

# Missions in Eden

## Glimpses of Life in the Valley of the Euphrates

As the ivy clings around the old grey tower, giving to it a gracefulness and beauty all its own, so do our most sacred associations cluster about the spot where the course of human history began. Eden!—the very name has power to charm the soul with visions of entrancing beauty. It flings backward the gates of memory and brings before us scenes of blessedness in that "happy rural seat of the first pair." But paradise has, alas! vanished from the earth, leaving behind only its mighty name to stir up the soul with pensive recollections, and to hold before man the prospect of a brighter paradise beyond.

Many have been the attempts made to identify the site of Eden. But none have been altogether satisfactory. It is not to be expected that this enquiry can now be attended with any great degree of success. The exact spot will in all likelihood remain forever unknown. The place, however, which those most competent to discuss such questions agree upon as the cradle of the race lies somewhere in the valley of the river Euphrates. That this is the authentic site of Eden is taken for granted by the author of "Missions in Eden," Mrs. Crosby H. Wheeler, who has been for forty years a missionary of the American Board in Harpoot, Eastern Turkey, or the country more familiarly known to us as Armenia. Her volume has recently been published by the Fleming H. Revell Company, and it is a distinct addition to the growing literature of missions.

The people of Armenia believe their country to be not only the first cradle of the race, but also the second; for here rested the ark of Noah upon the mountains of Ararat. According to their own tradition, they are descended from Togarmah, the grandson of Japheth. In ancient times they were closely allied to the Persians, and in their religion were fire worshippers. This relationship made the Greeks hostile to them. Then we find them so intimately allied to the Parthians that they had a Parthian dynasty on the throne. This brought them into the great wars between the Parthians and the Romans, and many of the battles between these nations were fought on Armenian territory. Traces of the great campaigns of the Romans are still found in the land.

As the traditions of the land with respect to Eden would indicate, the country is naturally one of the most fertile in the world, and its mineral resources are beyond computation; but under a tyrannical and unprogressive government little encouragement is given to the development of its wealth, and the people in the midst of the greatest natural riches are held in abject ignorance and poverty.

The traditions of the Armenians say that the gospel was first brought into their land by Tl ad-

deus, the disciple of the Lord, and that many then received it. But it was not until the third century that Christianity was generally accepted, through the efforts of Gregory the Illuminator, the royal secretary of Tiridates. At this time Christianity became the state religion. Thus Armenians have the honor of being the first to receive Christianity as a nation.

Henceforth they were cut off from the friendship of the Persians, and the long series of persecutions began which have continued down to our own day. Thousands laid down their lives under the cruel treatment of Sapor II, who determined to destroy the Christian faith and bring the people back to sun worship. He slaughtered them in cold blood, and even built a tower out of the skulls of Christians. An Armenian bishop built a city named Martyropolis over the place where so many gave up their lives rather than return to idolatry. The old Church of the Martyrs is still standing, a beautiful relic of ancient Armenian architecture. Afterward's the Turk conquered the whole land, and suffering anew began for Christ's sake. Still Christianity did not die out among them. They still reached upward to something higher and better. The fact that Christianity has been retained by the people, in spite of repeated and terrible persecutions which have reduced them to a condition of great poverty and helplessness, is convincing evidence of their sincerity. Their religious history is written, not as by some other historic churches, in bitter theological controversies, but in a brave and simple record of loyalty to Christ, written with the tears of saints and illuminated with the blood of a martyr host.

Through the long centuries of darkness and persecution that befell the Armenian Church, it is not difficult to understand that much error and formalism crept in to obscure the simplicity of the gospel. And so it has come to pass that the Armenians stand to-day in need of the pure teaching of the Scriptures which has uplifted and blessed Protestant lands. It is seventy years or more since missionaries from Europe and America began work in the Ottoman Empire, and their labors among the people of Armenia have been most encouraging from the first.

It was in January, 1857, that Mrs. Wheeler left Boston as a missionary to Harpoot in a sailing vessel bound for Smyrna. The glimpses of the people and the scenes through which she passed are vividly portrayed, and her book reminds us anew of the heroism of those soldiers of the Cross who do pioneer work in the dark places of the earth.

From the old city of Trebizond, on the Black Sea, they journeyed through valleys and over mountains to their destination. The journey was