Life and Light for Woman, Volume 9

#Woman's Board of Missions
LIFE AND LIGHT

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GIRLS' SCHOOLS IN TURKEY.

NUMBER FIVE.

MARDIN BOARDING-SCHOOL.

High up on one of the loftiest peaks of the Anti-Taurus Mountains, in the province of Koordistan, in Asiatic Turkey, stands the city of Mardin—most emphatically "a city set upon a hill." As far back as the fourteenth century it was in vigorous existence, successfully resisting the attacks of the brutal Tamerlane, and for a long time hurling defiance at his armies from its almost inaccessible crag. The name "Mardin" is said to be of Koordish origin, meaning "insane man," and, according to tradition, was given to the city in this way: "A woman in search of lost sheep wandered over the mountain, and accidentally came upon a man slumbering upon its rocky crags. She awoke him, and inquired what he was doing in such a desolate and inaccessible place. 'This is the site of a future city,' he replied. 'You are a crazy man,' answered the woman, and resumed her hunt for her sheep; and so this nameless personage has given a name to the city of which he prophesied.' The language of the inhabitants is chiefly Arabic, although Koordish and Turkish are spoken to some extent, and is the only station of the American Board where attention is specially devoted to the Arabic-speaking races of Turkey.

Probably the first American who ever visited the city was Dr.
Grant, in 1839. The first resident missionary was Mr. William F. Williams, who moved there from Mosul, in 1858, and who, with the assistance and companionship of his devoted wife, laid foundations broad and deep, upon which the present work has arisen.

Here, as in other parts of Turkey, the necessity for educated wives for native helpers suggested the need of a girls’ school, and in September, 1868, the first year of the existence of the Woman’s Board, Miss Olive L. Parmelee was sent out by our society to take up this work. In the following May she writes:—

‘Now that we are happily settled in our new home, you are expecting to hear something of our labors. Well, stammerers as we are, and only able to express a few ideas as we would like, we are engaged in something this summer that is helping us more than any teacher could—a little opportunity to practice what we do know, and come more in contact with the women. The plan of opening the Girls’ Boarding-School had to be given up, as it was impossible to secure suitable buildings. However, the men came together as usual in the Theological School; and as three of them brought their wives, it seemed best, both for their sakes and our own, to organize a little class. This gives us something to do, and relieves us of the uneasy feeling that we are idlers in the Lord’s vineyard.

‘I wish you could have looked in upon us this morning, and seen our five pupils seated on the floor, with their queer silver head-dresses, and their embroidered or bright-colored veils thrown gracefully over their heads, sheltering their faces as they bend over their books. I have half a mind to introduce them to you, if you will permit me. First, there is little Miriam, as we call her, to distinguish her from the other Miriam, who sits beside her. I cannot tell her age, though I presume she may not be more than fifteen; but I find I cannot judge of ages in this country, as the women marry so very young. Miriam is but just learning to read, and pursues her studies under some difficulties, as she is obliged to bring her tiny six months’ old baby to school with her. Next to her sits Miriam from Hulbaat. She is not so quiet and prepossessing in her looks and manners as some of the others, but she is bright and quick, and very eager to learn. Then there is Shimone, who graduated at Harpoot, and comes here to be with her husband, and improve in her Arabic. As I look at her delicate face, with its almost childish look, I am reminded of our dear girls in America, whom we shelter very carefully in the home-circle for many years; and yet our little Shimone has for some time had a home of her own, and many womanly cares. The other two are women from the congregation, who, we thought, might profit by coming.’

During the years 1869–71, the buildings were erected which are
seen on the extreme left of the picture on the previous page (Fig. 1). The first, beginning at the left hand, is the Collegiate Theological Seminary. The second is a double house containing the Girls' School, rooms for two lady teachers, and a missionary residence. The other two buildings are missionary residences.

The girls' school-room was completed so as to be occupied in June, 1870, and the term opened with five regular pupils, besides others who came in as often as possible for lessons. Of its first examination, in 1871, Miss Parmelee wrote:—

"Mr. Pond conducted the opening exercises, and, I must confess, that I improved the opportunity to indulge in some wandering thoughts. I had one excuse—I was surprised to see how bright and pretty the pupils all looked. Their clean holiday clothes, and their smooth, shining braided hair, were some improvement upon their daily school attire; but more of an improvement upon anything we see outside of our school-room, and upon what we could have seen there one year, or two years ago. All had new handkerchiefs thrown gracefully over their heads and falling down their shoulders; some white, embroidered, others figured with gay colors. If I had not thought to dress my own head with a black lace veil and bright ribbons, I should have felt out of place among them.

"The recitations followed very much in their daily order—reading, arithmetic, lessons in the Scripture, Catechism, Westminster Catechism, and classes in the Old and New Testament. As Miss Baker was away, on account of illness, her classes in geography and physiology were omitted, to our great regret. All was far more satisfactory than I had dared to hope. I had feared that the presence of the Kokowadjis and other men would send the girls, and perhaps, also, the women, back to their old habits of hanging their heads and giggling behind their handkerchiefs, when asked to answer a question; and my heart was made more glad than I can tell you, to see how forgetful they were of these old customs, and how they modestly, but confidently, looked up when the gentlemen questioned them, giving their answers as they would not have given them to me months ago. After the exercises, parents came up with very proud, beaming faces to thank my 'kindness,' and to say, 'The Lord increase your good,' etc.; all intended to express their satisfaction for the pains taken with wives and daughters.'

From the time of this first examination to the present, the school has gained steadily in influence and power; not only supplying educated wives and teachers, but winning the respect and approval of pupils, parents, city officials, friends and foes alike. Miss Baker, who joined Miss Parmelee in 1830, was married to Mr. Stocking, of the Presbyterian Board, in 1873. Her place was supplied in
MARDIN BOARDING-SCHOOL.

1874 by Miss Sarah Sears, who, during Miss Parmelee’s absence in this country, in 1873, was placed in charge of the school. In 1876 Miss Parmelee, who returned to Mardin as Mrs. Andrus, took out with her Miss Clarissa Pratt, as an associate teacher.

As a specimen of the outside work of graduates, we may take the school at Mosul, which is probably the largest of any in the out-stations. It is taught by Fareelda, one of the early graduates, and the wife of the native pastor. The description of the school is best given in her own words, taken from a letter written to Mrs. Andrus, in 1876. She says:—

“You have heard about my work, and the great increase in the number of girls in the school. One hundred and fifteen names are now written, and the average attendance is seventy-five. What can I do with seventy-five girls, of all ages? How can I make them obey and be quiet? How can I hear all their lessons? What room have we large enough for so many? I have them in two small rooms and in the ewan (a kind of piazza enclosed on three sides). When the church committee saw how hard it was for me, because of the number of pupils and the heat,—for the house is very open to the sun, which pours into it from morning until night,—they said: ‘We think you would better send some of the younger girls to their homes for the summer;’ but you know I do not wish to let any one go out of the schools without learning all I can teach her. The mothers, too, are not willing, but say, ‘If you dismiss the younger ones, we shall take out the older ones;’ so this does not seem best to me or my husband. I have thought, Oh, that you could send a pupil from the school to help me! Pray for me, you and the teachers and the girls of the school, that the Lord may strengthen me, and make me able to do much more in His vineyard.”

There are at present connected with the Mardin station twenty village and day schools, with nearly five hundred pupils, about one-third of whom are girls. The numbers are somewhat less than they were two years ago, owing to the effects of the war. The progress of female education in this vicinity for the last seven years is thought to be quite remarkable, when it is considered that during nearly all these years the people have been overburdened with the heavy taxation and war-levies of a government making its last desperate effort for existence; while crippled finances at home made the improvement of what opportunities there were for enlargement an impossibility.

As an illustration of present needs, a very interesting work is reported in a village a few miles from Mardin. The account says:—

“We have a teacher and a young woman there this winter, and they work night and day. It is, ‘Come here!’ ‘Go there!’
‘Read to me!’ ‘Pray with me!’ One whom we sent over there last Saturday, said ‘It is killing the teachers, the amount of work they have to do.’

“Oh, how much we need means for such places! In that village we have only that one little, dark, dingy room, in which friends at home would not stall their cattle; and it has to answer for church and school, audience-room, sitting-room, sleeping-room, dining-room and kitchen; in which, if they make a fire, they are sadly smoked. They are daily calling to us for help. They are ready and willing to do all they can themselves. Money, they have none; but of such as they have, they will give — they will work. But what can we do?’”

**SPAIN.**

**LETTER FROM MRS. WM. GULICK.**

We make the following extracts from a letter recently received by our Secretary:—

* * * “You will rejoice with us, that, though the persecution of the church-members still continues, most of them remain true to their faith in the Gospel. It would be interesting to record all that this ‘little flock’ is passing through of suffering and trial, or even annoyance; but it would be impossible. I will only mention the latest case that has come to our knowledge.

“Day before yesterday, the wife of one of those who has been longest a member of the church, called upon us to tell of their troubles. She said they were beset by ladies and priests urging them to abandon us. The ladies offered to send the children to an expensive school if she would take them out of ours, but she said:

“‘No! although I have to pay for them, they are learning something where they are, and they shall stay; they have never learned anything yet in a Catholic school.’

“‘But your husband is condemned — he is lost! Can you not influence him to leave?’ they asked.

“‘No,’ she answered; ‘before he was in this he spent his evenings in the tavern, his money in drink, and his blows on me; now he spends his leisure with his Bible, at home, and has such a love for the book that he often strikes a light in the night to read a little, as he cannot rest for thinking of the Gospel.’

“This woman is bright and intelligent, but, as yet, is not converted. She says she is ‘neither for the one or the other,’ but her