

# **What's Left of a Life?**

By Hermoine Dannelly Jackson

## **INSTRUCTIONS FOR PRESENTING**

### **How to Proceed**

Study the play.

Decide where and when the play will be given. If it is to be presented before a large audience, use the play as printed or expand it by adding more characters (see suggestions below). If it is to be presented by and for a small group of women, use only three characters: Woman 1, Woman 2, and one reader.

If the play is presented at night, spotlights can add to the effectiveness of the presentation. Use two spotlights and change scenes by turning spotlights on and off. If spotlights are not used, Woman 1 and Woman 2 may bow their heads and freeze in position as readers speak.

Select women who will interact naturally for Woman 1 and Woman 2. Work from the beginning to be sure actors are heard.

### **What to Assemble**

A table, two chairs, percolator, two cups and saucers, sweet rolls, Easter lilies in a vase, large folders for readers' scripts, and a cardboard box containing the following items; brick, Oriental objects, map of U.S. mad to look worn, jar of coffee, right-hand glove, and a gift box.

### **How to Use More Characters**

Select men, women, and children to dress in costumes and step into the spotlight as items in cardboard box are discussed. For example: As Reader 1 begins to discuss what a brick meant in Annie Armstrong's life, a little girl dressed in an old-fashioned costume steps into the spotlight. Spot holds for a few seconds, then fades out. Another spotlight remains on Reader 1 throughout the narration.

Characters to correspond to objects could be: brick – little old-fashioned girl; Oriental object – a man of the 1870's; map of U.S. – an Indian boy; jar of coffee – a Brazilian man or woman; a woman of the 1880's; gift box – a pioneer minister and his wife.

## Staging

Use these suggestions if the play is presented as presented:

Mentally divide the stage area into three parts. Set up kitchen scene on stage right and place a reader with a stand in each of the two remaining areas.

Use these suggestions if more characters are added:

Set up kitchen scene at stage right. Place both readers at one stand in the center area. Each costumed character steps into stage left according to this schedule:

Little old-fashioned girl – when Reader 1 begins to speak about Annie as a child (indicated with a number one (<sup>1</sup>) superscript).

Man of the 1870's – when Reader 1 begins to speak about a missionary from the Orient (indicated with a number two (<sup>2</sup>) superscript).

Indian boy – when Reader 1 begins to speak about Annie Armstrong's interest in Indians (indicated with a number three (<sup>3</sup>) superscript).

Brazilian man or woman – when Reader 2 begins to speak about E. Levering and Company importing coffee from Brazil (indicated with a number four (<sup>4</sup>) superscript).

Woman of the 1880's – when Reader 1 begins to speak about Annie Armstrong's hand aching after writing letters (indicated with a number 5 (<sup>5</sup>) superscript).

Pioneer minister and wife – when Reader 2 begins to speak about Annie Armstrong sending boxes of clothing to foreign missionaries.

## WHAT'S LEFT OF A LIFE?

*(Spotlight on stage right as WOMAN 1 enters and drops the cardboard box containing objects on kitchen floor, then starts to open it.)*

**WOMAN 2:** *(Knocks off-stage right and yells)* Anybody home?

**WOMAN 1** I'm in the kitchen. Come on in. *(WOMAN 2 enters from right.)* I've been cleaning all day, and I'm just dead!

**WOMAN 2:** *(Jokingly)* Dead? Come to think of it, you don't look too good!

**WOMAN 1:** It's not the work, actually. It's the sadness. Discarding mementoes of the dead is pure sadness. Look at these *(points to box on floor)* –the last of Aunt Emma's things I have to sort. I can't imagine why she wanted to keep them.

**WOMAN 2:** They probably meant a great deal to her.

**WOMAN 1:** Some of these mean nothing, absolutely zero, to me since I don't know the source of them. But you know as I have worked here this past week I've often thought – what's left of a life? A few meaningless trifles? *(She pauses; looks at WOMAN 2).* I'm sorry I'm in such a mood. The trouble is I dearly loved Aunt Emma and discarding her treasures upsets me. Let's have a cup of coffee. *(Both women take a seat at table. WOMAN 1 picks up percolator and pours.)* Here, try one of these sweet rolls. *(Both women take a bite and a sip.)* What have you been doing today?

**WOMAN 2:** I've been planning our Week of Prayer for Home Missions and the promotion of our Annie Armstrong Easter Offering.

**WOMAN 1:** *(Explosively)* The Baptist saints – Saint Armstrong and Saint Moon! There's something you should know! Annie Armstrong is dead! I've seen her grave – her tombstone reads: "Died December 20, 1938. She hath done what she could." Period.

**WOMAN 2:** I hear what you say. I've been hearing you from the first. Your great aunt is dead. You're dead tired. Annie Armstrong is dead. You really are in a mood! But I can see there's hope for you yet!

**WOMAN 1:** *(Somewhat flippantly)* Enlighten me!

**WOMAN 2:** *(Takes a lily from a vase and holds it up)* These Easter lilies that we gave Aunt Emma –

**WOMAN 1:** Don't say it! Let me say it for you. It seems a long time since last Easter when we were working on that Girls in Action project.

**WOMAN 2:** The children were so proud of all those plants.

**WOMAN 1:** They weren't as beautiful as florist plants. They weren't even blooming by Easter! But the green shoots were up, and there was promise of more to come. They had special meaning, I guess, because the children planted those dead-looking bulbs themselves – and then life appeared as shoots grew.

**WOMAN 2:** I can hear their voices now as the children recited on Sunday morning – *(both women recite together):*

Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal . . . because I live, ye shall live also. I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. *(From John 12:24-25; 14:19, 11:25-26)*

**WOMAN 1:** Remember how some of them lisped over the “liveth” and “believeth”? *(She pauses as both sip coffee.)* You know something? You make a pretty good preacher! I feel better already. I can almost hear our minister saying *(imitates very profound voice):* “The metamorphosis seen in nature is duplicated in the nature of God's man.” It may have been a little over the children's heads – and I'll have to admit, I've been acting as though it were over my head, too!

**WOMAN 2:** I'm sorry I dropped in on you at a bad time. I know what it is to decide and keep and throw away possessions of someone you loved.

**WOMAN 1:** That is what I mean. *(She picks brick out of box.)* Look at this brick, for instance. I found it in the bottom of the closet. Why did Aunt Emma save a brick? What possible meaning could it have?

**WOMAN 2:** I know what a brick would mean to Annie Armstrong.

*(Spotlight moves to center stage.)*

**<sup>1</sup>READER 1:** As a child, Annie Armstrong attended family reunions at Sater's Church, eleven miles north of Baltimore. The relatives gathered each June for worship in the meetinghouse which Henry Sater had built in 1742.

Annie did not think it strange that the men and boys separated from the women and girls as they entered this historic first Baptist church in Maryland. This was the custom in many churches of her day.

*(Spotlight on stage left)*

**READER 2:** Perhaps this influenced her in later years, because she refused to speak in public when men were present. It may also have influenced her conviction that men and women should not be educated together in classes at the seminary, the basis of her opposition at a later date to the establishment of the WMU Training School on the campus of the seminary in Louisville.

*(Spotlight on center stage.)*

**READER 1:** What young Annie enjoyed most at these reunions – or should I say, what she enjoyed most next to diner on the grounds – was the story of her great-great-grandfather. Henry Sater had come from England to Virginia. Persecution of the Baptists led him to move to Maryland, where he owned over a thousand acres of land by the time he married Dorcas Towson.

Mrs. Sater did not believe that the barn was a proper meeting place for the small congregation that had outgrown her husband's house. She offered to surrender her dower rights to one acre of land if Mr. Sater would build a proper church on it. On the day of dedication, the crowd was amazed to see Dorcas place the corner brick. It was not customary for women to receive such public recognition.

*(Spotlight on stage left.)*

**READER 2:** As Annie Armstrong heard this story, a seed lodged in her soul. Could this story have influenced the first major undertaking of Woman's Missionary Union in 1888 – aiding the Home Mission Board in building a church in Havana using "brick cards" to pay for the building? Later, there were "brick cards" for churches on the frontier. There was also a chapel-building fund in 1892 to commemorate the centennial of foreign missions. Chapel brick cards were sold at ten cents each and were known as "Annie's bricks." The Church Building Loan Fund of the Home Mission Board, which Annie Armstrong envisioned and promoted for a number of years before its inauguration in 1900, has been furnishing since then the price of millions of bricks and other construction materials for building new churches.

A brick had meaning in the life of Annie Armstrong.

*(Spotlight moves back to stage right.)*

**WOMAN 1:** A brick! *(She holds it up and looks at it.)* It's a sturdy thing – a permanent sort of thing! Perhaps this was from my aunt's old home or her country church. I wish I knew more about it. There are so many questions I should have asked Aunt Emma! What did we talk about all those years when we visited and loved each other?

**WOMAN 2:** Life is so daily! I guess we all do a lot of surface talking and living, never getting down to basics. I become more convinced each year that children need a sense of history – a knowledge of their family heritage as well as their national and religious heritage. It gives them something to hold on to. It makes them realized that they are not just detached individuals, but that they have roots in the past.

**WOMAN 1:** Look at this. (*She holds up Oriental object.*) Did she buy it herself? Was it a favor at a party? Did a missionary bring it to Aunt Emma?

(*Spotlight on center stage.*)

**<sup>2</sup>READER 1:** In 1881 a distinguished missionary from the Orient asked Annie Armstrong to be his wife. But to this missionary whose deep conviction was that China must be his field of service, Annie Armstrong said no. She felt that the Heavenly Father had not called her for foreign service. Annie Armstrong loved her country and the Lord. Her place of service was here. But she had not always felt this way. She had been the usual teen-age rebel. Her family liked to tease her about the remark she made at fourteen, before she became a crusading Baptist. She said: “Possibly I *could* be a Presbyterian, or perhaps and Episcopalian, but never, oh, never a Baptist!”

(*Spotlight on stage left.*)

**READER 2:** Nevertheless, through the years she attended church faithfully with her mother, sisters, and brother. Annie’s father died before she was two, but he had been one of the principal donors to the building fund of Seventh Baptist Church in Baltimore, where her mother is listed as “an original constituent.”

Her father’s untimely death was not the only sorrow that touched Annie’s young life. When she was five, her younger brother died because of a serious injury sustained when an older boy knocked him down. Her mother told the children not to reproach the playmate or make him bear any blame. “We must forgive and forget,” she said. Another idea had been implanted in young Annie’s mind which bore fruit much later.

But Annie Armstrong did not join the church until she was twenty. Her pastor had commented in his sermon: “What the Christian has is not peace from trouble, but peace in the midst of trouble.” She wanted to be like her mother – victorious in trouble. When she gave her life to Jesus Christ she gave herself completely.

(*Spotlight on center stage.*)

**READER 1:** Annie Armstrong loved the Lord, and so she loved missions. Many events influenced both the child and the woman. Missions she had learned about from her mother and her mother's friends. Mrs. Ann Graves, mother of a medical missionary to China, was a neighbor who gathered women for "female missionary prayer meetings" in her home.

Annie Armstrong loved children. She grew in Bible knowledge as she taught the "Infant Class" in Sunday School. She also served on the board of managers at Home for the Friendless, an institution for orphan children in her city of Baltimore.

*(Spotlight on stage left.)*

**READER 2:** In addition, she organized the Ladies' Bayview Mission to minister to the unfortunates in Baltimore's poorhouse. For over thirty years, she made a monthly visit to Bayview, even in severest weather. She expressed her feelings when she wrote these words: "How I wish I could get our women to realize, as I am doing, that if God gives us a work to do, he is going to give not only spiritual but physical strength."

*(Spotlight moves to stage right.)*

**WOMAN 1:** *(Picks up map of U.S.)* Look at this map of the United States. Wonder how old it is? It sure looks bedraggled. *(She opens it up.)*

**WOMAN 2:** It was printed before there were interstate highways. Look, it shows all the Indian reservations in the U.S. Aunt Emma must have been interested in Indians.

*(Spotlight to center stage.)*

<sup>3</sup>**READER 1:** Annie Armstrong's interest in Indians probably began when she heard a speaker describing the plight of Indians who had been forced by the government to move from their homes to the plains of the southwest. Her concern for the Indians continued throughout her long life.

When Annie's wealthy uncle, Mr. Eugene Levering, died, he left a legacy to the Home Mission Board. In 1880 the money was used to build the Levering Manual Labor School in the center of the Creek Nation in Indian Territory. In 1882 Baltimore women formed home mission societies to help provide clothes for the Indian children who had no clothes to wear and so could not attend the school. Annie Armstrong undertook leadership of the project to produce two hundred and forty suits for the Indian children.

*(Spotlight on stage left.)*

**READER 2:** This aid to the Home Mission Board was typical of Miss Armstrong's support of the mission boards. She believed in working through the Home and Foreign Mission Boards. This would be the direction in which she would wisely steer Woman's Missionary Union for eighteen years.

Everywhere she caught sight of needs and moved in to help. Under her influence Baptist women of the Baltimore churches, white and black, formed a "central society" with the name Woman's Baptist Home Mission Society of Maryland, and local societies were organized in white and black churches. The purpose of the society was to cooperate with the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention in all its work. In 1896 a black gentleman representing the National Baptist Convention asked her to help the women of that convention to organize their work. She gladly consented. The leader of that organization called Annie Armstrong "the *real* pioneer in Christian interracial understanding and cooperation."

*(Spotlight on center stage.)*

**READER 1:** Living in the harbor city of Baltimore, Annie Armstrong was aware of the immigrants flooding the eastern seaboard. It seemed to her that God was saying, "Here are these people. I have sent them to you that you may mass your forces and lend a hand to save them." As she spoke to groups of women, she emphasized: "We must Christianize, assimilate, and Americanize these foreign people, or they will demoralize, Romanize, and foreignize us."

*(Spotlight on stage right.)*

**WOMAN 2:** This is certainly good coffee. Is it Brazilian, Colombian, or what?

**WOMAN 1:** I really don't know. *(She reaches in box and takes out jar of coffee.)* Here's half a jar of coffee. It says, "100 percent pure Latin American coffee."

**WOMAN 2:** Your aunt did love coffee!

**WOMAN 1:** Yes, like most people I know. I guess a coffee-break is looked upon as part of every worker's right. *(They laugh.)* Isn't it amazing how good the attendance is at our meetings when we advertise a coffee time? Frankly, I believe it's the fellowship and not the coffee that makes the coffee break appealing!

**WOMAN 2:** I bet one thing for sure – Annie Armstrong would never approve a coffee break. She worked the first ten years as executive secretary of Woman's Missionary Union without even a week's vacation!

**WOMAN 1:** *(In amazement)* Would you think Annie Armstrong drank coffee at all?

**WOMAN 2:** Oh, probably. Her relatives were in the coffee importing business.

*(Spotlight on stage left.)*

**<sup>4</sup>READER 2:** E. Levering and Company imported coffee from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. It was a lucrative business. When Annie Armstrong heard that her twin cousins had been taken into business partnership with their father at the age of sixteen, she was frankly envious. She enjoyed the excitement of the import business. Her later years as WMU executive secretary proved what a real talent she had for business – the King’s business.

*(Spotlight on center stage.)*

**READER 1:** The Leverings, too, were interested in the King’s business. In the cold January of 1881, their ships could not leave harbor because of the bitter, freezing weather. A young couple to whom they were giving passage to Rio were delayed in their departure. They were Anne and William Bagby. Annie Armstrong came to know the Bagbys well and loved not only the story of their romantic call to the mission field but the thrill of the work done by these first Southern Baptist missionaries to Brazil. She and Anne Bagby became lifetime friends.

*(Spotlight on stage left.)*

**READER 2:** The Bagbys were not the first missionaries to embark from Baltimore. In 1872, eight missionaries had been commissioned from foreign service in Annie Armstrong’s home church. Two single women were among those appointed. One of them was assigned to work with the Bible women of Canton, China.

The youthful appearance of the second single appointee amazed Annie Armstrong. Miss Edmonia Moon, a delicate girl of eighteen or nineteen, was appointed for North China to assist veteran missionaries in educational work. The next year, Miss Lottie Moon stopped off briefly in Baltimore on her way to join her sister in China. Did Annie and Lottie meet? Probably. At any rate, their paths would soon be interwoven in a common cause.

*(Spotlight on center stage.)*

**READER 1:** The King’s business woman, Annie Armstrong, said as she wrote to women in 1887: “There is work to do, and the responsibilities rests upon us to do it in the most effective way....Women of the Southern Baptist Convention gave to foreign missions and to home missions not even three cents apiece in one year. Three cents a year from Baptist women towards converting the heathen who are dying at the rate of 100,000 a day! Are we willing to assume the responsibility of *not doing*....?”

*(Spotlight on stage left.)*

**READER 2:** She was to see great response in increased giving through the years. By 1894, Woman's Missionary Union's contribution to the Foreign Mission Board was almost one fourth of its budget and was almost a third of the Home Mission Board budget for the year.

*(Spotlight on stage right.)*

**WOMAN 1:** I wish Annie Armstrong had never said anything about our responsibility for NOT doing. I can think of many things I have NOT done since I've been so tied down with Aunt Emma in recent years.

**WOMAN 2:** Just think of the things you have done and be grateful.

**WOMAN 1:** I am so thankful for my Aunt Emma. I hope what I could for her meant as much to her as it did to me. I'm glad I did what I could. *(She pauses)* We're back where we started, aren't we? Annie Armstrong's marker reads: "She hath done what she could." If that's taken in its fullest sense, that's all any of us can do, really. But most of us can't truthfully say that we've done what we could.

**WOMAN 2:** I remember that someone recently prayed, "Forgive us our sins of omission as well as our sins of commission."

*(Spotlight on center stage.)*

**READER 1:** Annie Armstrong believed in prayer. Through prayer and persistence, she led women to organize a convention-wide Woman's Missionary Union. Women from ten states met in Baltimore on May 14, 1888, and voted to organize. Annie Armstrong and her sister had worked on a constitution prior to the meeting, consulting a lawyer, a pastor, and a layman about proper wording and procedure. The preamble to the constitution reads: "We, the women of the churches connected with the Southern Baptist Convention, desirous of stimulating the missionary spirit and the grace of giving, among the women and children of the churches, and aiding in collecting funds for missionary purposes, to be disbursed by the boards of the Southern Baptist Convention, and disclaiming all intention of independent action, organize..."

*(Spotlight on stage left.)*

**READER 2:** Annie Armstrong was elected the first executive secretary of WMU. Headquarters offices were in Baltimore in the Maryland Baptist Mission Room. Since all money collected by the women was to be sent to the Foreign Mission Board in Richmond and to the Home Mission Board in Atlanta, the executive committee requested \$100 from each board to finance their work. Miss Armstrong never accepted a salary during the eighteen years that she held office.

The first project of the new organization was the Cuban brick card project to help the Home Mission Board build a church in Cuba. The success of this project made Annie Armstrong eager for the new organization to undertake a challenge from the Foreign Mission Board. Miss Armstrong knew that Lottie Moon had served more than eleven years in China without a furlough and that she refused to leave until reinforcements arrived. Miss Moon wrote a letter suggesting that a week of “prayer and self-denial” be set aside just before Christmas. She wrote: “Is not the festive season, when families and friends exchange gifts in memory of the Gift laid on the altar of the world for the redemption of the human race, the most appropriate time to consecrate a portion from abounding riches and scant poverty to send forth the good tidings of great joy into all the earth?”

The Week of Prayer for Foreign Missions was set aside, and the offering that first year was enough to send three missionaries instead of the two requested by Miss Moon. At Annie Armstrong’s suggestion, the name of the offering was changed in 1918 to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering.

*(Spotlight on stage right.)*

**WOMAN 2:** One thing I remember about your Aunt Emma is that she always wore white gloves everywhere she went.

**WOMAN 1:** Yes, and I wonder what happened to all her gloves. I can only find one – a right-handed one. *(She takes glove from box and holds it up.)*

*(Spotlight on center stage.)*

**<sup>5</sup>READER 1:** Annie Armstrong’s right hand always ached after that first Christmas offering. Without the aid of typewriter or clerk, she addressed by hand letters to all the state central committees and to as many as the 1,206 missionary societies as the states requested. Hour after hour she sat at her desk until her fingers ached so that she had to loosen their hold upon the pen. Her right hand troubled her the rest of her life. She seemed so disciplined, able to deny herself for the cause of missions.

*(Spotlight to stage right.)*

**WOMAN 2:** I wonder what would happen if we went back to the custom of calling our weeks of prayer weeks of self-denial? That's what the Week of Prayer for Home Missions was first called.

**WOMAN 1:** I can tell you what would happen – you'd make hypocrites out of a lot of us!

**WOMAN 2:** Of course the names of Annie Armstrong and Lottie Moon stand for self-denial, but a lot of people don't know their story. We must keep reminding ourselves – as the children of Israel were reminded over and over of God's leadership – that the self-denial of Jesus calls for the gift of self-denial on our part.

*(Spotlight on stage left.)*

**°READER 2:** Annie Armstrong loved to send boxes of clothing and other necessities to frontier missionaries. She also insisted that every "self-respecting" missionary box should contain something "to enrich the spirit." Happy touches often added to boxes and barrels were toys for the children, household helps for the mother, books for the preacher, cash in the pocket of a new suit, and candy for all. The boxes were first lined with a brand new quilt, and then the garments neatly packed within. Used clothing, if clean and appropriate, might be sent. She emphasized that the gauge in selecting the contents was the Golden Rule!

Women all over the convention territory responded, and Miss Armstrong saw the results of their efforts when she toured the West in 1900. Her forty-day trip covered almost 4,000 miles. What touched her most deeply was the personal sacrifices made by many missionaries. She was encouraged to learn that the gift boxes which they received were of great benefit. Even empty boxes were used to make furniture and the iron bands from boxes and barrels were converted into hoops for wooden wash tubs. Seeing the poverty in which many home missionaries lived, Annie Armstrong began to urge larger money contributions from the churches through the Home Mission Board so that meager salaries could be increased.

*(Spotlight on center stage.)*

**READER 1:** Looking back on what that trip and other missions trips to the West meant to her, Miss Armstrong wrote: "Among the sweetest recollections of life will be the memory of the many poor, obscure, unknown people to whom we have been permitted to minister, to brighten their dull, monotonous lives by bringing them in touch with worldwide missions. A shabbily dressed, poor woman in a little frontier town thus expressed herself: 'I no longer belong only to this little town, but I feel that I am a part of God's great universe.'"

*(Spotlight on stage left.)*

**READER 2:** When the first Week of Self-Denial for Home Missions was observed in March 1895, the offering called the Self-Denial Offering, went to help pay the debt of the Home Mission Board. Later called the Thank Offering for Home Missions, the offering became known in 1933 as the Annie Armstrong Thank Offering for Home Missions. We now call it the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering.

In a speech Annie Armstrong once said, “Let each bring what she has to the Master, only bring it, give it, trusting to His wisdom to find a place for it – for us – in His great plans.

*(Spotlight on stage right.)*

**WOMAN 1:** *(Begins taking objects from table and putting them back in the box.)* What’s left of a life? A lot of mementoes, for sure. But more! Even as we’ve talked, I’ve felt surrounded by happy memories of Aunt Emma. And our recollection of Annie Armstrong – how significant her life proved to be!

**WOMAN 2:** Annie Armstrong proved that what we do matters – even if what we do is just a little, such as providing the price of a brick if that’s the best we can do. But much more if we have greater resources. The sum total of many gifts amounts to much!

**WOMAN 1:** She left a cause that will be carried on by faithful believers in Jesus Christ today and throughout time and eternity.

**WOMAN 2:** She left a realization that it makes a tremendous difference that each of us has lived, that our service in the Lord is not in vain.

**WOMAN 1:** Miss Annie W. Armstrong left an example of a quality of life that is still a source of influence and inspiration to Southern Baptists.

**WOMAN 2:** She left a heritage of self-denial. Though she be dead, yet she speaks.