Theresa Huntington Ziegler 1875-1945

Worker in Turkey 1898-1905



Theresa was a Congregationalist. She always made sure to point out that she had been sent to Turkey by the Congregational Women's Board of Missions founded in Boston in 1868.

She served in the mission station in Harpoot (also called Harput or Kharpert) a town in the foothills of the Taurus Mountains in eastern Anatolia.

The timing of her arrival in Harpoot is interesting. She arrived just a couple of years after a major massacre of the Armenians under Sultan Abdul Hamid II that took place between 1894-96. She left in 1905 a few years before the First World War when the Armenian genocide was to end for ever the Armenian presence in their traditional homelands.

Theresa's father was the Rev. Henry Huntington, a Congregational minister in New England, USA. She was close to her family – her mother Mary, three brothers and two sisters.

Theresa graduated from Wellesley College as an English major in 1896. Her brother Ellsworth, who was a year younger than Teresa, had graduated from Beloit College in Wisconsin near the top of his class. In 1897 when he was 21 years old, he was asked by the president of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (AMBCFM) in Boston to become assistant to James Barton the president of Euphrates College in Harpoot. As Theresa was considering joining Ellsworth in Harpoot she wrote in her application to the mission, **"God has spoken to me so plainly ... that I do not dare to disobey Him. The need and the sadness of those who are without Christ has lately begun to be a burden upon my breast"**.

In September 1898 Theresa sailed from Boston aboard the S.S. Winifreda – a freight steamer. They were carrying 300 head of cattle, 89 horses and 1000 slaughtered cattle. There were 32 passengers on board. In the missionary party there were four workers plus Theresa.

They arrived in Tilbury and disembarked. After London they boarded the Orient Express train for Constantinople. They arrived in Turkey three weeks after sailing from Boston. They had to stay another three weeks in Constantinople as permits to go to the interior were not being issued.

By October 26, 1898 permits had been granted and they set out for Samsoun on a French steamer, The S.S. Circasse of the Paquet Line. The leader of their party was Caleb Gates. He had been in Turkey for 16 years. He and his wife Mary Ellen Moore (Nellie) lived in Turkey for 51 years until his retirement from the presidency of Robert College in Constantinople when he was 75 years old. He was President of Euphrates College in Harpoot during most of Theresa's stay there.

On the sea voyage most of their party were seasick. They arrived in Samsoun and completed the rest of the journey by 'araba' – horse cart. Theresa arrived in Harpoot 32 years after the first missionary party had made the same journey.

The town of Harpoot is perched on a steep hill near the Upper Euphrates. It had been the centre of the American Board's Eastern Turkey Mission since the arrival there of the first missionaries – Rev. Dunmore and his wife in 1855. He established a Protestant School. His wife returned to America after a year but Mr Dunmore stayed on and in 1857 he was joined by two couples Crosby and Susan Wheeler and Orson and Caroline Allen. In 1858 Mr Dunmore moved to Erzroom (Erzurum) – a place visited by Henry Martyn in 1812 as he attempted to reach Constantinople. Henry Martyn died in Tokat on October 16, 1812.

For Mr Dunmore America proved more dangerous than Turkey! He died of a bullet in the head in the Civil War when he was chaplain to a cavalry regiment.



Harpoot in 1907

In 1859 Dr Herman Barnum and his wife Mary arrived to join the Wheelers and the Allens and these three couples devoted their life's work to the Harpoot station. The Barnums were still there when Theresa arrived and she often mentions them in her letters.

The Allens left just before Theresa arrived after 40 years' service. Four of their children are buried in the missionary cemetery on the hillside just outside the town. The Wheelers also left after 40 years just before Theresa arrived. Dr Wheeler was the founder of Euphrates College and there is a bronze bust of him in the assembly hall. He set down clear guidance for their work. Some of this sounds surprisingly modern!

- Nothing was to be given away free. **"Because the Gospel is worth more to those to whom it costs some pecuniary sacrifice!"**
- Churches must be made self-supporting as soon as possible.
- People – including the women – had to be convinced that they could learn to read.

For background to the work in Harpoot that Theresa joined in 1898, it is well worth reading **Ten Years on the Euphrates** written in 1868 by Rev. Cosby H. Wheeler. A pdf of this book can be found at: http://www.archive.org/details/tenyearsontheeuphrates

He describes a region with hundreds of villages and cities and a population of about 400 to 500 souls speaking three different languages – Kurdish, Turkish and Armenian. Their goal was to plant self-supporting churches with a mission vision so they would be able to evangelise the region and the missionaries would be free to move to 'regions beyond'. They wanted to recruit 12 men to occupy four centres.

Harpoot was on the trade route between Persia and the outside world. As well as Armenians, Kurds and Turks there were Greeks, Persians, Circassians, Russians and renegade Europeans. Harpoot was 700 miles from Constantinople.

The Wheelers and the Allens used the Armenian language while the Barnums used Turkish. In communicating the Gospel their first focus was Bible distribution and teaching people to read the Bible. Their second focus was on Biblical preaching and there was a third focus. Rev. Wheeler writes, **"I must not fail to notice a third instrumentality used in bringing men to the truth – congregational singing. Thanks to Dr Riggs and some others many of the sweetest and most precious hymns of the churches at home are doing their blessed work of teaching and saving different races in Turkey. ... Thousands of young and old commit these precious hymns to memory and by the very exercise of singing them, bring their souls into sympathy with the sentiments of penitence, faith and tender love which they express."**

In 1859 a Theological Seminary was established with Mr Allen as the head assisted by Mr Wheeler and Mr Barnum. They offered a four-year course. Each year there was 7½ months study and the rest was evangelism in "out-stations" of Harpoot and other stations from which the students came.

To qualify as a student a young man had to be 18 years or older and have shown evidence of Christian character and earnestness of purpose. He had to have a strong desire to preach and be able to read and write a little as well as have a good knowledge of the Gospel story.

After two years, if it was thought a student would make a good teacher but not a good preacher, he was given a certificate as a teacher and he left the college. The goal of the missionaries was to be able to hand over the work of the seminary to the churches.

They realised the need to also educate the wives of the students. They opened the seminary for wives who attended seven hours a day five days a week. Many had children and so the seminary opened a nursery. In the beginning the women were not very interested. They came not because they wanted knowledge, but in obedience to their husbands since the seminary rules required

students to bring their wives. Many were not Christians. In 1867 there were 94 women students and 41 were converted during the year. The Bible was the chief textbook and a copy was given to each student the first day of term with the words, **"This is the key to God's treasure house of knowledge and your first duty is to learn to use it"**.



Armenian Family in Harpoot

As well as educating the students' wives, the goal of this seminary was to excite public attention to the matter of women's education. As these women went back to their communities and taught others. A "leaven" was being cast into the different communities.

As this work continued the women's seminary also began to admit single ladies with a view to providing educated future wives for unmarried male students. Another goal of the seminary was to unite the different races with their different languages as they studied together in one seminary.

It soon became apparent that there was a need for an Arabic medium seminary. Such a school was started in Mardin under the directorship of Mr Williams. In speaking of this venture Mr Wheeler wrote, **"It is one of the most encouraging facts in regard to this seminary that so many of its pupils have so much practical faith in Christ and that, by daily contact with Bible truth, their minds are becoming constantly more and more elevated and ennobled"**.

What about the "fruits" of this work? According to the principle that the churches should manage their own affairs, the pastors and delegates met in Harpoot on October 17, 1865 to discuss together some form of Ecclesiastical Union. After much prayer and consultation, with a mature and earnest spirit that surprised the missionaries, they adopted a constitution. Here is a translation of the beginning part:

"We thank God that evangelical churches have been planted in this land by the missionaries of the American Board and though it is the right of the missionaries still to prosecute their special work independently and we still need their aid, yet, feeling that it is the duty of the national pastors and churches to undertake this work themselves and knowing that this can be done only by united action, we therefore – the pastors and churches of the Harpoot Pashalie – agree to form a union."

Rev. Wheeler spells out the details of the constitution of this union in his book **Ten Years on the Euphrates**.

And so 75 years after the arrival of the first protestant missionaries in the Ottoman Empire, the future of the work in that part of the world seemed bright. By the mid-1890s there were not only American missionary societies in Turkey, there were German, Scottish, Irish, English, Dutch and French societies as well.

In 1895 the activities of the American Board in Turkey centred round 18 stations of which Harpoot was one. Forty years after the arrival of Rev. Dunmore in Harpoot in 1855, the small elementary school he established had grown into a mission station of dozens of buildings that was a source of great pride to the American Board. It occupied over 400 acres on the crest of the hill above the city proper. The schools drew pupils from a wide area of outlying villages.

There were signs of trouble ahead. Outbreaks of cholera threatened the populations of several towns. Swarms of locusts devastated crops causing widespread famine. In addition to these disasters, oppression of the Armenians was increasing.

In 1894 a massacre of Armenians broke out in Samsoun. The news spread like wildfire through the missionary community in Turkey. Generally the mood was one of faithful stoicism. Dr Barnum wrote, **"We are glad to be here whatever may happen. If the Lord permits us to be cut off in an uprising of fanaticism, it will be because we can bless the country more in that way than in any other. Perhaps something of this kind is necessary; if so, for my part, I am ready"**.

This was the prelude to a wave of massacres that swept the country between October 1894 and January 1896. It is estimated that 200,000 Armenians in various Ottoman provinces were killed and thousands more left homeless. The missionaries in Harpoot realised they were about to be put to the test of their lifetime.

In November 1895 the mission buildings in Harpoot were attacked and the devastation of life and property was heart-breaking. This situation was certainly one of the reasons that Theresa felt compelled to join her brother Ellsworth and try to alleviate some of the great need in this recently devastated land.

So Theresa began to unpack her trunks and settle in to the room she was to live in for the next seven years in Harpoot. Together with the other new recruits – Laura Ellsworth from America and Ada Hall from Liverpool, England. Theresa started Armenian lessons right away. She also started giving English lessons to the Armenian teachers. She loved to go for long walks or horseback rides for exercise and she kept this up during all of her seven years in Harpoot. Any remaining free time was spent in writing letters home. These letters are collected in a book entitled, **Great Need over the Water** by Stina Katchadourian.



Euphrates College,

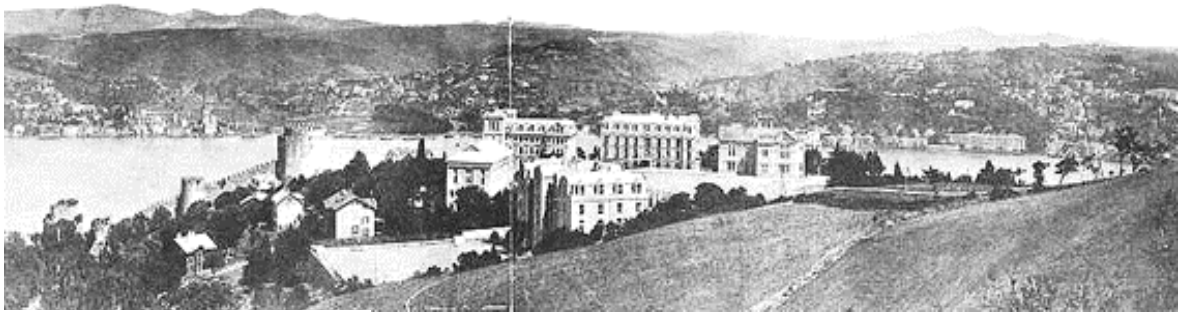
The missionary group in Harpoot welcomed the infusion of strength Theresa and her co-workers represented. Although the workload for each person was heavy and the hours long, there was a sense that the political situation was stabilising and the government would permit the work to go on and to spread.

Ellsworth was very glad to have his sister in Harpoot. He wrote to his brother, Harry, **"I just want to say that Theresa improves all the time. She is very bright and merry and her character has gained a great deal of strength"**.

By the end of the school year Theresa had managed to learn the Armenian alphabet well enough to manage her first letter in Armenian. She wrote an invitation to some Armenian women teachers to visit the summerhouse of the missionaries called 'The Garden'. It was a modest place but was surrounded by fruit trees of all kinds. It was quiet. The air was fresh and the views of the mountain scenery were splendid. It was about an hour's walk from Harpoot.

During the summer they celebrated the 40th anniversary of the Barnum family coming to Harpoot. It was a time of much storytelling and some stock taking. All agreed that the shadow of the massacres still lay heavy on the people. Many of the best young men, the ones trained to be teachers and preachers, wanted to emigrate to America and the moral and spiritual condition of the people did not appear to be the best. Still they weren't discouraged. They thought it was a matter of time and hard work for the Christian spirit to spread.

In early April 1900 the death occurred of a young baby born to Dr. and Mrs Gates – Elizabeth. They had prayed for a daughter for many years and had been thrilled to welcome her into their family. Dr. Gates wrote to the Board in America, **"Last Saturday our little girl was taken to her heavenly home in a very sudden manner. She had a cold and bronchial trouble which the doctor called slight. She woke up from sleep gasping for breath and in a few moments her spirit had taken its flight. She was a beautiful child, the light and joy of our home, but the Lord knows best and he will take such care of her as we could not"**. This was the second child Dr and Mrs Gates had buried in Turkey. They had lost their firstborn son at their first station in Arabic-speaking Mardin to the south of Harpoot.



Robert College, Constantinople ~ 1900

At the burial service Mr Barnum spoke some words of comfort. This was especially poignant since the Barnums had buried six out of their nine children in the graveyard. Describing a picture of the mission buildings, Mr. Wheeler wrote, **"Upon the right and in the rear of the picture is seen the little missionary cemetery in which lie the remains of Mrs Williams and 10 of our "little ones" whom Jesus has taken to himself"**. The death toll among missionary children was very high but they still pressed on to accomplish the task God had called them to.

In August 1900 Ellsworth wanted to go on an excursion to Lake Gyüljük at the foot of Hazar Baba, the region's highest mountain. He invited Theresa, Ada and Mary to go with him. Part of his reason for the trip was that he wanted to map the area. Theresa wrote to her family of the astonishment of the local people at her great rowing skills. Little could they have known that she had been a member of the Wellesley crew!

Theresa's younger brother George, three years younger than her, had just graduated from Williams College and was on his way to visit Theresa and Ellsworth in Harpoot. George was to spend a major part of his life in Turkey. After a short stay in Harpoot he took a job as tutor at Robert College in Constantinople – the first American institution of higher learning in a foreign country. The college had opened in 1863, three years earlier than the American University of Beirut. It was founded with a missionary impetus but was independent of the American Board. George remained at Robert College until 1904 when he left Turkey for graduate school at Hartford Theological Seminary and was then ordained as a Congregational minister in 1907.

After a great deal of frantic reconstruction to the buildings in Harpoot during the summer of 1900, the Fall semester started on an optimistic note. A record number of students were clamouring to be accepted. The Barnums were expected to return after their furlough in Switzerland. Soon a new missionary was expected to join them – Miriam Platt. She and Theresa became very close friends and Theresa named her youngest daughter after her.

After the massacres of 1894-1896 a number of missions, including the American Board, had set up orphanages for the thousands who had lost their families. They needed to be taught a skill so they could earn their own living as soon as possible. There was precedent for this since the Armenians had always been the artisans of that part of the world. The businesses established included a tailoring business, a bakery, a rug weaving business as well as weaving cloth and gingham. All these were soon profit-making.

By 1901 Theresa was suffering from a degree of homesickness. Both her brothers had left and she herself had still three or four years before she would go on furlough. Soon she would celebrate her third Christmas in Harpoot. There were many rumours among the Armenians of new massacres. It was hard to know if any of these rumours bore any truth. In general there was a lot of unease in the land. One report in the Missionary Herald says, **"Economic conditions in this land continue to grow worse and worse. The torpor produced by the events of 1895 still remains like a dead weight on the hearts of the people and neither prayer nor faith can yet remove it. Periods of fear still periodically occur, followed by longer or shorter seasons of paralysis of effort. Then there seems an increasing stagnation of trade in general caused by the partial or entire crippling of certain industries"**.

But despite the many rumours of impending massacres the autumn of 1902 passed without any earth-shaking events. Theresa continued to enjoy her teaching and was encouraged by the progress her girls were making. She writes, "**For composition they are translating the Gospel of John into English**".

As 1904 drew to a close, Theresa decided the time had come to take a furlough. She had been working hard for six years and she was tired. So in the summer she set out from Harpoot the same way she had come seven years earlier down the hill to the plain, over the plain, over the mountains to Samsoun on the Black Sea and from there by steamer to Constantinople. Her travel companions included the Barnums who were on their way to the United States for furlough.

After a few days in Constantinople, Theresa and the Barnums caught a steamer to Naples. From Naples Theresa expected to travel by herself to Rome to meet up with her sister Cornelia and her travelling party. But there was a surprise for her! Waiting for the tug boat in Naples harbour to take her ashore, she caught sight of two figures in a small rowing boat alongside the steamer. In the boat were Cornelia and a gentleman friend, John. In letters to other family members Theresa expressed many doubts about John as a suitable partner for her sister. We don't know what happened but it wasn't John that Cornelia married.

From this point on we don't know too much about what happened to Theresa. Her daughter had no more of her letters. We do know that on her return she resigned from the Women's Board as a missionary and a year and a half later she married Charles Ziegler.

We learn a little more of the circumstances in a letter of March 16, 1906 that she wrote to her brother Ellsworth. She said that two days earlier she had become engaged to Charles Ziegler Elizabeth's older brother. Elizabeth and Theresa had been classmates many years earlier when they were at Wellesley College. She tells Ellsworth that Charles had begun to care for her before she went to Turkey but she didn't know it. Now that he had declared his love for her she couldn't help loving him in return. She expresses the desire that he would never be disappointed in her and asks Ellsworth to pray to this end.

Charles was eleven years older than Theresa. He had a very demanding business and so she wasn't able to see him very often. We learn from her letter that they are planning an October wedding.

As the news of her engagement and upcoming wedding reached her Armenian women friends in Harpoot she received a letter from one of them written in excellent English. It read as follows: "**When I heard the news of your engagement I was sorry much for my part and for the school to lose such a useful worker, but on the contrary I wish you gladly to have good fortune for the future. I congratulate you for your new friend. May God keep both of you and bless you in every case. ... I will never forget those kind deeds which you have done for me. It was good for me to have such a compassionate friend as you but as it is pleasing to God to be separated from you what can I say? Here after I will remember you lovingly**".

Theresa needed to inform the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions of her resignation and her upcoming marriage. She wrote to the Board Secretary, James Barton, who had spent some time in Harpoot himself. He warmly commends her for her work in Harpoot and then says, "**While this brings a sense of most keen disappointment, yet I want to say frankly that I believe you have made the right decision and that the Lord will bless you in it. We shall always remember you as a member of the Harpoot circle. You know the statement, the truth of which you will realise more and more I am sure, that when one has been a missionary of the American Board he never ceases to be such wherever he may go and whatever he may do. I feel sure that your interest in the work of the Board and especially at Harpoot, will never slacken and that we shall always have in you a coadjutor and friend**".

Theresa Lyman Huntington and Charles Lincoln Ziegler were married on October 18, 1906. They spent their first married years living with Charles' family in Roxbury where they had their four children – Constance was born in 1907 followed by Caroline in 1909. Their son Lyman was born in 1912 and in 1919, when Theresa was 45, the youngest daughter Miriam arrived.

James Barton was quite right when he said there would always be a 'missionary side' to Theresa's life. From 1926 until her death from cancer in 1945 at the age of 70 she frequently gave talks on her experiences in Harpoot.

Theresa and Charles were devoted to one another. Miriam remembers, "**I never heard them argue or fight they were totally devoted to each other and they never tried to hide their affection for each other**".

As for the American Board work in Harpoot, the Armenian massacres of 1915 devastated the entire area. What remained was further devastated by the earthquake of 1939. Certainly the strategy of committing the work to national workers as soon as possible proved vital. Only God knows what has resulted from the faithful service of the missionaries in the Harpoot station. He never wastes the sacrifices He asks of His servants. Heaven will tell the story.