

Hisar Women's League
Dec. 13, 1960

Dr. Mary Mills Patrick

First President of the American College for Girls.

I have chosen today to speak of Mary Mills Patrick , not only because she might be of interest to you as the virtual founder of the American College for Girls, but because she was in herself a very remarkable woman. She lived in Turkey for 53 years. She was devoted to its people, particularly to the education of its women and she was the interested witness of immense changes in the country, social, educational and political. Being the child of her era, she had the spirit of the pioneer. She was a feminist, passionately dedicated to the independence and emancipation of women.

The trouble about talking of Dr. Patrick is that there is so much to say that I hardly know what elements to pick out. Her life was so closely connected with the Girls' College, for so many years that only a complete history of the institution would do her justice. A talk about her could be taken from a dozen different angles.

She was born in 1850 in Canterbury, N.H. but when she was only a child, her family moved west to Iowa, and it was here that she grew up. Her family was a pious, God-fearing one with bookish habits, for her immediate forebears had been clergymen. Her mother and father and brothers and sisters were interested linguists and read their daily Bible in several languages. She went to a small Iowa College, called Lyons

College and she graduated with honors. Because of her peculiar upbringing, it was natural that she was fired with the idea of being a missionary. So, when she was 21 (far too young) in 1871, she was appointed by the Woman's Board of the Congregational Church to a mission school in Erzerum, eastern Turkey.

You should read her account of her journey from Chicago, where she bade her father goodbye to Erzerum in 1871. She had never been far from home; she had never seen the ocean; she had never been abroad, at all. Her journey, with a small group also on their way to Turkey, took her to New York by train, to London by ship and then to Europe. There was no train to Constantinople in those days, so her party came down the Danube to the Bulgarian port of Rustchuk, whence a steamer brought them to this city, via the Black Sea. Then there was another long trek in front of her, again into the Black Sea to Trebizond and from there on horseback all the way to Erzerum, a trip that took a week.

Erzerum in 1871 was a walled city, bleak in winter, a place out of the world. It was a completely oriental city, with veiled women, a strange conglomeration of religions and nationalities and very backward in all educational matters. One may imagine the impact on a young woman straight from the farm lands of Iowa. She was bewildered and homesick. But she possessed a certain iron resolution in her character, that challenged any hardship. There were other Americans in the mission, some seven or eight, who could guide her. She

learned Armenian and Turkish and was eventually able to teach in the former language. She had been there only 18 months when word came that her mother in Iowa had died. This was a dreadful blow to her, especially as it had taken six weeks for the news to reach her. She nearly gave up her work to go home. Fortunately for many women in Turkey, she remained.

Dr. Patrick never talked about her Erzerum experience and it was probably an unhappy time in her life. Many of her ideals of service received rude shocks. She was not prepared for the primitive people amongst whom she worked. She was young, however, and full of curiosity, travelled about the strange country she found herself in, on horseback (the roads for vehicles were impossible) and she managed to learn a great deal.

She was delighted at the end of four years to be appointed to Constantinople, to teach in a newly founded, tiny High School for Girls in Üsküdar, called The Home School. This was in 1875. At that time, the first building of the school, Bowker Building, was being built at the top of Üsküdar hill, and for a few months classes were conducted in a rented house. The head of the school was Kate Pond Williams and one of the young teachers was Clara Hamlin, the daughter of Cyrus Hamlin, who had founded Robert College and who was then conducting his college in a very new building, Hamlin Hall in Rumeli Hisar.

Although Dr. Patrick was so young, she was already much experienced in the ways of the country and felt at home. From the very beginning her thoughts ran on improving standards, reaching more young girls to educate, expanding the school as

much as possible, and eventually making it an independent institution. When Mrs. Williams, the head, retired, Miss Hamlin and Dr. Patrick became joint principals of the Home School and they worked together for years, until 1889 when Miss Hamlin married and Dr. Patrick became sole head. She taught ~~er~~ many different subjects in the Home School, but later in the college her specialties were psychology and philosophy.

During the years the fame of the Home School grew, gifts from America came in, a new building was added, Barton Hall, connected with Bowker Building by a long corridor. Dr. Patrick herself went to America and there began raising funds and inspiring interest in her school. But all the time, even thus early, she was planning to raise the standards sufficiently to make it into a college and this with the help of powerful friends, among them Caroline Borden of Boston and Mrs. Durant, a benefactor of Wellesley College, she was eventually, years later, able to do. It should be remembered that colleges for girls even in America, ^{then} were, many of them, in their infancy.

The girls who came to Üsküdar at first were only Armenians, but soon Greek girls and then Bulgarians and at last a very few Turkish girls entered the school. Dr. Patrick herself, learned modern Greek (she already had a good foundation of Ancient Greek) and Miss Hamlin went to Bulgaria to learn some Bulgarian, hoping to entice girls to Üsküdar and in this she was successful.

All this time there was the lively political background. When Dr. Patrick first came to Turkey, Sultan Abdul Aziz was

the sultan, an enlightened man, who, however, nearly ruined his country financially by building palaces on the Bosphorus and in other ways. In 1876 Abdul Hamid II became sultan. It is unnecessary to remind you that his rule was despotic, that he was greatly prejudiced against education for women, especially in a foreign school, that he kept an army of spies and was in other ways a tyrant towards his own people as well as to the minorities in his country. Because of the capitulations, the school was able to carry on. But for years Turkish girls could not come for their education unless they were very courageous and were able to avoid the spies. They were only a handful.

At last after further visits to America and much backing from new-made friends, the school was able to obtain in 1890 a charter from the State of Massachusetts turning it into a college. This was one of Dr. Patrick's happiest moments which she always referred to with pride. And we can honestly say that without her constant and untiring efforts, it could never have been accomplished. To show you how serious she was in her desire to raise standards, she herself, after she was 40 went to study in Berne and obtained her PhD in philosophy. She was always an accomplished linguist and the acquisition of German did not deter her from her purpose, to secure a degree. She also showed good judgment in the choice of some excellent American teachers in her new college.

The year 1903-4 Dr. Patrick was in America fostering more interest in her work among other women and appointing trustees now that the school was definitely an independent college. Here

again there were difficulties. For instance, she approached Mr. George Plimpton, head of Ginn and Co. and asked him to be a trustee. He was already head of the Board of trustees of Amherst College (his son by the way, Calvin Hastings Plimpton, has just been appointed president of Amherst) and ^{he} gave her a curt "No." She remarks in her reminiscences, "I waited a little and asked him again and he ~~const~~nted." This was a measure of her continued success. (I might add that Mr. Plimpton was here at the dedication of the second president of the college)

In December 1905 there was a disastrous fire and ^{in ~~Amherst~~} Barton Hall burned down, ~~one~~ night. That is, by the morning nothing remained but the four walls. The fire began on the roof. A newly installed heating plant was defective and it was this that started the blaze. Girls who were sleeping in dormitories, and teachers whose rooms were in the Hall, all got safely out, but it was a sad morning ~~when~~ they came back from neighboring houses where they had taken refuge.

Dr. Patrick, however, was not daunted. Her first remark that morning was, "We shall build again, not in Asia but in Europe." It was a dream. She had no property there, no money with which to build but she was determined to have her way. The college at Arnavutköy is her monument. But this was years ahead. The times were hard for Turkey. In 1908 came the bloodless revolution when a constitution was proclaimed, in 1909 Abdul Hamid was deposed and the Young Turks took charge. In 1911 there was the disastrous war with Italy when Tripoli

was lost to Turkey and in 1912 and 1913 the Balkan wars broke out, which touched the lives of all the students, Greeks, Bulgarians and Turks."

These political changes had many repercussions on the country as well as on the college. In 1908 there was immense rejoicing because of the new constitution and the students for the first time were able to write and talk of the new freedom for their country. In 1909 when Abdul Hamid tried to get back into power, there was fighting in the streets of the city. Teachers on the roof of Bowker building could see the puffs of smoke, as the soldiers from Salonika stormed their way up Yildiz Hill to the headquarters of the sultan. It was an anxious moment for a woman responsible for the safety of some hundred girls in Üsküdar. In 1912 the Bulgarians nearly captured the city. They got as near as Catalca and for some days it was possible to hear the guns if the wind were in the right direction. Perhaps this was one of the greatest moments of anxiety for Dr. Patrick, her school and her students. There was a very real danger that the Bulgarians might break through into the city, following a retreating, demoralized army. One may imagine what chaos might have resulted. Fortunately this did not happen, but the days were tense with apprehension.

During these years Dr. Patrick had a staunch ally in Dr. William Peet, head of the Congregational Board in Turkey. It was with his help that the beautiful property at Arnavutköy, was bought, but only after endless negotiations in 1908. Where was the money to come from to build the college at the top of the

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hill? Dr. Patrick went to America and stayed two years...1908_1909 and single handed, she secured enough money to build, Gould Hall, Sage Hall, Woods Hall and Mitchell Hall. This was a herculean task. It was her personality that impressed the people whose money she solicited. The first large contribution was from Helen Gould Shepard and then others followed. If any of you have ever tried to raise funds in America for some remote cause on the other side of the world, you will know what a gigantic task it was. She once confessed that she hated to be a beggar. When she first approached Mrs. Russell Sage that lady very firmly told her she was not interested. But did Dr. Patrick rest there? No. A little later she asked again for an interview. I don't know what magic she used but the consequence of her acquaintance with Mrs. Sage was enough money to build Sage Hall, the dormitory building at the far end of the long college line.

The new college was begun in 1910 with an American builder and some American workmen and in April 1914 it was ready for occupancy. The removal from Üsküdar is a saga in itself. Most of the college effects were brought over by bullock cart. A great deal of new furniture was bought in America. It was a huge task; but Dr. Patrick wanted it to be done quickly even in the middle of the scholastic year.

On top of all this the First World War broke out in August 1914 and soon Turkey was involved. Dr. Patrick certainly needed the granite in her character to carry on, to

believe the college would survive though it passed through difficult days. She again came to America in 1916, but before the end of the war was back again at her post. After the war she had another five years of the presidency as she didn't retire till 1924. She was then 74 years old. You may imagine what a wrench it was to hand over her beloved college ~~into~~ other hands. She lived first in California and then in New York City, on her retirement, kept in close touch with every event in Turkey and died in her sleep in 1940 a few days before her 90th birthday.

She had found time during the busy years of her life to write four books: Sappho and the Island of Lesbos, Sextus Empiricus and Greek Scepticism, A Bosphorus Adventure, an account of the American College and Under Five Sultans, her autobiography.

What had she seen in this country during the long years? When she arrived in 1871 Turkey was called "the sick man of Europe." All women were veiled, lattices adorned all Turkish houses, public education for women as well as for many boys was neglected. She saw the country depleted by several disastrous wars. And then at last she witnessed the great upsurge of the people under the inspired leadership of Atatürk, when veils and lattices were discarded, a democratic form of government inaugurated, a new era when "Turkey faced West." It was the kind of progress that appealed to many but particularly to Dr. Patrick's aspiring personality. At last many tiresome restrictions were abolished, girls were to go to any schools they chose, women could

vote, could pursue any profession they wished. It was a marvellous social revolution. It looked to Dr. Patrick that all her dreams, especially for women might be coming true after all.

What did she look like? She was fairly tall, had brown eyes and brown hair, a round face and a rather snub nose. She held herself well. She loved a joke and her smile was mischievous. She had a somewhat remote manner, as though she were constantly planning another progressive move.

Her methods of administration were excellent. She gave her teachers responsibility and was always ready with encouragement. She also had diplomatic ways. For instance, if a teacher would complain about the food she would say: "You are quite right. It probably needs improvement. I'd like to appoint you the chairman of a food committee to look into it!" The complaining teacher usually withdrew in alarm some of her sharper criticism.

Dr. Patrick was aloof, did not make close friends, unless they were devoted to her college. If their interest flagged or if they went away, she forgot them and did not keep up connections. The students for the most part, stood in awe of her. As a Greek girl once said to me: "Dr. Patrick is something high."

She had her weaknesses as who has not? She put great emphasis on academic distinctions and insisted that her teachers should be called professors. She was not at all interested in marriage for herself or for her teachers. She was contemptuous of domesticity and wanted all her students to be blue-stockings.

When a young member of her staff became engaged, she trembled to tell Dr. Patrick the awful fact and she scarcely ever received anything but the most condescending good wishes. Sometimes hardly these. When my own time came she had become slightly hardened for she had had a series of such disappointments, I screwed up my courage one morning to tell her I was engaged. Her first remark was, "But how awful! I was afraid of that!"

After one was married she would ask on one's arrival for a visit to the college, "Well...how do you like housekeeping?" And there was that in her tone which indicated that she thought to be concerned with domestic affairs was a sad come-down from the heights of academic pursuits.

She was always a stimulating person. For instance, to a young teacher sitting next to her at table, she would say suddenly, "When are you going to study further? Have you inquired about courses in London, Columbia, Paris?" One was startled and knew not what to say.

She used to say she would like to get rid of all parents, for they were a nuisance. And then she would laughingly add, "Of course I know without marriage and parents I wouldn't have any students...still I'd like to get rid of some parents."

One of her characteristics was that she never harked back to the old days. Sometimes at informal gatherings, some of the older teachers would tell amusing tales of the earlier, simpler, more primitive days. The students loved hearing these tales. But Dr. Patrick would never participate. She could have told wonderful stories. But no..her eyes were ever on the futre. She didn't want to think of the past.

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One of her greatest ambitions was to see her college full of Turkish girls. She took immense pride in the career of Halide Edib the first Turkish college graduate of the class of 1901. Perhaps it would be fitting in conclusion to read in part what Halide Edib said of Dr. Patrick in an address on Charter Day in 1940. She called her a Great Standard Bearer in the Education of Women.

Quote:" I was enrolled at the college inspite of the opposition of Abdul Haid to foreign schools. It was during the interview my father had with Dr. Patrick at that time that I first saw her. My one strong memory of that interview was my shyness in her presence but afterwards I remembered the beautiful Turkish with the idiom of the Eastern vilayets which she spoke. It was the kind of Turkish I had heard at home from the time I first began to speak. It sounded so familiar to me that had I not been awed by her strong personality, I would have thrown my arms around her:

"During the first year at college I felt very much a stranger.. At this period we saw very little of Dr. Patrick but when she passed through the corridors even among the most unruly students a feeling of veneration arose and a kind of awed silence descended. After one year, on the secret report of a spy, this period ended and an imperial order forced me to leave the school. But finally I was able to return to the higher college classes as a boarder and after three year I graduated. It was during these years that my real contact with Dr. Patrick began. In her classes there was always the greatest freedom for exchange of ideas and discussion. Both as concerned ideals and in regard to the higher quality of instruction she was an exceptional teacher and director. Today I salute her with gratitude and affection as a great person and a great teacher. And I know all her students join me in honoring her memory."

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It is seldom that one knows a woman so single-minded a purpose in life. The college was Dr. Patrick's life. Anything connected with it was of immense interest to her. She was as jealous of its reputation as the most possessive of mothers. She had grown into its life from the age of 25 to 74, it had become her great obsession. We get this feeling when we read the last

words of her autobiography. Here they are:

"I had spent 53 years in the Turkish Empire under five successive sultans. How I would love to be there for another fifty years longer, while the American College for Girls is steadily growing in the era of the Turkish Republic."

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