

**Memorials to
Mrs. Lillias Horton Underwood (1851-1921)**

1921-1922

transcribed by Sung-Deuk Oak

PHS Microfilm RG 140-2-8

No. 594

November 7, 1921.

Death of Mrs. Horace G. Underwood

To the Chosen Mission.

Dear Friends:

It was with a sad heart that we received the cable of October 29 announcing the death of Mrs. Underwood. The message was not altogether a surprise, for we knew of her frail health. My last letter from her was dated September 5, and she then said that she was "quite ill with sprue"; and yet the announcement of her departure from earth was a shock. I at once telephoned the sad news to Mr. John Underwood, and on the same day of my receipt of the cablegram, letters were dispatched to all the relatives and friends whose names were on our books. At the following meeting of the Board, which was held today, I presented the following to the Board which was read in full, after which the Board rose and was led in a prayer which made grateful remembrance to God for such a life and besought His comfort and blessing for the beloved son:

"A rarely gifted spirit left this earth in the death of Mrs. Lillias Horton Underwood, M.D., of the Chosen Mission, at Seoul, October 29. Born in Albany, New York, June 21, 1851, her life of three score and ten was crowded with stirring events. She was educated at The Young Women's Seminary in Albany, and the Woman's Medical College of Northwestern University, after which she took a course of post-graduate study and experience in the Cook County Training School for Nurses and the Hospital for Women and Children in Chicago. The child of long generations of devout Calvinists, with the blood of liberty-loving Huguenot and Dutch reformers in her veins, the daughter of a mother who herself had greatly desired to go to the foreign field

and who dedicated her at birth unto the Lord, she came naturally into an atmosphere of missionary knowledge and enthusiasm.

The Board of Foreign Missions gladly complied with her request for appointment April 4, 1887, and she sailed in January, 1888, under assignment to the Korea Mission. She was the first woman physician in Korea, and she therefore had to encounter not only appalling sanitary and disease conditions but an ignorance and superstition regarding the nature of disease and its remedies that might have discouraged a less dauntless soul. But Miss Horton applied herself to her task with indomitable courage and zeal. She quickly attracted the attention of the Royal Family, and the Queen was so impressed by her intelligence, skill and winning personality that she made the young missionary her personal physician. This appointment opened up wide opportunities which this consecrated worker suffused with the spirit of Christ.

March 13, 1889, she was united in marriage with the Rev. Horace G. Underwood, the first ordained missionary of any denomination in Korea. An account of their remarkable wedding trip would be a story by itself. Dr. F. F. Ellinwood spoke of it as "a story not of honeymoon experiences, but rather of arduous and heroic itineration." Dr. and Mrs. Underwood were taking what was in those days a most dangerous trip for more than two months, traveling over a thousand miles, treating over six hundred patients and talking with thousands of people about their souls' salvation. It was a courageous thing for this young bride to take such a trip, as she was the first foreign woman who had ever made a tour of that kind. She was a helpmeet to her husband in the truest sense of the term, without diminishing her own direct missionary activities.

It was usual in Korea, as in all non-Christian lands, to turn all people suffering from contagious diseases out into the streets to die. Rich and poor alike did so and Mrs. Underwood's heart was so burdened with the sight of these unfortunate beings, that she made especial efforts in addition to her usual work and was enabled to open a little hospital, "The Shelter," to which was attached a small dispensary given by Mrs. Hugh O'Neil of New York, where religious services were held for all who came for treatment. In 1895 cholera broke out with more than usual violence and the government, failing in its efforts to establish proper sanitary regulations, the task fell to our missionaries. Mrs. Underwood's "Shelter" was given up to the cholera patients and with a group of native Christian helpers who volunteered to nurse the patients they lived through that dread time. Two-thirds of all their patients recovered, and the onlookers as they saw those who were not of their nation giving themselves day and night to the sick, ex-

claimed, "How those foreigners love us? Would we do as much for our kin as they do for strangers?" More than once danger of violence was added to danger of epidemic, particularly at the time of the murder of the Queen. Her influence with members of the Royal Family and other prominent and influential Koreans steadily increased.

She began to use her pen in the interests of the cause to which she had consecrated her life, writing numerous magazine articles, poems and short stories, translating books, becoming the editor of *The Korea Mission Field*, and an author of books. Her volumes entitled, "With Tommy Tompkins in Korea" and "Fifteen Years Among the Topknots" were at once recognized as important contributions to missionary literature. After the death of her honored and beloved husband, October 12, 1916, she wrote an account of his life which was published in 1918 under the title, "Underwood of Korea." This volume will live as one of the great missionary biographies of one of the great missionaries of the Church.

During her long missionary service, thirty-three years, she had the joy of seeing the remarkable development of missionary work in Korea. She arrived in the day of small things when there was only a handful of Christians, but when she died the number exceeded 200,000, and the work of the Mission had grown to large proportions. In much of this wonderful development she had an influential part. Those who personally knew her marveled at her achievements, for she was a woman of frail physical appearance. Indeed, her hold upon life appeared to be so uncertain that no one supposed that she would survive her husband. But in spite of physical weakness and occasional serious illnesses she bravely continued her work. During her later years she was much confined to her home, but her mental powers were as alert as ever and she continued her literary labors to the end. She was greatly beloved by the missionaries and other foreigners and was revered by the Koreans as a veritable mother in Israel.

Her life was one of triumph over difficulties, of splendid courage amid dangers, and of a loyalty to Christ as Lord and Saviour which burned with an unquenchable flame. She had but one child, Horace H. Underwood, and she had the joy of seeing him consecrate himself to missionary work and in 1912 assigned to her own station. While the Board deeply sympathizes with him in this great bereavement it rejoices greatly with him in the inspiring memory of such a richly fruitful life and such a triumphant translation into the Heavenly Kingdom. She was one of the great pioneers who laid Christian foundations broad and deep. Having abundantly served her day and generation according to the will of God, she has been taken to her eternal reward, and

we who remain can only say with deeper faith and tenderer meaning: "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them."

I share the sorrow of all those who were so closely associated with this dear servant of God. My personal friendship with Mrs. Underwood began many years ago. She was one of Lord's saints. Death has taken heavy toll of honored and beloved missionaries in the last year, but we thank God with all our remembrance of them and pray that a double portion of their spirit may rest upon who remain.

Affectionately yours,

Arthur J. Brown

O. R. Avison, "Mrs. H. G. Underwood., M. D.," *Korea Mission Field* (Dec. 1921): 258-260.

The late Mrs. H. G. Underwood., nee Lillias Stirling Horton, was born in Albany, N. Y., U. S. A. in the year 1851.

The family moved to Chicago, where her father was a member of the wholesale hardware firm of Blair and Horton, and where the subject of this sketch studied medicine in the Chicago Woman's Medical College, an institution which later on became a part of the Medical School of the North Western University and which provided Korea with several other lady physicians.

After her graduation she was sent out to Korea in 1888, being the first woman physician appointed to this land by the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A.

As the first appointment of Protestant missionaries to Korea was made in 1884, just four years before, one can judge of the devotion and courage of the young women who in that early day offered themselves for a field of which so little was known and that little more likely to discourage and alarm than attract.

Dr. H. N. Allen had already won his way into the palace and soon after Dr. Horton's arrival

she was called to treat the Queen. Her faculty for friendship soon won the heart of Her Majesty, as her skill had won her confidence, and this relationship continued active until the unfortunate death of the Queen in 1895.

In the year 1889 she was married to <258/259> Rev. H. G. Underwood., the pioneer Presbyterian clergyman to Korea, and they celebrated the event by taking a tour together through the northern part of Korea to investigate conditions and especially to look into the results of the Christian evangelistic work already done in the far north by Mr. Suh Sang Yun, that flaming Korean evangelist who had introduced Protestant Christianity into this country even before the coming of American missionaries.

Such a trip was calculated to try the courage of even a brave man, but a woman willing to take it manifested a most unusual degree of that quality.

In thinking of Mrs. Underwood and the early days of my life in Korea I readily revert to the many occasions when we met in the palace, she going to see the Queen and I to see the King. Then when the *Myung II* or special days of the Korean calendar came round both families took great interest in comparing the presents sent from the palace, for both King and Queen seemed to try to utilize every opportunity which the many special days gave to show their appreciation of the service which we tried to render from time to time. When Her Majesty entertained any foreign ladies she invariably favored Mrs. Underwood with an invitation and, in my place, included Mrs. Avison in her list.

On all occasions when Mrs. Underwood was called professionally she was careful to use the opportunity to converse with Her Majesty on religious matters and the Queen manifested much interest in Christian teaching and practice. Mrs. Underwood was naturally one of the most timid of women except when the preaching of the Gospel or the safety and comfort of a loved one was at stake and then she grew bold and strong, fearing nothing for herself. So, when the king fled from his palace to the Russian Legation and all the city was in an uproar, she travelled through the city from her home to ours, a considerable distance, in order to consult with Mrs. Avison about a plan to get a message sent to Dr. Underwood and myself who were 140 miles away in the north country, and she left no stone unturned until she got a message to the King telling him we were in the country and likely to be killed and that she was anxious to have soldiers sent to protect us and bring us safely back, a request that His Majesty promptly complied with.

Up to the extent of her physical ability and the time she could get from her many Bible classes for women, she conducted medical clinics and visited the Korean women in their homes.

She always encouraged them to learn to read and then to study the Bible with thoroughness and to this end she was for many years a hardworking translator of tracts and Bible study helps which the women could use.

In the last few years, especially, did she devote herself to successful literary efforts, one of the most important of which was the supervision for the district comprised by Seoul Station of a course of Bible Studies by correspondence. She did not confine her literary efforts to Korean writings but in addition wrote several English books dealing with life in Korea, such as "Fifteen Years Amongst the Top-knots" and "Tommy Tompkins in Korea," while after her husband's death she put much loving labor into his biography.

In reviewing the nearly thirty years of my close acquaintance with Mrs. Underwood I think of her physical frailty, which never was allowed to stop her constant effort on behalf of the Koreans; of her devotion to her husband and son, and the thoroughness of her housekeeping which likewise she seemed able to carry on while she taught classes, looked after the sick and translated books and tracts; of her habit of wide reading not only of religious books and journals but of those dealing with political and social matters,—of her love for the Korean women, of her unfailing hospitality and of the supreme interest she always took in leading the Koreans to Christ.

Dr. and Mrs. Underwood made a deep impression on the Korean people and in whatsoever form the latter may develop nationally, <259/260> their life here will still be one of the most potent influences in the moral, social and religious aspirations which will in the years to come guide the people in their later development.

Now that they have both passed on Korea is to be congratulated, in that they have left a son to carry on their work and grandsons who may, in still later years, continue in this land that which their parents and grandparents started so well.

Mrs. Underwood rests from her labors. Thank God for her life. We who remain must carry on the work and we may well try in some degree to emulate her many virtues and pray that as the spirit of Elijah descended upon Elisha so may the spirit of Dr. and Mrs. Underwood envelope and fill us!

“In Memoriam: Mrs. H. G. Underwood.,” *Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Missions, PCUSA (New York: 1922), pp. 66-67.*

A rarely gifted spirit left this earth in the death of Mrs. Lillias Horton Underwood, M. D., of the Chosen Mission, at Seoul, October 29th. Born in Albany, New York, June 21, 1851, her life of three score and ten was crowded with stirring events. The Board of Foreign Missions assigned her to Korea, January, 1888, under assignment to the Korea Mission. She was the first woman physician in Korea, and she therefore had to encounter not only appalling sanitary and disease conditions. But Miss Horton applied herself to her task with indomitable courage and zeal. She quickly attracted the attention of the Royal Family, and the Queen was so impressed by her intelligence, skill and winning personality that she made the young missionary her personal physician. This appointment opened up wide opportunities which this consecrated worker suffused with the spirit of Christ. March 13, 1889, she was united in marriage with the Rev. Horace G. Underwood, the first ordained missionary of any denomination in Korea. Mrs. Underwood's heart was so burdened with the sight of these unfortunate beings, that she made especial efforts in addition to her usual work and was enabled to open a little hospital, "The Shelter," to which was attached a small dispensary given by Mrs. Hugh O'Neil of New York, where religious services were held for all who came for treatment. She arrived in the day of small things when there was only a handful of Christians, but when she died the number exceeded 200,000, and the work of the Mission had grown to large proportions. In much of this wonderful development she had an influential part.