

The Measure of a Man:

The Life of William Ambrose Shedd, Missionary to Persia,

by Mary Lewis Shedd,

New York: George H. Doran Company, 280 pp., No index.

Reviewed by George Yana (BebLa)

Doctor William Ambrose Shedd was born January 24, 1865, in the little mountain village of Seir, overlooking the Urmia plain, from missionary parents who had come to devote their lives helping the Assyrian community.

His life ended while in the service of this people. He contracted the same disease, cholera, that had wiped out thousands of the fleeing Assyrians in WWI. He died in Sain Ghala, during the flight of the Christian population toward Hamadan, and was later buried in Tabriz, Iran.

He worked for the Assyrian community, suffered with them, saved thousands of lives from massacre and famine, and, ultimately, gave his life for them. This is the story of an extraordinary man. His memory shall remain and be remembered as that of a man of deep faith and conviction, who loved the people he served to the extent that he gave his life for them.

Dr. W.A. Shedd's biography is written by his wife, Mary Lewis Shedd, and is made up of sixteen chapters, which cover a considerable time span.

Many times in the book, dates are given in day and month format only, and if the reader does not remember the year, he or she will have to browse back to find it.

The book spans over a period of time that begins from 1859 when Dr. John Haskell Shedd, the father of Dr. W. A. Shedd, went to Urmia, and extends to 1918 with the flight of Assyrians from Urmia. The events in the book take place in a vast theater, beginning in Urmia, Iran, and extending to the Hakkary region in Ottoman Turkey and to present day Iraq, which before WWI, was part of the Ottoman Empire.

Dr. Shedd's biography is of particular importance for the history of Assyrians in Iran in several ways: First, it is an account of WWI events with special focus on the Assyrian holocaust from the perspective of an expert eyewitness. Secondly, it provides ethnographic data on the Assyrians in Urmia (Northwestern Iran) during that period. Third, it is a corrective to the accounts of historians such as Ahmad Kasravi in their interpretations of the role of Assyrians in the World War I events.

Before we embark on our exploratory mission, I would like to clarify a point: In the biography of Dr. W. A. Shedd reference is made to Syrians or Nestorians, as the people whom he served. These are the same people widely known today as Assyrians, and it is this last name that we shall use in the review, when not making a direct quotation from the book. Those readers who are from Iran know that there, Assyrians are known as Assuri or Ashuri, and the name Syrian can be misleading. The Persian equivalent of Syrian is Seriani, which, with the exception of a few scholars, is unfamiliar to most people.

To better understand the events described in this book, we will attempt to draw the outlines of the socio-political environment of the region, which serves as a background against which those events unfolded.

IRAN

All the events covered by the book occurred under the Qajar dynasty. During this period, although nominally sovereign, Iran was in effect divided between Russia and Great Britain into their respective spheres of influence. This division was formally recognized in 1907 (Avery, 134). The central government was too weak and corrupt to resist foreign intrusion and protect its borders from its neighbors to the north. The events reviewed by this book took place during the reign of the last Qajar king, Ahmad Shah, who was reputed to be “incompetent, and pleasure loving.” (*Encyc. Britannica, CD 98*)¹

The Iranian national bourgeoisie, comprised of the bazaar, shopkeepers, merchants, and artisans, led by the clergy, resented the meddling of foreign powers in their internal affairs:

The Constitutional Revolution was the result of the ever increasing oppression of the deprived masses by the Shah, the princes, governors and government officials, also the result of the meddling by foreigners in all the affairs of the country (Kasravi, *The Constitution Revolution of Iran*, 4).

In addition, as Mary Louise Shedd notes:

The movement, though unexpected, was popular and patriotic, intellectual as well as political (Shedd, 81).

The movement demanded freedom, a house of justice “Edalatkhaneh,” and government by constitution (Kasravi, *The Constitution Revolution of Iran*, 5). Which is why it is known as “the Constitutional Revolution”. The nationalists succeeded in establishing a constitutional government in 1909 (Avery, 128). But the revolution which began in Teheran and reached Urmia soon after, was a failure as aptly explained in Dr. Shedd’s biography:

It was inevitable that such a revolution among a people to whom the idea of representative government was so foreign and for which they were wholly unprepared, should lead through anarchy and chaos to collapse...Mullahs and Sayids were enthusiastically talking of liberty and equality, with little conception of their meaning, but the road between Oriental despotism and democracy is not traveled in a day nor in a generation. A society soaked in vice and corruption, bound by the chains of ignorance and superstition, and controlled by religious fanaticism is

not a fertile soil for the propagation of democratic ideas and their practical demonstration. . . . Unfortunately those who held the greatest power in their hands were not those who were most enlightened nor those who were most sincere in desiring liberty, for the situation was largely controlled by the mullahs and sayids. When the question of the rights of the Christian subjects of Persia came up, it was openly claimed by the *anjuman* [assembly], in which mullahs were prominent, that the religious law of Islam should be strictly enforced (Shedd, 81-82).

Thus, the revolution left many groups discontented. In addition, foreign intrigues and internal corruption continued, which explains the disillusionment of the revolutionaries that led them to join the Turkish partisans during WWI. The failure of the constitutional revolution was a foregone conclusion on the eve of WWI:

The Nationalist movement in Persia which began a decade previously, and which succeeded in establishing the form of Parliamentary government, was a genuine popular movement, but it failed...It left behind it in Persia a smoldering Nationalist aspiration, discontented because of its failure, for which it largely blamed Russia. Russian influence antagonized the popular feeling, though it tended to secure order in the country. It left behind it also a set of professional revolutionists, men of some enterprise but no principle. Many of these were forced to flee and found an asylum in Turkey and in the war were active Turkish partisans. So in spite of the historic hatred, both national and religious, the Persians being Shia or Shiite Moslems, Persia's sympathy was with Turkey when she entered the war (Shedd, 139).

Turkey entered the war against the allied powers in October of 1914. Although Persia had declared its neutrality in the war, the central government was too weak to protect its borders:

During WWI, Iran was the scene of rival intrigues by pro-British and pro-German groups, among the notables, a class that succeeded in gaining control of the Majlis [the parliament]. The economic and political disruptions caused by the war were exacerbated by famine and national bankruptcy (*Encyc. Britannica, CD 98*).

The presence of Russians in Northwestern Iran made the Turkish invasion of the country inevitable.² Moreover, the ideology driving the Turkish offensive was religious, pitting the Muslims against the Christians. Thus from the start, Iranian Moslems were ill-disposed towards the "Christian" occupational forces. Religious sentiment got the upper hand, so that when the Ottomans entered Iranian territory to fight the allied Anglo-Russian forces, they were greeted as an

Islamic force, and together they fought the common enemy in an “Islamic Alliance”.³ To the Russian occupation forces in Azarbaijan, the Iranian reaction was both nationalistic and religious, and the anger and hatred thus created spilled over and engulfed everyone associated with them, Assyrians included.

OTTOMAN TURKEY

Just like Iran, Turkey was the scene of rivalry between foreign powers, in this case the British, French and Germans, who had divided the Ottoman Empire into their respective spheres of influence.⁴ Foreign interference and a corrupt political elite precipitated a reform movement there too. The nationalists, known as the “Young Turks,” were successful to bring about considerable civil and social reforms in the 1908 revolution.

As the Ottoman Empire began to collapse under its own weight in the 18th and 19th centuries, it became a battle-ground for rival European powers, wedged as it was between the Russian and Austrian empires. These rivalries led to the Russo-Turkish Wars, the Crimean War, and the Balkan Wars. By the outbreak of World War I the Ottoman Empire had essentially been divided into spheres of influence by the great European powers, but a reform movement was active within the Ottoman Empire itself. The Young Turks brought about a revolution in 1908 and were successful in introducing civil and social reform in the 1908 revolution (*The Grolier Multimedia Encyclopedia, 1996*).

The Young Turks governed until the end of WWI, and it was under their rule that the Assyrian holocaust took place.

Iraq was part of the Ottoman Empire until the end of WWI and became independent after the war, in 1933. During the war Iraq was occupied by the British, under whose mandate it remained until its independence. The Assyrians fleeing Iran from the atrocities inflicted upon them were given refuge in the famous Baquba camp, northeast of Baghdad.

In discussing the treatment of the Assyrian Christians and for that matter the Armenians at the hands of their Muslim neighbors in Iran, it must be noted that the main sentiment fueling anger against them was, first and foremost, religious fanaticism ignited by the presence and meddling of foreign powers. In Turkey, the leaders of the Young Turks Movement were trying to exploit nationalism, but this was the least developed element of the nation, the strongest being religion. Of course, it would be naive and wrong to think that religious violence against a helpless minority is the characteristic of Turks or Kurds alone, because history shows that violence similar to that which was perpetrated against the Assyrian people was committed by almost all nations in the past, and we see it happening today. But this does not constitute an excuse for what has

happened.

THE ASSYRIANS

The book under review is a first hand witness account of the blood stained pages of Assyrian history. At the same time, it provides valuable ethnographic information on the size of the community, and its legal and social status before the holocaust:

The Nestorians or Syrians were an ancient Christian people belonging to the old Nestorian Church. Thirty thousand of them lived in the villages of Urumia and seventy thousand, more or less, on the Turkish side (Shedd, 30).

The book also confirms an oral tradition the reviewer had heard before, from a native of Khosrava, regarding the origins of the community in Urmia.

Tradition says that Christianity was brought to Urmia nineteen hundred years ago by St. Thomas, who walked across the Lake, and the event has been celebrated each year by the Christians there (Shedd, 278).

This tradition is consistent with the one of Mesopotamia, which holds that Saint Thomas, on his way to India, made a stop in Celeucia-Ctesiphon.

Legal Status of the Assyrians

Regarding the legal status of the Assyrians, Shedd writes:

The Christian peoples of Persia were not recognized by Persian Law as possessing legal rights on a basis of equality with Moslems. The most honored and self-respecting Christian might be subjected to the grossest personal insults by Mohammedans without any right of redress; as in the case of a Syrian preacher, a man of culture and refinement, a graduate of an American theological seminary, who when spat upon in the bazaar by a Mohammedan, could offer no self-defense nor had he the legal right to make complaint (Shedd, 71).

The inferiority of the Assyrian legal status is evident from the following passage as well:

In Persia the village nearest the scene of a crime is held responsible, the fine for the life of a Christian being thirty Tomans and for the life of a Mohammedan one thousand Tomans (Shedd, 72). . . . According to

traditional Persian law, a Christian who is converted to Islam may claim the inheritance of all relatives within seven degrees of kinship. That is, a Christian who becomes a Mohammedan has the right to inherit the property of his Christian relatives, superseding parents, children, brothers and sisters, cousins and other relatives, to the seventh generation (Shedd, 76-77).

At the same time the Assyrians, as a “mellat” (recognized religious minority albeit inferior), were given the right to settle disputes among themselves according to their own religious traditions. From Dr. Shedd’s account it appears that this needed to be formalized at the time due to rampant corruption in the Moslem courts:

Cases in which Moslems were a party must of necessity be settled in the Persian courts, but the need of a court where litigation between Christians could be settled was an urgent need. The cases most common were disagreements in accounts, settlement of estates, a few divorce cases, personal and family quarrels. Such matters could often be adjusted by a patient hearing and authoritative advice, but if allowed to get into the Persian courts were seized as an opportunity for exacting bribes, causing endless trouble, and bringing dishonor upon the Christian Church. The Legal Board of the Evangelical Church was organized for the purpose of settling such cases between Christians and so preventing them getting into the Moslem courts... In 1898 the provincial authorities, including the representative of the Foreign Office and the Crown Prince, who represented the Shah in Azerbaijan, at the request of Dr. Cochran, issued an order which gave full recognition of the rights of the Legal Board to adjudicate matters in the Protestant Church (Shedd, 73-74).

In cases of civil or family law, the legal board followed the precedence set by the Assyrian traditional civil and religious code:

In practice Moslem law in many instances became customary, but the general basis for law in the Legal Board was the Canon law of the Old Nestorian Church. Latterly a code of rules with reference to marriage and divorce based on the Nestorian Sunhadis or book of Church government, was adopted by the Evangelical Church.

Comparing Christianity and Islam, Shedd says:

I do not believe there is a single doctrine in which the teachings of the two religions are really identical. In admitting identity, the danger is that the truth of Christianity be minimized. For example, forgiveness by free grace is fundamental to both religions; but in Islam the basis is

God's absolute will, in Christianity, it is His justice and righteousness manifested in the Atonement. [the reconciliation of God and man through Christ] (Shedd, 111-112).

The goals of the Protestant Mission among the Assyrians are openly stated by Dr. Shedd, and can also be partially glimpsed from the description of his own

duties and responsibilities. Note the following passage:

I should define the special aim of this work to be, (1) the training of Christian evangelical workers for Persia, (2) through our pupils and through the general influence of the school to build up the Christian community in this region and particularly the Evangelical Church and (3) to exert deep Christian influence on the Christless community about us and particularly on the non-Christian pupils. I should say that the special service under God that we can do for Persia in our schools is in training up of native evangelistic workers (Shedd, 98). . . . The ideal should be, I believe, toward the side of our Christian boys to turn out men in spirit and equipment, ready to be real missionaries to Islam, . . . (Shedd, 104). . . . During these years Mr. Shedd's first work was in the College as principal and teacher of Theology, often making his own text books. Part of the time he was also station treasurer, superintendent of village schools, editor of the Syriac newspaper, between times preparing other literary work, preaching on Sundays, and studying languages as opportunity afforded (Shedd, 66).

Considering that proselytizing among Moslems was strictly prohibited by the government of Iran, the goal of the Protestant Mission i.e., "to train real missionaries to Islam", seems to have been interpreted as political interference. But Dr. Shedd does not seem to have realized the political implications of his religious mission, and disclaims any political involvement:

It has been remarked by the Russian Consul and others that it is impossible for any foreigner, even a missionary, to divest his actions of political significance in the eyes of the people. I am sure that in Urumia a great deal of trouble is taken by our Mission to avoid mixing in political matters, and that we should rejoice to be rid of any political reputation. It cannot be denied in any case that the cause we represent is part and parcel of the country in which we live, and that we cannot be free and comfortable in the midst of such confusion as has prevailed all about us (Shedd, 87).

In the same vein, at the time of trouble in 1918, Dr. Shedd writes in one of his letters:

I anticipate there will be complaints against me at Tehran, and if the purpose of our diplomacy is merely to avoid complaints, I may be blamed. But if it be to try to help secure order in the country for ourselves and others, I do not see how I could follow any other course. . . . You know my instructions are to take no part in military affairs, and so I am only reporting conditions (Shedd, 225,226).

The Iranian historian Kasravi paints a very negative picture of the Assyrians in the history of Urmia during WWI. He describes them as a people bent on killing and having designs of creating a country of their own in Azarbaijan, together with Armenians, with the help of foreigners and an alliance with the Kurds (Kasravi, *Eighteen Years History*, 725, 729).

But a careful reading of Dr. Shedd's chronology clearly demonstrates that Kasravi is turning victims into villains: note the following passage:

As early as 1913 there were serious threatenings of a general massacre of Christians in Turkey. . . . It was only a little over a year afterward, in the late summer of 1915, that the blow fell, and practically all the Syrian Christians who escaped massacre, fled across the border into Persia, where they found temporary refuge (Shedd, 134).

As though anticipating Kasravi, Dr. Shedd writes:

The Syrians have always been an inoffensive people, and their cruel treatment at the hands of Turks and Persians is inexplicable (Shedd, 170).

Everything else that followed was to a great extent the consequence of this exodus. The Turks and Kurds Pursued and attacked the Assyrians and the Armenians. The latter responded in self-defense. The local population in the Islamic Alliance joined the Turks and the inevitable chain of events that followed spilled the blood of innocent people on both sides. The actual culprits in the destabilization of the region were not the local Muslims or Christians. Rather, they both were pawns in the arena of power politics on a larger scale as Shedd explains:

The topographical and geographical and geographical relationship of Persia, Turkey and Russia makes this corner of Persia strategically important and both Turkey and Russia wanted to hold it (Shedd, 140).

A more detailed eyewitness account of the events at the opening of the Great War, in the summer of 1914, and the aftermath follows:

The Russians were in military occupation of the Urumia region . . . As it was, a small force [Russian] stayed, fortifications were built around the city and preparations made for its defense. Turks and Kurds began to gather on the border and in September the Christians of the border region abandoned their villages and came to Urumia. Before Turkey's public entrance into the war, early in October, an attack under Turkish officers was made upon the city of Urumia. The Russians brought their mountain guns into action from a position near our Mission . . . Certain massacre would have followed the success of this attack but the city was saved just in the nick of time by the arrival of fresh Russian troops . . . Without any warning, as far as we knew, the order came to the Russian troops for the evacuation of the whole region and during the night of January 1, 1915, they began to move out. In the morning there was panic everywhere as the news of the evacuation circulated. The Christian population was at the mercy of Turks and Kurds and Persians. Dr. Shedd hastened to the Russian Consulate and found it already dismantled and everybody getting ready to leave . . . With the Russian authority gone and the Persian government paralyzed, Dr. Shedd was the man to whom everybody looked for leadership. He accepted the responsibility thus thrust upon him and for the next five months became the advocate and protector of thousands of helpless people who had no one else to whom to look (Shedd, 138-140).

The first flight of the Assyrians had begun:

By the morning of January 3 [1915], the people began pressing into our yards in crowds. The larger part of them had been stripped of everything but the few clothes on their back. It was winter with snow and slush, the temperature often ten to twenty degrees (Fahr.) below freezing, and many suffered greatly on the road . . .

One day six hundred people, led by their pastor, came in from the village of Kala Ismail Agha, . . . They had been promised by the Turks that they would be safe and so had remained in the village. Kurds came and after being fed as guests of the village, they disarmed the men and began to slaughter the people, killing over thirty and wounding many others), . . . News of the evacuation of the Russian army reached the villages at the northern end of Urumia plain late in the evening of January 2 [1915], and by midnight the people were hastening after the army toward Julfa [Iran-Russia border, NW Iran], . . . The cattle were left standing in the stables, and the furnishings and food supplies were left in

the houses . . . The old and weak died along the road and those who finally reached Julfa were so wretched and emaciated that their friends did not recognize them (Shedd, 144,149).

The first exile of the Assyrians lasted 5 months, until May 24, 1915. In those days Khosrava was a big, prosperous and beautiful village with three Churches, and between 700 and 1000 inhabitants. It became the headquarters of Mar Shumun Beniamin, the Assyrian patriarch who had taken refuge there. The fate of Khosrava is described in the following passage:

The Turks for a while had occupied Salmas and were driven out by the

Russians. Before leaving, they ruthlessly mutilated and destroyed the French Catholic Mission in the town of Khosrava. Jevdad Bey, commander of the Turkish forces there, had made the Mission his headquarters and was responsible for the havoc wrought, though before the war he had been a student in the French schools in Beirut. It was he who at the time of their withdrawal from Salmas, ordered and planned the massacre in the town of Haftdevan [Armenian village very close to Khosrava], in which eight hundred Christian men and boys were tortured, and hacked to pieces with a savage cruelty that could hardly be matched even in Turkey (Shedd, 191-192).

In 1918 it became necessary for Dr. Shedd to disassociate himself from missionary work and to apply himself to Consular work, as the American Consul. In the words of the biographer:

We began to make plans to rent a native house and establish the Consulate there, but before these plans could be carried out, the whole situation was thrown into utter confusion by the attack on the Christians by the Persians. . . . For weeks we had been living in the midst of two armed camps. Dr. Shedd was constantly busy with the leaders of both sides trying to prevent an outbreak. At a conference on February 22 [1918], each side promised not to attack the other. Scarcely an hour had passed when the Persians made an attack on the Christian quarter of the city... Agha Petros, the Syrian leader, was the man of the hour, and but for him and Malik Khoshaba, one of our mountain preachers who could fight as well as preach, there would have been a terrible massacre of Christians... In the afternoon of the second day a great shout of victory told us that Agha Petros' men had taken the *topkhana* or artillery square. Soon the white flags began to appear and in the course of the next few days every Moslem house was floating a white rag from the window. A band of *mullahs* and others went to Mar Shimon, who was then in

Urumia, to surrender, while the Governor sent a letter of capitulation. Later the leading Moslems met with Mar Shimon and the Syrian and Armenian leaders in a council of war and agreed upon terms of peace. The next morning several hundred *mullahs*, merchants, artisans, and other prominent men of this Moslem city, led by the Sardar who was governor in 1915, filed into the mission yard. They planted their white flags and the green flag of Islam in the snow banks in front of our door. They had come to surrender themselves and their city to the man whose confidence they had betrayed and would betray again, and yet were not afraid to trust... Neither side was willing to trust the other; both had confidence in him and wanted him in their council... The Persians freely confessed their premeditated plan for the annihilation of the Christians and laid the blame chiefly on four men (Shedd, 229-233).

As previously mentioned, according to the Iranian historian A. Kasravi, Assyrian occupation of Urmia was part of a plan to secure land for themselves. But Mary Lewis Shedd testifies to the contrary:

The victorious Christians had no idea of taking over the government, but asked for a Mixed Council composed of an equal number of Christians and Moslems. This council was formed and the Sardar was chosen governor . . . It was not easy to set up a government that would function, but the Syrian and Armenian leaders made every effort to establish peaceable relations and get along with the Moslems in working out a temporary government for Urumia. The Persians outside cut all lines of communication with Urumia . . . The Urumia Democrats, unable themselves to punish the Christians, appealed to their friends in Tabriz, who responded with great eloquence, . . . Telegrams were sent to Tehran complaining of pernicious meddling in politics on the part of missionaries and of Dr. Shedd in particular . . . Then like a bolt from a clear sky came the assassination of Mar Shimon, which completely upset everything that had been accomplished and threw all that region into a state of anarchy from which it never recovered. The Kurdish chief, Ismail Agha, or Simku, as he is popularly known, has played an important rôle in the Urumia tragedy. He had given assurances of friendship to the Christians, but at the instigation of Persians in high position, he most perfidiously murdered the Syrian Patriarch. Mar Shimon had returned to Salmas from Urumia and met the envoys sent by the Vali Ahd [Crown Prince] to confer with him in Dilman, the capital of Salmas. They had a satisfactory meeting and at the close Mar Shimon received an invitation from Simku to meet in Old City for a friendly conference (Shedd, 233-238).

Kasravi's account of the same event is:

As we said Mar Shimun was thinking to deceive Simku, [to make an alliance with Kurds to take over those areas]. So he sent him a message to find a place for negotiation. It was decided that in the evening of Saturday, Esfand 25 (March ?), . . . they both come to the Old City (Kohneh Shahr), and in a house there, they sit and talk”(Kasravi, *Eighteen Years History*, 726).

But Mary Lewis Shedd testifies that it was Simku who “had given assurances of friendship to the Christians”, and he was the one who invited Mar Shimun to meet him in the Old City.

The second phase of the tragic history of Assyrians in Urmia began with the flight of July 31, 1918.

On July 8, a British airplane landed in Urmia to deliver the message that they would send a squadron to meet the Assyrian-Armenian force in Sain Kala in two weeks. The British would then provide the force with rapid-firing guns, ammunition, money, and British officers. In the words of the biographer:

That meant they would reach Urmia in three weeks . . . The army began making preparations to meet the British with true Oriental lack of haste and efficiency . . . They started late, a thousand men under Agha Petros... reached Sain Kala several days behind the schedule, to find the British squadron had withdrawn. There was consequently a delay of several days before they all joined up at Sain Kala. In the mean time affairs in Urmia were not going well. The force that remained could not hold back the Turks who were pressing from the north; flight was imminent (Shedd, 254).

The flight that began in Urmia, ended in the Baquba camp north-east of Baghdad. Dr. Shedd and his wife, Mary Lewis Shedd, were with the Assyrians in this flight, and when they had reached Sain Kala, Dr. Shedd died of cholera and was buried somewhere there. His body was later recovered by his wife and buried in the Christian cemetery in Tabriz, more precisely in Leylava. Dr. Shedd had remained loyal to his mission to help the victimized Assyrians until the end. According to Mary Lewis Shedd, he once remarked:

that it would have been a sad commentary on us as missionaries if we had been so protected as to escape a share in the sickness, suffering and death that came to the people whom we served (Shedd, 178).

After the Christians were gone and peace was restored, there were still a few hundred Assyrians (mostly orphans, the elderly, and the sick) left in the

abandoned American mission yard. But even they were not spared. Mary Lewis Shedd describes the massacre that ensued:

Thinking the dangers past, Dr. Packard and his family returned to Urumia in May [1918] and the rest of Urumia missionaries then in Tabriz were preparing to do so, when the final blow came. Persians and Kurds were fighting in Urumia. On May 24, after driving the Kurds from the city, the Persians entered the American Mission Compound and fell upon the Christians who for eight months had practically been their prisoners. About two hundred fifty were killed, a hundred more wounded, and scores most brutally treated. (Shedd, 274)

How is Iranian history explaining this? Kasravi offers the following:

Because the people of Urmia thought these aggressions and the last disturbances [by Kurds] were Dr. Packard's provocation and his monetary help to Kurds had left deep impressions in their hearts, on 27 Shaaban 1337 some of the armed men, after defeating the Kurds and without government knowledge, attacked the American building, broke the door and entered it assaulting and killing the men and women that were being kept there. Hakim Saheb (Dr. Packard) himself was rescued with difficulty by some wise men and turned over to the government (Kasravi, *Eighteen years History*, 838).

This passage makes one wonder. If the people believed Dr. Packard was the instigator, then why the defenseless Christians were massacred and Dr. Packard was rescued?

ANALYSIS

Foreign powers operating in Iran, Turkey, and Mesopotamia, had their own agenda. They were out to secure their own interests. It is up to the people to be vigilant and avoid being used and manipulated by them. The Assyrians, a people persecuted, humiliated and massacred during the centuries, would, naturally, hope for a liberator.

In the plain of Urmia, too, as described in the biography of Dr. Shedd the Assyrian Christians, who for so long suffered under the oppression of the Moslems, saw in the Russian Mission the herald of Russian political influence under which they hoped to find deliverance from their intolerable position as subject races. The massacres of Christians in Turkey brought terror and panic to the hearts of Persian Christians and they thought to find refuge under the shadow of the Russian Church. The strongest pressure was brought to bear upon them [by the Russian Missionaries] and the wildest hopes were indulged in. All sorts of

reports were circulated and the people believed that the time of their deliverance was at hand and that at last they would be free from Moslem oppression and secure themselves a position of influence. This movement was under the distinct patronage of the Czar, and while on the surface it appeared to be religious, it was purely political and aroused strong Persian feeling against the Christians (pp. 65-66).

To sum up, the European powers, in competition with each other, decide to use every means they can find to protect or extend their zones of influence in Asia. They contact the small Assyrian community, both in Iran and Turkey, thus sowing seeds of suspicion in the minds of their Moslem neighbors. They utilized this small community to fight for them, who, in the process, ended up fighting its own Moslem neighbors in self-defense. Both Assyrians and their Moslem neighbors in Iran were victims of imperialistic greed, and were emboldened by the weakness of the Iranian Government unable to maintain its neutrality and protect its people.

The work of the missionaries, French, American, Russian and German, was a two-sided coin. It educated the Assyrians, built schools, colleges, hospital and presses printing in the Assyrian language, while at the same time subdividing the Assyrian community into so many denominations. Each mission preached its truth, and the Assyrian people became divided into so many truths, more of a quilt than a unified people. As mentioned above, the presence of missionaries created suspicion in the Moslem population. But as the efforts of the missionaries were bearing fruit and the Assyrians were becoming more educated and more prosperous, it created jealousy in the hearts of their Moslem neighbors. And jealousy often interacts with hatred. In Dr. Shedd's words:

Two causes that operated most widely were jealousy at the prosperity of the Christians and resentment at what was felt to be their self-assertiveness. The roots of both of these are religious. Christianity under any handicap is economically superior to Islam, largely because of the stability it gives to the marriage relation. Consequently, it has been universally true that the Christian villages have been conspicuous for their better buildings, larger wealth, greater comfort and profusion of household goods. The changes of the past two generations have rapidly increased this discrepancy, because the Christians have been more ready to profit by closer relations with the west. Emigration to America and consequently the flow of money from America hastened the change. In education and morality the Christians have been raised to a higher level by missionary work and this has reacted on social conditions.

Jealous resentment at the prosperity of Christians, has been sharpened by foolish acts of the Christians who took advantage of Russian domination to assert themselves in ways that were often exasperating and unjust. It was felt by men who were otherwise well disposed, for it is inbred and

inherited. Islam tolerates Christians, if they will keep their place. That place is not one of equality (Shedd, 194-195).

If the Great War had not happened, the presence of the missionaries alone would not have resulted in massacres and killings. Even with the occurrence of the Great War, if Iran had a strong government capable of safeguarding its neutrality and maintaining order within its borders, those tragic events would not have happened.

The Measure of a Man is a witness account of the sacrifices, devotion and love of a friend of Assyrians and also of the dark days of their history. It is a book that can fill some hearts with love for the people involved. Of course it is also important to resist the temptation of hating those neighbors of the Assyrians who gave in to their hatred and massacred them, because all were victims in this tragedy of imperialistic madness, and because all have to live together.

It is important to remember this historic fact that Iran did not offer any objection to the return of the Assyrians to Iran.

A harmonious life of Assyrians with their Moslem neighbors would be in keeping with the true spirit of Dr. William Ambrose Shedd's legacy, as expressed by himself:

Beyond immediate events, I believe there is a service to be rendered in making future adjustments more possible by diminishing friction and engendering good feeling (Shedd, 225).

Endnotes:

¹ The roots of European intervention in Iran go back to an earlier century:

By 1779 the Qajars had established their rule, but European politics intervened and seriously affected the future of Iran. The southward extension of the Russian empire toward the North-East threatened Britain's empire in the Indian subcontinent, and these two nations engaged in trade and diplomatic rivalries in Iran, turning it into a semi-colonial state that was economically controlled by the two European powers.

Riots broke out at the turn of the 20th century in protest of the Qajar monarch Naser-od-Din Shah (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, CD 98).

Naser-od-Din Shah was replaced in 1896 by his son Mozaffar-ad-Din Shah, who ruled until 1907. Mozaffar-od-Din Shah, an ineffectual ruler, was forced to convene a national assembly (the Majlis) and to grant a constitution in 1906.

Mozaffar-od-Din Shah was replaced, in 1907, by his son, Mohammad-Ali Shah. This king, with the aid of Russia, attempted to overthrow the parliament. He was deposed in 1909. Ahmad Shah, the son of Mohammad-Ali Shah, ruled from 1909 until 1925.

² A very important condition that had a direct effect on the events in Iran was the weakness and ineffectiveness of Iran's government.

As we have said, Iran was neutral in this war, and up until four years, more or less, that the war lasted, it remained neutral, but two things were incompatible with this neutrality and were making the work quite difficult. One, the presence of Russians in the northern cities of Iran, which in itself was a breach of neutrality. This it was certain will bring in the Ottomans, especially with the plan that the Germans had for Afghanistan and India of causing revolt there, for which they had to get access through Iran. Second, the unreasonable demands and policing activities of the Russians in collaboration with the British during the last eight years had filled the hearts of Iranians with hatred towards them, and it was most difficult for them to stay quiet in this turbulent world. Especially with the introduction of the Islamic Alliance which made its appearance many years ago and its fame had reached all Iranians, now it had acquired new excitement and was moving the Iranians . . . It is evident that if the government was strong it could have overcome both these problems and carry on with its policy of neutrality, but alas, there was no such government and in such hard times every cabinet that was installed could only last a few months and without accomplishing anything it would fall . . . (Kasravi, *Eighteen years History*, 588-589).

³ For additional information regarding the reasons why local Iranians joined the enemy in attacking their own local Iranians joined the enemy in attacking their own country, the following passage is instructive:

. . . because the Ottomans were Iran's neighbor from Azarbaijan and Kurdistan all the way to Khuzestan and the Persian Gulf, and everywhere along this frontier they were standing face to face with the Russians and the British who had come to Iran, this was making war inevitable. On the other hand, the Mojahedan [warriors of the holy war] of Tabriz, who in 1911, after the war with Russians had taken refuge in Turkey and most of them were still living there were compelled now to voluntarily attack the Russians (Kasravi, *The Eighteen Years History*, 593).

⁴ The roots of the Young Turk revolution are also found in the events of the previous century. background information follows:
Selim III (1789-1807) decided that it was essential to raise Turkey to the level of other civilized states, particularly in the military field. He had to overcome the

weighty opposition of nearly 400,000 Janissaries [member of an elite corps in the standing army of the Ottoman Empire from the late 14th century to 1826. Originally staffed by Christian youths from the Balkan provinces who were converted to Islam, [See The Encyc. Britannica CD 98], the college of the ulama [Theologians, clerics] and a host of dervishes [Sufi; Muslim Mystic]. This was a gigantic task attempted by Selim III. He failed. Mahmud II (1808-1839), the successor of Selim III, used a method that may appear barbarous but it was effective: All the Janissaries were massacred. On their disappearance an army on the European model was formed. It was during the reign of Mahmud II that the traditional costume was exchanged for European garb and the Turks adopted the fez.

Under Abdul-Mejid (1839-1861) the "hatt" [imperial charter] of Gül-Hane, promulgated on November 3rd 1839, announced that all Ottoman subjects were equal whatever their religion or nationality. Insurrections and palace revolts exhausted the empire, contributing to make it the "sick man of Europe," once more arousing the "Eastern Question."

These risings began in the reign of Selim III and continued throughout the first part of the 19th century. Turkey exhausted herself in internal conflicts (Ottin, 270-272).

During the reign of Sultan Abdül-Hamid:

A group of Turks, young men for the most part [mostly army officers], had founded a secret organization, the Committee for Union and Progress... These ardent patriots were exasperated by the policy of the Sultan and Western high-handedness. The revolution was unleashed by two officers, Major Naizi and Vice-Major Enver. The Sultan, seeing that the army refused to obey him, resigned himself to re-establishing the constitution of 1876. In 1909 Sultan Abdül-Hamid ordered his troops to march on the parliament and force the resignation of the Prime Minister and the President of the Chamber. When the news reached Salonika, Mahmud Shevket Pasha, a keen officer, sincerely attached to the Constitution, decided to march on the capital with his troops.

On April 24th the Constitutional Army took possession of the city. Three days later the two chambers announced the deposition of Sultan Abdül-Hamid and proclaimed in his place his brother, Prince Reshad, who took the name of Mehmed V. The new sovereign, a man of sixty-five, of a good and gentle, but weak disposition, gave a free hand to the Committee of Union and Progress, which became ultra-nationalistic and authoritarian. The Young Turks wanted to establish unity on the sole base of the Turkish nation, in other words on the least developed elements of the nation, rejecting the non-Moslem minorities, Bulgarians, Greeks and Armenians, etc., by vexatious measures (Ottin, 288).

The Turkish racist and cruel policy towards non-muslim minorities provided great Britain a good excuse to seek military measures against it.

The Turkish reputation for misrule, corruption, and cruelty had been a stench in the nostrils of Europe for a long time. The Liberals who had governed England since 1906 were the inheritors of Gladstone's celebrated appeal to expel the unspeakable Turk, the one great anti-human specimen of humanity, from Europe (Tuchman, 139).

Winston Churchill summarized the situation in Turkey in the following words: "A scandalous, crumbling, decrepit, penniless Turkey" (Tuchman, 139).

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