

Messenger and Visitor

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Ladysmith Relieved.

The announcement of the relief of Ladysmith, published to the world last Thursday morning, filled the heart of the British nation with irrepressible joy and caused the whole Empire to resound with exultation. It was not merely the joy of victory which moved the people. It was also the joy of a hope now realized, though long deferred and often almost lost in despair. It was the joy of sympathy with a brave commander and a brave garrison, who for four weary months had withstood the terrors of investiture and bombardment, who had fought indomitably against an enemy determined to crush by overwhelming strength of numbers, repulsing successfully, but at great cost, repeated assaults of the most formidable character, who had suffered still more from disease than from the bombardment of the enemy, who had seen one brave attempt after another to send them relief end in failure, and who, during the last weeks of the siege, had felt the cruel hand of famine clutching ever more fiercely at their throats, and still, though weakened and emaciated by hunger, had hoped and held on indomitably, determined to keep the old flag flying to the last. It was a noble defence, and the story of Ladysmith will hereafter have honorable place in the history of Britain's heroes and heroic deeds. It was well that the nation's heart and voice should respond in strong sympathy to the announcement that deliverance had come to General Buller and the heroic sons of Britain whom he is proud to command.

The relief came after about a week of continuous hard fighting, in which General Buller had found his way from Colenso to Ladysmith everywhere most stubbornly opposed by the Boers in strongly entrenched positions. By hard fighting and skillful manoeuvring, General Buller had succeeded by Tuesday in getting command of Pieter's Hill and Langewatch Spruit, strong Boer positions, and the capture of these enabled him to pierce the centre of the enemy's horse-shoe line of defences. The fighting was now practically over. General Dundonald, reconnoitering with his cavalry, found the road to Ladysmith clear, and accompanied by a composite regiment of infantry, Lord Dundonald's cavalry brigade entered Ladysmith on Wednesday evening. There has been a rather general disposition to discount General Buller's services in the war, and to credit all the recent successes—including the relief of Ladysmith—to the brilliant strategy of General Roberts. Lord Roberts' strategy has doubtless been brilliantly successful, but the task assigned Lord Buller was one that called for hard fighting rather than brilliant strategy, and probably when the full story of the war is told and understood, it will be seen that General Buller is entitled to a very respectable share of the honors.

The latest news from the seat of war indicates considerable activity on the part of the British forces in northern Cape Colony, and a corresponding weakening on the part of the Boers, who are being gradually pushed across the Orange River into the Free State. Price's command is reported seven miles north of Colesburg. General Clement's troops hold Achtertang, and he reports the railway open to Joubert's siding, but Norval's Pont bridge, on the Orange River, is still in the hands of the enemy. From Dordrecht there is news of an engagement on Sunday at Labuschagne's Nek on the road from Dordrecht to Jamestown, and as a result the capture by General Brabant's Colonial division of some

strong positions previously held by the Boers. General Joubert is reported to be collecting a large body of troops at Abraham's Kraal, 30 miles east of Paardeberg in the Free State. The Boers are also reported to be in force near Oosfontein. It may be taken for granted that Lord Roberts is not inactive, but while his plans are in process of maturing he is not likely to advertise them to the enemy, so that it is quite probable that for some days to come the news from the seat of war will be unimportant.

A Subtle Danger.

One of the subtlest dangers to which men are exposed in the religious realm of things, is that of confounding a mere intellectual assent to religious truths with a real vitalizing faith, such as gives complexion and purpose to the whole life. That danger has perhaps never been greater than it is today. The faith which the New Testament requires and commends, is something more than a merely passive acquiescence in its affirmations. That mankind are condemned in their sins and enemies to God by wicked works, that God has sent his Son into the world to save men, that spiritual regeneration is a necessity for all, and that all men everywhere are called upon to repent and obey the gospel, that he who believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he that believeth not is condemned,—these are truths which clearly demand something more than a cold intellectual assent. No mortal human being can afford to say—"These things may be all very true, but they are of no immediate particular concern to me, I do not deny their affirmations, but the matters of vital interest to me are other than these." If there is a Kingdom of Heaven which men may seek and enter, it must be sought first of all. If Christ is Lord and Saviour to the individual, then he must be given first place in that individual life and heart. The wise man, according to the declared judgment of Jesus Christ, is not the man who merely hears, but he who hears and obeys—who makes the sayings of the Lord the law of his life. It is the man who hears and does, and he only, whose building is founded on the rock, and whose house shall be to him a place of refuge when all others shall go down before tempest and flood.

No more subtle temptation, we say, besets men and women today than the temptation to put something else in the place of this vital, practical, and saving faith, and to trust in the fallacy that the man who hears the sayings of Christ, but does them not, shall somehow at last be found to have built on the rock, not on the sand. There are many, it is to be feared, whose belief in Christianity it would be an abuse of language to characterize even as intellectual. It is rather the careless, unintelligent assent of persons who are too indolent or too deeply immersed in pleasures or the business of this present life, to give any earnest consideration to the claims of Christ and to reach any honest conclusion as to whether or not those things which the New Testament affirms are really so. There are in the world a great many persons who are nominally Christians, but whose acceptance of Christianity seems little more a matter of conscience and of vital faith than their acceptance of their mother tongue and their family name. They are willing to be called by the name of Christ, they desire to enjoy any ultimate advantage which his coming into the world may mean for the human race, they have no quarrel with Christianity so far as its creeds, its ordinances, its formal worship are concerned, but they seem to have little idea that to have heard Christ implies for them any obligation to follow him and to have fellowship with him in his suffering and his victory on behalf of the world which he came to save. Such lives have been externally enriched and adorned by the fruits of Christianity, but one may well ask whether they are more Christian at heart than the lives of cultured heathens.

It is not for us to flatter ourselves that the temptation which has here been pointed out exists only in connection with worldly and fashionable congregations and has no direct personal interest for Baptists. A vast deal of worldliness and fashion are to be found in Baptist churches in these days. To live a life which is nominally Christian, but which is really worldly and self-indulgent to the last degree, to be called by the name of Christ but to have no vital fellowship with him in his life and death and his divine purpose of salvation for the lost,

seems a terrible possibility within a Baptist church. Is it not well then that if we call ourselves Christians, we should turn the search-light of truth upon our lives and ask what does our Christianity mean?—Is it more than a mere profession? Is the gospel to us something to be heard merely or does hearing involve obedience? Christ's call to faith and service means for men something infinitely nobler than a mere nominal faith, which leaves the man self-centred and subject to the debasing tyranny of human appetites and ambitions.

Editorial Notes

—We fear that the senders of a number of communications will be disappointed at not seeing them appear in this issue of the MESSENGER AND VISITOR. Everyone who sends us an item of church news or an obituary notice of course expects to see it in the next number of the paper. But it frequently happens that it is a physical impossibility to publish all the matter that reaches us for these departments the same week. This week, for instance, such communications have fairly poured in upon us through the mails. We have done the best we could, but necessarily some matter has been held over.

—The New York Presbytery, to which the case of Professor McGiffert had been referred by the General Assembly, having decided not to take action in the matter, the prosecutor, Rev. Dr. Birch, has appealed the case back to the General Assembly, which meets in May, in St. Louis. The case was before the Assembly in 1898, which then condemned certain teachings of Dr. McGiffert's contained in his book entitled, "A History of Christianity in the Apostolic Age," advising the author to withdraw from the Presbyterian church if he could not conform his teaching to its standards of belief. Dr. McGiffert did not withdraw and did not repudiate what he had written, but held that his teaching was not antagonistic to Presbyterian doctrine. The General Assembly therefore last year referred the case to the Presbytery of New York, that it might take action therein.

—Many are dying. The obituary column of the MESSENGER AND VISITOR has been unusually full of late. A number of churches mourn the loss of deacons as well as other valuable members. Among those recently departed is Deacon James Armstrong, of North Sydney, C. B., father of the Rev. W. F. Armstrong, a venerable man of over ninety. Deacon Shaw, of the Berwick church, to whose death our Halifax correspondent alludes, was a fine example of a class of men who, though they do not gather much wealth or occupy any large place in the public eye, are nevertheless the salt of the earth and the backbone of the nation. Their ideals are higher than that of the mere money-getter. The value which Mr. and Mrs. Shaw attached to education, is seen in the fact that their five sons have all received an Academeal training—three of them being graduates of Acadia. Two of them are now ministers of the gospel, two are engaged in educational work, and one is a physician.

—It is with deep regret and personal sorrow that we record this week the death of Mr. B. A. Stammers, who very unexpectedly to his friends was called away from earth on Sunday evening last. For the past two or three years Mr. Stammers, in addition to his duties as master of the St. John Marine school, had given part of his time as assistant in the business department of this paper. He had also for the past year filled the office of secretary to the Maritime Baptist Publishing Company. His services in connection with the paper have been highly appreciated. His uniform prompt attention to business, his kindness of heart and courtesy of manner made him a valuable man for the office and won him friends on every hand. It is gratifying to be able to say that, during the time Mr. Stammers had been connected with the MESSENGER AND VISITOR office, nothing but the kindest feelings had existed between him and all connected with its business and editorial departments. Mr. Stammers appeared to be a man who enjoyed perfect health. But a few weeks ago he had the misfortune to break one of his legs, and his health suffered in other respects, his illness being supposed to result from a chill sustained at the time of the accident. For some days, however, he had seemed to be improving satisfactorily, and his death was entirely unexpected. Mr. Stammers was a man of unchallenged integrity and truly Christian character, an active and highly valued member of Brussels Street church. To Mrs. Stammers and her family, to whom the blow is a crushing one, we extend Christian sympathy.

—If we consider certain facts in connection with the Christian life at the present day and ignore others, we may be able to take a very optimistic view of matters. We may say for instance that the organization for mission work, home and foreign, and the money being raised for the work, are out of all comparison greater than those of any preceding generation. We may point to the immense sums of money being devoted to Christian education, and to the great number of young men and women being educated year by year in Christian schools and Theological Seminaries. We may point to the high