

THE ASSEMBLY HERALD.

DECEMBER, 1899. Vol 2 No 6

“The holy land can be won in no other way than as thou, O Lord Christ, and thy apostles won it, by love, by prayer, by shedding of tears and blood.”

RAYMOND LULL,

Missionary to the Mohammedans in Africa. Stoned to death in his eightieth year, in 1315.

An Open Door in Syria.

By Rev. Wm. R. Richards, D.D.

A study of the atlas does not always give an adequate knowledge of geography, for the maps are flat. We had often noted east of the Mediterranean that inch or two of flat surface marked Syria, but we were in no way prepared for the view of the real Syria that greeted us as we neared Beirut about sunrise one morning last April; the blue sea, and bordering it as far as we could see the purple wall of the Lebanon mountains, and on their higher peaks the unearthly beauty of the snow; a flat inch or two of map could never show you that.

So perhaps a study of mission reports will not always give adequate knowledge of missions. Those columns of figures and pages of statistics have their value, but they seem flat and colorless if ever you have opportunity to compare them with the real story of living men and women, the lights and shades, the depths of need and the lonely heights of aspiration.

I was not many days in Syria, but while there had the advantage of almost constant companionship with one or another of the missionaries of our Church in that field. And a great advantage it was to walk about the streets of ancient Damascus, for instance, with such a guide as Dr. Henry H. Jessup, recalling its long history by his well-stored memory, and looking beneath the surface of its strange Oriental life by the aid of his clear interpretation. On our journey thither, as our train carried us over the high mountain range, he called my attention to the contrast between the province of Lebanon itself and the provinces on either side of it. Ever since the massacres of 1860 the province of Lebanon while nominally subject to the Sultan, has been under a Christian pasha, selected with the approval of the powers of Europe. And this favored province, like an oasis in the desert, gives evidence of security and thrift and increasing prosperity; while

Translating the Benga Bible.

By Robert Hill Nassau, D.D.

There lies before me a precious volume of almost 500 pages, carefully printed and neatly bound by the American Bible Society, comprising fifteen books of the Old Testament, translated into the Benga-Bantu language used in the Gaboon and Corisco Mission, Western Equatorial Africa.

On my return to Africa in 1893, my brethren in the mission committed to me, among other trusts, the solemn labor of translating the Old Testament.

An interpreter has long ago ceased, for me, to be needed in speech. But no degree of acquaintance with a heathen language will make unnecessary the assistance of a native collaborator in translation. Securing the presence of an educated native, I directed him to occupy half the day with a careful attempt, in his own house, at a translation of the Revised English Version, the while I examined specially important words in the Hebrew for the current verses of the day. Then each afternoon, in my own study, with him at my side, I spent two hours of every day in patiently comparing his translation with my own. It was a long task, day after day—two hours a day, year after year, for more than four years. Sometimes, in easy narrative, even half a chapter might be accomplished in one day. Often, in some intricate passage, we wrote only a few verses. Sometimes we disputed, I refusing to accept his chosen word. Sometimes he said there was no other. I would insist, and would state a supposed occurrence, and then demand of him what word the old men of his tribe would use under such and such circumstances. Generally, his face would light up, and he would give me the desired synonym, a synonym not commonly used among the younger generation, but known, and expressing the shade of thought I was seeking.

Often, with the frequent sick headaches of a weak stomach, sometimes bundled in a blanket to ward off the creeping chill of an ague, the slow, steady, sacred, often wearying, but always glad task went on. Only the prescribed two hours. For, however a student-pastor in healthful, ozone-supplied America may spend his four hours per day in his study, the missionary in Africa cannot, must not. He rises from the task with hand trem-

bling, temples throbbing and nerves tingling. He must put aside the precious pages and go to the brighter, even if hotter air outside, even if it be only to botanize or visit a native friend in the villages.

So the pile of MSS. grew higher and higher, till, three years later, five books were sent to the United States and were proof-read by a returned missionary brother, the Rev. H. E. Schnatz, over the press of the Bible Society.

Myself saw with what avidity that volume was received at Batanga by the pupils of the theological class. I remember in morning prayers, at my sister's house at Batanga, during Mission Annual Meeting, the dramatic utterances of surprised delight made by those young men as they lighted on some of those very synonyms with which I had struggled, and their almost amazement that the stranger white man had found out some of their forgotten secrets of their language. The retrospect of the long task's hard days became only an inspiration for the other days that yet lay before me. If I had wished any other reward than what I hoped Our Master would some day give in His "Well done," I already have it in the "Akeval akeval" (Thank you!) of my negro brethren. I was bringing my sheaves with me.

Three more years of piling up of MSS. Then, in February, 1899, I arrived in the United States on a needed furlough, with nine more books. The Bible Society's treasury was not able at once to assume the work, but by April promises, assured by gifts, initiated by the efforts of a lady active in W. F. M. S. of the presbytery of Philadelphia North, enabled us to set the press moving. Proof-sheets followed me over the country, from place to place, as I visited the churches on invitation for missionary addresses. In July the last page was corrected. In September the printing and binding was completed, and a portion of the edition is already on its way to Africa. I am safe now to sing,

"Fly abroad, thou mighty Gospel."

Half of the Old Testament books remain still to be translated, and the work is being carried on by a brother beloved, my thoroughly competent friend, the Rev. F. G. Knauer, of Batanga.