

MEMORIAL SERVICE

FOR THE LATE

REV. ISAAC G. BLISS, D. D.,

AGENT OF THE AMERICAN BIBLE SOCIETY

CONSTANTINOPLE

TURKEY

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FOR THE LATE MR. J. C. BAKER, D.D.

CHURCH OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, CONSTANTINOPLE

Translated by the Rev. J. C. BAKER, D.D.

PRESS OF A. H. BOYAJIAN

BIBLE HOUSE

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AGENT OF THE AMERICAN BIBLE SOCIETY,

CONSTANTINOPLE, TURKEY.

1889,

On the 10th of April, a very interesting service was held at the Bible House in Constantinople, in commemoration of the life and services of the late Rev. I. G. Bliss, D.D. for many years Agent of the American Bible Society in the Levant. A very large audience assembled consisting of Americans, English, Scotch, Armenians, and Greeks, testifying to the wide spread character of the sorrow which has been manifested. Rev. Dr. Washburn of Robert College presided. The service began with the singing of the hymn

"There's a wideness in God's mercy,

Like the wideness of the sea"

Dr. Washburn then read the Parable of the good Samaritan, (Luke X; 25-37), and after offering prayer spoke as follows :

"We have met here to-day to express to each other our common affection for a dear and cherished friend. We were not permitted to minister to him in his sickness, or to speak any parting words. We had not even the melancholy satisfaction of performing for him the last rites of burial. He sleeps far away, in the desert, on the banks of the Nile where he was laid by kind and loving hands, to await the resurrection of the dead. We have not come together to-day to erect any monument to his memory. This Bible House where we meet is all the monument of stone that he needs in Constantinople. We have not come to listen to any elaborate eulogy on his character,

although of few would it be so easy to speak such a eulogy; but we have come simply to express to each other our common love for our friend, and to comfort and strengthen one another by recalling the pure and self-sacrificing life that he lived before our eyes. Our words will not be altogether words of sorrow. When a good man dies, when his work is done and God calls him home, we rejoice for him and we give thanks for the life that he has lived in the Master's service. We take courage and press forward to imitate his example and emulate his faith.

Most of us have known Dr. Bliss only since 1857 when he came to Constantinople as the Agent of the American Bible Society. But it was in 1847 that he was appointed a missionary of the A. B. C. F. M. at Erzroom. At this station his sympathies were so deeply stirred, and his desire to redeem the people from their condition of ignorance and superstition was so intense, that his health gave way under the strain and he was forced to return to America in 1852, where he devoted all the strength he had to Christian work at home. Still his heart was in the East, and as soon as improved health permitted, he returned to accomplish his great life work in Turkey. Here many of us have known him intimately for 30 years and have passed with him through scenes of persecution, pestilence, war, sickness, sorrow, and disappointment, as well as through other scenes of joy and prosperity. It is not necessary for me to enter upon any detailed account of these 30 years, but I cannot let this occasion pass without some brief allusion to the impression which his life has made upon me. I can honestly say that I never spent an hour with Dr. Bliss without feeling a desire to be a better man. There was always something about him which was stimulating and inspiring. If you ask me what it was, I can only say that it was the man himself; not so much what he said or did, as what he was. But I think that I can indicate some of his characteristics which impressed me most.

I. First of all was the intensity and completeness of his consecration to the service of God. There was no fanaticism about him, and no cant. He had two pre-eminent qualities

which saved him from being a fanatic. He was humble and sympathetic. He believed in Christ and not in himself, and his heart was as tender as a mother's. His zeal was unlimited, but it was untainted by either pride or narrow-mindedness. There was no cant about him because he always spoke right out of his heart, with a sincerity which it was impossible to doubt. Fanaticism and cant even in good men are always irritating and repulsive, but Dr. Bliss's humility, sincerity, and sympathy were so apparent to all who knew him, that his enthusiasm in the master's service could not fail to win the confidence and stir the hearts of all who came in contact with him—even of those whose faith differed widely from his. The completeness of his consecration was as marked as its intensity. He seemed to think of nothing but the service of his Master. Whatever business he might be engaged in, whatever subject might be under discussion, in whatever company he might be, it was always plain that everything else was subordinate in his mind to the one idea of doing good, of serving God.

II. But there was a second characteristic of Dr. Bliss which impressed me quite as much as this. It was the steady growth of his Christian life; and I apprehend that *growth* is the truest test of spiritual life. Dr. Bliss was in many respects an ideal Christian, but he was not a perfect man, and no one realized this so fully as he did himself. He had physical and constitutional weaknesses which reacted on his mind and life, and often sorely tried his faith. Sometimes they tried, for a moment, the patience of his friends. We all have our peculiar weaknesses of this kind, but the great test of Christian character is found in resisting and overcoming them. In my long and intimate association with Dr. Bliss, I never ceased admiring the patience and determination with which he fought against these faults, and he so far overcame them that all who knew him felt that every year he became more charitable, patient, gentle and considerate; in every way more like his Master.

III. There was one other characteristic in Dr. Bliss's life to which this assembly bears witness, and which suggested to me the reading of the story of the good Samaritan as our scripture

lesson. Every man who needed his help was his neighbor, and every good cause was his own. He was never a strong man, and his own special work was a vast and absorbing one to which he was enthusiastically devoted, but he was always ready to lend a hand and give his hearty sympathy to all about him. He was as much interested in the mission work as though he were a member of the mission. The College and the Home School were as dear to him as though he had founded them. The churches in Constantinople whether native or foreign were almost as much in his thoughts as though he had been their pastor. And he had the same deep interest in what was going on in Egypt, Syria, and other parts of Turkey, as in Constantinople. His interest was not simply general, but extended to the joys and trials of individual souls. This is a rare quality even in the best of men but in Dr. Bliss it was pre-eminent.

I have spoken thus far for myself. It remains for me to say in behalf of my colleagues in Robert College that we feel that we have lost in Dr. Bliss one of our most faithful and valued friends. He never had any official connection with us, but for many years he has never ceased praying and working for the College. We shall never cease to mourn his loss and to cherish his memory."

Dr. Washburn then introduced the Hon. O. S. Straus, Minister of the United States, as one who had been brought both socially and officially into very close relations with Dr. Bliss.

Mr. Straus spoke as follows :

"I esteem it a privilege to unite with you, in paying respect to the memory and services of Dr. Bliss. I sympathize in the grief of the family and friends, for in Dr. Bliss, I too have lost a dear friend and a counsellor. Many of Dr. Bliss's cares were my cares, and many of Dr. Bliss's successes these last few years, have been my successes. I can add my testimony to the fact that none could come under the influence of Dr. Bliss, without being deeply moved by his sincerity. He was indeed a

very remarkable man, so sweet, and mild, and gentle, and yet so determined and wise. This Bible House, which has been spoken of as a testimony to his memory, is also a beautiful monument to his energy. When Dr. Bliss first came to Turkey, it required the qualities of a hero as well as of a teacher, to do his work without becoming disheartened. Any one who knew him would at once recognize in him the hero; and indeed, like a hero he has left impressions upon the sands of time, to give inspiration to those who should come after him.

He was my friend. I shall always cherish his memory, and deem it one of the privileges of my life to have been in close contact with him. For no one could keep from being made better by coming in contact with this noble, pre-eminent man."

Rev. Avedis Constantian, for many years connected with the work of Bible translation, was then introduced and spoke in Turkish as follows:

"For fifteen years, a native congregation has been worshiping in this hall. Most of the members of this native community had a personal regard for Dr. Bliss. I, myself, have known him for 25 years, and during about 21 years have been very close to him by reason of my work in Bible translation. Dr. Washburn spoke of the leading features of his life and there is no need of repeating what he has said. But I can speak of the influence of the life of Dr. Bliss upon myself. Why is it, that it should be spoken of? Why speak of Dr. Bliss and not of others, for many men die whose death does not move the people. The fact is that few men really influence the world. But on the other hand some have a great power among men; and for such there is no death, their influence is always a living power. When a man lives and works for himself, there is no importance attached to his passage from this world. But when a man gives himself, as did Dr. Bliss, to working for others than himself, then there is no death for his influence any more than there is an end to the influence of Paul, who speaks now as if he were still in the land of the living.

Dr. Bliss was one of those men who exercise an influence

which cannot be destroyed. He was not a perfect man, but he was a man wholly given to God. His work was Bible work, but he never limited himself to it. He provided for preaching and school work. He was deeply interested in Bible translation work, keeping it ever in his mind. He remembered the poor, and everyone naturally turned to him for help. It was his interest in the work of God in this land, which brought this Bible House into existence. He saw the need and could not help building this Bible House. And now it is always to be a center for the work of God in this city.

Few know how he worked day and night in the preparation of the Bible, always thinking how to make it attractive to the people and bring it within the reach of the poor. He gave his whole strength to the work of giving the Bible in a cheap form and in popular languages to the people of this land. Hence all the people give their sympathy to his family. In this country many have the custom of meeting on the birth of a child. This congregation has come together on the death of a man. It is because they who die in the Lord are blessed, 'for they have rested from their labors, and their works do follow them.' The works of Dr. Bliss do follow him. This Bible House holds the memory of him before all eyes. Let us all so live that our works may not come to an end at death, but may live after us; and may God bless us all in this purpose."

Rev. Dr. E. Riggs was then introduced as one of the surviving fathers of the Mission, and spoke as follows:

"It has been said of Mr. Moody, that the secret of his success was his thorough earnestness. As one writer expressed it, 'he was in dead earnest'. I would say of Dr. Bliss that he was in *living* earnest. His work in securing the erection of the Bible House was an illustration of this. He felt the need of such a building to the permanence of the work in this city, as well as to be its center. When he proposed it to sincere friends of the Bible cause, almost all discouraged him from

undertaking it. It was impossible, they said, to expect to raise \$50,000 or \$60,000 for an object so far from the donors. It was only by persevering effort that he obtained the consent of his society to his undertaking to raise the money needed to build the Bible House. And his success in overcoming all obstacles and completing the building was a remarkable instance of the power of earnestness. It is chiefly of his relation to his brethren of the American Board that I am asked to speak. And here I need not detain you long. The story is short because it is so simple and so true.

His work led him to visit the missionary stations all over the land, and everywhere he came into close contact with the missionaries with whom he always sympathized as if he were one of them. As an instance of this, I may mention the Book Department of the mission. Dr. Bliss felt it could be managed more economically, if under one control with the work of Bible distribution; and without neglecting his own work, he took this also upon himself and managed both of these enterprises in a way that saved at least a large portion of the time of a member of the mission. He simply saw the advantage that would result and so he took up the extra work. All the missionaries are grateful to him for personal sympathy and for his steady assistance to all mission enterprises. I have come into contact with our brother in many ways, and have sympathized with him in his difficulties and encouragements set forth remarkably in his report of 25 years of Bible work in Turkey. One prominent impression derived from contact with Dr. Bliss was his regard for the opinion of others. He was earnest and determined in his fixed purpose to scatter the Bible everywhere, but in the details he was in the habit of seeking the best advice, ready to profit and be guided by the counsel of others. May God's grace enable us to be as earnest, single hearted, humble, and devoted as was our brother."

After singing "Just as I am, without one plea", a favorite hymn of Dr. Bliss, Mr. Burness of the Evangelical church of Pera gave a sketch of the relation of Dr. Bliss to this church,

the pulpit of which he filled for a year, and in which he took a tender interest. In this survey of past years, he mentioned one interesting and characteristic incident. When the church was trying to raise sufficient money for a pastor who should devote his whole time to them, they succeeded in getting only £150, which was not enough. This pecuniary obstacle was made known to Dr. Bliss, and in response he said only, 'I see no difficulty there; all that is needed is that each donor should double his subscription'. Some of the subscribers did so, the money was raised, and the pastor came.

Dr. Bliss's motto was "Go Forward", his favorite text for sermons was "Grow in grace", and the spiritual influences he set in motion still go on. His life summed up might be expressed in the verse "What thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might."

Hagop Effendi Boyajian, the recently appointed Civil head of the Protestant Community was then introduced, and spoke in Armenian. He remarked that what had already been said of Dr. Bliss might be supposed to leave nothing for him to say, but since he had been in business relations with him for 20 years, he might speak of the impression produced on his mind as the result of this long acquaintance. He would first recall the activity of Dr. Bliss. His was the activity of a man who in his work has in view the interest of the whole world. Now it was a question of translation which occupied him, whether the language should be of a common or a literary style; now it was a boy who ought to be educated; now, a sick man who ought to be placed in hospital; then again it was the style of binding of the books, cheap for the poor people, or dear for other tastes. Again it was the question of the size of the page that should be printed, whether of pocket size or of pulpit size. He was always busy with such questions of detail.

Next, the persistence or continuity of his activity was noticeable. He never forgot matters that were up for decision. He would talk about a matter the last thing before leaving his office at night, he would think about it in the night, and as he came to the Bible House in the morning his first greeting would be:

'I've been thinking' and then he would come out with a solution of the difficulty.

Then again his activity and his persistence all centered about the work of the Society that had sent him. This was his special work. He thought of other things innumerable; to do good to the poor, to help those needing advice; but then his chief characteristic was the certainty that his powers would be specially devoted to the work of printing and publishing the Word of God.

So much might be enough to show him to be a great and good man, perhaps a complete man, but it does not prove him to be a Christian. There is another characteristic of Dr. Bliss that should be mentioned which will prove him to have been also a true Christian. This was his readiness to apologize when he felt that perhaps he was in the wrong. "He used to come into my room to discuss matters about which we differed" said Boyajian Effendi, "He hot-blooded, and I hot-blooded, and we sometimes talked with a good deal of warmth. Then he would go away, but in a few moments while I was still boiling over, he would come back and hold out his hand and say that perhaps he had said some things which he ought not to have said, and that he wished to ask pardon and shake hands over it. If Dr. Bliss with such readiness to apologize, and readiness to forgive when asked to do so, was not a Christian, who is a Christian?

We have all felt his eminent qualities, both as a gentleman and a Christian, and therefore we all grieve over his loss."

Mr. Boyajian then repeated in English the main points of his remarks.

Dr. Thomson, Agent of the British and Foreign Bible Society, was then introduced and spoke of the long continued relations he had sustained with Dr. Bliss. In this survey he noted particularly the substantial harmony between them, in spite of the many delicate and difficult questions that came up for settlement from time to time. He rendered a warm tribute to the energy

which had provided the Bible House, with its great conveniences for the work, and in closing alluded feelingly to the loss of Dr. Bliss as that of a fellow worker of the same age as himself.

Rev. Mr. Bowen, the present Agent of the American Bible Society in the Levant, was then introduced and in a few words spoke of the grief felt by the Society in view of the death of Dr. Bliss, as that for a near and dear relative. They had lost in him a highly trusted and honored leader. Only two men living have been longer connected with the Bible Society than was Dr. Bliss. In view of this near relationship, there had been a propriety in manifesting the grief of the Society by keeping silence, and he would add only a word to what had been said. Personally in the death of Dr. Bliss, he felt he had lost not only an associate and a father in the work, but also a dear friend whom it was a benediction to know and whose character would remain an inspiration while life should last.

Mr. Bowen closed by reading the following sympathetic and appreciative minute, adopted by the Managers of the Bible Society at their regular meeting on the 7th of March.

“The Board of Managers of the American Bible Society render devout thanks to God for the life and work of Isaac Grout Bliss, D.D., who having “served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep” at Assiout, in Upper Egypt, on Saturday, the 16th of February last.

Having devoted himself in early life to the missionary work, Mr. Bliss went out to Erzroom in 1847 under the auspices of the American Board, and there remained until a complete failure of health compelled him to return home in 1852. His health having been restored, he gladly accepted an appointment as the Society's Agent for the Levant, and entered upon this service in January, 1858. From that time, until he rested from all earthly care, the interests of the Bible work have been very dear to him; and with singular devotion he has sought to extend the circulation of the Holy Scriptures among the millions

of various nationalities dwelling in the Turkish empire and adjacent lands.

Enthusiastic, hopeful, cheerful, devout, he impressed himself on all classes with whom he came in contact, and imparted to them something of his own zeal in respect to the diffusion of the truth. Long journeys in European and Asiatic Turkey, in Greece, Syria, and Egypt, made his presence familiar in many missionary homes and in many assemblies of evangelical Christians, to whom he was always ready to preach the glad news of salvation.

He made several visits to the United States, and on the first occasion, in 1866, his stay here was prolonged for more than a year by consent of the Board, that he might secure funds to the amount of \$50,000 for the erection of a Bible House in Constantinople. This measure he successfully accomplished, and the building which was erected under his supervision with these funds in 1872, and enlarged in 1886, stands as a noble and enduring monument of his efficiency and zeal.

In his death the Society loses the prayers and sympathy and energies of a faithful and devoted Agent; and mindful of their own loss, the Board of Managers extend their sympathies to the widow and the family of Dr. Bliss in their deeper sorrow, commending them to the loving care of our Lord and Saviour, in whom he trusted to the end."

Prayer was then offered by the Rev. Mr. Barnum, and the meeting was closed with a hymn followed by the benediction.



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