ROBERT COLLEGE, CONSTANTINOPLE.

BY CYRUS HAMLIN.

In the spring of 1856, just as the Peace of Paris had closed up the Crimean war, Christopher R. Robert, a veteran merchant of New York, spent a week at Constantinople, *en route* from Egypt and Syria to Vienna and other capitals of Europe. A sheer accident led him to visit the Bebek Seminary of the American Board, which had then been sixteen years under the writer's care. This visit germinated into a deep interest in Oriental education, and led to a long correspondence. It was not until 1859 that he definitely proposed to embark in the novel scheme of founding an American college in Turkey, an institution which like our colleges should lay a broad foundation for after-building. His first proposal was very different from his great achievement. It was to head a subscription paper with $10,000, promising a reserve of $30,000 to meet contingencies. Having once embarked in the enterprise, after long consideration, he was not the man to abandon it because of unforeseen difficulties, and he had furnished me with $208,000 for its prosecution when I retired from it.

It will be the object of this paper to give a brief historic sketch of the difficulties and obstacles which the enterprise encountered and of the manner in which most of them were overcome.

I purchased the first site for the college on the upper slope of the village of Karoocheshmé (dry fountain), on the Bosphorus, at the close of 1859. A well of 110 feet depth was dug without finding water. In May, 1860, I came to the United States to obtain with Mr. Robert's aid $100,000

for the erection of a wooden building that might receive one hundred students, and for providing it with the needful furniture and apparatus for beginning operations on that scale. I resigned my official connection with the American Board in order to prosecute this as an independent enterprise. In passing through England, much encouragement was given to the scheme by gentlemen of wealth and distinction. In this country, the faculties of Harvard, Yale, Amherst and Bowdoin colleges expressed their high estimate of the scheme. Professors Felton and Agassiz, with Washburn and Parker of the Harvard Law School, exerted their influence to give the effort a favorable introduction to the public. There seemed to be a reasonable prospect of speedily obtaining all we had in view. But the political excitement of the presidential election became so great that it was decided to defer the effort until after the election.

I need not say that the election only increased the excitement. The subscribers to the fund, or rather, those who had promised to subscribe $10,000 each said, positively, "nothing can be done until this affair with the South shall be settled." A public meeting was to be had in Boston, at which Edward Everett was expected to preside, but it was postponed.

After the firing upon Fort Sumter, Mr. Robert acknowledged the futility of further effort, but immediately placed $30,000 in the hands of trustees and said, "return to Constantinople and by the time you have expended this amount upon the building our difficulties will be settled, and you can then return and take up the work of the endowment. But obstacles only thickened as we advanced. Soon after reaching Constantinople, in June, 1861, the Sultan Abdul Medjid, upon whose favorable disposition we had great reliance, suddenly died, and Abdul Aziz reigned in his stead. He had a favorite, Fetih Ahmet Pasha, who was a man of splendid personal appearance but of very cruel and infamous character. He had a cottage, a summer-house, overlooking

the site of the college, and he sent word to me that the Sultan would allow no building to be erected there. We knew that it was only the Pasha's will, but he ruled the Sultan, who always sustained him in his most atrocious deeds. While considering what should be done, our advisory committee of two gentlemen from each nationality most interested, decided that it would be unwise to incur hostility by pressing the case. A Turkish gentleman of high character sent me a special message advising me not to get the hostility of that man. "Yield this point and you will disarm him, and perhaps make him your advocate in some future need." We did so and I could never find that in the future contest he took any part whatever against us.

The abandonment of this site was made easy by an unexpected event. The owner of the site I first of all selected, as the finest, the most desirable position on the Bosphorus, who would not listen to our proposal for its sale, had become involved in his finances and now offered it at a reasonable price. It would have been a wise transfer, even if there had been no interdict. For in this favorite site there were inexhaustible supplies of the best building-stone, and also water attainable without great expense. A contract was made with the utmost secrecy, with the condition that the money, about $8,000, should be paid over when the government should grant official leave to build the college in that place. In the meantime, the Ministry of Public Instruction endeavored to bind me to certain impossible rules before it would grant its sanction. I evaded them by affirming that the college would be conducted in loyalty to the Turkish government, and in accordance with the character of American colleges, which have no political or partisan character. Our library, our text-books and all college exercises would be open to inspection every day from morning prayers, in which the Sultan and his empire would be prayed for, until 9 o'clock in the evening. Official and un-official visits would always be welcome

for we had nothing to conceal and only wished to be known. After a wearisome delay of months, the official permission was given and the money was paid. The deeds were made out and given in due order, and a force of men began quarrying stone and digging for the foundations. I was superintending their work when an officer of the Sublime Porte appeared and said "the work must be suspended for a short time until some formalities shall be completed." What formalities? He could not say. He acted from orders. How long must this suspension be? "Probably a couple of weeks or so." It was more than seven years! I apprehended some serious change in the government policy as the ground of such an unexpected order, and I was not long in discovering the source.

The Abbé Boré, a French Jesuit, who had played many parts in the East,—priest, consul, military officer, diplomat,—all with a certain skill and daring, was then at the head of the Jesuit missions in the East, which he was pushing with watchful vigor to counteract at every point Protestant missions. He was undoubtedly a man of great ability and of varied attainments. He had himself long aimed at having a Jesuit college at some prominent point on the Bosphorus, but Turkish prejudice and policy were invincible. Now when he found that another had obtained what he had failed to obtain he very naturally resolved to block his path. There were then two political parties among the Turks, the progressives or the young Turkish party, and the old bigoted moslems, comprising the ulema, the moolahs, imams, the teachers of the law and a large portion of the official class. The former had been nursed into life and influence by Sir Stratford Canning and Reshid Pasha. The Abbé easily stirred up the old Turkish party against this Protestant college, the scheme of a heretic and a "Ghiaour." The French embassy was under his control in all religious questions; all the catholic embassies would go with him, but above all and more than they all was the Russian influ-

ence. The great Russian Ambassador, General Ignatieff, rarely *appeared* in any question of this kind. Had I met him, he would undoubtedly have spoken in the highest terms of the projected college, and expressed himself desirous to do everything in his power to aid it. But I found ere long that everybody, high and low, who was known to belong to the Russian party, was an enemy to the proposed college at Roumelie Hissor.

It was evident the diplomatic contest might be a long one, but I had right on my side, and right must finally prevail, if we stand firmly by it. The American embassy refused to involve itself officially in our case against the government, and months having passed in fruitless efforts, I resolved upon a course that would give the proposed college a real existence,—"a local habitation and a name,"—without having any controversy with the government or with any one else. The Seminary which had been twenty years under my care at Bebek had been closed by the American Board. Dr. Anderson wished to reduce it to a vernacular curriculum, and turn out pastors rapidly by a short course. I refused to be party to such a scheme, and Dr. Anderson thought it wiser to remove the seminary from me rather than me from the seminary. The building remained empty, and I proposed to Mr. Robert to arrange with the American Board for the occupancy. He did so and furnished me with three thousand dollars for repairing and fitting it up. A very strong and sacred principle of Turkish administration, of which I had seen signal illustrations, enabled me to do this. It is the principle of "adet" or prescriptive right. What has been openly permitted for a length of time cannot be forbidden. A common saying is "adet is stronger than the Sultan's firman." Twenty years of "adet" covered my right to have an institution of learning then, in that building. I issued the programme of the college in some six or seven languages, and it was opened in November, 1863. In vain did the Abbé Boré

accuse me to the Porte of opening the college without a government permit or firman. The curt reply was "that American Ghiaour has had a school there these twenty years. We care not what name he gives to it. He will have it there twenty years longer if he pleases unless he commits some crime against the government." So Robert College continued restricted to that building until May, 1871. It could receive only seventy students; seventy-two was its highest crowded number, and every year we had to reject forty to fifty applicants. This restricted state of the college was very annoying, but it was not wholly lost time. It gave us a good opportunity to test the applicability of our plan to these peculiar circumstances of races, languages and religions. In the meantime we continued to prosecute our case with the government with all diligence.

I will confine myself to the following five distinct efforts, as their history will be substantially the same with the others.

After sending repeated petitions and arguments to the Grand Vizier, receiving always about the same answer, "The affair will be looked into," and after seeing that our own embassy would do nothing to aid us officially, although ready for "officious" aid, a diplomatic phrase of Constantinople for unofficial intervention not involving the prestige of the official, I laid the case before Sir Henry Bulwer, the English Ambassador. He was probably sent to Turkey because it was thought that the infamy of his licentious life would better befit the Turkish capital than the English, but he was a master of state-craft, and as Louis Napoleon demanded the retirement of the all-regnant Lord Stratford, Bulwer was sent to match the Russian. England has reason still to deplore the results of her foolish weakness. Knowing that the English government would patronize anything that promised good to Turkey, I laid the case before him. He was extremely gracious, said he would examine the case and let me know what course he would take. After some

time he required evidence that the college was not a "scheme of religious propagandism." In reply I sent him our curriculum of study, the college course entirely in English, our advisory committee composed of gentlemen of different nationalities, languages and religions, and my honorary diplomas from Bowdoin, Harvard and the University of New York, to prove to him that I had the sanction of high and differing authorities. After a few days he returned the papers as entirely satisfactory, and assured me that on the first good opportunity, he would bring that question to a conclusion. "I will never drop it until you have leave to build." I waited long and at length received a note saying that the Grand Vizier, Aali Pasha, had acceded to his demand, and in the course of three days or so, official leave would be sent to me. It was not surprising that I should wait a week or more, but instead of the official leave I received another note from Sir Henry, telling me I had made an unwise purchase, I should have known the Turks would never allow me to build a college on that conspicuous site, etc. The penalty should fall on my own head. The English embassy would take no further interest in it!

This was quite astounding and not a little discouraging. I made no reply to Sir Henry, but set to work to find out what had taken place. I soon found he had received a bribe of $50,000 to himself and $5,000 to one of his mistresses from the Pasha of Egypt to settle a quarrel of his with the Sultan. Bulwer was glad to accept the bribes and do the work. He not only sold the power of England for his private interests, but he accepted the three conditions which the Grand Vizier imposed: to abandon the Servian question, the Bulgarian question and the American College. Hence the second note. For once his craft failed him. This case of atrocious bribery became known and Bulwer had leave to return to England.

During the decade 1860–70, there was, what does not now exist, a young Turkish party, as before mentioned.

It was composed of progressives,—educated, enlightened men, brought into existence by the influence of Sir Stratford Canning and Reshid Pasha. While the authors had passed off the stage the party showed no little vitality and often controlled or modified public policy. The two most distinguished leaders were Fuad Pasha and Midhat Pasha; both were personally favorable to the college enterprise. I had a period of hopeful diplomacy with each of them. Fuad failed through the craft and overpowering influence of the Grand Vizier, who boldly falsified Fuad's report on the case. In the whirl of Turkish official changes the Sultan by some caprice made Midhat Grand Vizier. It was hoped now that we should have a period of real reforms and that the Hatti Humayoon would be really executed. My troubles were surely at an end. He was in favor of the college. He had done me personal favors. He assured Mr. Brown, our Secretary of Legation, that he would attend to it so soon as the pressure of his new appointment should be over. Before that was over he was displaced and our expectations perished. It was gratifying to know, however, that he had brought the subject before the Grand Council and obtained its approbation, and also, that of the Council of Public Instruction. There only remained the order from the department of Public Works. When an official is displaced, all business not actually complete falls to the ground.

After long delay, Lord Lyons came in place of Bulwer. I had now an advocate who would not fail me. He expressed great surprise at the proofs of Sir Henry's contradictory course which he found in the archives of the Embassy. He, also, was bringing the subject to a favorable conclusion when he was suddenly called to Paris. On leaving he wrote me a note saying Aali Pasha had promised him all he asked, and he was confident I would have no more obstruction. Before Lord Lyons reached Paris, Aali Pasha sent for me and wanted to *swap* territories. The

place he offered was both difficult of access and very steep. I told his Highness a college built there would be sure "to run down hill and get to the bottom." He laughed at the *double entendre* and said, "Well, Mr. Hamlin, I will send to you a man on Friday who will show you another site which I am sure you will accept." The site proved to be a clay flat. I saw at once his design to make me understand that my case was a hopeless one. I had heard of his impatient exclamation "won't this Mr. Hamlin ever die and let me alone on this college question?" I wrote him a very firm note: that my claim was that of justice which would never die; that the college was under the direction of a syndicate organized under the laws of the State of New York, and if I should die it would not change the question in the least. If his impotent exclamation was intended, as some supposed, to suggest that a true believer might give to that troublesome Ghiaour a cup of medicated coffee, he could not hope thus to reach a corporate body.

I then wrote a letter to the Vekil of the Armenian Protestants, indicating how the Grand Vizier, as a Turkish statesman ought to think and reason on the question, and begged him to explain to me the reasons of a course so opposed to Turkish interests and favorable to the enemies of Turkey. Among other things I said the Pasha ought to know that ultimately political complications will compel him to grant a great deal more than we now ask. In a private note I asked him to translate the letter into Turkish and let the Grand Vizier know that he had received such a letter, and as a public servant he felt it was his duty to say it was at his service if he chose to read it. When he returned it he made the single remark that the letter contained important considerations which would receive due attention. The remark on political complications reappeared as an important one some years later. I knew of no particular complications. I had seen so many ques-

tions before the Turkish government turn in that way I made the remark on general principles. Nothing at the time came of it.

Then Mr. Morgan of New York, brother of the then governor, a wealthy banker, and a personal friend of Secretary Seward, visited Constantinople. I invited him to the college site, on a beautiful afternoon when he could enjoy Turkish scenery, coffee and chibouks. He was so delighted with the view and with the position for a college, that he promised to go to Washington and present the case to Secretary Seward, who, he was sure, had not yet understood it. He asked me for all the written suggestions I could make, which I gladly furnished him. Mr. Seward promised to see Blacque Bey, the Ottoman Minister, and if that should bear no fruit, he would take the other measures proposed. In consequence of the interview, Blacque Bey wrote to the Grand Vizier that the American College question had better be settled favorably to the Americans, or, by-and-by it would become a thorny question, "*une question épineuse.*" We knew of this despatch, but nothing came of it.

Last of all came Admiral Farragut in 1869. I saw no significance in that. I was very much absorbed in other things. My little boy Alfred came into my study and said, "Father, won't you take me down to see our great Admiral." I said, "No, my son, we spent a whole day in trying to see Frederic (crown prince of Prussia) and we didn't see him after all. I would like to see him myself, but I can't spare a whole day to not see a man." The evident disappointment upon his countenance suggested to me how I would have felt at his age, and I said to him "Look here Alfred, I will go down with you early to-morrow morning, and if we find the old Admiral, well and good, if not, we shall come right home." So we went and found the Admiral all alone. He asked me at once if I was a resident and what was my occupation. I told him briefly of the College.

He evidently did not wish to hear it. He said, "I am sorry the Turks should treat you so unjustly, but I can do nothing for you. I have no diplomatic mission whatever"; and turning to the boy, he said, "Whose son is this?" And then putting his hand on his shoulder, said, "Well my son, what are you going to do in this world,—what are you going to be?" "I don't know, Sir," said the boy in his simplicity, "I wouldn't mind being Admiral of the American fleet." The Admiral laughed, and patting him upon the head, said, "Ah, my son, my son, if you are going to be the Admiral of the American fleet"—and to my disgust, the door opened and in came Dr. Seropian, who knew the Admiral, and with his hand out, said, "Good morning, Admiral. I am glad to see you here with Mr. Hamlin. You have come just in the nick of time to get him leave to build," etc., etc. As soon as the Admiral could get a chance to speak he said "Why doctor, I can do nothing; I have no diplomatic mission here." "Just for that reason" persisted the doctor, "you can do everything we want. You are to dine to-night with Aali Pasha, the Grand Vizier. Just ask him why that American College can't be built. And so when you dine with the Capudon Pasha and Seroskeer Pasha and the Molié Pasha, ask them the same question. That's all." "Anybody may ask the king a civil question," said the Admiral, "and I am quite ready to do that." "If you do that, Admiral," I said to him, "I would suggest that you make no reply to what they may say but receive it as satisfactory although there may be very little truth in it." I do not know how he understood the suggestion but he seemed to enjoy it, and said, "I'll do it, I'll do it." Others came in and the interview ceased. When I found he was to sail, I went down to ask him about those questions, but his cabin was full of diplomats, and I wished him a good voyage and left. Some days after, a kiatib (clerk) of the Sublime Porte came and sat down beside me in a Bosphorus steamer and said "Mr. Hamlin

I want to ask you a question. Was your great Admiral sent here by your government to settle that college question?" I knew at once he had asked the question and it had produced an excitement that had spread through all the rooms of the Sublime Porte. But nothing came of it. The effort to secure justice had been unremitting for seven years, and it was becoming monotonous. The college, too, chafed more and more under the restrictions imposed upon it. Scores of applicants were rejected every year. They were coming in from all parts of Bulgaria where the thirst for education was evidence of a complete "renaissance." The Abbé Boré was evidently not pleased with the success of the restricted college, and, in order to attract students, he liberalized the so-called French College under his care, in the same village, to that degree that his course displeased his superiors at Rome and another was sent who drew the reins so tight that all the non-Catholic and many Catholic students left, and finally the college was closed for repairs and accidentally burned.

A few months had passed after the Farragut excitement when one afternoon our minister's messenger boy, Antoine, entered my study with a letter. The substance of the note was this:

"I congratulate you, Mr. Hamlin, on the termination of your long contest with the Turkish government. I have just received a note from his Highness Aali Pasha saying, tell Mr. Hamlin he may begin the building of his college as soon as he pleases. No one will interfere with him, and in a few days the *imperial iradé* will be given him."

This was thrilling news—news that had been waited for and worked for through seven long years. But it seemed in one respect too good to be true. The "iradé" had never been asked for, had never been mentioned as possible. It is given by the Sultan himself. His sacred signature is affixed to it. It is infallible and cannot be changed, and it carries great prestige with it. I went directly to Mr.

Morris and said to him, "What hoax is this now?" He replied, "I don't wonder you think it a hoax but it can't be. You know what is said of Aali Pasha, that he never keeps a verbal promise and never breaks a written one. Here is his note." To my great surprise the whole note was in his hand-writing and bore his signature and seal. It was of the highest official authority.

A profound mystery enveloped the whole business. We were doing nothing. We had never thought of asking for the "iradé." Mr. Morris was perplexed. He could only say that Mr. Seward must have sent through Blacque Bey some very pungent message; but on the other side stood the two leading diplomats of Europe at the Porte,—the French and Russian,—and all the Jesuit and the Catholic powers. The public was perplexed, but I think hugely gratified. It, however, believed there was some hidden and hostile craft in it. Beware of Aali Pasha was often said. He has all the resources of "shaitan" and he will bring you a back-hand stroke that will lay you out some day.

I went immediately to work at the building and had the site covered with stone blasters and ditchers, in view of all moving on the Bosphorus. The change was as amusing as it was gratifying and inexplicable. Men who had long passed me with a stiff neck now gave me the oriental salaam, imagining that the triumph was somehow due to me, but being really as much in the dark as I was, and as far from the truth, as will appear. I had made the English government acquainted with the history of the case and I believed some private communication to Aali Pasha from the Foreign Office had caused the wondrous change. We were all wrong and were guessing in the dark. I however pressed forward the work, and wishing to try the temper of the Grand Vizier I called upon him and asked him for an order giving free passage through the Custom House, without delay, of the iron I should import from

Belgium and England, and the tubular bricks, cement and other articles from France. He received me pleasantly, was glad I would make the structure fire-proof, but my request did not belong to his department. He would, however, speak to Kiani Pasha, the collector of the port, and after two or three days I might have relations with him. I regarded it as a very polite negative, but when I called upon the collector, he had it all most satisfactorily arranged. It was a great boon to the college. There was no hostility here but positive kindness and yet it was all a mystery.

The iradé was given as promised, and the college became an American institution with the right to carry the American flag, which it has done to this day.

When the building was completed externally and before it was occupied, the Grand Vizier sent for me to call at his palace. He received me politely, cordially and said he wanted to congratulate me on having erected a building which was the ornament of the Bosphorus. He had examined our curriculum and he was more than satisfied with it because it involved the fusion of races into some unity, under one discipline, etc., etc. After some further remarks, terse and philosophical, and also complimentary, he rose, offered me again his hand and I retired. It was impossible to regard him otherwise than friendly, but the mystery of it deepened at every step.

The college was publicly opened with some parade, July 4, 1871, by Mr. Seward, on his journey homeward from his voyage and travels round the world. Besides the students, of thirteen nationalities and half as many religions, and the faculty, chosen from six nationalities, there were American citizens and certain Turkish officials. Mr. Seward, with a shattered and half-paralyzed frame, surprised every one by his splendid address. So soon as he opened his mouth he was Seward still. The students received him with immense enthusiasm, and his visit gave a certain national prestige to the college. It did not solve our mystery.

About a month after this, a Turkish gentleman called to see the college. He was a man of no ordinary address and bearing but he was alone, and I did not doubt was a "tepdil" or *incognito*. After examining the college and its *curriculum* with apparent interest and with great intelligence he apologized on leaving for claiming so much of my time, and added: "I think more highly of English education than of any other. I have some little grandsons, and when they are old enough, I intend to send them to this college." I then said to him, "Do you speak English, sir?" He replied, in perfectly good English: "Why yes sir, on occasions but I have had no occasion to speak it here." I wished to see more of him and I invited him to the college tower to survey the scenery spread out before and around it. He assented and was so charmed with the view that he became eloquent in descanting upon it, declaring that no university in Europe, and he had seen many of them, could match this scenery of the Bosphorus and its historic shores. As he turned to go down he said, "Ah, sir, we would never have given you leave to build your college here had it not been for that bloody insurrection in Crete." "That bloody insurrection in Crete!" I exclaimed, in unfeigned surprise, "What pray could that have to do with building this college here?" "O we understood it perfectly well," he replied with a sort of reproving smile." "But you speak enigmas," I said, "I do not understand it." "Have you been so long a resident in Turkey without knowing about that insurrection that for a long time kept us on the very edge of war?" "I knew all about that, sir, it is the connection of the two that I do not understand at all." He evidently doubted my sincerity but proceeded to say: "Why when your great Admiral Farragut was here, that insurrection was our greatest embarrassment, taxing all our skill and power. We would have gladly seen Crete swallowed up in the sea, but to grant her free-

dom would have involved the loss of all our islands, and would have brought on the disintegration of the Empire. Greek delegations surrounded the Admiral and reported that he had promised to pass along the shores of Crete and take off the refugees to Greece, and moreover, that he had assured them that his government would sell them one of its monitors. This gave us just cause of alarm which was increased not a little when the Admiral came to dine with the Sultan's high officers of state. He asked the Grand Vizier, point blank, why that American college could not be built. The Grand Vizier replied in friendly terms and the great Admiral said not a word. But he continued to ask the same question right and left. To the Minister of Foreign Affairs, to the Minister of War, and of the Navy; 'I would like to ask your excellency a question. I would like to know why that American college can't be built.' To all he held the same absolute silence and said not a word. We saw clearly the United States government was holding that college question over against us, and the Admiral was assured that all difficulties were removed and the college would soon be built. But when he rather suddenly left and went straight out by Gibraltar we breathed easily and we had no intention of granting you leave. A few months after, those letters from leading New York papers were sent, translated and in the original. They were very severe and unjust on the Cretan case, but they were written with ability and exact knowledge. We said: there is the finger of the great Admiral in this. His Government is preparing the American people for intervention. If only an American monitor should come into the Mediterranean it would be followed by war with Greece, and (lifting up both hands) war begun with Greece, Allah himself only knows where it would end. And we had been warned that this college question would become a thorny one, and that political complications would finally compel us to grant even more than was asked. We now felt the thorns, we

saw the complications, and we said: 'better build a hundred colleges for the Americans with our own money than to have one of Farragut's monitors come into the Mediterranean.' So we gave you leave to build on this matchless spot. We gave you the imperial iradé, which we never give, and we placed this college under the protection of the United States, as the greatest compliment to your government, and so (spreading both hands in a horizontal motion with a smile of great satisfaction) we smoothed it all off."

The history of the college and the impulse which it has given to education in Turkey have been such that the Sublime Porte has had no reason to regret its wise decision. Great changes have taken place in the education and the intelligence of the people during the past fifty years. Turkey is not the same empire now that she was then. She has suffered from European complications and ambitions; her commerce and industries have been preyed upon by selfish and greedy powers, — but her glorious climate and soil remain; her many natural advantages await the science and the skill of educated labor; and every institution of learning is a valuable addition of power and wealth. Robert College has deserved well of the government, and although it has been voluntarily and generously placed, by the imperial iradé, under the protection of the United States, it is none the less loyal to the best interests of Turkey.