

Concordia Theological Monthly



J U N E



1 9 5 7

Concordia Theological Monthly

VOL. XXVIII

JUNE 1957

No. 6

William Frederick Arndt 1880 — 1957

By PAUL M. BRETSCHER

IN a letter dated March 5, 1957, and addressed to Dr. Arndt's two surviving daughters, Rev. E. George Pearce of London, England, provided the following information regarding Dr. Arndt's last hours on earth:

Apparently Dr. Arndt took the 2:05 train [in the afternoon] from Kings Cross in London, arriving at Cambridge at about 3:30. This train stops [terminates its run] at Cambridge. The collector boarded the train to see whether all the passengers had removed and whether anything had been left on the train. He found the train empty except for the compartment in which your father was sitting. Noticing that he didn't look well, he asked Dr. Arndt how he was. "I'm not feeling very well," Dr. Arndt replied in quite a normal voice. The collector said, "All right, just stay there until you feel better. I'll be back in a few minutes."

When he returned, Dr. Arndt said, "I feel all right now, I'll go," reaching for his briefcase. "No, I'll take it for you," said the collector, and taking him by the arm helped him out of the train. They had gone only a few yards when your father slumped and collapsed but was held up by the collector. A stretcher was brought, an ambulance called, and in less than five minutes your



William Frederick Arndt

father was at the Addenbroke Hospital, Cambridge. The collector thought that your father passed on about 3:40, but it was not until around 4 o'clock that the doctors at the hospital confirmed his death.

Your father lived by the faith of Jesus Christ. . . . We mourn his passing, because a great void has been left in your hearts and ours. But we know that Monday, February 25, was a day of victory, another triumph over death, another sinner clutched from sin and cleansed in Jesus' blood, another saint saved by God's grace and mercy.

Obituaries of, and tributes to, Dr. Arndt have appeared in the *Lutheraner* (March 19) and the *Lutheran Witness* (March 26). In this tribute we are recording, therefore, only the most basic facts of Dr. Arndt's earthly life.

William Frederick Arndt was born at Mayville, Wis., on December 1, 1880. He studied for the holy ministry at Concordia College, St. Paul (1894—1897), Concordia College, Milwaukee (1897 to 1900), and Concordia Seminary (1900—1903). He earned his M. A. degree at the University of Chicago in 1923 and his Ph. D. degree at Washington University, St. Louis, in 1935. In 1930 Concordia College in Adelaide, South Australia, conferred on him the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity.

From 1902 to 1912 Dr. Arndt served parishes in Tennessee, Missouri, and New York. In 1912 he began his long and distinguished career as educator. From 1912 to 1921 he served as professor of ancient languages at St. Paul's College, Concordia, Mo., and since 1921 as professor of New Testament exegesis and literature at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. For a number of years he gave courses also in the Summer School of Concordia Teachers College, River Forest, Ill. In May 1956 he left for England to help lay the foundation of a program of ministerial training for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of England. A memorial service was held for him March 3 at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, in which Dr. R. R. Caemmerer, his former student, former pastor, colleague, and friend, preached the sermon. Dr. Arndt's body was laid to rest March 7 at New Bethlehem Cemetery, St. Louis, next to that of his beloved wife Emma, née Vetter, who died in 1933. Rev. Henry E. Dederer, Dr. Arndt's pastor, officiated at the grave.

The autopsy revealed that the immediate cause of Dr. Arndt's death was coronary thrombosis. A secondary cause was coronary atheroma.

Besides teaching at the seminary in St. Louis for thirty-five years, Dr. Arndt served the church in many other ways. He was secretary of the Western District from 1912 to 1921. For thirty-five years he was a member of the Board for Foreign Missions and for twenty-one years a member of the Committee for Lutheran Union. He frequently occupied pulpits, and he delivered many essays at conferences and synodical conventions. He was a founder of Mount Olive Lutheran Church in St. Louis in 1925 and its assistant pastor thereafter. He also lent a helping hand in the establishment of Luther Memorial Church in Richmond Heights, Mo.

Dr. Arndt was an effective writer. He contributed to the literature of our church a number of books and a vast number of articles. His name is linked with the CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY since its birth in 1930. From 1930 to 1938 he was one of its co-editors and from 1938 to 1949 its managing editor. From 1924 to 1926 he edited *Magazin für ev.-luth. Homiletik und Pastoraltheologie*, and from 1926 to 1930 the THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY. In the twenties he wrote also for *Lehre und Wehre*.

Dr. Arndt was every inch a scholar. His interest in the language, literature, history, and text of the New Testament kept him in close contact with leading scholars in our own country, Germany, Sweden, England, and elsewhere. He remained abreast of current New Testament scholarship by reading the most recent literature on the subject. Through persistent and patient effort he acquired a facile reading knowledge of Swedish, French, and Italian. Though Greek always remained his favorite language, he never lost his competence in the Semitic languages. A member for many years of the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis, the American Philological Association, and the St. Louis Society of the Archaeological Institute of America, he attended their meetings as regularly as his busy schedule permitted. He was an ardent promoter of the American School for Oriental Research. He was also a member of the Classics Club of St. Louis, where he read scholarly essays and which he also served as president. His trip to the Near East in 1947 enabled him personally to explore the sites hallowed by

the pages of Holy Scripture and led him to publish his sprightly and fascinating volume *From the Nile to the Waters of Damascus*.

Throughout his life Dr. Arndt retained the highest regard for the founder of our church, Dr. C. F. W. Walther. He was one of the last members of his generation who knew and assimilated Walther's theological views as Walther had expressed them in many articles of the *Lutheraner* and *Lehre und Wehre*. This interest in Walther led Dr. Arndt to become thoroughly acquainted also with other articles in *Lehre und Wehre*, some of which, because of his direction, appeared in English dress in this journal. Dr. Arndt could cite, without much effort, the number of the volume and the year in which important articles in *Lehre und Wehre* had appeared.

This link with the early theology of our church had an abiding influence on Dr. Arndt as a theologian. He was throughout his life a stout defender of the doctrine of the divine inspiration and inerrancy of Holy Scripture. In the preface to his recent commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke he writes:

The book . . . adheres to the position that the Bible is the Word of God and the only infallible guide for our faith and life and that Luke's Gospel, being a part of the Holy Scriptures, has been given through divine inspiration and must be treated as having that kind of origin. . . . There can be no doubt that it [this attitude] represents Christ's own position toward the Old Testament, and the author has the conviction that it is the attitude which our divine Teacher directs us to hold toward the writings of the New Testament also (p. ix).

But of all divine truths of Scripture, Paul's teaching of justification by faith always lay nearest to Dr. Arndt's heart. On this teaching he could speak and write with a special measure of joyous conviction because he sincerely believed it to be the heart and core of the Christian Gospel. And woe to him who dared to distort this most comforting doctrine! Every interpretation which in Dr. Arndt's opinion veered away in the slightest degree from what he believed is the true interpretation of Paul's teaching on justification was for him anathema. His studies of the Confessions, which had been largely stimulated by the theology of our early fathers, convinced him also that our Confessions are a true exposition of the doctrine of Holy Scripture.

Dr. Arndt shared with Walther a profound humility. This kept him from becoming a dogmatist in matters regarding which Scripture has not spoken clearly. He was critical of clichés and theological formulations which, over the years, so he believed, had become so worn that their original meaning had become obscure. For this reason he was always ready to discuss Scriptural truth also with those who were accustomed to formulations other than those current in our own theological language. This factor also, coupled with his personal piety and unfeigned love, kept him from rashly condemning those who disagreed with him in matters of no immediate bearing on the Christian faith. Dr. Arndt was a man who, though powerfully convicted of the truth of Scripture and the Confessions, had also learned the importance of respecting evangelical freedom. He contended that there will always be cases of casuistry which cannot be adjudicated by rules and regulations that violate the Christian principle of love.

His studies in Scripture helped him to grow in Biblical understanding. In instances he moved beyond formerly held positions and frankly acknowledged his change of opinion. But though his passion for truth compelled him henceforth to speak and write in terms of his new convictions, he remembered at the same time that Christians must be careful not to offend the brethren and that they must be willing to go to the utmost limits in their endeavor to be considerate, understanding, loving, and forgiving. It has been said that Dr. Arndt was kind and irenic. But he was that in the manner of Paul, who said of himself: "As servants of God we commend ourselves in every way . . . by purity, knowledge, forbearance, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God . . . in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute." (2 Cor. 6:4ff.)

Like Luther, Dr. Arndt cultivated a genuine interest in all things that are lovely and true. He knew that the God who redeemed the world is the same God who created it and that He created it for man and not man for the world. Dr. Arndt loved God's great outdoors. He had a naturalist's eye for the countryside, for flowers, forests, hills, brooks, and rivers. He could withdraw with his daughters over weekends in spring and fall and thoroughly enjoy the beauty and bounty of God's creative hand. At the same time

he had a high regard for the creative imagination of man. He loved the fine arts, in particular music (Brahms) and literature. Among his favorite men of letters were Homer, Plato, Thackeray, Macaulay, Scott, Schiller, Pascal, and Mark Twain, and he could quote freely from their writings. This knowledge often stood him in good stead in addresses and social gatherings. In addition, he accumulated over the years an almost inexhaustible store of poetic tidbits, humorous anecdotes, and harmless banter which colored and spiced his language. He was a raconteur of rare ability. Like the householder in the parable, he brought forth "out of his treasure things new and old" (Matt. 13:52). He had also a remarkably accurate memory. When telling of an experience the second or third time, and perhaps years later, the account varied only in non-essential details. He had a passion for truth, honesty, and integrity. There was a flash of fire in his eyes when anyone attempted to deal with him deceitfully and dishonestly.

Dr. Arndt had many friends. He had the rare ability to enter sympathetically into the concerns of children, adolescents, students, pastors, lay members of the church, and of scholars who represented various areas of scholarship. Always respected for his views by exegetes and linguists, Dr. Arndt could carry on fruitful conversations with lawyers, medical men, and learned individuals of other professions. And yet his love for the Savior and His precious Gospel was always uppermost in his thought. This love often asserted itself when the topic under consideration was a very mundane one indeed.

Dr. Arndt's closest earthly friend was his Greek New Testament, which he always had with him. At hotels where he spent many nights as essayist or guest of a conference or convention, he would, upon arising in the morning, get his Nestle, sit down on the bedside and read and contemplate a passage. But he read not only the construction, he examined not only the variants, but he also took a deep draught from the living water of eternal truth which the Holy Spirit has poured into the imperishable writings of Holy Scripture.

The Lord had endowed Dr. Arndt not only with a sound mind but also with a sound body. For this gift he oftentimes expressed his special thanks. Years ago he occasionally took off a few hours

for a round of golf. Professionals would have observed that his stance and swing were thoroughly unorthodox. But they would have admitted that he usually drove right down the middle. In late years he seemed to find most relaxation in the company of friends whom he invited to his hospitable home. He lost no time in purposeless motion. Even in England he preached quite regularly and read essays to the pastors' conference and before groups of students at Cambridge. "I cannot recall a single moment when I was troubled with feelings of ennui," he once remarked to Rev. Pearce. He could say this because he was always mindful of the Savior's sense of obligation expressed by Him in John 9:4: "We must work the works of Him who sent Me, while it is day; night comes, when no one can work."

In 1951, when Dr. Arndt was retired as a regular member of the faculty and placed on modified service, his colleagues honored him in a set of resolutions of appreciation, from which we quote the following:

WHEREAS, as a scholar, a theologian, and a teacher, he has been of singular benefit to the entire church in the training of her ministry; and

WHEREAS, in the interest of the church and in keeping with the precepts and teachings of the Word of God, he has helped to advance the cause of ecumenicity and of God-pleasing church union successfully and with due foresight, courage, patience, and discretion; and

WHEREAS, in his labors as a colleague he has been consistently kind, considerate, understanding, and helpful, always bearing in mind his obligations as a servant of Jesus Christ and of the church; therefore be it

Resolved, That the faculty, at this time of his retirement from our midst, express its appreciation for the valuable service he has rendered to Concordia Seminary and to the church at large; and be it furthermore

Resolved, That the faculty assure him of its prayers for continued health, strength, joy, and blessing.

In further token of its high esteem for Dr. Arndt, the editorial committee dedicated the December 1951 issue of this journal to him as a *Festschrift*.

The Lord of the Church crowned the labors of His faithful witness with abundant success. Late in 1956 Dr. Arndt had the joy of holding in his hands a copy of his valuable commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke, which had only recently been published. In January of this year he had the further joy of holding in his hands one of the first copies of the monumental Arndt-Gingrich *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, to which he and his associate Dr. F. Wilbur Gingrich had devoted all of eight years of intensive scholarly effort. For decades to come this lexicon will be the most widely used Greek-English dictionary of the New Testament.

But what are all tributes paid by sinful mortal men to a sinful fellow mortal? The Lord of the Church has now paid His devoted servant the final and greatest tribute. He has released him from this mortal body and given him the inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. Dr. Arndt often said when he had completed a labor of love or when friends complimented him, "God be praised!" We are certain that he said, "God be praised!" also in that moment when God called him to the heavenly reward. Ἀναστήσω αὐτὸν ἐσχάτῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ.

St. Louis, Mo.