A Brief Outline of the Life and Ministry of the Rev. George Armstrong, D. D.

Among the papers of the late Dr. Armstrong, was found a partially prepared account of his life and ministry. He promised such a paper to the Ministerial Conference of Kings County, N. S. It was to have been read at its meeting in April, 1884. I assume it was not completed. This is to be deeply regretted, as it would have been of the greatest interest to his many friends. The fragment which was found, throws light upon the early part of our brother's life, and is therefore of special value, for of this part of his experience his friends generally knew but little.

Dr. Armstrong was born in Dumbaum, County Tipperary, Ireland. When he was but a child, his parents emigrated to St. Johns, Newfound and. It is at this place Dr. Armstrong begins the account of his life and ministry in the paper referred to above.

I think it best to give this part of our dear brother's experience in his own words. Many, no doubt, when they read it, will have mingled feelings of pleasure and grief; pleasure that they know and loved so worthy a man of God, and grief that he has been removed from their fellowship on earth. They will, therefore, read with the greatest interest this record left by our brother, of God's dealings with him in the days of his youth.

REMINISCENCES OF MY LIFE AND MINISTRY.

My parents were strict Episcopalians, and I was brought up under the ministry of that church, was confirmed by the Bishop, and admitted to its communion; though it must be confessed I had little knowledge of Christianity, and no experience or knowledge of its spiritual saving power. I was early led to church, and listened to the solemn services, sometimes wondering much what they meant, why they were instituted, and of what interest or use they were or could be to me. The idea that fixed itself in my mind was—that by attending these services God would be pleased, and would deliver me from hell. Hence, it happened that attention was given to them from merely selfish motives,—to gratify my self-righteous feelings, quiet conscience, please my parents, or escape perdition,—and not from any love to the services, to God, or to religion itself. Still, serious impressions were at times produced, and a dread of death, judgment, and eternity oppressed me fearfully, and led to attempts at living a better life, but with little success, because made in my own strength.

The first religious meeting I attended, however, was not in church or cathedral, but in a secular building on the rugged, grand, and precipitous ridge of Signal Hill, which, rising abruptly and almost perpendicularly from the north shore of the *Narrows*, St. Johns, Newfoundland, reaches an elevation of more than five hundred feet above the level of the sea. The military station at that post had been ordered to England, and a young officer connected with the force wished to deliver a sermon or address to his company and other soldiers ere they embarked. It was a quiet Sabbath evening, and my mother, anxious to hear the officer's farewell discourse, took me with her. The hall or apartment was well filled, the military largely predominating.

The preacher appeared very solemn and earnest, and the service impressed me, though I did not understand much of the discourse, except what was contained in an anecdote told to illustrate the folly of yielding to temptation, and the necessity and resoluteness of renouncing evil company and shunning resorts that may lead to ruin. The story was to this effect: A goat, having been once enticed into a bar room and forced to take intoxicating drink, became so disgusted with results that, when its senses and recollection were recovered, the creature would never trust itself in the company of those men, and could never again be cajoled into the place where it suffered such degradation and wrong. Such was the wisdom and decision of this unsophisticated member of the lower creation. Would that men acted with the same discretion and determination to shun degradation and ruin! This sermon on Christianity and temperance was the first that fell on my ears, and it was in some respects like a nail in a sure place.

When this officer came to St. John's he was sceptical as to Christianity and the obligations of religion; but having gone to hear a learned and talented Wesleyan minister in that city to see him prove what was neither expected nor desired—that the Holy Scriptures are true—the sceptic became so convinced of the authenticity, inspiration, and authority of the Bible that he renounced his infidelity, became a true convert to Christianity, and openly avowed his faith in Christ. And undeterred by ridicule, and scoff from brother officers, the votaries of pleasure and the world, this young soldier of the cross appeared in military garb in the pulpit of the Wesleyan church and proclaimed the gospel of Christ with power to sinner. He was earnest, zealous, and courageous in the service of his Divine Master—the Captain of Salvation. I have often heard my father, whom the young officer sought to convert, speak with high admiration of his faithful efforts to do good to the souls of men, and bring them to Christ. It was over forty years after the event that, on referring to the above meeting, reciting the anecdote to my mother, and asking who the preacher was, I learned it was Lieutenant Vicars, the father of Captain Hedley Vicars, who received the converting grace of God in Halifax, N. S., and who, emulating the faith and zeal of his father, exhibited that grace in a devoted, earnest, active Christian life before the world and amid his companions in arms wherever called to serve his country. Hedley Vicars distinguished himself for piety and courage in the Crimean war, in which he met a soldier's death before Sebastopol while valiantly leading on his men to repel a night attack from the Russians.

That first meeting for Christian worship, Signal Hill, the anecdote, the preacher, Lieutenant Vicars, have been associated in memory from the fourth year of my life. The record is indelible, and the influence of that one service has been beneficial to the little boy who heard with wonder and awe that young officer preach the gospel of Christ. By all means encourage children to attend the Sunday school, the prayer meeting, and the sanctuary of God, that they may be taught the way of life, and learn the mystery of redemption.

The first mention of Baptists that reached me produced great surprise, and excited much curiosity and desire in me to know who the Baptists were—what they believed, what they practised, and how they looked and acted in the world.

When about eight or nine years old I heard, on a Sunday evening, my father, just returned from a visit to a near connection, relate to my mother the story, which deeply interested me. The son of this gentleman and my father got into earnest conversation on the Christian religion, and diverged into discussion as to the degree of scriptural authority attaching to the different denominations known to them, or of which they had heard, and various opinions and judgments were expressed, until finally my father's friend announced his conviction that, above all people and denominations he knew or came in contact with, the Baptists came, in their belief, doctrines and practices, the nearest to the teachings and requirements of the New Testament, and stated how he came to form this estimate of them.

Mr. A., my father's friend, having been on a visit to his friends in a maritime town on the north side of the Bay of Fundy, was induced to attend a service held by an itinerant preacher on the Lord's day. Being quick, intelligent, and of ardent temperament, and without, perhaps, a heartfelt experience of the gospel, though entertaining a favorable opinion of his own life and spiritual state, he listened very attentively, and became rather uneasy and nervous under the bold, incisive, and pungent utterances of this to him new and strange preacher. Taking what was said on man's depraved and lost condition, and his need of regenerating grace, as meant for himself, this excited and repellant hearer arose and abruptly left the dwelling in which the service was being held, saying as he passed out of the door, he did not come there to be abused. When the meeting was dismissed, the preacher made inquiry as to who this strange gentleman was, learned his name and residence, and was told of his annoyance and language on leaving. The minister announced to the friends his intention to visit and talk with this impatient and recalcitrant hearer on the morrow. True to his purpose, the minister prepared for the encounter, and called upon the visitor, avowing to the latter the object of his call to be a desire to explain anything in his discourse that seemed questionable or offensive. The stranger received the minister courteously, and to battle they went with high resolve and spirit—at least on Mr. A.'s part—and for three or four hours the contest was waged with varying success, until finally the minister demolished all the positions of the self-satisfied hearer and formalist, much to the surprise and annoyance of the latter. Scripture was the weapon by which the minister won the battle.

The result of this encounter on the mind of the hearer is not known except that he acknowledged his defeat to my father, and expressed his conviction that if there were any people in the world right in their religious views, principles and practices, according to the New Testament, the Baptists were that people. Coming from such a source, this judgment produced on me quite a favorable impression respecting doctrines, and people totally to me unknown except from this volunteered and what seemed impartial opinion. Many a time for years a strong wish haunted me to hear something distinct and definite as to the beliefs and practices of this to me strange and peculiar people.

A few years after hearing the above incident, my parents removed from St. Johns, Nfld., to Sydney, C. B., where the family resided for a number of years. Here occurred the first opportunity presented of hearing what was so much desired by me, a sermon from a Baptist minister. On a Sunday afternoon in summer, just before tea time, I heard a strange and exciting rumor that a Baptist minister was to preach that evening in the house of a worthy lady whose residence occupied a prominent position on the principal street in that town.

Immediately the resolution to attend meeting was taken to gratify the wish long entertained, and put to the test (if a lad of seventeen could do it), the correctness of the judgment my father's friend expressed. I entered the room with a kind of awe mingled with curiosity, and disposed to listen attentively to all that was said, and to observe closely all that was done. Soon the preacher arose and announced a hymn, which was sung; the Scriptures were read, and prayer was offered; and these exercises, though in most respects different from what I had been accustomed to in the worship of God, were appropriate and very solemn. Then came the sermon from Heb. 12:1, a very clear and distinct, earnest, pungent, and practical discourse, presenting the Christian life as a race, and requiring intelligence and faith, self-denial and courage, activity and perseverance, in order to gain the immortal prize which Christ holds forth to every faithful and successful disciple of the cross.

That young man gazed with great interest upon the expressive countenance, and splendid physique of the preacher; and as to the preaching he considered it the best and most impressive he had ever heard. Being accustomed to hear sermons read from the pulpit, the delivery of such a sermon *extempore* added much to the surprise felt and the favorable impression produced, as the language was correct and the thoughts consecutive. From this specimen the estimate formed of Baptist preaching was high; and could sermons of that quality be within my reach every Sabbath they would have a decided preference over those I was accustomed to hear.

So deep was the interest felt in the impression produced on the mind of that young man by that first sermon from a Baptist minister, that he sat up the greater part of the night committing to paper what he recollected of that memorable discourse. These notes were retained for many years, indeed until 1877, when, with many papers of interest and value, they were reduced to nothing by the great fire in St. John. Still, the vision of that preacher—solemn, earnest, instinct with life from Christ, and as having a message from God to his hearers, lingers before the mind of that then youthful hearer, and seems to say to him now, "try, pray, to be such a minister of the Gospel of Christ." That preacher, as I learned about two years after, was the *Rev. Richard McLearn*; a man of good understanding and possessing a large endowment of the grace of common sense, of startling integrity, unvarying truthfulness, indomitable perseverance, and whose religion was Apostolic Christianity in spirit, life and doctrine.

Mr. McLearn's ministry and labors were a great blessing to multitudes in these Provinces, who were converted or quickened and strengthened by his able and earnest presentations of the truths of the Gospel. In his illness and death, which occurred in Dartmouth, N. S., he gave convincing evidence of the power of the Gospel he preached to sustain the spirit of man in the deepest trials and make it triumphantly calm and sublimely helpful in the hour of dissolution. "The memory of the just is blessed."

Here the deeply interesting account from Dr. Armstrong's own hand comes an end.

He was one of a family of eleven children. Only one of whom survives him, James Armstrong, Esq., of Sydney, Cape Breton, father of the Rev. W. F. Armstrong, foreign missionary.

After hearing the Rev. Richard McLearn, it may be easily imagined that the young man continued to feel a deep interest in the salvation of his soul, and in Baptist principles. Of this period of his life, I am not able to give dates; but there are certain facts which bring into clear light the way in which he was led by the Saviour, whose pardoning love he so anxiously sought.

A special Providence gave him the opportunity of hearing the late Rev. F. F. Curtis. He was shipwrecked while on his way to Canada. The vessel was brought to Sydney. There Mr. Curtis preached the Gospel. Under his ministrations of the Word of Life, Mr. Armstrong was brought into the light and liberty of the Son of God.

Had he finished his paper, his friends would have had an account of the various steps along which he was led by his kind, Heavenly Father. Many will join me in regarding this a misfortune. It would be pleasant and interesting, especially as our brother now rests from his labors, to read from his own pen a detailed narrative of his inner experience in coming to Christ, and in embracing Baptist doctrine. All would be more than pleased to learn his exercises in obeying the call to preach the gospel; in what he passed through in obtaining an education, and in giving himself exclusively to the work of the ministry. His struggles must have been many before he reached this point, for it was years after he graduated at Acadia College before this final decision was reached. Instead of a full account of this part of his religious life, we have but a very few facts; but they are of such a nature as enables us to see that he had a rich experience, although it cost him many a fear and many a doubt. At the next point in the development of his religious life he is found in contact with the Rev. E. A. Crawley, D. D., whose home was then in Sydney. Dr. Crawley was eminently qualified to counsel and direct this youthful disciple of Christ, for he had been taught by his own experience. They had a common starting point, and Mr. Armstrong was looking to the goal already reached by his instructor. In childhood both found themselves in Episcopacy, established by law. Dr. Crawley's experience is known to the public. It is interwoven with that of the origin and early history of the Granville street church at Halifax. It is but natural that between these two men of God a life long friendship should spring up.

Young Armstrong was very fortunate to meet one, at this period of his life, so well qualified to instruct him in personal faith, in doctrine, in the matter of obeying a call to the ministry, and in the needful preparation for this great work. The sympathy, piety, talent, and culture of the instructor, did not fail to secure the love and confidence of this young disciple, and to inspire him to make the best of himself as a Christian, a scholar, and a minister of the word. This model, under God, had much to do in training the intellect, in moulding the character, and in shaping the life of our now glorified brother. Once, while pursuing his studies at Horton, Mr. Armstrong became so discouraged that he resolved to abandon his course and return home. This backward movement was arrested by the advice of Dr. Crawley, and in deference to wise counsels the discouraged student returned to his studies, so strengthened that the difficulties of the student's life never afterwards proved a stumbling block to him. He took heart, and was saved to the denomination.

After being fully persuaded that Baptist doctrines rest securely in God's word, this young convert sought and received baptism at the hands of Dr. Crawley. It was at Sydney that he made his public profession of faith in Christ.

In favorably considering the call received to preach the gospel, Mr. Armstrong had in his friend a good counsellor. He was thus led to the schools at Wolfville. During his college course he exercised his talents in the pulpit. Many in the Berwick church and elsewhere remember, with pleasure and profit, his preaching and friendship in those days. At this time he was often much depressed, and greatly discouraged; but his kind and humble spirit had made for him warm friends, whose words and sympathies encouraged him to go forward. He was a member of the second class that graduated in Acadia College.

Even after finishing his literary course he found himself not fully decided to give himself entirely to the ministry of the word. During this time of indecision he taught school, and preached as opportunity offered.

With a view to forever settle this question, he travelled through Quebec and Ontario. At Montreal he met Dr. Cramp, who was at the time laboring in that city. There is no record of his intercourse with this servant of God; but it is altogether probable that he opened his mind to him, and received such encouragement as Dr. Cramp was accustomed to give candidates for the ministry. Shortly after this, in the town of Hamilton, the final decision was reached, and from that time till the close of life, except for a short time while editor of the *Christian Visitor*, Dr Armstrong gave himself wholly to the ministry of the word. The result of this resolve was a great blessing to the denomination and the world. From that time onward the enemy was not permitted to triumph over him.

On the 31st of Dec., 1848, he was ordained over the Port Medway church. His pastorates were in the following places: Port Medway, Bridgetown, Sydney, Kentville, and Port Hawkesbury. For twenty years he went in and out before the church at Bridgetown. Here his greatest work was done. He dwelt in the hearts of his people and was held in the highest esteem by the entire community. His ministry was one of peace and Christian love. Although kind and genial in all his intercourse with the public, he never compromised principles or sacrificed the truth. When occasion required it he showed himself fair, courageous, and able in controversy; but in these efforts to defend the truth, he never forgot that he was a Christian minister.

Dr. Armstrong seemed specially adapted to the place and people where he spent his longest term of pastoral labor. At this place, it was my privilege to sit under his ministry for part of a year. I soon saw how much he was beloved by his church and congregation, and how highly he was esteemed by the community. It was not long before I was drawn into the embraces of his friendship which, ever after, I enjoyed in full measure. He opened the way for me to enter the ministry, and gave me advice which I readily accepted. In the best sense of the term Dr. Armstrong was a Christian gentleman; and richly merited the love, honor and esteem so universally accorded him. His first wife was Miss Mary Ann Johnson, of Wolfville. They had nine children. Four of them, a daughter and three sons, survived him. Since his death this daughter has gone to her rest. Dr. Armstrong was a devoted husband and a loving father. A letter written to the daughter, who had been an invalid for a long time, is a true expression of his parental sympathy. Its reading drew tears from many eyes on the occasion of the memorial service at Bridgetown. Mrs. Elizabeth Dykeman of St. John was Dr. Armstrong's second wife. She now mourns the loss of one of the best of husbands. Three sons are also in the deep grief of bereavement. They feel the loss of a devoted father.

For many years Dr. Armstrong was a member of the Board of Governors of Acadia College; and at the time of his death he was a member of the Senate of that institution. He ever took a deep interest in his *Alma Mater*. Temperance and every moral enterprise found in him a warm advocate.

The intelligence of his death brought feelings of sadness to many hearts; but the recollections of his friendship are an off-set to the grief experienced, for not the enjoyment alone, but the remembrance of it as well, is sweet and refreshing. His kind face and genial speech cannot be forgotten. Whether in the pulpit, soundly and ably declaring the truths of the gospel, or in friendly and religious intercourse, his manner and spirit were the same—quiet and captivating. He was an Israelite indeed. Blessed are the dead, for their works do follow them. Multitudes may raise their hearts in gratitude to God for the life, the friendship, and the ministry of Dr. Armstrong.

E. M. SAUNDERS.

Helen's Tenth.

"Can I afford to tithe my income?"

Helen See heard the words listlessly, as her pastor announced them as the subject for the Sunday evening young people's meeting.

An hour later, as she turned the latchkey in the door of her little home, the words came back to her. For the first time in her life she put the question to herself. She knew Mr. Jacques gave one-tenth of what he earned as principal of the school. She had heard that Mrs. Whetmore gave one-fifteenth of her income from writing. But it had never occurred to her that a young primary teacher just beginning ought to spare one-tenth of her earnings.

"I'm sure I ought not," she said, half aloud, and quite decidedly, "If I ever should have anything left after paying mother for my board and washing, and buying clothing and shoes, and paying car fare, and getting lunches, there is Ed always wanting shoes and things. And I am sure I never spend money for anything that I don't absolutely need."

She finished the sentence, and in her own room put out her hand to uncover a box of candy.

"You did not absolutely need this," conscience whispered.

She was oblige d to acknowledge it, but thought, crossly,

"It is a pity if one can't have a little candy once in a while."

At the dinner table Ed made a discovery.

"Hi!" he said, "another pair of new cuff buttons!"

"They are only oxidized silver, and I was so tired of the old ones."

Again the voice said; softly, "You did not absolutely need these." And again to herself she acknowledged, "No, I did not."

But she went to the prayer-meeting resolved that if her voice was heard on the question it should be decidedly on the negative side.

The young leader did not take any one passage of Scripture, but sustained the question by three propositions.

1. God commanded it, Lev. 27, 30–32; Deut. 16, 17; Mal. 3, 10; 2 Cor. 9, 7.

2. We cannot afford to rob God, Mal. 3, 8, 9.

3. God says we can afford it, Prov. 3, 9, 10; Prov. 11, 23; Prov. 19, 17; Luke 6, 38.

The thoughts of the leader that most impressed Helen were these.

"Until we get beyond the tenth we are only giving the Lord back his own. The ancients understood that God claimed a tenth, and they said: 'If we take his tenth we shall lose our nine-tenths.' Paul, advancing beyond Judaism, writing to the Corinthians, assuming that they would do more than the Jews had been accustomed to do, said: 'As God has prospered you lay by in store, above the tenth, for the Lord.

"All our money should be consecrated, but a sacred sum, a tenth or more, as God has blessed us, should be set apart for his use. Like the manna of old, money spoils if one hoards it. Used selfishly it breeds sin and death."

The first testimony came from the minister.

"For years I gave little. I reasoned that I gave myself, and that was my share of self denial. Besides I was in debt. At length I saw it a duty to give one-tenth. My salary was $500. I had given about $15 a year. To immediately put it up $50 was more of a trial than I had supposed possible. But I held steadily, and I found the plan had these advantages. It was a relief. Sometimes conscience had whispered that I was giving too little, and again under a strong appeal I felt that I had given too much. Now I was at rest. And it is such a pleasure to give $10 where I used to give $1. Then, it is profitable. Somehow my debts were almost immediately paid. My salary was raised. An avenue was open by which I could earn money with my pen. Our little homestead trebled in value, and I never lack means for my family or to give. Twenty per cent. of my income now goes to the Lord, and I have an abundance. Then it helps me spiritually. The victory has been a blessing to my soul. Having given my money all to the Lord, it is easier for me to give myself. Truly I can afford to tithe my income, and, as he promised, I have been blessed upon the earth."

The next testimony was from a fair-faced, blue-eyed young girl, almost a stranger to them:

"I am an orphan, and I support myself by painting," she said: "My father failed, then died, and left me almost penniless. One evening I came into this church, and your pastor said: 'I do not believe one of you is so poor but that if you love Jesus you will have some money to give to his cause.' I went home, and threw myself upon the bed and cried. I had not a penny in my purse. The weekly rent for my room was due in the morning. My three meals had been crackers and water. I was heart-sick. At last I rose, and fell upon my knees. I uttered no words. But the Lord knew just how sore was my heart. After a while I became quiet and peaceful. The next morning I spent an hour with my Bible and in prayer, and, without any breakfast, sat down to my easel. My heart was light, for I had come very near to the Saviour. The noon mail brought me a postal saying that a $3 picture, for some time on exhibition, had been sold. Afterwards, as I held the money in my hand, the glad tears came as I thought 'Now I have something for my Lord.' My father had always given ten per cent. to benevolences, so I put thirty cents away, though when my room rent and washing was paid I had just twenty-five cents for food, which it seemed might have to last me through the week. But it did not. The next day a $10 check came to me, and $1 was put away. From that day to this I have never lacked for food or clothing, nor been without money in my purse; but, better than that, as your pastor said, I am all the Lord's—my money, my time, my talents, my body, my soul, are all his. 'Bless the Lord, O my soul!'"

There were tears in Helen's eyes when this girl sat down. Impulsively she rose.

"I have never given a dollar of my own to the Lord. When this subject was announced at the morning service I was indifferent, but as it forced itself upon my attention at home I said decidedly: 'I cannot,' and I think I meant 'I will not,' tithe my income. But it looks very different to me now. I believe I can afford to tithe my income, and by the help of God I will."

The following Saturday was pay-day for Helen. She held to her resolution, though she knew it meant abstinence from luxuries perhaps for weeks.

But what to do with the money puzzled her. She planned to give a sum monthly to each church benevolence, but that would not take all. So she laid the money carefully away.

Months went by. One morning little Mollie Thorne, one of Helen's best pupils, came to school looking pale and weary. Twice she missed a lesson, and the second time she dropped into her seat and sobbed uncontrollably. As school closed Helen called the child to her, and said: "What is it, Mollie? How came you to miss?"

She hung her head, and the tears dropped fast.

"Darling, tell me." There was command as well as love in the young teacher's tone.

"I'm so hungry; I can't study," and the child put up her hands to hide her scarlet face.

"I'm so sorry, dear. Tell me all about it."

"Ever since pa and Jim were killed in the mine, mother's had a hard time, and she don't get much sewing, and she aint had anything to eat since yesterday."

"You poor child," and the teachers eyes were dim with tears. "Come with me, dear."

They stopped at a restaurant, and the famished child was fed. Some good things were bought for the mother and sent by the little one.

"Tell her I will come myself in a little while," was the message Helen sent.

She took two five-dollar bills from her tithing-box to supply the immediate necessity of the widow. She also enlisted the sympathies of a wealthy friend who promised that she should have all the could do, and took some work to her.

As the woman warmly expressed her gratitude, Helen said sweetly:

"Thank our Heavenly Father; it was he who put it into my heart to do it."

"O, I wish I were as good as you," the happy woman answered.

"He will help you," was all the timid Helen could reply.

But she invited the minister to visit the home, and the following communion Sunday the bright-faced mother, a reclaimed backslider, and her little daughter, stood at the chancel rail and gave themselves to the Lord. As the minister related a little of the story, and added that it was one young girl's work, Helen bowed her head and fervently thanked her Heavenly Father that out of a happy experience she knew that she could afford to tithe her income.—*Christian Advocate.*

—Have you ever noticed how badly boys write at the bottom of the pages in their copy-books? There is the copy at the top; and in the first line they look at that; in the second line they copy their own imitation, and so the writing grows worse and worse as it descends the page. Now, the apostles followed Christ, the first fathers imitated the apostles, the next fathers copied the first fathers, and so the standard of holiness fell dreadfully; and now we are too apt to follow the very lees and dregs of Christianity, and we think if we are about as good as our poor imperfect ministers or leaders in the church, that we shall do well and deserve praise. But now, my brethren, cover up the mere copies and imitations, and live by the first line. Copy Jesus. "He is altogether lovely," and if you write by the first line, you will write by the truest and best model in the world. —*Spurgeon.*

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