

LEARNING LESSONS FROM LIFE

(As a tribute to the life and witness of the late Miss Peggy Edmonds we have reproduced below just a brief selection of the many excellent articles she wrote for MINISTRY magazine in her "Life's Lessons by the Learner series". She "being dead yet speaketh." (Heb 11:4))

When, as a bewildered teenager, I arrived at Parliament Buildings in 1940 I was escorted to a very imposing room where a small gentleman sat behind what seemed an enormous polished desk. He asked me to sign the Official Secrets Declaration, and to take an Oath of allegiance to King George VI, and his heirs and successors. Complying with this request, I understood, was essential before I entered the Civil Service.

Having been brought up in a Christian home where the word of God was read and revered, I felt somewhat awed by taking an oath on the Bible which I held in my hand. This procedure impressed me greatly.

In 1941 King George VI and Queen Elizabeth (the late Queen Mother) were to visit Stormont, and 'the powers that be' decided that staff recruited the previous year should form a guard of honour for their Majesties as they walked from the House of Commons to the Senate. When I told my mother that I would be in this important role she pressed my suit, laundered my blouse, and polished my shoes to ensure that I left home without 'spot or wrinkle'. However, in those days there was no petrol for private cars, and the journey to Stormont Building had to be taken by tram, which stopped at the Massey Avenue gate. The remainder of journey was taken on foot along the Spender Path. Earlier on the morning of that special day it had rained, and so each step was taken carefully to avoid splashes on shoes and stockings. Then inside the building a timetable had to be observed. Each person in the guard had to be in a specific place at a specific time and there await the honoured guests.

At last they arrived and I was delighted to find that His Majesty was on my side of the guard. As he passed by he looked at each of us and smiled graciously. I shall never forget the moment I looked into the eyes and saw the smile of the sovereign to whom I had pledged my allegiance.

Recollection of that occasion brings before me another King who is the King of Kings, to whom I also pledged my allegiance when I was a little girl in Primary School. One of these days I am going to meet Him face to face, perhaps that will be when He comes again to take all those who love Him from this weary world to dwell with Him forever. Let us, as those who wait for Him, ask ourselves (a) Am I careful about my outward appearance i.e. my behaviour in this sinful world? (b) How and where I am walking? - Am I staining my witness? (c) Am I where He wants me to be or is there a space in the ranks by my absenteeism? (d) Is anyone or anything claiming my time and attention and distracting me from Him? (e) Am I really excited about meeting Him?

Life's Lessons by the Learner

One day the Learner and her sister arrived home from school to find that a young man from South Derry was visiting her home. This visitor was already known to them, and they were very excited when he told them that he was on his way to London, where he hoped to join the Metropolitan Police Force – a great honour in those days. His height and build suggested that he would meet the very high standard required for the force.

The whole family waved him off at the Belfast dock, confident that he would succeed in his new career.

On returning from school a week later, the young man was again in their home. Being warned by their mother the girls made no comment, but later they found out that Jim was on his way back to South Derry.

What had happened to his dream of a new life in London?

When Jim arrived at Scotland Yard, along with several other candidates they sat an examination which was the first step in securing a post. Some fell at this hurdle but Jim passed. The next step was a physical endurance test which he passed with flying colours, though others failed to meet the grade. Those remaining felt sure they would be appointed.

However, the final step was being measured for their uniform. Their height was determined by standing under the sliding arm of a measuring pole, which pressed down on their heads and gave a true measurement of their height. Now Jim had very thick black hair, which he wore straight back from his temples – convincing everyone that he was at least six foot three inches tall. But, when the sliding arm flattened Jim's hair and pressed it down, the truth was revealed – he was one half inch short of the required height! "Failed" was entered on his application form – so near but unsuccessful!

Jim's experience still lives in the Learner's memory, and the lesson it teaches confirms the truth of James 2:10 "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." Surely we can agree with Romans 3:23 – "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Others may look at us with approval, and may even think that we are exemplary, but none can ever meet God's standards. God looks at the heart (1 Samuel 16:7), and sin has made our hearts deceitful (Jeremiah 17:9).

Our only hope is to acknowledge our inability to make the grade by our own efforts, and to come, confessing our sins to the only One who can make us fit to meet a holy God. We can rest upon the fact that "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from ALL sin" (1 John 1:7), "... by the obedience of One (the Lord Jesus Christ) shall many (we) be made righteous" (Romans 5:19) – cleansed from sin, made righteous by the Eternal Son of God! What a salvation! Have you accepted it? **ARE YOU READY TO MEET GOD'S STANDARDS ON THE MERITS OF THE SAVIOUR WHO LIVED, DIED AND LIVES AGAIN TO PRESENT YOU FAULTLESS BEFORE THE PRESENCE OF HIS GLORY WITH EXCEEDING JOY?** (Jude 24).

At the commencement of the Second World War conscription was introduced in Great Britain but not in Northern Ireland. However, many Northern Ireland Civil Servants volunteered for service in HM Forces. In such cases their establishment records were endorsed 'in absentia', and the officers were considered for promotion just as if they were presently in post. When the war was over and demobilization was complete, these men and women returned to posts in the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

The transition from service to civilian life often created problems. RAF pilots missed the exhilaration of flying; some had married partners from outside Northern Ireland, and decisions had to be made whether to transfer to the UK Service or stay in Northern Ireland; whilst others were facing domestic responsibilities for the first time. They all, though, had one thing in common - they missed the companionship that had existed within their units.

Lunchtime provided an opportunity for these "returnees" to get together to discuss their problems. On one such occasion a group of these young men were discussing the best way to manage their household finances. One said that he thought it best that the man of the house should be responsible for paying all bills and only give his wife a housekeeping allowance plus enough to cover her personal expenses; another said that he didn't agree - his preference would be for a joint bank account on which he and his wife would each have a cheque book, and from it equally pay accounts. The latter had just finished speaking when an ex-Royal Navy officer entered the room. Immediately the others asked him for his views on the matter. His reply is clearly remembered by the Learner, who was present in the office at the time. He spoke thoughtfully and deliberately, and said "Boys, if ever I meet a girl that I can trust with my name - my father's name - then it will be no problem to trust her with all my money.' His words silenced the group, and gave the Learner a spiritual challenge.

Obviously this young man valued his family name more than possessions, and he was guarding it against any possible dishonour.

The Lord Jesus Christ provided salvation at tremendous cost so that men and women could enter God's family - children of God (John 1:12). Do we jealously guard the "family" honour? Do we reflect the family likeness?

It is interesting to note that believers were first called 'Christians' (belonging to Christ) at Antioch. Why? Was it the life that Barnabas and Paul lived amongst that group 'for one whole year' (Acts 11:26)? Did they see Christlikeness in their everyday life?

Now, does our behaviour and conversation speak clearly for HIM? Or are we sending out conflicting messages? Let us remember that the days are dark, the time is late, and our light needs to burn brightly.

In the early 1930's trainee nurses were provided with 'Board and Lodging' in the Nurses Home at the Royal Victoria Hospital but their monetary wage was very meagre. The Learner's mother knew some of the trainees' families in South Derry, so she had 'open' house for them to retreat to on their off duty breaks - they couldn't afford to go home. These girls were all saved and soon they, with other saved colleagues, formed a Nurses Testimony Band. This fellowship in prayer and Bible

study progressed to conducting meetings in Mission Halls throughout Belfast. As a young girl the Learner was particularly attached to one of these girls, Agnes, who often told her of exciting things that she had experienced in answer to her prayers. One of these amazing incidents is now shared with you, to encourage your faith.

It was nearing the end of the month and Agnes's money had run out, but she didn't worry, as she didn't expect any expenditure before pay day. However, one member of the Nurses Band contacted her and asked if she would speak at a meeting the night before her money would come to hand. Agnes had a problem - the bus fare to town was 2d, and another 2d. fare was needed to get to the Mission Hall, plus a further 4d. for the return journey - a total of 8d. - which Agnes didn't have. She put her need before the Lord, and asked Him to provide the money if she was to go to the service.

Now at that time the postage stamp for a letter cost 1½ d. and every two months Agnes's mother sent her 8 stamps, costing one shilling, so that she did not **have** to use her own money for writing home. Mrs. Bruce was just finishing her monthly letter to Agnes when the postman arrived at their farm. Seeing the letter, and knowing it was over a mile to the Post Office, he kindly offered to post the letter. Mrs. Bruce was pleased to accept his offer so just put a shilling in the envelope, with a request for Agnes to buy the stamps herself.

The morning of the meeting arrived and Agnes went on duty wondering what she should say to her colleague about the meeting. That morning they didn't meet so Agnes went on her break still puzzled as to what she should do. When passing the letter rack she noticed a letter in the "B" pigeon hole, but thought her mother's letter would not arrive until the next day. However, she felt constrained to look, and there she found her letter and was completely amazed to feel a coin inside it. On opening it the shilling fell out - enough for all her fares and 4d. for the collection! She spent that break thanking the Lord for His knowledge, His arrangement of circumstances and His perfect timing.

Just before Christmas this year, Agnes, in her ninetieth year, went to be with the Lord whom she had loved and served from her teenage years. However, the precious memories of her faith in, and dependence upon the Saviour will continue to encourage all those who had the honour of knowing her. May all who read this record be inspired to recall experiences in our own lives, and to say with the hymn writer:

Jesus, Jesus how I trust Thee;
How I've proved Thee o'er and o'er
Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus,
Oh! for grace to trust Thee more.