

To the American Board
office, Istanbul,

CH Janow

21 / H6V / 1977

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ERNEST A. YARROW

1876 — 1939



THE EDWARD W. HAZEN FOUNDATION
HADDAM, CONNECTICUT

ERNEST A. YARROW

Ernest A. Yarrow, known affectionately to all of his friends as "Syme", died on October 26th, 1939, in Middletown, Connecticut.

His life covered three major periods, the years from 1876-1904 when he was preparing himself for service, the years from 1904-1928 devoted to literally world-wide missionary and welfare experiences, and the final eleven years with the Edward W. Hazen Foundation at Haddam, Connecticut.

Syme's modesty was such that even the closest friends of his later years knew little of his early activities unless they had heard of them through press reports at the time. In his work as assistant treasurer and field representative of the Edward W. Hazen Foundation he came into contact with hundreds of leaders of young people, principally in the college field, and was loved by them for his qualities of tactful and painstaking guidance, and ability to work with others in genuine and hearty cooperation. His method was one of multiplication. He had early learned the leavening power of Christian love and friendship. He could use relatively small sums of money with almost uncanny effectiveness in achieving objectives.

Because many of us who were intimately associated with him during the later years knew so little about the first two periods of his career we have asked his wife, Jane T. Yarrow, to sketch in her own way the story of his life, family relationships and activities prior to his service with the Hazen Foundation. Following Mrs. Yarrow's account we include a summary of the later years. Finally, we indicate plans under way to continue the work which he pioneered. We believe those associated with the Foundation and Syme in these activities will be interested in these statements.

Mrs. Yarrow speaking

Syme loved to recount with a chuckle that when his family came to the United States from England in 1876 he was the only one of eleven children who wasn't seasick. The youngest of a Scotch-English family, he was only a half-year old when his father, a Primitive Methodist minister, settled in the United States and in due time became a naturalized American citizen.

After a hectic experience in public schools in various cities, he was corralled into Mt. Hermon School by his older brothers. He came to know

D. L. Moody personally and after four years at Mt. Hermon, where he made a start at good football playing, learned carpentry, and how to study, graduated in 1897, president of his class—a man dedicated to service for others.

He worked his way through four years at Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut, his course interrupted by service in the American army during the Spanish War and by several rather serious football casualties. During college years, he was chaplain of the Meriden Reform School. When I first met him, as the sister of his roommate, at commencement time, Syme told me that he had a job preaching every Sunday to never less than four hundred. Attendance was required at the reform school! I began then to feel the vividness of his warm, delightful personality. He graduated in 1901, again president of his class and a member of the Delta Tau Delta fraternity, then a local, called Phi Rho.

Having decided on the ministry, he entered Hartford Theological Seminary that fall. In the Christmas vacation of 1902, he came with my brother to our home in Oneonta, New York, and we became engaged to be married. He graduated from Hartford Seminary in 1904. For a third time he was president of his class. We were married that August and sailed for Van, Turkey-in-Asia as missionaries of the American Board. For some years we were very happy in a deeply rewarding work among the very finest of the Armenians.

In 1912 we returned with our three children to the United States for a year. We were back in Van in the fall of 1913 and our schools had developed into Van College, of which the freshman year had commenced. Syme was president of the college when the break-up came.

At the outbreak of the War in 1914, friction became more pronounced between the Armenians and the Turks and culminated in the siege of Van in April, 1915. The Armenian Revolutionists, entrenched around our section of the city, resisted the attacks of the Turkish troops. Our group of ten adult Americans and seven children were caught in a twenty-eight day siege during which stray bullets were always a menace. The situation was made even more desperate when the Turks, angered at our bolstering of the Armenian morale by our relief measures, on the twenty-eighth day of the siege trained their guns directly on our American homes and schools. That same night, however, the Turkish forces withdrew to the west as the Russian army was drawing near, and Van was "saved."

From April to August, 1915, was a nightmare of incessant work and strain. Thousands of entirely destitute Turkish refugees filled our school buildings. Syme organized the feeding of the typhus-ridden refugees until we were joined by a Russian Red Cross unit in charge of Countess Alexandra

Tolstoy who carried on when five of the Americans became desperately ill of typhus. Syme was supposed to be dying downstairs in our house while I was getting better upstairs. Alexandra Tolstoy came daily to translate for the Russian army doctor and to care for us both. While we were still ill the Russian army received orders to retreat northeast back to Russia on the whole of the eastern front. This meant the return of the Turks to wreak vengeance on what was left of Van. The whole population of that section of Turkey fled for their lives northeast across the border to Russia.

Our people gone, we also had to flee from Van. Befriended by the Russian Red Cross which gave us two wagons and escort out with their wounded, and helped heroically by Armenian friends at the risk of their lives, we started out for Russia. Syme, flat on his back with typhus but now expected to recover, was carried out in his bathrobe and put in a Russian army cart drawn by horses. Surrounded with bundles of clothing and food, I sat near him with our four children, the youngest, Ernest Junior, only one and a half years old. All around us on the vast barren plains were a mass of fleeing refugees, our own people, struggling through clouds of dust, in ox-carts, on donkeys or afoot, to reach the Russian border and safety. For five days, Syme and all of us jounced along in that rough cart, the food scarce and insufficient, the water dangerously polluted, up across the 10,000 ft. pass over Mt. Ararat. For two hours of the second day of our journey we were shot at by Kurdish snipers from the rocky ledges above the path. Thousands of refugees were killed in this attack. I have often tried to realize what must have been Syme's suffering on that journey, lying there helpless with his family and friends in such danger. At last, spent, disheveled, and heartsick we reached Tiflis, Georgia, in southern Russia. Here we recuperated for some weeks and then went on to the United States. That was the end of our service as missionaries.

In 1916, a Relief Committee was organized in New York for the 250,000 Armenians who had fled into Russia. Syme participated in all of the first committee meetings and was one of a group sent out to start the work. Our whole family sailed that July traveling north of England to escape mines and submarines. We landed in Bergen, Norway and went by train across Norway and Sweden down through Russia to the Caucasus. By 1918, the relief workers were augmented to about twelve adults. The work was going very well and we were living in Erivan, Armenia (southern Russia), where our last child, Jean Florence, was born.

The Russian Revolution had broken out in the fall of 1917, although the Soviet army did not really conquer the Caucasus until three years later. The Tartars, however, were on the rampage and were burning villages and massacring the people. In February, 1918, the Russian soldiers, instilled with

the new doctrines, left their trenches and encampments and started home. Enroute they set fire to the business section of Erivan. Syme worked to save our extensive weaving plants from the mob of irresponsible, often hilarious, ex-soldiers. In April, we Americans were ordered out of the Caucasus by the American Consul in Tiflis. Syme was chosen the head of a large company of American relief workers and miscellaneous British and Canadians desiring to get out of Russia. The American Consul at Tiflis secured permission from the Tartar chiefs for the safe passage of a special train from Tiflis to Baku on the Caspian Sea. Stranded in Baku for days by street fighting between the Russians and Tartars, this group of some forty persons managed to get food by back-door methods and subsist while Syme and his committee were trying to arrange escape for our small group from a city from which the whole population would have liked to flee. A boat was finally chartered and we were secretly gotten aboard. A last-minute strike of the crew was "settled" by a long harangue of a skilled Soviet orator authorized by Syme to promise wages. We set sail on the Caspian Sea bound for Astrakhan at the mouth of the Volga, a stormy passage, and uncomfortable because the crew had seized all of the staterooms. It must have been a fearful few minutes for Syme, when he went out on the rainswept deck the first night to see how Grace and George, aged eleven and thirteen years, were getting along sleeping under the lifeboat, and found them gone! Had they slipped overboard? Mercifully, he soon discovered they had crawled inside the lifeboat! I was sheltered in the crowded smoking room with the three youngest children.

Cheered on arriving in Astrakhan to find the rumors of "no bread," and "cholera" untrue, Syme arranged there to take our whole party in the sumptuous first-class on a Volga River boat. Peasant women were scrubbing the decks before we sailed, but after embarking there was no service. We divided into groups and did our cooking on board in the well-equipped kitchens. The wonderful observation glass front of the boat and the large staterooms were all perfect—except for a few insect occupants of the mattresses!

Arriving at Samara, the next step of the journey was arranged for by finding two badly dismantled but track-worthy railroad cars and getting permission from the various Commissars and Soviets for them to be attached to a Trans-Siberian train. To be sure, the railroad was in danger of being cut at various points by Korniloff or Semionoff, at large in Siberia with strong and mobile forces. Women had been hired to "clean" the cars but after we started rolling along Syme swept out from under the seats of the compartment assigned to me and my two daughters, age three months and eleven years, three dust pans full of dirt, a rifle, old shoes and other debris. Vermin aplenty rode with us on this train. For seventeen days, we traveled through Omsk, Krasnoïarsk,



Ed Marrow

Irkutsk, by Lake Baikal on to Chita and Khabarovsk, fed by canned milk, jam, bread, cocoa, and occasionally a goose or some cheese bought from peasants who came to the stations at our stops. A life saver was the boiling water obtainable at these stations. Our son George would always be the first off the train with a kettle. Syme cooked for our family on a Primus stove set on trunks in the baggage room, a task involving acrobatics as the old car lurched and swayed. In the heart of Siberia, we had a birthday party and a cake made without sugar for "Mike", age eight. When we crossed the divide, we were enjoying spring flowers which we had overtaken again, having gone north and east.

We learned later that our train was the last to get through to Vladivostok. We barely escaped being caught for years in Siberia. Czech soldiers, taken prisoners by the Russians, of whom we gave several a lift on our train, took five years to get from Russia across Siberia, the Pacific, and the United States back to Czecho-Slovakia. Our family was held in China for a year, while Syme helped in the flood relief, later going to Siberia for relief work under the American Red Cross by which he was made a captain.

In the spring of 1919, he received a cable calling him back to the still more urgent relief work in the Russian Caucasus. At the end of the war, an American army unit had been sent down there, but they needed a man familiar with the country and its people. I was to bring the family of five from China across to Honolulu and later join him in the Caucasus. This meant a separation of a year and a half. Leaving the two oldest children in Honolulu, the rest of us reached Batum on the Black Sea in August, 1920. By then, the military unit had withdrawn and Syme was director-general of the Near East Relief in the Caucasus. Over twenty-five thousand orphans in various places, extensive adult relief, a corps of more than one hundred Americans working under him, several million dollars worth of supplies from America, food, clothing, and medical supplies, all were his responsibility. During these years, he received six decorations, four from various Russian governments, one from the Persian government, and one from the Armenian government. At one time, in order to transport a cargo of American flour from Batum to the various centers, a distance of a few hundred miles, he had to negotiate permission from Ajaristan, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenian governments, supply all the guards for the train and even stoke the engines with wood torn up wherever available by his own hired engineers.

In the spring of 1921, the Soviet army finally took over the Caucasus and Syme had to arrange the difficult adjustments necessary to carry on the extensive relief work under the USSR. I believe he was the first American citizen to head a large enterprise financed by American money under the USSR. The next five years were trying and full of worries. The Soviet Government

had spies on Syme for years, but he acted squarely as he had promised he would, devoting himself solely to relief of suffering. I remember how punctilious he was, all the years we lived under the Soviets, not to write even in letters to friends in a derogatory manner of the Government under whose protection he was working. It was often very gratifying to find the Soviet Government extending unusual favors to our family. In Tiflis we were allowed a larger apartment, more square feet per person, than the general population. The courtesy of the Customs officials examining and sealing our personal baggage at our apartment was granted to us. The private automobile of the President of the Trans-Caucasian Republics met us at the railroad station in Tiflis.

As I look back the accomplishments of those years are unbelievable. At least a million lives were saved. Thank God, we were together most of the time; he, dedicated to service and I, by my great love, dedicated to him.

In 1926, Syme came home to stay. He was on the staff of speakers to raise money for the Near East Relief until 1929, when he entered the work of the Edward W. Hazen Foundation.

His work with the Foundation

During 1928, the last year of his life, Edward W. Hazen, who established this Foundation in 1925, became increasingly interested in work with college students. He recognized that the potential leadership of the future was largely concentrated in this group and felt that it was important not only that young people should be adequately instructed in the arts, sciences, and professions but that they should leave college with personality developed and sound character established if they were to make useful contributions to society. He had drafted during the year what he called "A College Plan." In this outline he expressed certain goals which he felt were important and methods by which he felt they might be achieved. Before his death, the original plan had been somewhat modified after discussion with numerous college presidents and administrators and others active in the college field.

The general objective of character development, personal counseling and guidance, remained a major interest with Mr. Hazen, and in the fall of 1928 he engaged Syme to help develop the processes which he had in mind. Before the latter's service actually began Mr. Hazen died, on January 9, 1929, but the work which he had outlined was developed into a program which became one of the major interests of the Foundation under the direction of Mr. Yarrow. Syme was later appointed assistant treasurer of the Foundation,

director of its field activities, and ultimately became a member of the corporation itself.

Since this memorandum is prepared for circulation among those with whom Syme was associated during the eleven years of his activities with the Foundation, most of whom are familiar in a general way with the chief aspects of his work, this part of the review will be brief.

One of his first activities was to lead a successful financial campaign for the Middlesex Hospital in Middletown, in which institution his last days were spent. As a result of this campaign in which the Foundation shared substantially funds were raised which provided a new home for nurses and other needed facilities. In the same year he had charge, on behalf of the Foundation, of the rebuilding of the old Brainerd Academy in Haddam and its complete remodeling into a fireproof town hall which was given to the town to replace the former structure used for that purpose which was destroyed by fire early in 1929. While these activities were going on plans were further developed for the work in colleges which was later to absorb the major part of his time.

In these developments the experience and advice of the National Council on Religion in Higher Education was largely drawn upon and most effective cooperation received, which has continued to date. The first "Hazen Conference on Student Counseling" was held in August, 1929, at Lisle, New York, under the joint auspices of the Foundation and the National Council on Religion. Similar conferences have been conducted annually ever since. In later years two and three conferences have been held each summer in different parts of the country, a total of twenty-one having been held. Attendance has been in part from among the so-called "Hazen Agents", who will be referred to later, and in part from among other administrative officers, counselors, and student leaders in the field of religion, philosophy and related departments. It was one of Syme's major responsibilities to establish sponsoring committees for these conferences, guide their activities, and assist in maintaining an effective program for each.

The system of "Agency-Grants", for the development of which Syme was largely responsible, grew out of the establishment of "bursaries" by the National Council on Religion in Higher Education out of funds provided for the purpose by the Foundation. Small grants are given to a group of qualified teachers, administrative officers or representatives of religious organizations on the campus to facilitate personal contacts and opportunities for guidance and counseling with students. It is not our purpose here to describe these grants in detail. During the period in which they have been effective some 300 agents in about 250 colleges have been appointed. Currently there are 150 agents in about 125 colleges. The selection and appointment of these men and women

have been the responsibility of an advisory committee working in close cooperation and with the advice of Mr. Yarrow who has acted as its secretary.

The Hazen Books on Religion, described as "a series of fresh interpretations of Christian philosophy as a guide to Christian living today" owe their conception and success in no small degree to the vision and persistence of Mr. Yarrow. He sensed the desirability of such a series of books, primarily for students, but written in a way to appeal to the interest and needs of others as well. A voluntary editorial committee has served faithfully in the promotion of the series and the entire project has been on a cooperative non-profit basis. An aggregate of about 100,000 copies of the nine titles issued to date have been sold. The tenth title is about to be published and two others are in process.

During all of his time with the Foundation Syme served actively on several boards and committees of national organizations active in the student field, including the National Council on Religion in Higher Education, the Student Division of the Young Men's Christian Association and the Intercollegiate Christian Council.

He was one of the most loyal alumni of Mount Hermon School and Wesleyan University and of his college fraternity, Delta Tau Delta. He shared actively in the program of many local and state activities concerned with the welfare of young people, including especially the church and the Young Men's Christian Association.

While he recognized the need for institutions and organizations and was competent in the administrative aspects of his work, he was most at home and happiest when dealing directly with persons, and endeared himself to his associates because of his sympathy and charity and his understanding of human needs and divine resources. One of his collaborators, appraising his work of recent years, describes these qualities as follows:

There is one element in Mr. Yarrow's part in the work of the Foundation which may slip through diagrams, and that is the infinite patience with which he nursed projects into existence and with which he kept them going. His constant attendance at meetings did two things that no office planning could do. It kept him sensitive to actual needs and it kept him in personal contact with all the people who had to be a part of any project. A method of promotion might be devised that would be less time-consuming but it would lack some of the factors which make for sound institutions, for personal contacts, and for persistence which were characteristic of Mr. Yarrow's method. These things are of special importance in connection with a Foundation which seeks to discover pioneering rather than stereotyped projects and to work with people rather than with institutions.

The Administrative Committee of the National Intercollegiate Christian Council adopted a resolution in appreciation of the life and service of Mr.

Yarrow which expresses with some definiteness the outstanding characteristics of his contributions in the student field. With the permission of the Council we quote this resolution at length.

We wish to record our sense of the great loss sustained by the N.I.C.C. and its member movements and Associations in the death of Ernest A. Yarrow, field representative and assistant treasurer of the Edward W. Hazen Foundation.

We have lost an able and tireless collaborator, a wise counselor, a friendly critic and a devoted Christian friend. During the past eleven years, through his work as officer and committee member in both our Regional and Student Christian Association Councils and through his active participation in, and support of, many conferences and enterprises of the Movement, Mr. Yarrow carried forward a Christian ministry that, for its influence on the growth of Christian experience among students, has not been excelled by any other person working among students in this period.

His position as field representative of a Foundation concerned about strengthening religious influences among students and prepared to make financial grants to further this interest was one of extraordinary delicacy. Yet he himself was so much a partner in every enterprise which he encouraged the Foundation to support, that there never could be the slightest suggestion of the use of his trust to influence unduly either the policy or processes of the groups receiving aid. He always trusted democratic group processes and took his part as a member of the group seeking high Christian ends.

Through the Christian simplicity of his life, his indefatigable labors in conferences, committees and budget-raising, and his intimate personal counseling with hundreds of church and Christian Association leaders and teachers, he exerted a unique influence upon religious movements among students. It is doubtful if any other religious leader had contacts that were so wide-spread or so personal as were his among the leaders of all student religious groups and movements. To hundreds of students and religious leaders in all parts of the country he was known as "Syme" Yarrow—a friend, trusted for wise counsel and loved for sincere and affectionate concern for them as individuals.

Among his many centers of interest in Student Christian Association work four stand out so prominently as to merit special mention. The first was his passion to give encouragement and financial support to the personal counseling work of those teachers and campus religious workers who were proving their capacity for personal religious work with students. This was given substance both through the Hazen Agency Grants and the Hazen Conferences on Student Counseling.

The second was his conviction that for the sake of the unity of the Christian Church it was imperative that encouragement should be given

to every movement leading towards more understanding and united work among campus religious groups. This faith he implemented in a score of ways—notable among them being the support of the N.I.C.C., the University Commission of the Council of Church Boards of Education, the National Council on Religion in Higher Education, various projects for seminars and year-round training together of all religious workers and teachers of religion, and many united field and national student conferences and enterprises.

The third was his belief that large numbers of students would read books on religion providing they were liberal in their religious and social viewpoint, inexpensive, and were written briefly and in simple style by the ablest theological and philosophical leaders in the country. This led to the venture known as the Hazen Books on Religion, a series that has already sold more than 100,000 copies, thus amply validating Mr. Yarrow's faith.

His fourth great contribution was his belief that on campuses locally and in national movements Student Christian work should be carried forward by men and women working together on a basis of growing understanding, respect and equality. He understood that this ideal could be achieved only as men and women learned how to develop the kind of organization and group processes which made possible equal responsibility on the part of men and women, both students and secretarial leaders. It was this conviction which led him to give a disproportionate amount of his time and energy to the various administrative bodies and commissions of the N.I.C.C. In his going from us at this time the N.I.C.C. and the groups associated with it have suffered an irreparable loss, yet his influence continues among us in the many points in our work where his leadership has enabled us to go forward together.

Be it therefore Resolved that this expression of our indebtedness to Mr. Yarrow and our affection for him be spread on our minutes and published in the Intercollegian and that copies of it be sent to our staff and field council officers, to Mr. Yarrow's family and to the Trustees of The Edward W. Hazen Foundation.

His service through the Foundation is appraised in this formal resolution by its Board of Trustees.

We record with deep sorrow the death of our friend and associate, Ernest A. Yarrow, on October 26, 1939. Chosen in 1928 by Mr. Hazen himself to supervise the field activities of the Foundation, especially in the counseling relationships with students, Mr. Yarrow fulfilled every expectation of the Foundation and of those working with him in this organization.

He came to us following an extremely significant missionary and humanitarian experience in Turkey, Armenia and Russia where he had already crowded into less than a quarter of a century much more than the ordinary equivalent of a lifetime of sacrificial service. With us he entered upon a

period of eleven busy years in a very different kind of work and showed his breadth and depth of capacity and versatility by pioneering in a field which was new not only to him but at many points was experimental for all with whom he was working.

He brought to us, however, an established skill as an executive. He knew how to deal with persons in every administrative relationship, and in his new work he showed to us and to many hundreds of leaders of students throughout this country how lives could be influenced for good through the impress and example of Christian personality and character.

As he himself wrote of Mr. Hazen, so it can be written of him that "his private life and public acts were motivated by a profound allegiance to religious principles as he saw them exemplified in the teachings of Jesus." We join Mr. Yarrow's many friends in this and other lands in extending sympathy to his family in their loss and in expressing joy for the enrichment which has come into our lives through association with one who himself so richly lived.

Syme's final illness lasted only a week. The suddenness of his going left his associates partially unprepared for carrying on some of the activities for which he had been responsible. Before trying to fill his position the Foundation felt that it would be wise to make a careful study and re-appraisal of the entire program now being conducted, on the basis of which study new directions might be taken or further emphasis put on features found to be most worth while.

Through the courtesy of the President and Board of Trustees of Northwestern University, Dr. Thornton W. Merriam, director of the University Board of Religion at Northwestern, has been granted a leave of absence to direct such a study in cooperation with the Foundation's president.

In the meantime, all field relationships with Agents, colleges, committees and beneficiaries will be continued and plans for the summer conferences will be carried out as outlined prior to Mr. Yarrow's death. Temporary staff assistance is being engaged to represent the Foundation in these activities pending selection of a successor.

The first of these interim appointments is that of Dr. Paul J. Braisted who is resigning in January from the Student Volunteer Movement, of which he has been General Secretary for the past three years. Dr. Braisted is planning to be with us for several months while more permanent plans of his own are maturing. We ask for him the same cordial cooperation which our hundreds of associates in the student field have so long accorded Mr. Yarrow.

Haddam, Connecticut
January 1, 1940.

