

Canadian Missionary Link

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MRS. H. M. N. ARMSTRONG.

Among Canadian Baptist pioneer missionaries there has been no more honored name than that of Mrs. Armstrong. When the news was published a few weeks ago that her work on earth was done, and she had gone Home, it brought poignant sorrow and a sense of personal loss to many hearts. We are glad to have for readers of the LINK the following sketch of her life, which has been kindly prepared by her daughter Miss Kate Armstrong, who also is a missionary greatly beloved by many Canadian and American Baptists:

Hannah Maria Norris was born in the little town of Canso, Nova Scotia, Nov. 30th, 1842. Even at the early age of ten she interested herself in the Lord's work, for although she was thought too young to be given a class, she collected together the children in the neighborhood and held one on her own account.

She finished her education at the Normal School in Truro, Nova Scotia, in 1860, and for some time worked among the Micmac Indians under Silas Rand. It was at this time she changed her religious views, owing to a peculiar incident which then occurred. One night some Indians rowed over to the mainland in great distress, begging Miss Norris to come across and christen their baby, who was dying. She went, but on the way wondered what would happen to the child if perchance she arrived too late. Would it be lost? She had been brought up a Presbyterian, but, studying up the whole subject of salvation, following up this incident, she was convinced of Baptist views, and was baptized by Dr. D. A. Steele, then a young pastor in Canso, she being his first candidate for baptism.

After this, although Miss Norris found sufficient scope for her religious fervor, she realized that "the field is the world," and her heart went out to those in distant lands with fewer privileges, who sit in darkness and have no one to lead them to the Light of Life. But the question arose: how could she go? She applied to the existing Mission Board, but they did not care to send a woman; so she asked a relative to pay her passage. He agreed, and, full of delight, she made her preparations. When all was in readiness, the relative, persuaded by friends that he was only sending her to her grave, refused aid. However, nothing daunted, Miss Norris went up and down among the churches of Nova Scotia, interesting the women in women's work, and organizing them into Circles, till at last the way opened for her to be sent out, when she sailed from New York, Oct. 29th, 1870. There was some doubt at first as to whether she would have to go around by the Cape, but the Suez Canal was just opened up in time, and she was one of the first to go through it.

Landing in Burma early in January, 1871, she devoted her time, night and day, to the study of Karen, and such was the rapidity with which she acquired the language that she led her first prayer meeting in Karen on May 4th of the same year, four months after landing. To this day the Karens of Burma will tell the new missionary of how wonderfully Mamma Norris learned and spoke the Karen language.