

Early Vancouver

Volume Three

By: Major J.S. Matthews, V.D.

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Narrative of Pioneers of Vancouver, BC Collected During 1933-1934.

Supplemental to Volumes One and Two collected in 1931-1932.

About the 2011 Edition

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**NOTES IN THE HANDWRITING OF HIS GRACE THE ARCHBISHOP OF NEW WESTMINSTER FOR
SERMON AT THE DEATH OF GENERAL SIR ARTHUR CURRIE.**

Christ Church Cathedral, Vancouver, 3 December 1933 at 8 p.m.

The first part of His Grace the Archbishop of New Westminster, Colonel the Most Rev. A.U. De Pencier's O.B.E., D.D., Sermon at Memorial Service to Sir Arthur Currie, at Christ Church Cathedral, Vancouver, 3 December 1933, at 7.30 p.m., is in his own handwriting. The latter part of the sermon was obtained subsequently, and referred to Gen. Currie's confirmation by Bishop De Pencier. (See elsewhere.) About 150 militia officers in uniform were present. The church was crowded. J.S.M.

"Behold I shew you a mystery—We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be charged—But thanks to God who giveth us the victory—Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast." (Text.)

One thought finds place in the minds of all. A great Canadian has passed; we meet tonight to do honour to his memory.

It is not the preacher's duty to try to give some expression to that thought—not with my poor attempts at flights of rhetoric—but in the simplest words at his command—words that befit the Presence Chamber of the King of Kings—the Leader of leaders—the Captain of captains—and words that are not out of keeping with the solemn mystery of death—whose summons no one—prince or peasant—officer or private—sovereign or subject may refuse to obey.

We are met in grateful memory of an honoured leader, a great fellow Canadian, and a dear friend; one who was known and honoured for his worth not only by his fellow countrymen, but by those of many lands of foreign tongue. All over Canada, and in centres in the old Home Land similar memorial services are being, or will be, held—a tribute of admiration and esteem for outstanding worth and ability.

It is not my desire to speak at great length: in hymn and Psalm—in the lessons from the volume of the Sacred Law and in music our thoughts are best expressed and directed in this service. But though my words are but poor interpreters of my feeling there are two notes which our Christian Religion sounds forth on this and similar occasions that I would emphasize. The one is "joyfully to hope"; the other "thankfully to persevere." If in this life only we have hope—we are miserable. (Text above.)

And this "hope" for the true living of this present life, and for that life that knows no ending. And that steadfast perseverance, overcoming all obstacles, upheld and strengthened to obtain the victory, his life exemplified. Sir Arthur Currie was one of the greatest soldiers Canada has produced and one of the ablest administrative heads of a great university! But he was more—he was a lover of his fellows. Our General inspired men to do their utmost to be at their best. His personality made an impression upon those with whom he came in contact, winning their regard and careful attention to his plans and proposals, tho' they might differ and disagree with them. The two great active qualities of a soldier, fellowship and sacrifice, these two virtues he possessed in an eminent degree. And with a thoroughness in the mastering of details, and a perseverance nothing could permanently check, his leadership was singularly successful.

The esteem in which he was held, and the wide circle of his influence are shown in some measure by the decorations and distinctions conferred upon him by the Allied Nations as well as by our own Sovereign. Then, too, his achievements as the Head of McGill, with the raising of the huge sums necessary for its endowment, and the building programme for its extension to keep up with the needs of the times—these, with the many internal problems presented daily to the Principal of such a great and distinguished University, attested to the high qualities, intellectual and practical, that he possessed.

Calm, and cool, and deliberate, with a courage that knew not fear, and with a capacity for application to work that is given to but few men, his personality suggested reserves of strength and power and a tenacity of purpose that knew no such word as fail.

His addresses to the troops, before some of the critical actions of the campaign, were marked with an intense devotion, and were phrased in language as marvellous in its simplicity and perfection of style as it was productive of high resolve and glorious endeavour on the part of those who heard them.

Not only as a great Canadian General and, later, as the highly esteemed and eminently distinguished Principal of a great Canadian University, but may be permitted to emphasize and to bear my personal testimony to another side of his character, viz: His deep religious convictions—his deep and abiding faith in God, in Christ, and in the Church which He established to hand on from age to age that knowledge of God which our gospel reveals.

I had many and peculiar opportunities of knowing of his religious ideas and ideals. If I may be permitted, I should like to relate some of my personal associations with our beloved commander, for they are, it seems to me, of more than personal interest to others, and it is fitting that I should speak of them.

It was at Camblain L'Abby, at Corps Headquarters, France, in January 1918. An ordinary concert party hut such as we had in France, a slapped up temporary shelter of boards, an earthen floor sloping from back to front; a number of bare boards as benches, held up by stakes driven in the ground, sloping down to the excavated "pit" in which sat the "orchestra" so that the audience of soldiers could look over their heads on to the small crude stage; the whole building would not hold one hundred and fifty all told; the interior dimly lighted by some kerosene lamps. [*The "pit" was actually an old trench.*]

The stage is occupied by some twenty men who are about to be confirmed. The door at the far end of the hut opens, and General Currie, accompanied by two aides, marches down the aisle, proceeds to the front and takes a seat on the front bench.

The Service of Confirmation went on without interruption. The soldier audience rose to their feet, and stood in bowed reverence as the ceremony proceeded. We knew what was about to happen. Those twenty men were destined for duty in the front line; we all knew what might and what generally did happen there; we all knew that few, perhaps not any, of the score would return; we all knew what twenty-four hours might bring; but it was no use telling them; that would do no good; so we just proceeded with the Confirmation, and presently it ended.

After the Service, General Currie asked me to come to his quarters for dinner. A distinguished gathering was there. There were Generals of our Corps, Prince Arthur of Connaught—who was Liaison Officer with the French. It was a congenial party, no formalities; just a group of good fellows, laughing, arguing, addressing each other by their surnames, and not by their rank, a happy family dinner.

After it was over General Currie called me aside and said, "Bishop, I want you to tell me what I should do; I have never been confirmed. When I was a boy I was prepared, but when the Bishop came I was ill, and the confirmation never took place."

I said in reply, "Can you take a few minutes each day till I come up again in two weeks, with the Corps Chaplain Mr. McGreer?" The General replied, "I can make it at twelve noon each day," and so it was arranged.

Then came the second incident I do so well recall—it was at the same place, two weeks later—the 4th of February 1918.

In the small Headquarters Office of the General we all knelt down, Canon Scott and McGreer, and some senior officers, and there we felt the Presence of God the Holy Spirit, in answer to our prayers, and the General made his vows and was confirmed after the usual manner.

As I was about to depart he took my hand, and said, "Bishop, before you go, if it will help you in your work with the men, tell them of this service, and ask for their prayers—I need all the help that I can get from God and my men to carry on my work"—and we parted.

And now he has finished his course, and has gone home.

Learn this lesson from his life—that this brave Christian gentleman had learned and practiced (as his brother G.O.C. of the Imperials, General Haig, learned it) our task as Christians is to save the decencies of life to uplift manners, to conserve moral standards, to keep the parasitic goodness of the community free from degenerating into badness. Thus we shew in our lives as he shewed in his life—the power of the consciousness of God ever guiding us:

Giving us the courage which initiates,
The sympathy which communicates,
The humility which obliterates—self.

Around earth's vagrant noises,
He caught the note sublime,
Today around his surges
From the silences of time
A flood of nobler music,
Like a river, deep and broad,
Fit song for heroes gathered,
In the Banquet Hall of God.

GENERAL SIR ARTHUR CURRIE, G.C.M.G.

A story is told of General Currie's enrollment as a volunteer soldier in Victoria. It was related to me some fifteen years ago by a gentleman whose name I think was Colbert; a Victoria man—a commercial traveller.

He said that one evening three young men, of whom he himself was one, had finished dinner, and were wondering what they would do to pass the evening. One of them said, "Let's go down to the Drill Hall."

Just what he told me followed I do not recollect in detail, but the upshot was that after they got there, all three decided to "sign up"; i.e., enroll.

One was Colbert; the other was Winsby, afterwards Colonel Winsby of Victoria who took a battalion overseas, and the third became Gunner Currie, afterwards General Currie.

J.S. Matthews.

According to General Currie, who told me the first time he visited Vancouver in uniform he came, either as a gunner or as a corporal, with the 1st Battalion, Canadian Garrison Artillery, to holiday celebration in which the 2nd Battalion of the same regiment was participating, 1897 or 1898. Arms were stacked in the old wooden drill shed on Pender Street.

J.S. Matthews.

The truth of the Colbert story could easily be verified by looking up the old rolls of the 5th C.G.A., Victoria.

J.S. Matthews, Major.

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION WITH MR. J.B. GIFFEN, EX-MANAGER OF R.C. DUN & CO., VANCOUVER, NOW RESIDENT 6689 VINE STREET.

WOODWARD DEPARTMENT STORES.

Mr. Giffen: "Do you know Charlie Woodward?"

Major Matthews: Of Woodward Department Stores? Yes. The first I remember of him he had a little store down on Westminster Avenue and he used to wear a big long apron of white cotton, with a bib up to his chin held up with a tape around his neck, and another tape holding it 'round his waist, and I remember him walking up and down in front of the store with a watering can, sprinkling water on the vegetables in a long box in front of the windows.

Mr. Giffen: "That's the way I remember him. When I first came here in 1908 I went over one day to get a statement for R.C. Dun" (Mercantile Agency) "from him. The store was all in confusion, things scattered