WENDY ELLIOTT

Grit and Grace in a World Gone Mad

HUMANITARIANISM IN TALAS, TURKEY 1908 - 1923

FOREWORD BY KAMO MAYILYAN

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About the book . . .

The title says it all—what an incredible story of resilience, courage and dedication of a small band of people trying to create islands of humanity in a region of constant armed conflict, tension and extremism. A must read for all those who want to understand what it takes to make a difference in a time of chaos and turmoil.

– **George Weber**, secretary-general emeritus of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent (i.e. Intern Fed)

A remarkably detailed and vivid account of events leading up to the Armenian Genocide, and the heroic efforts of foreign missionaries to confront unbelievably hellish conditions. Thoroughly and exhaustively researched, the author reveals scenes which even the most seasoned reader of this period will find revealing.

– **Atom Egoyan**, filmmaker

A captivating and a unique book about a dark and critical period of change and conflict which has not been sufficiently understood or acknowledged. Meticulously researched and faithfully narrated accounts of Christian aid workers' struggle depict one of the earliest and heart wrenching humanitarian efforts of the 20th century of a global scale. Extremely relevant for our times when religious conflicts, humanitarian crises and forced migrations are on the rise.

– **Kumru Bilici**, journalist, and executive at Voices in Dialogue

A priceless, finely-detailed juxtaposition of political and mission history in the midst of horrific tragedy. This study is a significant contribution to understanding Turkish political and religious life today.

– **Bishop Terry Brown**, Canadian mission historian and archivist

An engaging first-hand account that interweaves the personal and historical record of the tumultuous years of revolution, war and genocide in the Talas region of Ottoman Turkey. The humanitarian aid mission and its American and Canadian staff were key foreign witnesses to the horrific mass deportations and massacres of Armenians and Greeks, and provided heroic assistance to the countless refugees and orphans.

– **Alan Whitehorn**, professor emeritus, Royal Military College of Canada, and editor of *The Armenian Genocide: The Essential Reference Guide*

To all the front line humanitarian workers whose courageous actions help survivors survive, and to their financial, political and emotional supporters, who help keep them going.

Foreword

I first met Wendy Elliott in 2009 in my native country of Armenia. I was working in Yerevan at the American organization, National Democratic Institute, when a colleague said, "Today's guest speaker for the Young Political Leaders' school is Wendy Elliott from Canada. Will you interpret for her?" I was happy to do so. I remember we introduced ourselves, exchanged smiles, and she handed me a small Canadian flag pin. Little did I know that only a few years later, I would end up in Canada as an immigrant with my wife Meri and our one-year-old daughter Mariam, and that Wendy and I would collaborate to make public the remarkable story of a small group of humanitarians who displayed true grit and amazing grace under fire.

In 2012, as I was trying to adapt to my new life, working and studying hard to become a part of Canadian society, I never stopped being connected with Armenia. I continued writing articles for *168 Hours*, an Armenian newspaper, and kept up to date on the issues affecting my homeland. In 2014 I attended the Genocide and Human Rights University Program offered jointly by Zoryan Institute and the University of Toronto. It gave me more knowledge and understanding of not only the Armenian genocide, but all genocides of the twentieth century and the phases leading up to them. One day I met a young woman from the Armenian community of Toronto who had read one of my articles. She told me she had met a couple at a local church whose great aunt had been a missionary in the Ottoman Empire and had saved 3,000 orphans. I was immediately interested, and visited Nancy and Eric Moore, who showed old pictures and told me about their aunt, Susan Wealthy Orvis. I wrote an article about this missionary and her heroic actions, and as I had become friends with Wendy after arriving in Canada, I asked her to help me to polish it. She did some extra research and considerable editing, so I offered her co-authorship. That article turned out to be the impetus for this book.

After the article was published in the Boston-based *Armenian Weekly*, I was contacted by Julia Ann Orvis, a great niece of Susan Wealthy Orvis. Julie had original archival material of the missionary in an old trunk, and asked if I would like to see it. Of course, my answer was yes! I was astounded to learn that Julie had contacted several scholars over the years, but no one had expressed any interest in these original documents. When I shared the news with Vahan Kololian, a successful Armenian-Canadian business man who was sponsoring a project for positive change in Armenia which I was working on, he was as excited by this news as I was, and graciously offered to share the travel costs to Wisconsin with me.

When I saw the trunk in Julie's house, I had goose bumps. What a treasure it was! It contained more than 450 letters, photographs and other documents, including an account of the orphans and how they ended up in orphanages. For me, an Armenian, it was like discovering a very important missing piece of my own history. On the outside of one of the envelopes Susan had written: "Very valuable. A record of the sufferings and faith and loyalty of Christians in Talas, Turkey during the World War 1914-1918. Keep this, S.W.O." For the next hundred years, Susan Wealthy Orvis' family had honoured her request. But now was the time to do something important with the material.

I spent the whole day and night photographing the archive, thinking about what to do with it. By the time I got home, I decided that Wendy would be the perfect person to turn it

into a book. She had already written a book set in Armenia, a young adult novel about survivors of the Armenian genocide. She had self-published *The Dark Triumph of Daniel Sarkisyan*, and had done such thorough research for it that even I learned new things about Armenia from it, including many old names of streets in my own city of Yerevan! Most importantly, and above all, Wendy had the heart and soul to do it. In many ways, she reminded me of Susan Wealthy Orvis. Wendy had been an international development volunteer in Armenia, and one of her assignments was in Gyumri (formerly Alexandropol), Armenia's second largest city, where Susan had helped establish an orphanage and relief centre. Both Wendy and Susan had gone back to school in mid-career to earn a master's degree in education, Susan in religious education and Wendy in distance education. Susan taught elementary and high school pupils in Talas, and Wendy taught college students in Ontario. Both were strong, independent, caring women with an interest in making the world a better place. They even shared the same birthday!

Unfortunately, not even my relentless insistence that people should know this story could persuade Wendy to write it. She said she didn't have the same amount of passion as I, which would be necessary for the time and effort the project would require. But I had an ace up my sleeve. I had gone to Boston to obtain from Harvard's Houghton Library a copy of Susan's handwritten journal about her harrowing journey across Siberia during the Russian Revolution and her courageous work in Alexandropol. I urged Wendy to read "Through Russia 1917", convinced it would change her mind. It did. She was hooked by Susan's quirky personality, positive, down-to-earth attitude, and amazing adventure. After four years of intensive research and writing, Wendy has woven the story of Susan and her brave Talas colleagues into the events of the last destructive years of the Ottoman Empire to produce this captivating book.

Grit and Grace in a World Gone Mad is the perfect title for a book about the highest values shown during the darkest times. Within a span of 15 years, a small group of American and Canadian missionaries and relief workers, part of a massive international humanitarian effort, saved thousands of Armenian, Greek and Turkish lives while the despotic leaders of the empire were dragging its people through two coups d'état, four regional wars, three genocides, and a world war. It's a story that needed to be told to acknowledge and thank these brave people. It's also a story that needs to be read to understand how indifference to corruption, callousness to suffering, acceptance of fake news as fact, and demonization and fear of "the other" can lead to violence and ultimately to genocide. It's happening in our world today, and it will happen tomorrow unless we learn the lessons of history. *Grit and Grace in a World Gone Mad* is an important step towards that goal.

Kamo Mayilyan, 2018
Toronto and Yerevan

An Important Word about the Words

This book is written in Canadian English, which is a hybrid of British (*labour* not *labor*) and American (*organization* not *organisation*). Additionally, quotations from Americans will contain American spelling, and British quotations British spelling. Since most place names were changed after 1923, I have chosen the most common name and spelling among the missionaries and relief workers for a place during the time period. For example, present-day Elâzığ was known variously as Kharpert, Harput, Harpout, and Harpoot; I use Harpoot for ease of pronunciation. Please refer to the Glossary for other seeming abnormalities or for finding present-day location names. I also use common spellings of the period, e.g., Talat for Tâlat.

Almost every paragraph contains small endnote numbers. If you are a scholar, you'll be delighted to find the source of the information in the Notes section. If you aren't, ignore them—unless you're one of those people who likes to read the occasional note that has more information. I ask strict scholars to kindly ignore long passages of dialogue not indented in the proper academic style, and any minor word or punctuation change I have used in dialogue that is sprinkled throughout the book. It has been done sparingly, and only in the interest of flow and readability. All the dialogue has been taken directly from the letters, journals and memoirs of the person "speaking."

Dates are written as Month Day, e.g., December 25, according to the Gregorian calendar, which we use today. This explains the change in dates by 13 days of some Russian or Ottoman events, which were recorded in the old Julian calendar. For instance, the Bolshevik Revolution is called the October Revolution, though it took place in November according to today's calendar.

In English the courtesy title of "Mister" comes before a name; in Turkish, titles such as Agha, Bey, Efendi and Pasha follow a name (or sometimes are in the middle, e.g., Dr. Nazim Bey Selanikli). Not all Turks used a surname back then.

The missionaries tended to use "Ottoman Empire" and "Turkey" interchangeably. When I refer to the Empire I mean the larger territory, of which Turkey is one part. The government of the day was the government of the Ottoman Empire. Missionaries also used the names "Turkey," "Asiatic Turkey," "Asia Minor" and "Anatolia" interchangeably. In fact, Anatolia is defined by geographers as the area roughly equivalent to the American Board's Western Turkey Mission (see maps in Chapter 1). This geographical difference was understood at the time because the area east of Anatolia was often referred to as "eastern Anatolia." Though today the region is eastern Turkey, Armenians know it as "western Armenia" because it was the location of the six mostly-Armenian occupied vilayets of the Ottoman Empire, and is part of their traditional homeland. Similarly when they referred to the Caucasus they usually meant the Transcaucasus, roughly equivalent to today's Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.

Regarding the different Christian denominations, most missionaries and relief workers were Protestant (Congregationalists, Presbyterian, Anglican, etc.), though there were Roman Catholics and Friends (Quakers) among them. Most Greeks were Greek Orthodox, most Russians were Russian Orthodox, and most Armenians were members of the Eastern Apostolic Church, but were called Gregorians. However, it is important to know there were also Protestant and Roman Catholic Armenians and Greeks. Except for reference to the

Dervishes, I do not distinguish between the various Muslim sects.

Table of Contents

Part I:
A Time to Plant

1. A New Breed

As revolutions go, the Young Turks' was short, sweet, and relatively bloodless. It lasted twenty-two days in July 1908. Only a few dozen officials and army officers died. Its purpose was not to overthrow the sultan, but to force him to restore the constitution of 1876, which guaranteed justice for all subjects of the Ottoman Empire, freedom of religion, and freedom of the press.[1] When news spread of the abolishment of the sultan's vast espionage network, release of political prisoners, amnesty for political exiles, and most importantly, a restored constitution, a "carnival of joy" erupted throughout the Empire. "We are all brothers!" declared Ismail Enver, one of the revolutionaries. "Under the same blue sky, we are all proud to be Ottomans!"[2]

A young missionary in Constantinople wrote to her friends back home in the United States, "Last Sunday Turks, Christians and Jews in one wagon were seen embracing and congratulating one another. People can scarcely take time to sleep for their joy!"[3]

In Brousa a man who had been falsely accused of being a spy "made an impassioned speech, among other things, denouncing the spies and the spy system, in words of fire! Oh, the joy of uncurbed speech at last! As he stepped down into the crowd again, he exclaimed, 'I have lived for this hour!'"[4]

Susan Wealthy Orvis, an American missionary stationed in Talas, was on vacation when she heard the news. It was midnight as her boat approached Beirut. Fireworks lit up the sky. "The city was beautiful," she said. "The many lights in the houses, which are in terraces, reaching up from the shore and in a curve around the harbor, were more brilliant than usual that evening, for the city was celebrating the new constitution." She was surprised when she reached Jerusalem that there had been no celebration. The reason became clear two weeks later, when they started "putting up their flags. They have had to wait till the governor of the city would give permission,"[5] she added wryly.

The Young Turk revolutionaries proclaimed "Liberty, Justice, Equality and Fraternity, for all the races and religions of the empire, with equal rights and equal duties for all." George Washburn, American-born president of Constantinople's Robert College, had "no reason to doubt the honesty and sincerity" of the Young Turks, but he cautioned that lofty goals were one thing, and implementation quite another: "As we in America proclaimed these principles in 1776, and have not yet been able to put them in force in all parts of our country, we may expect to wait some time before they can be fully carried out" in the Ottoman Empire.[6]

No one had to wait long before they saw which way the wind blew.

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Susan Wealthy Orvis loved her name. She loved it almost as much as she loved God and her family. Sometimes she had to use her middle initial, but whenever possible, she used her full name. Even letters to her siblings were signed, "Your loving sister, Susan Wealthy Orvis." The love of her name was an extension of the love she felt for her grandmother, for whom she was named. She was very proud of her grandmother, Susan Wealthy White Orvis,

who had graduated from Oberlin College in 1844.[7] At that time less than one percent of Americans were college graduates, and even fewer were women.[8] When Susan-the-younger left Dubuque, Iowa for Talas, a town in the middle of Turkey, in 1902 to become a missionary, she brought with her all her worldly goods. They included her grandmother's college diploma, as well as her own from Iowa State College (later Grinnell College). After all, it was expected that, except for returning home to the States every seven years for a one-year furlough[9], she would remain in Turkey until she retired—or died, whichever came first.

Susan had thought seriously about becoming a missionary during her last year at college. She had joined the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions (SVM), and learned about missionary work conducted by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (known as ABCFM, or simply, the American Board) in Africa, India, China, Japan and Turkey. ABCFM had been founded by Congregationalists, though now its missionaries belonged to various Protestant denominations, and was the largest Christian mission society in the Ottoman Empire. The once-mighty Empire was still fairly big, encompassing parts of northern Africa, Mesopotamia, the Balkans, Egypt (though Egypt was a *de facto* British protectorate), Lebanon, most of Syria, and all of Turkey. The land where St. Paul was born, where Noah's Ark landed, and where St. Basil lived, held enormous attraction for Susan.

ABCFM had four divisions in Turkey: Eastern, Central, Western and “European” (the latter in the Balkans). Trying to convert Jews had proved to be a losing battle, so the mission in Jerusalem would soon close. Trying to convert Muslims was not advised. One could convert to Islam, but one could never leave. There was actually a death penalty for Muslim apostates, though by 1900 it was generally accepted that they would no longer be put to death.[10] That left as possible converts Christians of other denominations: Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, Armenian Gregorian (Apostolic), and Protestants of various ethnicities. There were an estimated 16 million Christians in Turkey,[11] certainly enough for the ABCFM to invest time, money and effort. And they had invested a considerable amount since 1819. In 1902, when Susan attended the annual SVM convention in Toronto, and made the decision to go to Turkey,[12] there were 172 missionaries in 18 stations responsible for 312 outstations, with 14,901 communicants in the four divisions.[13]


BLACK SEA
Sinope
Batum
Tiflis
TRANSCAUCASIA
(RUSSIA)
Kastamouni
Samsoun
Trebizond
Ordou
Marsovan
Amasia
Kars
Alexandropol
Erevan
Bosporus
Constantinople
Scutari
Ismid
Adabazar
Bardezag
Sea of
Marmara
Gallipoli
Dardanelles
Brousa
Angora
Eskishehir
Yozgat
Sivas
Erzingan
Erzroom
WESTERN TURKEY MISSION
EASTERN TURKEY MISSION
Gemerek
PERSIA
Ak Hissar
Afion Kara Hissar
Cesarea
Talas
Gorun
Harpoot
Moush
Manisa
Smyrna
Akserai
Malatia
Bitlis
Van
CENTRAL
Aidin
Konia
Nigdeh
Hadjin
Zeitoon
Diarbekir
Bourdour
Erekli
Oulou Kushla
Sis
Marash
Midyat
Urmia
TURKEY
Mardin
Tarsus
Adana
Aintab
Oorfa
Mersine
MISSION
Alexandretta
Mosel
Antioch
Aleppo
MESOPOTAMIA
Kessab
Der Zor
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
CYPRUS
Homs
Beirut
Damascus
Baghdad
0 50 100 150 200 250
English Statute Miles
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The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions
Asiatic Turkey 1910
Stations
Major Outstations
Division Boundaries
Other Cities
Railway
Foreign Boundaries
Map is based on William E. Strong, The Story of the American Board (1910).

Though the common perception of a missionary was a "somber-garbed, psalm-singing, nasal-voiced, narrow-minded proselytizer"[14], that was not true of Susan and her colleagues. She was part of a new breed. First, she was college-educated. In her case, she had had to work as a rural school teacher from age 16 to 25 before she could earn enough money to attend college, but she had graduated with the highest honours. She was also the daughter, niece and granddaughter of ministers, and a great granddaughter of deacons—all Congregationalists. In fact, she could trace all the branches of her family back to the Puritans who settled the Massachusetts Colony in the 1630s.[15] One group of Puritans were "strict Calvinists, who believed in predestination and a God who was an active participant in the daily life of earthly matters."[16] They were known as Congregationalists because of their conviction that the congregation should not answer to a central ecclesiastical authority, but rather govern itself.[17] They believed in the "priesthood of all believers,"[18] that is, that each person had the right to a personal interpretation of the principles of Christianity. Of course, to acquire a personal conviction, it was necessary to be able to read, and especially to be able to read the Bible in one's own language—an impossibility for most Greeks, Armenians, Assyrians or Catholics of the time. Catholic bibles were printed in Latin, which few lay people could read, and in most other denominations it was uncommon for anyone other than a priest to possess a bible.

Susan was unmarried. She was not conventionally pretty, but she was a handsome woman with a lovely smile. However, at 28 years old, it was statistically unlikely that she ever would become a wife, making her options as a woman in 1902 America very limited: live off the charity of relatives, or support herself as a teacher, nurse, office clerk or factory worker. Women could not vote, could not borrow money without the written consent of a male relative, and in most areas could not own property. The lure of living an independent life, travelling to foreign lands, and being somewhat of a celebrity—as missionaries were when they came home on furlough—was an attractive proposition. The American Board preferred to hire professional women in their late 20s-early 30s: mature enough to be responsible with a few years of occupational experience, but still young enough to be able to learn a new language.[19] If there were a checklist for candidates, Susan would have earned a perfect score.

She signed up, packed up, and went to New York to begin her journey. There she met Adelaide Dwight, who was also heading to Talas to teach at the Girls' School. Adelaide was five years younger and had a similar background, with a few minor exceptions: She had been born in Constantinople to missionary parents, and had only two years' teaching experience after graduating from Smith College. They were joined by Rev. Henry and Jane Wingate, both 37, their two children, John and Dorothy, and Rev. Henry Harrison Riggs, known as Harry to his friends and family. The Wingate family had been on furlough in Wisconsin, and were looking forward to returning to Talas. Henry had met Jane in 1890 when they were both teaching at the Marsovan station[20], 200 miles north of Talas, and it had been a true Congregational-style romance. They had moved to Talas in 1893 and within five years, Henry had established the Boys' School with 70 pupils, 46 of whom were boarders.[21] Henry and Harry were both graduates of Carleton College, '96 and '97 respectively, though Henry had gone on to Yale Divinity, whereas Harry had just graduated from Auburn Seminary. Harry had been born in Sivas, also to missionary parents, and was about to begin his own mission work in Talas.

The group sailed on the *von Moltber* steamship to Hamburg in early September, and arrived in Talas a month later, via train from Berlin, Vienna and Budapest to Constantinople, via ship to Samsoun, and then in wagons to Marsovan and Cesarea.[22] Susan and Adelaide were delighted with the reception they received. "A hearty Oriental welcome," as Henry described it. "Nearly five hours before arriving at Cesarea, people began to meet us, and by the time we rode into the city there was a great cavalcade of horses, donkeys, wagons and people on foot."[23] Five miles away, and 4,500 feet above sea level was the mountain town of Talas. More and more people gathered along their path as they got closer. At Talas, "we passed through rows and rows of school children, marshaled out in double file," said Adelaide. "The boys clapped as we passed through their ranks, while the girls sang a song which they had learned for the occasion."[24]

“Every member of our station turned out,” said Stella Loughridge, principal of the Talas Girls’ Boarding School. “It was not an ordinary occasion, for were not *two* American ladies coming to the school?”[25]

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The Young Turks were a new breed then, too. But they were not a cohesive group. In fact, they were not even a political party. They were likely named after the Young Ottomans, the secret society of intellectuals who were instrumental in creating the first constitutional government three decades earlier.[26] After Sultan Abdul Aziz had been “suicided” in June 1876, and his nephew and successor, Murad V, proved mentally unstable a month later, Murad’s brother, Abdul Hamid II, was proclaimed Sultan—but only after agreeing to accept the constitution and its parliament. In 1877 when the Russian Empire declared war on the Ottoman Empire, Hamid suspended parliament. The next year the Ottomans lost both the war and large portions of the empire, as determined by the Treaty of Berlin, with enormous input from Britain, France, Austria-Hungary, Italy, Germany and Russia. The result was independence for Romania, Serbia, and Montenegro; autonomy for Bulgaria; reforms for Bosnia and Herzegovina; and a considerable part of the Transcaucasus for Russia. Hamid immediately suspended the constitution. He ruled with an oppressive fist and a vast network of 100,000 spies for the next thirty years.[27] Not surprisingly, most of his subjects grew very unhappy.

In 1889 a group of students of the Imperial Medical School in Constantinople plotted to overthrow him. They were soon joined by students from the Veterinary, Artillery, and Engineering schools, and the Naval Academy. Despite the group’s secrecy, the Sultan’s spies managed to identify the culprits, who were arrested and expelled. The exiles, still committed to their cause, eventually regrouped in Paris to form the secret Society of Progress and Union.

Meanwhile in Constantinople another secret group was formed. There were not many career options for young, upper-class Ottomans except to join the military or civil service. Given the perpetual unrest in the Balkans, a large portion of the military was stationed in

the European *vilayets* (provinces). They had a great deal of interaction with their European counterparts. The contrast was palpable in every way: pay, uniforms, equipment, authority, and regard. Many army officers appealed for reforms, but there were few improvements. A similar situation arose within the civil service. Constantinople straddles the Bosporus—the strait that separates Europe and Asia—and is the gateway for trade between the Black and Mediterranean Seas. Senior civil servants had considerable contact with international personnel and ideas. Their calls to bring the Empire into the 20th century were more or less ignored by the Sultan. As a consequence, a group of army officers and civil servants created the secret Ottoman Freedom Society.

Through a chance encounter in 1907, the Ottoman Freedom Society and the Society of Progress and Union became known to each other. Deciding they had a common goal, and would be more effective if they worked together, they merged to form the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP). Even so, it was clear from the start there were two distinct factions. Their seven-article declaration of intent outlined the structure of the new society: two headquarters and two chiefs ("internal" in Salonica, Macedonia, and "external" in Paris, France). Each was "empowered to modify one another's operations only through persuasion." However, for the time being, they were all working together for a common purpose—to reinstate the constitution of 1876.[28]

There was one other significant group that supported the revolution: the *Dashnaktsutyun* (Armenian Revolutionary Federation), or Dashnaks, for short. This political party was created in the Transcaucasus after the war with Russia. One of the conditions of the Treaty of Berlin was reformation of the provincial administration of the Ottoman Empire. For Armenians living in their traditional homeland east of Anatolia, this was an especially important issue. The Sultan had always viewed the Armenians who lived there as Russian allies, and therefore a threat to his territory. He had allowed, if not sanctioned, raids on them by their Kurdish and Circassian neighbours. Consequently, there was a vital need for Armenians to be protected by law, and to have legal equality for their language and customs. After the Treaty, this became known as "the Armenian question." In 1890, with no reforms in sight, the Dashnaks formed a socialist party from the merger of many small groups.[29] Between 1894 and 1897 Sultan Abdul Hamid stepped up his repression of Armenians, with impunity. More than 100,000 were killed during the Hamidian massacres,[30] including 25,000 Assyrians.[31] Though there was international outrage, there was no international interference. Thus, the bloody "Red Sultan,"[32] as he came to be known, suffered no serious consequences. Ten years later, there were still no reforms. It is no wonder that, when the Dashnaks caught wind of the Young Turks' plan, they whole-heartedly supported them. It was time for a revolution.

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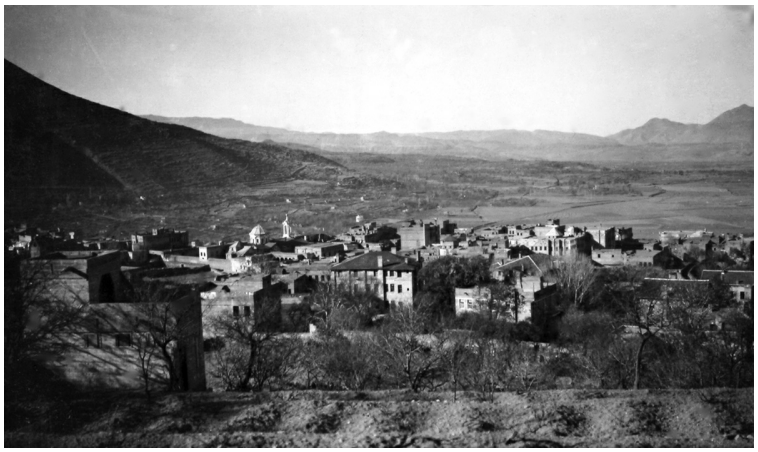
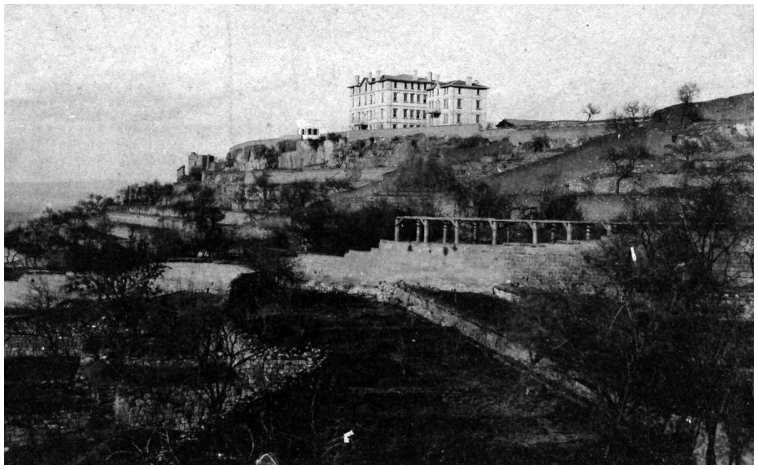
"All the windows have heavy iron bars, just like a prison," Susan wrote to her brother, John, about her new home in Talas. "We have a massive stone building that has been adapted to the needs of the school, though originally built for a private residence by a rich Armenian family." She described the large iron gates which opened onto the street and were "kept closed, night and day, only being opened to admit those who have answered the question, 'Who is it?' At first I could not enjoy living in such a fortress, but after I heard how all the

missionaries and native [*yerli*][33] friends had spent the time in the building during the dreadful massacre times [eight years before], I appreciated the security of it."[34]

Talas was located in the *sanjak* (county/district) of Kaisarieh in the middle of the ancient region of Cappadocia (see map). It was a mountain town of 15,000 Armenians, Greeks and Turks[35], nestled in the shadow of 10,000-foot Mt. Argæus, some fifteen miles away. Residents could not see the great mountain from their homes because there was a lesser one in-between. Or as one traveller of the time noted, "Ali Dagh intervenes, a hump of mountain like a vast pit-head heap, rising three thousand feet above the town."[36] An hour's walk down the hill and to the northwest was Cesarea, the bustling capital city of the sanjak. [The city and the sanjak had the same name, pronounced *kay-saria*, but spelled in various ways. (The Latin pronunciation of the Roman emperor Caesar is *kai-sar*, which is where the confusion lies.) To keep things simple, I will refer to the city as Cesarea, and the sanjak as Kaisarieh, which was used on local maps circa 1920. The ABCFM station was officially known as Cesarea, but informally as Talas. Again, for simplification, I will use Talas as the station's name.] The American Board had established a station in Cesarea in 1854 because it was the centre of commerce and society. Though picturesque with its flat roofed houses, tall minarets, round-domed mosques, baths, thirteen-acre market, imposing castle, and beautiful mountain view, it was also considerably larger (40,000), dirtier, and not as safe as Talas.[37] The missionaries preferred the clean mountain air and clean streets of Talas, and it soon became their base of operation. The Talas-Cesarea station was responsible for the largest of all ABCFM territories: 32 outstations scattered over the 35,000 square miles of the 800,000-strong sanjak.[38]



The station was a "fertile field to be cultivated,"[39] and they had toiled hard. The Boys' School was an excellent example. Situated atop a large hill, overlooking terraced gardens with "Ali Dagh's peak as a backdrop," this grand four-storey building was years in the making. When Henry Wingate started the school in 1898, it was little more than several dozen students in a couple of rented houses. Since then he had raised money in the United States, bought the property in Talas, obtained the necessary permits, and oversaw the construction of the majestic school. When it opened officially in 1908, it was "a visible testament to Henry's dedication and resolve."[40]



By then, Susan had settled into Talas very nicely. She had become fluent in Turkish, the official and common language of all Ottomans. She had seen much of the surrounding countryside while "touring" the outstations, and was acting principal of the Girls' Boarding School, now that Principal Stella Loughridge was away on a one-year furlough in Lincoln, Nebraska. Adelaide Dwight, who had accompanied Susan to Talas, proved to be quite fragile physically, but was a well loved teacher. Henry Wingate and Herbert Irwin, principal and teacher respectively of the Boys' Boarding School, were also ordained ministers and did much of the evangelical work. Their wives, Jane Wingate and Genevieve Irwin, conducted "women's work", which was just about anything else that needed doing. The Irwins were Canadian, as were ten percent of the ABCFM missionaries. Herbert was born in Port Hope, Ontario, and had graduated from the University of Toronto and Manitoba College. In 1903 he married Genevieve Du Val, also a graduate of Manitoba, and within a month they had joined the Talas mission. Genevieve was born in Wilmington, Delaware but had moved to Winnipeg at the age of twelve when her father, Rev. Frederic Du Val, a proponent of the Social Gospel movement, became the minister of Knox Presbyterian Church there.

Rev. James Fowle, from Woburn, Massachusetts, had been in Talas since 1878 when he met and married Caroline, daughter of Rev. Wilson A. Farnsworth of the Talas station. James was in charge of touring—driving his old wagon, often on a month's journey, from outstation to outstation, to administer to his flock. The hospital was run by two doctors, William Dodd, who had established it in 1893, and Wilfred Post, with their wives Mary Dodd and Annie Post, and two nurses, Rachel B. North and Emma Cushman. The kindergarten in Cesarea was usually operated by Fanny Burrage, but she was currently on furlough in her hometown of Arlington, Massachusetts.[41]

When news of the 1908 Young Turk revolution reached the Talas mission, everyone was happy to hear that the constitution had been restored with "little shedding of blood." The American Board rejoiced. As the commissioners saw it, "mission work, which has struggled on in the face of tireless opposition, will now be, in large measure, *free*."[42]

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In July the revolution brought joy to the Empire. By August, the euphoria began to dissolve. The harvest failure—a repeat of the previous year—reduced grain supplies yet

again. Recent harsh winters and dry summers had reduced livestock, resulting in a sharp rise in meat prices. A financial crisis in 1907, caused by American banks, negatively affected the global economy. Real income had steadily eroded while the cost of living steadily rose.

The port workers in Constantinople were the first to take action. They held a massive strike, which threatened to disrupt waterfront commerce,[43] especially for the British- and French-owned Quay Company.[44] It was a test for the Young Turk government. "Their movement had been represented by their enemies as anarchical; their cause would be lost were they to fail to preserve order among the populace." Their solution was to send in the cavalry. One officer told the strikers they were conducting themselves as "friends of the old regime" would have. He warned that if they were not back at work the next day, just like the police of the previous era, "I will, with my own hand, shoot down the first man who refuses to do so, and the rest of you will be swept into the sea or into prison." They went back to work, though some were later arrested.[45]

In September rail workers went on strike. They had formed a loose union in August, and sent a telegram to the Grand Vizier (prime minister), demanding the dismissal of the director-general of the German-owned Anatolian Railway Company "to end the deplorable, despotic, tyrannical, humiliating and arbitrary doings which have gone on for nineteen years." Even though many Young Turks sympathized with the workers' grievances, they could not afford the disruption to the vital transportation and communication systems of the Empire. There was also considerable pressure from Deutsche Bank, an investor in both the railway and the Ottoman economy, to end the strike. The government's attorney made a back-to-work deal with the union's president. One of the unfortunate consequences was "the Muslim Turkish workers . . . considered that the Ottoman Christian union leadership had abandoned them in favor of their European and Christian employers."[46] Cracks in the "we are all Ottomans" claim began to expand.

The end of joy came definitively in October. The Empire shrank once again. Austria-Hungary annexed Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria declared its independence, and Crete announced its union with Greece. Rising nationalism and unrest had been evident in the Balkans for many years, but the new Ottoman government was reluctant to go to war. The public was furious over the loss of territory, reacting with spontaneous demonstrations, marches, and "a new form of protest: the boycott." The Committee of Union and Progress supported this boycott against Austrian and Bulgarian goods and services, largely because it

kept the focus away from the government.[47] Only three months old, CUP faced serious problems. The internal squabbles were mainly over how to govern, since most of the Committee members had little experience. The external ones were obvious: a failing economy, a possible famine, a probable war.

What had started out so promising seemed to be rapidly spiralling downward. In Talas, Susan and her colleagues were committed to saving souls; if war were to occur, they just might end up having to save lives.

Notes

[←1]

Tachat Ramavarma Ravindranathan, “The Young Turk Revolution, July 1908 to April 1909: Its Immediate Effects,” (master’s thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1970), 64-71. Several members of the sultan’s inner circle, and only a few administrative officials and army officers died.

[←2]

James L. Barton, *Daybreak in Turkey*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1908), 282.

[←3]

Anna B. Jones, “Missionary Letters: Western Turkey,” *Life and Light for Woman* 38, no. 10 (1908): 458. (Hereafter, *LLW*.)

[←4]

Harriet G. Powers, Ibid, 458-59.

[←5]

Susan Wealthy Orvis (hereafter SWO) to Home Friends, August 8, 1908, Susan Wealthy Orvis Papers (Hereafter, SWOP).

[←6]

George Washburn, *Fifty Years in Constantinople and Recollections of Robert College* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1909), xxx.

[←7]

Francis Wayland Orvis, *A History of the Orvis Family in America* (Hackensack, NJ: The Orvis Company, Inc., 1922), 32.

[←8]

In 1840 the population in the United States was 17 million and the number of college graduates in that year was approximately 4,000 (US Bureau of Statistics).

[←9]

Handbook for Missions and Missionaries of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (Boston: Beacon Press, 1901), 22. The ABCFM policy on furloughs was every seven years for women and eight years for men.

[←10]

Selim Deringil, *Conversion and Apostasy in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 109-10.

[←11]

Florence A. Fensham, Mary I. Lyman, and Mrs. H. B. Humphrey, *A Modern Crusade in the Turkish Empire* (Chicago: Woman's Board of Missions of the Interior, 1908), 12.

[←12]

SWO to Judson Smith, February 22, 1902, Houghton Library, Harvard University, ABC 16.9.3, Microfilm A467, v34, Reel 623, 550. (Hereafter HL/HU.)

[←13]

American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, *The Ninety-Eighth Annual Report* (Boston: Congregational House, 1908), 148. (Annual reports hereafter, ABCFM-AR.)

[←14]

E. Alexander Powell, "The Romance of the Missionary," *Everybody's Magazine* (September 1909), quoted in American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, *Missionary Herald* 105, no. 12 (1909): 553-54. (Hereafter, *MH*.)

[←15]

Orvis, History of the Orvis Family; William A. Benedict and Hiram A. Tracy, History of the Town of Sutton, Massachusetts from 1704 to 1876 (Worchester, MA: Sanford & Company, 1878), 298; Hiram Carleton, Genealogical and Family History of the State of Vermont, Vol. II (New York: Lewis Publishing, 1903), 227; Oliver S. Phelps and Andrew T. Servin, The Phelps Family of America and their English Ancestors, Vol. II (Pittsfield, MA: Eagle, 1899), 72; Ralph Stebbins Greenlee and Robert Lemuel Greenlee, The Stebbins Genealogy, Vol. I (Chicago: privately printed, 1904), 56; Henry R. Stiles, The History of Ancient Windsor, Connecticut (New York: Charles B. Norton, 1859), 66-9. Strong Family Association of America, strongfamilyofamerica.org, (1997); C. Alice Baker, True Stories of New England Captives Carried to Canada During the Old French and Indian Wars (Cambridge, MA: E.A. Hall & Co., 1897), 155-192; Susan was "the daughter of the late C. F. Orvis, former paster of the Summit Congregational church here": "Miss Susan W. Orvis Missionary in Turkey, Writes Brother Here," clipping, Dubuque newspaper, n.d. (circa December 1922), SWOP.

[←16]

Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), 27.

[←17]

Congregational Churches in Massachusetts, Cambridge Synod, *The Cambridge Platform of Church Discipline: 1648* (Boston: Perkins & Whipple, 1850), 78-9.

[←18]

KJV, 1 Peter 2:5-9.

[←19]

Patricia R. Hill, *The World Their Household: The American Woman's Foreign Mission Movement and Cultural Transformation, 1870-1920* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1985), 125-7.

[←20]

Amerikan Bord Heyeti (American Board), Istanbul, American Research Institute in Turkey, Istanbul Center Library, online in Digital Library for International Research Archive, http://www.dlir.org/archive. The ABCFM kept personnel records (individual index cards, and some memorial records) for all missionaries, noting significant dates, locations, departures and arrivals. (Hereafter, ABH-PR.)

[←21]

Brian Johnson, *When Men and Mountains Meet: A Brief Account of Talas American School* (Istanbul: American Research Institute in Turkey, 2018), 7.

[←22]

A Statement, n.d., SWOP.

[←23]

Henry K. Wingate, "Triumphal Return," *MH* 99, no. 1 (1903): 25.

[←24]

LLW 33, no. 2 (1903): 68-9.

[←25]

Stella N. Loughridge, Ibid, no. 6: 281.

[←26]

Ravindranathan, 6.

[←27]

Barton, *Daybreak*, 256; Washburn, 101-6.

[←28]

Ravindranathan, 18-9, 46-8.

[←29]

Oya Gözel Durmaz, "A City Transformed: War, Demographic Change and Profiteering in Kayseri (1915-1920)," (doctoral thesis, Middle East Technical University, 2014), 53-4.

[←30]

Henry Otis Dwight, *Constantinople and Its Problems* (London: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1901), 38.

[←31]

David Gaunt, *Massacres, Resistance, Protectors Muslim: Christian Relations in Eastern Anatolia during World War I* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006), 39-45.

[←32]

Henry Morgenthau, *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1918), 283.

[←33]

The Orient 3, no. 20 (1912): 5. The people called themselves *yerli*, which translates as "native." (Hereafter, *Orient*.)

[←34]

"From the Land of Prophet Mohamet: Dubuque Lady, Missionary Among Turks of Asia Tells of Her Life," *Dubuque Telegraph Herald*, November 1905. The newspaper article was a reprint of a letter from SWO to her brother John, and referred to the residence as being owned by "a rich American family." The land for the girls' school had been sold to ABCFM by the Gulbenkian family, a rich Armenian family, so it is probable that Susan wrote "Armenian" but her handwriting had been misread by the newspaper editor as "American."

[←35]

Hervé Georgelin, “Armenians in Late Ottoman Rural Kesaria/Kayseri,” in *Armenian Kesaria/Kayseri and Cappadocia*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2013), 237. The estimate of 15,000 is based on 3,000 households.

[←36]

W.J. Childs, *Across Asia Minor on Foot* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1917), 184.

[←37]

Fensham, 48-52; *Orient* 4 no. 30 (1913): 1-2; Childs, 193-98.

[←38]

Herbert M. Irwin, *MH* 115, no 12 (1919): 500.

[←39]

MH 104, no 1 (1908): 22.

[←40]

Johnson, 9.

[←41]

ABCFM-AR 1908, 51.

[←42]

Ibid, 53.

[←43]

Donald Quataert, *Social Disintegration and Popular Resistance in the Ottoman Empire, 1881-1908: Reactions to European Economic Penetration* (New York: New York University Press, 1983), 80-1, 141.

[←44]

Keith Hamilton, “Dockside Diplomacy: The Foreign Office and the Constantinople Quays Company,” in *The Records of the Permanent Under-Secretary’s Department: Liaison Between the Foreign Office and British Secret Intelligence, 1873-1939* (London: Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2005), 19.

[←45]

E. F. Knight, *The Awakening of Turkey: A History of the Turkish Revolution* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1909), 237-38.

[←46]

Quataert, 84, 91-3.

[←47]

Y. Doğan Çetinkaya, “Muslim Merchants and Working-Class in Action: Nationalism, Social Mobilization and Boycott Movement in the Ottoman Empire 1908-1914” (doctoral thesis, Leiden University, 2010), 109, 47-9.