

INTRODUCTION

This book is the story of an authentic nineteenth century flesh and blood missionary, the Rev. Julius Frederick Ullmann, a German and relative of the author by marriage. Ullmann, as we shall call him, went to India in 1839 as a 22 year old, a newly minted schoolteacher. After a remarkably productive missionary life spanning 57 years, he died at his last mission post, known today as Dehradun, a city nestling under the Himalayas. Anyone may visit Ullmann's gravesite with its headstone in the somewhat neglected English cemetery.

Ullmann's understanding was that his missionary service would be 'SERVICE FOR LIFE if the Lord wills', while any return home for a year's furlough would not occur 'until after a period of at least ten or twelve years of actual service in the field'.¹

The reality proved otherwise for nineteenth century missionaries. Inevitably, many either returned home early, or else spent months in the Himalayan foothills, for recovery of health. In the first half of the century, no less than half the Presbyterian women missionaries died either in childbearing or through illnesses such as cholera and typhoid fever before completing a single term of service.

Ullmann only ever returned home four times on furlough: the first to find a wife, the second to arrange the printing of a new edition of the Hindi New Testament, the third to recover health and the fourth to visit his wife and daughter in London.

After short periods with Gossner's Mission and then the London Missionary Society, during which time he managed to shake school teaching out of his system, Ullmann joined the American Presbyterian Mission to undertake pioneering missionary work in north-west India.

Why write a book about Julius Frederick Ullmann?

Ullmann was an outstanding missionary: 'a man of devout spirit and earnest missionary purpose',² dedicated, single minded, hardworking, a profitable servant for his Master. Julius Richter in his survey of missionary work in India in the nineteenth century, named Ullmann along with two of his colleagues, as the 'distinguished missionaries' of the American Presbyterian Mission.³ He was a fine linguist, an evangelist and pastor, composer of hymns, translator of the New Testament into Hindi, writer of catechisms and tracts. His tract, *Dharm Tula – Religion Weighed*, proved extremely popular, demonstrated with the printing of a 32nd edition of 10,000 copies, twenty years after his death.

He pioneered for Presbyterians the concept of the centrally located missionary station, with its ordained missionary, either American or Indian, supervising and supporting Indian co-workers, located in a network of sub-stations in adjoining villages. An outstanding feature of Ullmann's work was his deep appreciation for, and willingness to work closely with his Indian co-workers, not something achieved by all missionaries. We will meet these Indian co-workers as well as the remarkable zenana worker, Miss Christine Belz.

In studying a person, context is important. In this study, brief, but careful attention is given to the British East India Company, Hinduism with its system of caste, Islam, and the rise of missionary interest in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Europe and America. Special attention is given to the way in which the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America organised its foreign missionary work at home and abroad, with a particular focus on India. A subsidiary purpose in writing Ullmann's story is to honour missionary-minded American Presbyterians of the nineteenth century. They were undeniably unwavering in their espousal of evangelical religion according to the

Reformed tradition, something easily missed given that Church's present day departure from such confessional moorings.

The Palmer connection came about through Ullmann's marriage to Elizabeth Hellings Palmer, a sister of the author's great grandfather. Sadly, Elizabeth proved to be unsuited to missionary work in India, something of a cross for Ullmann to bear. Nevertheless, sympathetic treatment will be given Elizabeth, considering the realities of missionary life in nineteenth century India for a person of her particular disposition.

The chapters are largely arranged chronologically. However, there are exceptions.

Chapter 1 describes the context for nineteenth century missionary work in India.

Chapters 2 - 3 deal with Ullmann's first period of service in India.

Chapter 4 provides the historical background to the arrival of American Presbyterians in India for missionary work.

Chapter 5 covers Ullmann's first years with the American Presbyterians.

Chapter 6 describes mission station life in the 1850s.

Chapters 7 – 10 follow Ullmann's missionary career chronologically from the time of his marriage to Elizabeth Palmer in 1851 to his last visit to England in 1881.

Chapter 11 covers Elizabeth's abortive return to India in 1872, consideration of the care provided her by husband and concludes with some details concerning the Ullmann children, William and Bessie.

Chapter 12 deals with a number of troubling issues faced by Ullmann and his colleagues in the 1870s and 1880s.

Chapter 13, with two appendices, describes Ullmann's wide-ranging literary accomplishments.

Chapter 14 covers Ullmann's last years and quotes extensively from obituaries that record glowing assessments of his life and service.

For those committed to Christian Missions there will be the discovery of a fascinating, perhaps alien past, that will prove both spiritually uplifting and challenging. It may even provoke thought about the prosecution of present day missionary endeavour. What can the church today learn from Ullmann and his colleagues with their 'service for life' commitment? Does the way they organised missionary work on a denominational basis, working according to a specified polity, have relevance today, and how would this work out? Should the church seek to increase the funds centrally collected to support its missionaries so that there is less pressure on missionaries having to garner their own financial support? Whilst not all in the past is relevant today, much is.

Regardless of whether the reader is committed to Christian Missions or not, the story told, based on personal letters, mission reports and other written material from the period, provides a unique insight into the life and work of a dedicated Christian missionary, working cooperatively with other likeminded missionaries and native workers in nineteenth century north-west India. These documents provide considerable detail on the progress of missionary work, including its effectiveness, the difficulties encountered, as well as describing the missionary's relationship with the governing authorities, his converts and the advocates for two very different religions: Hinduism and Islam.

In quoting from letters and other documents, Ullmann's practice of underling points he wished to emphasise has been retained. No attempt has been made to correct spelling or grammar and therefore the adverb, 'sic', normally added in square brackets to quoted material when the rules of grammar have been broken or incorrect spelling occurs, rarely appears. Any attempt to correct spelling or grammar would have led to an annoying proliferation of [sic]!

This means, for example, where 'Mifs' appears in a letter, it will not be rendered the modern spelling, 'Miss'. Other examples: Muslims were known as 'Muhammedans' in the nineteenth century, with multiple variations in spelling from one document to another; women's quarters could be spelt 'zanana' or 'zenana' and so on. Over time, Ullmann's (English) spelling and adherence to the rules of English grammar improved. Also observable are the changes over time in spelling from the English (e.g. 'labour') to American variants ('labor'). Interestingly, Ullmann changed his second name, from the German 'Friedrich' to the English 'Frederick' on his marriage certificate.

Ullmann and his colleagues are referred to by their surnames, as was the nineteenth century custom. His wife could have been referred to as Mrs. Ullmann, as was normal with missionary wives, but the author has chosen to honour her individuality and special relationship to her husband in calling Elizabeth by her first name. Miss Belz remains so, as that was how the author perceived her(!), and certainly how she was always referred to.

A particular issue was how to name female missionaries. At times the unmarried ones were called 'single lady missionaries' and at other times 'single women missionaries' or 'single female missionaries'. The various female Boards established after 1870 to promote and support females were variously called "Women's Boards' or 'Ladies Boards'. With possibly a few exceptions, 'woman' and 'women' will be used. However, readers will observe 'lady' or 'ladies' are almost invariably used in letters and will remain as such.

Nineteenth century place names have been retained and a glossary of place names with their current modern names is provided.

It is the author's wish, indeed his prayer, that this story of courageous missionary endeavour from long ago, will kindle spiritual ardour and commitment to declare the blessed Saviour's name and saving power, 'even to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8).

To God be the Glory, Amen!



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¹ *Manual of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America*, revised and adapted by the Board, and approved by the General Assembly, Fourth Edition, 1882, 6, 16, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nnc2.ark:/13960/t6zw7xt8j&view=1up&seq=6&skin=2021>, accessed 30 August 2021. It is the 1894 edition that capitalises 'service for life'.

² *Sixtieth ARBFM* (New York: BFM, 1897), 82, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=wu.89065737165&view=1up&seq=1212>, accessed 19 March 2021.

³ Julius Richter, translated Sydney H. Moore, *A History of Missions in India* (Fleming H. Revell: New York, 1908), 200.