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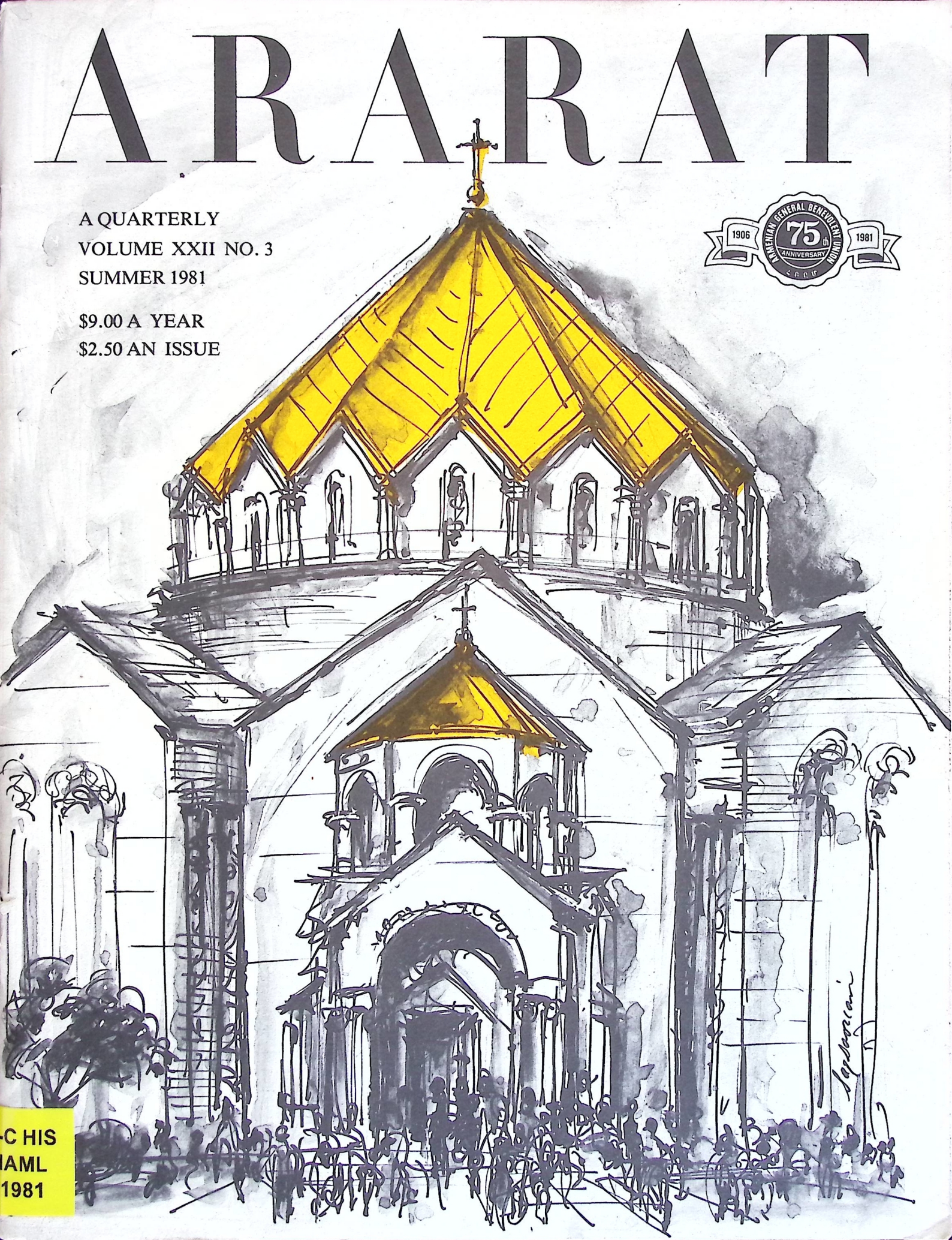

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The Terrorists



by Mark Malkasian

I.

He was now only a mound of flesh, his left hand still clutching a half-read newspaper, his pants neatly creased, his raincoat only slightly rumpled, his forehead punctured by a bullet, his life emptying onto the sidewalk.

The rain continued to fall silently, composing its own portrayal of death in a sketch of diluted blood. An open briefcase lay sprawled nearby collecting raindrops, its papers lining the gutter.

My brother caught all this in a glance. He should not have turned around at all. But he did. He had walked one-half block when he looked over his shoulder, his trigger finger still tingling. A small crowd had gathered around the body of the Turk. They whispered to one another in hushed tones. Someone said he was an attaché to the Turkish Embassy, but no one was quite sure. He was the third Turk to be killed in two months, they said. And they knew. Many of this day's onlookers had attended the sidewalk eulogy of the two previous victims.

A few in the crowd faintly understood why the Turk was dead, or at least pretended to. The Paris newspapers had mentioned something about massacres of Armenians, or Kurds, or perhaps Tartars, but no one could quite pinpoint the date. Anyway, it was a distant feud.

My brother did not hear the talking. He did, however, smile, as if alone on the sidewalk. He wanted to move closer to the body, to admire his work and maybe nudge the body to confirm his success. But he had a mission to fulfill and an individual's wishes must not get in the way of missions. He simply turned away and began to walk, confronting everyone he encountered with the brave stare of a man capable of killing another man.

This was his victory march, the procession of the one-man army. The battle was won, the self-appointed enemy vanquished. He slowed his pace as he approached the apartment.

Near the entrance, a sidewalk vendor squatted indifferently behind a carload of fruits and vegetables. My brother flipped a coin in the direction of the man and snatched a handsome orange from the bin.

Swiftly my brother thrust his penknife toward the heart of the fruit and pried apart its flesh, another test of strength for his newly powerful fingers. The juice he lapped greedily. The meat of the orange he discarded for the scavengers as he began the climb to our fifth-floor apartment.

I had stationed myself in front of the window on this day, searching for a bloody plot of sidewalk beyond the forest of skyscrapers, in fear, knowing but not wanting to know. Fastidiously, I had avoided the details of the murder, never sharing in my brother's methodical plans. It all seemed like an incredible game: surveying the traffic patterns, taking notes on the embassy compound, cleaning pistols every night. On the calendar he had slashed bold, red X's, surrounding the entire week. The largest X blotted out April 18, today's date.

"Victory!" my brother proclaimed, standing proudly in the doorway.

I turned my eyes again toward the window, as though searching for a forgiving face on the busy sidewalk below. But today there was no empathy for the two murderers: the brother who killed in blood and the brother who killed in ink. The city marched the sidewalks, never looking up to my gray, little room.

Yes, of course, my brother shared in the killing—but not in the crime. His was a zealot's mission, and he, a programmed missionary of vengeance. I had given him no guilt, no questions, only a purpose.

Here, in my solitary fortress five floors above humanity, I had gouged bloodless enemies with treatises on "destabilizing" governments and "collective guilt." Life gradually shrank, until eventually everything was reduced to stark symbols and well-placed arrows. But, somehow, the newsprint had seemed far removed from the guns and the bullets my brother stacked in neat columns. The words, yes, they were mine, my coward's haven—stimulating enough for my brave comrades in armchairs and shapeless sweaters. The corpses were never warm when I counted them.

At least my brother had killed nobly, killed as a lion kills for the taste of hot blood. He responded to instinct, not sickened by the flesh, not repulsed by the inevitable conclusion.

He was a young man, prepared to kill before youth and life could be contemplated. But "I"—I was the old man, polluted by a lifetime of inanimate thought. The hate and anger and youth that moved my brother to action only rotted this decaying mind.

For some incalculable reason, though, I wept for this Turk, tears that I hid from my brother but tears nonetheless. They were tears that should have been shed long ago, on April 24 when my grandfather greeted the world with tears and I impassively observed an old man's grief.

Forever, I had watched the tears, detached and without feeling, like a scientist examining his laboratory of white mice. The stale historical accounts I under-

stood—numbers, dates, names, all easily ingested. What was real—the wailing of the orphans, the agony of inescapable death, the survivors condemned to a new life—I avoided. Reality could only be lived, and living I shunned.

But now this Turk was finally reality, the most reality I had ever known. A man had lived only a few hours earlier. Now he was dead, forever. No belabored essays were written, swollen with morality. His life was simply taken, without debate. The only real choice I had ever made was decided, irretrievably. And in it all the Turk's life was not considered. Alive, he was not real. He simply lived, I assumed, much as we all do. He was a Turk, symbolically our predestined enemy, securely smothered beneath a hatred without anger. In death, however, his life was suddenly unique, suddenly real.

This Turk, my burden, I understood. I left the apartment softly weeping.

II.

That evening, I watched the TV news in a department store. There was the body, five minutes into the broadcast, ringed by onlookers, covered with a blood-stained sheet, all just as I had imagined.

The newspapers put it on the front page, again a picture of the body. There was the usual mention of the Armenian Genocide, this time in the seventh paragraph, and my brother was a "commando" in the headlines, not a "terrorist" like last year. But there was still bigger news: twenty-eight students had been killed at a political rally in El Salvador, a religious cult leader had been exposed in America, and Anwar Sadat had announced another breakthrough in the peace talks, etc., etc.

Nevertheless, the Armenians had made the front page and another victory could be claimed. The newspapers called my brother "daring" and "bold," even "fearless." He liked that. He saved all the clippings and folded them behind a picture of his grandfather.

There was also a heady sense of victory at the headquarters of the movement, a downtown basement oblivious to the outside world in its subterranean setting, blank and austere except for the usual assortment of posters and flags infringing on the gray concrete.

My brother came to the headquarters the evening after the assassination, making his entrance alone. There was applause and handshaking and a short speech by Boghos, the leader of the organization. My brother then pinned his favorite press clipping on the central bulletin board, next to the other articles and, again, bowed to a round of applause.

Only Boghos noticed my absence. He took my brother aside midway through the meeting.

"Your brother will be along later, I assume?" he asked in measured politeness. "Such a celebration. He should be here. After all, if not for him we ourselves would not be here. Without his inspiration, there can be no action."

My brother said I was sick, avoiding a direct confrontation with Boghos' steady glare.

"Oh, in that case I understand," Boghos said, suggesting that somehow he truly did understand.

And so the celebration remained a celebration, without my dismal interjections. There was talk of bigger targets and final victory. Boghos distributed copies of my recent essay on the collapse of the Turkish government and soon everyone was extracting key phrases from the text, releasing them like helium-filled balloons.

These were dangerous men, my men, patiently awaiting the next scrap of knowledge I would toss in their direction. I had shaped their minds slowly, guiding their intelligence down an ever more narrow path. They would never be allowed more than a fragment of knowledge, a shard of broken glass, sharp and deadly. But it was enough. Enough to justify pamphlets and bombs and murders. The "truth" could not be clearer.

"This was number sixteen," announced Boghos, waving my brother's press clipping.

"Four more and we'll have reached another milestone."

His audience applauded forcefully and Boghos slammed his fist on the podium. Boghos the master, the teacher; his authority supreme in his little basement kingdom. His timely outbursts of spontaneous emotion I knew well for Boghos was like me, his soul atrophied but his mind still cunning. His speeches followed a predictable course. Somehow, though, his message remained urgent, his tone, compelling. He had talked of the "coming revolution" for the past ten years, inserting the appropriate names and dates into a never-changing monologue.

Boghos was a leader, and like all leaders he savored power. And power he had. Perhaps not the power of numbers, where one could station himself in fixed salute before a parade of missiles and tanks, but power nonetheless. His power was of a more secure nature, never challenged, never questioned, maybe not even valued, except by Boghos. Yes, of course, he too once believed, but belief soon became secondary and goals strangely tangled. Now the struggle itself was the goal, forever onward but never reached.

"Brothers, we have won another great victory," he roared. "But there remain still greater victories to be won. Our enemy is reeling and now we must strike again, and again, and again. . ." his final words sub-

merged in a chorus of zealous voices.

"The struggle must never end!"

The meeting ended that evening at midnight, and each member slipped, one by one, into the tranquil drizzle, returning through the darkness to dormitories and apartments. Tomorrow they would again be students and department-store clerks and bookkeepers, far from the beckoning glory of the basement.

I stayed in the apartment that night, replaying the death of the Turk in my mind. It was a haunting vision of still photos amid puddles of warm blood. There was the briefcase, the slightly rumpled raincoat, the bullet, and yet, something was missing. This Turk, his eyes pained, somewhere I knew him. In his dying moment he was prepared to reveal his secret, but somehow, he could not speak. I fell asleep and the Turk was there too—stammering, gasping, groaning, and finally dying. I awoke early but the Turk would not leave me. His eyes were now a tormenting challenge, luring me closer.

Hastily dressed, I jotted down the details I found in the newspaper and took a bus to the Turkish Embassy. The morning fog was heavy, the sidewalk nearly vacant as the embassy compound glared angrily at passersby. I was no closer than twenty feet away from the entrance when I was met by two guards. I told them that I was a journalist and that I wanted to write a story on the assassination victim. I offered my press credential and one of the guards snatched it from my hand. The other pressed the butt of his rifle firmly against my shoulder and nudged me through the double doors. Inside, there were more officials, more guards, all eyes fixed intently on the intruder. I explained my purpose to the chargé d'affaires while the guards searched my coat. An official led me to a small, bare room without windows and ordered me to take off my clothes. I was then questioned in my underwear.

"I would be interested in knowing more about the victim," I told an envoy. "So often the identity of the victim is lost—such a triumph for terrorism."

The official nodded faintly.

"He was, of course, a man. He had family, friends, a past. People should know that a man was killed and not simply a Turkish diplomat."

The Turk appeared satisfied. He motioned to a guard, who handed me my clothes. Seconds later another guard appeared carrying a bound file. The envoy extended his arm politely and slid a chair out for me. He then left the room as I began thumbing through the file.

There was a picture of the Turk—smiling and



pleasant. Here, his eyes were content. I read over the dossier.

"Hakan Yulis. . .41. . .assistant to the Ambassador. . . married. . .three children. . .lives in Ismir. . .educated at the University of Istanbul, Boston College. . .raised in a government orphanage from age 6."

"He had an Armenian friend," said the envoy, interrupting my reading.

"How curious," I replied, gulping hard.

"An old Armenian man. He lives near a church. I think Khatchadourian is his name."

The envoy was right. The old man lived on the third level of an unimposing tenement. Strings of drying peppers framed his window while, below, a robust eggplant clung to a few ounces of dirt in a cardboard shoebox.

He was a friendly old man, clasping my arm with broad, coarse, open hands, immediately recognizing my last name. He said that he probably knew my grandfather, although they certainly had never met. But he knew me, or at least other Armenians like me. And I knew him and his generation. He guided me to a bulging armchair and unveiled a tray of *shakareeshi* from under a cover of waxed paper. I picked one out of the tray and watched as the old man ate, savoring the sweetness of the pastry and meticulously gathering up each crumb. He looked up and implored, "Eat, please, I have so few guests." And so I ate, unconsciously imitating the mannerisms of the old man.

"Well," said the old man, signaling the beginning of our conversation. "Why have you come to see me?"

"It's about the Turk, baron. The Turk who was killed in front of the embassy."

The old man shook his head sternly and brought his hand to his brow.

"Very tragic, very tragic," he began, without questioning my motives. "He was just here last week, sitting in the same chair you are in. Now I see his body in newspaper pictures. Such a world, such a world," he said with a deep breath.

"I knew many Turks in the homeland, you know," he began again. "There was a carpenter I knew—a Turk but a good man. He was interested in Armenians. I never asked why, but he was. It didn't seem so strange at the time, not at all. I would spend hours watching him at his trade.

" 'Turk'—the word meant nothing to me. I even prayed with him when he bowed to Mecca. I didn't understand then but soon I learned of Turks and Armenians, Muslims and Christians," he said, stretching out the final words of the sentence.

"I was fifteen when the gendarmes came to our village. It was a small village, and in a few hours all the Armenians had been herded into the square. The Turk was there too, standing behind the row of gendarmes, weeping silently. He was watching me as I huddled my sisters together. I had not talked with the Turk for seven or eight years, but now I wanted to talk with him. We stared at each other across the square, my lips tightly clenched. I was crying too. The Turk suddenly made a dash for the square. But just as quickly he stopped, never crossing the line of soldiers. He buried his head in his hands and turned away. I can never forget that.

"The Turk you know of, the one who was killed, he was a good man too. We met at a cafe. He thought I was a Turk. I told him I was Armenian and he stepped back, but only for a moment. He would visit me here and I would tell him about the village I lived in."

He paused and closed his eyes for a few seconds, sorting out his Armenian boyhood.

"You know, sometimes I would look at him and see the eyes of an Armenian. Not the eyes of a Turk who asked questions about Armenians, but the eyes of an Armenian I tell you. My youngest sister, she had eyes like that, deep, sad. You could see a thousand years of suffering in her eyes. I never saw my sister after that day in the square. A Kurd took her away before we even reached the outskirts of the village. He rode by on horseback, leaned over and gathered her up without ever breaking stride, almost as if she were a stray lamb. Such a sad life.

"There were so many little children who disappeared in the massacres. They never understood why the gendarmes were there with their uniforms and their guns. But they were everywhere along the roadside—sitting amid the dirt and the corpses, crying. All they wanted was water and maybe some food."

The old man took another deep breath and released the string of beads he had gripped so tightly.

"But that's enough of my past. These things must seem so strange to you. Back to the Turk from the embassy. He wanted to know about Armenians. He showed me a crucifix he owned, given to him by an old Armenian lady in America. Boston, I think he said. He would even come to church with me sometimes, his eyes always riveted on the candles. He cried once at the Martyrs' Day service—real tears as if he could feel the pain. I didn't understand."

The old man leaned his head back against the chair.

"But now he's dead. I saw him on the television."

He looked at me.

"I don't understand this killing, these bodies on the

television. Why do the young men kill?" he asked, pleading for an answer.

"I don't know," I replied. "Youth maybe."

"Yes, youth," he nodded knowingly, as though I had triggered another outburst of memories. "I was once young too—strong, virile, my jaw always so stubborn. And I carried my dagger under my belt, next to my skin. Find me an excuse, any excuse, and I would have killed then too—just to kill, maybe. But now, oh, everything is so different. Now I'm old and my appetite is gone. My eyes are weak, my hands without their strength. No, killing is for the young men. I have seen too much of it in my lifetime," he said as he inspected his gnarled fingers, indicating his final pronouncement on the subject.

I left the old man as he rewrapped the *shakareeshi* in the waxed paper. He held my hand tightly before I left and wished me well, never knowing and never asking why I came to see him. There was a simple trust in his embrace, as if he was immune to further harm.

Before I returned home I stopped at a bakery and bought a box of *shakareeshi.* It would be my dinner, as if somehow an old man's vision could be found in a box of cookies.

The apartment was empty, lit only by the streetlights outside. I left the lights off, sitting in the shadows, waiting for the Turk to return in my sleep. And return he did —the same haunting eyes. But this time they were the eyes of a child, a child orphaned and crying by the roadside, just as the old man had spoken of. The eyes were the same, though. The Turk was the child, watching blankly as his nation passed along the road, into oblivion. And there were other children along the roadside, all numbed and bewildered by life's incomprehensible cruelty. Some of the children were crying but many simply sat quietly, scratching the soil, incapable of further tears. And now the child with the eyes of the Turk, now he too was quiet. I watched him in my dream as he ran his fingers through the hair of his dying mother. His hand was steady and his touch calm. He slowly rose to his feet and began walking away from the corpses. I followed him as he walked, never looking back, until finally he was one with the horizon.

When I awoke, I understood, I understood the helpless eyes of the Turk and his captive secret. I understood the man I had killed.

III.

I waited forty-five minutes in front of the Turkish Embassy that next morning, watching Paris come to life. At 9 a.m. two guards emerged from the double doors, each carrying an automatic rifle. They recognized me immediately and led me inside. The envoy glanced up from his desk and quickly returned to his work, as though my entrance had been expected. I was seated in an imposing oak chair, waiting while the official poked through a stack of papers. He had no questions for me today but instead yielded the role of inquisitor to me.

I had only one question and he answered it before I completed my sentence. He never spoke, only nodded—slowly, deliberately, resigning himself to the long-buried truth.

I returned to my apartment and placed a phone call to the United States—Boston College. I talked to a professor about the dead Turk. I even reached the old Armenian lady who had given him the crucifix.

My brother returned to the apartment late in the afternoon, just as the sky was becoming an impenetrable shroud of gray. I had watched the sky the entire day, seated in a chair next to the window with my hands folded.

I allowed my thoughts to float freely, never holding one long enough to digest its meaning. And the images came rolling past, a jumbled mosaic of my truncated childhood. I saw my grandfather rocking in his front-porch chair, his face merged with the sun of the San Joaquin Valley. I saw the yellow flowers we picked every April 24 and then tossed into the flames. I even saw myself, writing furiously in some cramped, dark room, hunched behind a fortress wall of papers, never looking up.

There was to be a meeting tonight, my brother said. And I would attend. Neither of us spoke through dinner and while I sat next to the window my brother left for the basement. This evening would be my last meeting at the basement, a final act of penance. Tonight, I could not escape.

I trudged methodically toward the basement in pained deliberate steps, halting before I made my entrance into what suddenly became only a small, indistinct room.
I opened the door timidly, paused, and took a seat in the back row, hoping to melt into the concrete. Slowly, the heads turned to meet me, each acknowledging my presence as my eyes darted nervously.

These were the happy fanatics I would remember, each smug in his one-dimensional world with few thoughts and even fewer distractions. As they recognized their estranged mentor, I instinctively raised my hand to my forehead in a distant salute.

Almost instantly, though, Boghos regained command over his audience.

"Brothers," he proclaimed, looking directly at me.

"Our struggle has grown.

"We have watched it grow and we have nurtured its development. We have fought and we have died, knowing of our rightness. And a just cause it is," he said, accenting the final two words.

His audience responded fervently, all except my brother. He sat numbly in the corner, gazing blankly at the cement floor. Vatche was whispering in his ear, but it was a frantic whisper, sweeping through the room and back to my own bleak corner.

Vatche knew about the funeral of the Turk. His cousin in Istanbul had been there, expecting to see the burial of a Turk but instead witnessing the funeral of an Armenian. It had been a disturbing scene, Vatche said—a solitary Armenian priest conducting a service the attending Turks could not understand. The Turks left the gravesite of their slain acquaintance in disoriented clumps, suddenly unfamiliar with a man they had known all their lives. But Vatche's cousin understood and so did my brother, faintly nodding to himself.

My brother had murdered an Armenian.

He had discovered the identity of his victim the day before, compulsively following the same route I had pursued. He even met with the old man, exchanging tales about Turks and Armenians. They had spoken of lost identities, and nameless orphans, and fallen courage beneath the sword. And they had spoken of vengeance, a confused vengeance without criminals or victims.

Our Turk, our Armenian. Indeed, he made a strange martyr, a martyr no one wished to claim. Of course, it was clear there would be no martyrs in our lifetime, no greater reward for death beyond a silent tombstone. My brother, however, believed in martyrs. He believed in causes and clenched fists and death in battle. The others in the basement believed too, struggling to duplicate the martyrdom of their grandparents' generation.

Vatche had now finished his report. Breathless and drawn, he waited my brother's reaction. But my brother responded only with a steady, entranced nod. I watched him from my seat, sifting through the dialogues we had once held when decisions came so easy.

We had once made decisions about murder—"progressive eradiction" we titled it—who, when, how many, why. There were bold slashes across maps and biographical sketches—but never any corpses: Only later was I struck by the inhuman coldness of it all, sickened by my mind's steely machinations. Somehow, though, my brother never knew. My self-imposed facade had never cracked.

But now my brother knew.

Slowly, so terribly slowly, he shifted his gaze upward, tilting his head in my direction. The eyes that had beseeched me so earnestly were once again questioning.

"My brother, my brother, was the truth beyond me?" he seemed to say, his lips never parting. A lifetime of questions filled his eyes.

"But why?" he had asked so many times before.

"For justice," I would answer, never pondering, never hesitating, without qualification.

"And what of the innocent?"

"The cause is beyond an innocent life, or two."

"And must we also die?"

"We die willingly."

"Without knowing why?"

"You will know, in death you will know."

"Why?"—I had never answered, and again he was asking, his relentless eyes flaming white hot above a mouth and jaw unforgivingly frozen.

Feebly, I motioned to speak, but words suddenly seemed base.

I was without an answer, without my prefabricated assortment of sophistry. My mouth slack and empty, I turned away, still cringing from his searing gaze. Ultimately, I knew there was no answer, no warped justification. My words had failed me.

My brother's eyes remained fixed long after my departure, I was later told. But my seat was vacant, abandoned in a desperate lunge for the door and the refuge of the apartment. Boghos continued his oration, calling for greater victories and more bodies. He had selected his next target—"our greatest victory yet," the Turkish Foreign Minister. Amid the muffled confusion, my brother calmly strode to the podium, devoid of all feeling as he was swept along in a wave of slaps to the back.

"Our savior, our savior," Boghos proclaimed, embracing my brother in a sweeping gesture that took in the entire room.

And then they turned to face their cheering audience —Boghos, smiling and triumphant, my brother, vacuous and glassy-eyed, propped limply on Boghos' shoulder. Only Vatche, however, remembered my brother's eyes, and, so, the hollow elation continued to fill the tiny basement.

I never saw my brother alive again. He didn't return to the apartment that night. Later I was told that he had slept in the basement.

I watched the TV news the following evening. There was another body on the sidewalk in front of the Turkish embassy. There were crowds, and television cameras, and puddles of blood. The reporter said that the Turkish Foreign Minister was safe; the bomb had exploded in the hands of the terrorist, his body heaped anonymously on the sidewalk.

the Missionary of Mardin



Olive P. Andrus



Alpheus N. Andrus

By Frances Lyman

Black smoke arose in staccato belches from the engine idling at the platform. It was past time for departure and the engineer looked uneasily at his watch. At the top of the steps leading down to the tracks, a waiting crowd muttered and complained, anxious to be aboard

and away from the city. Armed guards controlled the barricades; they, too, waited for a signal.

Workmen, busy on the last car of the long train, finished whitewashing the windows, picked up their empty buckets, and disappeared into the gloom. In the gathering pall of soot made heavier by a threatening storm, the lantern of the trainman standing by the empty coach swung to and fro. The engineer reached up and pulled the cord overhead. A blast sounded and the guards opened the way. The pushing, jostling crowd descended, many, clinging to the handrails, fearful of being trampled underfoot.

Alpheus Andrus joined a small group of white-faced, silent passengers, who were ushered down the steps after the crowd had dissipated. They were Americans leaving the country before worsening relations between Turkey and the United States should forbid their ever going home. Two weeks earlier, on April 6, 1917, their government had declared war against Germany, and they were now enemies of Turkey's ally. The whitewashed car was for them.

All their baggage had been searched, even the blankets of the baby carried by a distraught young mother. A little boy objected when his knapsack of crayons and paper, security against the boredom of a long journey, was confiscated.

"No paper," the inspector said. "No paper, no pencils. Orders."

White paper, Alpheus had been told, might contain invisible ink. But certainly he, of all the passengers, would be allowed neither paper nor books. His unfinished transliteration of the New Testament into the Kurdish tongue had been given to Dr. Bowen to be stored in Bible House in Stamboul, safe from destruction by the Turkish government—at least for the present. Ruefully, he reflected that all he had needed was two weeks of diligent work, two weeks, and he would have completed the Book of Revelations. All he carried with him now were his personal belongings.

Like schoolchildren boarding a train for a day's excursion, the Americans were counted as they entered the car. When the guard was satisfied that there were twenty-six, he also entered and stood near the door. His charges struggled to lift heavy bags into the rack over their heads, the handsome, white-haired gentleman with the neatly trimmed Van Dyke beard, stowing his own and that of the young woman with the baby.

A single light bulb hung from the ceiling of the car. The air was hot and muggy and the plush seats would soon be sticky. Nothing was visible through the coating of whitewash on the windows. Dr. Andrus, when he had settled the young woman, reached for one of the windows to let in some air. A sharp command from the guard halted him in mid-stretch.

"You will not be allowed to open the windows. No windows. Be seated, please."

Alpheus smiled apologetically at the perspiring mother, patted her shoulder, and sat down across the aisle. It was an ignominious way to leave the country he had entered so long ago, he thought to himself. Wearily he rested his head against the back of the already sticky seat, and as the train began to move, he fell asleep.

Half a century had passed since he had first come to this land—he and Louisa. In April of 1868, when he was twenty-four years old, they had embarked from New York City, filled with enthusiasm for their task—to preach the Word of the Lord in eastern Turkey. They did not know that it would be nearly fifty years before one of them would leave the field after a labor of love among the Arabs, Kurds, and Yezidis.

When the Andruses reached Constantinople after more than six weeks of sea travel, they were among the first to carry the message of Jesus Christ to the Kurdish people. Nothing in Alpheus' boyhood had presaged such a tremendous step. Leaning over the rail of the steamer, staring in awe at his first glimpse of the great dome of the ancient Mosque of Suleiman reflected against the setting sun, Alpheus must have felt again that poignant stirring when he had come across a picture of it on the pages of the *Missionary Herald* in 1865.

Born in New York City in 1843, Alpheus Newell Andrus had grown up in a happy, close-knit family in Poughkeepsie and had been educated at Williams College where he had excelled in public speaking and debate. He was chosen at his graduation in 1864 to be one of the speakers, his topic "National Eloquence."

After Williams College, Alpheus attended Union Theological Seminary until 1867. Study at Union Seminary was not all books and theology. Answering a query from one of his classmates, he wrote, "Yes, Cupid's net has caught me in its meshes." Indeed it had, for enmeshed in the same net was Louisa Morse, a young lady from upstate New York.

For six months after graduation, he studied Arabic, and then sought ordination, still troubled by the call of the lonely missionary. When the American Board of Foreign Missions offered him a commission to assist in a small, newly formed theological school in Mardin, high in the eastern mountains of Turkey, he could not believe his good fortune. He would be serving in the same station as William Williams—and the call would indeed have been answered!

In March of 1868, Louisa and Alpheus were wed and set sail for the "foreign field." The American Board

had provided "outfit" and their transportation and an annual stipend of $1000, out of which they would have to draw living expenses and save for emergencies. As they watched the tip of Manhattan recede in the distance, the young couple at the rail must have felt a mixture of emotions. The life they had known was behind them; the life they faced was unknown.

A short stay in Kharpoot, 156 miles to the northwest of Mardin for indoctrination and language study, and Alpheus and Lu moved on to their place of labor, the School of Theology in Mardin. The work would be shared for a short while with Theodore Pond, another young missionary. It would include besides teaching and preaching, endless trips to the outposts, some of them days away, to assist in the newly formed churches. Not long after the arrival of the Andruses, the aged Mr. Williams died and Theodore and Julia Pond were transferred elsewhere. Now the task was theirs alone.

Slowly the church and school grew under Alpheus' skillful guidance and Lu started a class in reading, sewing, and the rudiments of health for the wives of the students. It was not a simple matter for a person to graduate from the seminary in Mardin. He attended school for five summers, being forced to return to his native village during the winters to support his family. Each summer when he began his studies again, he brought his family with him.

Working with both husbands and wives, Alpheus and Lu strove to send back to the tribes people learned in the Bible and with Christian convictions, who would share their new knowledge with others.

"It is important," Lu wrote home, "that they go forth from here with hearts alive and full of the Spirit."

She was a joy to Alpheus, bearing under a youthful gaiety and eagerness a firmness of purpose which had been hers ever since she had accepted Christ. She was twenty-two years old when she arrived in Mardin. If she longed for the comforts of the life she had left behind, she never showed it. Only slightly familiar with the Arabic which was spoken in the town, she nevertheless began classes for the wives and her warmth and friendliness soon made up for any lack in communicating.

Kate Williams, returning to America after William Williams died, would say of her:

Like some hidden spring that sends forth rills of refreshing, making a lovely fragrant greenness in the desert waste, so her life imperceptibly flows out, gladdening and beautifying a space in the great waste about her, within which many a weary pilgrim has found rest and strength.

Alpheus wrote to his sister, Hattie:

Lu makes the neatest and most industrious of wives. Our room always looks as if it came out of a bandbox.

and soon another letter was on its way:

Hattie, don't I wish you could drop in on us occasionally. If it please the Lord, by the middle of November, we shall have a baby for you to hold and cater to.

Hattie, named for her aunt in America, was born in November and two years later was followed by Kate and then Clara. Busy with the children and as much of her teaching as she could find the time for, Lu must have often thought that her own heart was "alive and full."

In time Olive Parmalee came to teach the village children who now formed yet a third school. Graduated from Mt. Holyoke College in 1861, Olive Parmalee was one of the first seven women to be sent out by the American Board as a missionary in her own right. Strong in her commitment, she was also a sensitive, caring young woman with a gentle smile and hands forever busy with her flowers.

Her days were filled with teaching the little ones and planning for the older ones, yet her steps were light and her voice cheerful as she moved from one responsibility to the others. "A slip of a girl in her twenties," as one of her colleagues wrote, she wore her brown hair in "crimps" parted in the center and drawn tightly back into a low knot at the nape of her neck. Wide-set eyes looked out on her world and a straight mouth broke often into a smile or a song. She was seldom heard to complain.

The entire missionary staff worked long hours. Indefatigable in his efforts, Alpheus not only managed the school, taught when he could and preached every Sunday wherever he was, but also began a program of civic improvement greatly needed in Mardin. It was a strange city built on the southern and eastern slopes of one of the highest peaks of the Anti-Taurus range of mountains that form the boundary of Mesopotamia.

Month after month, the now bearded young Alpheus rode to the aid of his flock, writing home in a letter to his sister that one month he had covered eleven hundred miles on horseback. No call was too insignificant. He answered them all. Whether it was trouble with the village fathers over efforts by newly-won converts to secure land for a church, or dissension fed by the Jacobite priests, he dealt with the situation.

On one occasion, a seminary graduate appealed for assistance in his village in the area of Sert, some eighty miles from Mardin. Alpheus responded promptly and

after matters had been resolved, he and his associates turned their horses toward home, determined to visit some of the outstations in the mountains. Later, writing to the *Missionary Herald,* he said:

> *After spending eight days in Sert and among these villages, we struck out to the valley of the Tigris, and followed its winding way through much of its course through the mountains, and we came to Jezireh where we turned to the east and came under the peaks of Jebel Judy—the more probable site of the settling of Noah's ark—bringing us up at the quiet Nestorian village of Hassana, one of the outstations of our Oroomia brethren.*
>
> *Returning to Jezireh and from there emerging into the heart of Jebel Tour, we passed through a number of these mountain villages which will, I trust, in some future day be flourishing outstations of our work.*

In the spring of 1873 while he was away on one such trip, the Lord took baby Kate, the second of his little daughters; and then in December came an even greater blow. Far to the north, a rider found him and together they made their way back through snow-clogged passes, where the howling of wolves punctuated the still, cold nights. When they reached Mardin, they found Louisa desperately ill, her throat rapidly closing. It was diphtheria, although they did not know it by that name. Olive had cared for her lovingly until she died.

Alpheus was devastated. In the five years of his marriage, he had been with Louisa only when he could remain in Mardin, and that was seldom. He began to blame himself and days on the trail only served to deepen his despair. Olive found herself caring for the two little girls, Hattie and Clara, as well as continuing to teach. Two years later, in 1875, an exhausted Alpheus came home for rest, taking the children back to Poughkeepsie for a few months to the care of a loving family. An equally weary Olive returned to her home in Toledo, Ohio, to visit her mother and sisters.

Relieved of the pressure of his work and with strength and vigor returning, Alpheus found time to think of his personal life. More and more, thoughts of Olive, already so much a part of his life in Mardin, filled his mind. He recalled her love for Louisa, her care of his children, and the many times he had turned to her for advice on the work and a listening ear for his disappointments and frustrations. Their relationship had been professional and yet, almost in spite of himself, he kept seeing her as a woman, a desirable woman, a woman he wanted to marry.

There was no time nor need for a long formal engagement. In the presence of Olive's mother and sisters, Alpheus wed the young woman who now filled his heart and after honoring a preaching commitment in his home church in Poughkeepsie on October 17, he and his new family sailed for Turkey. They arrived on December 29th, exactly two years after Lu's death. Life had begun again, a life that would bring happiness to Alpheus and Olive for many years.

Years passed, years during which the little one-room school gave way to a large building with a dormitory. Now children could come in from the outlying regions, returning home when they were needed for the annual sheepshearing. Classes which Lu had begun for the wives were replaced by a high school for girls. The compound itself began to grow as a hospital and then an orphanage were added and the houses for the missionaries improved.

Side by side with her husband, Olive worked to improve the mission, her door always open to any who might need her skills or her care. Sometimes the number of mouths to feed almost surpassed her capabilities.

Soon, to her great joy, Olive found herself preparing for the arrival of yet another mouth to feed, and when Laura was born, she thought herself blessed indeed. For ten happy months, she mothered three little girls, but tragedy had not yet finished with the Andrus family. Laura fell ill in the heat of the summer and was dead before her first birthday. Again Alpheus had to stand over a grave outside the walls and lay to rest with prayer from a troubled heart a life he had loved.

Never again would he know an untroubled heart, for Olive's health, although she strove to keep her frailties from him, became a ceaseless worry. She fell prey to "typhoid-malaria" in the summers and "grippe" in the winters, and then to add to her discomfort, was thrown by her horse who shied at something in the path. A badly broken foot which failed to heal properly left her with a limp.

By 1881 their lives were divided between the two stations of Mardin and Midyat, a village two days to the northeast. The people of this emerging community in the mountains needed supervision and it was decided that Alpheus and his family should spend several months in residence among them. It was a practice that would continue for three years, Alpheus packing up his family as the necessities of the work demanded and Olive opening and closing a house in each place.

"You do not know," she wrote to her classmate, Lizzie Gaylord, "what confusion all my household goods have been getting in these past two or three years, while I have been living a few months here and a few months in Midyat. . . . A missionary lady's time is very full of work. I am often reminded of the ladies of Queen Anne's

time, of whom we have heard they had so much religion that they could not find time to say their prayers, or of that older one who complained bitterly, 'They made me keeper of the vineyards, and mine own vineyard have I not kept.' "

Proficient now in Arabic, Alpheus often found himself handicapped by the lack of Bibles in the language of the people. How could he make the word of the Lord real to them when they could not read it in their own tongue? There was only one answer—use his skill in Arabic to translate the Bible for their use. There was need for an Armeno-Kurdish translation and a Arabo-Kurdish translation. He would do them both, though it would be difficult and slow. At the same time he would compile a hymnbook. With his usual verve he set about it. It was the beginning of a lifelong work and though he did not know it then, would set in motion forces which years later would turn the government of Turkey against him.

Now their evenings were spent across the great six-legged desk from each other, Alpheus trying out his phrases on Olive, her soft voice adding comments and corrections. When their two daughters returned to the United States for schooling, their absence left the house in Mardin echoing with emptiness.

* * *

For many years the Armenian people had served the Ottoman Empire as bankers, tradesmen, teachers. Now they were seeking autonomy. Sultan Abdul Hamid slyly encouraged Kurds and Moslem tribesmen to slaughter the "infidels." As the rebellion of 1894 grew, so did the massacres—one hundred thousand Armenians wiped out; two hundred thousand—more uncounted.

Mardin was flooded with terrified survivors. Money was raised in America and England for relief and sent to Alpheus to use as he saw fit. Characteristically, he dispensed it only after thought, setting the survivors to work repairing the main street of Mardin, a jumbled thoroughfare three miles long. Daily the widows of former students with their children poured into town and to them all, Alpheus and Olive ministered. Affection for these two Christians from another land grew steadily.

Armenians were not the only ones to feel Turkish wrath. In the hills of Kurdistan and among the Sinjar Hills of Mesopotamia, dwelt a singularly strange group of people called Yezidis. Mystery cloaked their origin which they claimed was earlier than Adam. They were called "devil-worshippers" by outsiders, although in fact they were not. They did believe that there was a devil who had been cast out of Paradise but who would be reinstated someday, and therefore must be placated lest he be offended. The Supreme Being whom they recognized was so good that he needed neither worship nor sacrifice.

Christian missionaries found it very difficult to reach Yezidis because of their prejudice against reading and against books in general. With his usual grace and charm, Alpheus had been able to penetrate their defenses and had won over an influential Yezidee in the neighborhood of Severek. Soon after his visit, an invitation was received to send a teacher to Severek that a school might be started. Alpheus said that the Yezidis were a people "whom I love and long to reach with the gospel of Jesus Christ."

They were not to be permitted to practice their ancient religion in peace. In 1892, the Sultan sent army officers to force them to embrace Islam. Rather than become Moslems, Yezidis began to flee to Russia, to the dismay of the Moslem landlords. Imperial troops were brought in and the massacres began.

Alpheus himself came under attack, as a suspicious and insecure government began to intercept mail, placing its own interpretation upon messages concerning "aliens." A letter from a student in Mardin to his father, reported the *Missionary Herald,* "was translated so that it misrepresented facts, purporting to implicate . . . among the number, Mr. Andrus, our veteran missionary of that station . . . . A message [from the governor] ordered force to be used in the arrest of Mr. Andrus if necessary as an unfriendly foreigner, and he was also to be thrown in the inner prison which is usually reserved for condemned criminals, and to remain there without any favors shown to him." Andrus went to the English consul at Diarbekir and put himself under protection.

Somehow the country weathered the massacres and crossed over into a new century. One day on one of his tours, Alpheus found in the hills a starving tribe, pitifully thin scarecrows of children, haggard women, and gaunt men. A sickness had carried off their flocks of sheep and they had no other source of income. Urgent appeals to the United States brought no help, for that land was experiencing a recession and there was no money for additional expenses. Desperate, Alpheus borrowed the sum of $1,200 and with part of it fed the tribe, replacing their flocks with the balance of the funds. It was a debt he was never able to repay fully.

Change was imminent. The Grand Vizier died—the same Grand Vizier who had been removed from office in 1896 for his friendship with Great Britain. Reinstated

in 1908, he had resumed his efforts to model the Turkish government after the British Parliament. With his death, nationalism intensified. The more Greeks, Serbs, or Amenians insisted they were equal to Turks, the more the Turks sought to suppress them. The day of Enver Bey had come—the Enver Pasha who gathered around him the "Young Turks" and established a military dictatorship. For nine years they would rule the country, nine years during which the nation would turn more toward Germany for leadership and the eventual renewal of the Ottoman Empire.

It was on a day during this period in the year 1915, when the door of the Andrus home at the edge of the compound was rudely kicked in and Alpheus was dragged off to prison in Sivas by soldiers who threatened to cut off his head. Not once but several times he had broken the law against publishing anything in the Kurdish tongue. That was the year that the entire community of Armenian intellectuals was murdered in Constantinople.

Olive was put out of her home and took refuge with fellow workers across the street. For a long, lonely year she suffered, never allowing her heartbreak and the pain of a broken hip which she had incurred in a fall six months prior to Alpheus' arrest, to show. She never saw her husband again. In August of 1916, frail and tired and finally admitting to her seventy-six years, Olive caught a cold and in only a few days was dead.

The mission suffered sadly during that year under massacres and deprivations. Half of the native agency—nineteen out of forty persons—were carried off. Half of the twenty outstations were scattered, and six of the seven churches with their congregations were broken up. Alpheus wrote home that "should Germany win the war she would not allow what is left of American missions and institutions in Turkey to remain." The hospital at Mardin was left in the care of Rachel North, a nurse at the station for several years, who tried to carry on alone when the mission doctor was taken away to Sivas with Alpheus.

Contrary to their threats, the Turks did not treat Alpheus badly, although he was held captive in Sivas for a year. He wrote of his captivity:

In May, 1916, the government sent all the missionaries at Sivas, except two single ladies, to Constantinople. The two ladies were allowed to remain in order to care for some sixty Armenian orphans in a Swiss orphanage. At Constantinople, I found the manuscript from which Dr. Bowen had printed the four Gospels and Acts in Armeno-Kurdish for the Kurdish speaking Armenians. I thereupon resumed the transliteration of the New Testament beginning at the Epistle to the Romans. When the United States, April 6, 1917 recognized a state of war existed with Germany, the American Embassy at Constantinople advised me, as an undesirable and under charges against me by the Turkish government, to leave the country while the way was still open.

Thus, Alpheus and the remaining Americans found themselves on the move that March evening of 1917.

Without warning, the train jolted to a stop. Men and women, waking from fitful sleep, stared at each other, their faces drawn into questions.

From across the aisle, Alpheus noticed the fear on the young mother's face. She held the sleeping child tightly and her eyes were wide. He leaned over to whisper, "Just a routine check, I'm sure," and touched her hand briefly.

Gutteral voices speaking a language most of the passengers did not understand approached the car. The door was roughly pushed open. Two jackbooted and helmeted German officers stood framed in the opening.

"Your passports, please," one of them said in heavily accented English. "We must have your passports."

The other started down the aisle, stuffing the reluctantly proffered documents into a bag which he carried over his shoulder. When he had taken them all, he turned sharply as though he were on parade and rejoined his comrade, ignoring the protests which arose on every side at this illegal seizure of their passports. With him departed the Turkish guard, who was immediately replaced by a third German officer. This one took up a position where the first guard had stood, almost as if there were footprints painted on the floor reading "stand here."

Hardly had he taken his place, arms folded across his chest, legs braced, than the train began to move again forward. The German managed a smile, "Berlin Express!" he said proudly. "Now ve go faster!"

"Faster" they did for awhile. Then just after passing Semlin on the Danube River, disaster struck. The Berlin Express ran into an open switch "upon which stood a train of empty freight cars," Alpheus wrote later.

"The engine and tender piled up on the wreck and part of our train was derailed, jammed and turned over on its side. The presence of mind of the engineer enabled him to apply the emergency brakes and so saved life, though his fireman was killed and he himself injured. Having reached Switzerland without further incident, but with the loss of my little satchel suspended from my shoulder containing my spectacles, eyeglasses, sleeve buttons, toothbrush and other little necessities, by the theft of it from

the rack by the German officer who felt himself entitled to the spoils of war, we obtained new passports at Berne and entered France at Portelier, and crossed the country via Dijon to Bordeaux. On the morning of June 4, we left the mouth of the river and remained all the first night on deck with our life preservers hung from our steamer chairs, ready to don and then take position opposite the lifeboat to which we had been assigned. But we had no experience with submarines. Our boat, the Chicago, *was large and steady but slow, so that it was 7:30 p.m. June 15 when we docked at her pier in the Hudson River.*

It had been a long time since he and Louisa had embarked from this same pier. Alpheus saw his daughters standing where loved ones had stood before, and then he was enfolded in waiting arms. Hattie and Clara were teachers in New York City and it was in their home on 91st Street off Central Park that he would stay while he waited for the war to cease. That he would not return was a thought far from his mind.

The following June marked the fifty-fourth anniversary of his graduation from Williams College and to his delight, Alpheus was asked to be the speaker at the Haystack Monument on the Sunday preceding graduation.

Because of war conditions, the attendance at graduation was small and also very quiet and sober. The audience was moved by the presentation to the College of a service flag inscribed with the number of Williams men—graduates and undergraduates—who were presently in some form of war service.

For the next two years, Alpheus crossed and criss-crossed New York and New England, raising money for Armenian relief and speaking about his people. At home, he began writing a Kurdish grammar. The war finally came to an end. Turkey as an ally of Germany lost much of her former territory. Closed borders again began to open and Alpheus laid his plans to return, ignoring his seventy-six years and his now failing health.

In January of 1919, his home church, the First Presbyterian Church in Poughkeepsie, called him to lead the congregation in a Communion service before he should leave. He agreed to the call and looked forward to seeing old friends. Early on the morning of Friday, January 10th, Alpheus woke feeling ill and remained in bed all day on the advice of his doctor. On Saturday, he felt enough better so that he pleaded to be allowed to go to Poughkeepsie, and reluctantly his doctor acceded to his wish. As the train wound up the Hudson on its two-hour trip up the river, Alpheus began to realize that he had made a mistake.

He was indeed ill by the time the train pulled into the station and he was taken immediately to the home of his longtime friend and benefactor, Mrs. Edmund Platt on Garfield Place. Dr. Knight Deyo was quickly summoned. There was nothing that could be done and at 1:30 on Saturday, January 11th, the heart which had devoted itself so long to service of the Lord ceased to beat.

His funeral on Tuesday evening, January 14th, in the sanctuary of the church drew many people both from Poughkeepsie and New York City—a congregation which heard eulogies from the Rev. Dr. George Schofield, Moderator of the North River Presbytery, and tributes from friends of years past. He was laid to rest in the family plot in the Poughkeepsie Cemetery.

Over sixty years has passed since Alpheus Andrus laid down his work. Little known in his native land, he is still remembered in Turkey and particularly among the Yezidis and Armenians. Truly the "Williams Haystack" meeting bore fruit in the service of Alpheus Newell Andrus.



the night of

By Elizabeth Sarkissian



Since that night I've convinced myself that God's own omnipotent hand had reached into my humble coffeehouse to effect His ironic little drama. Otherwise, I would have gone crazy trying to figure out the right or wrong of that incredible incident.

It began on a day much like any other, in the early morning gloom of my coffeehouse, where the aroma of previous night's cigarette ashes hit my nose. I consoled myself that this was better than swallowing mouthfuls of grit in front of those blast furnaces I'd tended at the Union Carbide.

As I swabbed the floor, my wife rattled her "Itold-youso's" in my ear: What did I know about running a coffeehouse? How could I follow in my storekeeper

the bells

father's footsteps when I'd barely been fourteen the time the Turks ran us out? And what made me think a bunch of lazy loafers sitting around drinking coffee, playing cards would provide the revenue to feed our children? Soon, I thought, she'll be eating her words. I knew I still had to walk a tightrope of economy and deprivation but I felt my little coffeehouse had at last turned the corner. Hoover was gone, and Mikayel was predicting Roosevelt would put us all on a collision course with prosperity. Everywhere you heard people whistling "Happy Days Are Here Again!"

Bolstered by this rosier view I proceeded to clean up the place, preparing for the long day. I stocked the icebox with soda and took inventory to determine the day's special. Food was merely an accommodation for a few bachelor customers, a small profit for me. I sold around ten meals a day and ran one choice, take it or leave it.

Throughout the morning and afternoon customers drifted in according to the shifts they worked, playing a couple hands of pinochle before they started their workday. Predictably, at four o'clock Bedrosian hurried over from the railroad yard, treating his ulcer to a bowl of madzoon before he rushed back to switch in the 4:48 arriving from Syracuse. I got a spurt of dinner business, starting with Mikayel, who worked in the city's educational system. Lean, with graying hair, an erudite face, Mikayel was a real gentleman, considerate and soft-spoken unless roused to an injustice. The poor fellow had barely finished his meal when Tomasian strode in and plunked some papers alongside his dish—an application form for a job which Mikayel promptly filled out for him. Later, while Mikayel took his coffee, Apkarian came in with his application for citizenship. Then Boghosian clumped in tracking his muddy WPA boots across my clean floor to the corner where Mikayel attempted to read his newspaper. Boghosian handed over a slip of paper he'd found in his paycheck which Mikayel smilingly interpreted as notice of a forthcoming raise.

Mikayel may as well have hung a shingle in his private corner beside my showcase. As greenhorns we'd all benefited from the knowledge of this self-educated man who hailed the NRA as the working man's Emancipation Proclamation and Roosevelt as a well-timed genius who gave politics a good name. Months ago when he'd posted the NRA's Blue Eagle with its motto—WE DO OUR PART—on my window I didn't object, though I feared it would sorely tempt rock-throwing Republicans.

Finally Mikayel could read his newspaper uninterrupted. He did look up once to mediate a noisy argument, chiding the men how foolish it was to have survived Turkish slaughter only to kill one another over a game of *tavloo*. By six the place had developed its own ozone layer of tobacco and coffee fumes mixed with the pungent odor of gambling men. Quite a routine evening until suddenly Boghosian bought everyone a drink in celebration of his raise. Before we could recover from his fit of generosity the door opened and in breezed Garo with a Turk.

Asdvadz eem, I thought annoyedly, of all the places in this free America the Turk could have frequented, why mine? Had I mortgaged my soul to the bankers just to cater to the likes of those who had so cruelly used us? Leave it to Garo. Still single, he had nothing to do but pick up stray Turks.

It seemed Garo had set out for Toronto on one of his binges when a customs officer interrogating him suddenly poked Garo's midriff and sent his *raki* bottle down his pants leg crashing to the cement. Garo produced his papers, which in one of the ignominies of our history states his former nationality as Turkish. They trotted him in to an interpreter who turned out to be this young Turk. Versed in six languages, the Turk took pleasure in exercising his own, albeit with an Armenian. Their exchange drifted into casual comments, wherein the Turk learned of a place that served some good Middle Eastern food. All went lightly for Garo when he offered to accompany the Turk.

Right off Garo ordered a *raki* for him so I forced myself to sacrifice my pride to the crass commerciality that fattened my four children. The Turk heaped *madzoon* over my *dolma*, soaked *pita* in the juice and devoured it. His appreciation came in smacking gulps and nods of approval.

"I haven't tasted such stuff since I left Stanboul," he said. "What good fortune to find this place! Nothing beats our Oriental cooking. I've sampled the cuisines of the world and can make that statement unequivocally. When I studied at the Sorbonne I thought French cuisine would be an exquisite treat. What do they do but

drench their meat and fish in alcohol! If I want spirits I'll take them in a glass!" He belted down another *raki*, parting his teeth as the stinging draft hit his belly. "When I attended Oxford I thought the highly civilized English would surely put a palatable plate before me. I don't think they even bother to kill the animals before they boil those tough hides." He smacked his fingertips to his mouth. "Nobody can surpass our dishes!"

Mikayel squirmed in his seat. "We don't claim to have the best, but Armenian cooking, like Armenians themselves, has stood the test of time," he said, making it clear not even our cooking could be assimilated into Turkish culture.

The Turk was eating too heartily to consider himself corrected. "What will you have on the menu tomorrow?" he asked .

"Imam bayeldi, Armenian style," said I, though I'd planned a simple meatloaf.

"Ah! I'll surely be here. Save me a portion of it. Those greasy diners have played havoc with my stomach. I haven't touched eggplant since I ran into a foul concoction of it in a New York Hungarian restaurant. They should have boiled that chef in his own noxious creation!"

In the end I charged him double; we must take these little victories where we find them. He made no fuss about the charge. Grudgingly I had to admit he was a rather handsome fellow. His teeth dazzled pearl-like in a bronze face. He had the striking blue eyes of some long-ago Circassian slave, accented by that thunder of black brow and sleek dark hair that enthralls women. I imagined he could win any woman he set his mind to.

Later I asked Mikayel, "Do you think God mocks us by sending a hungry Turk to my coffeehouse?"

"If any force sent him it'd be the devil." Then as two customers came in, he added dryly. "He makes these two look like boy scouts."

Just as they had for the past year, the two Italians arrived precisely at ten o'clock. Dressed in pinstripe suits, broad Panama hats, flashy stickpins in their ties, they took a front table, palming the bulges at their hips as they sat. Neither *tavloo* nor coffee interested them half as much as the grocery opposite where occasionally I sought my fortune buying a number. Could I tell these two odars they infringed on the ethnic quality of my strictly Armenian coffeehouse? Did I dare suggest the corner poolroom where they would feel more comfortable among their own kind? Not very likely. These characters made themselves at home where they chose. Their patronage, I'm sure, deterred a lot of those would-be rock throwers. They stayed a short time, smoking my cigarettes, drinking soda, till the grocer locked up shop and scurried across to enter their shiny Pierce Arrow parked in front. The two went out and joined him in the car where he handed over a sack containing, I assumed, the day's take of the numbers game. Then the grocer emerged and the car shot away.

Gangsters! Turks! What had happened to my cosy little sanctuary? "Why must they come in here?" I asked Mikayel. "Why not just go in the store and pick up the loot?"

"Because as Organization men they're very organized fellows. Why make shooting targets of themselves for some rival gang when the grocer's around to take the bullets?"

The two worked for Don Silvio DiNoto. Mikayel described it as a curious working relationship in which they kissed Don Silvio's hand as if he were some Pope or Bishop and, God forbid, Don Silvio ever rewarded them with a juicy kiss of his own on the cheek, they'd be dead ducks. Only through the most steadfast loyalty of his underlings, Mikayel informed us, can a Don of the Organization retain his foothold in that deadly business. All the town's brothels and numbers places belonged to Don Silvio who'd earned scars for them. Don Silvio lived elegantly on a baronial estate in reclusive Woodcliff Heights. He gave generously to charities, especially the Church, which his family attended faithfully. Don Silvio needed their prayers on earth and points in Heaven.

Shortly after the gangsters left the others gradually took off. At eleven Mikayel bought a few Baby Ruths for the children of the Irish widow he boarded with, maybe for the widow herself, who cared, as long as it made his lonely nights shorter. If the rest of us had turned the bloodiest page of our history to go on with life, we had only to gaze in Mikayel's haunted eyes to identify with the mirrored pain that neither time nor the new life can mitigate. The bittersweet memories of his lost loved ones had kept Mikayel to a monkish life with no thought of starting a second family. God bless that landlady, I'd often think, for *what*ever she threw his way.

After that I doused the lights, locked up, and took my own sack of the day's receipts upstairs. Shoving the sack under the pillow, I nuzzled against my wife's soft thick hair. Tomorrow, I thought, will be much better. I'll charge that Turk triple!

The Turk came every evening, ravenously hungry. Against my will I found myself catering to his fastidious palate. As a cook I'd had to take praise solely from the fact people cleaned their plates, so that I succumbled easily to his lavish compliments and created more and more exotic specials. The Turk conversed amiably while he ate, always emitting that flattering sign of a good table, a loud rattling belch. As eight o'clock

approached he'd swallow a few mints, smooth down his hair, and go off to meet the lady love he rolled his eyes about.

Gradually we got used to him. The men relished the way I kept charging him the shirt off his back while he ate. His rankling comments we left for Mikayel to deal with in his quiet subtle way. Often enough the Turk's pompous tales would leave Mikayel smoldering. Like the one about the Persians.

"We caught this Persian with counterfeit papers," he recounted. "At first he gave us no information, just clammed up as if he didn't understand my quite articulate Persian. I used some pressure, scared him out of his wits about his family back home and he broke. It seemed a whole colony of illegal Persians existed in New York. With my information the Immigration cracked down on the whole operation both sides of the border."

Mikayel's scholarly face emerged from his newspaper. "Did you earn a bonus for your efforts?"

"All in a day's work." The Turk flashed those pearly teeth. "But shortly after I did get a raise."

"They packed the whole lot back to Persia, eh?"

"That's the procedure."

"But that didn't end the matter, did it? Don't they still cut off heads over there, for the smallest offense?"

"Ah well, the Persians refuse to enter the twentieth century as my people have under Kemal Ataturk. They persist in dwelling on past glories and perpetuating such barbarisms."

What gall! He was attacking my delicious *tass kebab* so greedily he failed to notice Mikayel's glowering stare.

Actually, he seemed more comfortable conversing with Mikayel than the rest of us. He'd quickly determined which direction to address his wit and intellectuality. Both would converse in their polished English, Mikayel injecting his wry innuendoes, the Turk making bombast about his high education and romantic adventures. To the rest of us he'd afford his confidences in degrees. That lady love he ran off to every evening turned out to be a Christian girl he could never hope to marry.

"She's admitted our religions don't matter to her," he said dolefully, "but her parents are another matter."

"Why don't you run away together?" suggested romantic Garo.

"Because jobs like mine don't grow on trees. Her parents don't even know I exist. She fears their wrath too much so we meet secretly and dream of a life together."

According to the stories we prodded out of him they did a lot more than dream. A couple snorts of raki and the young Turk bared the most graphic details of his sizzling romance. In his rapture over her charms he claimed even her name had the sweet resonance of tinkling chimes, and he leaned over to whisper it to Mikayel as if the rest of us could not appreciate his poetic comparison. Mikayel merely frowned at his ungallantry to reveal his paramour's name, and he smiled sardonically, too, as if only a Turk would do such an unbecoming thing. The girl's sensuality overwhelmed us, not to mention the Turk's alleged prowess. I began slipping more garlic in his food. God help me, that Turk put some awful temptations in my way!

Within three months I'd overcharged the Turk enough to pay off my new stove. At the same time I cautioned myself against incurring new debts solely on the strength of his patronage. His cocksure attitude began to irritate the men. He didn't sense the underlying current of hostility, sitting there so sublimely dining on my haute cuisine. Despite the overall calm I suspected this master of tongues would someday trip himself.

In time he grew impatient that the men leaned on Mikayel like some oracle. Why should they listen to an elementary school janitor when such a superior wit as he sat among them. More and more he'd put in his two cent's worth, attacking Mikayel's strongest beliefs.

"All this hysterical adulation for FDR annoys me," he said. "Any fool should recognize he's masterminded a Communist plot with his New Deal. It reeks of socialism. The scoundrel has managed a bloodless coup just by mixing up the alphabet—NRA, WPA, PWA, CCC. And he's tricked that imbecile Congress into adopting his policies which come straight from Stalin. Any day now we'll be calling it Washingtonski!"

Now you could hear such tripe on the radio every Sunday afternoon from that radical priest, Father Coughlin. "Scab." "Anti-God." "Tyrant." The Turk sounded like an echo of the President's archenemy. Although we resented his vicious attacks, none of us had the political savvy to debate him. And we itched for something more than Mikayel's reserved put-downs.

"His reforms are outrageous!" ranted the Turk. "That NRA actually endangers the freedom of the press. No President has dared such a thing. But Franklin Doublecrosser Roosevelt"—he glared at us—"takes his nerve from the ignorant masses who grovel at his feet because he's thrown them a bone. Let me tell you he's stepped on some important toes in the newspaper world. They'll not tolerate his autocracy for long!"

We looked to Mikayel who, incredibly, was nodding

his head in agreement. "He's referring to the NRA's child labor clause which Roosevelt fostered. It does indeed curtail the press. Now William Randolph Hearst and other newspaper moguls cannot send eight-year-old newsboys into the streets peddling their papers from sunrise to sunset."

It went over the Turk's head. Villifying the President gave him such pleasure that he hardly noticed that he sat among the very men who worked for that alphabet soup he mocked. On my part, I felt a terrible ambivalence about this gabbling egotist. His compliments had so puffed my own ego I regretted the inevitable clash that would find him out on his ear. Even when he seemed most disarming he could, in a moment, rile our tempers. One evening he appeared with his oud, apparently intending to serenade his young lady in their love nest. After dinner he took up the instrument, and strumming its strings gave us a sample of how he'd entertain her.

Embarrassed at his outburst, the men hung their heads and continued their games while the Turk, in a sweet crooning voice, sang his Turkish love song. . . "Nights of splendor in my love's soft white arms. . ." In a little while the men were turning to listen to his appealing tune, drawn not by the lyrics or the Turk's quite charming delivery, but rather by the curious tranquility that seemed to float from that simple little song. We listened raptly. Echoes of the past, familiar warming little memories, came tumbling into my smoke-filled coffeehouse. The Turk's trilling voice transplanted us far from that industrial city with its crowded tenements and melange of tongues to another time, another place. I could hear my mother humming to a scratchy tune on our phonograph, her step livening as she prepared the evening meal. I saw our family seated at the supper table, my father with his grocer's apron tied about him. My sister Seroon's laughter would ring over our meal, so annoying me that I'd beg my parents to shut her up. Impish little Seroon who'd knot my shoelaces and hide my schoolbooks! Long after her laughter died I'd feel a painful remorse that I'd resented it so.

Around the room the men had grown silent. Mikayel's eyes misted over his newspaper. Nostalgia had overcome us all, caused by—of all people—the Turk! With his melodic tune I suppose he'd brought back the best of what had been in our common world. Now he looked almost benign, a kindred soul who'd shared our lives.

At the end of the song Garo, looking much affected, said: "I guess your girl friend swoons every time you play like that."

The Turk smiled cockily. "She becomes my slave."

"Do you suppose I can learn to play that oud?" asked Garo, who usually got tongue-tied with women.

His request seemed to amuse the Turk. "Will you quickly run to Hollywood and woo Jean Harlow with it?"

"Would you teach me?" asked Garo earnestly. "I'd like to learn to play an Armenian song on it."

"For some fishmonger's daughter?" the Turk said, with that pearls-before-swine look.

"I have a fairly good voice," said Garo, reaching out to pluck a string.

"Hands off, you lout!" Instantly the Turk snatched his oud away and encased it in its velvet pouch, pulling the string so tightly it nearly snapped. His face darkened with an ugly scowl as if Garo, by his touch, had defiled the oud, and we remembered sharply the worst that had been in our common world.

It broke the uneasy peace we'd kept, that rebuff to Garo. The Turk's nastiness opened old wounds and left the men spoiling for a fight. They plotted to put him in his place when he showed up the next day. Which he didn't. Nor the next, or the rest of that month. Every evening we'd watch the door, waiting for him to saunter in. It was like missing a toothache, but we wanted him back.

One wintry night he returned, shaking the snow off him, grumbling at the rotten weather. He looked wan and thinnish, probably from eating in some greasy beanery since deserting me. I could sense the men rubbing their hands for a go at him. The Turk himself seemed in a surly mood. After finishing his meal—which he claimed I should have thrown to the street's mongrels—he sat back and fanned out a game of solitaire. "I'm getting another raise in a few months," he announced. "At this rate I can put something down on a house next year. My kids will have a yard to play in, room to breathe, thank God."

"Thank Roosevelt," remarked Apkarian. "Without him, you'd be selling apples on some corner."

Not exactly your most compelling script, I admit. The Turk kept dealing cards to himself impassively, refusing to bite. Another round of similar remarks had no effect. Such a maddening attitude when the men itched to lock horns with him. Believe me, Roosevelt had little to do with it at this point. Decades of enmity had suddenly brought us to a personal Armageddon in my little coffeehouse. Finally Mikayel drew the Turk out with just the right bait.

"Roosevelt's enemies would have history claim he worsened the Depression only to make himself a God-like hero by pulling us out."

It stopped the Turk. Flinging the cards aside he turned

a withering look upon us. "Leave it to the Armenians to follow such an upstart. A God indeed!" Then he went into a tirade, a wild raving, without point or logic. It seemed more as if he were working off some frustration, perhaps over his job or the girl, and there we sat, the proverbial goats, on whom he could vent his anger. At one point he leaped up and grabbing the broom beside the counter propped it under his arm like a crutch and hobbled about madly. "There's your God! Not even half a man to him with those useless legs he drags about!"

His buffoonery caught us off guard. How could we respond to that appalling act, the utter cruelty he displayed? Surely, I thought, Mikayel will spit in his eye.

My God, instead Mikayel ordered a raki for him! And to our astonishment he sat at the Turk's table, spreading his elbows to indicate the Turk was his special quarry. For the next hour he kept the Turk spieling off against Roosevelt, the whole "jackass Democrat party." Poor Eleanor's buck teeth got a half hour of their own. The Turk was having such a hilarious time he lingered past the eight o'clock trysting hour, his dastardly tongue flapping under a parade of Mikayel's rakis. Why in the name of God, I thought, has Mikayel spent a small fortune getting this Turk rotten drunk just to hear such blasphemy. And smiling through it all, even when the Turk pointed to the Blue Eagle on the window and shouted, "Someday that Soviet pigeon will crap all over your stupid heads!"

Then Mikayel switched the subject to the Turk's romantic pursuits. Well oiled by now, the Turk veered easily from political blustering to braggadocio. I couldn't believe our reserved Mikayel could urge such intimate revelations from him. He went on goading the Turk, unmindful of the two gangsters who arrived on schedule. The two listened to the obscenities for a moment and turned away, shrugging the Turk off as a boastful windbag.

"Leave off, Mikayel," I muttered. "Who cares about his girl's cantaloupes." Vulgarities aside, I feared this crapulous Turk would any moment spew my hard-wrought *kufteh* over the floor. Mikayel gave me a scathing look that told me to mind my coffee brewing. So the poor girl continued to endure her ravishment until the Turk sated himself and at last slumped over in a stupor.

Nudging him roughly Mikayel shouted in his ear, "What about her family? Aren't they curious where she spends her time?"

"They think shesh shtill a virgin," the Turk chortled. "They think she goesh to shurshhh!"

A crazy thought flashed through my head, an inkling of Mikayel's game. I froze. Would our gentle philosopher

PERHAPS PINNED TO HIS CLOTHING?

By John Ditsky

Working late, I was
surprised to hear the door
bell ring (this,
in midnight) and then,
answering, to see in full
moon this totally
familiar man hanging
(the eyes rather open)
by a sky rope, twirling.

really carry out such a dangerous scheme? Those faded eyes of Mikayel's had fired up as if Providence had put him in a role he dared not refuse. It gave me an eerie feeling. Could it be that Fate had gathered us all there to play our various roles—I, setting the scene with my coffeehouse, Garo introducing the plot, Mikayel playing the catalyst with the Turk as foil? And if I hadn't guessed too wildly, we even had a set of efficient stagehands standing by to ring down the curtain. God has written it all, I told myself, we move to His direction. Only in that way could I accept what followed as justice.

"What's her name?" asked Mikayel. "That lyrical bell-like name?"

Stupidly the Turk mumbled his love's name.

Mikayel's face loomed over him with the intensity of a hunter poised for the kill. "LOUDER! What's that tinkling name!"

"Do - na - de - lla!" sang out the Turk.

"The whole name!" yelled Mikayel. "Ring out those bells!"

The Turk staggered to his feet swaying his body like the clappers of a cathedral bell. "DONADELLA DINOTO DONADELLA DINOTO DONADELLA DINOTO!"

The two gangsters swiveled in their seats and stared at the Turk filling the room with his tintinnabulating bells. Honestly, I'd seen warmer looks on rabid dogs.

Then Mikayel helped the Turk on with his coat and steering him to the door patted him on the back like a good little doggie and bade him good night. The Turk stumbled into the dark cold night with the henchmen of Don Silvio DiNoto close at his heels. Wordlessly, Mikayel returned to his corner and took up his newspaper. His face settled into its soft contours again. And quite properly, after he'd set off all those bells a kind of requiem crept into his lined face for all those perished souls who haunted his dreams.

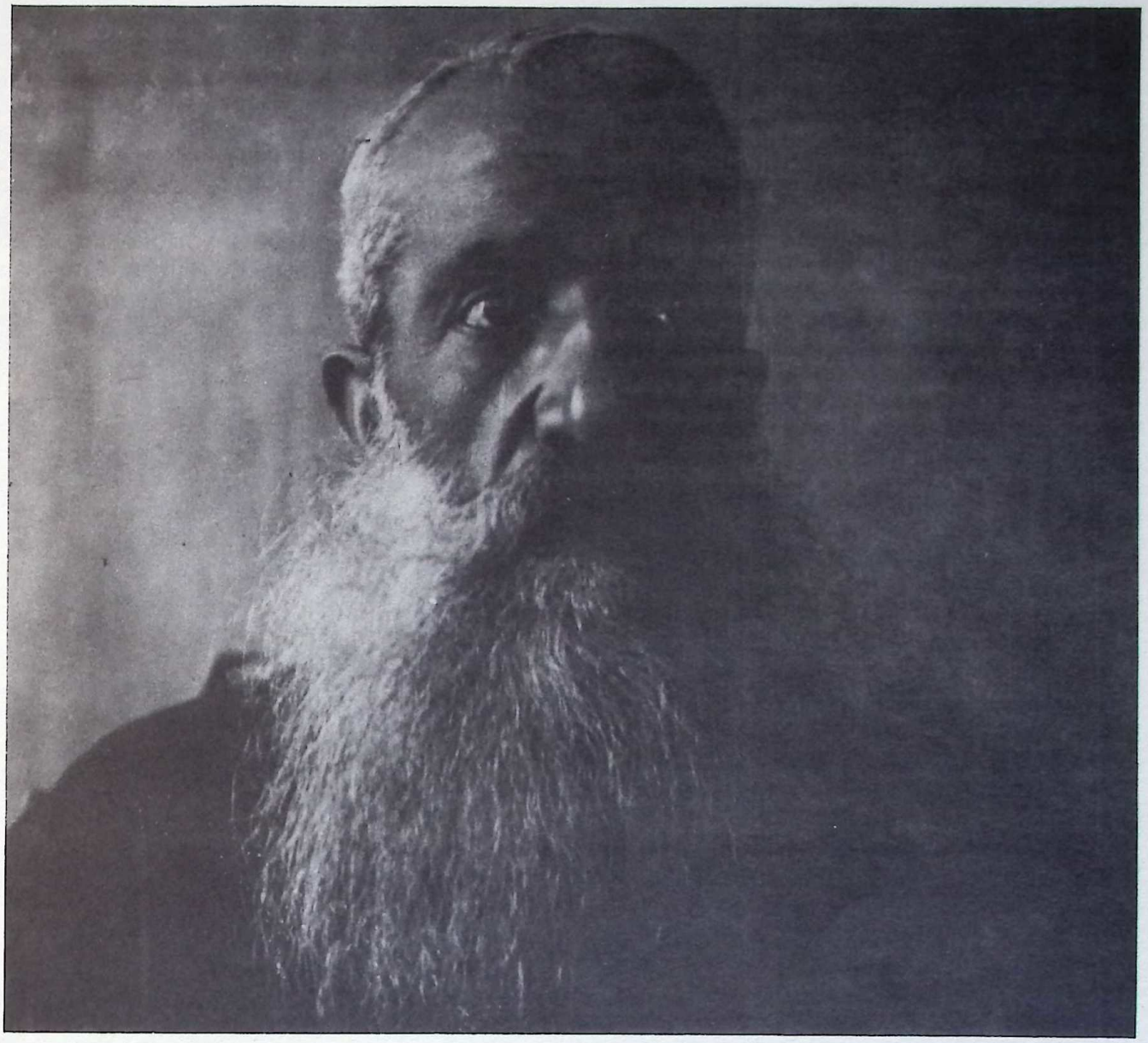
Ethiopian Sketches



By W. A. J. Semerjibashian

Sometime in the early 1900's my father left the walled city of Harrar for Addis Ababa's breezier, somnolent eucalyptus groves, its patchwork of conical thatched or rectangular corrugated-iron roofs and its dusty, gutted, and torturous roads which veined the city. Other Armenians followed soon after the massacres and deportations of 1915. As time wore on they formed a small community which in its peak years numbered some fifteen hundred souls.

While on the whole they were sociable, those hailing from the forbidding highlands of Marash or from outlandish Aintab were somewhat less so. These were known as "the people of the cracked wheat" *(bulgourdji)* because of their insatiable appetite for *bulgur*. They kneaded the cracked wheat with raw lamb mince-



Der Hair, one of the mainstays of the Armenian community in Ethiopia.

meat *(tchikuftay)* and gobbled it up in lumps shaped by the fingers pressed against the palm with large amounts of onion stems and mixed vegetables pickled in brine *(tourshi)*—the mishmash then washed down with quaffs of yogurt whipped in water *(tan)*.

I have never tasted *tchikuftay* because I dislike raw meat, but some of my acquaintances who have had a bite of it have found it rather palatable. It must have been nourishing since the *belgourdji* were generally sturdy and truculent. They spoke Turkish and they exhibited admirably the Levantine knack not only for making a fast buck, but for hoarding it as well. They were good craftsmen and plied their trade in the small shops, a class by themselves between the Arab *souk* and the emporium of the trader. Clannish by nature, they kept themselves aloof, and their family histories abounded with internecine quarrels sparked off by smoldering jealousies, rivalries, and downright arrogance.

The migrants from Arapkir, Agn, Bardizag, etc. were a more likeable bunch. They possessed friendly traits which molded their easy-going, congenial attitudes. And, what is more, they were given to intellectual and artistic pursuits. They were mostly employed as managers, accountants, office clerks, or in such exceedingly delicate positions as foreign legations interpreters —there was one doctor, one veterinarian, one military instructor, and one lawyer. Foreign travelers who despaired immoderately of the greed and duplicity of the

craftsmen and traders, wrote with better equanimity of the foreign legation interpreters. They found them to be less parochial.

Anxious to preserve their language, traditions, and their forefathers' faith of St. Gregory the Illuminator, they called themselves *"Yetovbahai"* (Armenian-Ethiopian) as a mark for having successfully straddled two worlds far apart—their own and the new one—without ever loosing their identity. Some had grotesque nicknames. Here are a few:

Agasses Artin (Beast of Burden Artin)
Pernaghir Hagop (Coolie Hagop)
Kit Ohannes (Big-Nose Ohannes)
Mesheodinem Ohannes (Blockhead Ohannes)
Otzghindog Artin (Snake-shaver Artin)
Esheg Avedis (Asinine Avedis)
Mishmish Kelle Kevork (Cooked-Skull Wise Kevork)
Kordzounim Mamas (Busybody Mamas)
Oozoon Avedis (Tall Avedis)
Japon Consul Vahan, *Somali* Artin, etc.

All told, they were hard-working and parsimonious, although the madcap streak which characterizes the Armenian egged them on to behave in a most unusual manner. As other people judged a man by his achievements, they judged his merits by the amount of cold cash he had amassed. In the end they inevitably prospered. They built a magnificient church, a large school, and a club. Yet, despite these amenities, their social lives revolved around a diminutive coffeeshop located in the central part of Addis Ababa, later to be known as *Piazza* (now De Gaulle Square). It played an important role in their lives as a meeting place and as a crossroad. Business and social news was exchanged freely; selection of candidates to the community council or to the boards of trustees of the church and school were debated, sometimes with vexatious results; and dark intrigues were plotted with suspicious glances and ominous whispers.

Housed on the ground floor of a one-story stone building, (like many structures of the period), it was constructed in the Indian style, apparent in the ornamental woodwork of the balustrades along the stairs leading to the first floor, or the X-shaped lattices of the balcony, the frilled cornices of the eaves, the carved doors and the tufted crests on the roof. It consisted of a rectangular room, perhaps 30 feet by 12 feet. Two flights of stairs led to a front verandah, thence to the room through two wooden doors in each of two wings. The doors stood open from 6 a.m. till midnight throughout the week, including Sundays and holidays.

Small wooden tables for coffee and drinks, lower tables for backgammon and wooden chairs furnished the room. Stepping inside through the entrance on the right, one faced a small bar on the opposite wall and a counter of the same length. On the left side of the counter was a pile of clean glasses and another of soiled; near the eastern wall a piece of *basturma* (jerked beef) with the special carving knife lay on a wooden deck alongside —jars of *tourshi* (vegetables in brine), olives, and *banir* (white cheese).

On occasion I popped in to deliver a message or on some other errand. It was often crowded. At times I could detect sprinklings of members of other communities since this was the only place of its kind for spending a leisurely hour—the Greeks also owned coffeeshops, but these were mostly gambling joints. I still recall the aroma of the brewing coffee; the appetizing fumes of *shish kebab* (skewered meat) wafting by; the pungent pepper and garlic smell of the *basturma*—all blending exotically with the loud conversation, interspersed by streaks of swearing provoked by cheating or bluffing at the games; the clatter of coffee cups, the rhythmical roll and fall of the dice and the slam and swish of the black-and-white round pieces on the backgammon boards. The room was lighted in the evenings by two *Petromax* kerosene lamps, hissing like angry adders in the bluish haze of the gurgling hubble-bubbles and the curling cigarette puffs.

It would be vain to write about Nazareth's coffeeshop without mentioning *Topal* (Lame) *Mammo*—the community's cosset and all-purpose scullion, who dawdled most of the time around the coffeeshop in search of an opportunity to render a service for a fee.

He originated from one of the southern provinces, perhaps Sidamo. He spoke tolerable Armenian. A bootblack by profession, he acted as messenger, discreet procuror, as well as a steward who looked after the mules and horses of the coffeeshop's patrons. He also distributed the famous kites *(troutzig),* circulars with which opposing parties bedraggled each other during campaigns for the election of members to the community council. He did all these for a fee, and eventually amassed a small fortune. He built a house, and finding it empty and solitary, he abducted the wife of one of his closest friends one rainy evening and started a home and a brood.

He was short and partially palsied on the left side so that he hobbled and shambled to the left like sandpaper grating on wood. He also lisped slightly. The left arm was paralysed at right angles at the level of the elbow. When polishing shoes with the right arm, the left moved back and forth in an opposite direction. As if all this was not enough misfortune, nature had afflicted him also with a slight hunchback. More often than not he

was in tatters, and he bore such a scruffy appearance as to remind one of a gargoyle.

II

Yervant Norarevian, alias *Kelles doctor*, presided over the proceedings in the coffeeshop since he was inextricably involved in the antics of the *Yetovbahai.* Short and stocky with a rotund girth, he was well-scrubbed and well-dressed. The head perched on a dumpy neck and the bald crown shone over a round face brimming with a smile. A carefully spruced goatee covered the lips and the chin. So long as he was not aroused, he was sociable, otherwise he would flash his deadly venom. Once, during an unusually heated campaign for the election of members to the community council, he came up blustering that two of his rivals were "a pimp and the pimp's companion-at-arms."

He was second to none when it came to disseminating the titillating gossip of the town's events, for which service he was nicknamed "the pauper's gazette" *(fekharayi gazetta).* Intellectually inclined, he also puttered in such diverse subjects as Armenian literature and history as well as extrasensory or supernatural phenomena, to the stupefaction of his mostly half-literate audience. Yet he wore the display of learning like a cloak to disguise a latent tendency for sloth and an inborn morbid passion for backbiting friend and foe alike. He would comment with a shrug: "The tongue has no bones; it is admirable for gossip." Or he would say with a show of grief: "Why should I be devoured by the pangs of worry? When my time comes I shall be a feast for the worms."

But for all that he lived in a well-ordered small house, sharing in the lavish repasts of the rich just as naturally as he would sup on meagre fare when he was hard up. This occurred mostly when he was unceremoniously denied the fellowship of the tables of the rich because he indulged in more peppery talk than the patrons could reasonably stand.

He claimed to be a dentist hailing from Istanbul. The more skeptical, however, chose to call him *Kelles doctor* —a mountebank—a sarcastic broadside that implied he was an amateur at best who toiled hard to do nothing—he argued that a heavy purse made the heart heavier. In this manner *Kelles doctor* preserved himself to a ripe old age, indulging in rare viands and potions as well as in viper's spite; all the more freely as others had to foot the bill. For him only today was real—yesterday was a dream and tomorrow but a fiction on the wings of fate.

By contrast Vahan was puny in appearance, slovenly in dress and anything but gregarious. Usually his face bristled with a week's stubble and his nonedescript trousers resembled outsized corkscrews. Just as *Kelles doctor* was nimble with his tongue, Vahan was skillful with his fingers. He was an excellent armorer with a reputation far and wide. He lived in the old Tomato Market in a single room which he used as living and working quarters. He was frugal and dined mostly on roasted lamb's head and fresh bread which he bought from "Baba," a Greek baker who looked like a grizzly bear.

When Vahan arrived for the first time in Addis Ababa at the turn of this century, Koorken the baker *(pooroondji)* received him ceremoniously together with his companions at Akaki railway station about eighteen kilometers east of Addis Ababa where work on the laying of tracks had been suspended because of a dispute between the government and the French company. They stood bareheaded in polite silence as the important occasion required. One could not fail to note telltale contortions on their faces as they suppressed a hilarious outburst. Pith helmets in one hand, they wagged makeshift banners suspiciously looking like garbled offsets of some Japanese standard as the carriage drew to a halt. There was also an old clarinet which started blaring a merry Armenian tune called *"Dari-Lollo"* as soon as Vahan got down onto the platform. Koorken approached with studied deference while his friends dipped their flags as a mark of respect. Koorken mumbled incoherent words about Baron Assama Maru Sato, the honored guest. Fortunately Vahan did not understand Amharie, since *"assama"* in that language means "swine" and as such it could have been an awkward prelude to trouble.

Ill at ease, Vahan stifled a sigh of annoyance. At once Koorken comforted him by explaining that all this was in the fitting tradition of the Yetovbahai. Afterwards the party mounted their mules and Vahan led the procession. They rode to the coffeeshop. Vahan was introduced as the guest of the day to be treated like a consul. Later, when the celebrations became jubilant, Koorken offered a toast *"Japon Konsulin ghenatze"* (to the health of the Japanese consul). *Kelles doctor,* in his turn, drew out Vahan to say a few words in reply. Vahan's acceptance was his undoing. Koorken jumped onto a nearby table and again offered a toast: *"Genatze Japon Consul Vahan."* The latter was too far gone with fatigue and drink to have noticed the name-calling ceremony. To this day no one knows exactly why this prank was sprung on Vahan.

To make up for his diminutive size, Vahan strutted into the coffeeshop defiantly; a light jerk rythmically throwing the right shoulder forward, the neck and chin craning slightly to the left, a thin uncertain smile playing on the lips and an arrogant flicker in the eyes. Although of an amiable disposition, Vahan was often at logger-

heads with *Kelles doctor,* who teased and chaffed him, reciting playfully the searing gibe by the late court jester Tebbo:

Had emperor Menelik not been born to become our shield,
The Amhara's tribute might well have been his testicles.

The gibe was used by *Kelles doctor* to insinuate that Vahan was performing a signal service in that with the arms that he repaired, tribesmen in the torrid lowlands killed other tribesmen, cut off their private parts and offered them to their prospective brides as a sign of virility.

Taunting and teasing all the time, *Kelles doctor* failed to note that appearances could be deceiving. Although slight in build, Vahan had a lion's heart. It was therefore bound to come to a head soon when Vahan bought a hippo riding stick tougher than a rubber bludgeon. At times when he felt out of sorts because of *Kelles doctor's* taunts, he would sit brooding in the coffeeshop, a red kerchief meaningfully tied round his frail neck while he fumbled somberly with the stick. *Kelles doctor* would be engaged with apparent unconcern in a backgammon or card game or in backbiting this, that, or the other citizen. Nevertheless he would occasionally throw wary glances at Vahan. Nor were the patrons at rest as they uneasily sensed that a storm was gathering.

Koorken had died some six weeks ago. The family invited his relatives and friends, *Kelles doctor* and Vahan not excepted, to what is called the "fortieth day" commemoration luncheon. After special prayers were said in the church for the salvation of Koorken's soul and *madagh** was distributed to the attendants, a brief visit was paid to the cemetary. Flowers were placed on the tomb and Der Hair prayed and said a few words of consolation about life being the real cause of death. Thereafter they all adjourned to the mourning house. Der Hair presided over the table. As was customary, he comforted the mourners, explaining that however long one might wish to live, one could not possibly see everything and hence death was a necessary evil with the golden lining of immortality to it. Libations were drunk with the traditional formula "May God illuminate the soul of the deceased." *Kelles doctor* also said a few words about Koorken being a good sport who cut capers at times. He illustrated the point by recounting the incident at Akaki railway station and later at the coffeeshop, drawing smiles from the guests who stared at Vahan with sympathy. And this made Vahan chew the cud of revenge. At dusk the guests took leave, thanking their hosts and wishing that God would "illuminate the soul of the deceased." Some went in the direction of the coffeeshop which was within walking distance.

Many years later *Khoumardji* (gambler) David gave me the following account of how the brewing storm suddenly broke. It must have been only a couple of days after that luncheon. One afternoon *Kelles doctor* and Vahan ripped noisily into the coffeeshop engaged in what seemed an animated conversation. They sat at a table and ordered cards and arak. The waiter complied at once. My informant distinctly noted signs of aggressiveness on the part of Vahan which made the doctor feel rather uneasy. Anyway, he continued, "as a rule where there are men, there is often a fight, but in their case the fight was already in them. As they got more groggy I overheard an altercation."

Kelles doctor said, "No fooling, Vahan. Water is for washing blinking corpses like that of (may God illuminate his soul!) the good Koorken. I feel thirsty. To your health *(Ghenatzet),* Vahan!"

Vahan replied, *"Ghenatzet!* You sound like the fool who sits in water and says he is thirsty."

Kelles doctor retorted, "Now, Vahan, steady *(gamatz).* Let's not start it all over again."

At this stage a hawker walked in with a basketful of watermelons balanced on his head. Vahan, simmering with pent-up revenge, made a sign and the hawker approached him. Pointing at *Kelles doctor,* he said:

"Do choose for me the one which is as large as his head."

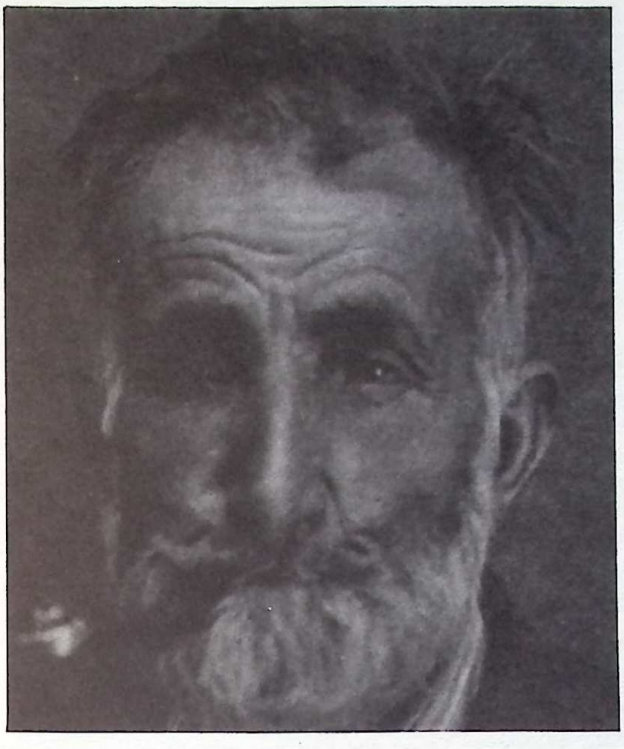
"Will this do?" asked the hawker, showing a large piece.

"Yeah, I guess that one is quite the size of his head, but not so thick. Isn't it, doctor? *Ghenatzet!"*

The witticism sent *Kelles doctor* into a rage and his face flushed. He did not reply to the toast. Pointing at Vahan, in his turn, he told the astonished hawker: "Do you know who that man is? He is a *buda,* I am telling you, a real *buda*—a blacksmith who changes into a hyena from dusk till dawn and wanders all over in search of carrion. Beware of his evil eyes, they can gobble you up and suck your blood."

That was enough. No sooner did the terrified hawker hear the monstrous revelation than he gathered his basket and in a single breath bolted out to the safety of the street. He spat three times in the direction of Vahan as a rearguard action. In the process some of the watermelons fell on the floor and burst into a pink mush. Beside himself with ire, Vahan overturned the table with a loud crash, littering the floor with broken glass. He grasped the riding stick firmly and pounced on the bald

*Pieces of boiled lamb rolled in *mass* (shewbread). *Madagh* as such means the sacrifice.



Kordzounim Mamas, another mainstay of the Armenian community in Ethiopia.

pate of *Kelles doctor* with the crooked end, yelling at the same time: "You s.o.b. *(dzo shantzak)!* You wouldn't stop at selling your mother's yarn."

Kelles doctor flew at Vahan's throat. He clawed and tugged at the red kerchief and he tore it into shreds. Swiftly his fingers scaled forward to close upon the jugular. Vahan's arm reached his pocket—a fateful move he would successfully repeat many years later, again in self-defence. Luckily, those standing by intervened and after some more scuffling *Wodaji* Mihran, the so-called Reverend Samule, and others managed to put down the fray at the cost of one broken tooth and a pair of smashed eyeglasses. Having completed his account, my informant inquired slyly: "Was the shadow of Koorken's 'Illuminated' soul scampering about?"

I acknowledged his inquiry with an understanding nod.

About ten years later, Vahan, grizzled, wizened and jaundiced owing to a liver infection, shot dead a giant twice his size. The robber tried to snatch his bag, but Vahan held fast to it. He hit Vahan savagely, flung him to the ground, and reached for his throat. But Vahan had already extricated one of his arms and had pulled out a small pistol from his pocket with which he killed his brutal assailant. The court acquitted Vahan with appreciations for his bravery. He died a month later, frayed by illness and in utter poverty, while some of the wealthier of his countrymen squandered fortunes at gambling.

III

The venerable priest, Der Hair, would not set his feet in the coffeeshop where similar profane incidents occasionally happened. Although he had been for quite some time on the wrong side of fifty-five, he kept on claiming to be that age just the same, on the ground that anyone who had crossed that threshold need not disclose his age any longer since he was living on borrowed time, anyway.

As a good Armenian, he viewed the world as the place where everyone should live by selling something, even if it was by preaching or praying, which, according to the venerable man, were just as good trades as selling wares in the open market. He was also an unsurpassed philosopher who took a broad view of life. And when reflecting on his own vocation, he would say with a wry smile: "There are as many sinners in this world as there are Bibles or Korans or whatever other sacred books."

Der Hair was a stickler when it came to the proper usage of a word. It must have been at the time of the death of Prince Makonnen, Duke of Harrar and Emperor Haile Selassie's second son, in the late 1950s when I became acutely aware of this in a most illuminating way. The Community Council had arranged for High Mass to be said in St. Kevork's Church in memory of the late prince. Archbishop Mampre Sirounian had flown in from Cairo to officiate. I had been appointed as master of ceremonies to receive and attend the palace dignitaries, ministers, high-ranking officers, and other distinguished guests to whom gold-letter invitations had been dispatched. Sitting one evening in our drawing-room, Der Hair and I were sipping coffee as we revised and sorted out the reception arrangements and the protocol. Suddenly, as if inspired, he looked fixedly at me and said: "I'm going to tell you something you'll have to keep well in mind. The Armenian word *jishd* means true, right, if it is translated into English; but not 'just,' though it be some kind of homonym. No two words could be so far a cry from each other. The Armenian *artar* is not quite the equivalent of just or equitable, unless it be used figuratively. In my opinion there is more to *artar* than simply just or equitable. Our folks back home used *artar* to denote purity, genuinness, or goodness, as when the farmer would say *artar garak,* meaning pure butter. So does our great mystic St. Nerses Shnorhali when in his famous litany for service at daybreak he prays: *"Aravod lousso Arekagn* ARTAR *are iss looyse dzakya."* ("The morning light of the blameless sun dawned upon me").

"Hence the Armenian's sense of justice is an idealistic

world-view rather than that commonplace justice whereby merited reward or punishment is administered. That, at any rate, is expressed by the word *tadasdan.*"

I was thrown off balance by this unexpected expedition into the Armenian language. After a moment I shed my daydreaming and replied: "Der Hair, you may possibly have hit the nail right on the head. Decades after the 1895 and 1915 massacres Armenians still hammer away at the 'Armenian Question.' According to you then, this incessant harping, this desperate wail is not, and cannot be understood, for it is a crisis of conscience that is pouring forth in the wilderness."

Der Hair smacked his lips and remarked thoughtfully: "Our yearnings for an authentic dispensation from a World Conscience, if there is one, is wasted on those who can only dispense political justice, assuming they have the good will to do so." He smiled triumphantly. Shaking his head slightly as his face again darkened with the crowding images of a lugubrious past, he continued bitterly: "There's the paradox which Armenians have never been able to grasp! We are too much dreamers. We are stretching our bare arms to reach a fleeting World Conscience, in defence of our Cause and the expurgation of the enemy's sins. Instead, we should have pointed our guns at the implacable foe so as to inflict punishment, so as to sit in judgment on him—to do practical justice, not to seek idealistic *artaroutioun.* It has and will keep on being like a dialogue of the deaf, so long as our Cause on one side and the world forum on the other remain estranged as they now are."

Der Hair was tall with a strong neck supporting an Armenian nose jutting firmly from an angular, oval face. He wore a pair of black trousers under the flowing cassock. He went about visiting his parishioners riding a scrawny brown mule with sad dark eyes whose straining neck was weighed down by an oversized head. Before riding, Der Hair would first roll up to the waist the expanse of the cassock. It was quite a sight to see Der Hair jogging on the mule, his dangling legs swathed in white johns, the white flowing beard flailing in the breeze, cleft to the right and left, and the mule's head bobbing up and down as the ears flapped back and forth in half circles.

He took delight in telling stories with a humorous twist such as "Man is born screaming, but expires whimpering." He would sit on the couch with one leg folded under him. He would slowly roll a cigarette, wet with his tongue the edges of the paper, and having rubbed off the bits of paper that stuck to his lips, he would roll it carefully over and over to make sure it shaped like a perfect cylinder. Having lighted it he would emit a large puff of blue smoke, at the same time throwing his head slightly back. The ceremony completed, he would then slowly embark on a story. He would rise from his seat just before bringing in the climax with a loud bang of the right palm on his thigh.

He spoke often with pride of the virtues of a beard which he counted as a prize among his assets, though he cautioned: "A goat also does have a beard, so the colubus monkey, but neither is a priest."

Once, *Dighin* Takouhi, seeking to confound the good priest, asked: "Der Hair, could you please tell us whether you tuck your beard inside the blanket while in bed?"

Obviously, Der Hair would be the last man to give in to the woman's double-entendre. Nor was he one to mince his words. Had he not been forcibly taken in 1914 to Deir-el-Zor along with his family to be massacred? And had they not all come back alive by the dint of his ability to wield his tongue? He blinked cunningly, stared into the woman's eyes like a panther stalking its prey, and replied without beating about the bush: *"Dighin!* God once said to an inquisitive, 'If you're fretting so much for an answer, why not come up here?' So nothing would be simpler than your joining me to ascertain for yourself the answer to this dilemma which perplexes you."

Put to the blush, the woman blurted out some incoherent words and sat straight in her chair with stiff lips. The incident was closed. Yet it enhanced the priest's reputation of giving chapter and verse to his detractors. For a long time *Kelles doctor* and his bedfellows, who were Der Hair's archenemies, held their peace. All this made him vaunt even more the virtues of the venerable beard, though the sequel to the "blanket" story has remained untold till now.

IV

During Epiphany and Easter, Der Hair made regular calls on his *dzoukh* (smoke), as in Armenia one refers to the smokestacks of the parishioners. This was an important traditional occasion. A little salt, a small loaf of bread, and a glass of water were brought out on a tray by the housewife and laid on the table, while Der Hair pulled out of his pocket a worn silver cross with the handle wrapped in silk cloth. He said prayers, chanted a litany, and at last having blessed the salt, bread, and water as a token for prosperity by making the holy sign over each with his cross, he offered the cross to the family members for kissing. He also delivered to the housewife a *neshkar* (Eucharistic bread), the size of a coffee saucer, made of dough without leaven, baked crisp, white, flat and with the crucifixion embossed on it and frills on the circular edge. According to custom she

would religiously preserve the *neshkar* in the locker till the following year, when it would be taken out, broken into pieces, and given to the family members for swallowing without chewing.

At a similar occasion Der Hair told his startled audience one of his stories to point out the moral that had he not been a *yetovbahai* straddling two worlds far apart, he would have wound up like any other country simpleton.

A long while ago a foreign couple were visiting the renowned vineyards surrounding Lake Van in Armenia. At about noon they stopped under the cool shade of a large tree to refresh themselves. It was windy and the blistering sun bore down like white heat. Having relaxed for an hour or so, the woman took out a mirror from her handbag to attend to her disheveled hair. She did it creditably in spite of the wind, but in the process she forgot the mirror on the ground as both were leaving.

A few hours later a farmer called Avak, who had been working in the field since dawn, gathered his tools and began plodding wearily toward home, wiping from time to time the sweat that trickled off his brow. He was middle-aged, with a face ploughed by deep furrows of long and hard years' struggle with the soil and the unpredictable elements. For over ten years he had had no news from his brother Armenak, who had left home for Istanbul soon after his marriage to try his luck. The silence compounded Avak's worries. He was whistling softly the song of the Armenian homesick exiles known in the vernacular as the *Bantoukhd:*

No man such longings wild can bear
As in my heart forever rise.
Oh that the wind might waft me there
Where my beloved's vineyard lies!
Oh that I were the zephyr fleet,
That bends her vines and roses sweet.

Dragging one leaden foot after another, Avak reached the spot where the foreign couple had been resting. He noticed something shiny on the ground. He approached with distrust and lifted it carefully. In those years, late 1880s, in countrysides removed from the beaten path, farmers scarcely had an idea about mirrors. He took it up warily with shaking fingers. He rubbed it with the ham of his rough palm, then pulled it near his eyes for a better look at the mysterious thing now that it had proved harmless.

What he saw staggered him there and then. His breath stopped for a fraction of a second. He could not trust his eyes. Was this at all possible? How could this happen? Was this a practical joke by the devil? Or was this God's unbound blessing? Finally, his weariness gone, he rushed to his hut calling: "Ashken, dear! Come, come. I can't believe what I saw."

On hearing her husband's calls, the farmer's wife ran to him, fearing something evil had happened. The farmer kept on calling, the voice hoarse and more disturbed than before. At last both met gasping by the edge of the brook. The farmer took a deep breath to slow his pounding heart. All upset, his wife asked him with affection: "Avak, what happened to you. Are you sick? I've never seen you so worked up. God bless my heart. I was just about to raise a hue and cry, for I thought you had come across something awful."

Taking up right where she had left, Avak said, still dazed by what he had experienced: "Blessed be the Virgin. After so many careworn years I've finally met my brother who had gone off to Istanbul in search of greener pastures." Replied Ashken in a voice which had changed tone as she had become calmer: "Where is he, Avak? Where is he? Why didn't you fetch him along? After so many years he should be terribly homesick."

Avak said with some difficulty: "My dear wife, how can I fetch him home? That's impossible. He is right here in my palm."

Ashken thought he was joking. But when she saw the shiny object in his palm she ogled him in disbelief. "What are you mumbling about your brother being in your palm? Are you perhaps possessed by Satan?"

She made the sign of the cross three times as prescribed for exorcising the devil. She closed her eyes and silently called for all the homegrown Armenian saints from St. Thaddeus right to St. Kevork for help. "Are you unwell, dear? Shall I ask Der Hair to come and say prayers and read the Nareg, our ancient prayer book by St. Krikor Naregatzi?" she asked.

Still very much shaken, Avak muttered in a broken voice: "Not yet. Do have a look at him first. This is his picture. You will recognize him even if he looks frayed by the years." He then tendered the mirror to his wife. She took it with trembling fingers and held it for a while with suspicion and revulsion at the same time. Slowly reassuring herself, she lifted it to her eyes. But what she saw not only dampened her reassurance but frightened her beyond recognition. She became livid, her eyes bulged, and she very nearly tore her dress. At once she recoiled and screamed: "Is this the picture of your brother? Oh, Lord have mercy upon me! This is neither your brother's picture nor of any other man. This is the picture of your mistress. What pluck and stupidity to show this smudge to me, your wife."

She was deeply disturbed. For no sooner had she lifted the mirror to her eyes than she had caught the unwelcome sight of a woman leering at her. Beside her-

self, she burst into tears. Throwing the mirror away, she whizzed round and rushed uphill. Avak picked it up and stood stone-still, brooding somberly on his strange predicament.

Not far away lived Der Baba (as a Der Hair was called in the countryside) with his wife, the *yeretzghin* (first lady), in a hovel lost in the cool shade of a spreading walnut tree. The village church and the cemetery ground were nearby at walking distance. Ashken ran straight to the hovel. When she reached it, she had to stop for breath. She stood indecisively for a time weeping. She then knocked at the door. The *yeretzghin* opened the door and admitted Ashken. She cast a curious look at the upset woman, then silently motioned her to a seat.

A black cap poised on a wizened shock of hair, Der Baba was seated at a table on which lay the registers of births, baptisms, marriages and deaths which he was bringing up to date. He raised his eyes and looked at her. Ashken rose and walked over to where he was seated. She took his hand and kissed it according to custom. He waved her back to her seat.

"What's the matter, child? Why are you sobbing? Did you quarrel with your husband?" he asked with concern. She dabbed at her eyes and shook her head. It took her several moments to recover and to tell what had happened, sobbing and sniffing intermittently as she poured out her story.

"Der Baba, this is truly abominable. I can't live with a man who keeps a hussy. I married him by the taking of the Holy Sacrament and look how he has misbehaved himself."

Der Baba listened to her in silence, chin resting on his right palm. He was much puzzled by her disclosures since he couldn't make head or tail of them. Finally, he muttered some sacred words and then admonished her: "I don't really know what you are talking about, woman. Do please calm down. Let me first go and speak to your husband. It is only the devil that can do such insensible things. I simply cannot believe Avak could be that unfaithful, unless he be off his onion." Ashken put her foot down, refusing to listen to any exhortation. "Der Baba, you have to undo our marriage. All is now finished. I must go back to my parents. If they will not take me back I will enter the convent of St. Hripsime, our supreme female saint." Der Baba frowned at her with incredulity and clasped his beard in an effort to control his rising temper.

"Listen woman! I can't undo what in God has been bound. That's absolutely for the Bishop. Now, be a good sport, stop that whimpering and stay here with



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yeretzghin. I'll walk over to your husband and clarify this nonsense."

Der Baba gathered his cassock, put it on hurriedly, tucked his old Nareg in the pocket and tottered out. He reached the spot where Avak was standing bewildered and motionless, the mirror grasped firmly in his hand. Slender and bowed with age, Der Baba smiled with benevolence at the stocky farmer whose shoulders humped in despair. He rubbed his hands with indecision, then inquired in a purr:

"God bless you, son! You are returned quite late from your toils. I know for you to work is to pray. I just met your wife and I am not quite sure what she exactly means. It appears the evil one is again busy behind the curtain. Perhaps this is so, I really don't know. Still, I resent it that your marriage should be put to the test after so many years of domestic peace. Do tell me please what's all this gibberish about another female?"

Avak looked dazed by the worst of all impossible situations. The bedeviled man could not speak nor move his sturdy legs for fear Satan might play another trick on him. Der Baba noted this. He opened the old Nareg, fiddled with the pages, and found the prayer pertinent to the situation. He began reading: "Out of the very depths of my heart, I spoke to the Lord. . ." As was expected, Avak seemed to pull his wits together. After an extended pause, he said: "Der Baba, I did nothing wrong, and this I swear upon the beards of all our saints. I found this picture here of my brother under the tree, yonder. When I showed it to my wife, she burst into tantrums. Losing her head, she screamed at me that this

was my mistress. She then took flight in the direction of your home."

Making the sign of the cross and reciting sacred formulas to dispel the incantation, Der Baba stretched his arm cautiously, unable to resist the temptation to glimpse at that satanical face which had caused all this conjugal trouble: "Let me have a peep at it, Avak son."

Guardedly, as it were, Der Baba's fingers grasped the mirror. Slowly, with increased misgivings, he lifted the suspicious object within sight range. When he shifted it into focus his hands shook violently—he had to catch his breath. Confusion could not be worse confounded. He squinted, and squinted again with incredulity. None of the claims so angrily voiced by the spouses was true. What was reflected in that mirror? Whom was he looking at? An old man with the abuses of time deeply carved on the bony face and a billowing white beard fluttering in the wind. With a kind of spasm contorting the corner of his mouth, the closest approach to a grin, he said:

"God have mercy upon my soul! I don't quite understand how this could be your brother's picture or that of a hussy. This is a remarkable revelation in God's own time. Son, it's him, him—the Bishop. The beloved Bishop residing in Istanbul, who ordained me nearly half a century ago. Blessed be the Lord and all the Saints. In his limitless bounty He granted me this blissful occasion to peer at the saintly face before my death. He has verily heeded my prayers. Let all the Seraphim with their three pairs of wings, and the Cherubin with their chubby and rosy faces chant a thousand loud praises to the everlasting glory of the Lord. For this day is the most blessed of all my days."

He then ordered Avak to follow him. When they reached home, they found *yeretzghin* and Ashken seated side by side, the priest's wife still trying to comfort the irate woman. Stepping upon the threshold, Der Baba removed his skullcap and addressed the spouses with happiness glistening in his eyes:

"Ashken, dear, what you saw in that mirror was none but the saintly face of our blessed Bishop in Istanbul who ordained me many years back. Let God bless your husband and you, for through you both He revealed to me the saintly bishop in full life. I shall keep this picture as heavenly manna." And, trying to heal the wound, he continued in a soothing voice: "I could not help but regret the unfortunate misunderstanding. Don't yield again to the temptations of Satan, the evil one. For he already had his bargain. Now, go back home so that the fire which has been handed down to you from your ancestors shall not die out. The Lord has bound you in His Grace and so you shall remain."

Things having taken this unexpected turn, the spouses went off, still dazed by the strange experience, all the way brooding silently on its significance.

As Thackeray said in *Vanity Fair,* "The world is a looking glass and gives back everyman the reflection of his own face."

V

In the course of Der Hair's early ministry during the 1920s, the *Yetovbahai* became sorely divided between *Dashnak* and *Ramkavar* (Federalists and Democrats). The reasons underlying the split are not too clear to me, except insofar as the additions from Beirut and other places in the Middle East might have largely contributed to the internecine strife. This was to be deplored indeed for until then the community had lived in peace and harmony.

The opposing factions started a real spree. They belabored each other in turn by blister and bluster. All places, including Nazareth's coffeeshop, the church grounds, shops and offices, homes and the public baths at *Filloha* were packed with babbling and gesticulating people. Some of them twirled and swore on their moustaches and dangerously raised their sticks, arguing and rebutting party plank with mystifying charges and countercharges. And when the priesthood and the teachers darted into the melee, the absurd repartees floated like jetsam in the ocean of prattle. If one were to ask what was the good of the *Ramkavar* party, before one would receive a reply, a benumbing voice would trumpet forth from a black hood about the Begotten and the Unbegotten; likewise, if one were to ask what was the good of the *Dashnak* party, one would be treated to a lecture that the Father was greater than the Son; or, if one would inquire about being neutral, he would be dismissed by the comment that the Son was made of nothing.

They raised such an uncogenial uproar that it finally reached the Armenian Bishopric and party heads in Cairo. Wisely the latter called for a provisional halt lest the warring factions jeopardize the species itself. After a good deal of soul-searching and huggings and taps on the shoulders, quarrels were patched up. A sort of slender truce followed, lasting to everyone's surprise until very recently.

The split changed the sitting pattern in the coffeeshop. Thereafter it was made along party lines—the *Ramkavars* strategically poised in the east corner astride the bar, the counter and other amenities, while the *Dashnak* shared the barren west corner like a disinherited brother. This arrangement was vehemently denounced by *Guldur* (Gobbler) Mardiros as the dia-

bolical machinations of the class-conscious ruling *Ramkavar* oligarchy, led by the devilish Krapos, Babayan, and Hususian. *Guldur* was the aggressive mastiff-voiced implacable Dashnak. The *Ramkavars* made light of him; they joked he had the uncanny gift of using all his waking hours between God's threatening dawn and merciful silent dusk to fling bog and tar at them. They said he belched out all the abrasive words in the Armenian equivalent of Webster's International Dictionary. *Tirvende Hanem* declared publicly: "I suspect *Guldur* of having swallowed the Adjarian dictionary. Surely, I should know what I am talking about. My persistent insomnia is totally due to the half-ruminated drivel. This further confirms the added suspicion that the gobbler might have swallowed the dictionary's special lectern as well."

As the rift widened, the community institutions shook to their foundations and some broke in two. Such was the fate of the Azkain Araradian Varjaran (National Ararat School). It was housed in the shabby thatched rooms that sprawled in the shape of an "L" in the compound of the equally thatched chapel built soon after World War I when building materials were scarce and only thatch and mud were available. Der Hair used to officiate in this chapel and I used to hold the Grand Cross during High Mass. Many years later both the chapel and the school were torn down and a tennis court as well as a one-story building erected to house the "Ararat Sports Club."

I still remember one of the deacons called Barnabas. He was long past the prime of life. He wore a Groucho moustache under the acquiline nose which also bore the weight of a pair of thick reading glasses. The intriguing thing about him was his ability to read a whole chapter of the Bible while holding the book upside down, mystifying me and persuading the believers that this was indeed an act of saintly inspiration.

Bursting with curiosity beyond redemption, I once managed to hide his glasses in the childish belief they reversed the characters in the book enabling him to read upside down. I had concealed myself in the room adjoining the vestiary where Barnabas had been rummaging for the glasses. Peering through the keyhole, I saw him pull out all the pocket linings in his coat, vest, and trousers one by one, without much success. Confounded, he made the sign of the cross and recited a prayer at the same time throwing his arms up over his head as if appealing to Heaven for help. Just then Der Hair unexpectedly surged into the vestiary. He was taken aback at the sight of Barnabas standing awkwardly with arms outstretched, pocket linings dangling out like the lolling tongues of so many thirsty dogs. He exclaimed: "*Baron* Barnabas, what's happened to you? Are you unwell?" Barnabas was tongue-tied, though visibly electrified by the voice of Der Hair who had discovered him amidst most unusual antics. He mumbled a little while later: "No, no; it's all right. I had a little back pain and I was exercising to relieve it."

It was obvious this explanation was far from convincing to Der Hair. Admittedly, no one in his right mind would pull out pocket linings simply because he had back pain. Der Hair scanned the poor deacon with disbelief. To my undoing I could not suppress a barely audible giggle although I had applied my palms to my mouth as fast as I could. Thus I betrayed not only my position but my presence as well. Since Barnabas was close to where I was standing, he had heard my faint giggle, but luckily not Der Háir, who was on the far side, further away from where I was.

As if struck by sudden impulse, Barnabas folded his arms and darted toward the door behind which I was standing transfixed with fear. Before he could reach it, Der Hair took a quick step forward, cut his advance, and held him tightly in his clutches. Then he shouted angrily: "Now, what are you trying to do? Bash your damned fat head against that door? Good Lord, I never saw such craziness. The man's simply petered out. Better have him strapped before he kills himself."

These words, which meant that I was saved, also brought Barnabas back to his senses. Realising he would soon be made the object of ridicule in the drawing rooms by the peppery *Kelles*, he composed himself and apologised to Der Hair. Then he emitted a kind of noise which sounded to me like the grunt of a pig expiring in a bucket of scalding water. He shook his head from side to side as if to express submission to his fate without reading glasses and began walking up the stairs to the chapel, utterly resigned to a blurred world.

After Der Hair had put on his ceremonial vestments and gone to say mass, I sneaked into the vestiary to steal a glimpse of the deacon. To my complete surprise I discovered him reading the Bible again upside down and, what seemed to me most astonishing, without his glasses. My childish belief flaunted, I kept standing with his glasses in my hands, petrified by the knowledge of my own discomfiture.

I was still motionless when I saw Barnabas returning to the vestiary with the incense holder. I tried to run away, but I was so bedeviled by the savage scowl in his eyes that I remained nailed to the spot. He strode towards me with knitted brows, snatched the glasses out of my hands, and shook his index violently in my face as a dire warning that a sound thrashing lay in wait for me

upon conclusion of the mass—the wages of my sin.

The Azkain Araradian Varjaran was the first victim of the rift between the two opposing factions. The *Ramkavars* removed their offspring to a masonry building in a diametrically opposed location and called it *Haigagan Ghertaran* (Armenian School). The *Dashnaks* were awarded the premises of the ramshackle Azkain Araradian Varjaran in the same way as the seating arrangement in the coffeeshop—like a disinherited brother. I was also transferred to the Haigagan Ghertaran. This must have been in late 1925, for I still remember hazily being promoted to the first grade of the elementary class among boys and girls much older than I. They made me the object of their pranks, such as warning me to come with my bib and diapers on. This treatment caused me much distress when it was insinuated in the presence of my form mistress of whom I was very fond—I believe her name was Zarouhi.

Yet the division was not altogether shorn of human drama, which at times allayed the bitter feeling in the community. Once *Aggasses* (Beast of Burden) Artin dropped into the coffeeshop for a gulp of the reviving brew. He was accosted by *Esheg* (Asinine) Avedis, a *Dashnak* bent upon ridiculing his opposite *Ramkavar* number. Wriggling a finger and with his usual gruff manner, Esheg Avedis asked *Agasses* Artin point blank: "Hey, you there! You always claim to be up to a thing or two. Can you tell me which is more important, the sun or the moon?"

Needless to say, Artin found himself caught between the horns of a dilemma; were he to keep silent, he would be at once impeached by his opposers as an ignoramus who went about raving that he was a walking know-it-all; were he to reply, he would for sure become the target of their mockery. So to gain time for extricating himself from this situation, he turned the tables: "Well, you certainly have a problem there, I admit. But before I state my judgment on it, I suggest you tell me yours first."

Those present began shuffling round the two men, not because they understood the transaction, but because it was quite uncommon for two members of the opposing factions to converse together. Avedis, who had not failed to note the interest of the patrons and the sudden change of climate in the room, cleared his throat, buttoned his coat, and said playfully: "Why, that's very simple! A suckling child will surely know it. The moon is of course the more important. Doesn't the moon shed its light in darkness, while the sun gives light only during the day which the good Lord has lighted anyway?"

The assembled group growled approval of this inspired statement. Artin and Avedis, for their part, looked at each other perplexed for having discovered the mare's nest. Both left the coffeeshop for the first time since the party cleavage in each other's company, entirely forgetful of their divisive allegiances. But, in truth, as Essedi of Tus says:

"The Sun is ruddy, strong and hale;
The Moon is sickly, wan and pale.
Methinks 'twas ne'er in story told
That silver had the worth of gold!
The moon, a slave, is bowed and bent,
She knows her light is only lent,
She hurries on the way to clear,
Till the Great Sun himself appear"

VI

Our Der Hair was not homely, like Der Baba hailing from the lush vineyards of the district of Van. I was told of an amusing incident that had taken place during one of Der Hair's rounds of his "smokes." As a member of the Community Council of the time, my informant had come to know that the foreign French-speaking wife of an Armenian had lodged a complaint against Der Hair for daring behavior and had insisted that apologies be tendered to her. The facts of the case were not so very embarrassing, but considering the special position of Der Hair, they were likely to lead to unnecessary gossip. The Council therefore tactfully summoned Der Hair to a closed meeting for an explanation. The president of the Council was charged to make the investigations.

"Der Hair, do tell us please whether it is true you visited the home of that foreign lady," he opened up.

"Correct. I did as always visit my smoke during Epiphany and Easter. Is there anything wrong in that?"

"Perhaps not. But did you say or do anything unusual?"

"Nothing that I am aware of," affirmed Der Hair.

Before shooting the embarrassing question, the president emitted a dry cough, drew forcefully at the cigarette, and let the smoke out in curls.

"Ehm! I mean, this is sort of awkward. You see, Der Hair, that foreign woman claims that maybe you wrongly touched her breasts—I mean sort of perhaps grazed them by accident. I hope this is not the case. What I say is that you did not mean it, at least sort of."

"You mean sort of grazed inadvertently?"

"That's right. Exactly! That's what I mean."

Der Hair had a premonition. His inquisitor appeared to know a great deal more than met the question. He thought an all-out attack might be a far better defence. He said sharply:

"Why, of course, it's true. I touched her breasts."

"You did, did you?" blurted out the president, choking upon a gush of saliva and in a voice aflutter with sad perplexity. Der Hair also waivered at the unexpected outburst of his crossexaminer. Yet, he resumed with a rare display of calm, scanning the president who had taken his handkerchief to mop up his sweating palms.

"That's right! I did touch her breasts. It was because I wanted her to tell me how they are called in French. Since I do not speak French, nor she Armenian, communication was not possible and the only expedient was body language."

Der Hair shrugged his shoulders as if to say, "Take it or leave it." Naturally the room rang with a peal of laughter at this shrewd reply. Another member interposed with sarcasm intent upon confounding Der Hair: "But, the lady insisted that you touched her breasts with cupped hands. Surely this not the way one would point out something to someone with whom he is trying to communicate?"

Now Der Hair felt cornered by the question. Beads of cold perspiration appeared on his forehead. Yet he was not defeated. About to leave the room flustered, he suddenly stopped. The far echo of a voice pleading with him to be more aggressive tingled in his ears: "Yea! Fling it at their pumpkins—the Armenian's Market Grammar *(Shougai Keragan).* Don't you remember? That unwritten no-nonsense code for free wheeling and dealing to get rich overnight like these selfish, poker-faced inquisitors. Sock their shining bald pates with it as hard as you can. Dash it! What are you dragging your feet for, dumbfounded like that?" He shored up courage to stage the final act. Of course, he would show them that he still kept a deck of cards up his sleeve.

His fingers froze on the doorknob as he was readying himself to open the door. He turned round, scanned them carefully, and flung at them these words: "Sure, sure. I used cupped hands to communicate with her. What's so bad about it? After all aren't the woman's breasts called *Keragan* (Grammar) in Armenian slang? So what? Since all Armenian priests are teachers as well, what's wrong if I were to pat the *Keragan?"*

This crafty remark was followed by another burst of convulsive laughter. The colorful allusion to the breasts of a woman as *Keragan* in the Armenian's Market Grammar meant that as an adolescent male began his schooling with the grammar so he would start his sexual experience with the woman's breasts. The Armenian's excessive concern with the *Shougai Keragan* (Market Grammar) will be explained at length some other time.

VII

Once Der Hair was traveling by train from Addis Ababa to Dire Dawa to say Easter Mass and to give communion to his "smoke" (congregation). He was seated in the compartment opposite a rich Arab merchant who wore flowing silk robes and a gold and ruby ring on his right little finger. After the customary *salaams* they started talking, and one thing leading to another, Der Hair bethought of the following words from a litany sung in the church, which he hummed: "In the higher Jerusalem, the abode of angels, Enoch and Elias live in great old age like doves, in the paradise of Eden."

"Holy man, what's that croon?" asked the perplexed Arab. Der Hair was seized by an instant apostolic zeal. He replied benignly: "It's a prayer which describes how our saints live in eternal bliss in Heaven. Why don't you embrace Christianity so you could share in that everlasting and blameless state of felicity in the paradise, the Eden?"

The Arab considered the idea in earnest, ruminating in his mind time and again; all the more so as Der Hair exerted himself to the utmost, preaching at him with saintly ardor. Before committing himself irrevocably, however, the Arab wished to clear up a few important points.

He doffed the garish turban purled in gold thread, scratched the crown of his head, then asked Der Hair after a pause: "Holy man, that paradise you call Eden, is it a free state?"

"Absolutely!" asserted Der Hair with vigor, though a little off the tangent by this unorthodox question which tended to raise complicated territorial issues of international law.

The Arab rubbed his eyelids, which were dabbed in antimony.

"Holy man, I'd like to know whether that Eden is occupied by the English at all?" he said with evident concern.

Der Hair was totally confounded. Still, he wished to explain to the Arab in territorial terms to make himself understood.

"No, not at all! It is a free state under the absolute dominion of God alone."

Prodding himself out of thought, the Arab clasped his beard colored with *henna,* and after repeated preening motions with his fingers he drawled pensively the nagging question.

"If the paradise of Eden is not occupied by the English at all, holy man, then I am afraid it cannot be a good place. For it is notorious that the English have laid their hands on whatever good places there exist!"

Der Hair could not suppress a smile as his eyes glinted with surprise by this practical response. He was thoroughly checkmated.

The Painting

By Michael H. Akillian

The canvas is a composite—
valley rising to meadow drying
into sleek desert;
a tree, broad and creviced, squats
beneath its shadow in the foreground
and counterbalances with a single distant mountain.
Except for the sky, everything is some shade
of earthworking and the texture of rich soil
that so enticed invaders.

The people are of earth tones too. The man
by the tree standing in the shade
of his mustache is almost sepia,
the young man in the meadow, the women
whose skin darkens to the tawny sand
of the desert where they walk.

It is the reds are missing.

I squeeze red onto the immediate starkness
of the white palette—red
the shade all red things want to be
but cannot.

In one place I mix tree sap, dark
viscous, until I see bubbles trapped,
trying to rise like something that wants
to say itself. I use a matchstick.

Clods of clay and dark earth I mash
into another for texture. I use
a horse hoof.

Onto a third I pour fine sand to break
the brightness. My tongue stirs in its saliva.

I finish this painting for you

Uncle Aram, patriarch, broad and strong,
lashed to the tree and burning with it
mingled in sizzles and smoke

and for you cousin Carnig
who smiled the whole time you were my brother.
As the riders grew large you bit back
your eloquence and spoke with silence

and for you Maral, small deer,
plunged early into womanhood
all along the wide, relentless arc
of beaten sand steps
that never did close the circle.

"The Painting" is the poem that won the prize in the Daniel Varoujan Poetry Competition sponsored by the AGBU—the poem most worthy of the spirit of Daniel Varoujan, the Armenian poet who was killed by the Turks in 1915.



Salute!



By Joseph G. Vitale

All my life I have read Saroyan with awe. How could one man write so much extremely entertaining and intelligent prose, poetry, and plays? His work makes me think, laugh, gasp, and aspire to his ideals of beauty, love, and truth. I want to live in his world of beautiful people. I want to be one of his eccentrics, maybe dying quoting King Lear, or philosophizing on life for a living, or—

In a way I *am* a Saroyan creation. Twenty-five, a stonelike idea of talent in my being, an urge to write, a disgust for capitalistic interference in the arts. I want to write literature. Not stories or novels or poems—*literature.* I don't need a job, I tell myself, life itself will support me.

But I'm not a genius and Saroyan is. My wife says I am (we haven't been married long) and considering all the Joseph G. Vitales in the world I suppose I *am* a genius. But put beside Saroyan—put anywhere near Saroyan—I vanish. You wouldn't even see a cloud of smoke.

To me Saroyan is the only great writer alive in America—maybe since Mark Twain. Forget Thomas Wolfe—he is too stuffy, too hard to read. A writer must write to be read. Who reads Wolfe in a day—or even a week? Faulkner can be canned for the same reason.

Hemingway? Hemingway was a megalomaniac who stole his style from Jack London (*not* from Gertrude Stein, as Hemingway led most to believe) and never had the manhood to say so.

Joseph Heller? Heller is too slow in writing. *Catch-22* was great. I admit it. But one great book, one bad book, and one so-so book does not a great writer make. (I'm still waiting for *Catch-23.*)

Saroyan and only Saroyan is *the* writer. If anyone deserves the Noble Prize for Peace, he does. (But, of course, he'd refuse it.) God! Who else in this country can actually make you feel *so good* about living? And some have the nerve to say that is precisely the thing *wrong* with Saroyan! He makes one feel good when American literature is supposed to make one feel bad. What I have to say to that is terribly obscene.

Saroyan's first book, *The Daring Young Man On The Flying Trapeze* (1934), was loved. Saroyan was considered most unusual. One magazine said there was no one in history comparable to him since Lord Byron.

Saroyan *is* unique. Once a gambler, it was not unusual for him to bet fifty grand on the turn of a card. Or to marry and divorce the same woman—twice. Or to write a hit play in six days *(The Time of Your Life,* 1939). Or to direct his own plays—or cast them by roaming streets and bars with an eye for the right "actors."

He likes to write and does so every day, even now, at the age of seventy. He's been published thousands of times and claims to have manuscripts he won't send out sitting in Paris and Fresno, California, in stacks.

He refuses money until a writing assignment is com-

plete. And he refuses prizes—even the Pulitzer (1940)—on grounds that commerce should not patronize the arts. And he's not limited his talent to plays, films, novels, stories, essays, poetry, or memoirs—he's also written, among other songs, the 1951 hit "Come On-A My House."

Later, to my sadness, Saroyan regarded his career as a writer shot. But he always remained himself. He never compromised ideals, never begged, never asked for sympathy. His belief is that suffering gives one dignity.

With such life in him I know he must be a god. And he is. Just as we all are, or will be.

With such love for Saroyan I knew I had to meet him. I wrote him a letter declaring my admiration for him. But it was too flowery and sloppy. One line read: "Some follow Christ, I follow Saroyan." That was insane to write to the man who urges individuality. No wonder he never answered!

A few months later I wrote him another letter, one humbler, more sober. He didn't reply to it, either.

Later, much later, I wrote a play about him, as other playwrights have done, which I called *The Robert Bivens Interview.* Since it was about him, and since I wrote it in a week trying to match the Saroyan play written in six days, and since I did not want him to be ignorant of the play's existence, I sent a copy to him. A while later I received a card showing he had received the play. But he never wrote a word to me about the play or anything else.

Still later I dreamed my wife and I met him. (My wife, who never heard of Saroyan before she met me, has been influenced by him. She, a goddess, a lover of all life, a lady who will put a spider in a jar and put it outside rather than stamp it with her heel as I do, has named a little homeless dog down the street "Saroyan.")

Saroyan was old and gray and friendly. We had dinner. It was a sad experience. In his eyes I saw an elderly man facing death, dreaming of the past. In his eyes I saw him looking at me and remembering how he was when *he* was twenty-five and ambitious and brilliant and about to stun the world with his bag of tricks. In his eyes I saw my own future. A long, hard road. Much success, much pain. Heaven and Hell. But with beauty in everything, for all is alive and anything alive is a joyous miracle, something to cause singing in the dark corners of the world.

Not long ago I again decided to write Saroyan, this time to tell him I wanted to write of his work, to radiate my love for his writings via my own writing of him, to describe his life, to be a Boswell to him. As far as I know, no one has ever done a biography of William Saroyan. How could they? Saroyan's work *is* Saroyan. His writings are letters to the world and his subject, like Montaigne's, is himself.

Yet I wanted more, as we all do. I wanted to describe a firsthand experience with the great author. I wanted to sing to the world his beauty, his truth, his miracle—for Saroyan's truth is our truth, and his miracle is the miracle of all mankind.

I sent the following letter to Saroyan, typed by my wife on an IBM Selectric to appear as professional and impressive as possible, and sent special delivery:

> *Right now I am comparing myself to the you of 1935, when you were to meet Jean Sibelius and were wondering what you would say to him, or he to you. You were twenty-six or twenty-seven at the time: I am twenty-five. I hope you will understand my request and reply affirmatively.*
>
> *I am doing a review of your writings. I would like my book to contain firsthand information to help throw light on your work, consequently better enabling one to place your art in the world of literature. I am not so much seeking a biography as I am a feel for you as a person.*
>
> *Would you allow me the privilege of a short meeting with you?*

More bushwah!

"I hope you will understand"—*of course* he will understand! He'll see right to my egotistical reasons for the letter. What a fool I was to write it! I can't blame Saroyan for ignoring it.

Yet Saroyan *has* answered me.

He has answered all—me, you, etc.—with his writings. They are so personal they become letters to each reader.

> *Everything I have ever written has been a letter. This book is a letter. Forget the* name *of the book, read the letter, and you'll know all you need to know about—me? Well, yes, but more probably about yourself.*
>
> *—from Saroyan's special message in the First Edition Society's publication of* Sons Come And Go, Mothers Hang In Forever *by William Saroyan (1976)*

Saroyan does not have to write to me. He already has. There was no stamp on the letter, outside of the one which read "LOVE," and there was no return address.

Then again, there *was* a return address. Just as Saroyan's writings became letters to me, and to you (and to you, and you, and . . .) so would my writings become letters to Saroyan. This very essay, this ego-infested long-winded homage to my idol, my spirit, his spirit, our spirit, *the* spirit—is nothing more than a letter to Saroyan, as well as a letter to all mankind.

OUD TAXIMS

By Mark Gavoor

Richard Hagopian

Sweet
The sounds peel off the hull
And voice
Vibrating his skull.

Eyes closed
. . . with back leaned head
Almost ecstacy
Of blood crimson red. . .



John Berberian

Sharp
Clean accurate
Deep, mysterious pondering jabs:
A bitter attack.

Strength
In silent deep-set eyes
Pathos, dripping
From violent ancient
Strings of passion.

Hrant

Rough gravel-voiced
Prince and master,
Leader to us all
Now gone. . .

Playing always playing
Lion of the oud
Sweet King of Taxim
Lord of Pathos
Oedipus, the oudji.

Bright, crystalline
Gemlike notes
Of brilliance
Striking through the static of old discs
To pierce the modern air
Reviving the pathos
Of lands lost.

Sing sweet prince
Of the stench of the past
Let the riffs blossom and burst
That spirit everlast.

Swooping dancing eagles
You never saw
Smoke-drunken hair
Belly-chested heroes
Old mountain goats.

Sing their bitter pleasure
Pain
Softly, in the next refrain.
Scream the rape of destiny
Higher yet and high,
Climb until the eagle shrieks
Its dire warning. . .
cry.

A Crime of Passion

By Suzanne Ostro Zavrian

He lay sprawled on the floor where he had landed; she stood a few feet away wondering if it was unhygienic, even in bad taste, to use the ice cubes in the tray she had hit him with.

She decided that since she had hit him with the underside of the tray, there was no point in wasting the ice cubes, which were in the top part. Besides, it would take hours to freeze more. So she took out three ice cubes and put them in a glass.

She went to the refrigerator and, opening the door, stood undecided between Coca-Cola and gingerale. She finally settled on gingerale, poured it into the glass over the three ice cubes, and went back into the living room.

She wondered if he was really dead. She felt a strong disinclination to touch him to find out; on the other hand, if he wasn't, she'd have to figure out what to do without making a mess. It was one thing on the spur of the moment, but quite another to have to think about it. Thinking about it, she was morally opposed to murder. It was very wrong to deliberately take the life of another human being. It would be on one's conscience forever. She shuddered. It was bound to come back somehow. Karma. She thought about karma. From what she understood, it worked something like paddle ball.

Of course, if you just *did* it, that was different. And she certainly hadn't given it a thought. He was sly, a troublemaker, and in completely bad taste. He didn't even have a dog.

He came from some little country in Central Europe with a name she couldn't remember without looking it up in the atlas, and he had an awful mentality. Actually, she thought, he had no mentality. Or had had no mentality, depending on his present state. He took on the coloring of whatever he thought was advantageous to him and he usually chose wrong. For instance, the color of his suit did not go with the rug. She supposed it was his cultural upbringing; she assumed most Central Europeans were liars, for one thing—but she didn't think that was an excuse.

She looked down at the body distastefully. He looked taller from this angle. Although if he had actually been taller, she couldn't have hit him with the ice tray, and certainly not hard enough to kill him. Assuming she had.

She sipped her gingerale. It didn't taste as good as the last bottle she'd bought. Though maybe it was the ice cubes, she added fairly.

She wondered about his family. She'd heard vaguely that he had some children somewhere belonging to an ex-wife. Or two. Or maybe a current wife. She really couldn't remember, but she didn't think it would matter much to them. Or to her, if there was only one.

She supposed she should do something about the body. If it lay around the living room for long, someone was bound to wonder how it got there. It was also in the way. It would be difficult—if not impossible—to vacuum, for one thing.

She decided she would shove it off the balcony. She thought that would be very practical, as a matter of fact: It would not only remove him from the living-room rug, it would also conceal the evidence. And if he weren't dead, he would be. She was pleased with her solution. She admired efficiency above most things, excepting tidiness.

She finished her gingerale, put down the glass, stood up, grabbed his foot with a grimace and both hands, and tugged it toward the balcony, the body coming along. Somehow, she managed to haul him up onto the railing. She leaned over, balancing him against the rail, to make sure the street was clear so that nobody would get hit, and seeing no one passing, tilted him over.

She thought that with all the bodies that kept turning up on street corners, no one would particularly notice.

NAZIM HIKMET:

THINGS HE DIDN'T KNOW HE LOVED

By Harold Bond

Nazim Hikmet (1902-1963), while a poet of Turkish origin, is truly an international visionary who conceived of his life as inseparable from his art. He is *persona non grata* in his own country, at least partly because of his public assumption of guilt for his nation's genocide of the Armenians. Hikmet was arrested on political charges and was imprisoned in 1938. He was freed in 1950 only after the intercession of some of the world's leading literary figures, among them Jean-Paul Sartre and Pablo Neruda. That same year he was awarded the World Peace Prize.

Hikmet's poems are collected in English in a volume titled *Things I Didn't Know I Loved,* translated by Randy Blasing and Mutlu Konuk and published by Persea Books in 1975. Politics and revolution are more than ideological tools in Hikmet's work. They are means of transformation in the melding of vision with the struggle for human rights. As a man, Hikmet, like the Armenians, was persecuted by the Turkish people. As a poet of conscience, he speaks for the Armenians, and for all his brothers and sisters.

The following translations, published for the first time, reveal Hikmet's great lyric gifts. Their passion and exotic energy are very much in keeping with the lushness of Armenian poetry. For additional poems by Hikmet and an essay on his work, see "Nazim Hikmet: The Bard of Brotherhood" by Victor Yelverton Haines in the Summer 1971 issue of *Ararat.*

RUBAYAT:

FOURTH SERIES

1.
To conquer lies in the heart, in books, and on the street,
in mothers' lullabies and in the announcer's news,
to understand—it's a terrific happiness, my love—
to understand what's past and what's to come.

2.
Our arms are branches heavy with fruit—
the enemy shakes us and shakes us,
and the better, the easier to harvest our fruit
they don't fetter our feet, they put chains in our heads.

3.
As long as you love
and love as much as you can,
as long as you give your all to your love
and give as much as you can, you are young.

4.
I think of Yahya Kemal, master poet of the Ottomans:
I see him in a store window, looking fat and pained.
And for some reason I suddenly think
of lame Byron dying in the Greek mountains.

5.
I am a stubborn gardener,
you are my rose that blooms every seven years.
I don't lose heart because you are so rare.
I think this might be why you are so dear.

6.
In this business one must be hard and a little proud:
not cruelty, grief, or sorrow
but death alone
must see you surrender.

7.
I don't mean to boast but
I shot through ten years of my bondage like a bullet.
And aside from the ache in my liver,
my heart is still the same heart, my head still the same head.

(Translated by Randy Blasing and Mutlu Konuk)

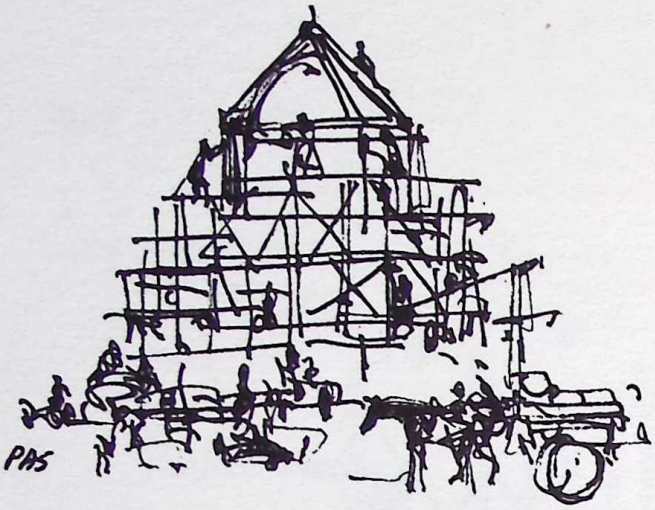
Armenia's Only Romance

By Robert Bedrosian

Among classical Armenian sources the *History of Taron,* attributed to the otherwise unknown Yovhannes (John) Mamikonean, is a peculiar work. The author of this medieval romance claims to have compiled it in 680-81 from shorter earlier accounts written by the abbots of the monastery of Glak in the district of Taron (in south-western historical Armenia, to the west of Lake Van). Actually, scholars are convinced that the work is an original composition of a later period (post-eighth century), written as a deliberate forgery.

The *History of Taron*, despite its name, is not a history. Rather, it is a relatively short "historical" romance in five parts, purporting to describe significant events occuring in the district of Taron during the Byzantine-Iranian wars when the Shah of Iran was Xosrov II (590-628). During Xosrov's reign Taron was frequently invaded by the Iranians. The *History* describes the actions of five generations of Mamikoneans (Taron's princely house), in defending and avenging the district. Each section or cycle of the story is devoted to the exploits of one of the defenders: Mushegh, Vahan, Smbat, his son Vahan Kamsarakan, and the latter's son Tiran. The heroes are at times superhumanly brave or duplicitous, wise or cunning, humble or bombastic, humane or brutally merciless as the situation requires. Above all they are the holy warriors of St. Karapet (their patron saint), and they zealously defend the monastery of Glak as well as all churches and Christians in the district. Much of the narration describes battles fought and the cunning tactics used by the Taronites to defeat the invading Iranians.

Despite some recent, unsuccessful attempts to rehabilitate the *History* and to substantiate the author's seventh-century claims, there are compelling reasons for suspecting a later date.[1] First, it is apparent that the author made use of a number of Armenian sources composed after the end of the seventh century. In addition to the works of P'awstos Buzand (fifth-century) and Sebeos (seventh) from whom he drew inspira-



tion, John Mamikonean was familiar with Ghewond (ninth) and Movses Xorenac'i (ninth) and wove into his *History* identifiable episodes from each. Second, the work contains chronological impossibilities; and few if any of the Mamikonean heroes are historically identifiable personages. Third, women in the society described by John Mamikonean apparently did not enjoy the right of church attendance along with men (see below, Note 1). This circumstance seems to place John in an era of strong Islamic influence (eighth to twelfth centuries)—though to my knowledge none of the authentic Armenian historical sources makes any mention of the segregation of women in church in any period. The religion of the Mamikonean heroes also points to a late date. Theirs is a vengeful and fanatical Christianity of the borderlands, akin to the religion of the Islamic *ghazzi* warriors. Their prayers are addressed not to God or Christ directly, but to their patron saint, Karapet, who appears among them and literally fights their difficult battles.

John Mamikonean wrote in a pseudo-historical style, attempting to emulate P'awstos and Sebeos. He frequently provides purely imaginary figures of the combatants' troop strength and casualty figures. He provides homey—and incorrect—etymological information about the place names of Taron. There is, moreover, a marked tendency on his part to revel in the gory details of war's cruelties. To John the enemy is barely human. He would have us believe that the Armenians are fighting the Zoroastrian Iranians, but John most likely was describing the invaders of his day, Arabs or even Saljuqs. The author's obsession with acts of vengeful brutality may provide a clue to the work's date. One senses that John Mamikonean wrote this romance as wish-fulfillment literature for the beleaguered Armenians of a difficult time.

Some scholars—having adjudged the work a medieval forgery, finding it neither historical nor particularly fine literature—dismiss the *History of Taron* as valueless. However, if this romance belongs to the ninth to twelfth centuries as we believe, then it would be profitable to analyze it in connection with the other great epics of the same period: the Byzantine *Digenes Akrites,* the Iranian *Shahname,* the Armenian *David of Sasun,* and the Turkish *Danishmendname* and *Book of Dede Korkut.* Admittedly, the *History of Taron* is a poor relation compared with these international classics. But in point of fact its composition may have preceded the others.

John Mamikonean was self-conscious about his work and was afraid that future scribes would try to change his composition or ridicule it. Thus he wrote in his concluding colophon: "When you make a copy of this, let nothing appear ridiculous to anyone. Instead, rewrite my exemplar fully and without deletions. . ."[2] Today, many centuries later, despite changed literary tastes, John still has an audience, and with good reason. First, the *History of Taron* remains the sole extant example of an original medieval romance in Armenian.



MUSHEGH

Without a doubt there were others, though, regrettably, none has reached us. Most significant is the fact that the *History of Taron* contains a rare example of medieval Armenian folk poetry ("Beasts devoured . . ." see Note

3), another genre for which we possess few specimens. Yet the real reason John Mamikonean still has an audience is his ability to entertain. The episodes translated below provide highlights from different cycles of this romance.[3]

HISTORY OF TARON

1.

. . .Now in the time of Mushegh Mamikonean's rule as Prince of Taron, and during T'odik's directorship of the monastery, marvelous events occurred at Glak monastery, at the church of St. Karapet. The Prince of Arcrunik', who was named Vard *patrik,* had built many churches and monasteries. He had a pious wife named Mariam. Since Vard was going to Caesarea, he took his wife to her father Mushegh. Leaving her there, he entrusted the district to others of the *azats,* and then departed. Since his wife Mariam was very desirous of seeing the holy men affiliated with Glak monastery and the congregation of St. Karapet, one day, with great enthusiasm, she went to the church of St. Karapet taking along her first-born son, a small suckling babe. Many times she beseeched the clerics to allow her to enter the church, but the attendants prevented her. However, the cleric Step'annos held the small child in his arms, took him before the altar, had him worship the Lord, and then brought him back and gave him to his mother. Now Mariam took the child and began to weep, saying: "Woe is me, sinner that I am, for I have been denied goodness. Let all women lament for me, let all mourners give way before my tears. Let the mountains cover me and the hills pity me. Let the beasts and all the birds grieve for me. Let the angels lament for me, since the *devs* (which have made their nests within me) are attacking me. Oh blessed attendants of St. Karapet, pity me and allow me to be taken into the church." Then she said to the child: "Oh my little son, why did you separate from my embrace, why didn't you pity your mother? Didn't I bear and nourish you? Why did you leave me all alone?"

Saying this, the woman took out numerous fragrant incenses and gave them to the attendants; and she gave much treasure for the needs of the church. She sent a message to abbot T'odik to accept the goods and to let her inside. But T'odik said: "We lack permission from our predecessors, and we do not dare allow it. However, your contribution is acceptable if it was made in faith. Do not importune us for a reply; instead, go in peace." But Mariam said: "No. If it is a question of authority, I do not fear you. Yet if it is a question of arousing the enmity of St. Karapet toward us, well, was He Himself not born of a woman, and the Lord Himself, the Apostles and the Prophets, did They not have mothers? Now, oh Lord, I shall enter and I have Your Mother as my intercessor. Do not turn Your wrath on me lest I be exposed to the scorn of the land. For if You ever drank a woman's milk, deem me worthy of entering the church." Having said this, she entered the church and kissed its wall. She went before the holy altar, kneeled and said: "Lord, see my broken heart and have pity on one who is

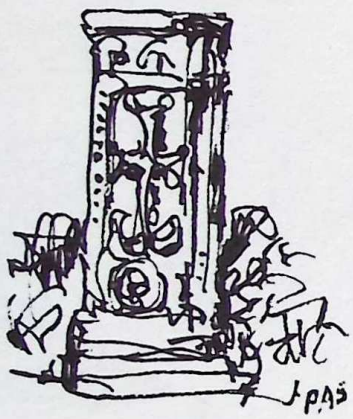


wounded, forgetting Your anger in pity. May Your name be blessed for eternity."

As soon as she went out, the church attendants became chagrined, resentful, and quite annoyed because of Mariam's act; and they did not prepare food for her. But Mariam ordered her servants to make a meal for the clerics and to call them all to table. There were 395 men. When they had dined, the woman said: "Oh lovers of holiness and zealots of divine service, rejoice with me in the Lord, for He forgave me and fulfilled the desire of my heart. Now bless me and let me depart in peace." After that her party departed.

The church warden and a certain one of the clerics

went before the altar of St. Karapet and said: "Oh Lord, if You pardon the woman who did this, other women will dare to do the same. Give a sign of Your strength that it be a testimony to the generations, and a witness and law to the multitude." As soon as they had set the woman on her way, she ascended a small hill on the southern side of the monastery, at the head of Nardak, facing a small stronghold of Mecamor below Nardak (which they call Andak). Mariam saw a wondrous sight to the north. She threw her child to the nurse and cried out: "I see a man with long hair coming to me from the church in a thundering cloud. I see with him a sword, sharp and wet and dyed with blood." While speaking she was struck, and she perished there. Seeing this, the servants went and informed the church attendants. The abbot grew angry with the warden and then became extremely sad, weeping for hours. Finally, taking attendants with him, he went to the site, made a



grave and buried Mariam there. He erected a *xaj k'ar* [stone cross] and wrote the following on it:

LET THIS SWORD GO THROUGH
ANYONE WHO DARES TO BATTLE
AGAINST THE CHURCH OF GOD

And this cross stands over the very spot.

* * *

The abbot took the woman's child and gave him to the nurses until he reached puberty. Later, the abbot took him to the monastery and trained him and established him as abbot before his own death. Now when the lad's father, the Prince of Arcrunik', had returned from Caesarea and heard about the death of his wife, he was seized with remorse. Abbot T'odik consoled him. And the Prince resolved to construct a church. He went in search of building materials to Matrvank', built a beautiful church there and named it after his wife Mariam, Surb Astuacacin [Holy Mother of God]. He adorned it with marvelous vessels and appointments. He similarly embellished the church of St. Karapet at Glak monastery with great glory.

2.

[During the Byzantine-Iranian wars in the reign of Iran's King Xosrov II (590-628), Iran repeatedly invaded Armenia. Defending the district of Taron was Vahan Mamikonean.]

. . . Now Vahan took troops and sent them down into the valley itself. The Armenian ambushers sprang out here and there and trapping the Iranians in their midst, cut them down not pitying anyone. Vahan ordered that 40 men be spared to inform the Iranian king of what had happened. He had the head of Mihran taken to the Iranian King Xosrov with the following message: "As soon as this *marzpan* of Armenia came to our country and tried to raise a brigade, he was unable. Since the Byzantines are our enemies, we did not dare go to them, yet we scorned you as there was no brigade of your soldiers. So we cut off that head and played with it. Now we hear that you have come from Shahastan to Bostr city where the land is flat and like a meadow. I know that you play polo. Take then the head of your sister's son and let it serve as a polo ball from generation to generation." When the 40 men took Mihran's head to King Xosrov, the monarch became unsettled and agitated, and he blushed with eternal shame. Yet the next year, swaggering once again, Xosrov sent other troops against Armenia.

3.

Once more King Xosrov (unable to forget the death of his sister's son Mihran) held a muster of soldiers to go against the Byzantines a second time. He sent his father's brother Vaxtang with 30,000 select men and horses. Now when the latter arrived in Apahunik' district, he sent tax-collectors to Hark', Hashteank', and Taron. The district chiefs then wrote to Vaxtang, saying: "If Vahan will pay taxes, we will too. If not, you will leave here empty-handed." When Vaxtang heard this reply, he grew arrogant and insolent. He left a lieutenant in Apahunik' and, all puffed up, he came to the border of Taron. Vaxtang rebuilt the great ruined city of Dziwnakert and changed the city's name to that of his wife (whom he brought with him)—Porpes—that is, "savory." He planted vineyards and orchards and converted to an *atrusan* [fire-temple] the cathedral which was established by St. Sahak. On Tawros mountain he built a stronghold and named it Garhar, since some



VAHAN

people had fallen off the mountain there on animals, thinking they were pursuing cavalry. He changed the name of Gorhoz mountain to Grhegurh after his son Grhegurh, and passed the summer days on it. He sent many gifts to Vahan and a letter like this:

"To the brave and mighty giant Vahan, greetings with the aid of the gods.

"Although we were saddened by the death of our brother's son, yet we were amazed by the strength of your wisdom. I have come here to make friendship and peace; so come to me and vow to pay the royal tax and be obedient and retain your previous honor and no longer enter into treachery. Remain well by the aid of the gods."

Vahan sent the following reply to him:

"You wicked and weak being, Vaxtang, swine of your class, eater of garbage, greetings.

"While I rejoiced over the death of Mihran, I wept over your foolishness. Having heard of his death, and acquainting yourself with my God-given strength, how could you dare come against the Church of God? If you have come seeking friendship, why have you brought along your wife? Could it be that you want a son from us? And why did you rebuild my city and make fortresses? No, I know that you are false and bite like a dog. Value life more than death and leave the country peacefully. Otherwise, the death you will suffer will be witnessed by the entire land."

Then Vaxtang grew angry and sent 6,000 men against him, to Mush. However, some people informed Vahan, saying: "Rhahan [Vaxtang's lieutenant] is coming against you with 6,000 troops." So Vahan went by night against the enemy encamped at C'mak, and fell upon them with the sword. They were unable to restrain the horses, for Vahan's son Smbat had gone among them and cut loose 4,000 horses. Smbat had them cross to the other side of the Aracani river and led them to the Hashteank' area. They gave 200 horses of their first victory as spoils-share to the church at Glak monastery, for that was [the Mamikoneans'] patrimonial home, and Smbat had been baptized there. Now Vahan got the Iranians into the swamp and cut down many of them, wounded many, and drowned 200 men in that swamp.

The Prince of Hashteank' had under his control 3,600 men;
the Prince of Palu had 2,200;
the Prince of Arjuts' had 3,000;
the Prince of Eghnut/Oghnut had 5,000;
Prince Vahan had 8,000, and his son Smbat, 6,000;
in all, 28,000 men.

This entire body was under Vahan's direction. However, he had divided it and left lieutenants everywhere. This gave him 3,000 men that day. The Prince of Hashteank' caused a great slaughter there since he hastened to behead Rhahan and put the troops to flight. He harassed them until they entreated him to stop and promised to pay the taxes. But Vahan said: "Give us Rhahan's head and we will let you go." And the Iranian soldiers in much anxiety sought for the head, but could not find it. But they seized Rhahan's son Vah and turned him over to Vahan. Now the Prince of Hashteank' came forward and said: "Either give us Rhahan's head or give us 30,000 *dahekans.*" And they gave the 30,000 *dahekans* and turned to go. When Vahan saw that they all were departing, he became filled with the zeal for God, attacked and started to destroy them. The Iranians raised a cry, saying: "Oh liar, why do you turn to battle?" And that place was named Arhinch' [Why]. The Armenians drove them into the plain and caused a great slaughter. Less than 500 men fled and went to Vaxtang and told him what had happened. Vaxtang became furious and ordered beheaded those survivors who came to him. Of those 6,000 men not a man remained alive.

Not a single one.

Then Vaxtang, transported into a rage because of Rhahan's death, sent Asur against Vahan, at the head of 8,000 soldiers. This army came and encamped on the shores of the Meghti river and sent the following message to Vahan: "Hey you vile wolf, Vahan. Knowing that you serve the Aryan king, why have you become so shamelessly brazen? Now come to us and be a taxpayer. Otherwise you will die like a dog." When Vahan heard this, he and his son Smbat went against them with 6,000 men. As soon as the two armies were facing each other, Asur started to insult Vahan by calling him a wolf. And Vahan replied: "Your epithet for me is accurate, because like a wolf I come, destroy, go, and come again." And they commenced battling with each other.

"First, the* History of Taron *remains the sole extant example of an original medieval romance in Armenian. Without a doubt there were others, though, regrettably, none has reached us. Most significant is the fact that the* History of Taron *contains a rare example of medieval Armenian folk poetry."

Once they joined battle, Vahan's son Smbat kept his eye on Asur and approached him. But when Asur saw that Smbat was a lad, he scorned him and said: "You stone-worshipping bastard, get out of the way so I may move on to the fighting men." Smbat replied: "Son of Satan, your name fits you, because your sword [*sur*] is as nothing [*a-*"lacking"] and by fighting with a youth you shall acknowledge your defeat." Smbat took his sword and cut off Asur's horse's head. Asur fell to the ground and then Smbat attacked him and cut off his head. He raised the head aloft and said: "Glory to You, Christ, and to St. Karapet who vanquished my adversary." Now while he was saying this, ten men surrounded Vahan and struck at him mercilessly, like men felling a forest. Vahan started to grow weak. Raising his voice he cried: "My son, Smbat, where are you? Come and help me, old man that I am." For Vahan was 88 years old. Smbat valiantly attacked them like a swiftly flying eagle, saying: "Help us, St. Karapet." And with that he cut off Asur's son's head, severing with it the right shoulder. Then Vahan became stronger and cut off the heads of six horses. The Lord gave the Iranian army over to the Armenians, and they chased them until evening. Of the 8,000 soldiers, only 3,000 went back to Vaxtang. Vaxtang remained quiet until the next year. That same year *k'aj* Vahan, avenger of the Church, died. He had his remains taken to Glak monastery where he is buried in front of the threshold at the door of the church of St. Karapet.

[Vahan's son Smbat and the latter's son Vahan Kamsarakan continue to battle Iranians over the years]:

When the sun set, 400 Iranians remained alive and found some way to flee. Since their horses were elsewhere, they went into a valley, hid themselves, and slept, eluding the Armenians until noon of the following day. The Armenian troops then came and found them, threw water on them and woke them up. Then they took the Iranians to Meghti. And that place was named T'mbratsor [Valley of Sleep]. Smbat ordered that the corpses be piled one atop the other on the hill which, because of the carnage commited by Varaz, was named Varazablur. Then they went and spent the night in a village of the monastery named Kenac' vayrk' [Place of Life]. As soon as they entered the village, old women came before them and sang, praising their many exploits. Later, when the corpses (which had not been removed) started to decay and stink, the people sang:

"Beasts devoured and grew fat on the bodies Varaz
made corpses of.
The cat ate, and swelled up like a bear.
The fox grew prouder than a lion.
The wolf, since it ate a lot, burst.
And the bear died of hunger, since what it ate did
not stay with it.
The vultures, since they were greedy
perched and were unable to fly away.
The mice, since they carried off much to their holes,
bruised their feet."

They said all this, and it was the truth. The name of the village was Shirenik'.

Now as for the men whom they had taken to Meghti, the Armenians healed them of their wounds, gave them treasures, horses, and weapons, and sent them to the Iranians. They themselves went to the House of the Lord, gave many gifts to God at the church of St. Karapet, and then returned to their homes in joy.

4.

Once more Xosrov sent another army against the rebellious Mamikonean house; this time the army was under the great Iranian general Tigran who commanded 20,000 men. As soon as Tigran reached Apahunik', he summoned Smbat. However, Smbat sent his son Vahan Kamsarakan to see what Tigran wanted. When Vahan went and found this out, he sent a reply to his father, saying: "Tigran many times promised good things, and many times evil things. But he demands the remains of Prince Mushegh and of your father Vahan, as well as

the remains of the wife of Vaxtang and his son, whom Varaz killed in battle. 'Otherwise', he says, 'I shall come to the place sacred to your faith, I shall uproot and ruin it and turn your church into a fire-temple and carry you off to the royal court.' Now this is what he said. He wants to come upon you through Hashteank'. I shall go along with him. Meanwhile, you assemble our forces, go to the church of St. Karapet and beseech the clerics to pray for us. Stay well in the Lord."

When Smbat heard this, he took Vahan's letter and went before St. Karapet. He stretched forth his hands before the altar and began to weep and say: "Arise Lord, and awaken Your forces. Lord, see, be not silent, do not delay. For the enemy scorns us greatly. May Your will be done. But we beg that You recall our efforts for You, for the convenant of our sanctity, by which Your blessed name is glorified." Saying this, he had 12,000 swords brought and placed before the bema while the mass was being offered. Then he took them and said: "Lord we believe in You and that these swords will be the leaven for other swords and that by Your command we shall defeat the Iranians. Oh Lord, we have become discomfited and weary from cutting down the impious; those who wiped our swords of rust and blood are also weary. We hope that You will now do as You have in the past."

Then Smbat went and assembled the troops, 9,040 men. They went and encamped in Hashteank' at a village called Gireh in a well-watered place. Tigran came and encamped at Honenkets' and sent to Smbat, saying: "Come to me without fear and accept from me treasures and greatness. I shall put a crown on your head and make you the *marzpan* of Armenia. Only give me the bones of Mushegh and Vahan." But Smbat seized the emissaries and, heating a spit of iron to red-hot, he placed it as a crown on the brow of the chief emissary, saying: "Wait! Let me see what gifts I shall receive for your sake, since I crowned you." Then he ordered all the men who had come with the chief emissary seized, and the Armenians severed heads until the sixth hour of the day. That place was named Moguts' [Mages'] Cemetary, or Mokkunk'.

After that Smbat went onto the mountain called Sremavayr and encamped opposite Tigran. As soon as it was evening, Vahan Kamsarakan, Smbat's son, arose and cut off the head of Tigran's son and of the three princes who were in the same tent. Taking their heads he came to his father. Then he returned to the same place and secretly entered under the flap of Tigran's tent. Now when Tigran saw the naked sword in Vahan's hand, he did not dare call out to anyone, thinking that Vahan merely wanted to steal the equipage. But Vahan suddenly seized a pillow, quickly threw it down over Tigran's mouth, and pounced on him. Another servant of Vahan's entered the tent and severed Tigran's head. Then he gathered up all the furnishings, precious stones, and choice swords, and departed. The Armenian troops were delighted and offered great thanks to God.

Meanwhile, Vahan, filled with wisdom, took 200 leather shields and attached them to 100 wild mules, placing a piece of iron on each side of the shield. Then, with 8,000 men under his direction, he went near the camp of the Hun who had replaced Tigran. He encamped close to the crag which is opposite Taron mountain. Vahan took the 100 wild mules and led them to the edge of the camp with one man going along with every 10 mules. With their swords the Armenians goaded the mules into the camp while they themselves followed, sounding war trumpets. They started to cut down those nearby, shouting and terrifying the Iranians and making a great racket. The mules invaded the camp from all directions, frightened by the noises of the shields, the shouting of the soldiers and the blaring of the trumpets. The Iranian troops thought the attackers were mounted and that the clanging of the swords was the result of a great slaughter. Each man could only shriek "Vay!" not knowing the real state of affairs; for the Lord did battle with them.

NOTES

[1]Manuk Abeghyan suggested eighth to tenth century termini for the *History,* see Abeghyan's *Erker I* (Erevan, 1966, repr. of 1936 ed.) pp. 188-89, 303-24. In 1976, K.V. Aivazian unsuccessfully argued for a seventh-century dating, see K.V. Aivazian, *Istoriia Tarona i armianskaia literatura IV-VII vekov* (Erevan, 1976) and also L. Ter-Petrosyan's detailed and scholarly rebuttal in the journal *Banber Erevani Hamalsarani* (1978) pp. 143-59, *"K voprosu o datirovke 'Istorii Tarona.'"*

[2]*Yovhannu Mamikoneni episkoposi Patmut'iwn Taronoy* (Venice, 1889, 2nd printing) St. Ghazar's press, p. 63.

[3]The so-called "critical edition" of the classical Armenian text of the *History of Taron* was published by Ashot Abrahamyan (Erevan, 1944) but because of its many errors has not won acceptance from scholars. Much preferred is the older Mxitarist edition (Venice, 1823, repr. 1889). All manuscripts of the *History* are prefixed by another spurious work, the *History of Zenob Glak.* Part 1 of the *History of Taron* begins with a fanciful listing of the fourth to seventh century abbots of Glak monastery, from Zenob to T'odik. The *History of Taron* is available in French translation in *Collection d'historiens anciens et modernes de l'Arménie, I,* V. Langlois, ed (Paris, 1867) pp. 361-82. A complete English translation, made by the present writer from the classical Armenian text (Venice, 1889), remains in manuscript.

The Vanished Joys of Julfa

By Paul Fouliard

Small patches of neatly cultivated green gardens separated by pale brown mud walls passed below the aircraft, in sharp contrast to the barren surroundings that stretched from the base of the nearby mountains; it was my first glimpse of Esfahan. The date was June 3, 1978; the only reason that I remember the precise date was that it was my first overseas job and my birthday. I didn't realize then that it was the start of an adventure I would never forget.

The warm days and cool nights passed and each weekend usually brought a new adventure in exploring the ancient city, but always our path crossed Julfa Square, near Vank Cathedral. Our apartment was only a few blocks from this historic church and most of our shopping was done with the Armenian merchants in this square. We settled into our new life and gradually came to look upon the slower pace as a blessing. It soon became routine to bargain with the vendors over the price of their wares, but to me the Armenians were still only very adept businessmen, who happened to run the best stores in the city.

By September of 1978, the newspapers and the BBC reports all contained the same news: the country was being torn apart by the riots, people were beginning to choose sides. I decided that it was no longer safe for my family to remain, but I hoped that life would return to normal so I decided to stay. It is here that the real story begins.

My family left and I moved from the outskirts of Julfa into the heart of the Armenian community. My apartment was owned by a wealthy Armenian named Macarian, who lived in Tehran. Mr. Macarian had his brother-in-law and his family watch over his properties and collect his rents in Julfa while he visited occasionally. In the beginning, our relationship was strictly business. It was their six-year-old son Ramon who broke this barrier.

The apartment that I rented had an underground parking area closed off from the street by a set of steel gates just big enough for a little boy to squeeze through. I opened the door one day to the sound of a small boy playing ball against the wall. As soon as he realized he had an audience, he dashed toward the steel gates and the street above. In his haste, he got caught between the bars; in broken Farsi I asked the boy if he would like some help. He just looked at me with his large dark eyes and gave me an impish smile, then pointed toward the interior of the garage, somewhere behind me. As I turned my head I heard a small laugh and turned back just in time to see a set of tiny sandaled feet running down Bambast Safar.

Each afternoon when I returned from work my little visitor would squeeze between the bars of my gate and play in my empty garage; it soon became our custom to sit and drink a Pepsi in the late afternoon. Up to this point the child rarely ever spoke and at some predetermined time, probably his dinner time, he would just get up and leave the same way he had come, back through the gate.

One day Ramon had gotten up to leave, when he grabbed my hand and motioned for me to come with him; he led me around the corner and down a short alley to his family's home. It was as though I were a frequent guest because I was immediately ushered through the courtyard and into the house, after being told to leave my shoes by the door, and was seated at their dining table. One by one the members of the family were introduced to me. Mr. Vartomian, whom I knew through renting my apartment, did the introductions. First was his wife, Navard, who was very fair in comparison to the darker-skinned Iranian women. Navard was not an exception; many of the Julfa women are fair-complectioned with light-colored hair resembling more closely Europeans than their Iranian neighbors. Next I was introduced to the oldest daughter, Marita, who was about thirteen. I say "about" because Iranians do not place the importance that Americans do on birth dates. One evening after dinner Ramon's mother and father and aunt and uncle tried to tell me when Ramon's birthday was; they remembered it was the year they got a very early snowfall, which they reasoned put him at about six years old. Raffi was the last to be introduced. Like all boys of ten, he regarded me as an unpleasantness that he was expected to put up with for a few minutes as a politeness to his parents.

The first evening would have remained on a formal basis if it had not been for Ramon. All during the meal he pointed out the best things to eat and carefully pro-

nounced the name in Farsi till I repeated it. The meal started out with ground beef and rice wrapped in grape leaves and flat bread with greens.

Navard never took her eyes off my plate, because the second before it was empty she would tell Marita to get me something else. In the meantime Mr. Vartomian kept our glasses filled with vodka, which seemed to have little effect on him. He would lift the glass, make a short toast and drain the contents. After my third plateful and many vodkas I realized that I was being tested. All during and after the meal Ramon brought me his treasures, showing me his toys one by one. But his biggest prize was a turtle that he kept in the closet. We ended the evening singing Armenian songs and the whole family ushered home a slightly drunken American.

I was fortunate that the next day was a Thursday and the start of the weekend, which meant I could recuperate from the Vartomians' hospitality. While I was sitting that morning nursing a cup of coffee, it occurred to me that since I had started to work overseas the word "foreign" had become a large part of my vocabulary, as well as that of most other Americans whom I associated with. We were "foreign workers" in a foreign country surrounded by foreigners. I suddenly realized how inappropriate an adjective can be, especially in relation to other human beings. The Vartomians and I had a language barrier which seemed to melt as the evening went on, and it was not due solely to my minimal Farsi or Mr. Vartomian's little English but rather through a kind of silent understanding. At dinner, I remember, I was asked about my family and I produced a photograph which was passed around. Although my children were slightly younger, our families were identical in composition. In the weeks to come, as we all became more adept at communicating, I found that one of the greatest things in Iran that my family missed was not a trip we had planned to Tabriz or Shiraz, but this Armenian family.

To add to all the other problems faced by the country, essential goods and services were becoming hard to secure. Fuel shortages began to plague car owners, as well as homeowners. People stood in lines for hours waiting to buy "naft" or petrol, since most of the homes depended on hand-carried fuel. The weather turned unusually cold in Esfahan between the months of November and December. As an American I found it often doubly hard to secure heating fuel. One day I mentioned the problem to Mr. Vartomian and the next day when I came home from work every fuel barrel I had was filled to capacity and a new propane bottle sat next to the stove. It didn't take me long to realize that my guardian angel had taken the form of the Vartomians. Because fuel was being rationed in Esfahan, at that time it meant that they had spent the entire day stocking up my fuel supply, probably at black-market prices.

Bread is a substantial part of the diet in Iran and Julfa was lucky enough to have one Armenian bakery and one Iranian. Almost every evening Ramon and I would wander down Rashide Aldine and cross Kahgani to buy bread. Ramon always delighted in darting to the front of the waiting line of people. (The bakeries in Iran usually only bake enough for the people waiting in line, because the flat bread cooked in beehive-shaped clay ovens only takes a few minutes to cook.) It seemed to be customary to let small children go to the front of the line and Ramon would get a few hot loaves wrapped in newspaper and dash back grinning from ear to ear. On the way home he would always steer me by the hand into a store owned by a crusty old Moslem, who always scolded Ramon for touching anything. The reason for this stop seldom varied: one Kit Kat candy bar and a couple of "Kojacks," which is what he called lollipops. I never understood if he called them that because he admired the TV show or that there was no equivalent word in Farsi or Armenian, but almost anywhere in Esfahan, saying "Kojacks" always seemed to produce the same result.

Up to this time Julfa had been spared most of the riots and fighting, most of it taking place across the river in the area of the Old Bazaar. But one by one the restaurants, especially those that served liquor and catered to foreigners, became a target of the revolution; the Pol restaurant was fire-bombed, cars owned by Americans became another target. Little by little my life centered on the Julfa area; I felt safe in the Armenian community; I was still greeted as I walked down the street by the shopkeepers and my other neighbors. Events that would soon take place in Julfa shocked me into realizing what a precarious sense of balance the Armenians had developed in Moslem Iran in order to preserve their fierce individuality.

Shopping for food in Iran is a daily chore because almost everything is sold fresh, so I was acutely aware of any changes in the stores or stands and their owners. I noticed more and more of the Armenian shops displaying a red decal with a black raised fist in the middle of it. I soon found out that it stood for Armenian unity—a unity that they felt was of permanent importance, as radical elements of Iranian society pressed in on all sides.

While the riots increased in intensity, the Vartomians tried to maintain a normal family life. Pressures from the constant rioting and rapid inflation, coupled with

the closing of most shops (which feared attack from either the pro-Shah or pro-Khomeini forces) drove Mr. Vartomian to use his family car for an unlicensed taxi-cab. During times of normalcy Mr. Vartomian was an extremely skilled dental technician, who provided very nicely for his family.

Driving his makeshift cab throughout the city became increasingly difficult for Mr. Vartomian. Each day new signs were devised by each side to show allegiance. One day, it was a piece of white tissue paper held under the windshield wiper; on another, it was headlights turned on. One afternoon while driving down the alleyway Mr. Vartomian had his windshield shattered. Somebody had changed the signal and he hadn't gotten the word. The damage was minor but the implications were ominous. Bands of fanatics from both sides began to roam the city looking for victims of their zealous beliefs. No one was safe. A man a few houses down the street was beaten for not displaying a picture of the Ayatollah in his store.

It was rumored that a large pro-Shah group was coming through the city, and that anybody without a picture of the Shah would have to pay the consequences. Up and down Hakiem Nazami and into Julfa, Armenian and Moslem children scurried across the streets with a picture of the King of Kings pinned on their shirts, both in the front and the back. Hit-and-run "accidents"



throughout the city became more frequent as pedestrians became revolutionary objectives. Cars had windows smashed out, stores were bombed. A prominent Armenian, the owner of the Omni store, was assassinated in his home by a grenade thrown through his window from the courtyard wall.

The power was routinely shut off each night until about ten o'clock; small *kouche* stores couldn't keep enough batteries, everyone was listening to the radio for news, moving about by flashlight. Listening to the BBC at night the sound of thousands of voices chanting "Allah, Akbar" filtered through even the thick walls of the Vartomians' home. More and more the Vartomian family gathered together each night to listen to the news and give each other strength. Since none of us was working any longer, we stayed up late into the night talking, feeling that it was safer to sleep in the day. Nearby a burst of automatic weapons' fire awoke Ramon and Marita with a start. Somewhere close by a car was blown up and army trucks rushed to the scene, and more shots were interrupted by the chanting thousands. One day blended into the next; it became harder and harder to know what day it was.

One afternoon I volunteered to get bread for their family and before I was out of the courtyard gate, Ramon was by my side. Everything had been calm that day so I didn't give much thought as to whether walking down to the corner would be dangerous. The day was crisp and cold and it felt good just to get out and stretch my legs. Ramon and I went into the Armenian bread store and awaited our turn; I told them in Farsi I wanted a dozen loaves and they motioned me to sit down and wait, while they slapped more bread dough into their clay oven. The idea of having to sit and wait was just too much for any normal six-year-old boy, so Ramon went into the street to play. It couldn't have been more than ten minutes and I had a dozen freshly baked flat loaves wrapped in newspaper under my arm. I started out of the bakery and glanced around for Ramon, when I saw the figure of a small boy surrounded by what appeared to be a group of village men holding pick handles and short swords. As I approached they were gesticulating wildly with their arms and shouting at Ramon. I still couldn't understand what they were saying to the child. Ramon was like a cornered cat, swinging at his antagonizers. "Jabin Shah," they kept screaming at the boy. I dropped the bread and ran toward him, when he started pointing at me and screaming back at them. The group suddenly became quite passive as I stepped between them and grabbed Ramon's hand. I started to lead Ramon out of the group when one of them, presumably the leader, blocked my way. With my free hand I felt in my flight jacket pocket for my pocket knife, but the little boy still holding my hand pulled forward and shouted something at them. The only words I caught were "Russian" and "kill." It wasn't till later that evening that I found out he had told them I was his uncle from Russia and very powerful and would have them killed. I couldn't help thinking that Ramon's fast thinking had saved us from a serious situation.

Later that evening, as we all sat around the table, I

tried to describe to Garnac and Navard what their son had done. I thumbed through our well-worn Persian-English dictionary and settled on the words *"hush"* (smart) and *"Palihavan"* (hero) for lack of better ones. His parents just smiled as Ramon played around the legs of the table and sister Marita kidded me about my pronunciation of the words.

It was almost January and time for Armenian Christmas and I thought of my own family halfway around the world. I knew I would have to leave soon. I was anxious to see my new daughter, but the Vartomians had become more than friends. It was as though we had known each other all our lives, all the barriers had ceased to exist, but in our closeness they sensed that I would have to leave and cautiously asked me about it. How do you tell people whom you care about that when you go you will probably never see them again?

Ramon had obviously questioned his parents about my going and insisted that he would accompany me to America. One evening Navard tried her best to explain to me how her little son felt, but all that she could say was, "you go, we have to stay." Thoughts of my own children raced through my mind and how envious I would be in a like situation. She couldn't understand everything I said in broken Farsi and English, but she understood the meaning and gently patted the top of my hand. It was though I had always meant to be in that place and I swore I would try to return.

There was a lull in the fighting and I decided that it was a good opportunity to do some Christmas shopping for my own family and my adopted family. I felt that each gift had to be special: for Mr. Vartomian I found a bottle of cherry brandy, which he had come to love; for Navard and Marita I picked some imported perfume, and for Ramon and Raffi I bought battery-powered cars.

Christmas finally arrived and we started out the day by attending services at Madonni Julfa. The Armenian priest looked skeptically at me as I entered the church, until the Vartomians assured him that I was a Catholic. He smiled and shook my hand and gave me a blessing. After Mass all the Armenians headed for their homes to prepare for the big evening. Navard and Marita worked furiously in the kitchen preparing *"boogalamon,"* turkey in a light tomato sauce. Ramon and Raffi finished decorating the Christmas tree, while I went with Mr. Vartomian to finish his Christmas shopping.

We roamed through the old bazaar at Madonni Shah while he tried to find a gift for each member of his family. I felt out of place in the sea of black chadors, but nobody seemed to notice us. The entire time we were there I did not see another westerner. The once-large American community had dwindled to a couple hundred. Mr. Vartomian finally settled on a beautiful hand-made rug for his wife and a block-printed scarf for his daughter, and for the boys he bought a new soccer ball.



On the way home we passed some of the devastation left by the riots; burned-out cars lined every block. At every major intersection armored cars stood surrounded by anxious-looking soldiers. The young soldiers paced nervously with their fingers on their triggers, staring at the few passing cars and warning pedestrians to keep their distance. Everyone knew that the end was near; the Shah had announced that he would be taking an extended vacation. On the outside of courtyard walls, spray-painted signs heralded the return of the Imam Khomeini. As we moved closer to Julfa the amount of destruction lessened, but there were still too many signs of recent fighting.

That evening we all sat around the feast prepared by Mrs. Vartomian. All their relatives in Julfa had come over to help celebrate the holy day. After the meal they exchanged gifts; outside it was quiet and that night the power stayed on in the district of Julfa, in honor of Christ's birthday. The house was filled with the wonderful smells of Navard's cooking and the sound of Armenian songs.

The songs and the food were slightly different from a Christmas in the States, but there was no mistaking that in many ways it was the same. In the corner of their living room stood a Christmas tree and below it was strewn the gaily colored wrapping paper from the gifts. Baba Noel or Santa Claus, as we know him, stood out on some of the cards that had been exchanged and a huge cardboard wall hanging of Saint Nick hung near the tree. For awhile nobody thought of the events that were changing the course of history in the country, and all hoped that next year peace would prevail in the troubled land.

Much of my time after the holiday, I was preparing to leave Iran. All the Americans who remained were doing the same thing; in fact, most of the foreign nationals were making arrangements to return home. None of the banks in Esfahan were open, currency ex-

change was almost impossible, and travel around the city required extreme planning and care. Riots materialized suddenly and unpredictably; the list of casualties had no end. Posters with pictures of the deceased people lined the walls along the streets. Most of the photos were of young men in their late teens to early twenties, but more than occasionally the small face of a child peered questioningly out of the death notices.

The Vartomians talked about going to Armenian Russia, but it was only talk. Esfahan had been their family home for generations and I knew they would not leave. The Armenians of Julfa showed concern but not fear. Even when an Armenian business became the target of angry mobs, life continued on. The mood in the rest of the city smelled of fear; people darted from one place to another; even the beggers that often lined the main streets had disappeared. Esfahan looked like an armed camp with soldiers everywhere, unsure of whose orders to follow.

My last days in Esfahan were filled with the Vartomians' hospitality. The night before I was to leave they prepared a large feast and invited all of the relatives. I was given the place of honor at the table, with Ramon sitting close to my side. Questions came from all sides about what I would do when I returned home and what it was like. During the meal I noticed that one by one they would leave the table and return a few minutes later. After the meal I found out the reason for this curious behavior. Ramon slipped a cassette tape into my hand, Marita and Raffi passed another tape to me, and then Navard handed me a small box. I didn't know what to say, but once again Ramon save the day; he grabbed one of the tapes and put it in their tape player. It was Armenian songs that I had once said I thought were pretty. Everybody watched as I opened the small box. Inside was a single gold coin. I picked it up and looked at the Vartomians. Thanks did not seem enough. It suddenly dawned on me with a sickening clarity just how final this farewell would be.

Navard broke the spell by serving coffee and oranges that she and Marita had peeled and broken into segments arranged like a flower. In the background the tapes I had received played softly. When I had finished the small cup of sweet coffee, Navard told me to turn my cup upside down on the saucer with the sediment drippings in it and studied it for a moment. She was going to tell my fortune. Everyone agreed that she was very good at it. I wasn't sure whether they were serious or whether they did this as a form of entertainment. Ramon came very close, as though he didn't want to miss a word that his mother had to say. In fact, they all became silent and watched her as she turned the saucer round and round while studying the drippings. "You will return someday and bring your wife and children." Marita quickly translated for me, Ramon smiled from ear to ear and wanted to know when it would be. I left their house that night wondering if she was right. Outside the thousands continued to chant. It was rumored that the Ayatollah would make his triumphant entry the next day, the day I was to leave.

My last day was spent answering the many questions that the Vartomians had. We took photographs of each other and I gave Ramon my ID card with my picture on it. When the time came to leave for the airport the whole family decided to go. Nobody said much on the way there and I watched out the window wondering if I would ever see Esfahan again. When we reached the airport it was surrounded by soldiers; tanks and armored personnel carriers were stationed around what used to be the parking lot. As we pulled closer to the terminal, the soldiers guarding the entrance became visibly more alert as they watched our car approach.

When they saw an American emerge from the car the soldiers relaxed and began to talk among themselves. It was only another *"ferenghi"* leaving. The soldiers' interest was once again aroused when the Vartomians emerged from the car and started to walk me toward the entrance to the terminal. A soldier blocked the way and explained that only passengers could enter the building. The moment I had been dreading was happening: I had to say good-bye. I picked up Ramon and hugged him; when I started to set him down I could see the tears in his eyes. I said good-bye to the other children and started to say good-bye to Navard and Garnac. He walked over and gripped my shoulders and kissed me on each cheek and Navard patted my back. They stood together and Navard tried to calm her little boy. Then she looked at me and asked that I never forget them.

As I walked into the terminal, I turned to watch their car pull away. I could make out Ramon's face staring out of the back window. I wiped my eyes without realizing they had been wet.

It has been almost three years since I have seen my friends in Julfa, but they are no less close to me. Letters have become increasingly difficult to get through and it has been some months since I have heard from the Vartomians and can only hope that they are safe. Recent events in Iran have banned the use of English, which makes it imperative that I have my letters translated into Farsi before I send them.

I left Julfa with a better understanding of myself but I also left a part of me behind. I hope someday I can hand this article to the Vartomians and show them that I never forgot.

This Mist of Ages

By Konstantin Paustovsky

Editor's note: This selection by the Russian novelist, Konstantin Paustovsky, is from the fifth book of his autobiographical series, Story of a Life, *the section called "Southern Adventure." Paustovsky is traveling for the first time in a region where the Soviet government had only just become established. Hence the occasional naivete and continual freshness of his observations.*

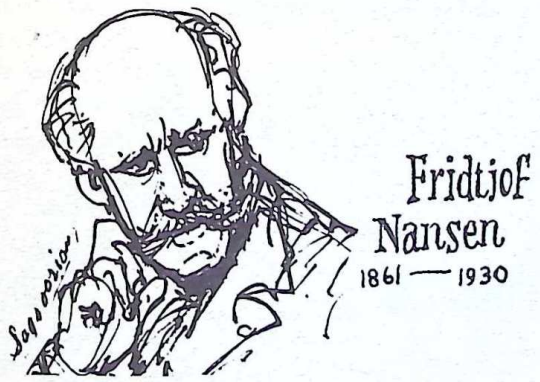
In the green gorge of the Pombak pass between Tiflis and Erevan the train went up the steepest possible gradients and took almost impossible curves. It creaked with all its rivets, springs, and buffers and slowly, so slowly that the movement was almost imperceptible, it crawled along narrow bridges which made one dizzy as one looked down.

Everything about that railway was calculated to put a maximum strain on it. The train was pulled along with the help of double traction and a pusher.

The very staid and polite—courtly even—old engineers who were traveling in the train, told me and an old Armenian doctor who, like me, had joined their highly technical society entirely by chance, that after the construction of the railway the engineer who had built it was declared insane and put into a lunatic asylum. And in the meantime, the railway functioned perfectly well, even though it struck terror into the passengers' hearts.

Never before had I traveled in such comfort as in that special train.

I had a compartment to myself. I sat all the time on the folding table by the window and the train rushed me



past canyons where leaves were stacked up in enormous piles and, warmed by the sun, smelt of turpentine.

Gaps between mountains revealed flowery valleys covered with dew. There were many of them, too many probably for any map, even a very large-scale map, to show them all.

These valleys seemed to me to be inhabited by very happy and patriarchal people. They sat and smoked at the doors of their houses. Sun-tanned women carried fresh water in copper jars. Wide eyebrows set off their glittering eyes.

I was convinced that it was the surrounding nature that made these people happy. But a cursory look was unable to reveal any signs of happiness. One had to become all ears and eyes to hear the musical buzzing of bees, which accompanied the rap-tap-tap of the carriage wheels and the whistling and bustle of birds, to see the rapid play of light and shadow in the grass, and the vitrous sparkle of water in the mountain streams which constantly crossed the railway line.

I hung out of the window, observed and thought. I thought of Maria and really imagined that it was to her I owed all this feast of light, mountains, and plants. As if she had brought me by the hand to all these places and was laughing with pleasure at my wonderment.

I did not even know how this part of Georgia was called. Perhaps it was no longer Georgia, but Armenia? Could well be. . . .

And the train was taking me further and further away from Tiflis. Woods gave way to scrub and rock.

Suddenly among all that scrub I saw a sight which to me appeared fantastic: a large tent, a flag-pole and on it—the Norwegian flag. Horses were tethered to trees beside the tent, and sun-tanned men in check shirts and gray felt hats went about speaking to each other in cheerful voices.

All this looked very much like an encampment of characters out of Mayne Reid or Fenimore Cooper. I even gave a shout of surprise and rushed to the Armenian doctor in the next compartment.

"Don't worry!" said the doctor, who was smoking a fat cigarette filled with very strong tobacco. "It's one of the groups belonging to Nansen's Food Mission. Those are not cowboys or skull hunters, but accountants and

doctors. Didn't you know that Nansen was working in Armenia?"

I did, but I could not imagine that "in reality" it could all look so exotic.

In the night the train reached the plateau and the air became cold. And in the morning I jumped up when the first square of sunlight began creeping furtively from one corner of the compartment to the other.

I rushed to the window and stood stock still. A slight chill ran down my spine. My first impulse was to wake up all my traveling companions.

They were all asleep. The stillness was only interrupted by the light snoring of the well-bred old men.

I rushed from one window to another and succeeded in lowering one of them by seizing the leather straps and tugging at them with all my might. Sharpness of outline and purity of color burst into the compartment together with the cold air; there, outside, a two-humped snow-covered mountain rose up to touch the very zenith of an ancient and virginal sky, shutting out half of it and the entire panorama. It was Ararat. It seemed to lift its snows right up to the sun. The sparkle of the snow filled the air with a shining mist.

Ararat! I just refused to believe that I was seeing it with my own eyes. All the myths of ancient times, all the fables of the distant past were incarnate in that gigantic mountain. The earth that extended at its mighty feet could not even be seen: it was hidden by a thick layer of the atmosphere. The peak of the mountain stood high above the world, piercing the mist.

I could not take my eyes off Ararat. I could neither eat nor drink. I was afraid that while I was doing this Ararat might vanish, disappear, become invisible.

The old doctor shook his head with disapproval and said something about my excessively impressionable nature, which was dangerous to health. But what did he know of anything, that old man with a butterfly tie!

Millenia stood close to me, were able to touch me. I breathed the air warmed by the rocks strewn in profusion all over Armenia. The rocks received the heat from the enormous sun which here cut through the blue of the sky with assurance and power.

Our ancestors prayed to it, to that sun, that it might not reduce them to ashes—their land, their skin, their hair. Rivers of light flowed down on the earth and through their glitter came the sound of steeds neighing and of donkeys crying—the cry of the outraged.

Here was the meeting ground of religions, traditions, legends, history inseparable from poetry, and poetry tempered in the flame of history.

In this state of semi-delirium and semi-dream I arrived in Erevan. Even before I had seen the town I accepted it with the whole of my being. If nothing had been growing in Erevan but a single solitary dried-up little blade of grass in a street or some vacant lot, this, even this, would have been sufficient for me to feel the fabulous quality of these places, their living antiquity and power.

At that time in Armenia they had only just started quarrying the light, porous rock known as artic tuff, colored in soft hues—lilac, pink, bluish, terracotta, yellow, black.

Elegant houses were built of tuff in Erevan in the very first few months of the existence of the Soviet regime.

I used to walk past these as yet empty buildings and hear a quiet echoing within, inside the walls of tuff rock.

I passed the entire day in Erevan completely alone. Only towards evening did I return to the train. I liked my solitude in that unfamiliar country and scorched, half-empty town.

I liked it because no one asked me about anything . . . and because I could often look in the direction of the north—where the billowing evening mist was by now obscuring the roads to Tiflis.

In the night the train started again on its journey, south to Dzhulfa.

In the afternoon we crossed the famous white-hot Gorge of Serpents where a great number of snakes lay, sunning themselves on the rails and where trains were sometimes taken in tow, because of this.

The old doctor maintained that the snakes could crawl into the compartments through various openings. He threw the conductor into such a panic that he—the conductor—walked about the carriage armed with a small iron crowbar and several times, without any need, let the air out of brakes because he was afraid the snakes might have got into them.

I saw several snakes cut in two by the wheels and still



writhing. The conductor kept counting the number of snakes killed and was delighted.

I never left the window that day either. I felt sad, but happy.

The soil was only cultivated in patches. In the empty rocky fields I saw Armenian peasants looking more like partisans or rebels than peasants: nearly everyone had a rifle slung behind his back. This was their old custom of working fully armed because of the Kurds.

Before 1923, when all the events described in this book took place, Kurds used to raid and lay waste our lands on the Turkish and Persian borders twice a year, in the autumn to have adequate reserves of loot in the winter, and again in the spring to have enough food for the summer. The spring raid was considered a minor one and not as devastating as the one in the autumn.

"I could not take my eyes off Ararat. I could neither eat nor drink. I was afraid that while I was doing this Ararat might vanish, disappear, become invisible."

Usually the Kurds crossed the Arax—the frontier river—on their lean horses. The Soviet authorities, therefore, had outposts stationed at the Kurds' favorite crossing places, and we had guards on the train.

However, we saw no Kurds. We saw only the warm and swift river Arax with its pink, cloudy water. The water had the color of the surrounding mountains.

Alexander the Great in the course of his Indian Expedition built a road across Armenia and bridges on the Arax. At one of these bridges we stopped and came out of our carriages.

The song of the desert larks rang like little trembling strings of a musical instrument in the sultry stillness.

Parched grass bristled like a yellow brush in the cracks of the vast slabs of stone with which the road was paved and large sand-colored lizards ran hither and thither.

The bridge had originally spanned the river in one immense leap from one bank to the other. The middle of the bridge where the so-called "key stone" used to be, had crumbled.

* * * * *

The elderly, well-mannered engineers stood looking at the bridge for a long time, picked off the rock-hard clay in between its stones, looked for traces of wooden supports, but found none. "Unbelievable!" they said and shook their heads. "Even our own Belelyubsky would not have built a bridge like that. A miracle of construction! A masterpiece!"

Dozens of lizards stared hard at the rare visitors and breathed heavily and excitedly. The wind drove coarse-grained dust up and down the bridge—the hot dust of the Persian land.

The torrid heat swathed the mountains in mist. On the Persian bank naked children stood on the roof of a low mud-brick house and the sun shone on their brown bellies as on so many little copper kettles.

"Unbelievable!" sighed the engineers. "Supernatural!"

While the engineers were lost in admiration I sat down on a piece of hewn rock at the entrance to the bridge. The rock represented a lion's head, calm and dispassionate. Its eyes were yellow with lichen. This made the lion look alive.

I wanted to bathe in the Arax, but the old doctor and the engineers and even the conductor all shouted at me. Firstly, the waters of Arax harbored some kind of worm, as thin as a hair; secondly, the waters of the Arax could give you leprosy; and thirdly, the Persian frontier guards—*askeri* (they lived, apparently in the same house as the children with shiny bellies)—could open fire on me.

The very word "leprosy" had something ancient about it, I thought. It seemed to have the dull glitter of mica, like the hot pebbles on that river bank.

I did not bathe, but contented myself with putting my hands into the warmish water. When they had dried I noticed they were covered with a powder-thin layer of brown dust.

In the afternoon the train stopped in a gorge with steep slopes on either side.

"Well," said the old doctor to me, "here you'll have to sweat it out for both of us. Up there"—he pointed straight up to the sky—"there's a cathedral standing on a sheer cliff, but you can reach it only by a long flight of steps. They are cut inside the cliff, in a cave. I'm afraid no one but you, the conductor, and the engineer Barkin——the most inquisitive man in Georgia—will venture to climb these steps. And in this heat, too."

The old man was right. The three of us were the only ones to make the ascent.

The entrance to the cave was overgrown with prickly bushes. We forced our way through them and with the help of a small electric torch found the bottom steps of the flight of steps which went up and disappeared in the dark.

The steps were steep and worn. But the air was not

stuffy or oppressive—a coldish wind blew behind us as through a chimney.

Soon we saw a light straight above us, and we reached, exhausted and cursing, the opening at the top of this subterranean passage and emerged in the apse of the cathedral, which was flooded with sunshine.

Swallows were flying about in that harsh, and in a way dead, sun under the dome of the cathedral. The gold haloes of the saints and the turquoise and purple of their evangelical robes made the frescoes glitter on the walls as if made only yesterday.

"What is Ani? There are, of course, things we cannot describe however hard we try. How can we describe a silence so complete that one can hear the rustle of sheeps' hooves in the distance and the sound of ripe seeds in the pods of dead and dried flowers rattling as in a child's rattle?"

We went out into the tiny courtyard in front of the cathedral. The cathedral stood on the very summit of the sheer cliff. We could see plainly the currents of hot air which streamed past us, rose up to the sky and surrounded the cathedral with a tremulous, flickering wall.

Silence lay all around. The air was so pure that it seemed nothing could disturb it. No sound could possibly penetrate that thick layer of sultry heat, and envious imagination could only think of the cool waves of the Black Sea washing the shore some two hundred kilometers away.

We found not a drop of water in the cathedral. It was difficult to see what the inhabitants of that impregnable fortress could have had to drink.

I was lucky. A small book, covered with dust, lay on a window sill in the apse of the cathedral. I took it. Or rather, I carefully ripped it off the marble windowsill and opened it.

The dry pages cracked. And I saw the Latin text of prayers and a dried up forget-me-not flower. . . .

In the precincts of the cathedral, among the hard prickly bushes, lay many thin marble slabs decorated with an intricately carved design.

I picked up one broken slab of pink marble.

Chiselled on it was a bunch of grapes, a unicorn's head and an intricate design made up of Armenian letters. Whenever the sun shone on it the slab became diaphanous and as if infused with delicate blood like a child's hand held up against the light.

I took that slab with me. The conductor and I hauled it back to the train and put it in my compartment. It, too, I wanted to give to Maria. Had it been feasible I would have given her the entire cathedral, where the human voice had not been heard for centuries and where swallows were now angrily twittering all around us, insisting that we should leave as quickly as we possibly could.

* * * * *

I have a dim memory of Nakhichevan and its dusty mulberry trees, a town so far away from Russia that it was difficult to imagine that there was such a city as Moscow in the world.

I remember Dzhulfa with Persia beginning at the other end of a bridge; in the middle of the bridge, where our territory ended, sat barefoot Persian soldiers selling roach and tobacco.

On the return journey the train went slowly and waited for a long time at each station. The engineers found fault with everything, checked everything, examined every detail of station life.

The old doctor slept, while I, exhausted by the burning, oppressive heat, sat for days on end in station gardens in the inadequate shade of some old mulberry tree, read the only available book, which I had confiscated from the doctor—*Diagnosis and Treatment of Tropical Diseases*—and occasionally dozed.

Now and again a goods train would lazily crawl into the station and the atmosphere then became twice as hot because of the engine and the oily water which poured out of the tender.

I sat in these stations almost till the evening and admired my own patience. But to move was almost impossible.

The tin tank on the platform, containing what was left of the warm water, leaked and small lizards constantly ran up for a drink at the puddle near the tank.

With nostalgia I read notices on the goods trucks: "Inspected at the Tver station depot" or "Inspected at the Vladimir station depot."

There, in Tver and Vladimir, rain was falling perhaps at that very moment in neglected town parks, genuine, quiet rain with no one to prevent it from hammering on the leaves, damping the soft earth on the flower beds with their petunias, and running down in lazy rivulets

into the river Klyazma, famed of old for its limpid water.

Sometimes I would peer at the low hills on the horizon. They probably had no name. Indeed, why give names to endless humps of dry soil made of gravel and clay? What a credulous dreamer one must be to march, like Alexander the Great, into those melancholy deserts, with the complete assurance that beyond the dead horizon flow vast rivers—the Indus and the Ganges and dozens of others, carrying their dark, fathomless waters down to the ocean, among lilies, lotuses, and temples fanciful as the edifices built by termites.

Sometimes a whirlwind would sweep the mountains, and pillars of red dust would then appear, like smoke, over their peaks.

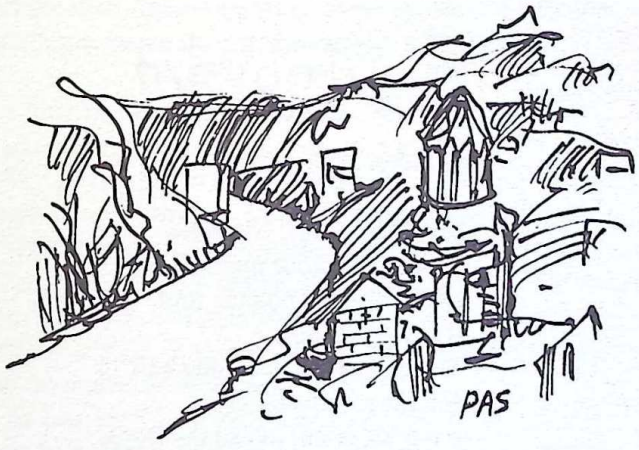
Then the train began to climb out of the parched and burnt-out valley onto the plateau, where the wind blew and the nights were cold.

The railway followed the banks of the river Arpacay.

Once, at the end of the afternoon the train halted at the river's brink. On the other bank we saw basilicas, tiled Armenian domes and a complete absence of human beings. It was the ruins of the ancient Armenian capital, Ani—one of the real wonders of the world.

The engineers summoned from the Turkish bank of the river the officer commanding the frontier guards.

He came over to us across the hanging bridge, nonchalantly, showing off somewhat, smacking the patent leather leggings of his boots with a riding crop. Behind



him came the soldiers, looking like dervishes or lepers—only some kind of copper discs on their shoulders testified to their military status.

The officer allowed us to have a look round Ani, but only before sunset. This decision of his evoked some excitement and joy among the soldiers. The smell of *bakshish* was in the air.

I boldly followed the officer across the hanging bridge to the Turkish side. Behind each of us walked an *askeri*, occasionally holding us by the elbow or stopping the rope sides when they began swinging a little too much.

The bridge was made of narrow planks tied together with rope.

The gap between them was quite sufficient to allow a man to fall through it and into the Arpacay at the first false step.

The bridge shook, swayed violently, leaned over and with every step we took increased its rocking movement like a swing, threatening to tip us all out into the water. The water was about twenty meters below us.

I reached the middle and stopped—the bridge hit my heels and flung me aside.

A soldier seized me and shouted. At once the rest of the soldiers began executing some complicated dance on the bridge in order to stop it swaying. Red with the strain of it, eyes wildly staring, they shouted with all the fury of an attacking horde.

The firm earth on the bank seemed to me the best refuge from all mishaps, particularly earthquakes.

In Ani there were soldiers living in a small barracks, and a few shepherds in the town itself. They looked after sheep which grazed among the ruins, and slept at night, in any one of the basilicas.

What is Ani? There are, of course, things we cannot describe however hard we try. How can we describe a silence so complete that one can hear the rustle of sheeps' hooves in the distance and the sound of ripe seeds in the pods of dead and dried flowers rattling as in a child's rattle?

How can we describe the shadows of swallows' wings on porch stones in front of churches, overgrown with quite ordinary dandelions?

Only grasses, frescoes and a sky which looks like frescoes live in this deserted, wind-swept silence.

The clouds stand still, just as painted by some famous Italian master, and the sun casts a ray—Dore''s famous, lonely, oblique ray, which he liked to depict—through a gap in the clouds.

That ray became from my childhood days part and parcel of pictures from the Old Testament. On seeing it over Ani's scorched squares I immediately realized that I was walking over places as ancient as the Earth itself.

The sun was setting. We had to go back. . . .

To go back across the hanging bridge no longer terrified me. Darkness made it easier.

The Turks shouted, a mule sobbed somewhere, bidding us farewell and the smell of wormwood seemed to me the most wonderful smell in the world. It was the smell of wanderings and bitterness. So I thought then and immediately cursed myself for being a sniveling symbolist.

Genocide

By Michael Becker

Armenian Martyrs' Day
April 24
One Million Killed by the Turks
in 1915

A friend copied this
From some calendar of atrocities
Onto her envelope
Where the return address belongs.

I wonder at the too exact figure.
Some editor has rounded off
More Armenians
Than there are in New England.

As a kid in California
I helped the starving Armenians
By eating everything
On my plate, and later
I delivered the *Los Angeles Times*
With one of them (six of us folding
On the same street corner).

Aram's father collected trash
And he talked with an accent
And Aram shaved
Before the rest of us

so one day
We dumped him off his bicycle
And circled like mad Turks
Stoning him
With his own newspapers.

When Aram's uncle was shot dead
In an ethnic bar
The *Times* called it a trash war
Between feuding Armenians.

The Armenians were trash, I suppose,
To the Turks
Who killed one million more or less,
In 1915
Over some such difference.

Our Miracle

By Shen Mah

Just your name alone
is enough to work
miracles
enough to wrench
my soul
from wandering
and retreat.

Etchmiadzin.

You stand upright
tall, proud.

We hear you.
We hear your voice
roaring out of the past

like a visitor
from our mother soil.

(Translated by Diana Der Hovanessian)

The Inexact

By Helen Pilibosian

The church of St. Nigoghos
stood small, stone upon stone
hand-elevated upon the root
of a pagan temple.
Women had cut their long hair
with the scissors of will;
eggs and lye had joined the magic
of a mixture with that sacrifice;
the stones were to be intact forever.
Was it 1800?
Nothing is exact for that time-place.
Only the story of
Father Garabed who had
surrounded the night with a gun
to keep the stones building.
Did he sleep?
Nothing is exact.

the Gold-Domed Church



St. John's Armenian Church, 22001 Northwest Highway, Southfield, Michigan. This shot is designed to show the carving ornamentation on the portico columns and the shell-shaped carvings above the windows on the building between the portico and the main building.

By Omer Henry

Every city prizes its churches. And rightly so. But in Southfield, Michigan, stands a small stone edifice of which the whole nation should be proud.

This is St. John's Armenian Church at 22001 Northwest Highway. Designed and constructed in the classical Armenian style, it accommodates seven hundred people and fascinates all who see it.

As you look at it from a distance, St. John's thrusts its golden dome skyward for ninety feet, commanding attention with dramatic visual impact from all directions. Its glistening roof, capped by a golden cross distinctly Armenian in shape, heralds the religious and cultural community it shelters.

As you get closer to the structure, the sculptural qualities of its design become more apparent and their affinity to the architectural character of the old Armenian churches becomes more recognizable.

This character is manifested in its materials, forms, and details. Churches of old Armenia used stone for all parts of the structure—floors, walls, steps, ceilings, and even roofs. This because stone was the most readily available material.

Armenian builders learned how to use this material skillfully and with esthetic sensitivity. They invented and developed novel methods of using it as a structural material. They also brought together hand, chisel, and heart to carve stone in beautiful ways to express their religious zeal and their joy in living.

The exterior of St. John's captures some of this enthusiasm. Octagonal in shape, the building is 96 feet wide. Its eight gabled bays are reminiscent of the church at Gecharis and another at St. Hripsimeh, one of the finest examples of Armenian architecture, built eight centuries before Columbus discovered Armenia.

Even the colors and size graduations of the variegated buff Indiana limestone used in St. John's recall the effects obtained in the older churches.

On six of the eight bays, the paired, blind (shallow) arches with shell-shaped tops and low-relief carvings around them, the square intaglio (cut in stone) crosses, and even the round moldings along the corners are typically Armenian details found in different forms on many old churches. The grapes, grape leaves, dates, pomegranates, blossoms and buds indicated by the carvings represent the most common and popular fruits of the land.

A delicatedly carved cross on the south bay and the boldly carved frame around the southeast doorway utilizes the motif of interlacing shafts found in many churches.

Three small windows at St. John's have wide molded frames, with three-sided rosettes radiating from each of

the four sides. This is another uniquely Armenian feature used to embellish the very small unglazed windows whose purpose is to let in some light without too much cold air.

On the north bay, over the main entrance, a rose window skillfully ornaments a small opening. This, too, is distinctly Armenian.

A crowning dome, typical of all Armenian churches, covers St. John's with a serrated (saw tooth) conical jewel-like peaked roof of sheathed pure gold.

At the north entrance, molded shafts of the portico columns and the unique design of their capitals recall one of the most charming examples of Armenian architectural sculpture used on a church in Ani. The tall, slender arched openings, the style of the inscriptions around the arches—one in Armenian and two in English —and the four gabled sides with stepped-down corners are typically Armenian architectural forms.

Over the cupola the gold roof and cross reflect in miniature the character of the roof over the church's dome just as the portico itself anticipates the elegance of the interior.

Around the entrance doors are further examples of Armenian sculptural ornamentation. The carved stone and the cross over the doors resemble many beautiful examples of decorative sculpture found on elegantly carved "cross stones" used to mark graves.

The design on the oak door at the main entrance was inspired by a delicately and beautifully carved pair of wooden doors found at a monastery in Armenia.

As you enter the narthex, or foyer, you will find on the walls facing you and flanking the entrance, two granite panels with an Armenian-style cross carved on each one. These were brought from Armenia, one of them a gift from the Catholices in Etchmiadzin.

Inside the nave, the great height of the space and the warm colors of the filtered golden light streaming into it and reaching into its many corners reflect qualities which, in other churches, often stirred an emotional uplift and created breathtaking responses.

Your eyes are drawn to the central disk at the top of the domed ceiling, 72 feet above the floor. From this central disk, sixteen arched windows radiate, each glazed with faceted glass. The tear-shaped motif represents a form frequently used for the stone dome ceilings in old Armenian churches.

These sixteen windows portray saints important to the Armenian church—thirteen Apostles and three Armenian saints. Saint Gregory the Illuminator is placed in the window just over the altar. It is flanked by the inseparable twosome, Saint Sahag and Saint Mesrob, founders of Armenian literature. The former was responsible for the translation of the Holy Bible, the latter for the invention of the Armenian alphabet.

The floor is paved with stone of colors and pattern that capture the spirit of the old Armenian churches where stones of various sizes, shapes, and shadings were used for the floors. In St. John's the materials used for flooring originated in Italy, Minnesota, and Ohio and are laid in a pattern which suggests a handmade, nonindustrial type of craftsmanship.

As you look down the center aisle, you see the sanctuary—the heart of the entire structure. With its richness and splendor, the sanctuary expresses the love and respect for God that is the basis for the Armenian religion and embodies all the ritual practices that are inherent parts of the Divine Liturgy.

The main altar in the center is made of marble quarried in Italy and carved with portraits of the Apostles at the Last Supper. Over the altar is an oil painting depicting the Madonna and Child—the work of Zabel Kachadourian. The reredos, or wood screen, behind the altar and the paintings form an elegant background and frame several pieces of ornamental bronze sculptured designs.

Before this screen stand eight wood poles capped with symbolic embellishments traditionally related to the service. Six lanterns hang from the ceiling to add sparkle and richness to the entire altar complex. The design of these lanterns and those used to illuminate the nave was inspired by the oil lamps that were offered to the older churches by pilgrims and hung in large numbers from the ceilings, giving the interiors of those churches a rich and splendid atmosphere.

Twenty-two feet above the Bema floor—on which the altar rests—is an ornate frieze with curtain tracks supporting the elegant curtains that are used as a part of the service when the officiating priests say their prayers in private. Over this track, visible both when the curtains are open and closed, hangs the eternally lit lantern.

How does it happen Southfield has such a remarkable church?

According to available records, individual Armenians have lived in the Southfield area since before the turn of the century. But the Armenian community did not exist as such until 1909. Since then it has flourished—and it continues to do so through the growth of its church and many social and cultural organizations.

St. John's is a part of the Armenian Cultural Center which has contributed greatly to the fields of music, theater, literature, government, science, and architecture. The warmth of this culture merged with the Armenian independent individualism has created a noble blending of spirit that pervades the American scene.

For Alexander Feodorovitch*

By Charents

Life keeps rushing, running
forward with such a tempo
these wind-chased days,
there is no rest, no break.
Every day packed now like a century,
every minute a year,
races past toward
the abyss of nonexistence.
And in the flux of days if we stop
to look backward for one moment
we see only your clear face
to remind us how you
enhanced, ennobled our time.
We give only a moment,
a backward glance
to respect, and to memory
and you reappear for that
brief time, but every moment
your blood rustles in our
arteries. In our nerves
the enthusiasm you fired
still boils, even now while the
past rushes into nonexistence.
At this moment, for just this moment
when we stop each year to
remember your face
it rises from that distant past—
calm. Here again, your noble
forehead, your smiling eyes. And we
see the way you moved, hear
you talk, remembering everything that
was human in your daily life.
All that is gone seems back again
incarnate, and we stretch our arms toward it,
while time rushes past
into its dust, its abyss.

(Translated by Diana Der Hovanessian)

*Feodorovitch was Alexander F. Miasnikian, the prominent Communist statesman who died in a plane crash in 1925. There are rumors that the accident was arranged; if so, he must have been one of the first victims of the Stalin purges.

The Wolf

By Anne Soorikian

A wolf leans towards me, black in shadow,
but I know that he's colorless.
His teeth are long and white
still, he doesn't want to eat me.

Not Little Red Riding Hood,
yet for some time
the wolf has been my mentor.
In desperate fits
when skin rips beneath the strain
of rusty edges
he watches, waiting and licking his lips.

The wolf burns inside himself
raking his own coals and agitating the ashes.
Teeth grow sharper like glass
wedged in cracks between the pavement.
Sideways his profile turns on me,
his breath remaining steady.
My face makes steam against the glass
watching the wolf shiver on the outside.
There is no pity.
Beneath the eyes and teeth that terrify
is a labyrinth
woven into his incinerator heart.

He stops. Heavily feeling center
his nose meets mine on different
sides of the window.
Flashing through my stomach
he settles himself,
not with a dancer's grace
but the strange clumsiness
that gives trees their unyielding balance.
A labyrinth of decaying roots,
the wolf feels center.



MUSICAL REVELATION

By Joseph Bloch

AN ANTHOLOGY OF ARMENIAN PIANO MUSIC, VOL. III: COMPOSERS OF ARMENIA. Sahan Arzruni, piano. Musical Heritage Society MHS 4229 (14 Park Road, Tinton Falls, N.J. 07724), $6.95 plus $1.60 for postage and handling.

For me, whose acquaintance with Armenian piano music has been limited to *Dances of Komitas,* the more familiar Khatchaturian and some Alan Hovhaness, this collection comes as something of a revelation, or as a series of revelations in the variety, polish and frequent subtlety of the music.

The first revelation is the pianism itself. What a first-class artist Sahan Arzruni is! Just listen to the control of accents and dynamics in the difficult Babajanian "Dance of the People in Sassoun" or to the seductive rhythmic inflections in Barkhudarian's "Naz-Par." But all the performances are colorful, fluent, and technically dazzling, and the works have been chosen with discrimination and placed in the most appealing order. The recorded sound is rich and has notable presence.

As for the music itself, the "Prologue and Motet" of Levon Astvatsatrian is of greatest interest. In this powerhouse of a piece, strong and uncompromising, the piano is used as a resonating percussion instrument throughout, and the structure moves in waves of stark intensity without a central climax, ending abruptly, almost disconcertingly. It is an extended work but not overlong, and "Motet" is a model of twentieth-century contrapuntal technic. Edward Mirzoyan's "Poem" is another serious and remarkable work, one that displays a complete understanding of the piano's sonorous possibilities.

The other pieces are lighter in character and intent. I found the "Naz-par" of Sargis Barkhudarian and "Prelude" of Gayaneh Chebotarian an attractive complementary pair, the first a simple, elegant miniature in a nineteenth-century idiom but with a delicious harmonic sophistication at the final cadence, and the latter a dark, arch-shaped piece in an effective Rachmaninoff or early Scriabin manner. Haro Stepanian's "Prelude" gives an original acid harmonic bite to the folkish material, and Tigran Mansurian's "Short Suite" is at its best in the expressive slow movement. The two outer movements' emphasis on the middle and lower registers of the piano contrasts oddly with the playful, jocular thematic material.

Surprisingly Khatchaturian comes off less well than his contemporaries. He seems less sensitive and coarser and more conventional in all ways. The big "Poem" of 1927 uses pianistic cliches which rob the music of its freshness, and its open, many-sectioned form rambles aimlessly. Arzruni's performance of the popular "Toccata" is a model of color, clarity, and control and justifies its inclusion in this collection of otherwise unfamiliar works. The early "Valse-Caprice" is pleasant and mildly sardonic salon music, but the "Dance" written at the same time in 1926 is a happy surprise, quite original in its rhythmic shifts, strong dissonance and more complex texture. The later Sonatina is a disappointingly faceless piece, though it has some pedagogic value in its use of standard keyboard patterns.

Of the four Arno Babajanian items, the rousing virtuoso "Dance of the People in Sassoun" from the set of *Six Images* is a winner, and the "Chorale" which precedes it has an individual and contemporary sound. They make me eager to hear the entire set. The two earlier works of Babajanian, the "Prelude" and the "Dance of Vagharshapat" are effective but ordinary.

(The record may be obtained from AGBU for $6.00 plus $1.00 for shipping and handling.)

ARMENIAN CLASSICAL PIANO MUSIC

By John Sarian

ARMENIAN CLASSICAL PIANO MUSIC. Norair Artinian, piano. Produced by the Mamikonian Cultural Committee of the Armenian Church of St. Gregory the Illuminator, 615, Ave. Stuart, Outremont, Quebec. H2V 3H2. 1978. One 12" 33⅓ rpm disc. Stereo. With the participation of Dagmar Kokker, piano, in the Armenian Rhapsody for Two Pianos. Music of Khachaturian, Gomidas, Babajanian, Harutiunian, and Baghdasarian.

Though recordings by Armenian musicians and composers have generally burgeoned, it is recently that discs devoted exclusively to classical piano music by Armenian composers have appeared. Previously, record

releases of piano music by Armenian art composers were limited to one-composer albums (chiefly Khachaturian or Hovhaness) or composite albums, containing a few piano pieces along with other types of music.

Armenian Classical Piano Music (like Sahan Arzruni's excellent three-volume *An Anthology of Armenian Piano Music)* is a welcome start toward filling the void. Mr. Artinian performs with sympathetic interpretations, deftness, clear phrasing, delicate dynamic nuances, and control. Included are biographical sketches of composers and performers, and stylistic analyses of the pieces, as well as major works of each composer in the bilingual (French and English) jacket notes.

"Polyphonic Sonata" (Alexander Harutiunian) has the least discernible Armenian elements, owing to its baroque forms and modern harmonies; some Armenian motives are observable in the last two movements.

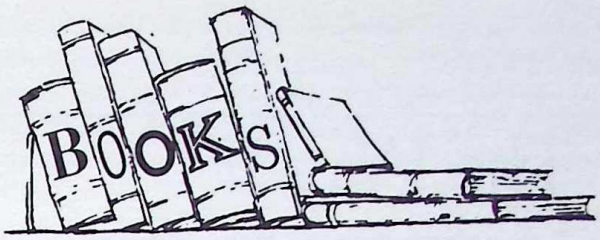
Khachaturian's "Sonatina" is stylistically akin to his collection of piano numbers for student pianists, popularly titled *Adventures of Ivan,* though the former is concert material. Melodically and in harmonic progressions "Sonatina" bears the flavor of the children's work. Only the slow second movement bears Armenian melodies.

"Prelude in D Minor" is a romantic selection suffused with beautiful Armenian melodies, countermelodies, harmonies, and flowing bass lines. Edward Baghdasarian has created a wistful, deeply emotional, and nostalgic piece.

Deservedly popular, "Armenian Rhapsody for Two Pianos" is a very lyrical vehicle for the seemingly spontaneous creativity of its dual composers (A. Harutiunian and Arno Babajanian). Its two sections successively present a slow lyrical 6/8 segment which leads abruptly to a jaunty, rollicking, infectious 5/8 dance. Mr. Artinian is here skillfully complemented by Ms. Kokker.

The album concludes with Gomidas' "Six Dances for Piano," his only original composition for the medium. Delicate and sophisticated melody, rhythm, and dynamics distinguish his masterpiece. Each dance, cast in a particular Armenian mode, and bearing varying moods and character, is a complex re-creation of Armenian regional dance tunes.

In the genre of Armenian piano music recordings, the disc under review is a trailblazer historically and aesthetically. It is hoped that succeeding such albums maintain the quality of its musical selections and analytic jacket notes.



REQUIRED READING

By Marjorie Housepian Dobkin

ARMENIA, THE SURVIVAL OF A NATION by Christopher Walker. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980. 446 pages. $30.

If American-Armenians were readers of books, which (despite some illusions to the contrary, and excepting readers of this quarterly) they by and large are not, Christopher Walker's *Armenia, the Survival of a Nation* (St. Martin's Press) would be making its author a small fortune. For one thing, it is the sort of book families should place on a conspicuous bookshelf where the younger folks, who are so frequently distressing their elders for lack of interest in matters Armenian, might pick it up and learn something. (So, for that matter, might their elders.) This is the sort of readable, comprehensive history that has not until now been available in English within the covers of one tidy volume.

To be sure, the focus is on the last two centuries, but that is precisely the period most calculated to hold the interest of hitherto disinterested youth; it is complex but not all that hard to digest. The early period of Armenian history—what with the Arsacids, the Sasanids, the Nakharars, the Marzpans shoving each other on and off the pages, is apt to put the uninitiated into a trance. General Reader must be weaned on more easily digestible fare.

Walker moves swiftly and deftly from the dawn of prehistory to the end of the Cilician Kingdom in one opening chapter. Just try condensing 1400 years of exotic history coherently, and with any degree of accuracy, into fifteen pages and you may perceive the author's considerable literary skill.

Once into the nineteenth century, Walker offers another much-needed "first" in presenting the chain of events in both Eastern (Persian, Russian) and Western (Ottoman, Turkish) Armenia. The period from the Crimean War through World War I to the short-lived Armenian Republic, and for that matter until the present day, is marked by the involvement of the great

The Way It Happens to You



**Though I could describe it
to you, I am afraid no one
would listen. Where would I begin,
it having previously begun?
Now I am carrying it like
a vendetta. Look: already it is
finding a place in my heart.**

from "The Last of the Free Samples"

". . . a book about always leaving, about loss, and about the hidden miracle that remains elusive."
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Poems by Harold Bond

Powers—a condition that existed no less in ancient times, but under circumstances that led to far less disastrous results. An understanding of this more recent involvement is vital to an understanding of what the "Armenian Question" is all about.

In the course of achieving his own understanding, Walker has read through the vital secondary as well as some primary sources, has visited the areas under discussion and spoken to Armenians of assorted political persuasions. Scholars, whose task it is to discover new first-hand sources, who deal intensively, within a highly limited time span or area, and who need not worry excessively (and sometimes never do) about keeping the reader awake, are not likely to appreciate what is involved in taking the salient facts from hundreds of sources and weaving them into a coherent narrative. And because accurate reportage is on the decline, sad to say, it should be recognized and cherished when encountered, as in this book. Walker has covered his bases thoroughly, and writes with authority as well as sympathy.

This last in itself is something to cheer about. Since the eve of World War I, few Western writers have touched on modern Armenian history without taking the Turkish view—which stance they call "neutral." Armenians writing in English, on the other hand, have recently felt the need to go to exceeding lengths to maintain a neutral tone, in order to be taken seriously. Often, they must balance their facts by offering those alleged by the opposition as well, eventually refuting, with evidence, the opposing version. This appears to be a necessary thing to do, unless one is taking the Turkish viewpoint to begin with, because in the parlance of Turkish historiography, "evenhandedness" has meant taking up, unabashedly, the Turkish side. To his credit, Christopher Walker has unflinchingly found for the Armenians. His bias is based on the bulk of the evidence, and he has let it show. This is evidently not "playing the game," but it certainly makes his book, among other things, refreshingly honest.

Walker's opinions and conclusions, in this reviewer's opinion, are very much on target. The Armenian revolutionaries were certainly *not* the parties responsible for massacres; they certainly *were* doomed to failure and seemingly isolated from reality in not perceiving that fact, as was the Armenian Republic—lacking the material support of a strong Power. And yet. . .and yet . . .what choice did they have, after all? Armenians were constantly beset, as Walker's book brings out, by the need to make impossible choices. He pinpoints the difference between the revolutionary attitude on the Russian and Turkish sides, as no general (or even specialized) history in English has done. Given the sequence of events after the ascendance of the Young Turks, the differences were crucial. In the absence of clarification, those upholding the Turkish view have been able to muddle the picture with considerable success. Walker has also explained the complex postwar situation in the Caucasus, including the story of the Dashnak Republic and the reasons for its demise. His handling of the recent division in the Armenian Church shows unusual sensitivity and understanding. His reference to the discrimination and harassment towards Armenians in Turkey today is one of the rare instances of this fact being seen in print in other than the Armenian press.

By now, Christopher Walker undoubtedly knows far more than he could possibly have wanted to about Ar-

menians. He must know, as well, the thankless nature of the task on which he spent so very many years. Books about Armenians, editors, agents, and publishers have told me, "simply don't pay." It seems sadly true that we sometimes appear to have more authors than readers. But once in a while, when a deserving volume such as this comes along, it would be well to prove them wrong.

ARMENIAN POETRY THROUGH THE AGES

By Peter Balakian

ARMENIAN POETRY OLD AND NEW: A BILINGUAL ANTHOLOGY, translated by Aram Tolegian. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979. 371 pages. $18.95 (cloth).

Aram Tolegian's bilingual anthology, *Armenian Poetry Old and New,* presents a sampling of Armenian poetry from Sahag and Mesrob to a selection of contemporary Soviet Armenian poets including Gevork Emin, Maro Markarian, and Barouyr Sevak. Notwithstanding the scanty representation of many major poets, he has managed to reveal through his selections certain pervasive strains in the Armenian poetic sensibility. Most of Tolegian's choices from the early Christian period through the eighteenth century disclose a deeply sensual imagination. Whether the poems are concerned with pietism, mysticism, or more secular experiences of love in a natural world, most of these poets are informed by the power of nature to reveal the multitudinous meanings of the universe.

In Nareg's "Vartavar," a poem about the feast of the Transfiguration of Christ, the miracle is witnessed in the lushness and fertile transformations of the natural world:

The golden ripe fruit
Protected by the leafy denseness,
The harp-shaped leaf
Sung by David the Wondrous.
In the bouquet of many-hued roses
Blooms a rainbow of vivid buds,
And in the cypress and poplar trees
Life-flushed branches move free.

Much of the powerful love poetry of the medieval period is full of this revelatory sense of nature; the organic world is the only adequate correlative for the transcendent. Yerzengatsi's "Love Song" recalls "Song of Solomon" with its tender brimming sense of nature which embodies the poet's passion. Subsumed by the organic, Yerzengatsi celebrates: "Set behind her lips are rows/ Of gems and precious stones;/ Fragrant, clothed in purple, her figure/ Is a garden of sweet-scented flowers."

It is the cyclical permanence of nature which enables Hovanness Telkurantsi (fifteenth-sixteenth century) to place his passion beyond the transience of sexual love. Although his love "sways like a willow branch, and sets the world on fire," he admonishes himself: " 'Foolish Hovanness Telkurantsi, really! Don't place your foot beyond the ledge:/ When a once radiant face has withered, the color fades from it, before it dies.' " Most of the poets of this pre-nineteenth-century period reveal some aspect of this sensual organicism. Tolegian's selection of poems by Kouchag, Mokatsi, Hovnaton, and Syat-Nova makes it apparent how sensually rooted and erotically oriented these poets were and how deeply they drew on (as the poetic books of the Bible had done before them) the compelling landscape of the Middle East.

In a way that roughly corresponds with the Romantic movement in Europe (which was concerned, in part, with the mythic shape of national identity), nineteenth-century Armenian poetry gives new expression to a sense of a people's collective experience and national origins and the sources which comprise their history. In addition to the political impact of the Enlightenment and the literary influence of Romanticism, this new burst of mythic sensibility and historical consciousness, Tolegian explains, was due to the impact of the Russo-Persian War of 1827 which placed Eastern Armenia under Russian rule. Under the Russians the Armenians had greater security and more intellectual freedom and were reunited with a Christian culture which gave new sustenance to their literary life.

This anthology discloses another obsessive concern of the Armenian poetic imagination—the loss of home. The lost homeland is fact which becomes metaphor—metaphor which expresses the essential moral and psychological condition of a people who have been denied their history and have been condemned to eternal estrangement on their indigenous soil. The poetry of Ghevond Alishan, Michael Nalbandian, Mgrdich Beshiktashlian, Rapael Patkanian, Raffi, Gevork Dodokhian, to name several, testify to the fact that to survive the disunity of history, a people must affirm a unity of soul. Grief is a condition of history, which unless uttered and humanized by the poet, will become a gnawing disease, a psychic block preventing a people from moving toward promise and hope. Such poetry is na-

tional purgation as well as an affirmation of the enduring power of the spirit to survive the fragmentation of history.

Gvond Alishan's "Hrazdan" summons forth the river of time—which is the deep sorrow of history—so that he can accept and love what will always be his:

Hrazdan, river of my homeland,
Hrazdan, my small sweet river,
O, you've quit the foreign lands
And brought my Papken to his home.

O Hrazdan, O waters of my homeland,
O banks, must you hold this sorrow?

Beshiktashlian's "Spring" reveals a poet for whom the past, no matter how ruined and full of sorrow, is his necessary life because it is the source, the mother—Armenia. "And though the murky brook of Armenia/ Winds its way among cypresses,/ These are the very sounds of my homeland/ May these never pass from my heart."

Concurrent with this melancholic sensibility is a poetry of rising national hope. Gevork Dodokhian, Raffi, Ghazaros Aghayan, Nalbandian, Patkanian, and Hakopian all bespeak a hope for a future nation, independent and united. Perhaps Hovhanness Toumanian's recreation of the David of Sassoun legend is the culmination of a certain romantic impulse which aspires to create, in the words of Walt Whitman, "national, original archetypes. . . which put the nation in form," in order to bring to literary consciousness the folk geist of a people and the prevailing greatness of their past. Though the Sassoun narrative revitalizes a legend of national honor and invincibility, this long poem in Toumanian's version lacks any poetic greatness or deep quality of mythic consciousness; for the most part it is a prosaic account of a folk legend. So far inferior is Toumanian's poetic ability when compared with the complex tragic vision and innovative poetics of Siamanto and the dense mystico-visionary poems of Varoujan, that it is a shame that Tolegian alloted some sixty-five pages for the complete version of David of Sassoun while including only one poem by Siamanto and three by Varoujan.

Tolegian's selection of poets from the post-holocaust period to the present is uneven. Derian's "In the Mist," Zarifian's "Compassion," Charents' "Sun-flavored Speech," and Emin's "Siamanto's Prayer" are the most powerful poems included from this period. They reveal the mixture of outrage and helplessness that is, in part, the result of what Michael Arlen calls in *Passage To Ararat* "that racial psyche of guilt, of anger without an object"; because "the Turks had made no official admission of guilt or criminality," Arlen maintains, the Armenians were left with an "unrequited hatred and a tormented feeling of innocence, impotence and betrayal." Derian's outburst: "What other country carries such grief in its heart/ And such forgiveness—what other country?" speaks to this truth. In the surrealistic sensibility of a poet like Hamo Sahian, there is a heightened terror in the quiet imagery of a world of missing pieces: "Blue mist hung in the woods,/ Autumn hummed softly in the woods,/ But still the trees could not fall asleep." Sahian's poignant lines speak for a whole generation severed from home and lost in a ruined wilderness: "Your call rings deep in the rooms of my heart,/ My faraway, faraway, faraway green poplar of Nairi."

A bilingual anthology such as this one has certain virtues and certain limitations. One of its positive values is that the reader (even the reader like myself who does not read Armenian) is able to get a sense of the rudiments of Armenian poetic form; one is able to see line length and the nature of enjambment, and ascertain something about the rhythmic qualities of the original language. With the poem in Armenian on the opposite page, it is apparent that Tolegian has remained faithful to these prosodic structures which comprise much of the rhythmic quality of a poem.

A comparison of Tolegian's version of "The Oriental Bath" and Nareg's "Book of Lamentations" with Der Hovanessian and Margossian's versions in their *Anthology of Armenian Poetry* reveals some of the problems and questions endemic to the nature of translation. In their efforts to bring Armenian poetry into a more modern idiom and impart the language with a more organic sense of form, Der Hovanessian and Margossian have taken more liberties with these rhythmic structures. What Tolegian's translations reveal to be a flatter and more conversational diction and syntax, Der Hovanessian and Margossian have often elevated into a higher-pitched language with a smoother and more controlled quality. Tolegian's version of "The Oriental Bath" discloses a more conversational rhetoric and a rhythmic quality that is slightly more taut and irregular. Similarly, his version of Nareg's "Book of Lamentations" has a less well-controlled line (not in any detrimental sense)—a line which unleashes a quality of spontaneity and anguish, while Der Hovanessian and Margossian give the poem a more polished voice and meditative quality.

Certainly one of the limitations of this bilingual edition stems from the editor's inability to utilize well

his special arrangement. Each poet is presented by a title page which includes a birth and death date and often a picture of the poet; with the necessary space allotment for the poem in the original, Tolegian often uses four pages for one poem. Thus, the anthology conveys the sense of being a poetry yearbook and there is something miscellaneous about its organization and conception. The reader cannot get a sense of the depth or quality of any one poet, and there is no discrimination with regard to a single poet's achievement or importance. For example, only twenty-two lines of perhaps the single greatest poem in Armenian history, Nareg's *Book of Lamentations*, are included; similarly, major poets like Frik, Shenorali, Syat Nova, Siamanto, Tekeyan are scantly represented and accorded no more space than much lesser poets. Contemporary poets such as Armen, Norents, Davtian are represented by a mere ten- or twelve-line lyric poem (often sentimental) and we can gain no sense of what kind of poets they may be.

Finally, the introduction is helpful at points and confusing at others. It supplies some valuable information about the effect of history and the evolution of the language on the development of the poetry. Yet Tolegian's writing is often imprecise and vague. It is unclear what the author means when he says that with the rise of secular poetry "lyricism became the dominant poetic mode, replacing the earlier conventions of mysticism." Mysticism is not a poetic convention and certainly Sahag and Mesrob wrote lyric poetry. To say of Toumanian, Varoujan, and Siamanto, that "these artists, in Armenia as elsewhere, were conscious of their art and themselves as artists, as never before," is a statement so naive and unclarified that it leads the reader to believe that writers before the twentieth century "everywhere" must have had little sense of identity. There are too many statements such as these, and we must expect from a university-press book, especially one that is appealing to a nonacademic audience, more lucid literary and historical analysis and instructive explanations.

By venturing to present the first bilingual anthology of Armenian poetry and in introducing us to many new poets, Tolegian further bridges the gap between the lost world of Armenian poetry and the English language. With the publication, in the last three years, of *Armenian Poetry Old and New* and Der Hovanessian and Margossian's *Anthology of Armenian Poetry,* a significant inroad for world literature in the English-speaking world has been made. These two anthologies are a testimony to the genius of the Armenian poetic tradition and they contain a record of a culture's power to transform its tragic history, its enduring religion, and its original relation to the primal landscape of Western civilization (the terrain of civilization's cradle) into a poetic language that speaks for the indomitable human spirit through the ages. These anthologies have, as well, laid the groundwork for the translation of more complete volumes by individual poets that translators of Armenian poetry will no doubt begin work on soon.

AMAZING GRACE

By Hagop Missak Merjian

CHEMISTRY: SONGS OF HARMONY AND DISCORD AND THE ALCHEMICAL VISION by John Dourgarian. Waupaca, Wisconsin: May Apple Press, 1980. $1.50 and $.50.

This book of poems, written by a young, new poet, explores the metaphor of the alchemical process as it relates to our humanness. "Aurum nostrum non est aurum vulgi" ("our gold is not ordinary gold"), claims the medieval alchemist, talking to the mystery, the process, the dialectical oneness of "the mixing" (*al chemie*), which, although carried out in a physical manner, becomes the analogue for the same process which informs the transformation of the individual from a sense of loss, barrenness, unconsciousness of being in the world, to a tested, tried, transformed human whose processes of awareness have brought him, alchemically, to a unity with his world. In the words of a seventeenth-century alchemist, "You will never make Oneness of Otherness until you yourself have become Oneness."

The poet is fascinated with the eternal ironies and paradoxes which fuse and yet separate, unify and yet dissipate the spiritual and material, the physical body of our lives, and the memories, thoughts, attitudes of love, death, and living. The "Prologue" initiates the reader into the Alchemic Rebis, the mystica of transmutation, the longing for the true self:

the dreams flickering
in endless universe

so remote
from the chemistry
of existence
the khemeia

The disparity between the intangible ether of human beingness and the tensions resolving that being with the physical body of life, thread through these poems, whether in fascination before the "processes" of change, or with the hope for the Center, the Space, the Whole, the Navel of the Universe, or the actual process of

unification and the bitter, denied impossibility of achieving it, especially given our Western duality, our almost inherently Manichean souls.

The science of the self is maddening; the alchemists hope to create a formula, a process which would axiomatically produce the end of the longing, the fulfillment of the Quest—the unity; what is alluded to in Dourgarian's poems as a kind of chimerical insanity. In "Alchemical Epitaph" he writes:

The Alchemist toys with the notion;
stepping between the mirrors; searching
for the elixir of perpetual youth;
distilling the dream thru

His alembic. But the want of an
eternal pureness; is far from pure;
so grotesque that the visage
remains uncomprehendable.

The maddening paradoxes within the disunion of matter and spirit tantalize the poet (our alchemist), and dangle alluringly before him the possibility of fusion, of oneness, but, always, so near and yet so far, just out of reach, creating the emptiness of a shattered dream:

But his mind, the alchemical ruby,
collapses inward, hurtling towards
a time with no future.

Dourgarian is inviting the reader to find his way through the *"oeuvre au noir"* to the possibility of poetic vision available beyond the *"oeuvre au rough";* he is asking the reader to collect the dialectic of "harmony and discord" in his life and to find a process (in his poetry, of course) which is the logomachic analogue to the alchemical process: calcination, putrefaction, solution, distillation, conjunction, sublimation and ultimately the philosophical "congelation"—all of which lead to Gold, the symbol of illumination and salvation. These alchemical processes have their mirror images in the movements of our lives; our own agonies and ecstasies are a metaphorical revelation of them. In the tissues of his poems you can "follow" this process; you can enter into his chemistry of seeing.

The ancients
dreamed of a mixture, rampant
alchemy, but not everything

on earth will rhyme or shine
like gold.

And just for a moment, in a poem called "Chemistry," does the poet see that there is only one unifier, one "giant peace" and that is the power of love. Able to slay the unicorn (see the poem "Essence"), and envelop the world's dualistic madness, love, love, is the Gold.

Dourgarian's effort in this collection (thought strung with the predicate clusters of young poets, though too often a string of early-term, pregnant aphorisms pretending to be a newborn poem, and hanging gerundives aching to be simple names of things) is a very promising, seminal effort. In this book the poet is perhaps too often a hunter, a suggester, a fearful finisher, and one who has immured himself into the unfinished faces of poems which try to collect too much of the chemistry of human incongruity. Nevertheless, perhaps the best look into the magic of his language and the potential of his vision can be found in his poem "Essence," a vision of the poet/hunter/lover slaying the single-horned, mystical beasts of eternal life, the unicorn: *I shot the unicorn,* he writes, speaking of the reified weapon, love/word which strikes to the heart of this mystery, the unicorn, the elixir, the golden nirvana, and he dies, *prey to my words.*

Drinking from the horn, "my chalice," the poet finds the totality of the last stage in the process, the chemie—"Solve et Coagula." And "forever immersed by a clear love" he attains the secret of what moves "deep in stone." He mystifies the reader by taking the trip; he carries us, phantasmagorically and yet so simply, into the other world, carrying us on simple wings—love words. It is a most wonderful temptation the reader succumbs to, this journey into the Great Forest. Take it, and hope that Dourgarian soon invites us to take more.

TOWARD A SPIRITUAL SPLENDOR

By Grace Morton

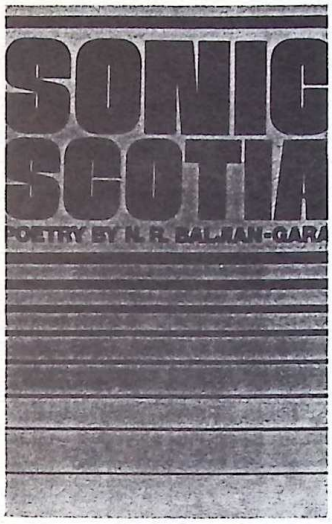
SONIC SCOTIA by N. R. Baljian-Gara. Ardmore, Pennsylvania: Dorrance and Co., 1980. 53 pages. $3.50.

This book attempts not only to see the modern world as it is, in all its fickleness, but also to describe the inner strengths of the individual who can grant solace in a harsh time and help us to move toward a spiritual splendor. It also sees beyond the modern wrack to the beauty of nature and personal feeling, expressed sometimes in tender details (a pheasant passing in weighted softness; starlings in a field) and sometimes in wit ("The instinctual channels of our blackbird/Lets you know she is upstairs").

Sonic Scotia is the second book of poems by Nvart

Rose Baljian-Gara, a painter as well as poet, who has had several exhibitions in American and European galleries. Her new book comprises poems written since 1976, some translations into French from her earlier book, *The Mind Compelling,* and "Intrados," early poems from 1961-1971.

Baljian-Gara's art background is in evidence throughout her poems. Colors, spatial relationships, and aspects of light are used frequently. Architectural terms are also abundant (triforium, towers, door, lattice); even the title *Sonic Scotia* suggests the architectural



molding at the base of everything, casting its dark, loud shadow, as well as suggesting the land, "Scotia." As in the title, words relating to sound are frequent, too; the author is the lyrist, the singer of lyrics, and a clamor of music is one way to fight against the rifts of the modern world.

Although there is a skeleton of logic behind these poems, language is distorted and new words invented. There is no punctuation, and separate poems merge to become one longer work, especially in the first two sections. The poet seems to be expressing her thoughts directly from her subconscious, rather than reshaping them in patterns of conventional language. The leaps she makes are sometimes private, requiring much agility on the part of the reader.

The poems of the last section, "Intrados," are straightforward, expressing many of the dominant themes in the book: the positive and negative aspects of individuals; the wonder of nature; the strain of disunity, both individual and societal; aspects of death; the problems of the modern world. Often a sense of joyousness breaks through, and there are provocative yet refreshing images throughout.

Her strongest work, though, is contained in the first two sections. Here is a vision of a somber, divided world. Yet in this world there is still loveliness: "splendorous trees," a "January robin keep[ing] vigil. . ."; and we ourselves have a beautiful "mimosa spirit."

In the first section, "The Muralist Ponders," the stress is upon clamor and search. There is the bleak search of the lorn masses who scramble up to towers only to find the truth of darkness. But there is also the lyrical search of the person who responds to light, the one who can travel

In a wanderment of trails
To rise
To the heights of splendorous trees
To moistness. . .

This person is often the creator, who finds within lattices and doors leading to this splendor. This person is the one who is able to reach inner unity with his or her spiritual nature.

The second section, "With Timbal Rage," continues the first, but in this part a somber vigil occurs. The poet will wait a thousand years for release of beauty. The poems are touched with a sweet, melancholy lyricism, and conclude with the dark yet hopeful spirit that permeates the book:

The reigning unction
Ceases
Becoming extinct
But a place reserved
Remaining
As the opalescence of a heart

PLAYFUL DEMOLITION

By Hagop Missak Merjian

PHASES OF THE MOON by James Magorian. Lincoln, Nebraska: Black Oak Press, 1978. $3. THE RED, WHITE AND BLUE BUS by James Magorian. Vol. V. Samisdat Press, Box 10, Brigham, Quebec, Canada, n.d., n.p.

This writer is at the same time an antiwriter; he is poet and he is unpoet; demythifier who wants to create a new kind of clever mythology; a creator, in the most profound sense, and yet uncreator; a wrecker of images and symbols, a collapser of language form, an iconoclast, a linguistic revamper, playing, tantalizing the reader with unconventional associations, incongruous images, insane juxtapositions and zany, absurd language tricks.

First, there is Magorian the serious poet, especially the poet of nature. American, midwestern in his feel-

ings, his perceptive sensations about the magical spirit in the natural world, his vision in an earlier volume, *Safe Passage,* presented the most delicate and perspicacious insights into the resonances found in his world, most often a Nebraskan world.

Alphabetical Order and *Phases of the Moon* continue the patterns of observation of nature. It seems as though the first collection, *Alphabetical Order*, began the poet's "examination" of nature in the freest form, in poems of free verse, proselike in their structure, but intently keen in vision, pure in their alembic of the moment, but too "free," too proselike in their weight and purpose. *Safe Passage* is a collection which refines the prose-poetry of the former book, finding itself able to deal with a refined line, a purified eye, a more polished language; more able to distill, eliminate, fashion a focused sight, sharpen words to pierce a finer point of vision. Some of the phrases, that is, the word implant combinations are lovely. A retired juggler cannot exercise with the implements of his art, so he "does the best/ he can/with words"; the frozen stalks of long dead hollyhocks are guardians, indices "allegorically" of the full plant's fullness; birds in a fruit orchard are "moon-veined" and the rich, pampered leaves of gloriously healthy greenhouse plants "hang like medallions."

The last of the "serious books," *Phases of the Moon,* is the most "worked" and the most "ordered" of the language in these studies, although probably not the most intense or the most sensitive. The poems are worked into compact units, each an image or two, each a complete, finished moment, each a gentle, honorable message. This reader finds that Magorian has achieved a more subtle, malleable language in these compact forms, but has lost the passion and the risk-taking of the earlier creations. All three, however, are very worthwhile, bringing us a poet who is inventive, in love with his wilds and the creatures of the wild, and extremely original in his seeing.

There is another Magorian. Pop art, found art, experimental limerick, weird language associations, antipoetry, unpoetry—call it what you wish, it is the language of:

The trick to bending this poem
in your teeth is to extend
the angles of the imagery as
far as possible and then pull
down evenly with both hands.

This "playful" link between the tactile and the imaginary, the use of the same language for both poetic and athletic imagery—this kind of fusion of the external, everyday world with the internal world of personal magic—this "angle of imagery" is what Magorian plays with. It is a kind of simplistic madness and there lies the fun, for the reader is always plagued with the afterthought—"But there must be more. Is that all?" And in that reflection lies the curious, almost perplexing use of language which is Magorian's primary outlay for most of his work. Some of the poems are antipoems. Witness:

Alto Trombones

Very few musical groups
use alto trombones.

Some of them are reminiscent of the concrete poetry of Aram Saroyan:

The Fesler Well Drilling Company
63 ft.

And some of them play, invert, convolute the language of "found poetry" such as "Restricted Poem Area," whose body says, in the bold letters of a sign:

PRIVATE PAGE
ALL UNAUTHORIZED POEMS
WILL BE TOWED AWAY

Satirically mocking the language of electronic communication, a poem entitled "Strawberry Myths" absorbs the robotlike communications of the "glass teat" into the world of poem writing:

"Recklessly quiet in a lush
field, the br

TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES
PLEASE STAND BY
DO NOT ADJUST THIS POEM.

And, too, caustic is thrown at the commercialization of art in "The Society for the Prevention of Poetry Workshops" which decries the selling of formal techniques at the expense of human experience to the extent that "a whole generation will/have grown up without/first-hand knowledge."

In a chapbook entitled *The Red White and Blue Bus,* Magorian attempts to create a viatic vision of America, her contradictions, her paradoxes, her human misery, ironies, madness and craziness, her passions and sensitivities—all in a kind of rushing, listing, moving line, imitating the modern mad love of motion, of the stops of the bus line, the stations, the passengers, the people,

the past and, of course, the future—of America. It is a kaleidoscopic bus, it is a "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" bus, it is a crank-letter bus, it is an omnibus of incongruities and historical-monuments bus, it is a vessel of hurts and pain, it is a bus bound for the Great American Nightmare/Dream, the 5¢ cigar, the double-chicken pot, the Mom's-kiss bus, the blueberry and make-the-world-safe-for-democracy bus. It is a trip worth taking —cheap, 5¢ a fare, an extralong trip, fascinating characters ("Cotton Mather sits beside/the fire roasting/marshmallow"); intriguing places ("The bus splashes through/ the Chickahominy River"); we live again, the time machine ("We wait at a stop sign/for a herd of buffalo to pass; Indian arrows bounce off/the room"); time and distance meld, meet, flow ("The bus rolls past/ Hannibal, Missouri./Mark Twain is/painting a fence.")

Yet somehow, the writer hopes the reader will be entertained by the uniqueness of the juxtapositions, by the weirdness of the imagery, by the flagrant dispossession of time and historical content. The bus ride we take gets nowhere, essentially. But perhaps that is the "catch"—it isn't meant to go anywhere. If so, fine. We can handle non-sense and iconiclastic satire. But Magorian's Berkeley editor in *Samisdat* says of his ridiculous ride on his multicolored bus, "His vision is of course absurd—ridiculous. Bu it forces one to ask, what is really ridiculous here? The satire? Or the subject?" The answer, because Magorian takes the intellectually simplistic route—the route of merely playing, joining, incongruities and not creating an intelligible, discernible, intellectually logical and coherent body of satirical ideas and criticism—the answer is simple: the satire is ridiculous. It is not enough to be a magician of insanities, or a lister of the incongruous or an alchemist of historical stupidities. An artist must produce an intelligible reflection of his own inner vision. Magorian does not. Art for the sake of jarringly stark opposites, madly original combinations, clever as they may be, is not art. It is raw, flip experimentation, language exercise, word play.

THE ABSURD AS ACCESSORY

By Patrick J. Collins

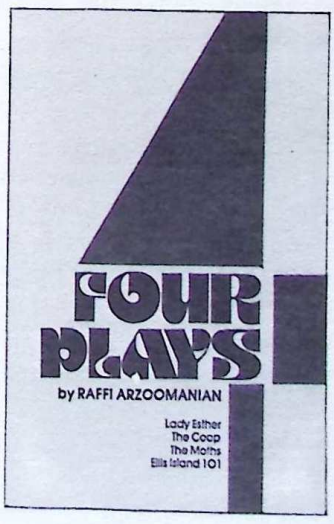
FOUR PLAYS by Raffi Arzoomanian. New York: The Ararat Press, 1980. Cloth: $12.50; paper: $5.95.

Raffi Arzoomanian is a playwright of intensity, wit, and vision. In his *Four Plays,* he has drawn upon these strengths to give us works which question, satirize, but ultimately and most roundly affirm the dignity of Man. This affirmation comes to us in the form of *Lady Esther, The Coop, The Moths,* and *Ellis Island 101* [first published in *Ararat*].

Arzoomanian's direction as an author is far afield of any sort of lighthearted Neil Simonesque romp through the banalities of everyday existence and the reader should be forewarned. Rather, he uses the theater of the absurd as a literary platform, not by taking us beyond the realm of our own ability to comprehend, but by making use of absurdist devices to sharpen the corners of realities from which we may have become insulated by the layers of our own experience. The result is a group of compelling plays whose characters are humorous, but who never lose their ability to question themselves, their fellow characters, or the environments in which Arzoomanian has placed them.

In the ironically titled *Lady Esther,* we meet a central character who, from the unlikely perspective of a woman who survives by collecting and reselling junk, teaches us that self-esteem is a valued commodity, even in the world of those whom society may have cast aside for a seeming lack of it. Her pitiful comrades include a fast-talking vagrant, a singer who can't sing, and that stock item on any list of low lifes, a pimp.

Much of the dialogue is between Lady Esther and her vagrant friend, Milligy, who is trying to escape incarceration by taking up residence with Lady Esther. During the negotiation of their living arrangement, the characters begin taking psychological refuge in a past which, for the most part, can't come back to haunt them. That past is amply stocked with distant memories which the characters distort at will for the purpose of turning past failures into triumphs. By the third and final act, the once harmless distortions become the bull's-eyes in a verbal game of darts in which Lady Esther and Milligy unwittingly and inevitably become involved. Their exchanges are fraught with an acrid humor not unlike that of *The Boys in the Band.*



While it may not hurt while we the readers laugh, we become almost immediately aware that our laughter will come back to haunt us. The laughter that Arzoomanian permits us at the expense of his characters is laughter at a kind of vulnerability undoubtedly shared by many of us. The author reminds us that we, too, will one day be heavily dependent upon the past tense as a means of self-expression. We are made to wonder whether we will be able to see things as we wish to see them, from a perspective enhanced by our own needs of self-worth and fulfillment, or whether there will be a Milligy awaiting each of us who will shatter our pleasantly hued perceptions much the way a vase shatters when it is dropped onto a stone floor.

In *The Coop,* the second work, Arzoomanian weaves an absurdist cocoon in the form of a prison cell shared by five men at various stages of life sentences for murder. The predictable way to have gone here would have been an extended discussion of the nature of violence as told through the lives of men who have known it intimately. Arzoomanian, however, is clearly not an author of the predictable.

We find the characters passing the hours at hard labor and having been together long enough for them to have had every conversation there was to be had. They know the smallest details of each other's lives and find themselves with the ultimate in having nothing left to say. The warden, who communicates via a wall speaker, compounds the problem by commanding the inmates to stop working and to dismantle their tools. The drone of mood music, the meals delivered by conveyor belt, and the atmosphere of a super-scientific chicken farm, combine to reduce the characters to behavioral routine of poultry, constantly pecking, mostly at each other.

Arzoomanian's characters are to drama as the Marx Brothers are to comedy, carrying each interpersonal conflict to its flashpoint on their voyage to desperation rather than comic madness. Arzoomanian champions the cause of human dignity by giving us a dose of life stripped of all freedom, a dose strong enough to make us savor the most mundane of moments in a free society.

The Moths is Raffi Arzoomanian's version of a family or ethnic play. It is the portrait of an Armenian family gathered for the purpose of paying homage to their patriarch as he lies upon his deathbed. The family gathered here is not of the nuclear variety you might expect. It consists of a daughter, a mistress, a best friend, an aunt, and a priest whose entire parish seems to consist of the old man. These are the moths that dance around the fading light emanating from their fading patriarch. A band is present throughout the three acts and plays at various times to lend a particularly absurdist touch, like the band in Jack Gelber's *The Connection.*

Ostensibly, the ethnic flavor of the play is Armenian, but the issues touched upon by Alex, the old man, as he gives his family a final set of commands, are universal. Through this character, sexual mores, sexism, religion, and friendship are dealt with in a kind of ribald candor and finality that only the dying seem to be able to afford.

Arzoomanian uses the characters of this work to satirize the rituals which surround death and dying. Alex, for example, wants his coffin to be weighted with bricks so that his pallbearers suffer all the more at his passage. We learn that the old man also seems to be planning a mass murder to insure a funeral grander than any member of his "family" could possibly suspect.

The Moths is an allegorical tale with the potential for as many meanings as it has characters. One can chuckle at the Rabelaisian displays of wit or be shaken by the verbal brutality of the patriarch; one can mourn the passing of the old man or dance along with the mourners as they drown whatever feelings they harbor in a raucous celebration. Regardless of the choice made by the reader, the play rises above the literary level of a simple family play into a sometimes mystical and often satirical look at the passing of a patriarch and how that passing can force growth upon the most stifled of individuals, even if that growth is represented only by a decision to go on living in the absence of the flame by which they had been so transfixed.

The final work is *Ellis Island 101*, a one-act sketch of two immigrants at the portal of freedom. Only one final hurdle, a literacy test, remains. One of the two main characters is a young man who intends to earn his living in America as a teacher, the other, an illiterate old woman who has stumbled at this hurdle a number of times only to be sent back to her homeland.

Arzoomanian's recurrent theme of human dignity surfaces once more as these characters interact and find that they have much to learn from each other and that together they can perhaps better deal with the psychological brutality of the immigration bureaucracy.

Ellis Island 101, a brief work, tests the author's ability to write with a precision and clarity that might not be necessary in a work where there is plenty of time to tie up all the loose ends. In this work, the author meets and masters the task and gives us a play of poignancy and supreme irony, despite its brevity and simplicity of structure.

Raffi Arzoomanian's plays are indeed an affirmation of the resiliency of the human spirit. Three of the plays attest to not only the resiliency of that spirit but its indelibility as well. *The Coop* achieves the same effect by

giving the reader an insight into life devoid of all its dignity. The work of this author, in its satire, mysticism, and poetry, strives to point up the inherent worth of the human species at every social stratum. In doing so, Raffi Arzoomanian has taken on a most noble cause and, through the medium of theatrical literature, has made some powerful eloquent and, most importantly, memorable statements.

THE GULBENKIAN LEGEND

By Ara Baliozian

THE GLORIOUS OBSESSION by Maurice Rheims. Translated by Patrick Evans. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980. 398 pages. $12.95.

A member of the Académie Française, the author of works on French artists and a number of novels, Maître Maurice Rheims was also for thirty-five years an auctioneer in one of the world's most prestigious auction houses in Paris. *The Glorious Obsession* is an elegantly written and enormously readable memoir in which an entire chapter is devoted to Calouste Gulbenkian. The chapter is titled "Hello, Mr. Gulbenkian Speaking," and it recounts how one day in June of 1937, the phone rang in the author's office and the voice at the other end said: "Mr. Gulbenkian speaking. I've just heard that two Armenian miniatures, very early ones, are coming up this afternoon. I'd like to see them." The author goes on to tell us in considerable detail of his fifteen-year association with Gulbenkian and the various assignments he carried out for him (consisting mainly in traveling around the continent and reporting back on the authenticity of certain paintings, statues, and other works of art).

Gulbenkian was such a shadowy and powerful figure, he writes at one point, that during the occupation of Paris, the Nazis never even dared to enter his house in the Avenue d'Iena. "It is said that Gulbenkian had a hand in some of the most important decisions governing the course of the war," he writes. He further calls him a "potentate . . . accustomed to hold empires by the throat."

Writing of Gulbenkian's palatial home in Paris, the author tells us that though he entered it on many occasions, he was never allowed to see all its contents, and that after dreaming about them for fifteen years and only after Gulbenkian had died, was he allowed to realize his dream, because in his will, the Armenian had assigned to him the task of cataloguing his collections. "I toured the salons, galleries, and staircases," he writes. "Renaissance bronzes, goldsmiths' work of the Regency period, carpets woven in Mosul five centuries ago, precious bindings, furniture from kings' palaces, masterpieces of Western painting—there was something of everything in this museum, hitherto reserved for the sole delectation of one man."

And here is how the author describes Gulbenkian's bedroom:

> *He slept in a big double bed, a few yards from a gigantic mirror-fronted wardrobe whose precious veneers were adorned with gilded bronze fitments in the opulent style affected by Near Eastern bourgeois and rich merchants in the late nineteenth century. Just so must have been his parents' bedroom. Not a single Watteau or Boucher on these walls, just a few chromolithographs and family photographs. Mr. Gulbenkian could have slept in Mme. DuBarry's bed, kept his files in the drawers of the two chests from the Queen's bedroom at Versailles, enlivened the marble round the fireplace with the four candlesticks carved by Gouthiere, which are regarded as the finest in the world, made the walls radiant with Renoir's* Portrait of Mme. Monet *or Rubens'* Flight into Egypt, *which were briefly the pride of the National Gallery in London. He could have covered the floor with emerald and ruby rugs from Ispahan, and amused himself by leafing his way through the King's own copy of Molière's works with the illustrations by Boucher. But to all this, he preferred to sleep surrounded by the interior which had charmed his mother and father, in the bed where both of them had died.*
>
> *If you too are eager to contemplate the things I had the unforgettable experience of discovering, caressing and listing, go to the Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon. His daughter and her husband, without changing their own lifestyle in any way, preside with simplicity over this prodigious foundation and guard its future.*

Other recent books in which Gulbenkian and his Foundation are discussed: Joseph J. Thorndike, *The Very Rich: A History of Wealth* (New York: American Heritage Publishing Co.); and Sir Kenneth Clark, *Another Part of the Wood: A Self-Portrait,* which is now available in paperback (Ballantine, $2.25). See also Nubar Gulbenkian, *Pantaraxia* (1965)—*Portrait in Oil* in the United States; and Ben Whitaker, *The Philanthropoids: Foundations and Society* (New York: William Morrow & Co.). Also see Vivian Leone, "Nubar Gukian, Millionairess, Dies" in *Ararat,* Winter 1974.

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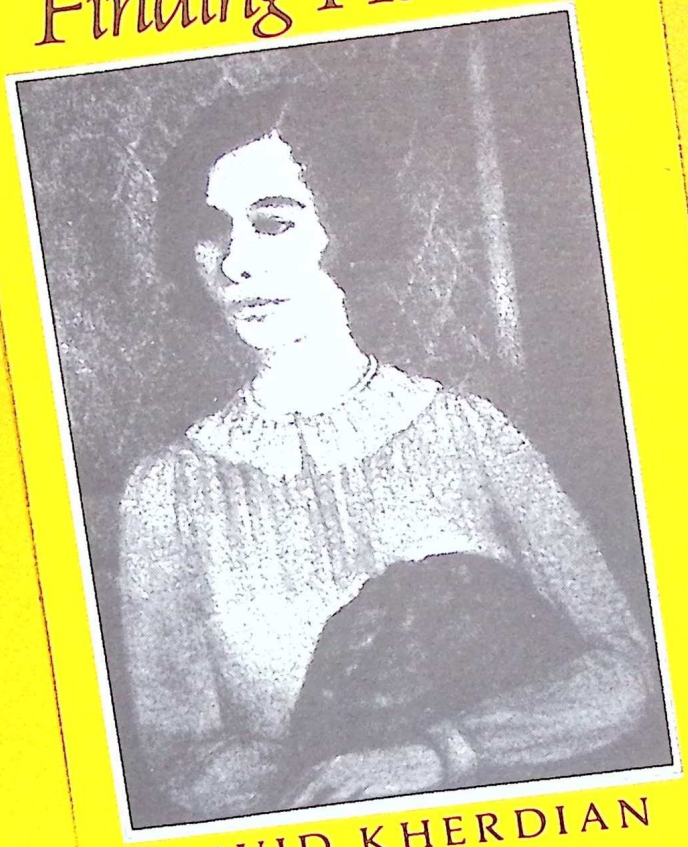

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