Thomas Laurie, *Dr. Grant and the Mountain Nestorians* (Boston 1853; reprint Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2005). Pp. xii + 418; $106.25.

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Asahel Grant seems to have enjoyed his mission to the Nestorians of Kurdistan more than he was always prepared to admit.[1] The mountains were as good for his health as the wilderness was for his faith. Critics were all too ready to say that he ought not to have left the sons of his first marriage with a guardian after their mother's death; exposed his second wife and the three children of his second marriage to the malarial climate of Urmia, where the twin girls and the mother lie buried; and put his own life and those of his associates at risk in a region where human life was cheap; all in the cause of reviving the Gospel – without seeking to make converts – among Christians he judged to be 'benighted', as an agent of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions.

Grant (1807–44) came from a farming family in Connecticut; but an accident made him unfit for work on the farm, so he studied medicine instead. This made him an asset to the American mission-station at Urmia, founded by Justin Perkins in 1834, the year before Grant's arrival, and saved his life more than once in the wild Hakkâri region. His ability to 'work wonders', by medical practice, based on science not on faith, opened doors even among the 'churlish' Kurds, the 'inhuman' Arabs, the 'ferocious' Nestorians and the 'oppressive' Turks (adjectives from the Table of Contents), not to mention the Yezidees, 'devoted to the prince of darkness' (p. 122). The only patient who showed no gratitude at all was George Percy Badger, a High-Church Anglican missionary, who considered it his duty to undo the 'dissident' Grant's work.

Badger's work on the *Nestorians and their Rituals* is more informative than this hagiography, full of self-righteousness and complaints about other Christians which (one supposes) were lapped up by the American Protestant public for whom the book

[1] For a readable introduction to the subject, see David Wilmshurst, *The Martyred Church: A History of the Church of the East* (London 2011), Ch. 9: The age of the European missions. The book under review contains no evidence that the missionaries were the instruments of colonialism and bore some responsibility for provoking the massacres of 1843–6, a suggestion which Wilmshurst examines and finds implausible.

was intended; for the self-deprecating Laurie (who was associated with Grant in his dangerous work from 1844 and continued it after the doctor's death), while he has a chapter (IV) on the history of the Nestorians, makes no pretence to learning. But Grant had a romantic attachment to the people he regarded as the descendants of the lost tribes of Israel;[2] an admiration for the past heroism of the 'Martyred Church', for its former Syriac divines and its intrepid missionaries (see the first footnote to this review); and a love for the independence of these survivors, who had yielded neither to the Qur'an, nor to tribute, nor even to the sword. It seems fitting that he died with that independence.

The book paints an interesting picture of the unlikely encounter of two Christian exotica, a Presbyterian from Connecticut and the Nestorians of Kurdistan. We also learn from it such facts that the Jacobites of Mosul accorded to Nestorian refugees of the massacres of 1843–6 the burial which the Chaldeans had refused them in churchyards which, until recently, had been theirs.

At this price one might expect the reprint to be a perfect reproduction of a crisply printed, pristine exemplar, not a ghostly photocopy with 'hairs', resembling crossings-out, on many pages. As for the map, 'prepared mostly from original materials collected by Dr. Grant and his associates', of which Laurie writes: 'Great pains have been taken, and no expense spared, to render it an important addition to our geographical knowledge of that region' (p. vi), Gorgias Press, less painstaking, has spared the expense of reproducing it.

[2] In 1853 the word 'Assyrian' had not yet been applied to the Nestorians, let alone extended across confessional boundaries in the name of a 'nation' united by a modern myth. Grant, inspired by Nestorians who told him they were 'the sons of Israel' and had no pagan ancestors (p. 186), clothed in historical plausibility a tradition which is today forgotten, though it is far more attractive – unless it is brute power that attracts you – than the implausible fiction that the Christians with a Syriac liturgy are the descendants of the pagan Assyrians, who boasted of the slaughter and enslavement of Aramaic-speaking peoples.