

American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions

## Status and Outlook of Missionary Work in Turkey

A Review of Conditions in the Near East

By Secretary JAMES L. BARTON

**N**EVER has the American Board faced conditions more baffling and yet pregnant with potentialities of good than those confronting us in the Near East today. A staggering blow was struck when the Lausanne Conference, in 1923, put the stamp of its approval upon the "exchange of populations." This gave Turkey the right to remove Armenians and Greeks from her country, and it gave Greece the right to do the same with Turkish populations in Greece and Macedonia. In Constantinople, however, the Greeks were to be allowed to remain, provided the Turks were not expelled from western Thrace. Under this arrangement only a few scattering Christians still remain in the country, outside of Constantinople.

Since the constituencies of the American Board across the country were largely Armenians and Greeks, it becomes evident at a glance that this work of large proportions has met with a severe setback. The great majority of the pupils in mission schools, patients in mission hospitals, nearly the entire body of membership in the evangelical churches, from the Bosphorus to Persia, were Armenians and Greeks. The great majority of the teachers in mission schools were from these two races, supplemented by a less number of American teachers. These schools, therefore, have been depopulated both of pupils and of teachers, except for the Americans and a very few Turks. This does not apply, however, to the Constantinople area, where Armenians, Greeks and Turks are still living side by side, and where the schools are flourishing with a mixed clientele.

At the present time in the Constantinople area Robert College, the Constantinople College for Girls, the Bithynia High School, at Geuz Tepe, the mixed school in Gedik Pasha, Miss Kinney's School for Girls in Scutari, and the School of Religion, are all in full operation. Outside of the Constantinople area the missionaries in Marsovan are in friendly relations with the local populations, and the school in Brousa, the two schools in Smyrna (International College for boys and the Collegiate Institute for girls), medical work and a small school work in Talas, the

educational and medical work in Adana, the medical work at Aintab, and the work at Marash are still in operation, some of these under quite limited conditions. In Smyrna and Brousa there are practically no Armenians or Greeks among the pupils. In Talas the work is limited, while in Adana the medical work under Dr. Cyril H. Haas is hampered by national regulations, as it is also in Aintab. The educational work in Tarsus and Marash is halted at present because of a difference of understanding between the officials and the missionaries in charge.

The missionaries have withdrawn from Sivas and Harpoot, as well as from Erzroom, Trebizond, Van and Bitlis. The work at Mardin was transferred to the Presbyterian Board of Missions four years ago because of the similarity of language between Mardin and the Presbyterian field at the south.

### GOVERNMENTAL RESTRICTIONS

Missionary work in Turkey is contending with certain handicaps. The Angora National Assembly has made regulations to the effect that no religion of any kind shall be taught in a school recognized by the government. These regulations apply, not only to the national schools, but also to all private institutions. Turkey's position, with reference to religious instruction in national schools, is essentially that taken in Massachusetts and other states, except that in Turkey the regulation applies to private schools, and it does not so apply in Massachusetts. The Turks allow and expect religion to be taught in buildings set apart for religious purposes, but such buildings cannot be regarded in any way as a part of any school.

The medical work is handicapped because of the decision of the Grand General Assembly that no foreigner can be allowed to practise medicine in Turkey. This is essentially, as I understand, the law in the state of New York and possibly in some other American states. The Turkish officials, however, have decided that doctors who had received a license to practise in Turkey prior to the war shall be allowed to continue under the old regulation. The National Medical University in Constantinople has graduated many doctors who reside in the larger cities of Turkey, and who are naturally jealous of foreign doctors who, they maintain, because of the fact of their being foreigners, lure patients away from them.

Another handicap is that the Armenian and Greek teachers, upon whom the missions and the schools in Turkey were largely dependent, have disappeared from all areas outside of the Constantinople region. This makes it imperative that the staff of American teachers be increased until from the present schools there can be raised up a group of dependable native teachers. The Turks, in their present state of mind, will not consent to having their children taught by Armenians and Greeks, even could Armenians and Greeks live in the country.

The Grand General Assembly is naturally suspicious of the work of

foreign teachers, doctors and missionaries. The Turks are in an attitude of self-defense. While this is not true of all, it is true of probably the large majority of the Assembly. It is difficult for Turks to understand the altruistic motive that has established our schools in their midst and brought in the Americans, and there is a certain spirit of jealousy which puts under a considerable handicap all forms of missionary work.

### OFFSETTING ENCOURAGEMENTS

There are, however, encouraging features. The mass of the Turkish people and the best educated of the leaders, beyond any question, feel the need of American schools and American philanthropic institutions. They have seen the great advance made by the Armenians and Greeks through their wide patronage of American institutions during the last generation, and they covet this same opportunity for their own young men and women. While some of the more fanatical are suspicious and eager to curtail the work of American institutions, the great mass of the people desire them to continue and are eager to patronize them. This is undoubtedly true also of the mission medical work.

There is a broad field opening for American schools in Turkey along the line of modern agriculture. The intelligent leaders are conscious of the fact that it is through the development of her vast agricultural resources that Turkey is to become a self-supporting country. The International College in Smyrna started an agricultural department prior to the war. This department is now looked upon with high favor by the Turkish officials, and it is reasonable to expect that similar departments at Aintab, Marsovan and other places will meet with general approval.

The Turks, with the revival of the spirit of nationalism, are becoming increasingly conscious of their lack of international experience, ideas and ideals. Their national press is awakening to this lack. In a word, the Turks are beginning to be as they have never been before a people eager for information. This opens the door wide for the creation and dissemination of an educational, social, moral and religious literature in the Turkish language. Much in this line has already been produced, but the present revival of learning and nationalism in Turkey opens the door for a much larger effort in this direction. The Bible, already translated into Turkish and Arabic, cannot fail to have a rapidly increased circulation throughout the Near East.

There is a readiness to form Turkish clubs for mutual improvement. This grows out of present conditions and a consciousness of a lack of general education and an awakening conception of nationalism and internationalism. These clubs have been successfully formed, and can be greatly increased. The leadership of a foreigner is welcomed, and, while direct religious propaganda is excluded, an unlimited opportunity is afforded for contacts which will disarm suspicion and demonstrate to the Turks the underlying principles of our Christian faith. In these

clubs any topic can be presented under the title of a lecture. It is encouraging to note the eagerness of many Turkish young men to know more about Christianity, its history, its content and its claims.

Already the interest of the young Turk in religion is becoming increasingly manifest. Questions are being raised in his mind as to the comparative merits of Mohammedanism and Christianity, questions which he himself cannot answer. Many are seeking personal conversation with missionaries on the subject of religion in general as well as of personal religion. There is every reason to expect that this spirit of inquiry will increase as friendly contacts increase, and as the young men, and the young women, too, realize the difference between the two religions. This is one of the present methods of approach and very likely the most effective now open to the missionaries. When the Turks seek the conversation the missionary is free to speak.

### A RECEDING OPPOSITION

In the past Turks have been suspicious of anything that seemed like an attempt to proselyte. They avoid Christian services and are constantly warned against the influence of missionaries. This has been carried to such an extent that when a Turk hears the name of Christ mentioned or a plea in favor of Christianity, it arouses a keen sense of opposition and makes unavailable any message that may be delivered. There is every reason to believe that under the present regulations, where there is to be in the schools no reading of scripture, no prayer, no singing of Christian hymns, no Christian symbols, gradually this opposition will die down, and the relation between the Turkish pupil and his Christian teacher will become more normal. In other words, the habitual attitude of resistance will decrease until it disappears. In the meantime, the Christian teacher will not fail to impress upon his pupils the necessity of a brotherly spirit of friendly co-operation and cordial relationship. He will teach the absolute necessity of truthfulness in utterance and in manner, of purity of life, word and character, of absolute integrity in dealing one with another. In other words, the Christian teacher in the Christian school, from which religious instruction is excluded by law, will impress upon his pupils those principles which lie at the very foundation of our Christian thinking and Christian living. The missionary will thus have opportunity to build Christian character into the lives of his Turkish pupils. The intelligent pupil will be quick to discern that these are fundamental Christian principles. The soul of a teacher in whose heart the Christ dwells is thus brought into contact with the souls of his pupils who have not known Him, and it is through such contacts that life and power are transmitted.

There is assurance that under this new order the Turks with whom the Christian teacher comes in contact will be disarmed of resistance and that ultimately a door of approach to the Turkish heart will be opening wider and wider. There is no doubt that to the Turks today

actions will speak vastly louder than any words that can be uttered; that the life of a missionary will have an influence far surpassing any reading of scripture, any public prayer that may be offered, or any verbal message he may bring. It may be that under these new regulations over which we can have no control, there may be discovered a way of Christian approach to the confidence and the hearts of the Turks which we would not have discovered if left to deal with this subject in our own traditional way.

Japan, at one time, excluded all religious instruction from Christian schools. That regulation was accepted and the mission schools went on. The restriction has now been wholly removed and not infrequently missionaries and Japanese pastors are called upon to give Christian addresses in the public schools of the empire.

### **MINISTERING TO CHRISTIAN REFUGEES**

The American Board is following the refugees from Turkey into Syria and Greece. They are aiding in the opening of schools and in the support of Christian services under native pastors and preachers, and doing all in their power for the comfort of the people in their wanderings. This in itself constitutes an extensive piece of missionary work and supplements the direct work carried on within the bounds of Turkey at the present time.

### **THE BEGINNING OF A NEW ERA**

The missionary work of the American Board in the Near East is not by any means ended. This may be but the beginning of a new era. The American Board entered the Near East with the Mohammedan populations as a goal, mentioned ahead of the Armenians and the Greeks. That fundamental purpose has never been changed. Large quantities of Christian literature have been circulated among the Mohammedans, and especially the New Testament in the vernacular. These Testaments have been sold by the tens of thousands. By many proofs the missionaries are convinced that these books have been widely read, and are still treasured. Much good seed has been sown, but the constant restrictions placed upon the Turks, hitherto, have prevented public confession of Christianity, although there have been many open confessions of belief in Jesus Christ. The constituency of the American Board could not take the position that, because conditions in Turkey have suddenly changed, that work should be abandoned after a century of seed sowing and planting. The Nationalist Government declares, with reiterated emphasis, that there is to be absolute religious liberty throughout the length and breadth of the land. There are many indications that this represents a purpose on the part of the leaders to make religion as free in Turkey as it is in the United States. The abolition of the Caliphate indicates the determination of the government to be free from religious dictation.

## THE SENDING OF RECRUITS

During the ten years following the outbreak of the war there have been very few new missionary appointees to Turkey. In that period also new missionaries' graves have appeared in a number of our stations throughout Asia Minor. Other workers, broken in health, have been invalided home. Still others have reached the age where they can no longer bear the heavy burden of constructive work. Unless the Board is ready to allow its work in Turkey to crumble and the present opportunity to lapse, and the planting of a hundred years to fail of the waiting harvest, a reasonable number of new missionaries must be appointed. It is not the purpose of the Board, at the present time, to add greatly to our staff in this important field, but it is necessary to make appointments of a few carefully selected and specially trained young men and women, who can be on the ground and there prepare themselves by mastering the Turkish language and becoming familiar with the conditions under which work must be carried on. This will require at least two years of close application, under the wise and experienced leaders still in the field. At the same time, it is an imperative duty for us to follow the Christian populations in their exile, to Syria and Greece, and we must have in mind that as soon as the Soviet Government of the Russian Caucasus permits, that field, too, naturally belongs to the American Board. The Caucasus today is crowded with refugees from our long-cultivated fields in Turkey, and they are eager for the modern school and for Christian work of every kind. This entire section of the world, including Greece and Syria, and the Russian Caucasus, has been left by common consent to the American Board, as representing the Congregational churches of the United States. It is a mighty responsibility, as well as an unprecedented opportunity. We hold the trust for Christendom, and we must not fail.

CONGREGATIONAL HOUSE

Boston, Mass.

June 16, 1924