

**HISTORICAL SKETCH OF
THE MISSIONS OF THE
AMERICAN BOARD IN
TURKEY**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649244935

Historical sketch of the missions of the American Board in Turkey by S. C. Bartlett

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

S. C. BARTLETT

**HISTORICAL SKETCH OF
THE MISSIONS OF THE
AMERICAN BOARD IN
TURKEY**

BARTLETT'S SKETCHES.

MISSIONS IN TURKEY.

In a missionary point of view, Turkey is the key of Asia. Nowhere has the providential guidance of the missionary work been more remarkable. The divine hand has alike prepared the minds of the Armenian people in Turkey for Christian influences, directed attention thither, blessed the missionaries with wisdom, interposed continually for the protection of their work, and led them forward to a success already so broad and deep, as to be silently molding the destinies of the empire.

The first effort of the American Board in Asia Minor was quite wide of the mark. It was when, in 1826, Messrs. Gridley and Brewer were sent to Smyrna, the ancient home of Polycarp, to labor with the Greeks and Jews. The movement was attended with no great success, and the place became important chiefly as a printing station. The Mohammedans of the country meanwhile seemed inaccessible to all direct Christian labors.

But there was one most interesting people in the country, signally qualified to be the recipients and almoners of the divine grace. It is the old Armenian race, now widely scattered from their native Armenia, and dispersed everywhere in Turkey and Persia, and found even in India, Russia, and Poland. There are supposed to be at least three millions of them, more than half of whom are said

to be in Turkey. They are a noble race, and have been called "the Anglo-Saxons of the East." They are the active and enterprising class. Shrewd, industrious, and persevering, they are the bankers of Constantinople, the artisans of Turkey, and the merchants of Western and Central Asia. The nation received Christianity in the fourth century, and had a translation of the Scriptures made in the year 477 A. D., which is still extant and profoundly venerated, though now locked up, with many other religious works of theirs, in a dead language.

The Armenian church is a body as marked as the Roman Catholic or Greek church, strongly resembling them in deadness and formalism. Its head is the Catholicos. It holds to transubstantiation, invokes the saints, enforces confession and penance, teaches baptismal regeneration, priestly absolution, and the merit of good works, observes fourteen great feast days, one hundred and sixty-five fast days, and minor feasts more numerous than the days of the year. It has nine grades of clergy, some of whom are obliged to be once married, and performs all church services in the ancient Armenian, not one word of which is understood by the people. For purposes of persecution, as well as government, the Patriarch had, until recently, almost despotic power. But there are hopeful features even about this fossilized church. It openly adhered to the Christian name and profession under centuries of persecution and oppression. It regards the Word of God with almost unexampled reverence, so that when the Armenian is once convinced that any proposition is contained in the book he has learned to kiss at the altar, that is to him an end of all controversy. Another hopeful circumstance, directly connected with this, is that the errors of doctrine and practice with which the church is

MISSIONS IN TURKEY.

3

incrusted round, have never been fixed by any decree of council. Their standard of moral purity is also said to be immeasurably above that of the Turks around them, and they have a conscience which can be touched and roused. The enterprising character of the race, their wide dispersion, their preservation of the sentiment of national unity, and their acquaintance with the languages of the lands of their residence, render them a people of great promise for missionary purposes in those several lands.

A singular coincidence of judgment fixed the attention of the American Board upon this race. The missionary Parsons, on his first visit to Jerusalem, in 1821, encountered some Armenian pilgrims, whose interesting conversation drew from him the suggestion of a mission to Armenia itself. "We shall rejoice," said they, "and all will rejoice when they arrive." Mr. Fisk soon after wrote from Smyrna to Boston, recommending the measure. But before a word was heard from either, intelligent friends of the Board at home had urged the same proposal. At Beirut, Syria, among the earliest converts were the Armenian ecclesiastics (in 1826), two of whom, Bishop Dionysius and Krikor Vartabed, had traveled extensively in Asia Minor, and resided once in Constantinople. These brethren assured the missionaries that the minds of the Armenian people were wonderfully inclined towards the pure gospel, and that should preachers go among them, doubtless thousands of them would be ready to receive the truth. They themselves wrote letters to their countrymen, which excited no little attention.

During a dozen years or more, already, the British and Russian Bible Societies had put in circulation several thousand copies of the Scriptures in the ancient Armenian

tongue, which were widely distributed in Turkey, and could be understood by the teachers and higher clergy; and at length they printed the New Testament in Armeno-Turkish and modern Armenian, intelligible to all who could read. Another important link in the chain of influences was the letter of Dr. King to the Roman Catholics, written on leaving Syria, and stating the reasons why he could not be a Papist. This letter, translated by Bishop Dionysius, and forwarded in manuscript to certain prominent Armenians in Constantinople, produced an extraordinary effect. A meeting was held, its Scripture references examined, and the determination adopted to do something to purify the church. One immediate effect was a training school for priests. At the head of it was placed Peshimaljian, a profound scholar, a theologian, and a humble student of the Bible—a sort of oriental Melancthon, even in his timidity. For while steadily exerting an evangelical influence, and silently guiding his pupils into new paths of inquiry, he was alarmed when he saw them joining the evangelical movement; and though at length he gained firmness enough to encourage their course, it was only on the year of his death that he openly declared his position. All the first converts at Constantinople were from his alumni.

In 1829 the Prudential Committee prepared the way, by the exploring tour of Messrs. Smith and Dwight among the Armenians; and two years later the noble Goodell began his work at Constantinople, to be followed in due time by the admirable band of associates, Dwight, Riggs, Schauffler, Schneider, Hamlin, Bliss, Powers, Pratt, Wheeler, and others, whose names are as household words in the churches. Their firmness, fidelity, and wisdom have been the theme of frequent

LANE MEDICAL LIBRARY
STANFORD UNIVERSITY

This book should be returned on or before
the date last stamped below.

MISSIONS IN TURKEY.

5

commendation from foreigners in public as well as in private life.

The first missionaries, Goodell and Dwight, seemed compelled, by the circumstances of the case, to reach the people, at first, chiefly by means of schools and the press.

The several translations of the Bible, — Armenian, Armeno-Turkish, Osmani-Turkish, Hebrew-Spanish, Hebrew-German, and finally Bulgarian, — and the various other books which they and their coadjutors have gradually sent forth, till they amount to a great body of literature, proved in due time to be the planting of siege guns, and the unlimbering of heavy artillery.

When Mr. Goodell called upon the Patriarch to seek his co-operation in establishing popular schools on an improved plan, that blandest of Orientals promised to send schoolmasters to learn the new method, and assured him of a love for the missionary and his country so profound, that if Mr. Goodell had not come to visit him, he must needs have gone to America to see Mr. Goodell! The one assurance meant as much as the other. The Patriarch promised again and again, but never moved till he moved in opposition. For nearly two years the missionaries gained little access to the Armenians. But God brought the Armenians to them.

The dawn of hope began in January, 1833, when young Hohnannes Der Sahagian came to open his heart. Some years before his father had bought a cheap copy of the New Testament, which the young man read and pondered, and compared with the principles and practices of his church. Then he joined the school of Peshtimaljian, where his inquiries were encouraged and aided. He was joined by his friend Senekarim, and for two years and a half they were seeking and praying together for

light, unable to grasp the great and simple doctrine of salvation by grace alone. At length a hostile report turned their attention to the missionaries, and to them they went, first Hohnnes, and afterwards both together, saying, "We are in a miserable condition, and we need your help. We are in the fire; put forth your hands and pull us out." They soon found peace in believing, and became active laborers for the truth. From that point there appeared tokens of the constant presence of the Holy Spirit among the people. Opposition was speedily aroused, the school broken up, and for a time the press was stopped at Smyrna. But the good work went on. The number of attendants at Mr. Goodell's weekly meeting, and of visitors at the houses of the missionaries, steadily increased, and their errand was to talk of the way of salvation. The Bible was eagerly sought for, and the disposition to talk on religious subjects spread through the city, the suburbs, and the villages on the Bosphorus. In every circle there were found defenders of the truth, and occasionally a sincere believer. An influence was abroad which Mr. Goodell characterized as a "simple and entire yielding of the heart and life to the sole direction of God's Word and Spirit." Evangelical sermons began to be heard from the priests.

The missionary force was increased. A high school was opened at Pora, and stations occupied at Broosa and Trebizoud. A school for girls—a novel thing in Turkey—was opened at Smyrna. The missionaries steadily pursued the policy of disseminating the truth, without making attacks upon the Armenian church. Still, opposition was more and more aroused, but was either frustrated or overruled to the furtherance of the mission. Then the wealthy bankers of Constantinople determined

MISSIONS IN TURKEY.

7

to crush the high school. To provide a substitute, they founded a college in Scutari, and remodeled the national school in the quarter of Hass Keuy, which they committed to the supervision of a great banker residing there. In breaking up the high school, the vicar who conveyed the message unwittingly informed the boys for the first time that the sign of the cross is not enjoined in the Scriptures. And when Hobannes Sahagyan was suddenly removed from his school of forty, to the amazement of all concerned, he was engaged by the banker of Hass Keuy to take charge of that school of *six hundred*. Every effort was made to shake the banker's decision, but though he had never been known as favoring the evangelical cause, he was perfectly firm; and so Sahagyan was advanced to a post of far greater influence and freedom, which he held for two years with marked success.

The year 1839 witnessed a deep-laid plot for the expulsion of Protestantism from the land, suddenly overthrown by the providence of God. The enemies of the mission had enlisted some of the Sultan's chief officers, and even gained the ear of the Sultan himself. Sahagyan and two other persons, a teacher and a converted priest, were arrested, imprisoned, and, with much personal cruelty, banished. The mild Armenian Patriarch was deposed, and his place filled by a man of violence; bulls were issued by both the Greek and Armenian Patriarchs, prohibiting the reading or possession of all missionary books, and even all intercourse with the missionaries. Long lists of heretics were made out, and the storm seemed about to descend in its fury, when the hand of the persecutors was arrested by the hand of God. The rebellious Pacha of Egypt was the instrument of rescue. The Sultan, with his broken army, was suddenly forced