

## MEETING GOD AT EVERY TURN

*Amy Dyer Russell*

*Tell me not, in mournful numbers,  
Life is but an empty dream,  
And the soul is dead that slumbers,  
And things are not what they seem.*

*Life is real, life is earnest,  
And the grave is not its goal;  
Dust thou art, to dust returneth,  
Was not spoken of the soul.*

Thus the poet, Longfellow, wrote of life, for he saw beyond today, looking to the eternal life which Jesus Christ promised to those who believe and follow him.

I look back on more than 94 years of life, beginning on March 23, 1896, and ask myself, "How has God dealt with me day by day, year after year?"

I was named for my Grandmother Dyer, with a slight change of her first name Amanda to Amy. Years later, I found that the name mean "beloved." I didn't use the middle name Melvina, and dropped it after marriage.

My childhood days were spent on a farm in Charleston, Maine, north of Bangor. There were four of us girls in the family, Lenora and Alice older than me, and Almatia the youngest. My earliest memory is the day of Almatia's birth—November 13, 1899. I sat in my father's lap in the kitchen of our farm home while the birth was taking place in the next room. Later, I was shown the new baby as she lay on the knees of my Grandmother Dyer. I looked in wonder at this newborn child, the fourth in our family.



Lenora, unknown friend, Alice, Amy



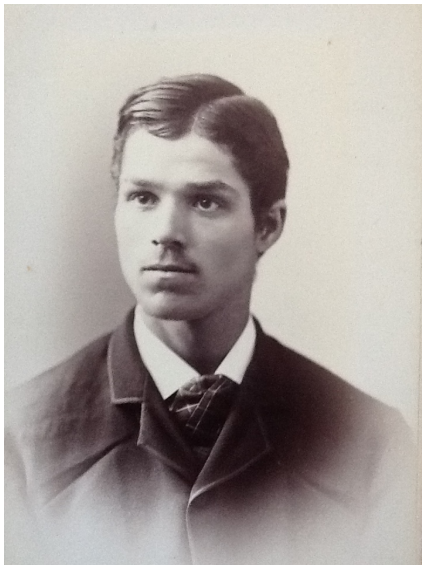
**The Dyer Clan**



Childhood days on the farm were happy and largely carefree as we enjoyed the farm animals, the wide fields and orchards, and all of country life—including the love of our Christian parents, who aspired to no greatness, but who daily walked with God as they guided us in His ways.

I have especially vivid memories of my father during my early years, perhaps in part because he was with us only until my 16th birthday, when he died. He was a person who held his children to strict standards, while at the same time, loving them much. Sometimes he played with us, carrying one of us on his back while he crept on the floor on hands and knees. He also played games with us in the evenings sometimes.

He placed special value on honesty. My first lesson in this regard I well remember. He had a clothes brush and it had a place which looked as though some bristles had been cut out of it. I thought it would be fun to cut some more of them. My mother spoke to me and asked if I had done this. I persuaded myself that some of it had been cut before I did anything, so I replied, "No." She warned me that my father had said he would spank any of us who told a lie. I then confessed to the truth. This incident was a lesson to me on honesty and made truth-telling seem very important to me.



The first actual punishment from my father that I can recall was when I was at the age of enjoying going barefoot. It was in early spring at the time when there will still patches of snow on the ground, but much of the ground was bare. My sister, Alice, and I took off our shoes and stockings and began to play in our old orchard where a swing was located, left from the previous summer. All at once, we saw my father coming from across the road. Alice, two years older than I was, became afraid at once, knowing she had done wrong, and began to run for the house. I followed and we crept under a bed. That didn't keep us from the spanking we deserved. First he spanked me, for I was on the closest side. It was a while before he got Alice to come out from under the bed, and gave her a similar punishment.

This incident was a decisive step in teaching me to obey. I must have stood in some awe of my father, for some years later, I feared a punishment would come when I was not at fault. As it happened, I was old enough to use a horse rake and had been using it in a field where there were hazards for such a piece of machinery. One of the teeth got bent in the process of haying. I was crying, but how understanding my father was! He told me very tenderly that he would not punish me for something for which I was not to blame.

Another teaching of his was the importance of giving a full generous measure in a business deal. Since there were no boys in our family, we girls did chores more commonly assigned to boys in those days. In addition to helping in the house, we worked in the hayfields and in picking up potatoes to sell—our main crop. My father offered a small reward for the potato picking, but we were always required to give generous measure in filling the potato bags.

We did the same when we sold raspberries. Boxes were heaped up high and the berries in good condition. In fact, some stores paid us what was then considered a fancy price because the boxes were so well-filled and in such good condition. A fancy price in those days might be 12 to 15 cents a quart!



Another incident I recall had to do with my father's treatment of my stubbornness. My sister and I were coming home from school across the field between the schoolhouse on the edge of our property and our house. My sister got ahead and would not wait for me—even though the remaining distance was just a few steps. Pretty soon, I saw my father coming and I was sure he was going to accompany me home. But I was mistaken. He had a tiny switch in his hand and he began to use it on my legs. It didn't take me long to get up and go the rest of the way to the house with that "incentive." My father wanted me to learn not to be so stubborn just to have my own way. Self was beginning to have too strong a place in my life.

My father was able to comfort, as much as to chasten us. When I was in my teens, I spent a week with my aunt who was sick, according to my turn among my sisters. I was very homesick during that week, but would not let her know. She would hear me singing, but didn't know that now and then the tears would be interspersed with the song. A few days later, my father drove over and I wept as he, oh, so understandingly, comforted me. If some people are never homesick, perhaps it may be that their home is not so much of a real home, or maybe they are more brave.

What my father was like was shown also by what others said of him or thought of him. At his funeral, the pastor used the words of Scripture to apply to my father: "Behold, how great a man in Israel has fallen."

My father was a godly man who was active in the church, always being present well before time for the service to start so that we could compose ourselves and be prepared for the time of worship. He was always generous in giving, feeling it was an important part of one's faithfulness to Christ. He taught the men's Sunday school class for many years. Although he did not have the privilege of even a high school education, his reading of the Bible gave him a better education in many ways and a genuine desire to teach others as to what the Bible made plain as to salvation and following Christ in our lives.

Although neither of my parents had college or high school education, the value of education was strongly impressed on all of us children. My father made up his mind that we should at least complete high school, and he did what he could toward helping us go to college as long as he lived.

I also have such good memories of my mother, a courageous woman who had come over from England while a teenager, and worked on farms in Charleston until meeting my father and marrying him in 1891. She was an unselfish and thoroughly humble Christian woman, becoming greatly loved throughout her life by all who knew her.



She looked up to my father, deferring to him as head of the household, but what a helpmeet she was to him and what a haven to us children! She was the one to whom we children felt free to go with our problems and troubles, for she was always understanding. Neither she nor my father were ones to show affection by physical demonstrativeness, but we felt their concern and caring. Later, I came to feel that showing affection outwardly is also important. When my mother was in her last years, she appreciated it when I kissed her or showed love in such ways.



## ***The Journey of Faith***

From very early years, I began to respond to inner promptings toward faith in Christ. My first definite memory related to this occurred when I was five or six years old. One evening, my father was taking the two older children to prayer meeting while my mother remained at home to care for Almatia and me. I wanted to go to the meeting too but they felt I was too young to go in the evening. Evidently I thought it meant that these older sisters were Christians, and I told my mother that I wanted to be a Christian "when I grow up." Just what I thought that meant, I do not know.

A few years later, a neighbor of ours made a smart remark which caused me to remember something the pastor had preached about from Jeremiah 17:9: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" This neighbor said very dogmatically that she didn't believe that verse. For some reason, her reaction made me remember, perhaps because my parents did believe the Bible, all of it. In later years, I came to realize how true that particular verse is.

Not long after this incident, another man was called to be pastor of our church—Justin Field. He was a young man with much enthusiasm and was very active in trying to reach people to join the church. Perhaps his depth of Christian experience was less than that of the former pastor. His way of working did attract folks, especially the young teenagers. He began to talk to my oldest sister, Lena, about becoming a church member. As I recall it now, his emphasis was more on church membership than on new birth in Christ. Lena did believe and decided to join the church. Pastor Field called at our home to talk with my parents, and he then asked if Alice would also take that step. Alice was very shy and probably didn't understand the meaning of the act so was not ready for it. He didn't ask me. No doubt he thought I was too young, not quite ten, but if he had asked, I would have said, "Yes."

Before the date of the baptism, one evening, the invitation was given to accept Christ, and as we sang the precious hymn, "Just as I am, without one plea, but that Thy blood was shed for me," I arose to show my desire to come to Christ.

How much I understood, I do not know, but I do know that it was my sincere desire to be what Jesus wanted me to be, and it was the beginning of a definite desire to please Him. I am sure I didn't grasp the meaning of John 3:3 or John 3:16 but how gently and understandingly God works in our hearts if we are seeking His will and way! As I look back now, I see His hand in so many experiences in my life, as I have met Him at every turn.

The next minister who was called to be pastor of our Charleston church was indeed a man of God, a pastor for whom I shall ever be thankful, Rev. Clarence Emery. His approach was thoughtful and steady. The people of the town felt the impact of his messages and his life.



I had joined the Christian Endeavor Society and while he was there, I led one of the meetings for the first time. Today, many may not know much about the Christian Endeavor Society, and thus it is a loss to them, for that Christian organization must have been born in someone's heart by the Holy Spirit. Personally, I think it wrought real growth in Christian young people in special ways. The active members were those who were already Christians. Others could join as associate members. There was a pledge card which active members might sign to indicate their intent to read the Bible and pray daily and to take part in each meeting "unless prevented by some reason which they could conscientiously give to their Savior."

The first time that I led one of these meetings, the topic was "Pleasing Jesus." Preparing that talk took much time. I wrote notes to take with me lest I forget what I wanted to say, but didn't refer to them much. I felt like crying afterwards, for I felt it wasn't well done, but Pastor Emery said he was sure it pleased the Lord and afterward, my sister Alice told me she thought it was good. She had been too shy to lead a meeting herself.

A few years later, I began to think I ought to be serving the Lord in some way besides the way I lived and what testimony I gave in my church, so I made arrangements to conduct some meetings in West Charleston, a section of Charleston where most of the folks had no connection with our church or any others. On Sunday afternoons, I went to the West Charleston schoolhouse. If my memory is correct, Pastor Emery came also one Sunday to be of help in bringing the Gospel message to these needy people. Perhaps this could be called my first home missionary work.

Looking to the future, I planned to secure a college education. I didn't know about Bible Institutes or colleges; so I planned to go to Colby College in Waterville, Maine. My high school, Higgins Classical Institute, was one of the high schools supposed to be a fitting school for Colby, and my sisters had attended that college. Also, I had the promise of a scholarship there since I was valedictorian of my 1914 graduating class.

However, before going, I needed to work for a while as my father didn't have enough income to pay the extra costs beyond the scholarship. So I accepted a position to teach a country school in Naples, Maine. There was no church in that part of town, but there was a Methodist church about three miles away; so I used to walk to this church each Sunday. Realizing the need of my pupils to know God, I decided to start a Sunday school. When the pastor learned of this, he gladly provided materials to help.

There were reasons that caused me not to go back to Naples for the next term. After teaching school elsewhere for a time, I found out about Gordon Bible College in Boston through a friend. As soon as I heard about Gordon, I knew that it was the kind of college I wanted. How wonderful that God made it possible for me to hear about Gordon at the right time! By the spring of 1916, I had been accepted by Gordon to enter in the fall of that year.



It so happened—if you can call it happening, for it must have been God's plan, not chance—that the new building on the Fenway was not finished in time for students to move into it or for classes to be held there that fall; so I had to rent a room near Clarendon Street Baptist Church, for the school had to continue to meet in that church. This arrangement meant that I was given the privilege of experiencing student life as it had been prior to 1916. Some of us got together to plan our meals—sometimes rather small and not adequate for good health.

We continued there until the spring of 1917 when it was possible to move to Frost Hall on the Fenway, the new location for the school. The first night there, we had the fun of using candles, as the electricity was not yet connected.

While at Gordon College for four years, God spoke to me in definite ways on different occasions. First, He began to make me see myself in a different way. I began to realize how far short I was of what a Christian should be. I told one friend that it seemed I had gone backward. She said it meant that I was growing. Evidently I simply was seeing my sins that had been there all along, but now God was showing me myself as never before. Truly the Word of God is sharper than a two-edged sword.

At Gordon Bible College, much emphasis was placed on being a missionary in other countries. I began to wonder if that was what God wanted of me. How would I know if He was calling me in that direction? As I talked with others who had become Student Volunteers to be missionaries, each one seemed to have a particular purpose: to be a nurse, a teacher, or other special kind of work. I asked myself, "Where would I fit in?" It didn't seem to me that I had a gift for a definite kind of work.

In my Senior year at Gordon, the Student Volunteers had a special rally and one day, a friend asked me if I was a Student Volunteer. Then she said she thought I looked like one. Again I thought very seriously about the whole question and prayed for an answer.



The speaker that day spoke on the motive of being a missionary. I again faced the missionary question, and asked the Lord, "What would be my special work there?" I knew that for all missionaries, the great basic purpose was to win the lost to Christ. As I sat there, the Lord seemed to assure me that He would show me how He would work in and through me, and as they sang the old hymn "My Jesus, as Thou wilt" that evening, I made that submission mine. As that surrender took place, joy filled my heart and I wanted to tell everybody about it. I also joined the Volunteers.



At that time I did not know Emmet Russell. I had met him, but that was the extent of our acquaintance. He was a member of the Volunteers, and planned to go to China as a missionary. He had a dear Chinese friend from Harvard, which may have been a factor inclining him toward that choice. I, on the other hand, had had some interest in Africa, perhaps because of the pastor at Ruggles Baptist Church where I attended, a big Irish man who had been a missionary in Africa but had to leave due to health problems.

Emmet began to ask me to go places with him, and gradually, our relationship deepened into love. On a May day, May 21, on the beach at Marblehead, he asked me to become his wife, and the following March 4, 1921, we were married at the home of President Nathan Wood.

I now see how wonderfully God had kept me from an earlier choice which would have been wrong for me. When I was 18, I had contemplated marriage to a young man who, I fear, had joined the church only to please me. I was not at peace about the decision, and finally felt led to break off the relationship. I am thankful to God for the way in which He fit me into His plan as to a life partner.

*Emmet and Amy Dyer Russell  
at the time of their marriage  
in 1921.*



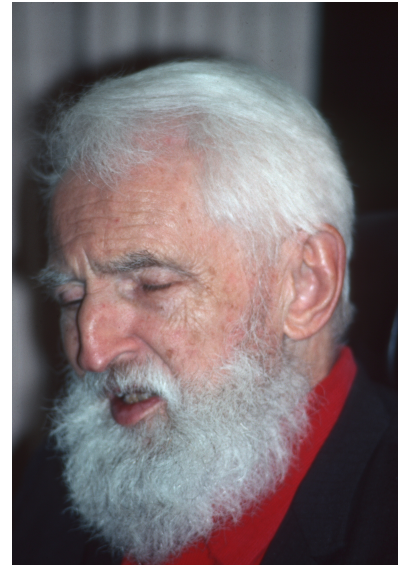
*Amy bore a son Howard in their  
first year of marriage, living in  
China. He had spina bifida and  
only survived six months.*

*Then came Philip in 1925, and Eunice arrived in 1929.*





*Snapshots through the years  
as Amy and Emmet aged*



*In their home in Hillsboro, NH in the 1960s*



*After Don and Eunice's wedding in 1969*



*Amy and Emmet in their last years together in Camarillo, California, living near son Philip  
and his wife Betty.*





## ***An Addendum from Her Daughter after Amy's Death***

Amy's story breaks off here, and she did not have the energy to complete it. And the story might be quite long, considering that she had only covered the first 25 years out of 95! But perhaps there is significance to this attempt on her part to return to her roots. "When a person has exhausted her personal history, she returns to the origins."

Her life with her husband Emmet did indeed take her life in an impelling new direction, beginning with the three-year sojourn in China where they laid their firstborn son Howard to rest six months after his birth.

For the next forty years, Amy gave herself to the two-fold ministry of pastor's wife and mother of a family. Amy's particular life journey involved an unusual element: Emmet was partly blind (now termed "legally blind" by the government). So Amy was drawn into functioning in more active ways at times—doing the driving, e.g.—but this was consonant with her early farm experience where the girls did the boys' chores, as recorded in her story.

Amy was ordained early on—something she was reticent to talk about—so that she could take on certain duties in connection with her early missionary work. She was always active in women's Bible study and prayer groups, in teaching Sunday school, in leading children's clubs, in being a Pioneer Girls guide and Pal. In modern terms, she had her own career—a calling of God—something she fulfilled to the very end. When she and Emmet considered moving into a Christian retirement community in the early 1970s, after visiting, she came back complaining, "But *what use* would we be there?" She always looked for opportunities to serve. Even at age 83, after Emmet died, she said, "Maybe I should go to work now," and asked for career assessment tests so as to identify her strengths and skills!



At home with her family during those years in a series of pastorates, she baked bread, fed her family with whole grains and fresh vegetables, and sewed her own clothes. She put her family on what would now be characterized as a low cholesterol diet before it became fashionable. Towards the end of her life, she sheepishly admitted that perhaps she had been too careful about her health, for her body seemed very slow to let go at a time when she was fully ready to leave it.



But, in the end, in her last years, it was to her childhood memories that she increasingly turned. Was she perhaps trying to make sense out of the whole of her life, before entering the Kingdom of God? This is what she has left for us in these pages. . .to be interpreted as you will.

Amy is at rest now. . .and at Home. How many people said that, upon hearing of her death. The words engraved on the stone marking the grave where Amy and Emmet are buried say it for them both:

*"To be with Christ—far better."*