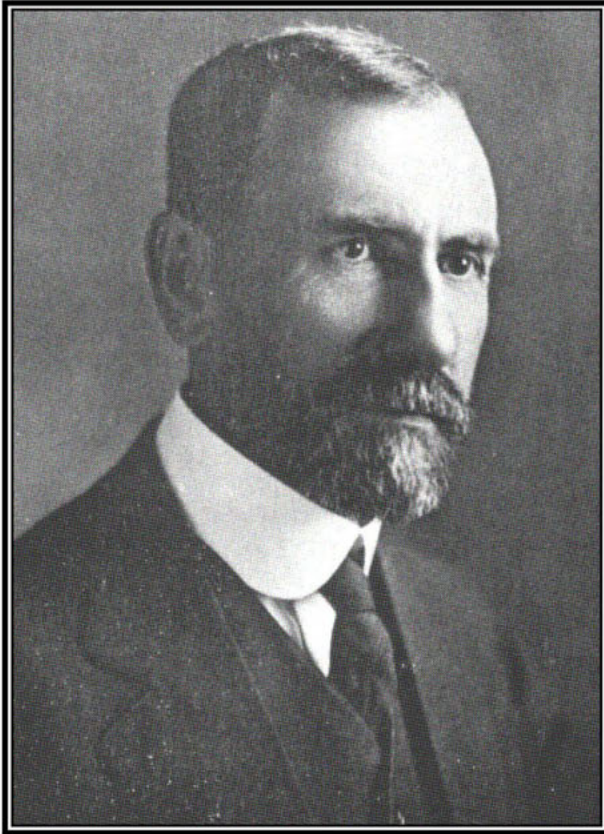


# **THE MEASURE OF A MAN**



WILLIAM AMBROSE SHEDD

*(Frontispiece)*

THE  
MEASURE OF A MAN

*The Life of William Ambrose Shedd  
Missionary to Persia*

BY  
MARY LEWIS SHEDD

*With an Introduction By*  
ROBERT E. SPEER

*ILLUSTRATED*



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## **A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF WILLIAM AMBROSE SHEDD**

William Ambrose Shedd was born in Urmia, Iran in 1876. His parents, John H. Shedd (in Urmia from 1847 to 1871) and Sarah Jane Dawes, had worked primarily among the “Nestorian” (Assyrian) Christians of northwestern Iran and had been actively involved in the final separation of the Protestant Church from the ancient Church of the East.

Shedd junior, after his education in the United States (including a couple of years at Princeton Seminary), in 1892 returned to the same mission field, where he worked for the Presbyterian Mission Board. By the time he went on leave to the United States in 1902/3 (during which he also married Louise Wilbur), he was already one of the important figures of this mission, a position that was to become even stronger in the later years, when he was leading the mission through the extremely difficult First World War period. In these years he occupied himself with almost all aspects of the mission, among which preaching, teaching at various levels, supervising the printing press and handling the legal affairs of the mission and the Protestant community.

Alongside these duties, he found time for his scholarly interests, among which a keen interest in the history of Islam and the Eastern Churches, especially those of the Syriac tradition (see his *Islam and the Oriental Churches. Their Historical Relations*, Philadelphia 1904, Gorgias Press reprint 2004).

Shedd had also been actively involved in preparations for the publication of a concordance to the Syriac Bible, as becomes clear from a letter of Prof. Duncan B. MacDonald of Hartford Theological Seminary of Kentucky that is quoted in the present volume (p. 125ff). Shedd had produced this concordance, based on the Urmia edition of the Peshitta, together with his co-worker

Benjamin W. Labaree and a number of unnamed Assyrian scholars. The work was ready for the press when the war broke out, interrupting its printing and later destroying the original (and only) manuscript.

Another scholarly work in which William Shedd, together with his father John Shedd, was involved, was the *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the Library of the Museum Association of Oroomiah College* (Urmia 1898) of which Oshana Sarau was the main author. Most of the manuscripts described in the catalogue did not survive the First World War, but the catalogue itself is an enduring testimony to the genuine interest of father and son Shedd in the heritage of the Christians of the Church of the East.

The war not only destroyed much of Shedd's labors, he himself fell victim to its final gruesome episode. In 1918, William Shedd died of cholera near Hamadan during the mass flight of Assyrian Christians and the remaining American missionaries from Urmia, towards safety in British-occupied Iraq.

Heleen (H.L.) Murre-van den Berg

**TO HIS MOTHER**  
**SARAH JANE DAWES SHEDD**

## INTRODUCTION

William Shedd was one of the ablest and best men I have ever known. These are direct and simple adjectives and they fit his direct and simple character. He was an able man, with a clear, fresh, unconventional mind, familiar with the accustomed modes of thought and forms of expression but assured that there was more to be known about the truth of God than man had yet apprehended and that there were ways of stating the truth of God that should be found and that would be more adequate and persuasive. He had a good scholarly equipment and a real scholar's instinct. In the Theological Seminary at Princeton both his teachers and his fellow students recognized his unusual capacity. He would have taken first rank in any one of several lines of study and research if he had turned his life in these directions. But he had abilities which led him away from scholarship into action-administrative and executive ability, the power of sympathy and of practical action. He was a good man in this sense, that he would not give his life to

the satisfaction of intellectual tastes even as a teacher or defender or explorer of Christian doctrine but must spend himself in helping needy and destitute people and in carrying the comfort and salvation of the Gospel to those who were as sheep having no shepherd. There were other senses also in which he was a good man. He was intellectually and morally honest clean through. He was modest and self-forgetful but entirely ready to face responsibility and to exercise leadership. The principle of justice and fair-mindedness was inwoven in his whole character. He was destitute of any fear that would estop him from duty. He had no desire but to know and to do what is true. He knew small-mindedness and malice and hypocrisy when he met it in America or Persia but he was endlessly charitable and kind-hearted and in the dark days of the war, without concealing his judgments or palliating wrong, he still worked patiently with all whose help might be of service in saving the people about him, Syrian and Persian and Kurd. And there was not one of them who did not recognize that William Shedd was an able and a good man.

He was one of the most competent and successful missionaries of the Church. He came

to his work in Persia with a thorough and adequate preparation. His inheritance, his family background, his education, his character, his knowledge gave him a unique equipment. At first he had his father and Dr. Joseph P. Cochran as his older associates and, after his father's death, Dr. Cochran, and later Dr. Labaree. He succeeded all of these in the confidence and regard of the people of Urumia and to them all, and to the Persian officials and to the representatives of Russia and France he was the incarnation of his Mission and of America and of the spirit of love and justice. It has been given to few missionaries to win such a place of acknowledged leadership among the people to whom they have gone. The whole Assyrian nation came to regard him as its counselor and guide. What Elijah had been to Elisha he was to this people, "The chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof."

The problems and perplexities with which he had to deal were enough to overtax any man. Nowhere in the world was there a more entangled and impossible situation than in Urumia during the war. The tides of human movement and of political interest were so confused that no human being caught in them could escape from them. As a missionary, as

American Vice-Consul, as a man, as a Christian, as the representative of righteousness and truth in human relationships, Dr. Shedd had a work to do in Urumia in teaching men brotherliness and goodwill, in protecting the vanquished from their victors and then those who had been victors from those whom they had vanquished and who were now victors in their turn, in exposing and preventing treachery of many kinds, in defending the helpless, in forwarding the cause of justice, in delivering a nation from death, which no other man could have done as he did it. The burden was more than any life could bear and he laid his life down under it. But it was a glorious way to lay one's life down. I do not know of any man of whom the words which Matthew Arnold used of his father in "Rugby Chapel" might be more truly spoken.

“But thou would'st not alone  
Be saved, our brother, alone  
Conquer and come to thy goal,  
Leaving the rest in the wild.  
They were weary, and they  
Fearful, and they in their march  
Fain to drop down and to die.  
Still thou turnedst, and still  
Gavest the weary thy hand.

“If, in the paths of the world,  
Stones might have wounded thy feet,  
Toil or dejection have tried  
Thy spirit, of that they saw  
No thing—to them thou wast still  
Cheerful, and helpful, and firm!  
Therefore to thee it was given  
Many to save with thyself;  
And, at the end of the day,  
O faithful shepherd! to come,  
Bringing thy sheep in thy hand.”

There are still other lines in Arnold's tribute to his father, which might justly be applied to William Shedd, true missionary, lover of Christ and of men, good shepherd like his Lord. One of the Syrian people, Professor Yohannan of Columbia University, who knew and loved him, has himself used just such speech of him and of his father. “Dr. Shedd,” says he, “was a scholar, and thoroughly equipped for the work with something more than the surface-teaching of the ordinary theological doctrines. His book, ‘Islam and the Oriental Churches,’ is an able piece of work. He laid, however, his literary ambition and all his scientific attainments upon the altar of God from whom they came, counting them loss for Christ. . . . He did not work for stipend, or honor, or the praise of men, but was im-

pelled by higher motives to the service of his Master. He was the champion of the oppressed, the shepherd of a gentle and humble spirit, to whom the poorest of his flock was not too poor. His greatest joy was in bringing a stray sheep into the fold."

But it is not necessary in these few words of introduction to tell the story of William Shedd's life or to attempt an estimate of his character. I want simply to bear testimony to what I knew. For nearly thirty years as intimately as a brother I knew him, his pure heart, his peaceableness, his courage, his quiet power, his tenderness, his prudence, his freedom, his loyalty. He also was one "who never turned his back but marched breast forward," trusting God. The years are freighted with the rich memories of him and every such memory is dear.

ROBERT E. SPEER.

## PREFACE

The life story of William Ambrose Shedd is so full of thrilling interest and inspiration that it needs to be written in permanent form. The task has devolved upon me, to whom it has been a labor of love. No other incentive could have been strong enough to induce me to live again the poignant experiences of the later years.

I have not attempted to write the history of Urumia Station nor of the war in Persia. Neither have I tried, in any adequate way, to tell of the services of others. There is much that is worth the telling but that task remains for others.

My gratitude is due the friends who have read the manuscript; to Dr. Robert E. Speer for his chapter of introduction; to Professor Donald B. MacDonald, who has contributed the history of the Urumia Syriac Concordance, and to Miss Rachel Capen Schaufler, who by her personal interest in the story and her careful reading of the manuscript, has encouraged and helped me greatly.

MARY LEWIS SHEDD.

*Philadelphia.*

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**THE MEASURE OF A MAN**



## CHAPTER I: A GOODLY HERITAGE

William Ambrose Shedd was of the eighth generation of the Shedd name in America, and the family ancestry has been traced in England for twelve generations more to the year 1327.

Daniel Shed, the first to come to this country, settled in Braintree, Massachusetts, about the year 1640. One of the name was a member of the "Boston Tea Party" and in the list of the Massachusetts soldiers in the Revolutionary War are the names of fifty-two Shedd.

In 1829 the grandfather of William Ambrose, Rev. Henry Shedd, a graduate of Dartmouth College and Andover Seminary, with his bride, Mary Gerrish, went from Rutland, Vermont, to Central Ohio as a home missionary. Thus for nearly a century the name Shedd has been associated with Missions.

Henry Shedd was fitted by nature and by consecration to the work of a pioneer missionary at the time when the two great questions before the Church and the country were Abolition and Temperance. He was uncompromis-

ing in his attitude toward both and untiring in his labors among the churches. "Standing through a long and self-sacrificing life for high principles in Church and State," wrote his grandson, William Ambrose, "he suffered much unpopularity for his anti-slavery convictions, not hesitating to bar the Communion against the slave-holder, or to stand alone in Presbytery or Synod, or to brave the rotten eggs of a howling mob."

Henry Shedd was also a patriot. In his diary in April, 1861, he wrote that he had preached on the war before the first company of volunteers raised at his home town, Mount Gilead, and that he had sent five hundred dollars in gold for a United States Treasury note to help put down the Rebellion. Three of his sons served in the Union Armies.

Life in the new country was hard for the frail, cultured wife, and in 1835 she died, leaving two little boys, Charles and John Haskell. John, who became the father of William Ambrose, was born July 9, 1833, and from the time of his mother's death, even after his father's second marriage, he lived with Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Hardinbrooke, godly neighbors in that pioneer land, and his foster parents had strong influence in molding his character.

His early education was received in a log schoolhouse in the woods. Later he attended the Academy of Center College, Ohio Wesleyan University, and Marietta College, where he graduated in 1856, second in his class and with a fine record for character and scholarship.

Shortly after graduation, he became engaged to Miss Sarah Jane Dawes of Marietta, Ohio, who was then a student at Western College, Oxford, Ohio, from which institution she graduated in 1858. Her father was Henry Dawes, whose family were from New England and among the first settlers in Ohio. An ancestor was William Dawes, who rode with Paul Revere on his memorable ride. Her mother, Sarah Cutler Dawes, was the daughter of Judge Ephraim Cutler and granddaughter of Rev. Manasseh Cutler, who for more than half a century was pastor of the Congregational Church at Hamilton, Massachusetts. He was chaplain in the Revolutionary Army, and late in life a member of the United States Congress. As director and agent of the Ohio Company, he negotiated, in 1787, the purchase of a large tract of land on the Ohio and Muskingum rivers, and secured the incorporation of certain articles that promoted education and forbade slavery, in the Ordinance of 1787

which provided for the government of the Northwest Territory. His son Ephraim became a settler in the new country and was a member of the convention for forming the first constitution of Ohio and so rendered to that state much the same service that his father had performed for the whole Northwest Territory.

John H. Shedd decided upon the ministry for his life work, taking two years of his theological course at Lane Seminary, Cincinnati, Ohio, and the third year at Andover Seminary, in Massachusetts, where he graduated in 1859. While in the Seminary, he offered himself as a foreign missionary to the American Board and was accepted. His son William, writing nearly sixty years later of his mother's part in this decision, said, "This consecration to missionary service was something that did not affect himself alone and surely a question was never more fairly faced and more fairly decided on the basis of fundamental facts, than by this strong and noble woman."

John Haskell Shedd and Sarah Jane Dawes were married July 28, 1859, and shortly afterwards sailed for Persia under appointment by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions to the Nestorian Mission at Urumia. This Mission station, where their

son William was born six years later, is in the northwest corner of Persia close to the border of Turkey. It is a land where time is counted in millenniums, on the borders of ancient Assyria, Media, and Armenia, while to the north is Mount Ararat, where Turkey, Persia, and Russia meet. Urumia is the traditional birthplace of Zoroaster, and many great ash hills mark the points where for centuries were kept burning the altar fires of the Parsees, or fire-worshippers. The plain, over which are scattered several hundred villages, is about fifty miles long and stretches westward to the towering mountains of Kurdistan, varying from five to twenty-five miles in width. Urumia Lake on the east is a great inland salt sea nearly a hundred miles in length and from forty to fifty miles at its greatest width.

The Mission field extended westward to Mosul on the Tigris near the site of ancient Nineveh, and included the plains north and south of Urumia Lake. This territory was partly in Persia and partly in Turkey. In the little villages of the plains and among the mountains of Kurdistan as far south as Mosul, wherever occupied by Nestorian tribes, the missionary found a parish.

The larger part of the population of the

Urumia field were Persian Mohammedans, Turkish in race and language but Persian in sympathy and allegiance and belonging to the Shia sect. 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, in the Kurdish mountains, on the Turkish side. The Chaldeans who live in the Tigris valley are Nestorians who have been converted to Roman Catholicism. There were Jews in small numbers through the whole field. Many thousand Armenians lived along the Persian border, in and about Van, Turkey, and scattered through the various cities of Persia. The Kurds live on both sides of the border and are Sunnis, or Orthodox Mohammedans, like the Turks.

Urumia, oldest of the Persian mission stations, was occupied in 1835 by Rev. Justin Perkins and his wife and Dr. and Mrs. Ashiel Grant. It had an uninterrupted history until the summer of 1918 when, by the tragedies of the World War, the work was entirely broken up and the missionaries and all the Christian population killed or driven out.

The mission was at first under the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions