

MEMOIR AND SERMONS

OF

REV. WM. J. ARMSTRONG, D.D.

LATE SECRETARY OF AM. BD. OF COM. FOR FOREIGN MISSIONS.

Edited by

REV. HOLLIS READ.

NEW YORK:
PUBLISHED BY M. W. DODD,
CORNER OF SPRUCE STREET AND CITY HALL SQUARE.

1853.

ENTERED, according to Act of Congress, in the year 1853, by
M. W. DODD,
in the Clerk's Office of the District Court for the Southern District of New York.

R. CRAIGHEAD, PRINTER AND STEREOTYPER,
53 Vesey street, N. Y.

duties often were, he never overlooked even the minutiae of life's common duties.

We are permitted to insert here some additional facts relative to Mr. Armstrong's early missionary life in Virginia, and a further testimony as to the estimation in which he was held where he long labored and was well known, kindly furnished by the Rev. Dr. S. B. Wilson, long the honored pastor at Fredericksburg, now Prof. of Theology in Union Theological Seminary. Dr. Wilson had known Mr. Armstrong from his first coming to Virginia as a missionary. He knew, loved and honored him up to the time of his death. In a letter dated Union Theological Seminary, Sept. 24th, 1851, Dr. Wilson says:—

“My acquaintance with the late Rev. William J. Armstrong, D. D., commenced soon after his licensure, when he came to labor in Virginia as a missionary. In this service he continued some time, preaching in destitute places on both sides of the Rappahannock river, below and above Fredericksburgh. His ministrations in this destitute field were in a high degree acceptable to the people, and it is believed were in many cases blessed to the conversion of sinners, and the edification and comfort of Christians, scattered as sheep without a shepherd. He was earnestly solicited to settle in more than one place in this region, where no church had ever been organized, and where the people had previously enjoyed no opportunity of hearing the voice of a Presbyterian minister. These earnest solicitations, he reluctantly declined from a fear that the climate on the tide water of Virginia would not suit his health.

“His attention was next directed to the beautiful, fertile, and healthy country that lies immediately on

the east side of the Blue Ridge. After laboring for a few months in the counties of Orange and Madison, with great acceptableness to the people, he concluded to take charge of the church in Charlottesville, then recently organized, and to which he had been cordially invited.

“This selected field of labor was one of great importance. Charlottesville was the county town of Albemarle, distinguished for its wealth, and for the intelligence of its inhabitants, and at that time selected as the seat of the university of Virginia, which was then being erected under the direction of Jefferson. It was a position also of no little difficulty; for in no part of the State was infidelity more rampant, and sustained by greater weight of character, both from high intelligence and political influence.

“But Mr. Armstrong, young and inexperienced as he was, proved himself qualified for his station. He conducted himself with so much wisdom and prudence, that the mouths of gainsayers were stopped, prejudices were removed, the truth, the necessity, and the infinite value of Christianity were established, and infidelity retired into secret places. The fruits of his labors, cherished and matured by his worthy successors, may be seen to this day, not only in the church to which he ministered, but in the respect shown to religion in all the region round about. By many, in that place and county, his memory is still cherished with the highest esteem and the most ardent affection.

“On the removal of Dr. John H. Rice from the First Church in Richmond, to the Professorship of Christian Theology in Union Theological Seminary, Mr. A. was selected with great unanimity to be his successor. No stronger evidence of the high estimation in which he was held could be given, than his selection to be the Pastor of

the First Church in the capital of Virginia, and the successor of such a man as Dr. Rice. Important and responsible as was the position to which he was now called, he fulfilled its duties to the entire satisfaction of his flock. Under his ministry, his church and congregation so much increased, that a new and larger edifice became necessary. Few pastors have been blessed with larger accessions to their churches than he enjoyed.

“As a man, Mr. A. was endowed with talents above mediocrity. His literary attainments were not of the first order, but they were considerable, and fitted him in an eminent degree for the duties of his station. As a christian he was humble, sincere, consistent, and full of ardor. In the social circle he was a cheerful, instructive, and agreeable companion. As a preacher, it was his custom to prepare diligently and carefully for his pulpit services. His sermons were well calculated to instruct, excite, and comfort Christians, and to awaken careless sinners. The fundamental doctrines of the gospel, as held by Calvinists, were preached by him fully and plainly. His style of composition was simple and plain, such as the most illiterate could understand, while the most accomplished scholars could find nothing offensive in it. There was in nearly all his ministrations an unction which proved how sincerely he believed what he spoke, and how tenderly he felt for his hearers. Such were the rich stores of truth treasured up in his memory; and such the fervor of his feelings, that on an emergency, he could speak extempore, with great appropriateness and power.

“On ecclesiastical judicatories, and other associations for benevolent objects, Mr. A. was a punctual attendant, and faithful in the performance of the duties assigned him. In all his intercourse with his brethren he was

kind and courteous, and hence was highly esteemed and greatly beloved by all who knew him."

Many are still living who will recognise in the picture, presented in the following extract, the preacher whom they once loved to hear, and to whom, under God, they were greatly indebted in the things that pertain to the spiritual life:—

"Albemarle, October 26th, 1851.

"MY DEAR FRIEND AND SISTER :

"At the time when Dr. Armstrong visited Charlottesville in company with Messrs. Kirk and King, I was pursuing my studies at the university of Virginia. Partly out of respect to the Misses Terrell, and partly from curiosity to hear one whom they considered an eloquent man as well as an excellent preacher, I accompanied them on Sabbath evening to the Court House. Miss E. Terrell had stated to me that, on a former occasion, during the time of Mr. Armstrong's ministry in Albemarle, her brother had gone to the Court House to hear him. As he entered, and paused for a moment, leaning against the door frame, his attention was arrested by some striking expression or commanding attitude of the speaker, and without materially changing his posture, he listened in wrapt attention to the end of the discourse. When the services were over and Mr. T. was retiring, a friend said to him, 'There were many who wept at that sermon.' 'Yes,' said Mr. T., 'and one must have had the heart of a lion, not to weep.'

"From this recital, my mind was prepared for something interesting. I was at that time a self-righteous moralist, believing that I saw as clearly, and felt and acted as well as most others. I fully came up to the description of character to which the text and sermon