

MECO celebrates 150 years in the Middle East

150 years ago, a courageous young Christian woman left the comfort and security of her home in England and headed for the Middle East.

The beginnings of the British Syrian Mission whose focus was on education and evangelism, and later became part of MECO.

With a desire to introduce Middle Easterners to Jesus, Mrs Elizabeth Bowen Thompson founded the British Syrian Mission, which later became part of Middle East Christian Outreach (MECO). The following is an excerpt from her biography entitled 'Daughters of Syria':

"The first evening I came here, I asked the Arab waiter, 'Did he speak English?' 'Could he read Arabic?' 'No.' 'Why don't you learn?' I asked. 'I have nobody to teach me.' I then asked to see the maid and she no sooner came than she exclaimed in Arabic, 'Oh, lady, I want to learn to read.' I took out pen and ink and wrote the first six letters of the Arabic. They repeated these letters till they knew them and then they both tried to copy them; every day they learnt a little.

Yesterday I went to the Arab printing press and bought some alphabet cards. These were at once put into requisition and the waiter brought four women, relations of his, who also wanted to learn. This morning the cook of the hotel made his appearance and said, 'Lady, will you teach me?' I proposed an evening school and the master of the hotel, who speaks English, came up to me and said, 'If you will open a school here, I will give you a room - I will be the first pupil.'"

Why was Mrs Thompson able to make such an impact on the community? The introduction to her biography explains:

"... the fact that a lone English lady, who single-handedly commenced in 1860 a work entirely new, amidst the ruins and devastation of a civil war of extermination, left behind

her after nine years, twenty-three firmly established schools, containing about 1,700 pupils under fifty-six teachers, is enough to arrest attention. What was the key of her success? Firm consistency and a single eye. She had but one object - to bring souls to Christ. Her aim was far higher than the desire to promote secular or intellectual improvement. From the determination to make known the Word of God, she never flinched."

Mrs Thompson's determination to 'bring souls to Christ' continues through MECO's passion for reaching out with Christ's love to Middle Easterners. Whether it is through teaching English, working with families with disabilities, serving in schools or theological colleges, ministering in churches and hospitals, or befriending people in the community, MECO workers aim to proclaim the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ among the people of the Middle East. Thank you for partnering with MECO as together we seek to bring glory to our Saviour both now and as we look ahead to service in the Middle East. 

"She had but one object - to bring souls to Christ."



Mrs Elizabeth Bowen Thompson



Children from a school founded by Mrs Thompson

FREE Book Download!

For your own copy of 'Daughters of Syria', go to www.aboutmeco.org and download it for FREE.