were as follows:

Resolved, 1st, That, in the opinion of this Presbytery, it is the duty of ministers, at all proper times, to enjoin upon their hearers their duties as citizens, explaining the difference between the "powers which are ordained of God" and usurpers, also the difference between a needful revolution and a rebellion; and, in the very language of the Scriptures, "putting them in mind to be subject of principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, and to be ready to do every good work," and reminding them that "whomsoever resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God."

Resolved, 2nd, That we recommend to all our ministers, elders and members, carefully to study Chapter 23 of our Confession of Faith, with the proof texts.

Resolved, 3rd, That, especially in a time like the present, when a long premeditated and thoroughly organized rebellion is raging in many of the States of the Union, which threatens entirely to overthrow our Government and to destroy our liberties and prosperity, it is the duty of ministers of the gospel to warn the people of the awful crime of rebellion, and earnestly to exhort them to stand by their Government, and to pledge to it their full support.

Resolved, 4th, That as we also believe God has suffered these our present calamities to come upon us because of our unfaithfulness as individuals and as a Church, and because of our manifold sins and iniquities as a nation, therefore should we make humble and hearty confession, while in earnest supplication we look to God for relief, believing that in Him only is our hope: and this will we continue to do till in great mercy He shall return and deliver us. And we enjoin upon all our churches, and exhort all the people solemnly to observe the day of fasting and prayer appointed by the President of these United States, viz., the last Thursday of September, and to keep the day in the manner and for the especial purposes which are set forth in his proclamation.¹

Unfortunately, there was only one reporter present at the meeting, a man representing *The Pacific*, a weekly religious newspaper. The reporter stated that when Rev. W. A. Loomis had presented the foregoing resolutions,

Dr. Scott rose and remarked that the paper lacked only one thing—a preamble resolving the Presbytery into a political organization, inferring that the resolutions were out of place in a meeting of an ecclesiastical organization.² Scott condemned the paper as a piece of political meddling, and suggested that the resolutions had been purposely drawn up in secret in order that they might be presented without his foreknowledge. He denied that the Presbytery had any right to call the war a rebellion, arguing that it was necessary to wait and see if it was successful before labeling it a rebellion. He further stated that Jefferson Davis was no more a traitor than George Washington and that Davis was as much president as was Lincoln. Judge R. H. Waller, an elder of Calvary Presbyterian Church, in replying to Scott, said that according to Scott's own reasoning the war, at the present moment at least, was rebellion and that the only thing that could save it from being a rebellion was success; that success had not come—so it was rebellion. A vote was then taken on the adoption of the proposed resolutions and they were passed with Scott casting the only negative vote.

There were those who felt that the account was not a fair one and who claimed that Dr. Scott had been misquoted. *The Pacific*, in answer to criticism it had received, printed letters from several ministers present at the meeting.³ The writers agreed that the report was fair and accurate, and testified that Dr. Scott had made the reported remarks.

Rumors were running wild in the city at this time to the effect that Scott had been arrested by Federal authorities and had given bail. The amount of the bail and the names of the bondsmen were whispered about. These same rumors said that if Dr. Scott attempted to preach the following Sunday, September 22, 1861, the people would hiss him down, and that there would be a meeting in front of Calvary Church on Sunday at which he would be publicly denounced as a traitor to the Union.⁴

The newly elected moderator of the Presbytery, the Rev. S. T. Wells, sent to one of the city's newspapers a letter for publication that he had received from Dr. Scott. Reverend Wells felt it should be published, in order that the public might know what Scott had to say in defense of himself. A portion of the letter is as follows:

... The only question I desired to discuss *was the right of the Presbytery, under the Constitution of the Church, and as an ecclesiastical body, to meddle with political affairs. I insisted that Jesus Christ had not given any such power to His Church.* I did not say whether Mr. Davis was a usurper or not; nor did I say that he was as much a President as Abraham Lincoln. Nor did I say that the revolution in the Confederate States was a rightful one. I neither said nor intended to say such things. I did say, that the Presbytery had no authority from the Head of the Church, nor from its standards to decide any such questions. I said expressly, and at two different times, in the course of my remarks, that I would not discuss the merits of the political issues involved in the subject matter of these resolutions. That on these points I had nothing to say. My only object was to show that Presbytery should not entertain these resolutions at all.

You will remember, perhaps, that this is not a new position. I have uniformly maintained in all my writings that the Church should have nothing to do with politics.

Thus I have endeavored to give you the train of my remarks, and as fully as I can.

W. A. Scott⁵

Public sentiment against Scott was increasing and many felt that he was guilty of introducing politics in his pulpit, for "in his prayers, he insisted on praying 'for all presidents and rulers and all officers of the Army and Navy'."⁶ Rumors, which had continued to circulate, had caused considerable curiosity among a number of the citizens. Shortly after midnight, on Sunday morning, September 22, a crowd began to assemble near Calvary Church, which stood on Bush Street between Montgomery and Sansome.⁷ Evidently nothing was afoot, the people having gathered simply to see if anything *would* happen. However, by daybreak it could be seen that someone had actually been at work, for at the top of the church a Union flag was flying; in addition Union flags were fastened to both the east and west lamp posts in front of the edifice. And on the northeast corner of Donahue's building, obliquely opposite the church, was an effigy dangling by the neck from an upper window. It was labeled: "Dr. Scott, the reverend traitor." At 6:30 a.m. two policemen arrived, immediately cut the effigy down and carried it away. The crowd remained mute. Although no violence had taken place, their numbers steadily increased and by 8 a.m. there was an estimated 2,000.⁸

Shortly after the effigy had been removed, a Mrs. Nelson, further identity unknown, made her way to one of the lamp posts and tried to dislodge one of the flags, expressing to the crowd her pro-Scott sentiments. The crowd prevented her from removing the flag, although she did succeed in lowering it a trifle from its former position. After this incident, James P. Noyes (listed in the 1861 *Directory* as a "mariner"), arrived on the scene, and, seeing that the flag had been moved, attempted to put it back in its original position. Thereupon the crowd, thinking he, too, was pro-Scott and was trying to remove the flag, surged upon him and treated him roughly before he succeeded in breaking away. He jumped up on the church steps and shouted to the mob that it had misunderstood his actions, that he was the person who had bought the flags (paid \$25 for them) and was one of those responsible for having them placed about the church. He laughingly added that the maltreatment he had received at their hands was well worth the cause.

As the hour for the church service approached, the Sunday School children along with their teachers began to arrive. They were allowed to pass through the crowd and into the church without harm. Shortly thereafter Chief of Police M. J. Burke and a squad of men came up and stationed themselves in the basement of the church to await any serious developments. About 10:30 a.m. the front doors of the church were opened and a large

crowd rushed in. Almost immediately all seats were taken.⁹ Among those present "were 500 Union men, sent there by the Union Secret Club to assist the police . . . in keeping order."¹⁰

Dr. Scott rode from his home to the church in a public carriage. As he walked down Bush Street to the church, it was seen that he was accompanied by two policemen. From the portion of the crowd remaining outside the church there came audible whispers. There was much moving about and straining for better views, but no violence occurred and Dr. Scott entered the church by a side door.

Scott was extremely cautious in the remarks he made from the pulpit during the service, and he read his sermon and prayer from a prepared manuscript. His prayer was silently and closely listened to. It invoked a blessing on the head of the government, on all in authority, on publishers and printers, and on all who were in a position to influence men. He discreetly omitted anything concerning the question of secession and "made no allusion to magistrates."¹¹ His sermon, entitled "Christian ministers, Christ's ambassadors," based on II Corinthians 5:20, was equally acceptable, so far as the critics present were concerned. Many persons left, feeling that no further excitement would occur, but others from the crowd outside took their places.

At the completion of the service the congregation departed quietly. Scott lingered inside the church talking with friends. Then he proceeded as usual down the west steps. He was stopped by a Mrs. Selby,¹² who offered him a ride to his home in her carriage. Scott accepted the offer, and they started toward her carriage with several policemen grouped about them as they made their way. As soon as they reached the sidewalk, the crowd surged towards Scott and Mrs. Selby, but they managed to get safely inside the carriage. Those nearest the horses' heads grasped the bridles and there were faint cries of "Hang him! String him up!" There were also some hisses. Two policemen jumped into the driver's seat, where they were joined by Chief of Police Burke, who, satisfied that Scott and his companion were so far unharmed, shouted to his men to "Put on the whip." A large fellow in a red shirt still held the horses, but seeing that Burke and his fellow officers were about to draw their guns, he jumped aside and the carriage drove away amid the cries of the crowd. Scott was taken at once to his home where he stayed the remainder of the day.

No sooner had the carriage rolled away than a man mounted the church steps and cried out, "Three cheers for the Union—down with traitors and seceders." Cheers rang out.

William Scott, son of Dr. Scott and about seventeen years of age, was among the congregation present at the service. As he was making his way through the crowd he was recognized by a man who shouted, "Here's the son of a ——, hang him." Young Scott immediately defended himself and

gave the man a blow that sent him sprawling to the pavement. This display of violence caused the mob to press toward William. James S. Bovee, a police officer, seeing that William was in danger, grasped his arm and advised that he allow himself to be taken to the station-house for his own safety. A young friend of William, Samuel P. Middleton, son of John Middleton, a trustee of the church, not realizing that Bovee was an officer and thinking he was one of the mob, hit him. Consequently, both Scott and Middleton were taken into custody. Before leaving the scene of the mob, the officer asked William if he had a gun. He admitted that he did and handed it over.

Shortly after this incident, the mob broke up and the streets were cleared. Although an evening service was scheduled at Calvary Church, the trustees, acting in accordance with the wishes of the city authorities, canceled the meeting and kept the doors locked. A small group of curious persons gathered around the church that evening, but there was no demonstration.

The following day, Monday, September 23, young William Scott's case was called in the police court and was heard by Police Judge Samuel Cowles. Scott was asked to explain why he was armed on Sunday. He replied that on his way to church Sunday morning a woman called to him as he was passing and asked if he had a gun. When he answered in the negative, this lady, who did not herself attend Calvary Church, handed him a gun, asking him to promise not to use it except in an emergency in defense of his father. William promised, and accepted the gun. When Judge Cowles heard the explanation, he commended young Scott and stated that his actions under the circumstances were justifiable. The case was dismissed.

On the same day Dr. Scott sent in his resignation, sold his house on Rincon Hill, and made plans to sail for Europe. It was rumored that he had received several threatening letters and that organized bodies of men had sworn to kill him if he remained in the city.

At a regular meeting of the trustees of Calvary Church held on the evening of September 25, it was voted that the salary of Dr. Scott be continued and paid up to the first of next January, a sum amounting to approximately \$3,000 for the balance of the year. Four trustees subscribed \$250 each, making a purse of \$1,000 to be presented to Scott before he retired from the city. The hope was expressed of securing additional money so that a purse of \$5,000 (including his salary) could be given him.¹³

A meeting of the congregation was held on the evening of September 30, an estimated 300 attending.¹⁴ Colonel McKee called the meeting to order, Rev. Dr. George Burrowes acted as moderator, and Mr. R. R. Provines as secretary. Dr. Burrowes opened the meeting with prayer, and the secretary read Dr. Scott's letter of resignation. A resolution was then offered by James B. Roberts, who stated that he did so with great pain and reluctance; but owing to outside influence it was impossible for Dr. Scott to remain in

the city with any peace to himself or his family. Roberts therefore hoped that his proposed resolution would be adopted in order that Dr. Scott might retire to some quiet place:

Resolved, That this congregation hereby accept the resignation of the Rev. Dr. Scott, and unite with him in asking the Presbytery to allow him to return to them the call which was placed in his hands to be our Pastor, and we hereby request the Presbytery to declare this pulpit vacant, and that we might be at liberty to call another Pastor without delay.¹⁵

Although fifteen negative votes were cast, the resolution was adopted. Several of the members did not want to accept Scott's resignation, but desired to give him twelve months' salary and let him go abroad and then return as their pastor.

On the morning of October 1, Dr. Scott and his family boarded the SS. *Uncle Sam* which was sailing for England. Scores of people were on hand to see him off. He was presented with a purse amounting to an estimated \$8,000. One lady brought him a gift of £ 100. Especially thoughtful were the members of his congregation who fitted out each of his six children with a four-year supply of clothing. Making the trip with Dr. Scott and his family were almost twenty other persons, including Mrs. Selby, Mrs. Reese [Mrs. Selby's mother], and her five children.¹⁶

A meeting of the Synod of the Pacific was held in Napa, California, on Tuesday night, October 1, 1861. This body passed "loyal resolutions" similar to those passed by the Presbytery of California. In addition, resolutions were passed deploring the violence in San Francisco which resulted in driving away from the church a pastor sound in the faith, a friend of all the benevolent boards of the Presbyterian Church, a strong friend of the Church of Christ, and an able and faithful minister of the Gospel. This body declared the pulpit of Calvary Presbyterian Church to be vacant and appointed the Rev. Dr. Phelps of Sacramento to preach there the following Sunday.¹⁷

In order that the Synod might go on record as not being in sympathy with Scott's views, the following resolution was proposed and adopted:

Resolved, That the Synod has no possible sympathy with the treasonable opinions thought by some to have been entertained by Dr. Scott, and that we detest treason against the United States Government, coming under whatever guise it may, or by whomsoever uttered, as a heinous sin against God, and a detestable crime against the nation.¹⁸

Dr. Phelps, complying with the appointment of the Synod, filled the pulpit of Calvary Church on the following Sunday morning, October sixth. At the close of the sermon he declared the pulpit vacant, and then Dr. Burrows read Dr. Scott's farewell letter. In part it read:

To Calvary Presbyterian Church and Congregation: Dearly beloved in the Lord—By circumstances you all comprehend more easily than I can describe, I am obliged to withdraw from your pulpit and from your city—from the very church which your

liberality and zeal for the worship of the God of your fathers erected for me to labor in. The long continued opposition to my ministry on the coast culminating in the demonstrations of the past few months and of the last Lord's day, seemed to me to be a call from the Head of the Church to depart, and I am happy to say, that I can do so without an unkind feeling to anyone. . . .

On two different occasions I have seriously contemplated a removal and sent in my resignation . . . the circumstances were such that I was ready to conclude that some one else might be more acceptable in the pulpit to a majority of the congregation. I was also very weary of the ceaseless opposition, and grieved that you were proscribed and annoyed by a groundless pressure from without. . . .

But a vast majority of you seemed to think otherwise, and desired me to remain. I have done so, until now I can no longer occupy your pulpit and preach to you the Gospel in peace.¹⁹

Letters from Dr. Scott received by *The Pacific Expositor* reveal that he arrived safely in Southampton, England, and on the nineteenth of November left for Paris.²⁰

After leaving California, Scott received many letters from friends and admirers, all expressing confidence, esteem, and affection. Among them was the following, written by John G. Downey, governor of California:

Rev. and Dear Sir,

I have learned with sincere regret that you purpose leaving this State for Europe, with a view of there making a temporary sojourn.

I beg you will carry with you the assurances of my high appreciation of your merits, both as a citizen and distinguished minister of the Gospel, during your long residence in California.

Your liberal and Christian spirit, as manifested by your teachings from the pulpit and your courteous conduct towards other denominations differing from yourself, have won my most cordial admiration. I trust, Sir, that your visit may be fraught with all the happiness and pleasure to yourself and family that your heart can desire, and I indulge the hope that you will again return among us, to ornament the pulpit with your distinguished abilities and Christian virtues, and that you will then find our beloved country restored to peace and brotherly love.

With sincere esteem and respect, I am, Reverend and dear Sir,

Your obedient servant,

John G. Downey²¹

Such is the story of the part played by Dr. Scott in California during the Civil War. Looking back across the span of years since his day, we see him as a man of profound convictions, unafraid to take a stand for what he believed to be right.

NOTES

1. *The Pacific*, Sept. 19, 1861.
2. *Idem*. See also W. A. Scott, *My Residence In and Departure From California* (Paris, France, Dec. 6, 1861), pp. 11-15.
3. *The Pacific, idem*.
4. San Francisco *Evening Bulletin*, Sept. 21, 1861.
5. Scott, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-14; also *Evening Bulletin, idem*.

6. G. H. Tinkham, *California Men and Events; Time 1769-1890* (Stockton, 1915), p. 196.
7. *Evening Bulletin*, Sept. 23, 1861.
8. Tinkham, *op. cit.*, p. 197.
9. One thousand persons could be seated in the auditorium of Calvary Church, according to the San Francisco *Directory* for 1861, p. 436. Included among the trustees were Henry H. Haight, H. M. Newhall, and Hubert Howe Bancroft.
10. Tinkham, *loc. cit.*
11. *Idem.* See also Scott, *op. cit.*, p. 6.
12. Probably the wife of Thomas H. Selby of the importing and metals firm of Thomas H. Selby & Co. (Peter Naylor), on California Street—the only Selby listed in the 1861 *Directory*.
13. *Evening Bulletin*, Sept. 26, 1861.
14. *Ibid.*, Oct. 1, 1861.
15. *Idem.*; see also Scott, *op. cit.*, p. 18.
16. *Evening Bulletin, idem.*
17. *Ibid.*, Oct. 4, 1861.
18. *Minutes of the Synod of the Pacific*, Oct. 1, 1861.
19. Scott, *op. cit.*, p. 21.
20. *The Pacific Expositor*, Feb. 1862.
21. *Evening Bulletin*, Oct. 7, 1861; and Scott, *op. cit.*, p. 28.