

MY MEMOIRS

SIRAK SARHADIAN



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Other indexes

Dedicated to the 90th anniversary of
the Great Armenian Genocide
perpetrated by Turkey

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Sirak Harutiun Sarhadian
1895 Van, Western Armenia, nowadays Turkey -
September 19, 1979, Teheran, Iran

The first and second volumes of Aygestan (Van) inhabitant Sirak Sarhadian's memoirs were published in Teheran, Iran in respectively 1961 and 1962. Based on sheer facts, his recollections, that are of immense cognitive value, present Van's April Heroic Struggle and the City's two great displacements (1915 and 1918), that marked a huge number of victims. A true story of a struggle for survival, the book also contains a number of episodes with some important personalities, both outstanding and unknown.

E. Vardanian, the author of another book on Vaspurakan Armenians' Heroic Struggle and deportations, mentions Sirak Sarhadian, the eye-witness and active participant of those events, in his work entitled "Vaspurakani Nahanj Byurots" ("The Retreat of Thousands of Vaspurakan Armenians"), Boston, 1920.

Dedicated to my father, Senior Priest Harutiun Sarhadian, and all those our compatriots who yielded up their spirits to God in foreign lands in an agony of terrible anguish, stripped of their homeland.

A FEW WORDS (Instead of a preface)

The forty-fifth anniversary of Vaspurakan's April Heroic Struggle provided me with fervent inspiration to write down my memoirs inseparably linked with the magnificent heroic revolt of part of the Armenian nation, that is truly known as the April Heroic Struggle, one of the most beautiful pages in the history of the Armenian people's self-defense.

I do not have the slightest intention of presenting a circumstantial and comprehensive account of that Heroic Struggle: even the most brief recollections are quite sufficient to show the present and future Armenian generations, especially the younger ones that in the most drastic period of their national struggle for existence, Vaspurakan Armenians were able to put up a unanimous resistance against the mean enemy's anti-Armenian ferocious attacks, forgetting about all kinds of class, religious, group and party discrepancies. They, i.e. Vaspurakan Armenians, saved the lives of tens of thousands thanks to their unbending will power and firm belief, thus proving to the entire world that they were able to survive even at the cost of their own blood.

I have tried to portray the sufferings of the Armenian population in Vaspurakan together with the bloodless genocide impudently premeditated for them, the countless number of deaths both during the escape-deportation and in the first shelters the refugeés found themselves in. Employing superhuman efforts, Vaspurakan people manifested great determination in their desperate desire to survive all the infernal misfortunes and the moral humiliation they suffered, having been reduced to homeless and semi-starving deportees. They succeeded in overcoming all this and gave a shattering blow to their numerous enemies, shouting at them, "All your diabolical weapons and political intrigues are absolutely powerless to exterminate us."

Vaspurakan Armenians' rebirth, just like that of the entire Armenian nation throughout their history, proved that their heroic will power and firm belief never failed them to resist any infernal plans by thousands of such villains and executioners of the Armenian people as Talaat and Enver. And they survived with the triumphant feeling of perpetuity and adamant resoluteness.

The Armenians who have always crushed all their enemies longing for their annihilation will never fail to win decisive victories over all those tyrants and malefactors who will ever endeavor to exterminate them.

While writing down my memoirs, I had a most sincere desire to pay tribute to the unknown graves of all those immortal heroes who sacrificed their young lives and noble blood for the Armenian people's salvation. I have also embarked upon this work in token of my deepest respect to all those brave and devoted warriors who made the heroic April a reality, saving thousands of Armenians.

Finally, I hope my dear readers will not consider it immodest if I state that I have also included recollections of my own family and my personal everyday life, providing a true account of all my struggles and experiences, directly linked with them.

Sirak Sarhadian

PART ONE

MY CHILDHOOD

My mother's death is like a remote dream to me: despite the fact that I was very small, perhaps, five to six years old, I remember when Mother was on the very verge of grave, her bed surrounded by Father, my two elder brothers and several neighbors and relatives, I was absorbed in my game in the garden. Being very fond of taking aim at anything, I was in the habit of putting some stones on the ground, at a distance of a few meters from each other, and hitting them with the stones previously gathered and held in my hand.

Thus, I was absorbed in my game when I heard sounds of cry and mourning from the room Mother was lying in agony. Approaching the window overlooking the garden, I saw Father and my two brothers weeping bitterly and hitting their heads.

I ran into our yard, climbed the small wooden stairway connecting it with the room and reached the ottoman, on which my dying mother was lying. Unable to realize the entire profundity of that irreparable loss, I loudly burst into tears and began calling mommy. One of our neighbors, a girl named Maro, who was very fond of me and whom I liked very much, embraced me taking me to their house.

I never learned anything else about my dear mother's death: I was not able to find out when my poor mother had been taken out of her room, how she had been taken thence, where she had been buried and who had attended her funeral, since nobody wanted to tell me anything about that. The only thing my vague recollections tell me is that Maro, who seemed like a guardian angel to me, kept me in their home for several days, her kindness and nice treatment deafening the feeling of my mother's absence about me.

A few days later, when Maro took me to our place, Father clasped me to his chest and I could hardly hear the following words whispered amidst his shower of kisses, "My dear son, my poor orphan... ." And with those words, a few drops of his tears fell onto my cheeks.

I burst out sobbing and shouted, "I want my mamma, I want my mamma, where is she?" Maro seized me from Father's arms and said, "Don't cry, honey, my dear Sergei. I'll take you to your mommy right now... ." And she took me away, but again to their place.

In their home Maro, who treated me like an affectionate sister, tried to soothe me with her endless kisses and words, "My dear Sergei, you're a boy, aren't you? If you keep weeping in that way, what about your dear little sister Araksi? I know well that you love her very, very much. You know that she is younger than you and wants to see her mommy more than you do. You should be strong and stop crying: otherwise, if she sees you crying, she'll do the same and nobody, except you, can calm her down. You're

everything for her, aren't you? The way she loves you can't be compared to the manner she loves your papa and brothers. Like so many beautiful butterflies that endlessly hover around a lamp, she is constantly at your heels and repeats everything you do. If you're naughty, so is she, if you play, so does she, if you're happy, so is she... but if you cry, I can't even imagine how bitterly she'll weep. I know that you love me, too and if it is true that you really love me, I want you to promise me you'll never cry anymore.

"You should bear in mind that if you behave yourself and stop crying, the kind angels will grow fond of you and will return your dear mother. You should tell the same to your little sister trying to convince her of that: I know you can do it.

"Well, my darling, my sweet, little boy, I repeat that if you truly love me, you must promise to do what I have told you, and then I'll love you still more. Now, promise me that, my little hero."

Thanks to her attractive sweetness and fascinating image, Maro always succeeded in subjecting me to her influence and will. I could not refuse her: I promised to do whatever she had asked me and did keep my promise.

I did not shed any more tears for Mother's loss, but I could never forget her: her wonderfully dear image remained ever living in my memory.

WHO WAS MARO?

Maro - her real name was Mariam, but our family called her Maro for short - was the only child of a very poor mother. Her father had died many years before and I did not remember if I had ever made any inquiries about him or not: in any case, I did not know anything about his life, mode of living and death. Maro's mother, whose name was Voski, was a poor woman of about forty-five, with her face lost in wrinkles and a hump projecting over her back. Despite that, however, her pale, thin face bore the signs of noticeable female resoluteness, perhaps resting on her adamant decision to sustain her only daughter and bring her up perfectly. Being both a baker and a laundress, she worked for at least ten hours nearly every day.

Their small house or, better to say, hut, representing a triangle about thirty meters of dimension, was located exactly opposite the main entrance of our house, on the other side of our four-meter street. The semi-ruined wall of its facade extended at a distance of four to five steps, with the two eight-meter walls, stretching in the shape of a triangle on either side of it. There was small open space on the left side of the triangle with a bed in the middle: Maro's diligent mother usually sowed a few kinds of greens there while her daughter watered it with the running water of the street twice a week. On the right and left of that bed towered two thick poplars, which, as Maro had once told me, stood in silent memory of her father. In the part forming the continuation of the small bed lay Maro's hut, a small single-room house, whose sad appearance seemed to testify that it had borne all the caprices of the weather, such as the snow, rain and winds. Every time its ruined and almost decayed door opened with creak, letting in the mother, her daughter and two or three visitors a day, including me and the women or children inviting Voski to work.

There was a one-meter-wide *tonir** (*an underground oven*) in the upper corner of the hut: in winter a *kursi* (*A big, square chair with a blanket covering it and a container full of burning wood generally put below it. When it is cold, people lie near it and cover their feet with the blanket.*) and was generally placed over it, being covered with a special blanket, a patchwork of different cloths. The fact that the blanket sewn of various numerous shreds was always neat and never had any holes kept surprising me all the time. The floor was covered with three shabby rugs of different colors that were always clean. The upper half of the walls in the whole hut had grown black with the *tonir* smoke while the ceiling and logs shone with pitch black. The roof *yerdik* (*an opening in the ceiling of the Armenian houses used as a chimney and for the purpose of illumination.*) was the only window in the hut: in winter it was covered with a sheet of glass and consolidated by mud so that the inhabitants of the cabin could be protected from the cold. When the *tonir* fire burnt, the hut door was usually kept open, the smoke slowly puffing out. In the warm summer months the *yerdik* glass was carefully removed to be kept for the following year.

Maro's mother could very seldom be found at home: nearly every day she either baked bread or washed clothes in wealthy people's residences.

We were not rich enough to always employ her in our house: it was only once or twice a month - and that happened only after Mother's death - that we could afford to call her to work for us.

Always complaining of ache in her shoulders, arms and sometimes legs, Voski said that she was exhausted, but did not want to miss work. She had taken an unbending decision to bring up her only daughter and marry her even at the cost of her own life. She repeated over and over again, "My only concern is to yield up my Mariam to a good husband and after that I don't care a damn about my death. My only wish is to have a noble son-in-law and may God help me. May He have mercy upon me and keep me alive, after having deprived me of my husband, until my dear child finds her happiness. Women like us are to suffer endlessly from the very moment of their birth: if I deserved it and the Lord loved us, I would be strongly supported by my husband, like all other women. Well, this is what was predestined for me, I obey the omnipotent merciful Lord: with this misfortune having befallen us, He is sure to open the door to good luck for my poor orphan and me."

I can never forget the image of that dear, selflessly devoted mother, who was the pure embodiment of the Armenian woman. She kept and protected Maro, her only child and the only consolation in her life, like a bright colored rose, and would never tolerate her fading away.

She turned out a real prophet since her desire came true. Struggling like a selfless, invincible soldier all her life, she realized her wish through hard toil and succeeded in finding a suitable match for her Maro. Later we shall see how that happened.

For her age Maro had a splendid figure: according to her mother and my father, she was not fifteen yet, but had a broad forehead, fine brows, as if drawn by the light touch of the nature's brush, and big, fascinating eyes of light blue, arched with long eye-lids resembling black amber. Her cheeks and lips were like a newly-blossomed rose shining

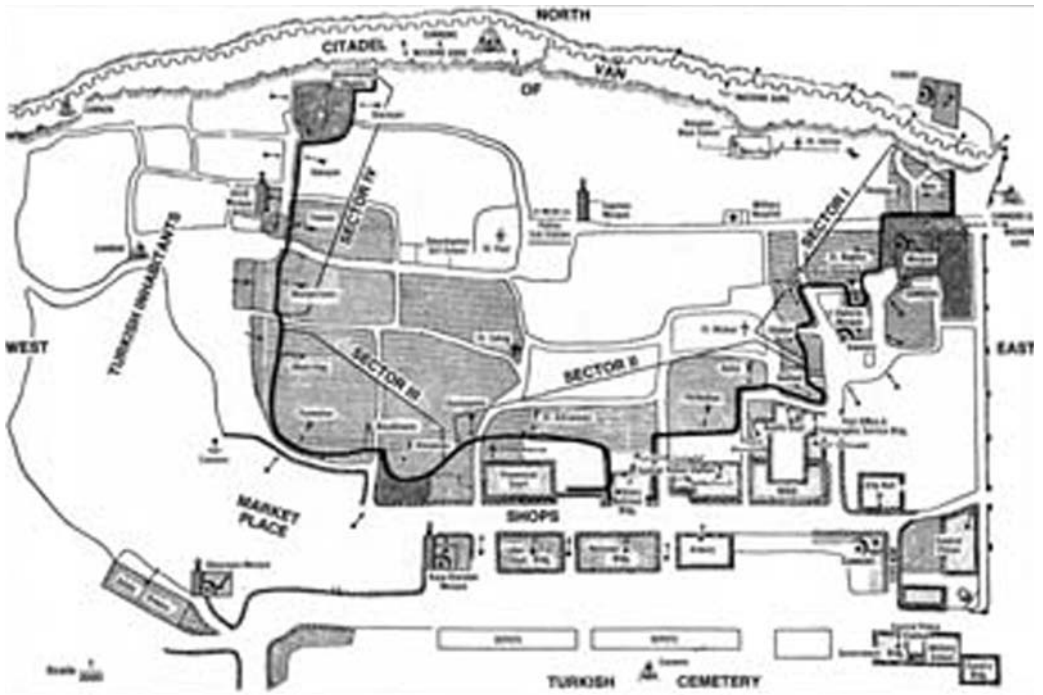
*The explanations of the Armenian realias and certain dialectal words as well as the notes are provided by the translator.

in the color of red from under the dawn dew, and her voice resembled the mild modulation of the beautiful pipe coming from afar. With all those features, however, she was surprisingly modest and meek and the clothes she wore were always plain but spotless.

Indeed, as a child I was unable to appreciate her excellent beauty and exceptional features. The only thing I remember well is that I loved her very, very much: that was the reason why I always obeyed her without any contradiction and caprices. I felt that she loved me, too, perhaps because she did not have a father or any other relatives and there was nobody to love her, except her mother. Maybe, I also loved her because I had lost my mother and greatly needed her dear, maternal love.

AYGESTAN AND OUR STREET

Our house was located in Kherani Street, Aygestan, Van's most beautiful part, abounding in quarters extending on vast territories. *Aygestan* (In the Armenian language *Aygestan* means 'an area covered with gardens' or 'a city of gardens'.) was the characteristic name of that portion of the city since it was covered with endless gardens following each other. In Aygestan the majority of the houses had gardens attached, and it was in such dwellings that the upper and middle class lived, the poor being deprived of that gift endowed by nature. However, I should state that such people formed a small percentage in the city: incredible as I may sound, I do not remember having ever come across an Armenian beggar in Aygestan. There were some poor people, but there did not exist any paupers since everybody worked. The rich and part of the middle class were



The plan of Van City

engaged in commerce, but greater portion of the latter comprised craftsmen and wandering vendors. The poor rendered different services for the wealthy merchants and craftsmen: unemployment was regarded as shameful vice and no trace of theft or depravity could be found there.

As a young boy, I once heard that a woman's head had been severed from her body, for she had been caught in infidelity.

The Armenian quarters, separated from the few Turkish ones, stretched in the aforementioned immense gardens. Surprising as it may sound, no Turkish houses could be seen in the Armenian streets or even quarters, while the quarters with mixed Armenian and Turkish population constituted but a very small number.

Our street lay in the quarter called Hankusner, that had a church of the same name and a secondary school. The houses of two outstanding Armenians, who are the glory and pride of our Van, Khrimian Hayrik and Aghasi Khanjian, were in the same quarter, which was their birthplace.

Our street began in famous Seghga Avenue, which connected Aygestan with Kaghakamej (fort). Two fast and rich springs ran in the middle of that avenue and at the beginning of our quarter: one of them named Sofi *Keahriz* (an underground canal) abounded in cold water resembling a stream, the other, known under the name of Mokhri Keahriz, was located at the other end of the street, sloping down towards the gorge called Hankusner. That spring, whose abundance of water made it look like a river, had wonderfully clear, cool and useful water. Together with my little sister, I so often carried jugs of drinking water for our family from that unmatched spring. Never have I been able to recollect the miraculous, cool water of my magnificent birthplace without a feeling of inconsolable grief and utter regret. May those who violently took control of our majestic birthplace be cursed by an infernal curse!

OUR HOUSE AND FAMILY

As I have already mentioned, our house was located in Kherani Street, such a crooked, narrow one that a passing carriage at once occupied half of it. In the whole street only two families could boast prosperous conditions, the others belonging to the middle class or even the lower one. The neighbors were generally on good terms with each other and I do not remember them ever having such discrepancy or dispute that would compel them to apply to the Turkish court. The old and those enjoying respect and honor always succeeded in smoothing away any conflicts, forcing the parties to be nice to each other.

Our house was situated almost in the center of the street: it took us nearly the same amount of time to reach both Sofi Keahriz at one end of the street and Mokhri Keahriz on the other. However, we preferred to take our drinking water from the latter, despite the fact that we had to descend twenty-five to thirty meters down the hillside and then ascend it, with our jugs full of water. We bore that small toil with pleasure since Mokhri Keahriz enjoyed great fame in Aygestan for its pure, cool water.

I have to confess that the economic state of our family was far from satisfactory: that is why, after Mother's death, the inhabitants of our quarter decided to ordain Father as a priest and fulfilled their decision within less than a year.

It should be said for the sake of justice that almost all Armenian Apostolic priests who never received any permanent payment were a kind of legal tax collectors or, better to say, "honorary" beggars.

My father, a modest person of honor, was almost always dissatisfied with his work, particularly because it had fallen to his lot to have a most avaricious and selfish companion. That priest, whose name was Father Housik and who had been working in St. Hakob Church for a longer period than Father, exploited and almost robbed my poor father. Supported by the wealthy, influential *aghas* (an old title used with reference to wealthy, influential people) and landowners, he had made it his monopoly to hold all the ceremonies connected with the housewarming, baptizing, wedding and funeral of the rich.

I remember Father often (when being alone with the members of our family) complaining of his lot, for being forced to work with such a niggard. He used to say, "My children, how could I be so mistaken to agree to be ordained. I wish I had stayed in my position of teacher and had never met this mean person. This worthless rapacious man (he meant Father Housik), who is an utter fool, does not like me, gossips with the aghas about me and slanders me. This devil disguised under the priest's cassock is ready to kiss the soles of the aghas, employing all kinds of mean and sly manners indecent of a priest, merely to get two *kuruses* (an ancient Turkish monetary unit) (two Turkish kranes) more."

Some years later, being already a grown-up boy, I noticed that Father had acquired his proper position among the believers and was held in high esteem. I was often told that he almost fully shared his income with the poor, orphans and the sick; that was very flattering for me so that despite my previous discontent with Father's being a priest and my eagerness to see him having given up that job, I gradually got reconciled to the idea that he was a clergyman.

About two years after Mother's death, my elder brother married a young, slim girl named Haykanoush, the daughter of one of the rich families in our quarter. My brother started working as a teacher of Armenian and singing in the six-year preparatory school attached to Hankusner Church. An able and clever person, he also began attending the Theater Ensemble, that had commenced its activities in Van in the recent years. The first performance of that ensemble with my brother's participation is like a dream to me, and I cannot remember its plot. According to the contemporary views, my brother performed the part entrusted to him perfectly: his beautiful, resonant songs won him great success during the performance, making the audience applaud over and over again addressing him several encouraging "Bravos".

The next morning Father clasped my elder brother Karapet to his chest and said, kissing him warmly, "My boy, whatever I heard about you was a true surprise to me: you really deserve your mother's milk. You gained us great honor with your acting, but I could not understand who had taught you all those things. It is a great pity that my post of priest did not allow me to come to the performance. I again wish you success, through which you may win us great esteem among all those wishing us both good and evil."

To that my brother responded, “My dear father, now you and my wife have finally found out why I returned home late at night during those two months. You did not believe me when I told you that I had gone to the rehearsals and always complained of it. Now you are convinced that for a beginner like me it would be impossible to appear on the stage without these long rehearsals.”

My other brother Armenak, whom we called Armen for short, was older than me and younger than Karapet. My two brothers were absolutely different: unlike my elder brother, who was very courageous and at the same time careless, stout and of fine build, Armen was tall, thin and a sort of reserved. From the very beginning the latter was reluctant to study so that he could hardly complete the four classes of the preparatory school, and that being forced by Father. He was ever serious, sometimes even sad and lost in thoughts, all our efforts to cheer him up always proving in vain. Refusing to continue his studies at school, he changed three masters within a few years: at first he tried apprenticeship with a goldsmith, then a shoemaker and, eventually, a tailor. Proving unable to learn anything with any of those craftsmen, he left for Russia three years before the events of Vaspurakan. I was not able to find out through what miracle he had managed to reach Tiflis, since my family could not afford to provide him with fare.

Our three brothers' only sister Araksi, who was three years younger than me, was my most beloved person in our family, without taking into account Maro, who was not a family member. We loved each other very, very much, our young hearts being inseparably linked together.

At home we were always together and when I went somewhere, Araksi tried to follow me: if I refused, she huddled, began weeping and shouting in such a way that I took pity on her and agreed to take her with me. She even bore the toil of bringing water from the spring so as not to be separated from me, despite the fact that it was very difficult for her to carry even the small jar. It is common knowledge that in all families small children often quarrel with each other, hurt and even beat one another, but I do not recall Araksi and me ever insulting each other.

Our new sister-in-law, who had been reared in one of the traditional Armenian families, was the true embodiment of the Armenian woman. She was meek, compliant, humble and hard-working: I did not ever see her doing nothing, her hands folded in her lap. She was very quiet by nature and, what is most important, she never gave way to self-conceit, which would be quite expectable taking into consideration the fact that her family was far richer than ours. She might naturally be discontent with her present condition, clothes, our mode of life, living and numerous other things. Doubtlessly, she was a true embodiment of modesty and decency and thoroughly deserved first her family and then ours.

Our house was far from being a new and single-story one: entering through the big, double-leaf entrance door, we crossed the corridor-yard (four to five meters long and two meters wide) into the actual yard, where, to the right of the entrance, extended two

beds, that were almost always trampled and semi-cultivated. There grew two black mulberry trees, always loaded with ripe and half-ripe mulberries in summer. On the other side towered two tall poplars, whose tops always provided a shelter for our longevous cat, when it was chased by dogs. In Father's absence, I also often climbed to their top enjoying that dangerous exercise greatly: in such cases, my sister kept begging me not to climb so high and when I refused to obey her, she would begin crying and hitting her head with her small hands.

Our house consisted of a large tonir room, adjoined by a dining-room without any partition, and a cellar housing the flour bin, which was made of strong boards and came from time immemorial. We also had a large bedroom, where poor Mother consigned her soul to God, and a small guest-room, which could hardly accommodate eight to ten people sitting on the floor.

The house also had an underground basement, where Father generally kept the crops gathered from our garden, apples, pears, quinces and reddish bunches of grapes, all of them hanging from the ceiling. The large clay pitchers of cabbage and tomato pickles, preserved either in salt water or greens, were placed around the fruits, beside each other. Near the opposite wall still more pitchers were semi-buried under the ground, containing the refined wine that we normally got by carefully squeezing our garden grapes.

Inside the house we also had two wood-sheds, where we usually accumulated our winter firewood, i.e. withered branches gathered from our garden, brushwood, sometimes sheep droppings and cow dung procured from outside.

Recently our stable, which used to be the only shelter of our milch cow during Mother's lifetime, was in a neglected state: Mother's death had rendered the poor animal, which had always given our family its milk and was liked by everybody, ignored and abandoned so that Father had to sell it.

Our large garden abounded in every sort of fruit-bearing and fruitless trees that were generally grown in those times. A large part of it was covered with vines; for about six months per year we lavishly enjoyed the plentiful fruits and greens of our garden, being very happy about it. However, it so happened that during the three summer months, we sometimes had difficulty in procuring irrigation water: in such cases, we and those who were not rich enough to water their gardens at the appropriate time by the force of money and bribes cursed the greedy and corrupted people who distributed the water unfairly and unequally, supplying it to those from whom they could squeeze more money.

A HOUSEKEEPER OR HOSTESS?

Early in the summer of 1905, I had already completed the third class of the preparatory school in our quarter and was to enter upon the tenth year of my life in a few months. I had hardly begun cognizing myself and the world around me, trying to draw a demarcation line between the good and evil according to my own estimate. I had also grown fond of school life and did well in my lessons, causing no dissatisfaction for Father.

It was at that very time that our family underwent a change, which I was too reluctant to accept, despite the fact that I was still a child. Hardly had two years passed after her marriage when our sister-in-law, my elder brother's wife, fell ill. Unfortunately, in those days Medicine was not developed at all to set precise diagnosis of diseases: the few doctors, who were quite qualified in their profession, would not condescend to help such common mortals as we were so that we were almost denied any access to them. People like us who earned their living with grave difficulties had to confine themselves to the experience of elderly illiterate or semi-literate women, the poor patients often falling victim to their traditional remedies that were mere tests.

Our unlucky sister-in-law came to add to the number of such victims: although death miraculously spared her, the wrong treatment she had received deprived her of the happiness of maternity and, perhaps, forever, as my close friend Maro explained to me, yielding to my endless entreaties. That lively and hard-working woman blooming like a newly-blossomed rose frequently complained of her illness, unable to attend to all the work in our comparatively large family, despite all her eagerness.

It was just at that time that Father and my elder brother's relatives who "wished them good" procured a housekeeper for us, cramming her into our family out of their desire to help us. The economic conditions of our family being far from desirable, we could hardly afford to sustain that woman, let alone her prematurely grown up son, who had no character at all. My infantile intuition forced me to regard the day of that woman and her son Yeghishe's arrival at our house as the evil day; I was opposed to that from the very first day they came. Indeed, that could not remain unnoticed by the boy and his mother, who considered herself a kind of hostess-impostor, so that they tried to incite my brother and, particularly Father, who was very gullible, against me.

My hatred for that woman gradually grew more and more since I considered her alien and unnecessary in our family, especially because I noticed that in her turn, she hated both me and my little sister, as if trying to take vengeance on us for something.

Once returning home from school after noon, I did not find my sister at home. My search in every corner of the house and garden proving absolutely fruitless, I ran to my friend Maro's hut, but it was closed and there was nobody in. Completely out of breath, I ran to my aunt, whose three-room small house was at the beginning of a garden adjoining ours but separated from the latter. I found my sister there: she was extremely pale, with traces of tears dry on her face. While I was looking at her bloodstained clothes in horror, my aunt said the following in a tone of infinite grief, "That merciless hoyden, Iskouhi (she meant our housekeeper), has beaten the poor child with sharp scissors. The Lord has saved her: the scissors could have hurt my unfortunate orphan's eyes and blind her. Alas, I wish I were blind not to see these days and not to meet that crazy pitiless creature... ." Then addressing me, she added, "Sergei, my darling, my kid, don't worry, the Lord has saved your dear Araksi and the wound isn't very deep. I burnt it with oil and dressed it with a clean rag. See my child, don't be afraid, she'll be all right in a few days." With those words, she raised my sister's upper clothing to show me the wound on the hip of her left leg: it was still bleeding.

The disaster that had befallen my sister almost drove me crazy: I ran to our house without even a second of thinking and saw the malefactor sitting alone in the tonir

room. I attacked her, undid the braid on her head and began dragging her on the ground, gripping her hair tightly in both my hands with incredible courage and bravery.

Undoubtedly, both by her strength and weight Iskouhi was three-fourfold stronger than me, but I had chosen her most vulnerable and sensitive part, i.e. hair, which made that proud and unbending woman cry for help. Hearing her shouts and cries for help, my brother and her son ran in, in great panic: with his heavy hands the former struck several heavy blows on my fists, being hardly able to free that worthless woman subjected to my lynch law from my hands. While Yeghishe was inquiring his malicious mother about what had happened, my brother dragged me out to the yard holding me in my right hand. Shouting at me - something I was completely unaccustomed to- he said, "You, blockhead! What madness and wild behavior! How did you have the face to do such a thing? She is older than you, isn't she? Doesn't she always worry and trouble for you? She constantly toils for all of us, are you to respect and honor an elderly person in this way?" To that I said, "No, no, I don't want her to work for us, cook and wash for us. We had better be hungry and naked rather than allow her to make my poor sister suffer, beat her continually making her body black with her pinches. I won't tolerate her to plunge scissors into her thin and emaciated body, covering that helpless orphan with blood.

"Neither you nor Father takes any interest in us: you seem to have absolutely forgotten about our existence since the very day this snake, this deceitful, hypocritical woman and her worthless boy entered our house."

I was stifled by my utter excitement and unrestrained weeping so that later I did not recall what else I had told Father and my brother for the careless attitude towards both of us. The only thing I know is that my lips erupted all our discontent and hatred accumulated for a whole year.

I noticed my words cast a cloud of sadness over my brother's ever cheerful face; I even got the impression that if he were not embarrassed by his age and position, he would follow my unfortunate sister and me, weeping for our dear mother's loss and our present inconsolable state. For several times he bit his lower lip with his upper teeth to restrain his cry and, smoothing my dishevelled hair with his hands, he murmured in an excited voice, "Sergei, darling, I am going to talk to Father about it." When he left me, I also heard him saying, "Really, we have been blind so far."

LIFE IN THE HOUSE AND GARDEN

Having finished the fifth class of the preparatory school in our quarter early in the summer of 1907, I thought I had already grown into a small individual. My sister's and my hatred for our housekeeper Iskouhi had not abated at all; our relations had not improved either. Neither Araksi nor me could stand that woman and we both got terrified at the idea that that spiteful, malicious woman could or had the right to occupy our dear mother's place.

Mother's faded existence was but a vague dream to my sister and the only thing she knew was what had been told her, that her mother had been a kind angel who had gone

to heaven... As for me, I recalled her only dimly: being a small child before her death, I was unable to appreciate all her motherly love and affection. Despite that, however, I was convinced that she had been dear to and beloved by my sister and me, and her heart had constantly palpitated only for our tranquility, happiness, our joyful shouts and laughter, in a word, for all our feelings.

In order to console my beloved sister and fill her little heart with hope and tenderness, I kept telling her the following, "My dear sister, the heavenly angel always persecutes the devil, doesn't he? Be sure one day our dear mother will return to us like that angel, with the fiery sword in her hand. She will drive away this infernal demon from our house to her former dwelling, i.e. hell."

I myself did not believe those words recently invented by my dear Maro and handed down to me like a legacy, but I noticed that they provided at least temporary comfort to my poor sister, for whom I was everything, both a mother and father, a brother and friend.

By the time I finished the fifth class of the preparatory school, my sister had completed the first class of the same institution. According to Father, our age difference was forty-two months, but we resembled twins having striking similarities in our features, build, inclinations, in short, in our character in general.

At home we were almost always together: if I went to play, Araksi immediately began looking for me; if I commenced doing my lessons, she was sure to do the same. If I went to Maro's or my aunt's, she would rush after me and, finally, if I was in poor spirits or happy, she could not be in another mood. I did not think real twins were different from us.

As I have already mentioned, our garden was quite large, a great part of it being covered with grape vines. In our region grapes began to ripen in the middle of summer and we had to employ different ingenious contrivances to protect the ripe or semi-ripe grapes from dogs, foxes, hares and other harmful animals as well as crows, starlings, sparrows, etc. In order to panic and drive them away, we used terrible-looking human-shaped scarecrows, wearing human clothes and sitting on top of long poles, cameleer's rusty bells hanging from the trees and deafening with their peal, boards roped to the branches and hit by wooden hammers, etc. Indeed, a few reports of a simple hunting gun would be far more helpful in achieving that goal, but the Turkish Government had issued quite strict orders for those who would try such tricks.

In the garden we had a board ottoman called Tarma. Being four to five meters high, Tarma, which was a kind of heritage for us, served as a sort of vantage-point whence one could watch the whole garden observing everything easily.

At summer nights Father would order that Yeghishe and me, sometimes one of my brothers as well sleep on that high, aerial ottoman, whose boards were nailed onto the logs fixed among the trees posing no danger at all.

The magic, fascinating scene of those bewitching summer nights that enchanted you with a kind of natural appeal will remain ever vivid in my memory. The beautiful shadows cast by the poplars and ash-tees on the edge of the garden as well as the mulberry

trees towering amidst them created various entrancing views beneath the cloudless summer sky, shining with light turquoise. The full moon or crescent rained silver glitter over those captivating night scenes that were the gift of nature, those ravishing views being often intertwined with and accompanied by the fascinating breeze and mild rustle of the leaves. I was so delighted with the alluring night sights of our superb Aygestan that I was often plunged into oblivion, forgetting everything connected with my everyday life and its events.

My board Tarma provided me with tranquil sleep at those entrancing nights and I woke up only in the morning running to our house, where I once again read my lessons with clear mind. The inspector of our school once told me, "Sergei, if you learn the lessons of the sixth class and do well in your exam at the opening of the school, I will try to make an exception and move you to a higher class, procuring a certificate of the completion of the preparatory school's sixth class for you. Now roll up your sleeves and work very, very hard."

That promise induced great enthusiasm about me: having lost a whole year because of my illness, I had always regretted that and was eager to restore that loss, so that the inspector's promise was a golden opportunity for me.

I studied for five to six hours a day and did my utmost to realize my fervent wish, i.e. to be moved to a higher class. To receive the certificate of the sixth class in two to three months seemed the summit of happiness to me.

MY DREAM AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

As it often happens in life, ambitions frequently come into collision with obstacles: despite all my resoluteness, an insignificant misfortune made all my plans fall flat and I suffered a fiasco for the first time in my life.

The summer vacation was about to expire. Once, unlike all the other nights, I had a very troubled sleep. Having seen a dream, I jumped up from my ottoman and ran to our house under the influence of that dream. I started knocking violently on the door opening into the garden and generally fastened from inside with a stone. The door opened later than usual, the person opening it being Father.

"You, an uncouth worthless boy! Isn't it enough that you don't leave us alone in the daytime? You keep troubling us even after midnight! What on earth do you want at this hour? Go back to your place and lie in your bed... ."

Hardly had Father finished his rude, infuriated speech - something quite unusual for me - when he almost pushed me into the garden, slamming the door right in my face.

So far never had Father insulted me in such a way; I was so shocked that I could not pull myself together. I was still but too small, obstinate and hot-tempered, unable to tolerate and endure such an abuse by Father. I suddenly hit the roof and again started knocking on the door with stones, with a firm determination to continue it endlessly until the door was broken open. This time Father opened the door quite late and, having flown into an uncontrollable rage, slapped me for several times. I burst into loud weeping, which woke up my sister: in her turn, she ran up to me and burst out sobbing.

Our noisy, loud cry roared like a thunder in the silence of the night, reaching farther and farther. Soon the whole family gathered around Araksi and me, but I still wonder whence and how my aunt and my guardian angel Maro rushed to us in the dead of night. Except for that wicked Iskouhi, who was impudently scolding us, all those present defended my sister and me.

My aunt began reproaching Father, addressing him words of rebuke and blame, "Brother, dear, aren't you ashamed of your position to show such an attitude, what will people say? Aren't you afraid that the rumour will spread that a certain priest, driven crazy under the influence of a demonic woman, is beating his sweet, motherless orphans? Even if these creatures, your own children, have become alien to you, how are you going to stand God's and people's judgement?"

With those reprimanding words, my aunt told Maro without a second thought, "Maro, dear, please, hug my unfortunate orphan Araksi and let's go to our place." Then she addressed me, "Sergei, my kid, let's go to our home. Your aunt is still alive; we'll somehow get our piece of bread and won't starve."

Despite Father's and my elder brother's opposition, my enraged aunt, who had plucked up courage, almost seized us from our kinsfolk together with Maro and took us to her house on the other end of the garden.

Early in the next morning my elder brother Karapet came to my aunt's and had a long tête-à-tête with her.

Having already woken up, I was sitting in my bed, but Araksi was still having her sweet sleep: evidently, the midnight nightmare had exhausted her lean body. I was on my guard trying to overhear at least anything from their whisper, but in vain. I even thought of creeping towards the cellar door, behind which they were talking in such a way that it was utterly impossible to make out anything, with bare feet, on tiptoe, but I somehow refrained from doing it. It seemed to humiliate my self-esteem, particularly if they suddenly caught sight of me: that is why, I made a great effort to keep from doing it. Their whisper did not last long or, perhaps, it so seemed to me.

When they finished, my aunt approached me, kissed me warmly for several times and said, as if against her will and desire, "My dear Sergei, my darling, please, you are to go to your house with your sister: your father is waiting for you."

She wanted to say something else, but her extremely great excitement stifled her voice and I noticed a flood of tears flowing from her eyes. She made an attempt to conceal that she was in the grip of deep emotion, but in vain. Her kind face made it but apparent that a violent storm of feelings was raging inside her noble heart.

"Auntie, I won't go! No, no, I don't want to go to our place. I saw a terrible dream last night. I saw my dear mother, who told me, 'Sergei, my beloved kid, that shameless woman has planned to bring disaster upon first your unfortunate orphan sister and then you. Be careful, very, very careful. Don't let that devil incarnate to realize her demonic plan, take your sister and go away, run away from that ruthless witch. The very devils have sent her to ruin my family... .

‘She is the same hag, who made Karapet’s wife Haykanoush unhappy. It was on her instruction that one of her mean accomplices slowly envenomed your brother’s young wife, shining like a newly-blossomed rose, with magic herbs, robbing her of her health like a most merciless bandit. Unfortunately, they succeeded in extinguishing the bright sun of her happy life. That harridan wants to take possession of your brother Karapet and use him for the satisfaction of her lusty, disgusting passions. She has not forgotten either of you, my beloved orphans, in her demonic plan... . I again beg you, take your sister and leave that house, run away till my graceful Lord comes to your rescue... .’ ”

Having become all ears, my aunt and brother were staring at me in astonishment, pale and unable to utter a single word. I stopped telling them my dream, but they were eager to hear it up to the end and asked impatiently, “Have you finished, Sergei, or do you have anything else to say?”

“Yes, auntie, even now I recall my dear mother and the discoveries she made last night: yes, her words are still ringing in my ears. When I jumped out of bed and ran to tell Father about it, he didn’t even allow me to say a single word and slapped me in the face for several times without any reason. I couldn’t believe my eyes, I couldn’t convince myself that it was my own father who slapped me, he, who is our only protector. But his voice and shouts finally made me realize everything and, to my utmost regret, I got convinced that it was really my own father who slapped me... . Maybe, he was under the spell of that devil incarnate, that wicked woman, who has come to ruin our family.

“Auntie, now I’m fully sure of the trustworthiness of my dear, beloved mother’s dream, and I won’t return home; nor will I let Araksi go. She is sure to share our dear sister-in-law’s ill luck. Who knows, maybe that demon has already begun working and we aren’t aware of anything... .”

Drawing me closer to him and squatting down opposite me, on the edge of a wooden tripod, my brother said, “Sergei, you’re not grown up yet, but I know you are a sensible boy. How can you swear that you’ve really told us the truth and have told your last night’s dream just as you really saw it?... yes, please, tell us the truth. First swear as you usually like to do and then tell us everything.”

“Brother, I was a small child when mommy died; from that time onwards I always tried to recall her face, but in vain. Finally, last night, when I saw her in my dream, I recollected her thin, pale but kind face and ran towards her with a profound wish to hug her. I wanted her to cuddle me, clasp me to her bosom, kiss me, caress my head with her maternal hand, but she always stood aloof from me and I failed to reach her. However, her face was constantly directed at me and shone brightly, although a sorrowful smile seemed to be discernible on it.”

“But, my dear brother, my beloved Sergei, you aren’t answering my question. Please, swear that whatever you have just told us is really your dream and you haven’t coined it.”

“I swear by my dear mommy’s sacred memory that all I’ve told you is my last night’s dream and there are still other things which I cannot recall.”

I noticed that my aunt and brother were lost in grave thoughts; for a long time they stared at each other without uttering a single word. Finally, my aunt told Karapet to

accompany her to the garden where they talked for several minutes. Then my brother left us, without urging me to return home, while my aunt, who seemed to be bearing the heavy burden of grave sorrows, came up to me and said, "My meek and innocent boy, you can stay here with your sister till we see what comes of all this. Now I'll make tea with bread and cheese for you."

AFTER THE PUNISHMENT

Throughout two weeks I persistently refused to return home. As my dear friend Maro told me, during the first two days Father, who had repented of having punished me unjustly, made every possible effort - through Maro's and our sister-in-law's mediation - to persuade my sister and me to come back home. On the third day, he himself came, approached first me and then Araksi, kissed us warmly for many times and addressed me in the following way, "My dear Sergei, you are a very stubborn boy and so far I have failed to understand you properly. Maybe you are right, my son: perhaps, I have been strict and unfair to you, but I am an ordinary human being, am I not? I may sometimes be tired and angry, could you not have told me your dream the next morning without causing all that stir?"

"Father, I don't think I'm to blame for anything! The dream I had seen was so impressive and my dear mother's command so decisive and drastic that I thought of telling it to my father as soon as possible. It didn't even occur to me my loving father would give me an unfair beating, without even trying to ask me anything and find out the reason for my coming home at midnight.

"After all this, I'm convinced that the person who is actually to blame for everything is that worthless Iskouhi: she is the only reason for all the disasters that have befallen us. She doesn't have any right to subject us to her will, beat my motherless sister and prick all over her body with scissors. Nor has she any right to address bad words to any of us. I wish I were strong enough to teach her a good lesson of beating. I feel such a great pity that that woman has put an end to the welfare, peace and happiness in our house. But for me, she would have already sent my poor sister to my unfortunate, untimely dead mother."

I could not continue my blames anymore: I was suffocated by the lump that the flood of tears and my deep sorrow had caused in my throat. I also wanted to tell him about my poor sister-in-law, who had fallen victim to that demon Iskouhi's malign remedies, but it proved beyond my strength.

All my father's attempts to persuade and make me return home were futile: indeed, he was far stronger than me and was able to compel me to obey him by force, but he never resorted to it. Apparently, he was sure that everything I had told them was true and I was right. Seeing that he was not able to persuade me, he turned to my sister, held her in the hand and told her to go back home in such a strict tone that she did not dare to contradict. While leaving, Araksi turned back to me and shouted weeping, "Brother, if you don't come back home, I won't stay there. I can't stay there alone, I'm afraid of her, she will again beat me."

Really, my sister was very afraid of that demonic woman, thinking that it would be utterly impossible for her to live in that house without me. Her fear was quite understandable, since in my absence Iskouhi did not miss any opportunity to offend and beat her. I myself did not know why my presence kept that woman away from doing anything wicked: undoubtedly, the trouble she had fallen in lately, had had its serious result; I supposed she would not dare to create another scandal, particularly out of the fear of attracting Father's, my brother's and the neighbors' attention.

I suffered greatly from Father's slaps, considering his punishment rather unfair. Although I was still a child and had hardly entered upon the first stage of youth, my character had already grown kind of mature, and no infantile features could be traced about me. My sensitivity compelled me to regard myself abandoned and unfortunate; as if it was only then that I fully realized Mother's absence and all the tragic consequences of her death. Then I considered myself as a sort of orphan. "I don't have a mother, do I?" I asked in great despair. "Yes, I have a father, but he fails to understand me, show empathy with me, fill the terrible precipice of Mother's absence at least partially and, finally, imbue me with his paternal warmth and feelings: therefore, there can be no doubts that I am a total orphan."

Those of my friends who had parents and, especially a mother seemed exceptionally lucky to me and I envied them their happiness. In those days, when I was my aunt's uninvited guest, I would often say to her, "Auntie, dear, what sins had Araksi and I committed that God deprived us of our beloved mommy so early? We were still so small and needed her care and love so very much, didn't we...?"

"Sergei, my sweet boy, don't complain, so goes the world; you should be happy that you have a father. Have you ever thought about those thousands of children who are total orphans and don't even have relatives, a tonir-room, a bed, nor even any rags to cover the nakedness of their bodies."

There existed great empathy between my dear aunt and me: she willingly put herself in my shoes and always comforted me with the sorrow raging in my insulted heart.

My desperation had grown to such a frightening extent that I did not even think about the exams I was to take in a month, and the certificate of the completion of the sixth grade. Since the moment I left home in an annoyed and offended state, finding a shelter under my aunt's aegis, I had not ever thought of the impending exams, nor had I read a single line in the subjects I was to study. I thought that my refusal to study was a silent but powerful alarm for Father, who had not failed to notice that, being greatly worried for me. A week later Maro told me the following, "My dear Sergei, you can't even imagine what your father has promised me. You won't believe if I tell you that he has sworn by your mother's grave to dismiss Iskouhi by all means if you return home and prepare for your exams."

Regarding Maro's words as something incredible rather than indefinite, I asked, "What do you mean? Do you want to say that he is going to drive her away from our house forever?"

“Indeed, my dear, he is your father and he will never give preference to her at the cost of your leaving your own house; you can be quite sure of it. Who on earth is that woman that your father is to defend her more than you? Your father loves you very, very much, and what happened was but an unfortunate misunderstanding. You should also know that he repents his conduct greatly, but you are to blame, too for your obstinacy; he is your father, isn’t he? You shouldn’t be hurt, I’m sorry, I want to say that even if you are right, you shouldn’t be offended. It is high time you came back home.”

“No, my dear Maro,” I answered, “you know that I love you as I love Araksi, you’re my sweet elder sister. So far I’ve always obeyed you and fulfilled everything you’ve told me, but this time I’m sorry, I can’t. Tomorrow I’m going to my cousin Mihran, who works in one of the most famous ateliers in our city and is greatly loved and respected by his master. I’m going to ask him to intercede with the latter for me and find some suitable work I can do. I’m sure Mihran won’t refuse me and will manage this.”

While Maro was looking for proper words to be able to persuade me, I added with determination, “Maro, my dear sister, I put my poor sister Araksi in your charge; she is my only concern binding me hand and foot, or else I would have gone to work from the very first day. She is my only worry; I know she’ll become as thin as a rake in that devil’s hands, will wither, fade away and die without anybody to protect her.”

MY ATTEMPT TO LEARN A CRAFT

Maro was right: my extreme egoism or, better to say, the sensitivity born in the course of years as a result of my being deprived of Mother and maternal tenderness, was rapidly growing more and more, inciting me to jump to conclusions and reach extremities.

I believed that if I succeeded in finding work and receiving at least some little amount of payment, I would win independence of everybody and even Father. Under the circumstances of the past several days the only thing I thought of was to earn my living as soon as possible, also trying to sustain my small sister, who seemed to be my twin.

Parallel with entering upon youth I had acquired a sort of unusual self-confidence, being of the opinion that a person having a fervent desire to live would somehow manage to make both ends meet and earn his piece of bread.

My aunt’s (Mother’s sister’s) husband died about a year earlier, that occasioning great grief to his wife, who was in constant mourning all the time. She always wore a black dress, a black kerchief and stockings. Throughout the year she had left her house only for several times, and that being compelled to visit her brother and sister (us) as well as some other relatives.

When I told my aunt that I wanted to find work with her son’s help, she cried out, completely taken aback, “My dear son, you’re still too young to work, to learn a craft! Last time I came to your place Maro told me that you were the excellent pupil in the class; isn’t it a pity that such a clever boy as you won’t complete his studies?”

“Auntie, how long am I going to study?” I murmured in great confusion. “I’m not going to be a professor. Whatever I’ve learned up till now is enough for me. Who doesn’t know that Father isn’t very successful in his work. I’ll gradually learn a craft to be of certain use to Father and my sister.”

“You aren’t right and I don’t want to believe you. It is impossible for a child to become the most favorite pupil of the entire school and the excellent pupil in the class, if he is completely reluctant to study. Certainly, I have to find out what has really happened.”

Then, after a few moments’ silence, during which she was plunged in thoughts, she added, “Yes, of course, I can’t be mistaken: that worthless Iskouhi is continually ruining my poor, unfortunate sister’s family, bringing disaster upon everybody. Now I know what I’m supposed to do; I’ll tell your uncle (mother’s brother) Ohanes Agha everything and send him to your father. He enjoys great authority upon him and will surely manage to settle everything. As for you, my good boy, you don’t need to learn any craft, it’s still early for you. You should continue your studies and become a well-educated person to revive your dead mother’s memory.

“If necessary, I’ll talk to your father personally... .” She continued mumbling something right under her nose, but I could not make out anything.

That day my aunt did not let me leave her house and kept me there for the night. I did not feel well: I was too weak, all my body was aching and I had a splitting headache. She prepared a soft bed for me; at night, when auntie bent to kiss me “good night” on my forehead and cheeks, she suddenly said, “Why, but my boy, you’re running a temperature. Alas, woe is me, why should I see my poor orphan in this state! How much time has passed since you left home? Doubtless, you caught a cold at your aunt’s.” Then, turning to her only son Mihran, she said, “Mihran, darling, rush to the drugstore unless it is very late and tell chemist Petros that we need a sudorific, buy it and come back as soon as you can. Sergei has got a cold and we have to make him perspire.”

Leaning over my bed, auntie again kissed me for several times and said, “My dear, suffering boy, if you were lucky enough, your mommy wouldn’t have left you so early! Almighty God, please, forgive me, I can’t make out anything in your doings, but I was at least ten years younger than my sister, why didn’t you send her death to me? Alas, I wish I had died before seeing my sister’s and husband’s deaths.”

“Auntie! What are you talking about? If you were dead, what would your only begotten son Mihran do? Thank God, I have a father, a sister and brothers, but he is all alone in the whole world, does he have anybody but you? No, auntie! Mihran deserves a mother like you and would be unlucky without you.”

For a minute my aunt seemed to have forgotten her son, her only hope, support and the apple of her eye; my reproof brought her back to her senses. I knew that she had loved her husband very, very much, his loss causing an irredeemable grief to his elderly wife. She did not answer me, but I heard her silent, bitter weeping: she had turned away her face so that I could not see her tears.

A little while later, she left my side, saying that she was going to prepare tea before Mihran’s return: together with the pill, it would help me perspire soon.

Really, I was running a very high temperature, but sometimes in such a condition one improves his abilities to meditate and ponder on life in general. I seemed to have appeared in the stormy ocean of various thoughts; I laid the blame for what had happened on God, nature, myself, then my sister and family. “Oh, Lord! It is common knowledge that You are merciful and graceful, then why did you deprive us of our dear mommy so soon? We, my sister and me, are so very small yet and need maternal tenderness and affection, do we not? We need the warmth of motherly love and, like all other children, want to sit on our mum’s lap, cling onto her bosom, hear the beating of her dear heart, caress tenderly and kiss endlessly her nose, mouth, face, ears, forehead, head, hair and neck, sometimes cling to her skirt asking her to take us to the aunt’s, uncle’s and others’ places with her... .

“Maybe, my sister Araksi or I am to blame for what has happened, perhaps, we were not good children for our mommy and caused her a lot of worry and suffering so that she withered out of concern and finally consigned herself to death. But I cannot recall our childhood; the only thing I can say is that both of us never gave our mum any reasons to grieve and suffer.

“So what? Does this come to mean that our father and brothers are to blame for the fact that she got tired of life so soon and yielded up her spirit to God, rendering us orphans. Probably, she could not bear the heavy burden of our poor financial conditions and her strength faded away, making her easy prey to premature death.

“Unfortunately, the bitter reality is that the cruel death seized our beloved, beautiful mother from us: she is no longer with us and we are totally deprived of her irreplaceable caress and affection.”

One comes across many kinds of adversities in life, struggles against them and sometimes even overcomes them. However, the most terrible and irredeemable loss that one can suffer, especially in infancy, is the loss of his dear mother... .The child having lost his beloved mother is unlucky, extremely unfortunate... .

No human being can ever replace that precious treasure, your dear, affectionate, adorable mother... .

MY COMPASSIONATE AUNT

I did not let my aunt sleep a wink during the whole night, my temperature gradually growing higher and higher till sunrise. I had fits of delirium, calling my sister and dead mommy for help. Horrified at all that, my poor aunt woke up her son Mihran and they both did their best so that I would somehow perspire and my temperature would drop. They put a hot-water bottle and warm bricks among my feet, rubbed me with vinegar, gave me some pills; in a word, they did everything that occurred to them. At the crack of dawn they finally managed to make my temperature drop and I fell asleep, weak and exhausted. Waking up very late in the morning, I saw my kind aunt sitting beside my bed. She greeted me by kissing me warmly on the forehead for several times. I felt happy in the depth of my heart; although I had been deprived of my dear mother, at least I had two noble, affectionate aunts (Father’s and Mother’s sisters), who took

compassion upon me and did everything in their power to help and support me whenever necessary. My aunt said, "It'll soon be midday, promise me that you won't leave your bed till I come back. I'll bring a cup of warm tea for you; drink it quickly while it's warm. You were running a temperature last night and shouldn't eat anything for the time being. I want to give you some medicine against diarrhea; it's necessary for you. Alas, I wish I were blind not to see you in this condition; why on earth should you run away from your home at your age?"

Without waiting for my answer, she once again urged me to remain in bed, then took her black kerchief and left the house. However, she came back from the yard, poked her head round the door and said, "Sergei, don't forget what I told you; if you get out of bed, you'll again catch a cold and run a temperature. I've put a chamber-pot beside your bed in case you need to go to the bathroom."

I did not ask where she was going, nor did she tell me anything. Since her husband's death she had hardly left the house for several times, and even then being compelled to do so. This time, however, she left home on her own initiative and I supposed she was going to her brother, i.e. my uncle, to talk about my being a fugitive.

It was only five hours past midday when my aunt returned: she was surprisingly happy, looking proud and triumphant. Hurrying towards me and kissing me on the forehead again, she checked my health condition by holding my right hand in her palms, rubbing and caressing them for a few times and taking my pulse. After all that, she cried out, "Thank God, you don't have a temperature at all and now I'll prepare buttermilk soup for you over the hearth. You'll eat it with a great appetite and then we'll have a short talk. You may take some of Mihran's books and read them if you want. My poor Mihran is a very pitiful boy and greatly worried for you last night. We both were afraid that you were in a very grave condition, for you were constantly raving."

She got up and began making the buttermilk soup she had promised, but I noticed that she had something to tell me and refrained from doing it. Finally, unable to bear it any longer, she approached me and said to me the following in a tone of ultimate secrecy, "Sergei, my darling, today you're still weak and shouldn't get out of your bed, but I hope you'll be better by tomorrow and we'll go together to your place around afternoon. Your father is looking forward to meeting you: you shouldn't worry for that worthless Iskouhi is no longer there. Your father has driven her away from the house for your sister's and your sake."

The next day in the afternoon, I went to our place with my aunt: my family members, Maro and Father's sister gave us a most cordial welcome, greeting me with hugs and kisses. On seeing me Araksi rushed towards me and began cuddling and kissing me endlessly. In his turn, Father embraced me, too: as if they were meeting a dear person who had been aloof from them for years and whom they had been terribly missing. Eventually, Father, whose face had brightened up in a smile of delight and happiness, embraced me once again and said, "My dear, precious kid, I have always loved you and from this time onwards I will do my utmost so that you will not suffer so much from your honorable mommy's loss. Please, my son, forget the painful misunderstanding that you had with your dear father..."

PART TWO

THE LAST STAGE OF MY YOUTH AND THE FIRST PERIOD OF MY ADOLESCENCE

HAMBARDZUM YERAMIAN AND HIS SCHOOL

Since I had not prepared properly for the graduation exams of the sixth grade, I was not sure I would be able to pass them: that is why, I was reluctant to take them. Being attracted by the great fame of “Yeramian” Secondary School, I asked Father to take me there and he immediately gave his consent, taking me right to Hambardzum Yeramian¹ himself.

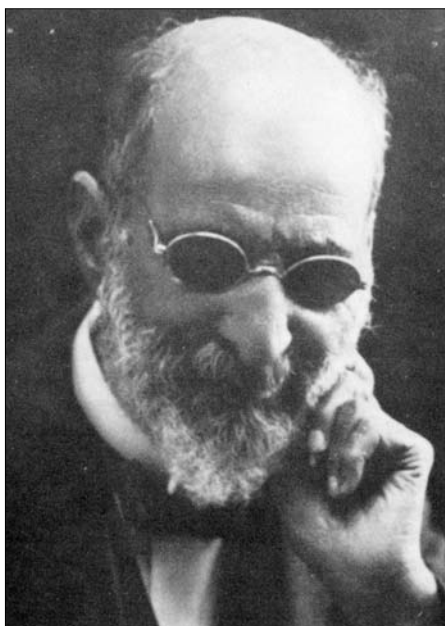
The latter, who had been told about Father’s poor financial conditions, was happy learning that I had left Hankusner School as the excellent pupil of the fifth grade, and

said, “It is all right, Father Harutiun! Your son will be admitted at a discount of fifty per cent monthly. I agree to fulfill his request to include him in the seventh grade of our school tentatively, for two months. I hope he will not fall behind his classmates.”

I was so happy as if I had suddenly become the master of all the treasures in the world; I cried out in my utter happiness, “I am so very obliged, dear inspector.” With those words, I ran to kiss his hand while he caressed my head with great affection saying, “I will be very happy if you succeed in becoming an excellent pupil in our school as well.”

“I will do my utmost to realize your kind desire.”

Yeramian Secondary School was established in the ‘90s on the main avenue called Seghga,



Hambardzum Yeramian

¹ **Hambardzum Yeramian** was born in Van, Western Armenia (nowadays Turkey) in 1857. Smallpox blinded him at the age of eleven, but that did not hinder him from teaching in two schools in his birthplace beginning with 1874. In 1882 he founded Yeramian School, which functioned till 1915. In 1914 Hambardzum left for Egypt to seek financial support for the school, but later he proved unable to return to his homeland. He held the post of inspector in the schools of Sisvan, Port-Said, and Poghosian, Alexandria, Egypt. Yeramian wrote many articles. He died in 1929, a year which also marked the publication of his two-volume large work entitled “Monument to Van-Vasputakan” (Alexandria).

extending in the large quarter of Aygestan, Van City, not far from the Central Market named *Khach-Poghots (Cross Street)*.

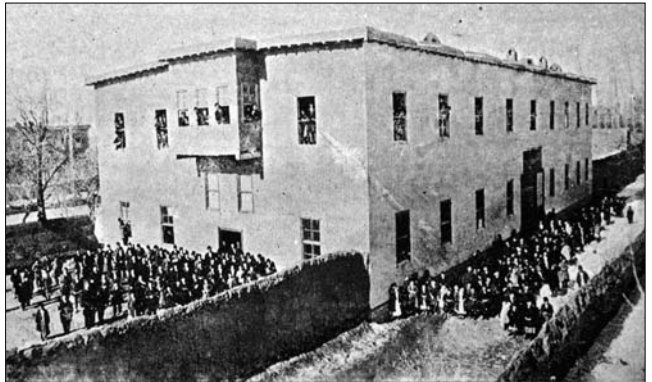
Three years had elapsed since I began attending that school and, fortunately, during that period I had fully succeeded in fulfilling the promise I had given to the school inspector on the first day I went there, i.e. to be the first excellent pupil in my class.

The founder of the school was Hambardzum Yeramian, who was said to have become blind at the age of eight as a result of smallpox. Despite that fact, however, he was a person of great intelligence, who taught national and general history in the higher classes of his school remembering all the dates with astonishing exactness. Strangely enough, he had a perfect command of the French language.

My bright recollections tell me when I was in the last two classes of the school, he would frequently call me either after classes or during the afternoon break so that I would read parts from the French history textbook for him. Walking about the northern section of the school, from one end of the large yard to the other, almost at a running speed, he was at the same time able to hear what I was reading. Whenever I made any mistakes, he immediately stopped and said, "No, that will not do, repeat."

Thus, it remained a complete mystery to me how that blind person had managed to learn all those things so perfectly. Surprising as it may sound, he knew all the pupils in the classes where he taught by names and surnames, being also aware of the abilities and general character of each of them. He knew even more about the pupils' lessons, after-school occupations, private affairs and families than their classmates.

Despite the fact that Yeramian's lessons abounded in historical facts and dates, they were so interesting that the pupils became all ears while listening to him. If any of them happened to take no interest in his lessons, they did not dare to utter a single sound, since the teacher immediately guessed who the noise-makers were and easily made them keep silent.



The building of Yeramian School

Yeramian was in the habit of asking after each lesson, "If there are any moot points for any of you, please ask me."

A true patriot by nature, Yeramian conducted his history lessons with the utmost enthusiasm and zeal. Without confining himself to the mere account of the events and facts, he also analyzed them making certain conclusions. The most important fact that did not leave his stormy soul in peace was that the Armenians were not united and never lived in solidarity.

He would often say, "If our people, our nation had always been united and not prone to splits, at present we would be one of the most advanced and great nations in the world. Indeed, our geographical, political and even religious conditions have always

been but too unfavorable, and we have frequently become prey to the antagonism, avarice and egoism of the grand powers. In spite of this, however, we would be far luckier and stronger if we did not give way to extreme egocentrism and were not incurably infected by the disease of destructive discord. These main but pernicious shortcomings have turned the Armenians into a squeezed orange, the burden of the responsibility for the current inconsolable political situation falling upon the people entrusted with the governance of our nation.

“Our national egocentrism and desolate state have blinded our people so that we have never been able to penetrate fully into the essence of the events of world significance and make a shrewd and objective judgement of them.

“Unfortunately, the political organizations forging our people’s destiny are permeated with unreal romantic egoism, unable to make a true estimate of the political situation and developments in order to draw a conclusion in the interests of their nation; nor are they able to find out any way of salvation.

“I wish we were able to appreciate our people’s utmost interests properly so that they would not be sacrificed for the sake of certain groups’ benefits.”

The witness of the unsuccessful and unfortunate outcome of the revolutionary movement of ‘95 to ‘96, Hambardzum Yeramian, who was a true prophet, already had a prediction that a most bloody future awaited the Turkish Armenians, his entire soul shuddering at the thought of the impending calamity.

Being able to estimate the reality perfectly, he greatly regretted that the irredeemable mistakes, resulting from the incompatible, adverse, egocentric and imprudent conduct and activity of our political parties, would lead the Turkish Armenians, a million and a half souls, to the abattoir created by the Turkish criminals, where the helpless people would be pierced by the bayonets, axes and bullets of their cruel, ruthless executioners, thus being exterminated.

Before World War I and the beginning of the fatal self-defense, Yeramian, who was longing for the constant existence and welfare of his school, left for Egypt, hoping to receive the assistance of foreign rich people and the Armenian General Benevolent Union.

Yeramian should thank his lucky stars to have left the school he had been cherishing so far, with more than a thousand pupils receiving not only education but also moral and spiritual food there, his beloved teaching staff and the countless number of his dear compatriots in that way. He was spared those intolerable sufferings and grief, which would undoubtedly paralyze him, once he witnessed everything. Those were the black days of the horrifying nightmare, when his courageous compatriots who had defended themselves, their families and their homeland in a valiant struggle, were forced to abandon their centuries-old treasured motherland, their houses, trees, flowers, the soil and water resorting to a retreat-escape that was to be violently imposed on them... .

THE SCHOOLS, POLITICAL AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

The main quarters in Van had their churches and six-year preparatory schools attached to them. The Central National Secondary School and the one called Varzhapetanots, founded by the Armenian General Benevolent Union a few years before the war, were in a kind of rivalry with Yeramian School. In comparison with the latter, the former two were in better financial conditions, but Yeramian School enjoyed great popularity with the nation and retained its permanent position in the educational domain, unbending like an invincible fort against all the howling adverse winds. It succeeded in maintaining the high educational level it provided for its pupils, attracting the cream of the youth longing for knowledge.

Apart from the aforementioned, there also existed six-year schools established by the Protestant, Catholic and German missionaries, female schools and Women's Cultural and Social Societies founded through the individual or collective efforts of the progressive women in Van. The local press comprised the weekly papers *Ashkhatank*² (the Armenian equivalent for 'Labour') and *Van-Tosp*³ as well as those of the Students' Unions in Van, that were printed by hectographic press. In 1906 on the initiative of David Papazian, began the publication of the Turkish language newspaper *Sapah-ol-Khayr* by gelatin printing. The paper, whose editor was Papazian himself, was highly appreciated even by those Turkish military figures who were against the anti-Armenian state policy, so that they even collaborated with it.

Selfless revolutionary Yeghishe Gotakchian's⁴ wife Yeghisabet Gotakchian⁵ played an immense role in the education and progress of Van women: in cooperation with her two sisters she founded the famous female school of Aygestan. The three sisters made a vast, unforgettable contribution to Van women's rebirth and progress.

Throughout several centuries Zharangavorats School in Varag Monastery, renowned revolutionary Portugalian's⁶ Varzhapetanots, Yeramian and the Central Secondary Schools as well as numerous other institutions presented Van Armenians with a bright constellation of intelligent patriots, a huge phalanx of selfless devotees who made Vaspurakan Armenians' glorious rebirth a reality.

² "*Ashkhatank*" literary, political and economic weekly (afterwards issued every three days) was published in Barseghian's printing-office, with Ishkhan (Michaelian), Armenak Maksapetian and Hmayak Manukian working as its editors-in-chief in turn.

³ "*Van-Tosp*" literary, scientific and religious periodical (at first issued semi-annually, later changed into a weekly in 1912) was published in 1911 to 1914 first in Zhamkochian's, then Hovnanian's publishing-houses with H. Avagian and N. Hakobian as its editors-in-chief.

⁴ **Yeghishe Gondakchian**, born in 1852, worked as a teacher with Kuloghlian in Taron and Baghesh Districts, Bitlis Province, Western Armenia in the middle of the 1880s. Returning to Van, he was involved in revolutionary activity in the ranks of the Armenakan Party, whose leadership was vested in him after M. Avetissian's murder. He died of pneumonia in 1897.

⁵ **Yeghisabet Godakchian** (also Gondakchian), born about 1870, was famous national figure and politician Yeghishe Gondakchian's (from Van in origin, died in 1897) wife. She founded a private female school in Van through her sisters Marina and Annik's support. In 1930 Mrs. Yeghisabet and her sisters were still alive.

⁶ In 1879 **M. Portugalian** founded Van's Varzhapetanots School, whose status changed into that of Central National College in 1881 thanks to his efforts. It functioned till 1885, when it closed on Van's Pasha Hamid's order.

The harbinger of Vaspurakan's rebirth became Khrimian Hayrik⁷, an unsurpassed patriot, Aygestan Armenians' dear son born from their very bosom. From Varag Monastery, that impregnable fort towering on the summit of the mountain, which was the Armenians' sacred pilgrimage site adorned with all but natural beauty, the Father of all Armenians constantly heralded the reawakening of the liberation movement through the newspaper edited by himself.

Sultan Hamid, that tyrant longing to shed the Armenians' blood, incessantly incited the avaricious Turkish bashi-bazouks and, especially the Kurdish bandits and thieves to kill, rape and rob the hard-working, innocent Armenian population in the cities, villages and settlements. That impudent and debaucherous policy was conducted in the Armenian-populated areas beginning with the 1880s: one of thousands of such incidents occurred in Moosh, where the Kurdish gang leader Musa Bey kidnapped an Armenian girl named Gyoolizar.

The infernal provocation launched by the sultan faced Vaspurakan Armenians with the grave alternative of life and death: they were to choose between the stormy path of honorary death and the life of humble slaves, inevitably subject to gradual extermination.

The Armenians who had suffered the bloodthirsty, ruthless dominion of the Turks, the faithful descendants of Chingiz Khan and the Mongol barbarians, turned out unable to tolerate that anymore. They rose to break and crush the bonds of slavery in a heroic struggle.

⁷ **Khrimian Hayrik** (1820 to 1907 Vagharshapat), the alumnus of the schools of Lim and Ktuts Monasteries, Timar District, Van Province, was a writer, prominent public, national, cultural figure and statesman. In 1842 he took up residence in Constantinople. In 1847 Khrimian Hayrik travelled in Persia and Transcaucasia and visited Jerusalem. In 1848 to 1850 he taught at the school in Khasgyugh Quarter, Constantinople, Turkey. In 1851 he conducted investigation in Cilicia and was ordained as archimandrite in 1854. In 1855 Khrimian Hayrik started issuing the "Artzvi Vaspurakani" ("Vaspurakan's Eagle") periodical, its publication lasting till 1856, when he assumed the priory of Varag Monastery. In 1857 he founded the boarding-school of "Zharangavorats", attached to the aforementioned sanctuary, where he resumed the publication of the "Artzvi Vaspurakani" periodical in 1858 (this time the publication continued till 1864). In 1862 Khrimian Hayrik assumed the position of Taron's spiritual leader and prior of St. Karapet Monastery, establishing another school of "Zharangavorats" and the bi-weekly "Artzvi Taroni" ("Taron's Eagle") under G. Servandzians' direction. In 1868 he was ordained bishop in Echmiatzin, Eastern Armenia, and served as Patriarch in Constantinople in 1869 to 1873. In 1878 he headed the Armenian delegation in Berlin Congress and was elected Van's spiritual leader in 1879. In 1880 Khrimian Hayrik founded a college of farming in Van City, Van Province, Western Armenia (nowadays Turkey). In 1890 the Turkish Government exiled him to Jerusalem under the plea of sending him there on pilgrimage. In 1892 Khrimian Hayrik was elected Catholicos of All Armenians, after which, in 1895 he went to St. Petersburg to seek tsar Nikolai II's auspices for the implementation of reforms in Western Armenia. He struggled against the Tsarist Government's decision of the confiscation of the estates of the Armenian Church, calling upon the diocese authorities to oppose it.



Catholicos of All Armenians Mkrtych I (Khrimian)

The military feats and valiant deeds of their Armenian forefathers stirred the blood of Vaspurakan youth, who experienced a period of rebirth in the '70-'80s. Gradually military resistance was launched against the Turkish and Kurdish tyranny in the very heart of Vaspurakan, Aygestan, and in the mountainous, impregnable regions such as Shatakh, Pesandasht, Moks, Karjkan and even Timar occupying a plain area.

That resistance was presaged by *Sev Khach*⁸ underground organization, that had just begun its activity, followed by the political parties of the Armenakans⁹, Hnchakians¹⁰, Ramkavars¹¹ (Democrats) and Dashnaktsutyun¹².

In 1895 to 1896 Sultan Hamid, distinguished for his hatred for the Armenians in general, planned the massacres of the hard-working, prolific and financially well-off Armenian people, constantly occupied with creating and building. The avid mob of the Turkish bashi-bazouks and Kurdish gang leaders was “informally” given a secret order to slaughter and rob the wealthy “Armenian multitudes,” who were politically “dangerous”. A vast amount of Armenians were massacred in the ancient cradle of the Armenian nation, i.e. the Armenian provinces, that extended from one end of Anatolu to the other and were violently occupied by the Turkish barbarians, although being mostly populated by the Armenians. The victims of the pogrom represented the cream of the Armenian society, young, lively people imbued with bright hopes for future happiness, their fate being shared by those who had received their mental food in the Armenian temples of science.

However, in Vaspurakan and, particularly Aygestan the enemy had to pay a heavy price for the blood of such immortal heroes as Mkrtych Avetissian, Martik, Peto and eight hundred valorous young men. Their eight-day brief but heroic self-defense showed the government of Sultan Hamid the magnificent spirit of the righteous revolt and protest of the Armenian nation. Throughout the existence of the Turkish Armenians, their tragedy always consisted in their solitude and helplessness in the fair, noble struggle they fought against the enemy. Apart from that, there also existed another factor that was the most terrible and impertinent feature of all those matters: in 1915 to 1916 it was the anti-Armenian Germans who dictated to Talaat and Enver to realize the horrifying Armenian massacres supporting them with all possible means; in the same manner, Vaspurakan Armenians' slaughter of 1896 was insolently ordered and encouraged by such pro-Turkish and anti-Armenian representatives and agents of the “merciful”

8 The “**Sev Khach**” (the Armenian equivalent for “Black Cross”) secret national liberation organization was established in the 1880s with Khrimian Hayrik's efforts and active participation.

9 The national liberation organization of the **Armenakans** was founded in Van in 1885 through M. Portugalian and his adherents' efforts. Their press organ was the “Armenia” newspaper (Marseilles, France), whence the name of the organization derived.

10 The **Social-Democratic Hnchakian Party** was established in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1887. Its programme mainly comprised the liberation of Western Armenia from the Turkish yoke and the restoration of the Armenian state through the unification of the Armenian lands.

11 The **Ramkavar Azatakan (Liberal Democratic) Party** was founded in Constantinople, Turkey in 1921.

12 The **Hay Heghapokhakan Dashnaktsutyun** (Armenian Revolutionary Alliance) Party was established in Tiflis, Georgia in 1890. Its main objectives were the liberation of Western Armenia through armed struggle and the creation of a free, independent and united Armenia.

English Empire as that impudent William, who provided Hamid's thugs with his treacherous plan of crushing the courageous, selfless Armenian warriors' opposition and sieging them.

Unable to put up a resistance against the Turkish and Kurdish mobs, that were far stronger, and the regular army divisions that had joined the former with guns, Avetissian, Martik, Peto and their brave companions-in-arms, about eight hundred people in number, left their positions in desperation and, taking advantage of the night dark, decided to leave for Persia to find temporary refuge there. However, the furious enemy chased and reached them in the Bazi-Dazi and Garahisar Mountains as well as in the vicinity of St. Bartholomew Monastery, where all of them were ruthlessly slaughtered.

The monstrous atrocities launched by Sultan Hamid grew even more intensified and dreadful, their "indisputable and convincing" justification being the Armenian *giaurs* (a name the Turks used with reference to the Christians whom they regarded infidels) means infidel disobedience and resistance. The infuriated enemy rained their horrid brutalities over Aygestan's peaceful, innocent population who had absolutely no means of defense. The pogrom, plunder and devastation lasted for many days, with many a flourishing house being reduced to ruins and ashes. Deep and bitter mourning permeated everybody: people grieved over their lost young children, sisters, brothers and fiancées who would never see the realization of their most sacred wishes.

Long, long years were to elapse before Vaspurakan Armenians recovered from those fresh, bleeding wounds and rided their soil of the traces of the horrid depredation and burning... .

With revenge roaring in their hearts, Vaspurakan Armenians were still full of a desire to endure and survive; their wish to live had not faded away at all...

TWO SIGNIFICANT EVENTS IN 1908

The dreadful massacres of Vaspurakan Armenians in 1895 to 1896 inflicted a more severe blow to them: many a year was to pass before they were able to get over them and revive, for which they also needed huge potential, exceptional vitality and unbending will power. Van Armenians, who enjoyed great fame for their diligence and persistent toil, again found that determination and strong will power within themselves: amidst the widespread ashes and devastation, the shoots of new life began rapidly growing and became stronger, gradually acquiring more and more liveliness.

Parallel with creative work and construction activity, Vaspurakan youth dedicated themselves to the cultural revival of their homeland, great vivacity being established in cultural life. Different cultural centers and libraries opened, Pupils' and Students' Unions were founded, papers and leaflets were published by hectographic press, performances were staged one after another, lectures were delivered, public meetings, cultural and party gatherings were held. The general enthusiasm and widespread rebirth were accompanied by the active work and underground preparations of the Armenian revolutionary and political parties. Unfortunately, however, faithful to their agelong habit, they again implemented incompatible, adverse and even hostile policies, reluc-

tant to reach an agreement and even abusing each other without any repulsion. That struggle of controversies often reached extremities; I have to state with grief and bitterness that the antagonism between or among parties sometimes even penetrated into the very heart of the party converting into a true evil. The general atmosphere of split, adversity and egocentrism continually poisoned the party members, the eloquent proof of that being the betrayal of the former Dashnakist devoted warrior, who sacrificed the collective interests for the sake of his own, making both the party and the nation pay a heavy price for that.

Now let us explain everything properly. In the first month of 1908, the members of the Dashnaktsutyun Party, who were engaged in underground activity, had a certain dissension and rivalry over a girl. The defeated side, i.e. in that case Dhertsi Davo, was imbued with revenge, considering his love feelings despised and violated. He decided to rid himself of the poison gnawing at his heart by wreaking vengeance and told the Turkish Government the hiding-place of the weapons conveyed from abroad through long years' toil, at the cost of many sacrifices. Indeed, traitor Davo received the punishment he deserved: in March 1908, the lethal bullets shot from the two pistols of Tajat Terlemezian¹³, an eighteen-year-old unsurpassed hero from Van, knocked him down, killing him in a most notorious and shameful way, before the very eyes of the Turkish chief of police and his armed guards.

Unfortunately, however, the arms stored with but unimaginable difficulties for the sake of the salvation of thousands of people had already been removed from their hiding-places and confiscated by the state. On the day of Davo's murder, about one hundred and fifty Armenians returning to Aygestan from Kaghakamej were butchered with axes and stoned to death right on the road¹⁴.



Tajat Terlemezian

¹³ **Tajat Terlemezian**, born in 1890, was a graduate of the Central School and one of the adherents of the Dashnaktsutyun Party. On March 10, 1908, he killed traitor Davo with several bullets, shot right before the mounted policemen's very eyes, in front of chief of police Mehmet Bey's house. He managed to run away immediately afterwards, but the Turks took vengeance for their accomplice upon about 120 innocent Armenians returning from Van's market to Aygestan: they were killed with axes and cold steel. In the same year Tajat shared Aram's group's fate and was imprisoned, but he was released after the declaration of the Ottoman Constitution and went abroad. He stayed in America till the autumn of 1914 and returned to Caucasia as a volunteer, harnessing himself to party activity. During Van's second retreat, he went to Persia, Mesopotamia. After the armistice had been established, he returned to Armenia, but in 1920 he again moved to America, where he still lived in 1930.

¹⁴ On the day of traitor **Davo's** murder, the Turks took revenge for him on some innocent Armenians returning from Van's market to Aygestan. According to Sarhadian, those killed with axes and cold steel amounted to 150, but H. Ajemian mentions another figure, i.e. about 120. (See the Armenian original in "Vaspurakan", Venice, 1930, p. 281)

In July 1908, the Turkish authorities adopted the Ottoman Constitution and the Red Sultan Hamid was deposed. Being in greatest rejoicement, Vaspurakan Armenians, joined by their compatriots living in Turkish Armenia and the Armenian provinces, made speeches of happiness and joy, held meetings and gatherings shouting loud “Bravos” and “Long lives.”

The leaders of the newly-established Turkish Government issued slogans of equality, fraternity and justice for all the nationalities in that vast country, irrespective of their language and religion. They declared that they rejected the centuries-old policy of the Ottoman Empire consisting in anti-Armenian discrimination so that Vaspurakan Armenians cherished a forlorn hope and even conviction that they would no longer be subject to any robbery, pillage, kidnap, confiscation and murders on the part of the insolent Turkish bashi-bazouks, Kurdish thieves as well as official bodies and state institutions. Those hopes made them happy; they believed that at last they would be able to live in peace, dedicate themselves to tranquil construction activity and develop their culture by using their innate abilities.

An Act of Oblivion was proclaimed for all the political criminals: the huge doors of the dreadful Turkish prisons opened granting freedom to the Armenian revolutionaries who had been chained there for years. Those Armenians who dealt with the official bodies received delicate and even kind treatment. Seeing the eradication of the regime of tyranny, the discrimination and hostile attitude inevitably resulting from it, the happy Armenians both in Van and the regions hoped to be on nice terms with the Turks from that time onwards, becoming orderly, loyal citizens for their new Ottoman motherland.

Alas, what a great pity that all those hopes were merely beautiful and sweet dreams that were soon to vanish: the new authorities of the country, who were the true heirs to the anti-Armenian policy of Sultan Hamid, Talaat, Enver and similar officials, had received the entire legacy of the former tyranny with all its ideology.

ENTERING UPON LIFE

It was the spring of 1914 and I was about to leave Yeramian School in several months. In order to please and flatter Van Armenians, Van’s Turkish Governor Jevdet¹⁵, who was famous for his anti-Armenian views, promised our inspector Hambardzum Yeramian to send two of the school graduates (the first and second pupils) of that year to Constantinople to receive a higher education in the State University in the following year. That happened before the inspector’s leaving for Egypt and he told his assistant to speak to the Governor about me, proposing me as one who had been the excellent pupil of the school for many years. The assistant fulfilled that order, but Jevdet informed him regretfully - employing the typical Turkish sham - that our departure for Constantinople had been postponed because of the outbreak of the World War.

A month later we learned the true reason for that cancellation: the trouble was that some people had told the Governor that I was an unreliable, anti-governmental element, as a result of which my classmate Krkents Vahe lost that chance, too.

¹⁵ **Jevdet** succeeded Van vali (province head) Tahsin Bey.

Immediately after the graduation exam, M. Nalbandian appointed me a teacher in Yeramian School for the purpose of softening my righteous vexation and, probably also performing Yeramian's order. On the very first day of my appointment, he had a tête-à-tête with me in the inspector's room and said, "Dear Sergei, it goes without saying that our dear Mr. Yeramian holds a very high estimate of you. I hope you will not lay the blame for the frustration of the plan of your university education upon me. Accused be the wicked person who told the Governor you were an unreliable person, doing that out of the mean hostility between certain groups. The only thing I could do to compensate you for that missed opportunity was to appoint you a teacher in your alma mater. I am sure when Yeramian returns, he will manage to convince the Governor and send you to Constantinople in the coming year. Before that, however, I would like to give you a piece of friendly advice: be a little more careful and try not to deal with your party rivals."

At the end of September, when the first month of my being a teacher expired, I got my first salary, an amount quite unexpected for me: a piece of Ottoman gold and thirty kuruses. Despite my misfortune and fiasco in my attempt to acquire a university education, I was very happy on that day: I had entered upon a stage in my life when I was financially independent, having received my first salary. When one steps into the path of adolescence from youth, one is imbued with a kind of innocent pride and sometimes even complacency, since his self-esteem grows stronger and stronger in the depth of his heart, especially if he succeeds in starting an independent life and work. Recently, while I was still at school and had to spend Father's own financial means for my clothes, stationery and tuition fee, I worried and felt shame.

On the same day I gave the piece of gold that I had received to Father: he did not want to take it, but I begged him to.

"My son, this is your first work and you need not give it to me. You had better spend it on your clothes and whatever you need. Then, if everything is all right, you will support us."

"No, Father Harutiun (recently my sister and I had begun calling Father by the name of his religious position in token of higher esteem), I have decided to give my first salary fully to you. I am well-aware of the great sacrifices you have made for all of us and now it is my turn to help you. I still have thirty kuruses on me, which I am going to share with Araksi: I want her to be happy about her brother's first payment."

On receiving my second salary I divided it in about six equal parts, shared by my sister-in-law, Maro and my aunt; I kept the remainder for my sister and me. At first I was thinking of giving it to my mother's sister as well, but then I changed my mind considering that she did not need my present.

I have also to mention another fact: when Father learned that I had given away all my two months' salary, there remaining only a scanty amount for me, so that I could not afford to have a proper suit made for me, he ordered shoes and clothes of fine fabric for me with the piece of gold I had given to him.

On the whole, the financial conditions of our family had considerably improved, three out of its five members being engaged in constant work. Seeing my firm deter-

mination and stubborn opposition to return home, Father had to drive that woman away not to lose me. Indeed, I had many supporters, such as my two aunts, my uncle, Maro, my sister-in-law and others, who exerted considerable pressure upon Father.

In the first quarter of 1915, it was already seven months since I began teaching the Armenian language in the second and third grades of our school. When I was in the eighth, ninth and tenth grades, I engaged our Armenian teacher Armenak Pokharian's special attention and perhaps even liking for my Armenian compositions. One of my classmates was my dear compatriot Hayk Ajemian, with whom I pursued a strong rivalry in the composition lessons and always got the highest mark.



Hovhannes Kuloghlian, the author's mother's brother

It was that very success in writing compositions that gave School Assistant Nalbandian the idea of entrusting me with the teaching of Armenian there. Taking advantage of that fact, I took no heavy pains to prepare for my lessons so that I had enough time for other occupations after classes.

I had just entered upon the nineteenth year of my life; strange as it may sound, before that, in the cheerful period of my life, I had been engaged in only my school work as well as party and public activity, without taking the slightest interest in any other feelings or experiences.

It was common knowledge that Vaspurakan inhabitants in general and Van Armenians in particular were practical people: we can bravely state that ninety-seven per cent of them were people of actual work and tangible profit. They were never interested in abstract notions and

“idle philosophies,” as they themselves regarded them. Even when at school, they dedicated their free time to learning either crafts or commerce and tried to earn money, if possible.

Van people were such astute and abstinent merchants that they soon succeeded in expelling the Jews from their field of activity. Really, I did not recall ever having seen a Jewish merchant in Van; the reason for that was as plain as a pikestaff: Van Armenians had completely driven them away or as is generally said in such cases, they had wiped them off Van thanks to their exceptional smartness and astuteness.

I should confess, however, that there also existed the other extremity: the party members, revolutionaries, political and social figures from Van in origin were distinguished for their utmost devotedness and patriotism. I do not think there is a single Armenian who has not heard about great patriot and renowned public figure Khrimian

Hayrik, true patriot and talented statesman Aghasi Khanjian¹⁶, M. Avetissian, Martik, Hovh. Kuloghlian¹⁷, Yeghishe Godakchian, Shirin Yeghiazarian¹⁸, Melkon Kemsian¹⁹, Abraham Brutian²⁰, Levon Shaghoyan²¹, Tajat Terlemezian and thousands of other selfless and heroic people from Van.

¹⁶ **Aghasi Khanjian** was born in Van on January 30, 1901. After Van's first deportation, the Khanjians settled down in Yerevan. In 1917 Aghasi gained membership of the Communist Party. In 1921 he was sent to Moscow, Russia, where he entered Sverdlov University. Staying in Leningrad (St. Petersburg), Russia till 1928, he returned to Armenia, where he was elected first Deputy Secretary and then (in 1930) First Secretary of Armenia's Communist Party. He was engaged in wide national and political activity in his endeavors to achieve some settlement for the problems of Artsakh (Karabakh) and Nakhichevan, that had been annexed to Soviet Azerbaijan. It was for that very reason that Stalin ordered his assassination in 1936.

¹⁷ **Hovhannes Kuloghlian**, also known under the pen-name and revolutionary pseudonym Divana-Bahlyul, was born in Van in 1860. He was Sirak Sarhadian's uncle and one of the first graduates of the Central National School, founded by M. Portugalian. In the late 1880s, he left for Moosh and then Baghesh together with his classmate Yeghishe Gondakchian to work there as a teacher. Returning to Van, he continued his activity in Jesusian, Yeramian, Hankusner and Central National Schools as well as Zharangavorats School of Varag Monastery. Nurtured under the influence of Portugalian and Khrimian Hayrik's national ideas, Kuloghlian reared an entire generation with pure national ideology throughout more than 25 years. In the days of the April Heroic Struggle in 1915, his presence was of immense instrumentality and support to the Armenian warriors: passing from one position to another, he encouraged them with his patriotic speeches and reassuring advice. Kuloghlian died during Van's first retreat in 1915: according to Sarhadian, he gave up his spirit to God right on the deportation road, but H. Ajemian holds the view that it occurred in Echmiatzin. The following quotation gives an eloquent picture of his sufferings, "He could hardly reach Echmiatzin on foot after all the ordeal he had gone through during that Golgotha. Unable to endure the terrible heat and formidable torture the refugees were exposed to, he died at the age of fifty-five and was buried at a corner in Vaspurakan's Common Cemetery, extending at the edge of a forest in Echmiatzin, where his modest grave lies, unknown and sunk into oblivion." (See the Armenian original in "Vaspurakan", Venice, 1930, p. 281)

¹⁸ **Shirin Yeghiazarian** (1876 Kharakonis Village, Arjak District, Van Province to 1920 Alexandrople, Eastern Armenia) was in good terms with the Kurds and Assyrians, which helped him to carry out secret conveyance of arms from Persia to Van. In the days of the Genocide, he organized the self-defense of his birthplace and his fellow villagers' safe movement to Van. In May 1915, Yeghiazarian was the lucky person who lowered the Turkish flag from Van Fort and hoisted the Armenian one instead. In the days of Vaspurakan's independence, he was appointed district head of Arjak.

¹⁹ **Melkon Kemsian** (Ter-Marugian), who was also known by the pseudonym of Azat (the Armenian equivalent for 'free') Vostanik, was born in 1873 and can righteously be considered one of the most tortured warriors of Van's Hnchakian Party. In 1895 he became the right-hand man of Hnchak Martik, who had come to Van. Melkon was sent to Hayots-Dzor to preach the ideology of his party, but he was taken into police custody and brought to Van, where he was sentenced to 101 years of incarceration. In the autumn of 1896, the Act of Oblivion released him from prison and he resumed his revolutionary activity. Kemsian and two of his friends were sent to Persia, where they joined Paramaz's 29-member group and returned to Van. In the autumn of 1897, however, Melkon was again imprisoned and condemned to the previous punishment, but this time he was to serve time in chains. He was released from jail only 12 years later, i.e. in the summer of 1908. He left for Constantinople, where he studied dentistry and came back to Van, harnessing himself to peaceful work. On a summer night in 1913, some Turkish policemen treacherously killed Melkon Kemsian in one of Aygestan's streets. The news of his assassination gave rise to still further turmoil and mass rallies against the Turkish Government. His funeral was attended by more than 10,000 Van inhabitants.

²⁰ **Abraham Brutian**, born in 1882, left Central National School in 1905 and became affiliated to the Hnchakian Party, his rare skills and rhetorical gift soon earning him the post of party leader. He was taken to Van prison, whence he was moved to the military hospital due to his serious illness. His body, all hacked to pieces, was found on May 19, 1915 and was interred in the Pantheon of Hay Heghapokhakan Dashnaksutyun (Armenian Revolutionary Alliance) Party, at the eastern corner of Khachabak Cemetery of Arark's main church.

²¹ **Levon Shaghoyan** (1887 Kharakants Village, Shatakh District, Van Province to 1973 Havrezk Village, Zakho District, Iraq) led the self-defense in Pesandasth, Shatakh District, Van Province (April 1915) till Martiros' company from Dro's volunteer unit came to his rescue. After Vaspurakan's liberation, he was appointed district head of Gyavash. After the retreat in 1918, Levon settled down in the north of Iraq and founded three villages near Zakho, i.e. Havrezk, Verin (Upper) and Varin (Lower) Pasetka.

Fortunately or unfortunately, on the threshold of my adolescence, I was carried away with that unbridled ideological movement and had converted into a public figure or, better to say, was trying to win the popularity of a socio-national figure. Having gathered nearly sixty young people of about my age around me, I had embarked upon a large-scale party activity despite our school assistant's friendly advice. Although I still maintained membership of the Students' Union, I also took an active part in organizing different kinds of party work engaging the attention and appraisal of the principal leaders of the Hnchakian Democratic Party.

On my own initiative a reading-hall was allocated to the students in the party's club, where public lectures were delivered once a week. We published a two-page paper by gelatin printing with the same frequency, meetings were held at least once a week, with the party members and students giving lectures in turn. We also had exchanges of ideas and debates reaching certain conclusions.

We went on trips to different regions almost once a month, our main aim being propaganda. To tell the truth, we encountered serious difficulties, firstly because we were simply greenhorns and then, the opposing parties made every possible endeavor to dispel the effects of our propaganda.

MARO'S MARRIAGE

In the first half of June 1914, exactly a week after I had received my graduation certificate, we celebrated my dear, beloved Maro's marriage, which was the happy outcome of a surprisingly interesting coincidence. Once Maro went to help her sick mother, who always suffered from ache in her arms and shoulders. That woman, who had been confined to bed for several days, suddenly got out of it still finding some crumbs of strength and energy in her withered body and unwilling to hearken to her daughter's pleading and entreaties to remain in bed.

"Look here, Maro! I've promised ma'am Shatikents Zaruhi to do their washing, she's waiting for me and I'll go. I don't care a damn that I'll die, so much the better, I'll rid myself of this idle world."

"Dear mommy, you're seriously ill and can't wash those countless sheets, pillow covers and clothes. What if you do it tomorrow or the day after tomorrow?"

Proving unable to make her mother break the word she had given, Maro asked her to let her go and help her in her work. At first Voski opposed that, but finally, she gave way to Maro's pleading. By a most strange stroke of good luck, on that day Grigor Bulgharatsy²² was asked to dinner at Shatik's, where he saw Maro helping her mother.

Bulgharatsy was a modest, noble revolutionary born in a poor and simple traditional family, where he had got accustomed to many a privation. He proposed to Maro through his host: Shatik, Maro and, particularly her mother were astonished, unable to

²² **Grigor Bulgharatsy** was born in Karin City, Western Armenia (nowadays Erzurum in Turkey). The last mention of him dates back to 1919, when he chaired the Western Armenians' Conference in Yerevan, Armenia. The place and date of his death are unknown.

believe in the truthfulness and seriousness of that proposal, but the humble revolutionist succeeded in convincing them by saying, "I am myself the son of a simple, destitute Armenian family and I have been looking for a girl from such a poor family for a long time. Thank God, we were predestined to meet in this fashion and if Maro and her mother agree, I will keep my word and marry her as soon as possible."

Although Maro's modest wedding was celebrated with but few guests present and was devoid of any outer pomp, it was a happy and delightful day to my sister and me. We both considered it extremely fortunate that our closest and beloved friend had been lucky enough to marry such a respected revolutionary, who was a great patriot. Maro's bridesmaid was Araksi and her bridesman was me: that happy day will never fade from my memory.



Grigor Bulgharatsy (Grigor Kyozyan)

It is but impossible to portray Maro's long-suffering and hunched mother's infinite happiness: that poor woman, who had spent all her life in dreadful toil, finally witnessed the realization of the only sacred dream of her entire life. She had been asking God for it for quite a long time, had she not? Throughout many years she had pleaded and entreated Him day and night to bring good luck and happy marriage to her daughter, the apple of her eye, the only hope and comfort in her life.

I can never forget the happy night, the lucky moment I was congratulating Voski at the end of the wedding ceremony. She clasped me to her bosom in maternal affection, kissed me endlessly and said the following, completely lost in tears and very excited with happiness, "Now you see, my dear boy, that the Lord hearkened to the entreaties of such a miserable, helpless old woman as I'm, and now I see my dream realized."

I hurried to answer, "Mother Voski, indeed, your prayer reached God, but you should know that your Maro is no ordinary girl: she is a true gem, one that is impossible to find anywhere. She fully deserves to be the wife of such a noble revolutionary as your son-in-law."

EARLY IN 1915

In a few days we were to see in the New Year and as usual, the schools had a two-week vacation at Christmas and the New Year.

My young friends (among them were Hrant Darbinian, Aghasi Khanjian and Vahan Kheranian) and I, six boys on the whole, decided to spend that holiday by visiting the most beloved places of Vaspurakan Armenians, i.e. Varag and Aghtamar Monasteries.



Varag Monastery (photo early 1910s, by Vardan Hambikian)

I can never forget those two famous sanctuaries, which lay in the beautiful blue Van Sea, the former resembling a majestic, proud eagle and the latter an invincible lion.

Both we and the monks had a certain premonition so that our kind treatment of each other had reached its height. We had taken with us pears, apples, quinces that could not be easily found in that dreadful winter time, as well as cigarettes, tea and sugar, while the generous monks treated us to fresh milk, matzoon (*sour, clotted milk*) and butter. In Aghtamar we partook of the oily barbecue made of the famous herring of the Van Sea.

Like a person who has been thirsty for many days and is eager to drink at least a few drops of water, the monks were longing to get any information about the political situation in the country as well as the causes and process of the war. Indeed, we kindly told them everything we knew and sometimes also explained to them the course of events according to our own mode of understanding, drawing certain conclusions.

Both the monks and we had a gloomy misgiving of an impending gruesome disaster, regretting bitterly that our peaceful, creative lives were to be devoured by the war. And the foreboding of that morbid catastrophe made us compassionate towards each other so that we became closer and closer like old friends.

The formidable recollections of Van massacres of 1896 had not faded from the people's memory yet and the tears shed by many a family for their slain friends, relatives,



Aghtamar Monastery (photo 1913, by W. Bachmann)

husbands and children had not dried up. Yet, the dreadful premonition of an impending disaster and the nightmare of still new slaughters had again permeated them.

On the eve of April Self-Defense, about a month before it, secret relations were established and consultations were held between parties. The nation had appeared on the very verge of a most dreadful precipice and realizing that, the party members put aside their rivalry and discrepancies, thinking day and night of somehow resisting the coming danger.

The Turkish Government had the misfortune of entering into alliance with the Germans in the disastrous World War I. Immediately after having found themselves in the very crucible of the war, the Turks embarked upon realizing the insolent plan they had been meditating over for a long time. Unfortunately, they did not lack any pleas for that: on the north-eastern borderline of their country Armenian volunteer units were being organized for the purpose of invading Turkish Armenia, liberating the Armenians and restituting the provinces belonging to the Turks to their proper owners. Was that not an appropriate excuse for them? Indeed, if the Armenians were able to recruit volunteer groups and enter into war against the Turks, supported by the Tsarist Government, the Turks could fully take revenge for that with the full consent and under the aegis of their German allies, thus making the Armenians kiss goodbye to their wish to win freedom and their native soil.

“Yes, you can, you have the right to it,” the Germans dictated to their Turkish friends, distinguished for their natural bloodthirstiness, “slaughter and exterminate

those worthless Armenians so that their compatriots living in foreign countries will not be able to join them and seize your territory and country from you.”

The satanic plan of establishing internal governance in the six Armenian vilayets, appointing two authorized American governors there, preventing the invasion of the volunteer units, the outbreak of internal revolts and revenge had been premeditated and dictated a long time before. The Turkish mob, longing for the Armenians' blood for many decades and led by the instructions of the trinity (Talaat-Enver-Jemal) heading them, carried out that demonic program ordered by their crazy German allies with an impudent exactness.

Turkish gang leaders Talaat, Enver and Jemal, who were their sanguinary ancestors' true descendants, commenced implementing the program of butchery and annihilation cunningly. First, they recruited all the Armenian men aged between eighteen to forty-five both in the capital and remote districts under the pretense of mobilization, then they gathered and imprisoned the revolutionists and politicians under various pleas, the latter's fate being shared by all the outstanding intellectuals, writers, lawyers, in a word, the cream of the Armenian society. They did not have mercy even upon ingenious Komitas, renowned lawyer Zohrab and hundreds of such geniuses as, for example, talented writer Siamanto, who were not engaged in politics at all.

In late November 1914 encouraged by the endless promises of protection on the part of their “omnipotent” German allies, the Turkish army led by Enver Pasha attacked Caucasia and the front line Sarighamish-Kars-Ardahan-Ardvin, forming its threshold. That risky but senseless attack resulted in boastful and addle-brained Enver's crushing defeat in Sarighamish, the scapegoat of that shameful defeat and escape becoming the Armenian and Syrian population of the north-eastern districts of Vaspurakan. Releasing all the Kurdish and Turkish bandits from prison and providing them with abundant ammunition and weapons, the Turkish authorities gave them an inhuman command to slaughter the region's helpless population, in consequence of which thousands of innocent Armenians were exterminated in the districts of Bashkale, Sara, Arjak and Timar.

Everywhere the infuriated Turkish district heads, who had got their hands free having acquired unlimited rights in their barbaric atrocities, embarked upon the realization of the plan of the Armenians' extermination, longing to get the title of “heroes in the holy war,” waged and encouraged by Enver's adjutant Jevdet. They also worked out infernal plans for the annihilation of the Armenians in Hayots Dzor, Moks, Karjkan and Gyavash, but fortunately, they did not manage to carry them out; later we shall see how that happened.

A FEW DAYS BEFORE THE APRIL HEROIC STRUGGLE

The first days of April 1915: everywhere a general mood of tensity and uncertainty had permeated the people. On the order of Van Province Governor, villain Jevdet Bey, horror had spread to the region's large and small districts, where mass butchery was being perpetrated with the direct participation of the Kurdish and Turkish bandits, mur-

derers and malefactors, i.e. the dregs of the society sentenced to life imprisonment. Being caught in the villages, in their places of work and fields, the Armenian men were sent to the army under the pretense of mobilization whereas in fact, they were taken there merely to be slaughtered.

Throughout March and early in April for the aim of horrifying Van inhabitants, the authorities held demonstrations, accompanied by the exhibition of guns, machine-guns and ammunition, all that being organized with particular care and cunning tactics.

A few months ago, they also arrested the five prominent leaders of the Hnchakian Party, including A. Brutian, Aso and Artashes Solakhian²³, those actions pursuing the aim of discouraging Van Armenians, depriving them of their heads and thus leaving them without any protection. On April 3 resorting to mean fraud as ever, Jevdet called Ishkhan and told him to go to Shatakh with Van's chief of police to put an end to the local tense Armeno-Turkish relations, that were about to convert into fighting. Being a selfless devotee, Ishkhan agreed to that and set out with his brave companions-in-arms (Vahan Kheranian, Shatakh-tsi Mihran and Kotot Poghos) with sincere determination to prevent the danger. However, he fell victim to the base plot insolently devised by Jevdet on the way, in Hirj Village, his friends sharing his fate.

Witnessing that and many other barbarities, Vaspurakan Armenians, who had the misgiving of the coming extermination and butchery, faced but two alternatives: either life or death, to be slaughtered like a flock of sheep or die an honorable death of heroes with but a remote hope to survive through some unexpected miracle.



Ishkhan (Nikol Poghossian)

AN INVITATION

After midday on April 4, an incident took place, which could be considered a sheer nonsense, had it not happened in those gloomy days of formidable expectations, when even a most ordinary occurrence seemed a nightmare.

At about seven o'clock p.m., a young man approached our student library; before entering, he started arguing with the door-keeper since the latter did not want to let him in, obeying our previous warning.

²³ **Artashes Solakhian**, a talented pedagogue, art historian and political figure, was born in Van City, Western Armenia in 1884. In November 1914, the Turkish authorities put him into custody because of his involvement in the Armenian national liberation movement. In prison he wrote his memoirs, the last of his records being dated February 14, 1915. Solakhian shared the fate of more than a hundred prisoners, being hacked to pieces in mid-February, 1915. His recollections originally comprised seven copy-books, but only two of them were "released" from prison, being first published in 2000. (See Artashes Solakhian, *Memoirs of Prison*, Yerevan, 2002, in Armenian).



Artashes Solakhian

“What’s the matter, Markos?” One of our friends said, rushing out.

“Comrade Vahan, this man insists that he’s some urgent business with our friends.”

“Let him in and we’ll see.”

On coming in the young man gazed at us in embarrassment for a few minutes and said, “My God, you’re really hot-headed creatures! How on earth do you dare to come together, when you’re so many, fourteen to fifteen people, in these disastrous days and, particularly in such a central quarter? Good boys, nothing to say! Well, at least you should have gathered in such a place that even the devil couldn’t make out anything from your meeting.”

“Indeed, you’re right,” Hrant said in response to that, “it’s our hot-tempered friend Sergei who’s to blame for our being here on such a dangerous

day.” Then, as if to correct himself and not to hurt me, he added, “My friend, it’s a reading-hall and we’ve come here to learn the latest news!”

“Well, that’s absolutely none of my business, I beg your pardon for my scolding, it’s high time I went now. Please, could you tell me which of you is Sergei?”

“And why are you asking, why do you need Sergei?” I asked, a little worried about his question.

“I’ve to see Mr. Sergei privately. I’ve an urgent message to convey to him.”

I asked my friends to leave me alone with the mysterious harbinger: nobody objected and when we were all by ourselves, he immediately told me the following, “Bulgharatsy Grigor has ordered me to take you to him without any delay: at eight o’clock a secret meeting is to be held among different parties and since all your main friends have disappeared, they found it expedient to invite you. You can take one of your friends with you, of your own choice. I think everything is clear to you now. We are living very gloomy lives on these days, with the enemy sword hanging over us every moment. At present we have to be very careful; otherwise, several of our leaders, who’ve had a narrow escape so far, are likely to share the fate of our arrested and disappeared friends.”

I immediately took Aghasi Khanjian with me and we set off with our guide, who led us to one of the secondary streets attached to Norashen Quarter. He stopped in front of a two-story edifice and quietly knocked on the door with a mallet for three times, after a careful check of the situation in the street, which assured him that there was no possibility of danger. Apparently, that was a conditional knock previously thought of, since almost at once somebody asked from behind the door, “Who are you and what do you want?”

“It’s Sako, open the door quickly.”

The two-floor house, before which we were standing and wanted to enter, was almost lost in the dark from the side of the street, so that it was hard to suppose that any-

body was awake there: that was the best precaution taken in those dreadful, adventurous days. The hard clank of metal was heard, the door half-opened in our faces and we were met with the Mauser held in the porter's hand: suddenly I began shuddering.

"Why, my boy, you seem to be a true rifleman! Didn't you hear my name? Well, enough of you, put down the Mauser, these two young men are our friends and deserve great honor. Keep your arms to pierce the enemy in a couple of days."

The door-keeper immediately moved the Mauser that was ready to fire from his right hand to the left and gave us a military greeting straightening his whole body. At once we went in, led by Sako, reached the rear of the building, ascended the second floor and found ourselves in a large, dimly lit room.

A MEETING AMONG PARTY MEMBERS

When we entered, the meeting among party members had already begun and besides the two of us there were fourteen people present, most of whom I did not know. Our "Good Evening" being answered by the silent nods of the participants, we sat ourselves on the long bench at the wall on the right. The speaker was Grigor Bulgharatsy, who introduced us to those present by interrupting his enthusiastic but noiseless speech for a minute, "As all of you know a few months ago the leaders of the Social Democratic Hnchakian Party were "invited" somewhere and arrested. We knew only Comrade Hr. Galikian among those who escaped this fate and it was he who suggested that these two young men be invited. I know Sergei, but I am not acquainted with the other fellow."

"Let me introduce our young energetic friend Aghasi Khanjian to the dear participants," I said in response to him.

"We are very glad to meet you, you are welcome," could be heard all over the room.

"Our false friends," Bulgharatsy went on with his speech, "the criminal and barbarian leaders of the Turkish Ettehat Party, who are unwilling to confine themselves to the dreadful Adana massacres, have decided to subject the Armenians and, particularly the courageous youth, to ruthless and atrocious extermination. All of you are aware that they have already started carrying out that demonic plan by gathering together our young able men and pulling up the very roots of our nation. Allegedly, these people have been taken to fight against the enemy, but those villains and deceivers have told us a lie, for actually they have been taken away merely to be slaughtered.

"As you know, in the past two to three months Vaspurakan's Provincial Governor, *Vali (Governor) Jevdet Bey*, who is the obedient, humble accomplice of those insolent, merciless Talaat and Enver, has ordered the butchery of the Armenian and Syrian population in our province, large and small districts and villages. However, this is still the tip of the iceberg for yesterday they robbed us of our renowned revolutionist and public figure Comrade Ishkhan together with three selfless revolutionary friends.

"From this time onwards, within a maximum of a week, our turn will come to share their fate: the merciless extermination of our people in Aygestan and Kaghakamej is but a premeditated, inevitable fact. So I have briefly conveyed everything I know to you; it is up to you to make a decision and do your utmost to rescue at least the thousands of Armenians in Aygestan."

Ramkavars' representative Armenak Yekanian asked for the floor, saying approximately the following, "Dear participants of the meeting! I cannot boast any abilities to make a speech, nor is it necessary under such circumstances. We have but very scanty time and need to act more than speak. If you want to fall victim to our executioners like a helpless flock of sheep, that's another case, but it would be an utter betrayal on our part to put our compatriots, sisters, brothers and, finally, our wives, children and parents at the mercy of these barbaric bandits.

"Everything comes to prove that we are doomed and predestined to extermination without self-defense, so that I shall cut it short: we have to resort to self-defense. I think it redundant to waste any more time on speaking."

Apart from the party leaders, the meeting was also attended by Priest Father Gevorg, the diocese vicar, and three famous merchants, i.e. Set Gapamajian, Toutounjian and Nazaret Bournoutian. I had often heard their names, but I did not know them personally. The chairman invited one of them, Set Gapamajian, to convey his opinion regarding the situation.

"Like Mr. Armenak Yekanian I don't have any rhetoric skills and besides, I'm not very literate either. I don't believe in what I'm going to say, but still, wouldn't the dear participants of this meeting find it expedient to send a few representatives of the Armenian nation, i.e. reliable and non-party-affiliated people headed by one of our influential spiritual fathers to that worthless, Godless vali? What if they try to assure him that if they don't cause us any inconveniences from this time onwards, our people and we will be quiet and will even render certain financial assistance to his government? I repeat I don't believe in what I'm suggesting very much."

Whispers of dissatisfaction were heard in the room; the diocese vicar asked for the floor and said the following, "Dear Mr. Gapamajian is partially right, but I think he is not aware of what has been ongoing in the past several days. Three days ago I visited our leader Yeznik *Vardapet (Archimandrite)*, who went to Jevdet, accompanied by two people on very close terms with the vali. Their aim was to ask him to prevent the Armenian massacres in the regions, but that impudent dog did not even deign to receive them in his residence and shouted at the Vardapet in the hall, 'Clear out, away with you, traitors and infidels' head! You, ungrateful creatures, are attacking us in the rear in the time of warfare, your volunteer regiments are causing our patriotic soldiers more damage and injuries than the Russian gjaurs, who are our centuries-old enemy. But never mind, soon we will show you what it means to kill our selfless soldiers uniting with our enemies. This country, our glorious Ottoman Empire, belongs to us and not to such treacherous Armenians as you, who do not have any homeland. It is our utmost duty to rid our sacred fatherland of you as well as the everlasting intercessions and troubles on the part of your friends and protectors, those infidel Russian traitors.'

"Thus, my dear compatriot Mr. Gapamajian, after all this, it seems but too inappropriate to beg the merciless beast for mercy, the executioner for compassion and the sanguineous animal for freedom! All of us have but a single way out, which is our self-defense, as our dear participants have already mentioned. Like all those present I realize the essence and difficulty of this undertaking, but we do not have any other remedy; this is the fate predestined for our poor nation.

“I have no doubts that these ruthless beasts who are not going to spare any of us have planned to slaughter us in an inhuman fashion, like bandits, just as they have been treating the thousands of Armenians in the numerous districts of this province so far. Then, why should we let our merciless enemy to exterminate us like sheep? Are we not the true descendants of our compatriots who bravely fought during the Van massacres of 1895 to 1896 as well as many a century ago, when the Armenian nation was struggling against the infidels led by Commander Vardan and Priest Ghevond?”

“Then let us die an honorary death, a death of immortal heroes that befell all those courageous warriors who sacrificed themselves for the liberty of our nation.”

Diocese Vicar Father Gevorg’s speech was extremely impressive and the participants of the meeting came to the conclusion that they had no other remedy but to embark upon their self-defense. Following the rules of etiquette, the chairman, who was the first speaker, Grigor Bulgharatsy, asked those present if they had anything to add or suggest and then addressed us saying, “Now it is your turn, my young friends, do you have anything to say or not? The decision of today’s meeting is of vital importance: we are facing the grave alternative of our survival or extermination so that each of us is fully entitled to express his viewpoints.”

“Whatever should be said has already been stated and we do not have anything to add,” I answered. “We thoroughly share your wish and goals: under the present circumstances all of us have only a single desire. We have to do our best to struggle for the sake of our people’s salvation and if we are foreordained to die, let us at least die with honor.”

The meeting was declared closed and the chairman asked the participants to come to the same place at eight o’clock the next day to choose a Central War Committee and the other necessary auxiliary sections. Taking into consideration the extremely critical situation, the party members were told to be on their guard and keep everything secret.

A TRUE PATRIOT AND NOBLE REVOLUTIONARY

When Aghasi and I were leaving the meeting hall talking about the impending danger, somebody caught my right arm affectionately: it was Grigor Bulgharatsy, who began reproaching me gently, “Sergei, *oghul* (*The word ‘oghul’ means ‘boy,’ ‘lad,’ ‘my son’ in the Turkish language.*), why on earth haven’t you visited your close friend for so many months? She often remembers you and is missing you very, very much. She even went to your house, but she did not find you there. She keeps saying that besides her mother she has a brother and a sister as well, meaning you and your sister. How can one be so alien and indifferent to such a dear close friend?”

“Mr. Bulgharatsy, you are right. Indeed, I am to blame for that, but you know its reason...”

I began drawing, from which he surely could not make out anything so that he asked me sincerely and point-blank, “Oghul, why are you ashamed and embarrassed? Tell me frankly, what’s the matter?”

“I thought that since I am not one of your followers my presence in your house would be unpleasant for you.”

“Ah, oghul, you should be ashamed of yourself to have such thoughts! Aren’t you ashamed to say such things? Maro has always told me that you are her best, sincere

friend and brother. I repeat you should never think and say such things: the Armenian people should never be divided into party-members and non-party members.” Then he added after a short pause, “Sergei, my boy, if you wish to know my opinion, all these names and divisions like Dashnakist, Hnchakian, Armenakan and Ramkavar are but idle talk. We are a small, persecuted and hard-suffering nation who should always act in unity and solidarity. We should unite and have a single party that will be the nation’s party, that of the people’s freedom and our homeland’s salvation.

“You are well-aware it is not far from probable that tomorrow or in several days the Turkish barbarians may slaughter us, kill our fathers, mothers, sisters and brothers, kidnap our wives and children and convert them thus extinguishing our homes altogether. Having faced all these for many decades, our wretched people keep founding parties and sowing splits within us. I deeply regret that my words were not listened to in due time... Try to come to our place tomorrow: I still have a lot of things to tell you and Maro will be very glad to see you. Now I am sorry, I have some urgent matter to attend to tonight in connection with our self-defense.”

For several minutes, I was in astonishment by his friendly treatment and sincere words coming directly from the depths of his heart. Apart from being a good revolutionist, Grigor, who was called Bulgharatsy, turned out to be a noble patriot and true Armenian in the very proper sense of the word. And who could deny that he was not right in his thoughts and feelings? Indeed, why on earth did a small, persecuted, horrified nation ever living in the endless nightmare of butchery and outrages need so many adverse parties contradicting each other? Was Bulgharatsy not right when he insisted that we needed a single party, the nation’s party, that of the people’s freedom and liberation...?

A VISIT TO MY DEAR FRIEND

Having received Grigor Bulgharatsy’s kind invitation, I hurried to Maro, my best friend of childhood and youth, at nine o’clock in the next morning. She was so happy to see me that she threw herself into my arms just on the very threshold and began kissing my face and forehead endlessly.

“Oh, my dear Sergei, was our year-long close friendship to end in such a way that we could not meet each other for many months, unable to alleviate our fervent anguish? I can’t believe you’ve forgotten that once you called me your sister and kept assuring me that you loved me like Araksi. How could you have forgotten me for such a long time?”

“My dear Maro, how can I forget you? Can anybody forget his sister, to say nothing of such a beloved, precious sister? Not only have you been a sister to me but also a caring mother, governess and I do not know what else. Never, never can I forget you and will always love you like my dear sister.”

She led me to their dining-room still holding my arm in hers and suddenly asked, “Has Araksi told you, do you know that now I have a three-month-old pretty boy?” And without waiting for my answer, she dragged me to their bedroom. I was astonished at the order and cleanness in Maro’s plain, small house: truly, that girl was an exception, she was extremely tidy and mad about order and neatness. It is a wonder how she had acquired those exceptional abilities in her poor family, living with her hunched and withered mother.

Maro's newly-born child sweetly sleeping in his cradle was as smart as Maro herself, who was shining with joy and happiness at that moment. Completely lost in thoughts, I fully shared her infinite felicity recollecting the cheerful hours we played together and ran about our garden. When I got tired, I asked Maro to sit down so that I would put my head on her lap and she would caress, cuddle and kiss me... In those times I felt a great need for genuine maternal love suffering the terrible anguish of its absence.

Once again kissing me and naughtily joking with me, Maro again asked, "Now, Sergei, tell me why, for what reason have you forgotten me? Have I hurt you or what has happened to you?"

"Sergei, even if you find a beautiful, interesting girl, still you don't have any right to forget me because you're very, very dear to me like a true close friend. You can't forget the happy days of our childhood spent together."

"Maro, dear, you make me shy and embarrassed: never have I forgotten you and I love you as before, perhaps even more. So far I have taken no interest in any girls and firstly because I have never had time to think about it. Your husband will confirm that I have really been very short of time being always engaged in either school work or public activity." In a little while I asked her about Grigor's absence, "Maro, where is your husband? He promised me to meet me in your house today." Waiting a little, I added, "You know, Maro, you should thank your lucky stars to have such a noble husband as Bulgharatsy."

"You're fully right and I'm really happy to have such a husband as my Grigor. As for his absence, he came home very late last night and was exhausted. Lately he's been sleeping but very little, being occupied with party work all the time. Even if he somehow manages to fall asleep, he sleeps very badly. Hardly had he spent a few minutes at the breakfast table when he said that he had some very urgent business."

"Yes, he was right. We are in a grave situation now and it is not far from probable that it will still worsen on these days. At present we are suffering the continual nightmare of the Turkish attacks and massacres."

"Well, Sergei, what are we to do? It's hardly a year since we began living quietly; now I'm very happy with my family and, especially my three months old Koryun. What's it? Don't we have the right to live in peace and enjoy the sweetness of life at least for a short time? What are we to blame for? Have we done any harm to anybody? Who has cursed us not to have a single peaceful day?"

I noticed Maro turn terribly pale, like a horrified person drowning in the stormy sea. Indeed, she treasured her present mode of life and, particularly her adorable small child, whereas I unconsciously darkened her great felicity telling her about the impending horrible disaster. Apparently, her husband had told her nothing about the raging catastrophe and Maro, who had been shining with infinite happiness but a few minutes before, grew sad and gloomy, her eyes full of tears. I tried to correct myself and encourage her, "Maro, my dear Maro! You shouldn't be so sad and depressed, for Aygestan Armenians cherish great hopes for salvation. The Turks won't dare to attack us since we've all the means and abilities to protect ourselves. I was merely joking to check how brave you were. It's a pity you haven't rid yourself of the cowardness you had as a small girl. I'll do my best

to visit you once or twice a week for I'm not going to be too busy now."

Embracing each other once again, for the last time, we parted.

THE SECOND AND DECISIVE CONSULTATION

In the hall of the previous meeting at eight o'clock on the evening of April 5, the second and conclusive party gathering was held, its participants establishing the Central Committee of Aygestan's Self-Defense. All those present were imbued with extreme panic. Everybody agreed to a suggestion heard from the left corner of the hall, "Please, let Hovhannes Kuloghlian take the trouble to chair today's session."

Hovhannes Kuloghlian, a revolutionary and adherent of the Armenakan Party, the surviving witness of the calamities and slaughters of '96, a tragedian, who praised and lamented them in his poems, stood up and addressed the audience, "I am grateful to all of you for your high estimate and confidence in me. In the past several days, particularly since last night, I have begun to believe that we all are permeated with the same desire and ideas. We have to do our utmost, make every possible endeavor to fulfill the sacred duty of the organization of our self-defense impeccably.

"It goes without saying that the idea of self-defense, sacred as it is, is actually a voluntary, conscious sacrifice. We are going to fight with the profound realization that our struggle is one between life and death. It will not be an exaggeration to say that each of us realizes he is selflessly rendering himself easy prey to death.

"What are we to do? All of us are undoubtedly convinced that this noble and fair struggle will cost our lives: at the same time, however, we know that we do not have any other alternative, any other remedy for salvation. Sacrificing our lives voluntarily we at the same time firmly believe that we are going to meet our death bravely, losing our lives for the sake of a single noble idea, for the sake of our people's protection and the free, honorable existence of the future generations.



Panos Terlemezian

"Yes, we are going to die as the courageous sons of a noble, heroic nation; yet, we shall prove that our mean, barbarous enemies will get drowned in the pool of blood shed by our revengeful warriors. We will sacrifice ourselves for the protection of our nation and homeland, for the liberation of our usurped land and homes. Long live the Armenian people with their bright future!

"Taking into account the fact that every second is precious for us from the standpoint of our self-defense, I suggest that we immediately choose the Military Body of this Central Committee together with its necessary auxiliary bodies. I have to confess that we are

already very late in embarking upon urgent actions within our self-defense, whereas our enemies have already prepared our slaughter with the methods of its perpetration.”

After a brief exchange of ideas, which passed with almost no debates and opposition, the meeting chose a Military Body or Headquarters, consisting of Grigor Bulgharatsy, Armenak Yekanian, Hovhannes Kuloghlian, Panos Terlemezian²⁴, Professor Michael Minassian, Hr. Galikian, David Papazian and L. Shaghoyan. Shaghoyan had to leave for Pesendasht at the same night to take charge of the local self-defense. If necessary, the Military Headquarters was to consult Aram Manukian.

The following auxiliary bodies, or sections were established:

The Procuring Section was to supply the essential food products to the soldiers fighting in the positions and, if possible, provide for the Armenians escaping to Aygestan from the abandoned and neglected regions. That body was to have bakeries and kitchens at its disposal: the necessary flour and meat were to be procured in various ways.

The Food Gathering Section headed by famous merchant S. Gapamajian was to assist the aforementioned one collecting the essential food from the upper and middle classes of Aygestan and storing it.

The Health Care Section was to function under the supervision of Doctor San-Fani (Khosrov Chituny) assisted by Doctor Khachik, who were to have at their disposal the entire “Armenian Red Cross” with its medicaments, surgical tools, transportation means, hospital and several first aid posts.

The Planning and Building Body was to carry out tasks of the utmost significance in the days of self-defense: about four hundred to five hundred masons, digging workers and constructors were to restore the destroyed positions immediately, dig trenches for the warriors and set underground tunnels to secure communication and mutual help between and among the emplacements. The secret roads and underground passages dug by those selfless masters were to enable the fighting Armenians to blow up the enemy’s arsenals, towering in the very heart of Aygestan and endangering the city’s self-defense. That sec-

²⁴ **Panos Terlemezian** was born in Van in 1867 (some sources mention the year 1865). He received secondary education in the parish school of Hankusner Quarter and continued his studies in Van’s Central School (1881 to 1886). In the late 1880s, Panos was one of the most fervent revolutionaries in the ranks of the Armenakan Party. In 1890 he was caught red-handed while conveying arms and revolutionary literature and was imprisoned. He, however, resumed his activity as soon as he was released from jail. In Tzitzants Village, Shatakh District, Van Province in 1892 Panos and several of his friends participated in the attempt upon the life of a certain Kurd from the tribe of Gravs named Shakir, who had become a true scourge for the district’s Armenians. A few Kurds were killed, but Shakir himself had a narrow escape from death. On its way to Van the group had a fight with the police and killed two policemen, that making the Government sentence Panos to death penalty. In order to escape it Terlemezian left Van via Persia and went to Petersburg through Caucasia with the objective of studying painting. Two years later, he was put into police custody there on the order of the Turkish Government. As a Persian subject, however, he was set free with the mediation of Persia’s ambassador and was sent into exile in Persia. He managed to go from Tabriz to Paris, where he entered the Academy of Painting. He took part in various exhibitions, won numerous prizes and soon earned himself the fame of a talented artist. Khrimian Hayrik rendered Panos financial aid to enable him to improve his painting skills. Returning to Caucasia, Terlemezian started teaching painting simultaneously at Nersissian and Hovnanian Schools, Tiflis, Georgia. Then he again left for Paris, where he stayed till the adoption of the Ottoman Constitution, after which he went to Constantinople and devoted himself to painting. Panos’ pictures won a gold medal at the exhibition held in Munich City, Germany in 1913. In 1914 he returned to Van with the aim of painting landscape in his birthplace. In the days of the April Heroic Struggle in 1915, Terlemezian played an immense role in Aygestan’s Military Body, fighting side by side with the Armenian warriors. Unfortunately, an important part of his pictures was lost during Van’s first retreat. In 1916 to 1918 Terlemezian lived in Eastern Armenia, in 1919 he went to Constantinople, in 1922 Paris, then North and South America and, finally, in 1928 he settled down in Yerevan, Armenia, where he died in 1941.

tion or, better to say, organization was headed by Shavarsh Hovivian, Azat Khorenian and Gr. Panirlian, whose utterly enthusiastic work deserved the highest appreciation.

The Technical and Arms Distribution Sections were to act as true saviours during our self-defense: the main occupation of the former, headed by Professor Michael Minassian, was to make powder in a private workshop. Mambre Mkrian, a teacher of mathematics and chemistry in Yeramian School, was to help the professor in his work. The latter, comprising David Papazian, Margar Gharibjanian, A. Borozanjanian, Kar. Beglarian and Gabriel Ajemian, was to carry out indispensable work repairing all the damaged or broken weapons in the munition-factory.

The Propaganda and Information Section, consisting of Hovhannes Kuloghlian, A. Khanjian, Onik Mkhitarian and Armenak Pokharian, was to publish appeals by hectographic printing and keep the fighting soldiers and public at large in awareness of the process of the struggle, patrols' resistance and valiant feats of those heavily wounded or killed for their compatriots' salvation. It was also to encourage and cheer up the warriors and those selflessly working in every sphere of self-defense.

The meeting found it necessary to establish judiciary and municipal bodies: the former comprised Hrant Galikian and Ruben Shatavorian and the latter constituted Petros Mozian, Ghevond Khanjian and Khachik Zinoyan.

On Grigor Bulgharatsy's suggestion and by the participants' consent, I was charged with all the storehouses and food products that were to be put at the disposal of the Procuring and Food Gathering Sections. Grigor also suggested that all the sections convene meetings and decide their immediate tasks and mode of working.

Beginning its activity, the Military Headquarters worked till two o'clock at night, establishing all the defensives and patrols in Aygestan and appointing the commanders of the Defense Center and each position together with their assistants.

THE ALARM AND CRISIS

Immediately after the second party meeting, at half past ten at night, the Central Committee of Self-Defense commenced its energetic work with the Military Headquarters and Sections. In cooperation with the Arms Distribution Section, the Headquarters carried out continual search making the list of all kinds of weapons, pistols, guns as well as powder and bullets hidden in the cellars and corners of different houses.

At the same night working with the Planning Section the Headquarters also fixed the lines of self-defense and the location of the positions.

The plan of Aygestan's self-defense and resistance included five main areas, each with twelve to twenty defensive positions, patrols, their commanders and assistants. Those five areas were under the supervision of their heads, who in their turn were dependent upon the Central Headquarters of Self-Defense. The number and qualification of the patrols as well as the quantity and kind of the arms allocated to them had been determined in accordance with the importance or, better to say, vulnerability of the emplacements. In case any danger threatened the positions, one or two auxiliary groups, formed of brave and risky youngsters aged between fourteen and eighteen, were to come to their rescue. The fixation of the defensive borderlines and positions had been

preceded by a circumstantial, thorough study, the aim of which was to omit the most vulnerable and dangerous areas from the self-defense zone.

However, the fact that the state forces (arsenals, guard-houses, etc.) were concentrated within the self-defense line was of the utmost significance.

The Turkish Governor and provincial military *hazarapet* (a commander of a thousand soldiers), who had a sneaking suspicion that the Armenians were planning resistance and opposition, had consolidated those arsenals and storerooms a long time before: they had even accumulated a vast amount of food and water there.

The only factor ignored by the anti-Armenian Turkish Government was that Vaspurakan Armenians, distinguished for their unbending will and unsurpassed valor, had determined to break the bonds of the Armenian nation's slavery making the Turks pay a high price for their blood. Early on the morning of April 5, at sunrise Aygestan inhabitants were filled with most dreadful alarm: the panic-stricken Armenians dwelling in the Turkish quarters had started moving their essential food products and valuables to the Armenian quarters on donkeys, oxen and carts. Most of them were eager to bury their carpets, copper articles and valuable things under the ground, but they were very short of time since they had been ordered to move as soon as possible, treasuring every hour and minute. Fortunately, the majority of Aygestan Armenians were concentrated in the Armenian quarters, the Turks living in separate ones.

Two days earlier, I warned Father, "Father Harutiun! St. Hakob Church is in the very heart of the Turkish quarter! Tell the sexton to inform the few Armenian families in that quarter to move to the Armenian quarters, handing the gold and silver utensils of the church to the verger or the Quarter Council Head, Sargis Agha."

"I do not know how some of the Armenian parishioners learned of the coming disaster: they came to ask me for advice, but to tell the truth, I was not able to tell them anything. Now, if you insist that it is of great necessity, I will immediately inform those poor people so that they will not remain in captivity. As for the church articles and valuables, our greedy companion Father Housik has already taken them away, and I do not know whether the verger or Sargis Agha are aware of it. It is no wonder for he was always waiting for such an opportunity to saturate his avaricious appetite."

Some months ago Provincial Governor Jevdet dismissed the small personnels of the Russian and English consulates and closed those bodies. As for the rest, and, especially the American missionaries, he suggested allocating them Turkish and Laz soldiers under the plea of their protection: however, his mean intention being revealed in due time, his plan was not realized.

The Self-Defense Committee asked American Doctor Asher to provide the fighting soldiers with sanitary aid and he willingly agreed to put all his medicaments, sanitary and hospital equipment at their disposal.

The greatest difficulty facing the Self-Defense Sections was the insufficiency of arms, munition and food. Although all the Armenians in Aygestan, both the rich and middle class, sometimes even the poor, had given everything they had, the military sections and authorities were horrified at the inadequacy of those two indispensable means of self-defense. Yet, the alarm of the fatal struggle between life and death had already rung.

The disturbing tension was growing hour after hour and even minute after minute: we had been expecting the first gunshots of fighting every second since the dawn of April 5. Governor Jevdet and the Turkish hazarapet had learned everything about the preparation of the Armenians' revolt and made attempts to mislead and discourage the Armenians psychologically through provocative leaflets, which were of the following contents:

“The *giaur fidayis* (*infidel Armenian combatants*) are unleashing war against our state and army.”

“Those crazy, empty-headed creatures have grown so insolent as to begin fighting against our troops.”

“The Russian army proved unable to resist our hero Enver Pasha's troops and retreated, leaving thousands of casualties all along the eastern front. How on earth do these crazy *fidayis* dare to rise in rebellion against our army?”

“Their disobedience is great luck for us. We shall slaughter them like worthless flies, proving their protectors and, especially their friendly Americans that the only people to blame for all this are their revolutionary leaders, who have become impudent beyond any reason, daring to fight against our state.”

“Those American Wilsons and their honorable missionaries will collect the impertinent and disobedient *fidayis*' crumbled skulls, torn apart by the might of our brave soldiers' bayonets, and use them in the foundation of their churches and preaching centers.”

“You, wretched Armenian people! You cannot distinguish between your friends and enemies yet. Can you not realize that it is your crazy *fidayis* who are your real foes, while the Ottoman state is your true friend and protector?”

“Put up resistance against those *fidayis*, seize the weapons they have stolen from their hands and yield them up to your government. Be convinced that only your friend Ottoman Empire is able to defend you.”

Thus, those provocative leaflets were spread among the Armenian society with the objective of depressing them and, if possible, inciting them against their saving leaders.

On the order of the Self-Defense Headquarters, the Propaganda and Information Section immediately embarked upon counteracting the provocation launched by those criminals. One after another gelatin slogans, encouraging speeches and appeals were issued, having approximately the following contents:

“Armenians! The remedy for your salvation is your unity and solidarity: never allow yourselves to give way to provocations.”

“Several months ago the fraudulent, base enemy arrested our unsurpassed revolutionaries and slaughtered them in their infernal prisons. Just a few days ago they deprived us of our selfless revolutionists, deceiving them like villains under the plea of smoothing away the mutiny in Shatakh and several regions.”

“You should not be cheated by those bandits Talaat, Enver, Jemal, Jevdet and others like them, who keep making high-flown speeches about how merciful and benevolent the Ottoman Government is; the protesting voices of the victims of Adana and Cilicia massacres have not faded away from our ears yet.”

“Jevdet, who attempts to lull you into a false sense of security, has committed the

butchery of thousands of your compatriots almost in every region. A few days ago he impudently and violently drove away your spiritual leader, who had gone to ask him for intercession in behalf of those helpless, wretched people.”

“Those sons of a sea cook, i.e. Jevdet and his bloodthirsty accomplices, are the successors of the gang that perpetrated the Van slaughters in 1896. Armenians, you have the sacred duty of taking revenge for that before being slaughtered and made prey for those cannibals!”

“Your survival will not be worth a straw since your closest relatives, your mothers, sisters and wives will be kidnapped from your very lap and outraged before your eyes! Is it not better to beat those beasts to a most shameful death and then die as true heroes before being subjected to that formidable humiliation?”

“Armenian women, girls and men, make the enemy pay a high price for your lives and honor and take revenge upon your families’ and people’s executioners before your death.”

Such encouraging leaflets and appeals for rebirth were of immense significance: firstly, they secured a strong counter-attack against the depressing provocation launched by the state spies and agents; secondly, they forged the determination of the warriors, preparing for the struggle between life and death. The Central Headquarters of Self-Defense expressed its deepest gratitude and appreciation to the Propaganda Section for that.

A MEETING WITH MY FRIEND

Before noon the following day, I decided to visit several of my relatives, Maro and my family members. I met Bulgharatsy and Kuloghlian in the Center of the Military Headquarters at seven o’clock in the morning; their extremely thoughtful and worried state of mind made a deep impression on me. I thought that those people, distinguished for their turbulent revolutionary activities, truly realized the graveness of the situation and the impending danger better than me. Despite my zeal and enthusiasm, I was thoroughly permeated with an invincible, bitter sadness, unable to overcome its depressive burden. I thought I might never be able to see my dear relatives and friends again: we had resorted to a struggle of life and death with quite unequal forces, and it was not far from probable that we all would fall victim to the enemy’s bullets or sword. Plunged in thoughts, I was looking forward to seeing my dear faces once more, perhaps, for the last time.

Lost in those sad meditations, I left *Klor-Dar* (a quarter in Van) to visit my beloved aunt, when somebody, who had, apparently, been running to reach me, barred my way and asked, “Why are you going in this direction, Comrade Sergej?”

It was our dear friend Karapet Tantian, a promising, intelligent, young teacher in the parish school in Arark.

“But what’s the matter, my dear Comrade Tantian?”

“The direction you’re going in is dangerous; it’s a prohibited zone.”

“If you mean any danger, at present all of us are endangered; I’m going to see my aunt at any cost.”

“But I’d advise you not to do so: it’s wrong and risky.”

“I’m a little acquainted with the plan of the self-defense lines and location of the positions: it is about four hundred meters from where we’re now standing to the last emplacement in this direction and I need to cover half of that distance to reach my aunt’s.”

“It’s up to you to decide, but still, I’m again warning you. Perhaps, you’ve not heard anything about the announcement the Headquarters made about half an hour ago.”

“No, I’ve not heard. I was there about two and a half hours ago, but I didn’t hear any emergency news. Has the fighting begun yet?”

“Not yet, but we’re expecting it at any moment; that’s why, the Headquarters has announced to the population not to leave houses in the daytime and, if possible, avoid any situation likely to arouse mutiny or excitement.”

“Well, my dear friend and teacher, is there any other news for me?”

I made that short joke to alleviate my depression and then added, “What are you to do within the plan of self-defense?”

“There’s some news: since yesterday afternoon an influx of a great number of hungry, barefooted and naked women and children has commenced in the city. They left their homes and belongings stealthily, under the cover of night and fled to Aygestan hoping to have at least a narrow escape from the revengeful Turks’ atrocities. They told us they had not heard from the male members of their families for already many days, but they’re said to have run away from the Turks.”

“I’m sorry, Comrade Tantian, I’m very sorry, but I’ve to hurry. Yesterday my friends told me that you’d been entrusted with a most important and vulnerable position: you’ve been appointed assistant of the main patrol of the emplacement known as Dardanel. Now it’s my turn to give you a piece of friendly advice: your position is said to be the most vulnerable during the fighting and it’s evident that the enemy’s first and most severe attack will be directed to similar ones. Please, be on your guard for it’s only the unbending resistance of such emplacements as yours that will save the thousands of Armenians, whose only shelter has become Aygestan. If I manage I’ll come to you in a couple of days. I’m now cooperating with many committees and sections: from this time onwards, your eyes will be busy watching the enemy while your stomachs will be waiting for our help. See you later, my dear friend. I’m sorry for being a little stubborn in my decisions and ignoring your advice.”

With those words, I continued my way. I do not know how I managed to conceal the truth from my experienced friend. My aunt’s house was much farther than I had told him: it was almost attached to one of the extreme positions on our self-defense line.

Entering my aunt’s, I saw her all by herself; she was happily astonished at seeing me. When I asked her about her son Mihran she burst into tears and said, “It’s already two days since he entered the neighboring position, where he stays days and nights and doesn’t even come home to have a piece of bread quietly. I don’t know what I’m to do: may God protect and support him. My poor boy hasn’t even overcome our great grief, while now these cheeky Turks don’t want to leave us alone. I said to him, ‘My boy, your father died without seeing the realization of his aims and wishes so that now you’re my only son. God forbid, cursed be this tongue of mine so that I won’t utter these words, but if anything happens to you, your wretched mother will be paralyzed and will die all alone. Nothing will save me then.’ ”

“My dear auntie, remember that God is Almighty and be sure if He tolerated your beloved husband’s death, He’ll never permit any disaster to happen to your only son. We cherish great hopes that we’ll succeed in overcoming this catastrophe and will again live freely and happily. We’ve to endure this storm: our enemy’s unjust and unfair; I don’t think it probable that our Lord will tolerate those Turkish barbarians’ taking possession of our nature, its light, its bright and vivifying sun... . No, auntie, no, that’s impossible! Such a helpless, persecuted nation as we are has more rights to enjoy and be nurtured by that life-giving sun and its warmth than those who want to stifle and slaughter us in the dark. Our cause is fair and we do have a right to live.”

My poor spirits, that had sunk imperceptibly and automatically giving rise to depression, suddenly vanished; although I had talked to my aunt in a little high-flown and complicated manner, my words raised her spirits as well. Claspng me to her bosom she began kissing me warmly, “What a sweet tongue you’ve got, my dear boy! You’re right, my son, our merciful God, our graceful Lord will never leave His innocent flock helpless and will certainly come to our rescue and save us from these ruthless Turks. My son, I only fear that we won’t be able to resist them: they have a government, an army, a vast amount of weapons and munition, don’t they? As if that’s not enough, they’ve also established friendly relations with the Germans so that they will excel us in every sense.”

“I’m well-aware of all that, auntie: they’re stronger than us for they represent a state, they’ve troops, arms and a huge amount of ammunition. Unfortunately, however, they lack a single thing, something that no tyrant or murderer can have: it’s their belief in the righteousness of what they’re doing. In contrast to them, we’re sure of the justice and uprightness of our cause and this conviction imparts will power and courage to us.”

I did my utmost to persuade my aunt to move to either our place or her brother’s, but unluckily, in vain.

“If I’m predestined to die, I prefer to die in my own house, beside my beloved son and the position defended by him... . My entire family consists of my only child and his entire family consists of his mother.”

Immediately after leaving my aunt, I hurried to see my kinsfolk, but before entering our house, I decided to visit my father’s sister. Although her house adjoined our garden, I had not seen her for over fifteen days.

I found my aunt completely alone: unfortunately, she did not have any children and it was more than a month since her husband, a rude and illiterate person, who was a peddler, went to the nearby villages to sell tea, sugar, matches, spices, threads, needles and other petty articles. On seeing me, my aunt burst out sobbing like a small child and began complaining, “My dear Sergei, my darling, where have you been? Didn’t it ever occur to you that you’ve an aunt, whose only comfort is Araksi and you. How could you be so close to my house and never think of coming and seeing whether I’m alive or dead?”

“My dear auntie, God forbid that anything happen to you. Hasn’t Araksi told you that I’ve been so busy these days that I didn’t even come home to sleep at the past two nights. My work’s highly responsible; we’re procuring bread and food for our soldiers

and those hungry women and children who've poured into Aygestan. It's our lot and each of us is to be helpful within his or her own power; otherwise, all of us will be doomed."

Clasping me to her withered chest she said, "Good for you, my boy, your mother didn't feed and rear you in vain. Perhaps, we'll be saved if all our young people act unanimously. They say our situation is really grave; you know this better than us."

While I was going to answer her inquiries in a few words, she continued, "We cherish hopes that if all the settlements and regions are as protected as ours we'll be able to endure for a while till our volunteers reach us by the grace of God. Soghomon's house along our Mokhri Keahriz has turned into a position and emplacements have been fixed in our street and at the beginning of Shan (Dog's) Street as well.

"Thanks to these high positions, the entire area of the river mouth in Hankusner Quarter is under control so that no *askyar* (a Turkish soldier) or *bashi-bazouk* (a Turkish bandit) will dare to attack them. If they do so, they'll be knocked down before reaching the positions. Poor people, they're not to blame either, they have parents, wives, children, sisters, brothers, and are forced to kill their innocent Armenian compatriots only on the order of this fraudulent vali and his people."

Apologizing to my aunt I said that I was in a hurry and had to rush away. I promised to visit her again in several days.

I crossed our garden adjoining my aunt's and went to our house. It was only two days since my sister Araksi last saw me, but those two days had seemed two months to her: she made a jump toward me and hugged me with her delicate arms.

"Where've you been, my dear brother? Why didn't you come home for so many days and nights? Why don't you think about me? My God, I myself don't know why I'm missing you so very, very much."

"Araksi, have I been absent for more than two days for you to miss me so much? You're a grown-up girl and shouldn't complain of loneliness. You've a lot of chores in our house: from now on you should gradually begin performing our beloved mother's duties... By the way, is it really true that our poor sister-in-law Haykanoush is again confined to bed? What a pity that that brilliant woman was deprived of the greatest gift in life, i.e. health, in the bloom of youth. Alas, may that impertinent Iskouhi, who made her suffer that misfortune, be cursed... Who else is at home?"

"Father is in the garden. Didn't you see him while coming here? He's become very depressed and angry these days. He isn't able to go to church: it's impossible to go to St. Hakob, which is in the Turkish quarter. The road is barred at a distance of two hundred steps from Khach Street: our soldiers have fixed a position there and nobody dares to cross the boundary between the two quarters."

"Where's brother Karapet?"

"Yesterday morning he told us that he'd been appointed patrol in the position at the beginning of our street. He also told us not to wait for him since he'd been strictly ordered not to leave the emplacement anyway."

"Well, my dear sister, I'm sorry, but I've to leave the house for a while, for I've been entrusted with a responsible task. I shouldn't have left my position even today, but I was eager to visit my people once more. Who knows, perhaps, we'll be deprived of the



General view of Kaghakamej Quarter, Van before 1915

opportunity to see each other for some time.”

“What’re you talking about, brother? How can I endure not to see you for some time? I can’t live without you. I won’t demand that you leave your work in the daytime, but surely you can do it at night.”

“The point is that probably I won’t be able to do it, but be sure I’ll rush to you as soon as I’m able.”

With those words, I embraced my sister and kissed her cordially for several times.

Running after me, she shouted in tears, “Please, come tomorrow morning by all means, don’t forget: Maro’s promised to come to our place with her baby and mother.”

After a short pause, she again cried, “Brother, come the next day, too. You know why? Voski is coming to bake bread for us; she’s promised to bring several herrings and roast them. I know that you like herrings very much, please, don’t forget. I’ll treat you to newly-baked *lavash* (*flat, thin bread baked from wheat or barley flour in an underground oven*) and roast herrings.”

“Well, well, dear Araksi, don’t worry, I’ll try to come.”

Two minutes later it was my turn to shout, “Araksi, if I fail to come, please, eat them instead of me and share them with Haykanoush and Father. Never be sad because of me and tell Father Harutiun to pray for our nation’s salvation for he can’t fight. He’s a fervent believer and hates murder, but we’re not to blame for the fact that our fraudulent enemy is slaughtering us mercilessly, without any reason. We’re obliged to struggle against them and kill them to defend our existence, our parents, sisters, brothers, wives and children... .”

PART THREE

VAN'S SELF-DEFENSE OR THE APRIL HEROIC STRUGGLE

The beginning of April 1915 marked endless minutes and hours of panic and crisis for the Armenian population in Aygestan and Kaghakamej, Van. On April 3 we lost touch with the inhabitants of the latter, but we knew that the local people were in the same critical situation of panic thanks to their messengers who miraculously succeeded in reaching Aygestan.

According to the trustworthy information we had received Kaghakamej Armenians had organized their self-defense, the presence of Van's spiritual leader, Archimandrite Yeznik, and Aghtamar's Prior Daniel encouraging them very much.

The Self-Defense Committee of Kaghakamej was established under the guidance of the aforementioned high-ranking clergymen and Haykak Kosoyan²⁵, a valorous young man. It was easier for them to settle the problem of munition and, particularly food since the defensive line covered a comparatively smaller area and besides, the food products could be found in greater amounts than in Aygestan. The richest and economically most important commercial centers with their shops and warehouses were concentrated in Kaghakamej. The houses were situated very close to each other - actually the quarter was encumbered with them - so that it was easier to fix the positions there.

The Defense Body or Military Headquarters in Kaghakamej had entered into collaboration with several sections. Originally Kaghakamej population expressed a desire to cooperate with Aygestan, but the distance between the two quarters being about four kilometers, such a plan proved impracticable. Each of the two major quarters of Van had but one remedy, i.e. to organize its own separate self-defense and struggle with the aim of reaching a bright future, promising liberation and salvation.

THE FIRST DAY

On the morning of April 7 (Tuesday), the dreadful peace was finally broken and the situation of morbid uncertainty came to its end. Random reports were heard being immediately followed by volleys; the fighting broke out. The infernal volleys grew

²⁵ **Haykak Kosoyan** (1882 Van to 1968 Persia), the alumnus of Gevorgian Jemaran (an institution of higher education), worked as the inspector of Jesusian-Shushanikian School. In the days of the April Heroic Struggle in 1915, he took up and successfully realized the leadership of Van's self-defense. In 1919 he participated in the Western Armenians' second conference held in Yerevan, Armenia and was elected member of the Armenian Parliament. The "Hayrenik" magazine published his memoirs entitled "Van's April Struggle" (1925, Boston, USA), which later reprinted for many times.

more and more intense while the constant gun-fire aroused a formidable roar and noise.

Began the struggle between life and death; hardly had two hours elapsed when entire Aygestan was shrouded in smoke, powder, fire, ruins and general disorder.

The whole of Aygestan was being bombed from any possible direction, and the mortal horror and panic coming from the Turkish arsenals and positions permeated through the quarter. Parallel with that fierce bombardment, the Turkish soldiers, armed with hand grenades and machine-guns, attacked the Armenian positions with ear-shattering hurrahs. The courageous Armenian warriors, entrenched in about seventy positions, did not hesitate to shower them with mortal fire: most of them even left their positions, offering resistance to the enemy in the open field. The selfless soldiers of self-defense had determined and sworn not to make a single step backwards from the defensive line entrusted to them so that the enemy was absolutely unable to gain any access to that line.

Van Governor Jevdet Pasha had decided to spend but a few hours to crush the “uprising” of those crazy *giaurs* (infidels), obeying their impertinent revolutionaries and national leaders’ directions and “disastrous” advice. It had been commanded to bomb the positions mercilessly, intensely and incessantly, reducing them to grounds and thus breaking the defensive chain into Aygestan.

The very first attempt of invasion was directed to Akрпи, Sev Kra, on whose hills heavy guns and three to four sotnias of regular army had been concentrated. A group of Turkish askyars, armed to the teeth, tried to break the defensive line with deafening hurrahs, their aim being to reach the German missionary center, fortify their position there and subject the innocent population to gun-fire and hand shells, creating panic among them.

Fortunately, having previously foreseen that, the Military Headquarters had established a strong controlling position on the road to that center. The Turkish soldiers trying to intrude upon that emplacement were showered with intense gun-fire: being surrounded by the auxiliary mobile group hurrying to the Armenians’ rescue some of them were killed right on the spot while the rest took their heels in great panic. Although two of our brave young men, Yeghia Nakhshunian and Hakob Derzian, lost their lives in that first valiant fighting, they made our insolent, impertinent enemy to run away from the battleground, that escape proving fatal for our subsequent defense.

The first unsuccessful attempt of intrusion infuriated the enemy: that was a shameful humiliation for the Turkish governor and provincial military commander so that it was ordered to intensify the widespread bombardment. The Turkish army units received an instruction to make every possible endeavour to crush the uprising and resistance of a group of revolutionary *giaurs* as soon as possible.

Night had already descended, a terrible and dreadful night: the formidable explosion and deafening roar of the guns and automatic machine-guns was incessantly growing more and more fierce. Aygestan was shrouded in fire, flames, suffocating smoke and horror of death, spreading from all the Turkish positions, i.e. Sev Kra, Sahak-Bey, Tobrak-Ghali, Hajji-Bekir, Hamud Agha, Arark Square, etc. Our main emplacements, particularly Dardanel, Shah-Bander, Sahak-Bey and Khach Street, came under infernal flames, being rapidly burnt down and reduced to ruins.

Emitting howls of starving wolves, the Turkish and Laz soldiers resumed their invasions with their most hated shouts and hurrahs.

Those were the most decisive minutes of the unprecedented, ruthless, morbid and fatal struggle between life and death. Glory and highest honor to the heroes of Vaspurakan! They had taken a steadfast oath and would remain loyal to it. Yes, they had decided so and remained valorously faithful to their oath. All of them had unanimously resolved to die in the position, but die a death of hero, forcing the enemy to pay a high price for their blood.

With inflexible, unbending determination, the courageous warriors continued their fatal resistance from behind the walls of the collapsed emplacements, from among the burning logs filled with smoke as well as the heaps of bricks and ruins. Surrounded by the victims and wounded soldiers lying right under their very noses, at a distance of but a few steps from them, they did not retreat, did not grow discouraged and continued fighting and resisting selflessly, carried away with their devotion, knocking down all the askyars trying to intrude upon the positions.

The truly infernal night of the valiant resistance ended in our unsurpassed heroes' victory: it was a rarely miraculous feat, in which the Armenian nation will take pride forever.

Bloodthirsty Jevdet and his accomplices, who were eager to see the Armenians' blood shed, were at a loss and panic-stricken: it had never occurred to them that the Armenians, those gians, whom they had always merely despised, could be so selfless, so devoted to the protection of their honor in their heroic resistance. The first day of self-defense assured them that the murder of every single Armenian would cost them the slaughter of hundreds of their soldiers; the Turks were well-aware that the number of the Armenians ready to die was far too great. It being common knowledge for them that the fighting Armenians concentrated in Aygestan amounted to several thousands, they were horrified at the idea that they would be forced to sacrifice thousands of their soldiers in those drastic days of warfare. They knew that they were to pay a heavy price for such a loss.

The valiant resistance of Aygestan's lion-hearted warriors within the first twenty-four hours of the fighting became their sheet-anchor whereas the enemy's self-confidence was thoroughly crushed.

Although the first day of that famous self-defense took away the lives of twenty-two heroes and unsurpassed warriors, those victims secured the sure salvation of thousands of their compatriots, their blood becoming a ray of liberation and encouragement for them.

When the dusk of the first day of self-defense fell and dawn broke after the first critical, dreadful night, twenty young messengers working for the Information and Propaganda Section spread a great number of gelatin leaflets among those fighting in the emplacements, people involved in different kinds of work within the self-defense plan as well as all the population. Those leaflets contained old revolutionary, poet and propagandist Hovhannes Kuloghlian's encouraging speech made amidst the ruins of

Dardanel Position at eight o'clock on the second day. It said, "Long live our courageous warriors! Long live the heroes who protect us in the positions, in our ditch-trenches as well as behind the collapsed walls of our houses and emplacements!

"The enemy obliterated most of our positions with their huge army, vast amount of arms and their guns erupting bombs and flames: however, they failed to break the spirit of those valorous lions.

"The Turkish askyars' and their friendly Kurdish and Laz soldiers' corpses are scattered below the walls of our positions, at the edges of our defensive trenches and ditches like dried up and withered leaves.

"Armenians of Aygestan! Do your utmost to help your selfless warriors, irrespective of your sex and age.

"Do not spare anything for your self-denying fighters, supply the Headquarters and its ancillary sections with every kind of food, clothes and copper containers. Please, you are even welcome to gather the bullets and bomb frags that the enemy has fired all over the city.

"Pluck up your spirits and be aware that each of your unmatched warriors is ready to sacrifice his life consciously and purposefully, and when they are forced to do so, they will take away the lives of hundreds of enemy soldiers.

"Part of the positions destroyed by the enemy shells was repaired before dawn. Now that work is still underway and will soon be over. The number of our heroes will increase fivefold to compensate for all our warriors killed by the ruthless enemy. The Turks can murder our fighters, but they will never be able to kill their immortal souls, for they acquire wings and transmigrate into thousands of Armenians.

"Compatriots! Be aware that our cause is sacred and the only remedy for our salvation is our solidarity, sincere cooperation and selfless exploits.

"Vaspurakan Armenians! You should never experience the horror of death for you know how to resist the enemy bravely and protect yourselves."

Those encouraging and hopeful appeals imparted a new spirit and efficiency to our self-defense.

THE SECOND DAY

The enemy resumed the bombardment of our emplacements and defensive lines on the morning of the second day of self-defense, but this time they did not attempt to intrude upon those lines as on the first day: apparently, the counter-attack offered by our courageous fighters had caused them quite a number of fatalities so that they had been ordered to do everything within their power to escape new victims.

On that day, probably following Jevdet's and the military commander's instructions, the Turkish troops used new tactics, which consisted in intensifying the bombardment and destroying the positions as soon as possible. They hoped to exhaust the Armenians in that way, depriving them of the ability to resist and the opportunity to repair their emplacements. There were two enemy arsenals and a fortified military guardhouse within our defensive line: the former were called Hamud Agha and Pochik-Ahmad, the



Армяне Вана во время осады.

Van Armenians during the siege of the city

latter was housed in the English consulate. Like cannibal birds, they kept their leaden paws upon the heart of Aygestan population, fighting for the sake of their liberation, and stifled those people. From the very first day, those cannibals targeted their lethal fire on some of our most important emplacements, including Shah-Bandar, Dardanel, the one situated at the edge of the gorge of Hankusner, and others. The neighboring positions appeared in a critical situation being obliged to defend themselves both against the outside and inside enemies.

Our positions located in the vicinity of the arsenals were reduced to ruins within two days: however, that could not stop the crucial and fatal self-defense. Analyzing everything very well, Aygestan Armenians realized the situation: even the slightest withdrawal and discouragement on our part was sure to betoken our sanguineous enemies' black victory, which was to signify our death, our general, merciless and final extermination.

There was no way for us to retreat: we had no other alternative but to fight, resist and die a death of heroes if we were to die.

The patrol, who were busy making continual counter-offensives on the enemy's attacks and defending their positions crazily amidst the ruined emplacements, kept in touch with the Headquarters through twenty lion-hearted messengers; they received instructions and, if necessary, aid every two to three hours.

Life seemed to have lost its value in that formidable struggle: nobody thought of desertion, escape or remaining alive. Everybody realized that they should fight and sacrifice their lives for the sake of survival.

The history of Van-Aygestan's self-defense abounds in a great number of heroic pages and, probably, an important part of it has not been recorded so far due to the general disaster and tumult. I do not know whether one of the heroic episodes that occurred at the edge of Hankusner Gorge has been ever mentioned in any piece of writing. It occurred under the following circumstances:

The Turkish arsenal towered at the top of the large building of Hankusner's church-school, on the hill slope of the same name like a dreadful, black cloud. At sunset on the second day of our self-defense a rather large group of Turkish soldiers began approaching our marginal position on Hankusner's escarp (at the edge of the gorge), crawling on their hands and knees separately, two by two, at a certain distance from each other. The space between the arsenal and our emplacement being about two kilometers, probably, that secret attack could not have escaped the patrol's notice.

A twenty-two years old girl known by the name of *Kagh* (the Armenian equivalent for 'lame') Hamas lived in the basement of the position. She was included in the church choir, being its pride thanks to her innate sweet voice. Taking advantage of Vardges' absence - he had been wounded and taken to hospital - without telling anything to the patrol or asking for permission, she took a Mauser and slipped away from the emplacement, hiding herself behind some huge stones lying beside the road, on which the soldiers were advancing.

When the Turkish askyars approached Hamas, she commenced fire right to the point and knocked down two of them. However, the soldiers coming up from the rear noticed the girl knocking down their friends and rained bullets all over her body. Fortunately, our brave patrol immediately took revenge upon the enemy killing four of the advancing Turkish soldiers; the rest of the askyars took their heels, horrified and panic-stricken at the sight of their friends' murder.

Hamas, who was innately lame, was highly appreciated by the church choir and respected by the believers for her modesty and sonorous voice. She sustained her mother and somehow made both ends meet on the meager gifts received from the believers.

Here is the story of another heroic sacrifice:

On the second day the Turks were fiercely bombing our positions known under the name of Dardanel from two sides simultaneously, i.e. from one of their emplacements beside Arark Square, almost attached to our defensive line, and Hamud Agha's arsenal within our set of trenches. Taking advantage of the deepening twilight and fierce bombardment, ten askyars from the enemy positions of Arark attacked our main emplacement of Dardanel with the intention of occupying it. The patrol commenced fire, but the enemy soldiers continued their way, defending themselves with hand shells. Soon other askyars came to their rescue and the situation became critical: we needed an exceptionally valiant deed to make the enemy withdraw, and the person ready to commit himself to that unmatched, selfless exploit did not hesitate to declare his willingness to do so. It was Karapet Tantian, a thirty-two years old patriot teacher from Arark School, who climbed the roof of their semi-destroyed position and began raining shots over the advancing askyars. He managed to kill seven of them within a few minutes and made the rest escape, but alas, to our greatest lamentation, the bullet fired from Hamud Agha's arsenal exploded right over that unsurpassed patriot's head crushing it immediately. I have to remind with profound sorrow that that hero was the very friend of mine, who was urging me to be careful three days ago, when I was going to my aunt's.

Fell the second night of our struggle for existence: despite the enemy's continuous fierce bombardment and several unsuccessful attempts to intrude upon our positions, they again failed to break our disobedient people's resistance. Most of our emplacements had again been ruined and levelled with the ground, within two days about thirty of our brave warriors had been killed while about twice that number had been heavily wounded. Indeed, nobody could learn the exact number of the casualties except for the Military Headquarters; no official announcements were made in that regard, in order to keep the people in high spirits and not to depress them. However, following the

Headquarter's order on the second day the Information and Propaganda Section addressed the population with the following appeal, "Compatriots! Our fierce and merciless enemies have suffered another fiasco in their attempt to crush our and, particularly your strong will. Be sure that the Turks will never succeed in invading our defensive line as long as our selfless patriots resist their offensives with heroic determination and we are unanimous in our work, struggle and thinking.

"We are fighting for the protection of our existence and do not want to leave our wives, sisters, children and parents to the base enemy's mercy. They have fraudulently taken away our best compatriots and slaughtered the Armenian soldiers violently and meanly.

"Today they continued their unceasing, ruthless attacks, destroyed our positions and made numerous attempts to intrude into our lines to subject us to their bayonets and pole-axes. However, they will never succeed in it since we are offering them a unanimous, valiant resistance. They have suffered hundreds of casualties within these two days whereas we have lost only several warriors.

"Long live our heroes! Long live our unbending patrol and the workers of the rear who help them diligently!"

At seven o'clock in the morning on the order and with the immediate participation of the Construction Committee began the restoration of the collapsed and ruined positions: apart from the children and those at a rather advanced age, Aygestan's entire population began working with but magnificent and unprecedented zeal. Everybody did what they were able to: they helped the masons, the women and girls carried mud, stones and bricks, others assisted the digging workers by moving away the unnecessary soil from the underground passages they had destroyed. Some people rushed to render aid to the injured by supplying them with underwear, bed clothes, garments, warm dishes and soup, while many were engaged in gathering bread, food, clothes, stocks, shoes, underwear and other necessary items. The work in the rear proceeded with great enthusiasm and devotion.

THE THIRD DAY

The third day of Van-Aygestan's self-defense was perhaps the most crucial of all: like a heavily wounded beast, the enemy resumed their mass offensives shrouding every part of the city in infernal fire and flames. However, the most intensive volleys and shots were targeted on the central quarter of Norashen, where the Turks rained shells and grenades fired from the guns on the houses; they immediately exploded, converting into hundreds of splinters and causing fires here and there.

The enemy supposed - and unfortunately, that supposition was true to reality - that the warehouses and Center of our self-defense were concentrated in that quarter: that was the reason why it became the target of their bombardment.

Fortunately, Aygestan inhabitants managed to keep their composure even on that dreadful, fatal day thanks to their profound conviction and realization that they had no other alternative but self-defense and resistance till their dying breath.

There are certain misfortunes that have indefinite extent and a vague outcome; notwithstanding that, they are rays of good luck and happiness. The same is true of our self-defense: the Armenian nation had commenced a crazy mass struggle, fully convinced that they would be saved only through such a self-denying, self-sacrificing resistance.

The Headquarters focused its attention on the emplacements and defensive lines sending auxiliary armed forces to substitute for those killed and injured. Each of the ancillary sections, the munitions factory, Technical, Planning and Building, Procuring Sections as well as the others worked diligently, without sparing time or energy in their attempts to fulfill the tasks entrusted to them perfectly.

The women, girls and sometimes even the old and children bravely fought against the fires: they took all the soil and ashes they could find in their houses and tonirs and scattered them here and there to extinguish the fires caused by the bombardment.

How wonderfully unanimous and solidary the Armenians were in those days! I wish they were able to retain forever the highly laudable unity and unyielding unanimity they revealed in those terrible days...

Eventually, night descended over that critical, formidable day and, fortunately, the enemy again failed to break our resistance.

The third day of Aygestan's self-defense will ever have its permanent place in history in token of the Armenian people's undescribable, valiant resistance and their strong, steadfast will to live and breathe freely.

At half past eight at the same night, despising the horror aroused by the enemy's bombardment, "Fanfar," the band of Varzhapetanots' students, formed under the guidance of Hovhannes Pujikian and Margar Pakhchoyan, began playing patriotic melodies appealing to fight. On the one hand, they encouraged the lion-hearted warriors of Aygestan inciting them to struggle, on the other hand, they infuriated the enemy, who had suffered another fiasco.

The young messengers, encouraged and cheered up by the band music, ran about the city to spread the following appeal-announcement issued by gelatin printing that night, "Compatriots! Today we have again succeeded in resisting our enemy's unspeakably fierce and violent offensives and bombardment. Our patrol fought and protected us with unsurpassed heroism, with all of you having your share of aid in our general struggle. Be fully convinced that we will not be defeated: the Lord, who is our protector, will not ever let the mean, merciless enemy exterminate and trample us on, extinguish our hopes and lives and seize our native soil and houses like bandits. Our beautiful Aygestan is our forefathers' sacred land, their beloved homeland, Vaspurakan is a precious legacy, which our ancestors built and improved with the sweat of their brow and handed down to us. We have the sacred duty of defending it up to our last breath and if we are predestined to die, let us die an honorable death of immortal heroes... ."

IN THE SUBSEQUENT DAYS OF THE SELF-DEFENSE

Before sunrise on the fourth day, I decided to visit my family members and then see our friend Kheranian on my way back to tell him to attend the night meeting to be held in my food storehouse on the same day.

My first impression of our street was very painful and heart-rending: at a small distance from the arsenal called Hamid Agha, or Hamud Agha, the two-story and three-story houses of the rich had collapsed being almost reduced to heaps of ruins. In certain parts, access to our crooked, narrow street was simply impossible. In those days to walk about that street in broad daylight equated to committing suicide, but fortunately, it was only beginning to grow dark and I managed to reach our house with great difficulty.

I knocked on our outside door for several times, but nobody opened it. I suddenly began shuddering terribly: what had happened to my family? Where had they gone? I had to move towards our garden wall extending on the continuation of the street and our house. Knowing that it had a comparatively lower part, I climbed it and entered our garden, completely panic-stricken: within a few minutes dreadful thoughts had assailed me.

What had happened to my people? I thought they could have fallen victim to bombardment, but the exterior of our house was not damaged. Unwilling to knock on the garden door, I climbed the low wall not far from it and ascended the roof of our lumber-room. Then I climbed the black mulberry tree and descended our yard, where I stopped for a moment looking around. Our single-story house had suffered no damage at all, for the bombardment coming from Hamid Agha's arsenal had not reached us. I supposed that my people might be sleeping in the tonir room since it was the safest place in our house and my supposition proved right.

I slipped into the tonir room quietly. It was divided into three sections, i.e. the so-called ante-room, the part with the tonir and the place where we slept, a section two and a half meters wide, four meters long and about half a meter high. Generally the female representatives of our family slept in that part, while the males slept either in the room or bedroom. However, when I entered I noticed that that order had been violated: apparently, my sister and brother's wife had asked Father to sleep in the upper corner of that section, being afraid of remaining alone.

Upon entering I called in a very low, hardly distinguishable voice, "Araksi!"

She immediately jumped out of bed, ran up to me, put her still very tender arms and hands around my neck following an old habit still preserved from her childhood and burst out crying so that she woke up Father and our sister-in-law.

"Where've you been, Sergei? Why've you left us alone and neglected?"

"My dear Araksi! Wait a moment and calm down. First of all, you should be ashamed of crying; you're already a grown-up girl of fifteen to sixteen, your peers do their best to help our warriors. And why do you consider yourself neglected and lonely? Thank God your parent, Father Harutian, is with you."

"It seems to me you've forgotten that I'm taking care of our brother's sick wife: she won't live a single hour without me. We didn't get a wink of sleep this night: when Haykanoush learned that Karapet had been injured... ."

"What? Karapet's been injured? When? How?" I asked hurriedly, interrupting my sister.

"Haven't they told you? I sent you the news through messenger Sourik yesterday evening."

"He hasn't seen me yet. Tell me how he was wounded and in what part?"

“In the arm, in the left arm. You know that he’s included in one of the patrol groups. Yesterday morning he was moved to *Kor* (the Armenian equivalent for ‘blind’) Khecho’s position, which was heavily bombarded after midday and the gun bullet exploded right there, killing poor Avo on the spot and, fortunately, injuring our brother.”

“Tell me if his wound is grave and whether he’s been taken to hospital.”

“They say the injury is light and he’ll soon recover. Father Harutiun went to hospital and returned about two hours ago so that we’re completely alone. My dear Sergei, I can’t hide from you, I was so frightened, so frightened that I can’t express it. And when poor Haykanoush - you know what splitting headaches she generally has - learned that Karapet had been wounded she began vomiting. What could I do alone, tell me what could I do?”

She again began weeping.

“My dear Araks, if you go on crying, I’ll immediately leave you and never return. I keep saying that you shouldn’t cry, shouldn’t, can you understand it? I repeat, your peers are doing heroic work: they’re carrying mud and stones for the destroyed positions, gathering the fragments of the enemy shells thrown over us, putting soil and ashes on the fires, working as messengers, delivering food to the patrol while you’re busy only taking care of your sick sister-in-law, as you’re claiming, and are crying for it. Now you yourself tell me, isn’t it a shame for you to be so poor-spirited and faint-hearted?”

“I’ll be happier to do all the work you’ve just mentioned, take me with you, I can’t stay here alone.” And she again began crying with those words.

“I can’t stay here.” I repeated my sister’s last words involuntarily and started meditating over her grief. There was a strange, inexplicable bond, a spiritual bond that linked her with me to such a great extent that I seemed to constitute her entire family after my poor mother’s death. When I was absent from the house it was empty for her and nothing could comfort her. It was not fear, loneliness or the difficulty of helping her sick sister-in-law that made her cry: she was weeping because I had been absent from home for several days.

I firmly clasped her to my bosom, gave her several warm kisses and cheered her up, addressing her the following consoling words, “Araks, my darling! If you love me, you shouldn’t cry anymore. I can’t tolerate your weeping: when I see you crying my heart’s rent and I can hardly breathe. I repeat, if you love me you shouldn’t cry.”

Then I talked to my father and sister-in-law for about half an hour making every possible attempt to console and encourage the latter. She was very pessimistic about her health: the majority of sick people generally believe in their recovery, but unfortunately, our Haykanoush was one of those who thought it hardly possible.

In my youth I was a fervent believer since the Marxist ideology had not succeeded in shattering my belief yet: I asked Father to pray ardently for our fighters and people’s salvation.

HEART-TO-HEART TALKS

Beginning with the fourth day of self-defense, our belief that we really would be able to defend ourselves grew stronger and stronger: after those critical, dreadful days,

we considerably overcame our doubts and fears that we would not be able to resist the enemy. Besides, we saw that the enemy did not succeed in realizing their impertinent decision to crush us within a single day: yes, they were convinced that it would take them merely twenty-four hours to break our resistance and defense.

On the fourth day, the intensity of the Turkish offensives and bombardment considerably abated: probably, they were busy working out new criminal plans so that the Armenians who were defending themselves would be taken aback, but indeed, we were not able to learn anything about that.

That night I was waiting for ten of our young friends whom I had invited to a meeting. In those days it was first of all difficult and then dangerous to gather a large number of people in the same place, but I had managed that through six of our boys who were among the twenty messengers.

The meeting was attended by V. and N. Kheranians, A. Khanjian, Hrant Darbinian, Kaljian, Mihrdat Brutian, Mrs. Solakhian and two others. (Mihrdat Brutian's brother Abraham Brutian and Mrs. Hasmik Solakhian's husband Artashes Solakhian had been arrested several months before the beginning of the fighting, being tortured to death in prisons by the Turkish barbarians.)

I opened the meeting with the following words, "I deeply regret that we have to meet under the circumstances you are well-aware of. All of you know that we have started an extremely unequal struggle with the enemy thousandfold stronger than us. You also know that we have not commenced this fighting voluntarily, willingly: the enemy have imposed it upon us, the Aygestan population. They fraudulently invited and imprisoned the Armenian revolutionaries and our best patriots, including Brutian, Solakhian, Aso and several others. At present we have no information about them: before the fighting, numerous attempts were made to release them, but unluckily, they proved unsuccessful. You know that on April 3 of this year, Jevdet meanly invited Ishkhan and his friends under the plea of sending them to Shatakh as mediators to put an end to the local Armeno-Turkish skirmishes, but violently slaughtered them in Hayots-Dzor. Finally, you are fully informed about the formidable widespread massacres of the Armenians in the region's districts and villages.

"The primary objective of today's assembly is to meet each other and keep our friends in awareness of the occurrences of the past days. By the way, if you have any instrumental suggestions, you may put them down briefly and hand them to the Central Military Body so that it will carry them out, if they prove expedient. However, I think all of us would like to know what share the members of our Students' Organization have had in this struggle between life and death."

The first person to take the floor was Mrs. Hasmik Solakhian, who said the following, "Although I have a seven-year-old son and a four years old daughter, who need maternal care particularly in these tumultuous days, I was not able to persuade myself to stay at home. I left my children in my mother's charge and voluntarily applied to the hospital of American missionaries now allocated to the wounded patrols. I have been working as a nurse during these days and right now, while sitting here, I am very anxious since some of the injured are in rather grave condition. Unfortunately, the essential medicaments are quite insufficient in the hospital. The absence of experienced sur-

geons, disinfection means and even the most vital medicines bind us hand and foot putting us in a desperate situation.”

“On behalf of my friends and me I express our profound gratitude to our much respected friend’s selfless and unmatched wife for her devotion and self-denial,” I said, shaking her hand warmly.

“I have been appointed second assistant of “Shah-Bandar’s” patrol,” Darbinian said. “We are in the very jaws of death for our position is at a distance of four-five hundred steps from Hamud Agha’s arsenal. We have been constantly subjected to the infernal flames and gun-fire coming from that accursed armoury. So far they have twice destroyed our positions killing our first chief patrol Karo, who was an unsurpassed, brave warrior. Despite this, however, the fighters are resisting the enemy with greatest self-sacrifice, like drunken madmen.

“Nonetheless, I have to confess that we would have been utterly unable to resist the enraged enemy but for our compatriot masons who have been building and rebuilding the ruined positions over and over, like automatic machines. We have been defending ourselves against those serpents’ volleys and formidable fire with but great difficulty while our indefatigable masons kept erecting walls and barriers behind us, at a distance of two to three meters. However, the most exciting thing about all this was to see our women and girls, among whom were also hunched old women and men, bringing stones, bricks and mud to the workers. I wonder whether it is possible to imagine a heroic struggle more exciting and patriotic than this one.”

“My friends! I see everybody’s eyes directed to me,” Aghasi Khanjian began modestly. “I know you want to hear what I have been doing: Comrade Sergei is aware of what I have done and I think you could also learn about it.

“At the last meeting of the Defense Committee I was included in the Information and Propaganda Section together with Hovhannes Kuloghlian and Onik Mkhitarian; to my mind I was able to justify my being admitted to that body being helpful for our cause within my power. All the patriotic and encouraging appeals made on behalf of the Headquarters as well as its announcements and orders were realized through our three-member committee.

“I hope it will not sound as self-praise if I tell you that I have been entrusted with the important task of editing a considerable part of the announcements issued by hectographic printing as well as the appeals and encouragements made to raise the spirits of the people who have resorted to self-defense.”

“As for me,” V. Kheranian said, “I am collaborating with the Technical and Planning Section. Two of its elderly members, Professor Minassian and Mambre Mkrian, are theorists in chemistry, and we also have chemical technicians headed by Grigor Bulgharatsy. Our section, which is carrying out very difficult and responsible work, has a great number of craftsmen, armourers, casters and moulders at its disposal. It also comprises skilled digging workers who are assigned the hardest and most urgent tasks: each of them toils under the ground fifteen to sixteen hours daily. We have set it our objective,” at that moment Kheranian paused for a little while, looked around, shook his hand in the air and continued, “eh, it is all the same for all of us have only a single common goal, and none of us can have anything to do with those rascals. Yes, it has been

planned to explode and burn down those vipers' two arsenals that keep molesting us causing inconveniences to our fighters. You heard our friend Darbinian's account: we have to annihilate and reduce to ashes those two arsenals in all haste so that our valorous patrol will be able to breathe a sigh of relief and do not have to struggle against the enemy attacks coming from two sides simultaneously.

"However, even more necessary and important is the preparation of powder and guns that are precious for us. Our chemists are working day and night for the achievement of these two indispensable means."

That announcement was so encouraging that the meeting participants began to applaud the speaker, having completely forgotten the graveness of the situation. Kheranian resumed his speech, "As our theorists in chemistry and chemical technicians have told us, soon, perhaps within a couple of days, all the plans of the section will be successfully fulfilled and our courageous warriors' power of resistance will multiply."

Again the happy applause and long lives roared. In my turn, I added, "My dear friends, I see that all of us partake in this sacred cause of self-defense within our power. And this is quite normal for otherwise we would have been ashamed to fall behind others. We have a common goal in this critical struggle, that is not to give the enemy a single chance to pave their way to victory via our compatriots' and our corpses, with impertinent laughter.

"The history of the Armenian nation abounds in heroic struggles for existence: we have never destroyed others' houses or countries and have never extinguished fire in our neighbors' fireplaces. We have never darkened their bright day, nor have we reduced their houses and gardens to debris through gun shells. We have always tried to build and improve everything in an attempt to prosper thanks to our own hard work. I am fully convinced that tyranny and barbarity cannot reign long.

"I am glad you have come to this meeting and wish you good luck, my friends. Hurry up to perform your noble, sacred duty before your compatriots."

Kissing each other my friends parted; remaining alone, I was suddenly imbued with sweet pride in having such honest and self-denying friends.

THE BURNING OF HAMUD AGHA'S ARSENAL

It was the fifth night of self-defense: about fifteen people, i.e. the members of the Military Headquarters or its ancillary sections, had gathered in the center of the Military Body. It had fallen to my lot to be present there on that day and we all were waiting for Bulgharatsy impatiently.

Since the very first day of the self-defense, the Technical and Planning Section had begun its hard and very dangerous toil of digging underground passages with Bulgharatsy's immediate participation. It had been decided to burn down Hamud Agha's arsenal, that posed so many obstacles for our fighting, creating more and more fatalities among our warriors, especially those in the nearby positions.

The arsenal, that had been built of hard hewn stone about eighteen years before, had all the facilities for self-defense and attacks: the large terrace on the second floor was thoroughly fortified by a barrier, in whose niches, at a distance of two meters, were

placed machine-guns and heavy cannon incessantly firing shells and flames all around them. It would be utter craziness to attack that impregnable fort under those circumstances and the only way to get rid of it was to burn it down.

Below the arsenal ran the water of the *keahriz*; the digging workers had first used that spring's way, then had turned to the left and dug the underground passage to the arsenal at a distance of twenty-five meters.

The digging ended up successfully without arousing any suspicions among the enemy soldiers still stationed in the arsenal, and the powder prepared by our specialists was placed below the building's ground floor.

That night the fuses fixed to the powder were lit at the appointed time and it exploded.

Entered Bulgharatsy and those present in the Headquarters surrounded him waiting for his words in great anxiety.

He said, "I am very sorry," and profound despair could be traced in his words, "I've to tell you that the dynamite we'd prepared didn't prove powerful enough. I think the proximity of the water way must have reduced the exploding power of the powder. Our digging workers' hard toil of five days and nights appeared completely futile."

"Oh, what a pity, what a great misfortune! And what are we to do now?" Similar desperate exclamations could be heard all over the room.

"What are we to do? This is the most important thing," Bulgharatsy answered automatically and absent-mindedly. A little while later, tapping his forehead for several times with his two long fingers, he added in a decisive tone, "We have no right to give way to despair for it's equal to voluntarily yielding ourselves up to death. We will have to consult our theorists again and try to improve the quality of our powder. We have no other way out: those villains' arsenal seems to be our death angel and we should make every possible endeavor to extirpate it."

Bulgharatsy hesitated for a moment and was going to continue, when two of our young messengers ran in out of breath and said, "Mr. Grigor! The arsenal is lost in smoke. Look through the telescope."

"What are you talking about, oghuls, are you dreaming? I myself stayed there for two hours after the explosion to see the result, but nothing happened... Well, let us look through the telescope. Perhaps... . Boys, I can't see anything through this telescope, only night and darkness. My dear friends, please, run to the arsenal again and bring us some trustworthy news. But be careful, very careful: if the arsenal has really been burnt down, the enemy will now be infuriated... I wish I were young..."

I myself rushed out and hurried towards the arsenal without any command or invitation to go: I was very young then and was eager to see the burning down and collapse of our executioners' den, like the rest... .

An hour after midnight, everything became clear: despite its very little power, by a stroke of good fortune, the explosion of the powder had generated a small crack and reached the ground floor of the arsenal, where straw, various shells and cartridges were stored in different sections. The fire broke out flaring up every minute and spreading so rapidly that the askyars of the armoury were not able to extinguish it, despite their strenuous efforts.

Out of fear of being burnt to death the desperate, panic-stricken soldiers began rushing out of the arsenal defending themselves with any fire-arms they could find. The Armenian warriors of the nearby positions volleyed those rascals and devils with revengeful shots killing about twenty of them.

The fire was gradually blazing up and spreading: the predators' den that had been towering in the heart of Aygestan Armenians throughout eighteen years had fallen prey to flames. During the five days and nights of the self-defense, those ruthless barbarians had shed the blood of many of our brave patrol as well as the helpless women, children and old people so that now the Armenians were wreaking vengeance for all that.

Hardly any of those criminal, demoniac askyars would have been able to escape our warriors' vindictive bullets but for the general confusion, night darkness and the vicinity of Toprak-Kale's arsenal.

At one o'clock, the students' "Fanfar" began playing patriotic and freedom-praising melodies before the fort of crime and tyranny that had appeared in the jaws of the blazing flames: those melodies alleviated the wounds of Aygestan Armenians' suffering hearts and ravished them greatly.

Early in the next morning, despising the fear of Pochik-Ahmad's arsenal's Turks, who still huddled up there in great panic, and the enemy reports coming from outside the defensive line, Aygestan Armenians, engrossed in their self-defense, poured out into the streets - irrespective of their age, or sex - to witness the annihilation of that hated arsenal that had been located at the beginning of Aygestan's main avenue for twenty years, stifling their free breathing like a dragon of a thousand heads. When they saw with their own eyes that those vipers' den was no longer existent having been reduced to ashes, they began singing exciting revolutionary songs for joy, and many of them even started dancing with profound enthusiasm... .

That day and on the following two days the arsenal still mourned its obliteration in the dreadful black smoke of fire... .

GLEAMS OF HOPE FOR SALVATION

The burning down of Hamud Agha's arsenal was an encouraging glimmer of hope for Aygestan Armenians ardently struggling for their self-defense.

In those days Aygestan inhabitants resembled a person caught in a raging blizzard in the depth of a forest or meadow. Strong and powerful as he is, that person cannot escape and rid himself of the lightning roaring over his head; nor can he eschew the gale-force howling winds, plunging him into the snowdrift. He is swept off his feet, falls down, tumbles in the snow and again rises to his feet with the utmost efforts merely to get stifled in the snowstorm and be buried in the snowdrift, completely out of breath. Exposed to the unbridled fury of the elements, he enters into a supernatural struggle against them to somehow free himself of their all-absorbing jaws, but his endeavors prove fruitless, absolutely fruitless.

Can you imagine the psychological state of a person who has found himself in that mortal struggle and notices a ray of light or the slightest traces of a gleaming fire all of

a sudden? That immediately imbues him with a desire to live, arouses a glimmer of hope in his heart so that he doubles and intensifies his resistance for the sake of salvation and rescue.

Exactly like that person exposed to such a natural disaster, Aygestan Armenians were inspired with that hope, the hope that they would be able to win. They had been putting up successful resistance throughout those five days and nights, had they not? Moreover, for the time being they had abolished the enemy's annihilation plan by burning down Hamud Agha's arsenal.

The valiant self-defense of the first three days and, especially the burning down of Hamud Agha's arsenal were of paramount significance in that struggle: but for those extremely remarkable events, Van's population might have surely been slaughtered by infuriated, bloodthirsty Jevdet and his accomplices.

Immediately after the arsenal had gone up in smoke, before the dawn of the following day, it was decided to burn down Pochik-Ahmad's position, where the enemy guards were concentrated. That emplacement comprising about thirty soldiers and sanguiferous janissaries was the second enemy fortification by its military significance.

At four o'clock the next night that second den of vipers, which had been raining bullets on our patrol and even the innocent inhabitants until the previous day, was shrouded in blazing fire and puffs of thick smoke that totally reduced it to ruins. While that fortification located inside the Armenians' defensive line was crackling in the flames lit by the revengeful Armenians, Van inhabitants who had gathered there commenced dancing around it and jumping talking to each other through hearty laughter*.

–Տղա, բա էս դիրքի տաճիկները դրվորը (որտեղ) են ճղեր (“Lads, and where've the Turks of this position run away?”)

–Բա՛, յիմար էս, չես խասկկնայ, հե՛նց որ կրակը տեսան բոչունի թևեր խազան, թռան ու փախան (“Look here, are you a silly clot? Don't you understand they ran away like lightning as soon as they saw the fire?”)

–Դվոր փախան, որ ո՛չ մեկին չը տեսանը (“Where did they run away so that nobody saw them?”)

–Տո՛ գիժ-տուտուց դվոր պիտի փախչեին հրեւ էս բոցերի ու ծխի ու մոխրի հետ մեկտեղ, դրանց «արդար խոզին» թռաւ ու զնաց Թալաթ-Էնվար փաշաների մօտ (“You, fool, where could they run away? See these flames, smoke and ashes? Their ‘innocent souls’ flew to those Talaat and Enver Pashas together with these flames, smoke and ashes.”)

–Վա՛յ տամ ձեր խելօք գլխին ու ձեր փշոցներին: Ա՛յ միամիտ յիմարներ, էտոնը էն ժամանակն են փախել ու ճղել, երբ Հասնուլ աղի խաբար-էլածն այրեց: Ափսո՛ւ էս մեր փէտերն ու նաւթը, որ էստեղ խարամ արանը (“Woe is me to hear all your clever talks and lies! You, naive fools, they took their heels when that accursed arsenal of Hamud Agha was burnt down. It's such a pity we spoilt so much wood and oil there.”)

–Հա՛յ, հա՛յ, տնավեր չէլած էդ դժոխքի դեվերին էրելու համար փէտերն էլ ափսոս կուգաս (“Good heavens! One doesn't want to use even wood to burn those devils incarnate!”)

Indeed, later it turned out that the askyars who had fortified themselves in that position had disappeared as soon as they saw the obliteration of Hamud Agha's arsenal, taking advantage of the general tumult and, probably, changing their clothes and disguising themselves.

* The talks are presented in the Van dialect with their English translation following in the brackets.

Whatever it was, now we had to thank our lucky stars for having completely rid ourselves of the dangerous enemy who had been constantly causing trouble to us within our defensive line. No longer imbued with the fear of being attacked from the rear, our patrol and fighters focused their attention on resisting the offensives threatening them by the outside enemy.

However, the impertinent governor and hazarapet could not put up with that new manifestation of Van Armenians' disobedience easily: they were extremely infuriated at the burning down of the arsenals as well as the slaughter of their soldiers and the narrow escape of those surviving. After two days of comparative abatement, the enemy resumed their heavy attacks, and the deafening explosion of the shells and volleys again roared in the entire city. Again houses and positions were set ablaze and reduced to ruins, panic and terror permeating the people. Would our heroes be able to repel the savage offensives of the enemy once again? Van's people had determined to continue the resistance even at the expense of their lives.

AN ALARM AND A THANKSGIVING PRAYER

Several days elapsed without any particular emergencies and on the morning of the thirteenth day of our self-defense, the young messengers spread the leaflets issued by the Information and Propaganda Section all around the city, through the emplacements, trenches, houses, etc. The leaflets said, "Compatriots! Yesterday all day long our enemy who had again grown enraged were raining infernal flames on our defensive lines, but our courageous warriors did not retreat even for a single step. Last night our devoted masons and their assistants, the brave workers re-built our destroyed positions. We are sure that the enemy will never manage to break our strong will and depress us.

"We have fortified our Technical and Planning Section so that the number of its members has now increased by five. We are asking you to give that section as much red copper, lead and other easily melted metals as possible.

"We should not display any shred of depression, faintheartedness or omissions of any kind: these are harmful phenomena equating to betrayal, something quite alien to those having direct and indirect participation in this invincible heroic struggle.

"Believe in the heroism of your warriors and you will share the final victory with them. Long live the Armenian people who are able to defend themselves with self-denial, sacrificing their lives for the sake of their homeland and nation...!"

That appeal had its immediate response: during the next several days, Aygestan people handed all kinds of copper utensils, bowls and samovars to the Technical Section, all those metals converting into small guns in the hands of skilled specialists, with Bulgharatsy's immediate participation. Those guns began firing thus considerably raising the fighters' and, especially people's spirits.

In Norashen Quarter's church, of whose domes only one had remained standing, a requiem mass was administered and a thanksgiving prayer was sent to heaven on Sunday to perpetuate the memory of those killed in the two-week self-defense, ask the Lord for strength and power for our fighters as well as the salvation of the Armenians under siege.

Despite the fact that in those days the horror of extermination hung over Van Armenians like a sword of Damocles, a large multitude had hurried to their beloved church despising every kind of disaster and trouble. They had come to join the priesthood in addressing All-gracious God the entreaty coming from the very depths of their hearts, “Hallowed be thy name, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven, give us this day our daily bread and deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom and the power... .”

What a marvellous, magnificent mass it was in those dreadful days! I myself had the luck of being present at that historic mass for a little while before it was over. The entire crowd was praying in unity for the mercy of Almighty God; utterly heart-breaking were those whispers of unanimous prayer that reached the semi-destroyed arches of the church to go to infinity, to the domains of the omnipotent Lord, mixed with the bluish smoke of censer. Finally, the vicar administered a solemn requiem mass, lauding the unsurpassed valor of those courageous fighters who died a death of hero for their people’s salvation, their honor and glorification.

A CONVERSATION IN THE CHURCH YARD

Upon leaving church I noticed that the multitude who had attended the mass mainly consisted of women, children aged between eight to fourteen and men over fifty. A group of elderly people who had gathered in the church yard, not far from the main entrance, below the last arch of the porch, were busy discussing current issues and showering questions on a man whom the others treated with profound respect. I recognized that man: it was Hovhannes Kuloghlian, one of the members of the Military Headquarters.

One of them asked, “Hovhannes Agha, would you please tell us what this barefaced Jevdet and his state want of us and what’s to happen to us?”

“You’re one of our experienced revolutionaries well-aware of the general situation. How long do you think our warriors will be able to repulse our enemies who are as strong as a horse?”

“Kuloghlian Effendi! I beg you if you happen to know anything about our volunteers, please, tell us.”

“People say the Russian army has crossed the border and will soon arrive. Do you know anything about this?”

“They say..., but this means waiting till the cows come home.”

Hovhannes Kuloghlian, who had been busy running from one position to another to cheer up and encourage the warriors with his patriotic speeches, employing his high rhetoric skills, this time seemed to have lost patience and answered in an almost angry tone, “Aghas! All of you are elderly people who have wide experience and know the difference between good and evil. First of all let me tell you that I know these cruel Turks better than any of you for I have been struggling against them for twenty-five years now. They have hated us since the times of Sultan Hamid up to these criminal pashas called Talaat and Enver, they have always declared that the Armenians have no right to pose any claims to land, homeland and freedom on them. They have always said

that if the Armenians wish to stay in their land and earn their piece of bread, they will have to be humble and obedient, yielding themselves up to their mercy and compassion, giving away their weapons and disobedient fidayis. They keep stating that the Armenians should be grateful to the Ottoman Empire and its benevolent government and pray God for them. Now do you understand what they require of us?

“As for your other questions, I have to say that it is very difficult for me to answer them now. I have heard the news about the arrival of the Russian troops and volunteers, too, but I cannot say anything about how trustworthy it is. However, there is an important fact that we should not forget: we consider Russia, England and France to be our friends and protectors, most of us believe in this, but I myself hold a different opinion, for which I have firm grounds.

“Aghas, I cannot believe that it took you such a short time to forget about the massacres of Van and other places perpetrated in ‘95 to ‘96. Have you forgotten the slaughter of our poor compatriots in Adana? In those times these states were not engaged in any war for us to think that they were too absorbed in their own troubles and problems to concern themselves with ours.

“In those times the countries which we regard as our friends were not engaged in any war, and if they wanted, they would have backed those unfair Turks into a corner. However, they were not willing to do so for they had their own private interests and were not troubled at all about the massacres of the wretched Armenians. They put the heavy burden of the responsibility for the slaughter of the innocent people upon their conscience and remained as silent as Zechariah when he was dead.

“I beg your pardon, my aghas, for such a long answer, but I still have something necessary to say: let me tell it to you so that I will not have any pangs of conscience.

“It is perhaps more than twenty years since we worsened our relations with the Turkish Government and I cannot say that only we are to blame for that. Each individual, no matter what nationality he is, has a desire to live a human life, toils day and night to earn his living and secure free life for his family, doing everything within his power. Then, how can he bear injustice and violence if after all this, one day somebody comes and uses every plea in order to deprive him of whatever he has gained through hard work, with the sweat of his brow?

“These merciless Turks are not satisfied with the fact that many centuries ago their barbaric ancestors invaded our country putting a huge number of young people, the select representatives of our nation, to the sword, converting their dwellings into slaughter-houses, stripping them of their homeland and perpetrating all kinds of outrages. And now they have tied us hand and foot and are stifling us, robbing us of our property, profaning our sanctuaries and saying impertinently to us, “You are alien in this country, you are our humble subjects and do not have any rights to speak and even think about such nonsense as ‘freedom and equality’.

“My dear misters, we have but one remedy and that is the solidarity of our compatriots as well as their sacred struggle for liberation. I am very sorry, my dear compatriots, that I cannot add anything to what I have already said. I have some urgent matters to see to and if there is any opportunity, we shall again speak about such issues. I wish you all the best.”

HIDDEN PERFIDY AND THE GHOST OF FAMINE

Driven to utter despair at the resolute resistance of Aygestan Armenians under siege, infuriated at Kaghakamej brave warriors' self-defense, grown almost crazy at the disobedience and fighting in Shatakh, Pesandasht and other regions, Jevdet Bey decided to employ new tactics with certain concealed perfidy. He ordered to intensify the siege of the Armenian population in all the aforementioned regions without any further fatalities and attacks till those in a state of siege were starved into surrender.

That new treacherous tactic was but mortal, particularly for Aygestan Armenians: we had been constantly struggling against inevitable physical extermination for already twenty days having almost completely run short of food products.

What were we to do? How were we to feed at least those soldiers who guarded us and fought day and night for our common interests, those performing the technical tasks and the injured lying in hospitals?

The situation was but too critical. Despite the fact that the Armenians having some food resources had not spared anything, voluntarily handing in as much as they could, it was decided to entitle the Food Procuring Committee to carry out thorough search and take all kinds of food they could find, leaving the owners resources for only fifteen days. Unfortunately, that search yielded but very insignificant results so that the threat of starving to death was becoming graver and graver day by day.

For five days, from the sixteenth day of self-defense till the twentieth, when our positions in Aygestan were being bombarded at short intervals, we had no news from our compatriots fighting in Kaghakamej. Sometimes we even doubted that their resistance had been crushed and they had fallen victim to mass slaughter.

On the twentieth day, a group holding white flags approached our farthest emplacement at Khach Street from the side of Kaghakamej and handed in Jevdet Bey's written invitation to surrender addressed to Aygestan Armenians. Thus, we gained the clue to the entire hidden perfidy of the Turkish governor. Written in a mild tone, the suggestion that we should yield ourselves up said, "Our Armenian compatriots! Our benevolent and placable government has ordered us to treat you with forgiveness so that we assign you to put an end to the senseless bloodshed immediately and resume your peaceful, tranquil lives giving away your weapons. We have been commanded to provide you with a proper guarantee of this.

"Taking advantage of the opportunity, we would like to inform you that our Armenian compatriots in Kaghakamej, Shatakh, Pesandasht and other places have ceased their resistance and mutiny and have handed in their weapons."

The messengers were told that they would receive the reply to the "generous" governor's appeal in twenty-four hours.

At eight o'clock on the same day the joint session of the Military Body and all the ancillary sections discussed the governor's suggestion of surrender and unanimously decided - with only two people abstaining - to reject Jevdet's proposal which was actually another manifestation of fraud.

We were lucky enough, for a few hours before we handed in our rejection of the governor's suggestion, two of our valorous young messengers, Mkro and Sevo, returned to the Headquarters. Five days before, they had voluntarily committed themselves to

going to Kaghakamej in the dark of night, disguised as wandering beggars, to obtain certain information about our fighters' defense there. Thanks to the fact that those young men had worked as treasurers for the local Armenian merchants for many years, they knew all the streets with their entrances and alleys like the palm of their hands. Overcoming different obstacles and having but a miraculous escape, they came back and told us the following, "The Armenian warriors in Kaghakamej continue fighting and offering valiant resistance: they have burnt down and destroyed almost all the state institutions and huge storehouses belonging to the Turks. They are lucky enough for they are supplied with abundant food, powder and cartridges."

The Defense Committee of Kaghakamej had avoided sending any piece of written information or appeal through those young boys confining itself to only certain coded message that had been previously agreed upon. That happy news made us present the flat rejection of the governor's proposal.

Another manifestation of the governor's fraud consisted in that the authorities evicted the Armenian women, children and elderly people from the nearby villages into Aygestan. They had been told to go freely, without any fears, merge into Aygestan population and live there "peacefully" for the Turkish Government had decided to grant a pardon to Van Armenians. How were the hungry, poor, exhausted and helpless peasants to oppose that order? Those wretched and starving people had no other alternative but to obey having been told the following, "Your security is thoroughly in your hands: having sent all their armed forces to the front the Government is not able to defend you against all the Turkish bash kasans (those who cut necks), killers who escape from prisons and the Kurdish robbers."

Thus, within several days large multitudes of starving, almost naked and completely derelict children, elderly women and men poured into Aygestan, Van. The authorities had taken away the young Armenians under the plea of mobilization and had slaughtered almost all of them whereas the young Armenian women had been kidnapped.

What were the Self-Defense Bodies to do to counteract that perfidious and pernicious trap laid by Jevdet? The population within the defensive line and even the fighters themselves were on the verge of becoming prey to the ghost of famine; moreover, the catastrophe was growing more severe since there was a constant influx of new crowds of hungry and naked people who were almost starved to death and could hardly breathe.

The most horrifying thing about all that was that many children in those immigrating groups held sheets of paper in their hands delivering the following ultimatum, "If you refuse to receive these people, the state cannot provide any guarantees for their safety."

Truly, they carried out their threat: in compliance with the merciless Turkish governor's order those parts of the groups that could neither penetrate into Aygestan nor find some natural shelter, trench or dwelling for themselves, became targets for the enemy volleys.

When our Headquarters was assured that those bloodthirsty beasts did not spare even the helpless, wretched children and the aged for the fulfillment of their infernal

plan, it had to order our warriors to let in those derelict peasants with great caution, in the dark of night.

The very first condition for letting them into the defensive line was to run a strict and careful check on all of them, since the Headquarters suspected that the enemy might take advantage of that circumstance by sending some of their armed forces into our defensive line together with those wretches.

As a result of that permission, Aygestan was flooded with thousands of starving, suffering, exhausted and half-dead women, children and elderly people. Fortunately, spring had already set in and the reawakening nature was beginning to endow Aygestan with all its green wonders: there was no bread, but there was green grass and lucerne, the last gift of God to those extremely unfortunate and starving people.

THE ENEMY'S LAST ATTEMPT

It was almost the end of heroic April and by that time we had received no exceptionally happy news. There was no information on the arrival of the Russian army, the volunteers and the aid we had been looking forward to. Despite that, however, Van inhabitants were persistently and constantly waiting for them thinking that they would certainly come; the contrary was impossible.

That feeling permeating the very depths of the human being's heart, i.e. the hope for the near future is strange and surprising: but for that, perhaps hundreds of thousands of people might have lifted their own hands against themselves and put an end to their lives by committing suicide. But no, quite the opposite is true since hope, bright expectations for the near happy future save a great many people ridding them of the stifling jaws of disastrous despair.

All Van Armenians cherished similar hopes and expectation of happiness: constantly experiencing the gun shells, volleys of the machine-guns and their crazy flames in those infernal days, Van warriors and common people - from the members of the Military Body up to the very last inhabitant - were filled with the vivifying warmth of that great hope and ray of salvation.

Whenever some people, irrespective of their age and gender, met in any place, their usual talks and exchange of thoughts focused on that general feeling of hope.

–Տղա՛, իմացար որ մեր իմաստուն Բուլղարացու քօփերի կրակոցի ձե՛նը կամատրների ակնջին խասու և է՛ննք իրենց ձիերին խե՛ծած՝ քշում, հա քշում են մեզ օգնութեան խասներու համար (“I say, old man, have you heard our wise Bulgharatsy’s guns’ fire reached the volunteers and now they’re riding at the highest speed possible to come to our rescue?”)

–Իսկ դու իմացար, որ մեր տերտերների Կիրակայ աղօթքի ձե՛նն Աստուծ լսած է և է՛ն անջիզեար Ջավդատ քե՛նորազ էլածին քոցրած է (“And have you heard that God hearkened to the Sunday prayer of our priests and blinded that merciless Javdat*? May he never see any of his wishes come true.”)

–Է՛՛, է՛՛, անխելք տխմարներ! դուք հալա խաբար չունիք որ էս մեր Թարլամազեան Փանոսը մեկէլ զիշերը սու ու փուս իր սնարալ ձիուն նստած քարքից դուրս է պրծել և չել է կամատրներին ղիմատրելու (“Ouch, you, silly blockheads! You don’t know yet that the other night our Tarlamazian Panos left town silently on his beautiful horse and hurried to meet the volunteers.”)

* Common Van people referred to Van Governor Jevdet as Javdat.

–Ի՞նչ դարտակ-դարտակ դուս կտաք: Բոլ է ձեր բռնբռնությունը, վազ տեք պահեստը, եթե էնտեղ չկայ, մի կտոր ուտելու հաց ճարեք Շահբանդարենց դիրքի մարդկանց համար: Երեկ գիշերանից այդ գեօզալ դիրքասպահներն անօթի մնացած են (“What nonsense are you talking? Enough of your idle talk! Run to the storehouse and if there’s nothing left there, try to get a piece of bread for the warriors of Shah-Bandar’s position; those unmatched fighters have been hungry since yesterday night.”)

The last statement made by a young messenger who was aware of the course of events poured cold water on those people’s heads and they dispersed, downcast and at a loss.

It was the evening of May 2: the dark shadows were gradually permeating the large houses and gardens in Aygestan, and the last birds chased away from their nests had hardly settled in their semi-destroyed homes. The comparative tranquility of the last several days had somehow encouraged the warriors and those having some participation in the fighting so that they had fallen asleep. However, the stormy, dreadful bombardment, mixed with the volleys of automatic machine-guns, was resumed both in Aygestan and Kaghakamej. A little while later intense shooting began followed by general tumult, cries of the attack and hurrahs reminding of the hungry wolves’ howl.

The Headquarters with its ancillary sections, the patrol, fighters in the trenches, the hospital, Red Cross, American and foreign missions, the consulates located in the city, in a word, all the organizations and the public at large got into a state of undescrivable, blind panic.

Several days before, some foreign sources had spread scanty information, according to which Khalil Pasha was arriving in Van with a huge army amounting to several thousands to finally crush Van’s Revolt. At night the Headquarters and auxiliary bodies raised the alarm and the patrol were put on their guard. It is impossible to express the intensity and fierceness of the attack, with the widespread flames constantly exploding and erupting over Aygestan and Kaghakamej.

Two hours later the Headquarters issued the following announcement, “Our courageous patrol, fighters, ancillary and mobile groups, young messengers, and you, our selfless craftsmen, masons and citizens! According to the trustworthy information we have received the enemy who have continually suffered fiascoes, unable to break your strong will power and brought to their knees, are now making the last endeavors to give full vent to their bile and rage.

“You have been able to stand all these fierce offensives and long-lasting ordeal for quite a long time; so please, endure this one, too using all your courage and steadfast determination. We are convinced that this is the enemy’s last heavy attack in this mortal struggle and they are sure to suffer a most shameful defeat, unable to break our inflexible will and resoluteness wherewith we are ready to sacrifice our lives for our freedom. Resist like valorous heroes to become the true successors of those warriors who were martyred for your freedom.”

The incessant night bombardment was so terribly intense that entire Aygestan seemed to be shrouded in volcanic eruption clouds. All the means for any kind of aid or communication had been obliterated.

Parallel with the fighters and people's determination to resist up to their dying breath, the entire panic-stricken population was waiting for the enemy's offensive with beating hearts.

It was generally supposed that the attack would begin by the cavalry with its machine-gun and gunners' divisions, immediately followed by the infantry comprising soldiers of the regular army. In their turn, they were to be followed by the bands of Kurds, bashi-bazouks and killers armed with every kind of weapons, including axes and swords with crooked edges. Those sanguineous gangs were to flood the city and mercilessly slaughter everybody, all those who dared to be Armenians in origin, without sparing anybody. They had been ordered to ruthlessly kill those infidel-giaurs, i.e. the Armenians, cursed by their Allah and Prophet.

"Perhaps, they do not dare to launch the offensive at night."

"Yes, of course, they will wait till the dawn breaks so as to know where they are going and what they are doing."

"They want to exhaust and terrify us beforehand, destroy our positions and trenches, crush our resisting power and then attack us confidently."

Such were the suppositions occurring to our warriors, waiting for the impatient, infuriated and bloodthirsty enemy.

ON THE THRESHOLD OF SALVATION

The dreadful night was coming to its end and the bright, silver dawn of May 3 was about to break over the city. The morning began shining in the clear, cloudless sky of May and the vivifying sun commenced spreading its golden and reddish rays through the Orient. However, our enemy's armed forces with their cavalry and heavy guns had not launched the offensive yet. The incessant gun-fire and the volleys of machine-guns still continued, with Aygestan and Kaghakamej heavily shrouded in thick smoke and stifling dust.

Unfortunately, last night's continuous fierce bombardment made it impossible for our workers to repair some of our most important positions that were the direct targets of the enemy's well-aimed fire. Behind the ruined emplacements temporary ditches and canal-shaped trenches had been dug, with our patrol huddled there and waiting for the impending enemy attack with panic-stricken hearts.

The Turks continued bombarding the city with the same intensity, keeping us under that infernal fire till two o'clock in the afternoon. Throughout twenty hours, Aygestan and Kaghakamej were being continuously bombarded: our positions were reduced to ruins one after another, while the number of the fatalities and, especially those injured was gradually increasing.

Fortunately, after two o'clock, the bombardment considerably abated: now fire came only from the arsenals of Toprak-Kale and Hajji-Bekir and sometimes also from the emplacements of Zemp-Zemp Mazare.

That day, when the sun was about to sink below the horizon, cries of joy and delight permeated everywhere, "The enemies are escaping! The enemies are escaping!"

The news that the Turks had taken their heels spread to all the positions, trenches, houses, gardens and throughout the entire city like lightning.

“At last they ran away, our people’s executioners have disappeared!”

“They ran away, but how did it happen?”

“They were brave as long as they’re fighting against our helpless people who have no arms at all, but hardly had the Russian army and volunteers reached their positions when they ran away, frightened to death and without even firing a single cartridge.

–Այ տղա չէլնի որ էս էլ դրանց կողմից մեկ ֆրոլդադ ըլնի մեզ խաբելու և մեր դիրքերից դուրս քաշելով մեզ կոտորելու հասար սարքուած (“Look here, old man, I say God forbid, but might this be a trap set by them to cheat us into leaving our positions and then slaughter us?”)

–Ծօ, անխելք տուտուց! Բա չիմացար, որ մեր զինտրները շտաբի իրատունքով վազ տան էրելու Թօփրաք-Կալէի և Հաճի-Բէքիրի Տէր-մեռած գորանոցներն ու զըմփ-զըմփ մաղարէի տաճիկների դիրքերը (“You, empty-headed booby! Didn’t you hear that the Headquarters allowed our soldiers to burn down the accursed arsenals of Toprak-Kale and Hajji-Bekir and the Turkish positions of Zemp-Zemp Mazare?”)

–Չարմանալու բան է: Տօ, խէր օրխնած մէ ախանջներդ լաւ սրի, էն է քաղաքամէջը դեռ կոյի է: Թնդանօթի դէվի գոռգոռոցները կրնա՞ս լսել թէ խլացած ես (“It’s very surprising. My God, strain your ears! Can’t you hear them still fighting in Kaghakamej? Are you deaf or can you hear the howling of those demonic guns?”)

While people were busy with such talks and cries of infinite joy, the Headquarters issued the following appeal-announcement, “Dear compatriots, receive our congratulations! Throughout an entire month you have been offering a valiant resistance to all the attacks of the fierce enemy with self-denial and unsurpassed sacrifice. You have been fighting bravely for your and your compatriots’ defense, with many of your close people and relatives falling victim to the enemy. With profound gratitude, we are bowing down before their fresh and still semi-buried bodies. Be sure that their conscious and patriotic self-sacrifice will be recorded in gold letters in the history of our heroic struggle. Soon all those heroes’ dead bodies will be interred in the common communal graveyard dedicated to the immortal heroes’ memory. May their families and nation be glorified!

“Dear compatriots! It is not far from probable that in several hours, sooner than tomorrow, our volunteers’ regiments and our friend Russian army will reach us. But before that, be on your guard and continue patrolling in your positions till the situation changes. It has been ordered to reduce to ashes all the enemy arsenals causing the death of our dear, selfless warriors.

“It has also been ordered to move the wheat and flour left by the Turks to our warehouses in Aygestan together with other food products, if any.”

Two hours had already elapsed after midnight, but Aygestan population still continued their merrymaking: the students’ “Fanfar” was playing patriotic and heroic melodies imbuing the hearts longing for freedom with rejoicing. Almost everybody was dancing, rejoicing and enjoying themselves, as if gathered round a huge, endless wedding table.

Yes, that was a true feast of rejoicing and exultation: with their own hands the people were burning, annihilating and reducing to ruins the dens of those vipers who had been stinging, poisoning and killing so many of their dear, unmatched sons throughout

the entire month. The reddish flames devouring those arsenals kindled delight and great zeal in Van Armenians' hearts, those hearts that had been forced to give away their blood, i.e. their best children's lives, incessantly, for many days.

SPITE AND REVENGE

Unable to repel the Russian army and volunteers' regiments' general and simultaneous offensive extending from the north-eastern Russo-Turkish front up to the Persian-Turkish borders reaching Sharafkhane-Maku-Dilman, Khalil Pasha's army amounting to several thousands withdrew in great panic. The news of their retreat infuriated the state and military powers of Vaspurakan and Van; that was the reason for the fierce, heavy attacks during several days in late April and early in May. They and, especially that Jevdet, Van people's fierce executioner, had determined to give full vent to the spiteful bile accumulated in their fraudulent hearts by ruthlessly slaughtering the Armenians in Kaghakamej and Aygestan and thus alleviating their mourning hearts, burning with black fire.

Fortunately, they did not succeed in carrying that out for the main reason that the panic-stricken escape of Khalil Pasha's troops had extremely discouraged and paralyzed them. That dreadful beast that had been wounded in the very depths of his heart was perplexed, embarrassed and panicked in his last outburst of rage.

Jevdet and his accomplices, who were terrified and driven crazy at their severe enemy, the Russian and Armenian armies advancing at a distance of hundreds of kilometers, decided to run away ridding us of their abominable existence.

They did run away, with their hearts sunk, and took away the Turkish inhabitants to Bitlis on the sailing ships concentrated in the harbors located in the south-east of Lake Van. They were so mean that they mercilessly and impertinently slaughtered the Armenian oarsmen who saved them by taking them to Bitlis.

Our beautiful Aygestan, that was being gradually decorated with foliage and spring rebirth, had been almost levelled with the ground in the recent days in consequence of the gun fire and, particularly the intense fires breaking out here and there.

After the enemy's escape, the fire and flames still continued devouring the mostly wooden house doors, windows and roof logs in Aygestan and Kaghakamej.

The latter had suffered more severe damage due to the closeness and density of the houses as well as the abundance of the Armenian merchants' warehouses of drapery and other highly inflammable goods. The entire barns, caravanserais, meadows, workshops and the majority of dwellings had almost completely gone up in smoke, their blackened and smoking walls standing everywhere as the silent, gloomy witnesses of the eternal curse.

No human tongue and no pen, however eloquent and talented they are, can describe the dreadful scene of formidable devastation, heart-rending confusion and obliteration caused by the barbaric Mongols' sanguineous and cruel successors, our centuries-old vindictive and ruthless enemies, i.e. the Turks.

With heart-rending and genuine grief Van Armenians, who had hardly recovered the shock of the terrible blow, saw and realized the horrible depredation it had caused and lamented helplessly over the utter annihilation and obliteration of what they had obtained through long, long years of hard toil, strenuous efforts, diligent work and creative activities.

Unfortunately, that bitter, burning sorrow was not to be the last one: Vaspurakan Armenians were predestined to experience still more unfortunate days of more severe ordeals and blows still more disastrous and fatal... .

IN THE TURKISH PRISONS

Almost immediately after the enemy's escape, I told some of our friends, Hrant, Aghasi, Vahan and Solakhian's and Brutian's wives to join me in going to Kaghakamej.

Instead of Brutian's wife, his brother Mihrdat came and the six of us set out. It generally took about an hour to cover the distance between Aygestan and Kaghakamej on foot - it was impossible for us to get a carriage at that tumultuous hour - and we decided to start without a minute's delay. We were eager to find out something about our dear friends as soon as possible: we had heard that Brutian, Solakhian and Aso had been arrested and were kept in the central military Turkish prison together with several of their friends.

We were walking very fast, almost running so that despite the night cool, we often had to wipe the sweat off our foreheads with our hands or handkerchiefs. At about eleven o'clock at night, we reached that accursed jail, whose iron doors had been broken down by most of Kaghakamej Armenians who had probably preceded us. The prison was thronged with curious people who partially illuminated the gloomy, damp and large building with the oil lamps they had brought with them. Black, sooty water drops, accumulated and condensed out of the humidity of the walls and, particularly ceiling, were continually falling down.

The gaol teemed with the prisoners' bodies suffocated, tortured to death, hacked to pieces and killed with spear. Different hacked parts of those wretches' bodies, i.e. heads, arms, hands, calves and legs, lay side by side on the floor.

The scene awaiting us in the jail was dreadful: everybody was weeping and tearing their hair. Solakhian's wife fainted and fell down amidst the hacked bodies and we had great difficulty in raising her to her feet and taking her to the prison yard, holding her arms for support.

All of us went into great mourning at the sinister conclusion: what we had seen led us to the thought that our elderly friends had certainly shared all those numerous victims' fate, for none of the unfortunate prisoners had escaped the barbaric, violent carnage. While some of our friends were busy bringing Hasmik Solakhian to her senses, Mihrdat, Hrant and I returned to the prison in order to make search for the victims of the Turkish barbarians.

We were almost stifling in the damp, mouldy air that became even more unbearable because of the disgusting smell of congealed blood.

“Mihrdat,” I said to Brutian’s brother, “be very attentive and try to find your brother’s hacked body or if it’s impossible, try to find his shoes, stocks and clothes.”

The search proved long and futile. Exhausted and desperate, we were about to leave the prison when our friend Hrant, who had silently moved away from us and was busy searching, shouted to us, “Sergei, come here, our unfortunate friend Brutian is lying, hacked to death, in the cell adjoining this military hospital.”

Together with Mihrdat we hurried to the cell mentioned by Hrant, often being forced to step onto the blood-stained corpses. It was in that abominable cell that we found poor Brutian’s body, his head hacked off. The iron cage was so narrow that his torn body could hardly lie on the floor and the part of his head was leaning on the wall. Mihrdat immediately recognized his brother and fell down on him, losing consciousness. It took us great efforts to bring him to his senses: he was weeping bitterly, like a child having lost his beloved mother and left all alone in the world.

I did not know whether it was the sudden shock or grief that had put me in stupor: I wanted to talk, to say something, but I was not able to. I wished to scream, shout and cry for help, but in vain; finally, I managed that and burst into bitter weeping.

A little while later, when my strained nerves relaxed a little, I was hardly able to say to my friend Hrant, “And how can we find Solakhian’s, Aso’s and the others’ bodies or at least their traces?”

“It’ll be a senseless and futile search, I’ve walked about the entire prison: the Turkish barbarians have slaughtered their helpless victims so violently and stained them with blood to such an extent that it’s utterly impossible to recognize them by face. As for bringing back Hasmik, it’ll equate to causing her sudden death without any special efforts.”

Then Aghasi returned to the prison and said to us, “There’s no point in lingering here. We should take Hasmik to Aygestan as soon as possible: she has suffered a heart attack and needs urgent medical aid. I don’t hope to find any remedy or doctor here, in Kaghakamej after midnight; besides, I don’t know, which of us is familiar with Kaghakamej.”

“I know Kaghakamej quite well,” Hrant said, “but under these circumstances, when everything has turned upside down, I’m not sure that we can find a doctor. Even if we do manage, it’ll take us quite a long time so that I think it expedient to find a carriage immediately and take Hasmik to the American hospital in Aygestan in all haste: she’s working there and everybody knows her.”

We all agreed to that and Hrant voluntarily hurried to get a carriage: in some ten minutes a cab pulled up at the prison door.

“Boys, a misfortune can’t be infinite and our blind fate deigned to pull its gloomy face into a half-smile at us. I’ve found my old friend, cabman Mkro, now hurry up.”

Before leaving, I told Brutian’s brother to wait till Hrant returned so that they would move Brutian’s torn body to Aygestan with the help of Hrant’s friend cabman.

THE REVENGE

The Turkish arsenals, that had been causing so much trouble to Aygestan and Kaghakamej Armenians, were still burning, shrouded in dark, thick puffs of smoke. Under ordinary circumstances, their ruined, blackened walls would be sure to bring forth bitterness and sadness, but the Armenians, who had been experiencing the horror of death throughout the entire month, rejoiced at their dreadful appearance, hidden in black.

–Այս, ինչպէս էս էրած սիրտս խովցաւ էս սատանի բների ւտերում-խաւարումով (“Oh, my God, you can’t imagine how my burnning heart quieted down with the total destruction of those devils’ dens!”)

–Հըլա ու՞ր ես մէ սպասի մեր կամաւորներն ու ոսները խասանեն էսնց եօթ խէրը կանիծեն: Էնպէս ջարդ ու փշուր անեն, որ էս անօրէնների արինը սրտերին չորանայ: Էնպէս փախչեն ու կորչեն, որ քանի աշխարհը կայ խայի անունը լեզի չը պիրեն ու ինոնց ունեցածին աչք չը տնկեն (“This isn’t all yet; once our volunteers and Russians reach here, they’ll teach them such a cruel lesson that it’ll be remembered even by the future Turkish generations. They’ll crush them in such a way that those rascals will totally bleed to death. They’ll run away and vanish without any trace so that they will never again utter the Armenians’ names and have their eyes on their property.”)

–Կասեն շուն ցնդկած Ջավդատն իրա վախից՝ Արտամետին չը խասած իրեն ծովնի թալէ: Այս, ափսոս չի մեր Վանա ծովը, որ կեղտոտի ինոր կեղտոտ-խտտած լաչից (“They say that dirty dog, crazy Javdat, dumped himself into the sea out of fear, hardly able to reach Artamet. Oh, I’m so sorry our Van Sea is going to be daubed by his dirty, rotten carcass.”)

And thousands of similar cries of revengeful rejoicing, words reflecting the people’s hopes for a better future and encouraging statements passed from mouth to mouth. Meanwhile, the common people burning with revenge were eager to take their vengeance upon the enemy. Although the Headquarters had banned to burn down other buildings, the turn had come for the houses in the Turkish quarters. It was difficult, if not impossible, to somehow mitigate the raging tempest of spite and revenge accumulated in the people’s hearts. Like volcanic lava, that revenge erupted over the abandoned and deserted Turkish houses, the houses of the wealthy leeches becoming the first and primary targets of the people’s vengeance. Throughout many years those parasite Turkish aghas and beys had mercilessly exploited and robbed the Armenian ploughmen, workers, and craftsmen, and now the latter thought time had come to wreak their vengeance at least once.

–Ես էս անօրէնների եօթը պորտն անիծեն: Էս է խարիր տարի մեր էրունը քամել ու ծծել են: Մեր խալալ աշխատանքը գօռով զավթիրեն: Մեր խօրտիկ ջահէլ-ջիվաններին կոտորիրեն: Ինչքան շատ մեր գեօգալ աղջիկ-խարսները փախցուցած են: Բա մէկ անգամ դովրը մեզ խասած է, նորէն խնայենք: Բաս ասէք որ մենք դրիստ էշի բուռակներ ենք (“May those villains be cursed to the seventh generation. They’ve been sucking us dry throughout a hundred years, squeezing whatever we gained through hard work out of us, killing the best of our youngsters, kidnapping our pretty girls and women. And now that our turn has come after all these outrages, why should we spare them? Then let us accept at once that we’re utter asses.”)

–Էդ հալալ ոչինչ: Բա չես ասի, որ էս մէկ ամիս մեր օրն ու արևը սևուցած են: Մեր իզիղ դրբապահներին սպանած, մեր խացն ու ջուրը խարամ արած են: Մեր տունն ու տեղը արած ու

քանդած են: Մեր խօրոտիկ քաղաքը դժոխք են դարձու՞մեր: Էլի խնայենք... (“Never mind all that. You know they ruined our lives during this month, killed our brave patrol without letting us have our piece of bread and water peacefully! They destroyed our houses and turned our beautiful city into a total hell. Are we still to show mercy after all this...?”)

–Այ ախպեր, ամենակարեւորը մոռցար ասել: Էդ անասուածները Յանկոյսների ու Սուրբ Յակոբա եկեղեցին ու դպրոցները հենց էրեցին, հենց քարոքանդ արան, որ քարը-քարի վրայ չքողան: Աստուած սիրողներ ով ինչ կարող է, եթէ չանի նամարդից նամարդ ի (“Look here, brother, you forgot to say what is the most important. Those godless villains burnt down Hankusners’ and St. Hakob Churches without leaving a single stone standing. If those who love God don’t do whatever they can, they will be the meanest people in the world.”)

–Տղերք, բոլէ էդքան սաղմոս ու շարական ասելը: Շուտ արեք, մէ էս ցորենն ու ալիրը, եղն ու պանիրը, խաւերն ու ճոտերը հաւաքոտեցէք, մաքրոտեցէք, սրբէք վերջացրէք: Քանի որ էս մեր շտաբներից վրայ չեն խասել էտոնց հաշիւը մաքրենք (“Guys, enough of babbling! Hurry up, gather all this wheat, flour, oil, cheese, hens and chickens. Let us finish our work with them unless some of the members of the Headquarters or sections come and catch us here.”)

–Այ տղա, Գէվօ, Մերոք, Կարօ, վազէք: Էդ անօրէնների մարագից խոտ, սէգ, փայտ, նաւքերէք, որ կրակ տանք, վառենք ու լցնենք: Հրէս էս Հաջի Եունէսի տունը խեռու չի, ինչ որ ուզէք էդ սրիկայի տան մէջէն կը ճարէք: Շուտ արեք, էնոր խաշիւն էլ մաքրենք: Չեզ դուրքան վազէք: Եթէ ուշանաք շատ կը փոշմանէք (“You, lads, Gevo, Serob, Karo, hurry up! Fetch grass, couch-grass, wood and oil from those rascals’ hayloft so that we will make a fire and burn down everything. Hajji Yunes’ house isn’t far from here; you can get anything you want in that villain’s house. Be quick, let’s finish up with it, too. Hurry up, guys; if you’re late, you’ll be very sorry.”)

THE SELF-DEFENSE OF KAGHAKAMEJ HEROES

My modest and noble friend Hrant fulfilled my assignment with great willingness and moved outstanding public figure, revolutionary and orator, unfortunate Abraham Brutian’s torn corpse to Aygestan with Mihrdat’s help on his old friend, kind-hearted cabman’s carriage. The discovery of that greatly respected man’s dead body, after it had been so tragically hacked to pieces, was a kind of slight comfort to all of us. Placed in an appropriate coffin, his remains were temporarily interred in the graveyard of Norashen’s church.

Hrant suggested that we go to Kaghakamej on his friend’s carriage and managed to persuade me to.

“Sergei, it will be very interesting to find out how our heroic compatriots proceed with their self-defense; besides, we can see the local fort and Kaghakamej, liberated only thanks to their brilliant feats. I’ve been told that national figure and member of the Headquarters Panos Terlemezian is going there with a group of patrol from Aygestan. If we leave immediately, we’ll either arrive a little earlier than they or will join them a bit later.”



Van Fort, at whose eastern foot Kaghakamej Quarter was situated (photo 1913 by W. Bachmann)

“All right, let’s go. I’m interested in seeing the marks of our compatriot citizens’ valiant resistance as well as the present state of Kaghakamej and, particularly its liberated fort.”

It took us less than half an hour to reach Kaghakamej by carriage. We knew that the local Military Headquarters was housed in the Armenian diocese leader’s residence, so we got off the coach and immediately headed for that building’s garden decorated with foliage. Fortunately, Aygestan people, headed by Panos Terlemezian, had just arrived and were exchanging cordial greetings with the courageous warriors of Kaghakamej and the members of the Headquarters. It was the morning of May 4: the sun that had just appeared on the horizon had already begun spreading its rays on the beautiful foliage of the garden, still shining in minute diamonds of dew. It was thronged with a vast multitude, everybody imbued with joy and exultation.

Taking the floor, renowned artist Panos Terlemezian said, “I am greeting our heroic citizens, may all the fighters who bravely resisted the enemy and won a victory over them be glorified and highly honored. Your Aygestan companions-in-arms are sending you their best regards and admiration for you. In both places we gained a glorious victory over the enemy, who ran away, powerless and shameful. We have heard that the Russian army, led by the volunteers, has already reached Berkri, but still, there is a serious duty upon us. Never think that we have to lay down arms; now we should be even better prepared to encounter all kinds of surprises. The escaping enemies are not far from us: they can return at any time and attempt new attacks... .”



A view of Kaghakamej Quarter (photo 1913 by W. Bachmann)

A little while later Aygestan warriors were treated to tea and newly-baked *gatas* (*traditional Armenian pastry made in various ways in different Armenian regions, but mainly comprising a filling of flour, butter and sugar*), which Hrant and I partook of, too. Then the guests from Aygestan ascended the famous ancient Van fort together with the main fighters of Kaghakamej. That historical rock had been the glorious witness of Semiramis' times as well as Artzruny princes' and kings' reign, but it had also had the misfortune of seeing Timur's notorious hordes and the five-century tyranny of the barbarian Mongols' successors, the Turks.

On that day the triumphant flag of Vaspurakan's glorious liberation was glittering at the top of that liberated fort.

THE ARRIVAL OF THE LIBERATORS

It was one of the wonderful, sunny days of May: since the previous day the Armenians had been impatiently waiting for their liberators with beating hearts. After midday on May 5, their uncertainty and impatience reached their climax. Three hours before, the messengers of the Headquarters had returned with the news that the volunteers' regiments and Russian troops would soon reach Aygestan.

The vast multitude of the Armenians, comprising children, elders, women, girls, youngsters and amounting to several thousands, had poured out into the streets, waiting for the liberators they had been incessantly dreaming of with impatience beyond any description.



Вступление армянских дружинъ въ Ванъ
The arrival of the Armenian volunteers in Van
 (photo "Kavkaz I Vayna")

Aygestan's main avenue Seghga, that began from Kaghakamej and extended for half a kilometer beyond the ruins of Hamud Agha's arsenal, was teeming with the large crowd who had come to meet their saviours. Those children and youngsters who had not managed to somehow find room in that avenue had climbed the tops of the tall poplars perching there like birds.

The old and the young men had been forced to ascend the roofs of the nearby semi-ruined houses whereas the majority of the multitude had thronged the mouths of the side streets beginning from Seghga Avenue. Many people were dancing for infinite joy, others were singing enthusiastic and cordial melodies, still others were beating the drum and playing the *zurna* (an Oriental wind instrument).

How could they not rejoice in the very depths of their hearts, their faces not shine with joy and happiness when soon, very soon they were to see those who they had

been waiting for with beating hearts throughout an entire month?

Here they were! At last they were coming and reaching us! They were coming in endless columns, passing through the central avenue in Aygestan both on foot and on horseback, and then again on horseback and on foot. Those columns seemed to have no end or at least such was our impression. Here were the volunteers' regiments with their leaders and colonels. Those were the cavalry regiments followed by the columns of guns, automatic machine-guns, arms, military vans, munition and food products. Here were the rows of horse-drawn equipment, in a word, the countless, endless columns and rows of troops and ammunition.

If only hearts and souls shared common troubles and problems in a single tongue, that would be very dear to them, mankind would be infinitely happy. However, it is a pity, a great pity that the false, mercenary-minded, egoistic and fraudulent diplomacy and politics set boundaries between those close hearts attached to each other!

That sacred closeness and empathy bridged the hearts and souls of thousands of people, i.e. those arriving and those meeting them, with invisible but firm bonds.

It took long, long hours before our saviours came. They went to have some rest and sleep, but Van Armenians could not tear themselves away from the road on which they had stepped and passed, unwilling to leave that road and the avenue their liberators had traversed. They seemed to regret that they could no longer see the tracks of their feet, horses, vans and columns.



Армянскія сироты подобранныя русскими войсками
(въ районѣ Вана).

Some Armenian orphans found by the Russian soldiers, Van Region (photo "Kavkaz I Vayna")

After a long month, that night marked merrymaking and exultation for Vaspurakan and, especially Van Armenians. The doors of the semi-destroyed casinos were wide open before their former customers now turned into refugees and vagabonds. The feast and carousal typical of only Armenians had permeated through the entire city.

At the entrance of the Headquarters "Fanfar" was enthusiastically playing proud military marches and patriotic melodies in accordance with its director Hovhannes Pujikian and his assistant Margar

Pakhchoyan's enthusiastic movements, exciting the audience up to the very depths of their hearts. In the square of Norashen's church had gathered a vast multitude, who were singing and dancing in a ring with the drum and zurna in the center. Everybody was singing cheerful, happy songs making the ground thunder under their feet by leaping up and down. At the same night one of Van's rich men, Gapamajian, held a lavish supper in his house inviting the Russian troops' commander Nikolayev and his assistants. Only three of the volunteers' leaders attended that banquet: Andranik, that great patriot, unmatched hero and commander, had not come since the people sent by Aram Manukian to meet the volunteers' leaders had not honored him properly. It should be mentioned that his regiment did not partake in the troops and military figures' glorious arrival either; insulted and grief-stricken, Andranik stationed his soldiers in the area between Shushanats Village and the extreme end of Aygestan.

The supper was attended by some of the members of Aygestan's Military Body and Sections, the whole number of those present amounting to forty-two. Among the guests were Aram Manukian and the diocese vicar who blessed the table.

Some speeches were made and toasts proposed at the supper, the most interesting and impressive of the latter belonging to Grigor Bulgharatsy, Hovhannes Kuloghlian and Panos Terlemezian. A special toast was proposed to the success and final victory of the Russian army and its allies. The volunteers' regiments' valor was praised and the participants drank their commanders' good health.

In the end general Nikolayev expressed his gratitude, praised Van inhabitants' admirable deeds stating that hopefully, through the help of the Russian army and volunteers' regiments, the Armenian provinces would soon be liberated and their inhabitants would gain the freedom they had been dreaming of, like Van Armenians.

VAN'S TWO-MONTH SELF-GOVERNMENT

Indeed, the reader remembers what has been mentioned at the very beginning of the book, namely, that Van City consisted of two parts, the one called “Kaghakamej” being three to four times as small as the other named “Aygestan” from the standpoint of space. All the Turkish state institutions as well as Van’s commercial houses and warehouses, every kind of big and small workshops and stores were concentrated in Kaghakamej; in a word, all the treasures and fortune of Van population was mainly kept there.

Aygestan, as the name itself suggests, abounded in large and prospering gardens of omnifarious fruits. With the exception of a small number of three-story tall houses, all the local buildings were hidden in thousands of fructiferous and unfruitful trees of those gardens, their luxuriant foliage and shadows. In the streets, amidst the rows of trees the resonant waters of numerous springs ran and purred leaving their silver reflection around. All that gave the remote observer the impression that he was approaching a large, endless, evergreen forest, garden or country place.

The two parts of the city were connected by the wide and long Seghga Avenue, where Aygestan’s small market was located. The streets taking their beginnings in Aygestan’s main quarters opened into that avenue. The secondary schools of Yeramian, Kentronakan and Varzhapetanots as well as the foreign missions and consulates were situated either on the main avenue or the adjoining streets.



Aram Manukian

Almost immediately after Van’s liberation, the Provisional Body of Vaspurakan’s Self-Government was established. According to the Russian army’s Commander General Nikolayev’s May 7, 1915 decree Aram Manukian²⁶ was appointed Governor of Van and the Region and embarked upon arranging the so-called municipal and regional affairs. The police, City Municipality as well as the judiciary, agricultural, migration, public health care and other departments were established, immediately beginning their activity with their newly-appointed heads.

Aram Manukian personally - certain private individuals and sometimes some common people called him by the name of “Aram Pasha”, which was alien to many others because of its Turkish origin - was an able leader and organizer. Unfortuna-

²⁶ **Aram Manoukian (Sargis Hovhannissian)** was born in Zeyva (nowadays David Bek) Village, Kapan Region, RA in 1879. Early in 1905, he arrived in Van, where he succeeded Vahan Papazian (Koms) in the post of the leader of Dashnaktsutyun Party. In 1907 he was arrested in connection with Dhertsy Davo’s murder and was released from Van Prison only after the declaration of the Turkish Constitution in 1908. In May to August 1915, he performed the duties of Van Governor. In 1918 Manoukian was appointed Minister of the Interior and Food Supply in the Republic of Armenia. In December 1918 he was infected with typhus and died on January 29, 1919.

tely, however, from the very beginning he was surrounded by mercenary elements and depraved group leaders, who actually only compromised him and damaged his reputation, although acting in his name.

Outsiders and even the honest and disinterested members of the Dashnaktsutyun could not understand and explain why, for what reason Aram Manukian did not rid himself of those mercenary-minded and corrupted elements' influence.

It should be stated for the sake of justice that among those so-called chiefs of police or group leaders there were some who had rendered quite remarkable services and even performed heroic deeds during Van's defense, but that did not entitle them to abuse their past glory.

Despite his strenuous efforts and willingness, one of the noblest and selfless figures, David Papazian, the general Chief of Police at that time, was not able to influence those leaders, who actually did not differ from the Turkish bashi-bazouks and directly enjoyed the "Pasha's" support.

Apart from slaughtering the Armenian youth, the Turkish Government had totally robbed the Armenian families in Van's regional districts and villages of their flour, grain and all kinds of food. Thousands of Turkish soldiers and, especially the time-serving Kurds, i.e. the mob and Turks' accomplices, had devoured all those resources, with almost nothing left.

After the Turks' escape, the slight amount of corn and food that they had been forced to leave was to be gathered and stored in Van's previous warehouses to be allocated at low prices to the semi-starving Aygestan people and, particularly the famine-stricken multitudes who had flooded the city from everywhere. A similar order was issued with regard to the livestock for slaughter, i.e. sheep, goats, cows and other domestic animals.

It was particularly in that respect that the aforementioned group leaders heavily abused their positions. They had founded a private black market of food products and livestock for slaughter filling their avaricious pockets with the income received from the smuggling of the resources intended for the semi-starving multitudes.

Unable to witness such abuses, I resigned my post of the supervisor of the warehouses. Grigor Bulgharatsy, in whose decency and nobleness I had great confidence, and who had become a member of the Provisional Government after the liquidation of the Headquarters, once invited me to have a talk. Stating that my protest was completely righteous, he said, "Sergei, I highly appreciate your uprightness and devotion to work. We have heard about these manifestations of indiscipline, too and I have spoken to Comrade Aram about them. He has promised to put an end to those leaders' harmful and illegal abuses. Our government is only beginning to make its very first steps and is far from boasting firm foundations. We have a lot of drawbacks, but we do not give up the hope that everything will be settled. I find it expedient for you to renounce your resignation."

"I cannot," I answered, "believe me I cannot. I highly respect you, but I am afraid that those leaders and chiefs of police also damage my name and compromise me. The mayor has offered me to work as secretary in the City Municipality and I have agreed. I do not know whence he learned that I knew a little Russian."

“Do you know Russian?” Bulgharatsy asked in surprise.

“Well, actually whatever I know amounts to nothing. While in the higher classes at Yeramian School I learned some two hundred or a little more words and phrases used in everyday speech. Well, what are we to do? We have to learn when necessity compels us to. This is the Armenians’ destiny; we have to change the languages we learn as often as our masters change.”

“You seem to be quite an intelligent boy, Mr., I’m sorry, Comrade Sergei. I’m very glad we cooperated during the hard days of warfare. In any case, act as you yourself find it suitable. You can always rely on my friendship and help within my power, if you need it.”

“Thank you very much for your friendship.”

I warmly shook hands with Bulgharatsy, asked him to be remembered to Maro and tell her that soon I would try to visit her. While leaving the building known as the Van Province Municipality, I thought that truly, that man was a most honorable, modest and selfless figure. I wished there were many such people.

WITH MY FAMILY AND FRIENDS

My sister Araksi was very glad that after my forced absence of the April nights, she almost always found me at home.

“Oh, my God, how terrible those days and, especially nights were, when you and our brother Karapet were constantly absent from home,” she kept telling me.

“Thank God, those dreadful days passed and now, I think, you don’t have any reasons to complain.”

“Reasons to complain,” she repeated in hesitation, “but for Haykanoush’s illness and our financial troubles, I wouldn’t have any reasons to complain.”

“Don’t be sad, my dear sister! I know that it’s hard for you to satisfy out family’s needs but I hope to get some salary in several days. As for Haykanoush, I’ve already spoken to Chief Doctor San-Fan from the Public Health Care Section: fortunately, he’s an Armenian and, what is most important, he’s a good specialist in internal diseases. He’s promised me to thoroughly examine Haykanoush in one of these days and, if necessary, hospitalize her, provided that this is within his power, for they have great difficulties, too. There’re so many injured people, others suffering from nervous breakdown, unimaginable exhaustion, people who’ve been starved into diseases that it’s completely impossible to help them, supply them with remedy and, especially hospitalize them.”

“Oh, how great it is to have a brother like you. I don’t know what I’d do without you and your encouraging words. You know that our brother hasn’t recovered from his arm wound fully and sometimes suffers from heavy pain. He goes to hospital every second day and still, isn’t able to do any work, whereas St. Hakob Church where Father was working has been destroyed by the merciless Turks. Most of its believers have been robbed and reduced to poverty so that now they’ve but one remedy, to cry and pray. You know Father’s character well: he allocates most part of the tiny donations he gets to the poor.”

“It’s all right, you and me should be proud of having such a conscientious father-priest.”

My sister shook her head sadly and confined herself to only saying, “ Yes, I agree with you, but we’re in abject poverty, too.”

One day after noon having left the City Municipality, I decided to visit one of our remote relatives, the chief guard of the Russian consulate, Sahak Agha.

The building of the consulate that had been occupied was his property.

Before the April fighting, when the Turkish state unleashed war against the Russians on the order of its German allies, the staff of the Russian consulate had to leave Van. Immediately after their departure, the following day, five armed askyars came, led by a colonel, lowered the consulate’s Russian flag, tore it to pieces for show, burnt it and trampled the ashes underfoot scattering them all around. However, they were not satisfied with that: they lowered the pole supporting the flag, broke it to pieces and burnt them. After all that, they somehow managed to find Sahak Agha, who had hidden out of fear, and gave him a severe beating trampling that poor, helpless man underfoot and almost torturing him to death. But for Ghevond Khanjian’s intercession and entreaties, he would have certainly been killed.

Upon seeing me Sahak Agha cried out for joy, “Oh, my son, how did it occur to you to honor me? Don’t you ever remember that you’ve a relative who’s had a narrow escape from death. I can’t understand what made you get tired of us so suddenly. Well, it’s all right with us, but what about our daughter Anoush? How couldn’t you remember her at least once? She doesn’t have any other relative except you and she worried about you very much. Well, you’ve come and that’s at least something, I’m very glad, come in, my kinsfolk are at home, I’ve some work, I’ll finish it and come.”

He did not wait till I found some justification and cried in his manly voice, “Anoush! You’ve a guest, invite him into the house.”

To tell the truth, I did not expect such a reception by Sahak Agha. I knew him as a strict and conservative father, and it first of all amazed me that he told me about his daughter’s worrying over me. Once Van people used to be distinguished for their great conservatism and adherence to official manners: then how could I explain the fact that Sahak Agha’s only daughter had dared to tell her strict father about her anxiety over me. It particularly perplexed me that Sahak Agha, conservative as he was by nature, spoke to me about that feeling.

While I was absorbed in those numerous questions striking me one after another, Anoush, Sahak Agha’s only daughter, met me on the threshold of their living-room with a happy cry, leaving her mother behind.

“Oh, ‘Mr.’ Sergei, your friendship with me is but great! You haven’t deigned to come to our place for already three months; so you lied to me when you told me that I was your second best friend after Maro.”

I had not overcome my embarrassment and perplexity yet when I got the second blow from Anoush. With great difficulty I drove away the thoughts striking me and said, “Miss Anoush, to tell the truth, I can’t find any justification before you and your dear mother. You’re completely right: I haven’t been fulfilling my duty of relative properly, but... .”

“Well, it goes without saying,” Anoush interrupted me, “that you’ll justify yourself by the April fighting. I know everything... By the way, I congratulate you on performing such responsible duties, despite your young age. Still, I think you could’ve found at least some half an hour for us only if you wanted.”

“Those criminals beat Sahak so violently that he was confined to bed throughout two months, our Lord had pity on him,” Anoush’s mother added.

“I’ve heard about it, mother. What can we do? Thank God, he was fortunate enough to survive and get rid of those devils. Of course, you know that hundreds of our young men have fallen victim to the mean enemy. Besides the widespread slaughter perpetrated in the regions, those demons’ bullets have caused a vast number of casualties right here, in the positions and trenches.”

While I proceeded with my account of the enemy’s widespread violence and destruction, Sahak Agha entered in the same high spirits in which I had found him upon my arrival, and we began talking about current issues sometimes criticizing briefly this or that problem.

Sahak Agha, who was a fervent Russophile, insisted on the following, “Our only protectors and friends all over the world are the Russian people and their Government, who’re to be considered our only saviours in time of any predicament or trouble. We’ve already seen the eloquent proof of this: if that noble, pro-Armenian Government’s army and volunteers’ regiments, whom they had supplied with arms, hadn’t reached us, those criminal, ruthless Turks wouldn’t have left a single Armenian alive not only in this city but also in the entire vilayet.”

Then addressing particularly me, he added, “Mr. Sergei, perhaps, you’ve got the impression that Sahak Agha’s a Russophile since he’s always earned his living and accumulated some fortune thanks to them, but upon my honor, if they had never given me a single penny, I would again be their supporter and would praise them, for they are Christians like us, they worship the Holy Cross and Gospel, love God and believe in Him. They’re merciful and compassionate so that there are mountains and valleys between them and these cruel criminals. If our nation is ever to win freedom, that freedom and salvation are to be gained only and only through their help, under their protection. This’s my firm opinion and I’ll believe in it up to my very last breath.”

Finding it useless and inappropriate to argue with Sahak Agha under those circumstances, I expressed my gratitude for that three-member family’s kind hospitality and the tea they had treated me to and left them. Miss Anoush saw me to the main exit; shaking her hand warmly and with tenderness, I promised her to pay frequent visits to her, provided that they did not make her conservative father angry.

THE FUNERAL OF OUR DEAR VICTIMS

It was one of the bright, sunny days, May 19; it had been announced that in the Pantheon of National Heroes at ten o’clock in the morning the official funeral of our dear and irreplaceable victims would be held.

Having been previously temporarily buried, the corpses of all the victims who had sacrificed their lives for the sake of the Armenian nation’s freedom, were to find their

eternal peace in the National Pantheon built in the grave-yard of Arark's *Sourb Targmanchats (of the Holy Translators)* Church. Surrounded by guards of honor, the remains of A. Brutian, violently hacked to pieces in prison, Ishkhan and his three friends fraudulently killed in Hirj as well as the twelve patrol members and their assistants martyred during the April fighting were taken to the Pantheon, carried on the people's shoulders.

It was not merely a funeral but mass national mourning, which was at the same time a demonstration of the entire nation's protest, revenge and hatred for their enemy. Vast multitudes of thousands of people attended the burial of the nation's dear, irreplaceable sons.

The coffins, all shrouded in bunches of roses and green branches and carried on the people's shoulders, were followed by the huge crowd of Armenians that seemed to have no end at all. So great was the number of those attending the funeral that the large territory of the cemetery appeared too small to accommodate all of them. The children and youth had climbed the trees and walls of the cemetery and neighborhood while thousands of other people had to confine themselves to staying in the streets.

Many funeral orations were made taking long hours. The ones made by Grigor Bulgharatsy, Panos Terlemezian, Armenak Yekarian, Hovhannes Kuloghlian and Levon Shaghoyan were laden with infinite sorrow and mourning. Kuloghlian, that old revolutionary and talented poet, rained curses over the Armenians' centuries-old enemy. Never can the following of his words be blurred in my memory, "The merciless, mean Turks killed our Mkrtych Avetissian on St. Bartholomew Monastery's hills and the same fate was shared by his friends Martik and Peto on Garahisar's slopes. Brutian was hacked to death in his gloomy, dark prison, Ishkhan and his friends were treacherously killed in Hirj Village, Hayots-Dzor. Some of our heroes, such as Yeghia Nakhshounian, Hakob Derzian and Karapet Tantian, were killed right on their barriers while hundreds of brave warriors were slaughtered in the positions. However, was the enemy able to exterminate the mothers who had given birth to those heroes...?"

"Those Armenian mothers are not small in number, are they? They are the mothers who give birth to the heroes of the Armenian nation, who have nurtured and fostered a countless number of such mothers in their bosom. Therefore, as long as the Armenian people exist, their unmatched and noble mothers will live always giving birth to new heroes.

"We are bowing down before our courageous heroes' graves, the golden memory of their feats will ever be bright in the very depths of our hearts. We are proud of their self-denial and are glorified, witnessing the unbending will power of those heroes' mothers. They will always give birth to a countless number of heroes for their nation and our age-long enemy will sooner be blinded than see our steadfast will broken."

The very last graveside oration was made by Levon Shaghoyan, who spoke in the manly, proud tone of a self-made military person saying, "I am imbued with infinite sadness for the grave loss of these admirable heroes. Our hearts are rent at the loss of these beloved, dear victims. It is hardly a day since I parted with the adamant warriors of the heroic Armenian mountainous regions of Shatakh, Pesandasht, Moks, Gavash, Karkar and other places.

"My unsurpassed friends! You fulfilled your duties of patriots and revolutionaries nobly, winning laurels. Highly respected by all of us, rest in eternal peace in this National Pantheon. You fully performed your noble duty of true Armenians; so be sure

that your deserving successors will always keep high the flag of freedom that you raised and will wreak vengeance for you upon our common enemy.”

No more funeral orations were heard in the Pantheon, but the multitude could not tear themselves away from the grave-yard of the heroes martyred to death for their salvation. Their souls were weeping together with the grief-stricken funeral marches played by the band.

AFTER THE LIBERATION

At last Van and Vaspurakan were able to breathe a sigh of relief: the Turkish Government with its robbing and slaughtering institutions and corrupted elements leading them had vanished without any trace. Together with those mean, depraved state and administrative elements, Vaspurakan had got rid of all their accomplices, the infernal, bloodthirsty jannisaries, gendarmes as well as the various irresponsible elements constantly causing every kind of disorder and tumult, and the Kurdish gang leaders notorious for robbing the population everywhere. The only thing that now troubled the Armenians in Van and the neighboring regions was how to prevent the violations and abuses of the chiefs of police and group leaders.

The protests flooding the Provisional Provincial Department, Police-Station and the Provisional Public Prosecutor resulted in that a few travelling investigators were appointed in order to prevent those abuses.

The population had appeared in a severe situation. It had become very difficult, if not impossible, to earn one's piece of bread, the enemy and robbers had completely stolen all the flour, wheat, all kinds of food products and, especially the dairy cattle and livestock intended for slaughter.

The devastation and massacres perpetrated by the Turks before the April fighting deprived the population of their young, working hands so that they could not even think of beginning agricultural work in due time. In general, under those circumstances, the only thought dominating the people's minds was to somehow survive and remain alive.

Fortunately, the advent of summer encouraged the semi-starving population: yes, they had been deprived of everything, but the enemy had not been able to strip them of their trees with their summer fruits that were the Lord's gift. The Turks had not managed to uproot the trees and extirpate their fruits.

Van and Vaspurakan people, who had been fighting for their salvation heroically, could not retreat and give way to despair. Gradually, they began ridding their houses of the traces of destruction caused by the enemy and step by step they found their consolation experiencing a rebirth. They had already started working diligently and building everything again. It was difficult, very difficult, but not impossible for Van Armenians, who had passed through the crucible and ordeal, always falling to the Armenians' lot.

HELP ADMINISTERED IN A STATE OF ABJECT POVERTY

Once before Sunday midday, that was generally considered a day of rest, I was in our garden. One of our apricot trees was heavily laden with a variety of apricots that we

called by the name we ourselves had invented 'karmratoosh' (the Armenian equivalent for 'red-cheeked'). I was very fond of that kind of apricot that was very big, succulent and as sweet as honey. The tree had a thick trunk, but I had been accustomed to climbing the tops of trees easily, like cats since my childhood. Strangely enough, I was very fond of picking fruits off the branches and eating them just on the spot, while they were fresh. On that day having climbed the apricot tree, I was partaking of the karmratooshes, when my sister ran up to me and told me that two of my friends had come to see me. I asked her to lead them into the garden and immediately climbed down the apricot tree moving forward to meet my friends Hrant Darbinian and Vahan Kheranian.

After usual greetings and inquiry about our health, Hrant told me that one of the two children of our friend and famous poet Aso, who had been slaughtered in prison, had died and his poor mother was completely at a loss, having appeared in a grave financial predicament. I asked them to invite all our main friends to a meeting in order to raise some amount of money to help our friend's poor widow. I promised to inform two to three of them about the meeting myself.

On the evening of the same day, the twelve of us and Hasmik Solakhian gathered in Hrant's place. Being Aso's neighbor, he was well-aware of the former's widow's conditions: explaining briefly that unfortunate woman's grave financial predicament, he asked us to render immediate help to her.

The trouble was that the April struggle had reduced all of us - together with Van population in general - to almost abject poverty, and those once enjoying comparative prosperity had been rendered as poor as us. The comparatively rich friends of several of our comparatively rich friends, such as Hrant, Vahan and others, had sunk into poverty due to the slump in trade as well as the burning down of their warehouses of cloths and other goods.

With great difficulty we managed to collect some amount and hand it to Hrant and Hasmik asking them to somehow alleviate Aso's poor wife's sorrow by giving it to her and rendering whatever help possible.

PEACEFUL BUT FLEETING DAYS

Van-Aygestan had hardly begun ridding itself of the dust and ashes of the April bombardment, devastation and mass depredation. People had succeeded in preventing the disaster caused by the subsequent tumult and disorder, imbued with bright hopes for the future. The sunny spring was to gradually yield up its place to summer, abounding in greens and rich varieties of fruits.

The huge multitudes that had been eking out a semi-starving existence throughout many months began to satisfy their hunger by the lavish gifts of nature, the greens and fruits. The petty merchants and craftsmen were gradually starting work.

Life was persistently aiming at resuming its former natural course.

People engaged in trade and crafts, from youngsters to the aged, talked only about the resumption of work.

– Բարիլուս Գաբօ, լսեցի կօշիկի խանութ բացած և գործի ես կպած (“Good morning, Gabo, I hear you’ve opened a shoe store and started work.”)

–Ի՞նչ ընենք բարեկամ: Ինչքան վախժ անգործ նստեն ու բոշ-բոշ ման գամ: Թէ խավաս էր հո բաս էր: Իսկ դու ի՞նչ կընես, դարձու խանութ չե՞ս բացած (“What can I do, my friend? How long can I twiddle my thumbs and wander? And what ‘bout you? Haven’t you opened a tailor’s shop?”)

–Դէ ես էլ ստիպւած եմ գործիս պոչէն նորէն բռնել: Անգործ մնալուց ի՞նչ օգուտ կը գայ: Ախպէր Գաբօ, իմ գործը քուկէն շատ աւելի դժուար է: Օլուղ-չօճուխ շատ ունիմ: Հաց ուտող բերան էլ շատ ունիմ: Պարտատր եմ աշխատել, քէ չէ բանս բուրդ է (“Well, I’ve to start everything from the very beginning. What can we gain by idling about? Brother Gabo, my work’s far more difficult than yours; I’ve many children and many souls to earn bread and butter for. I’ve to work; or else, things will be hard.”)

Similar talks could be heard everywhere: everybody was seriously thinking about embarking upon peaceful, constructive work.

ONE DAY AFTER NOON

About mid-July one day after noon, Aghasi Khanjian came to me. I did not fail to notice that his usual smile was not playing on his face and he was kind of angry and panic-stricken.

“What’s the matter, Aghasi?” I asked, “I’ve never seen you so anxious and in such a bad mood. Even in those dreadful April days your smile never disappeared from your face.”

“What’s the matter?” He repeated in a mysterious tone, “The matter is something that none of us could ever expect or even think about. The Province Municipality and, especially the narrow group of bodies gathered around Aram Manukian are worried and panic-stricken. Before noon, Bulgharatsy, Levon, Terlemezian and Yekarian were having some secret conversation in Aram’s room for about two hours. I went to Aram so that he would ratify some of the orders of the Public Health Care Department and saw the door locked from inside. His body guard told me that he had been ordered not to let anybody in, without any exception.”

“Then, then?” I was eager to learn the end.

“Then, it’s the most important thing. When the meeting was over and the nation’s leaders came out, I noticed an unusual anxiety and anger on their faces. I entered Manukian’s study and found him even more worried and perplexed. He told me briefly that the Russian army had begun retreating and encouraged by this, the Turkish troops were now persecuting them upon their heels.”

‘If the Russian army does not stop its withdrawal,’ Manukian said, ‘perhaps, we shall be forced to issue an order of retreat for our Vaspurakan compatriots.’ ”

“Oh, what formidable news, Aghasi! What is our exhausted and still semi-starving wretched people to do?”

“Such an unbearable and dangerous displacement is sure to cause undescribable disasters and new massacres,” answered Aghasi, totally grief-stricken.

PART FOUR

DISPLACEMENT AND OUR STATE AS REFUGEES

The sinister news that Aghasi had told me turned out to be true: at three o'clock the next day, July 18, the following brief but horrifying announcement appeared on the walls of Aygestan's main streets, "Vaspurakan Provisional Department regrets to announce to the Armenian people that, because of the Russian army and Armenian volunteers' retreat, they should leave the city immediately and immigrate into Igdirdir with the objective of crossing the Russian frontier. Any delay is fraught with further calamities."

That announcement was like a bolt from the blue: at the first hours and in the first days of the self-defense, the enemy's fierce, heavy bombardment had hardly been as dreadful and disastrous as that formidable, horrifying announcement consisting of several lines.

"Woe is us! What a calamity befell upon us!"

"What a misfortune! What a catastrophe! What cursed fate!"

"Why on earth were we born? I wish we weren't born at all."

"This is a misfortune sent from heaven. Absolute hell. This is all divine punishment!"

"Well, but why didn't these godless aghas and leaders, these merciless heads let us know this some days ago so that we would find out how to save ourselves."

Thus, confusion, tumult, curses, swear words, mourning and weeping permeated through the entire city.

Displacement, escape... . Crazy and confused haste... . Everywhere crowds, fuss, cries, screams, curses and helpless, desperate, hopeless entreaties and supplications.

You should have gone through the entire ordeal of retreat and displacement, should have experienced the horror of being put to sword by the ruthless, barbaric enemy persecuting you at your heels in order to realize what displacement and horror-stricken escape are.

Unfortunately, the more magnificent and premeditated the self-defense in Van-Aygestan, Shatakh, Pesandasht and the other regions was, the more tumultuous, hasty and horror-stricken Vaspurakan's retreat and displacement were.

Like the roaring waves of the stormy sea, the emigrating multitudes were thundering in utter chaos.

Almost nobody knew and understood what they were doing: a terrible instinct instigated them to abandon their houses, tearing them away from their homes to the street

in an obscure and hopeless direction, towards the vague and dreadful road to foreign lands.

None of them could ever think that after the heroic April, after the arrival of the Russian troops and volunteers and finally, after their wonderful, brilliant liberation, they would see the day some invisible scum would drive them away from their native, dear land with its trees and flowers, and their beloved city and beautiful homeland. What sorrow and mourning, what a morbid grief and unspeakable suffering!

Hardly had an hour elapsed after the apparition of that ominous announcement on the city walls when I came across vast horror-stricken multitudes storming out of the city. The general turmoil and panic perplexed me and I was particularly at a loss over my brother's wife's illness: she was not able to walk, let alone continuously walking for days and running away, if we were compelled to. What could I do? We had no horse, donkey or even cow so that she could be placed onto or tied to it.

I thought of hurrying to Grigor or Levon and asking them for a horse, explaining my predicament to them, but where could I find them at that very last hour?

Bulgharatsy's house was not very far and I decided to turn to him for help. I was sure that he would never reject me if it was within his power to assist. I almost ran to his place where great disappointment awaited me: I knocked on the door with the door hammer for several times, but in vain. Taking a big stone from the canal, I again knocked intensely so that I was about to break it open, but still, there was no answer. Undoubtedly, the house was empty and they had already left.

Desperate and totally powerless, I flew into a rage, blaming myself for my strange carelessness. I knew about that unfortunate escape even earlier than twenty-four hours ago, did I not? Then why did I not prepare my family members for it, why did I not speak to them about our sick sister-in-law? How could I dare to go to them now and what was I to tell them? I was considered the smartest in our family, was I not?

I was completely at a loss, but I had no way out so that I began running to our place. The sweat running off me, I reached our house finding my family members in a state of chaos and panic. Upon seeing me my sister, whose eyes were swollen and red with tears, began crying and jumping for joy.

"My brother's come, my brother's come!" And running towards me she put her thin arms round my neck, following her old habit.

"I'm very sorry that I couldn't find the necessary food and a horse for Haykanoush," I said trying to justify myself, "I was trying to find a horse, that's why I was late."

"What can we do? I tried hard to find a horse, too, but I couldn't," my brother said.

"We should thank our Lord that Maro's mother gave this burro to our sick daughter-in-law," Father said, pointing to a small donkey standing in the yard. "Seeing our hopeless situation, our dear friend Maro's mother made us accept this burro."

"Well, but what about Voski herself?" I asked. "Probably, Maro had given that animal to her mother so that she could move out."

"Voski, that woman who's an absolute treasure, refused to take that animal, despite all our expostulations.

“Woe is me,” she said, ‘I don’t care a damn if I die right on the road, but it’ll be against our Lord’s will to leave this young, beautiful woman. No, you’ll get a heavy burden of guilt on your conscience if she’s left at the mercy of these godless rascals.’ ”

“Well, and what’re you going to do?” I asked, “we’re already very late, almost the entire city’s empty now.”

“Father Harutiun, Araksi, Sergei and you, Karapet, please, all of you can go. You needn’t worry about me, leave me to die here,” Haykanoush said, utterly desperate and grief-stricken. Then wiping the sorrowful tears flowing down her faded cheeks, she added, “It’s all the same, for whatever you do will be in vain and I’ll die on the road. I know for sure that I can’t reach anywhere in my condition.”

Uttering those words with but ultimate difficulty, our poor sick relative burst into bitter tears.

“My dear Haykanoush! You needn’t worry and weep so much for we won’t go anywhere without you. Even if we couldn’t have found this burro, we would carry you on our backs in turn. Now, my dear, we’ll be very grateful, if you cheer up instead of crying and thus encourage us,” I said, trying to comfort our Haykanoush.

“Hurry up, brother Karapet,” my sister said, “let’s bring that burro, put some thin blankets on it and help Haykanoush mount it.”

Despite the fact that Haykanoush, who was in utter despair and had totally lost her moral strength, insisted that we should leave her and go, we somehow arranged the things to be loaded onto the burro and helped her mount it. My brother and I prepared for walking on either side of the burro in order to keep her equilibrium.

Fearing that the small donkey, that was our only hope and support, would get exhausted and unable to continue the way, all the four healthy members of our family took food resources, very thin covers and blankets on our shoulders and under our arms, within our power, of course. I was the only one whose burden was comparatively the heaviest because I was carrying a rather weighty bag upon my back.

The main thing troubling all of us was our sick relative’s serious condition. At that crucial moment each of us was convinced - although none of us dared to share that anxiety with the other kinsfolk - that Haykanoush would not be able to endure on that meager and insufficient vehicle and would fade away on the road of that infernal Golgotha.

Dusk had almost descended when our five-member family was leaving the house: Father proved unable to stifle the sorrow accumulated in his heart and burst out sobbing bitterly like a little child crying at his dead mother’s grave. Taking off his hat and raising his two hands up to the sky, he whispered, “You, Omnipotent God, please, have mercy upon us and lead us... .”

“And deliver us from evil...,” my brother added.

“Wait a minute, I’ve forgotten to take the red-cheeked apricots I’ve gathered from our garden today. I’ll fetch them now, let your mouths taste the sweet fruits of our garden for the last time,” my sister said and ran in. She immediately returned, with the copper bowl of beautiful and truly red-cheeked apricots in her hand.

“Let each of you take several of them, it’ll be difficult to take all of them with us. It’s a pity they’ll be crushed on the road.”

“Yes, my dear Araksi,” answered I, “you’re sorry for those several apricots while our stone-hearted, barbaric enemies don’t pity and spare us, and are driving us away from our houses, gardens and land under the threat of slaughtering us. They, those merciless, mean Turks are persecuting us tearing us away from our ancestors’ land.”

The golden sun was hurrying to hide beyond the horizon whereas we were running away from our dear, paternal homes.

MY LAST VISIT TO ONE OF MY FRIENDS

We left our forefathers’ house where we had been living for many years, our hearts rent by regret intertwined with unbearable anguish. When we reached Aygestan’s main avenue at the beginning of our street, we found the wide Seghga Avenue comparatively deserted: the rows of the deportees covering the entire space of the avenue two hours before, had considerably shrunk in number.

Mainly addressing my sister, I said to my family members, “Araksi, help Haykanoush with your brother for a few minutes and be careful so that she won’t fall down from the donkey. Go towards Noratoonkner, I’ll join you in a little while.”

“Where’re you going and why? What a time you found to go to other places!”

However, instead of answering those questions, I ran away from them.

We had not started moving yet when a hard thought struck me: I wondered what Anoush and his parents had done and was eager to find out whether they had set out or not.

I was going to Anoush’s place: I was going very fast, sometimes even running so that hardly had a quarter passed when I found myself near their house beside the main entrance of the Russian consulate. I knocked on the door and a voice answered from the inside in a minute, “Who’re you and what d’you want?”

I recognized the voice: it was Sahak Agha.

“Open the door, Sahak Agha, it’s me, Sergei.”

The door opened and Sahak Agha, who had, apparently, been taken aback, asked, “How could it happen that you’re still in the city? What d’you want, my boy?”

I was perplexed and did not know how to put my question, but finally, I stuttered, “I’m sorry, I wanted to be somehow useful to you before the displacement.” A little later I added, “And what about you, Sahak Agha, don’t you want to emigrate?”

Instead of answering me Sahak Agha took a creased color handkerchief from his pocket and wiped the tears flowing down his face.

“I’ve sent Anoush and her mother, they’re all by themselves.”

“And you, Sahak Agha! Why didn’t you leave with them?”

“I, I ... And what about this consulate?”

“Well, and if you stay, what’re you going to do with this consulate?”

“What am I going to do...? I can say I’ve asked that question to myself for a thousand times...” Hesitating for a few seconds, he said in a resolute tone, “I’ve decided to stay here and defend this consulate even at the cost of my own life.”

“Defend? And how are you going to defend it all alone and with no arms? Have you forgotten that a few months ago, while the Turks were lowering its flag, they gave you

such a severe beating that you had a miraculous escape from death? Upon reaching the city those barbarians will hack you to pieces.”

“You’re right, my boy, if they manage to find me, they’ll tear me to pieces, but... .”

“But, what but? You mean you’ll hide, well, but how long will you be able to hide? Suppose, you managed to hide, but you need something to live on. Upon arriving in the city the enemy will either burn this building or turn it into a military or state institution.”

“I know, I’m sure even if those criminals come, they won’t be able to stay here long. This retreat is merely a political show for the Russians, who would find it sheer shame and disgrace to withdraw really. Soon, very soon they’ll come back and I’ll wait for their return. And if these barbaric Turks find and kill me before that, I don’t care... . I’ve been their guard for many, many years, I’ve shared my piece of bread with them as long as I can remember, and it would be base ingratitude on my part to desert their consulate and run away.”

Seeing that my efforts to persuade that voluntary soldier and enemy were sure to yield absolutely no results, I thought of bidding my farewell and leaving him immediately. At the very last moment he shook my hand cordially, kissed me on my forehead and face like my own father and said, “I wish you all the best, may God be always with you. I’ve a request to you and I hope you won’t reject it. If you happen to come across Anoush and her mother on your way, please, help them. They wanted to go to my brother, who’s in Tiflis. I hope soon they’ll come back.”

FOLLOWING MY KINSFOLK

I set out, my heart aching, strange as it might seem. Why did I turn out to be so shiftless at the most responsible moment, when I ought to have taken Anoush with me? That beautiful, modest girl had been the target of all my pure dreams and enchanting mental wanders for about two years before we started that infernal way of ordeal and suffering. Was it ever to fall to my lot to meet her again?

I was walking very fast, already feeling the heavy weight of the bag on my back, although I had just begun my hard way. Without any reason my legs were bending, but I did not know whether it was because of premature exhaustion or the despair that had imbued me.

There was still a long distance to cover before I could reach Noratoonkner and Seghga Village, and my calculations showed that I had not passed through even half of it. I was extremely tired and very thirsty, but I was still very far from the place where I knew I could drink water. Being absorbed in thoughts, I had not made any attempts to find my family so far, but I supposed I had not come across them. I thought that even if I had failed to notice them being plunged into meditation, Araksi would have certainly seen and called me. I came to the conclusion that my family members must have already covered the road I had passed so far. I could not decide how long I had sat there having some rest: I was longing to sleep, but that thought horrified me making me jump to my feet. Tying the bag onto my back I resumed my way.

I looked at my watch: it was nine o’clock and fortunately, the moon was illuminating the road with its bright, silver glitter. Under other circumstances, the bewitching,

admirable brilliance of the July luminary would certainly fascinate me, but I had become completely indifferent to the unspeakable spell of that magnificent night of Vaspurakan.

I was walking unconsciously like an automatic machine, and it was only the cries and screams of the rows of refugees, gradually becoming smaller and smaller, that made me return to the reality. They were shouting at their relatives, kinsfolk and animals urging them to quicken their pace with requests, sometimes angry cries and even swear words.

At last I reached the spring I was familiar with, its resonant, cool water being like an exceptional treasure to me. Abundantly surrounded by and endowed with such cool, clear springs, Aygestan Armenians never felt short of those divine gifts so that it had never occurred to us how precious they were.

Having drunk the water at several intervals, I duly washed my hands, face and exhausted feet. Then I took a small *carafe* ('ghomghoma' in the *Van dialect*) out of my bag, filled it with water and continued my way. Now I felt a little refreshed and was glad at the thought that weariness would not make me yield up. The only wish I had was to reach my family and find Anoush.

It was already past midnight when I reached Seghga Village via Noratoonkner. It had been the refugees' first haven, where they had scattered some of the necessary luggage they had taken with them: in a state of complete fatigue, utter despair and with aching hearts they had been forced to throw away some of their belongings to make their baggage lighter. Everywhere you could see woolen blankets, *carpets* ('khalicha' in the *Van dialect*) and copper vessels, whose owners once, perhaps for long years, had dreamed of them and made hard efforts to gain them now being forced to just throw them and leave.

Very few of the vast multitude of the deportees had stayed in the village. Some of them were waiting for their late relatives completely panic-stricken, others had been compelled to fall behind the caravan so that the sick or the old in their families could have some more rest.

While looking for my family members, I came across Khachik's Gevorg's family living not far from our house. Hardly had seven to eight months passed since their daughter-in-law got married and now she was suffering from severe pain under the heavy burden of the child living in her womb, unable to bear the fatigue of the long way covered on foot. The young, unfortunate woman was writhing about, cramped in the agony of premature birth pangs. Her husband, younger brother-in-law and parents-in-law, who stood there in complete worry and perplexity, had been running about here and there for long hours, but they had proved unable to render any help to their daughter-in-law struggling against her unbearable and incurable pain, extremely exhausted with labour pangs in the jaws of certain death.

Witnessing her dreadful condition arousing only compassion, I did not dare to ask them anything about my family, but little Ashot suddenly said to me, "Mr. Sergei, when I was running about to find a doctor or midwife, I saw your kinsfolk. They were anxiously looking for you. They had stopped at the village entrance, near the small spring."

“Dear Ashot, and what about our sick Haykanoush? Could you learn anything about her?”

“I don’t know exactly, but your sister was complaining about her condition.”

Asking them for pardon and wishing their sick daughter-in-law a quick recovery, I hurried away to find my family in the place indicated by Ashot.

Unfortunately, all my search proved futile: I could find them nowhere and when I was fully convinced that they had not stayed in the village, I decided to continue my way.

I was well-acquainted with Vaspurakan’s map, but I was unaware of the retreat route so that the only way out was to move forward in the direction of the refugees’ caravan. According to my calculations, the last part of the refugees must have left maximum an hour before: therefore, I had to cover a distance of two hours to reach them, provided that I quickened my pace. I did not lose the hope of coming across my family members among the refugees and encouraged by that hope and calculation, I began increasing my speed. On leaving the city, I had no food in my bag, but I had found some pieces of round loaves of bread baked by the refugees in a house in Seghga Village. I had eaten two of them with great appetite and taken the other four ones with me.

WITH MY FAMILY

I did not know exactly how much time I had been walking. I was in a state of complete fatigue: my calves and, especially feet ached terribly, but a wish, a striving continually instigated me to move forward. Having been walking for more than sixteen hours, I was longing to have some rest and, particularly sleep. However, I was afraid to sit down for a short rest since I was sure that sleep would overcome me as soon as I sat down, while the thought of falling behind terrified me.

Sunrise was approaching and among the other stars Venus, the morning luminary, began shining triumphantly in the sky.

The enchanting cool breeze of the dawn began blowing and I decided to sit down at least for several minutes and breathe deeply that vivifying breeze. I began singing the first four lines of several patriotic and encouraging songs in order not to give way to sleep that was disastrous for me.

The first golden rays of the rising sun began glittering on the horizon in the East, their vivifying brilliance spreading abundantly on the endless horizon. It seemed that those shining rays were to strengthen the desperate, half-dead, panic-stricken and aching hearts with refreshing blood and saving zeal.

Fascinated and enchanted with those lovely rays, I felt an unspeakable freshness and energy in the depths of my heart so that I got up and decided to walk and continue my way till I reached my family. I cherished the hope that after having reached my family members and calmed down, I could have a tranquil sleep for at least a few hours, restoring my exhausted strength.

At half past six in the morning, I arrived at an Armenian village named Janik. The confused multitudes of the deportees had reached there at midnight and the village represented almost the same picture of chaos and turmoil that I had already seen in Seghga

Avenue, Aygestan. Everybody was trembling at the thought of the enemy's persecution: everywhere you could witness the same noise and screams, the same curses and swear words and the same widespread impatience, haste and vexation.

–Կարօ, շուտ արա՛ ջահընճած ըլնենք, կորենք էս տեղէն: Ասէնքը զնացին, հեռացան իսկ մենք հալա էս անիծած գիւղն ենք մնացած (“Karo, hurry up, let’s disappear from this place and go to blazes! Everybody’s already gone, but we’re still in this accursed village.”)

–Ալմաստ! քէլի, առաջ ընկի: Ծծկերդ վերցրու, մնացածը բող մնա, գէտ ու ջահընճած էլնի (“Almast, move forward! Take the suckling and let all the rest go to hell!”)

–Քեա՛ մարդ Աստծու, ապա էսա ուտելու բաներ որ չտանենք, կէսօրին ի՞նչ պիտի ուտենք: Մի քիչ համբերի, ինքդ օգնի, ժողվի, վերցրու որ էրթանք (“Why, old man, if we don’t take this food, what ‘re we going to eat in the afternoon? Wait a little and help me to gather everything to leave.”)

–Վայն իկե գլխիս, բա էս շան լակոտ Արշակն ի՞նչ էլաւ, որտե՞ղ ջահընճած էլաւ: Ինչպէ՞ս ինոր բողնենք էրթանք (“Woe is me! And where on earth is this puppy Arshak? Where the hell has he gone? How can we leave him and go?”)

–Այ հէր չապուք քէլի: Էսա կասեն քրդերը կը խասնեն, մեզ կը պրտեն (“Father, be quick! They say the Kurds will soon reach and slaughter us.”)

Perplexed and confused in the general tumult, I was completely at a loss. What should I do? Where should I go, whom should I ask and how should I find my family in that vast, storming mob amounting to several thousands?

Everybody had his own troubles and problems and was anxious about finding some remedy for them. Everybody was plunged in a single nightmare, i.e. to run away without a moment’s hesitation, to go away so that the criminal, bloodthirsty enemy would not catch and slaughter them.

Completely helpless and despondent, I was continually elbowing my way through the huge crowd and shouting, “Araksi, Karapet, Father Harutiun, Haykanoush! Where are you?”

However, all my shouts and cries were lost in the widespread turmoil so that they were not heard even at a distance of five steps from the place I was standing.

Getting convinced that all my shouts were to be lost in the raging chaos of that large throng resulting in nothing, I decided to go to the other extremity of the village as soon as possible. I thought - and my supposition was well-grounded- that I would surely find my kinsfolk at the mouth of the road beginning from the village end, among the rows of refugees pouring out of the village.

I rejoiced at that discovery and ran to wait in the place I had previously thought of in order to find our family or at least some friends and acquaintances knowing them.

I stood waiting throughout an hour. It is hardly possible to describe the panic and tension of the waiting situation; my heart was violently trembling, and I was thoroughly imbued with the fear of being unable to find my people.

I was beginning to give way to despair blaming myself for my egoism. If I had not gone to look for Anoush at the very last hour, I would not have parted with my family and would not have lost them. However, the thing that made me suffer most of all was my brother’s wife’s hopeless illness. I did not know why, but I was somehow convinced that she would not survive without my help. While I was suffering under the burden of

remorse, I suddenly recognized Father in the influx of crowd flooding the road. He was walking beside my sister and brother, his cassock on his shoulders.

Calling my family members' names one after another I ran up to them, reached them and began kissing their dusty faces and foreheads warmly. I was greatly surprised and happy to see our Haykanoush lying in a properly arranged bed on a small cart, with the burro that Maro's mother had given us drawing it energetically. That unexpected news made me very happy and I cried with joy, "What a wonderful discovery! How glad I am for this cart!"

Then I approached Haykanoush and asked, "Dear Haykanoush! How are you? You must be quieter lying on the cart, mustn't you?"

"Thank you, brother Sergei, but I'm not very well. I've a splitting headache and constant nausea. My bowels are always writhing, as if they're ready to be torn to pieces. In short, you shouldn't have made me come with you, it's all the same, I won't survive this way."

"What're you talking about, Haykanoush? You shouldn't be so hopeless, you've already got over the beginning that was the most difficult period. We've only a three-day distance to cover and as soon as we cross the border, we'll find a good doctor who'll cure you thoroughly. Pluck up your courage; the very first precondition to recover your illness is hope, self-inspiration and self-encouragement. You should try to convince yourself that you'll be okay. Don't be sad and don't grieve. You'll certainly get well and will be our former brave Haykanoush."

"No, my brother, I know I won't ever get well... ."

Haykanoush wanted to say something else, but it proved very difficult for her.

I noticed that accursed escape had squeezed every drop of strength out of her within a single day. Even before that, she had completely thinned down and faded away as a result of her long months' illness and was truly unable to endure the suffering of that chaotic escape, the shocks, terrible tumult and thick clouds of dust accumulated in the air. I found it expedient not to make her talk anymore letting her stew in her own juice.

My family members complained about my being late and the worry it had caused them. I was ashamed to tell them the reason for my delay and confined myself to saying that I would explain it to them later.

"My delay was by no means inappropriate, but I could never think you would be able to cover this wearisome way with our sick sister-in-law so rapidly and successfully."

"You're completely right," my brother said, "Araksi and I had great difficulty in keeping Haykanoush on the burro till we reached Noratoonkner. There to our or Haykanoush's good luck, we saw this cart amidst the poplars. I don't know if those retreating had left that cart that brought us great happiness. We tied our burro very easily and helped Haykanoush lie on it, having previously put a blanket and pillow on it."

"But why, brother Karapet, fortune smiled on us even in this dreadful disaster: if Maro's kind-hearted mother had not given this burro to our sick sister-in-law, Haykanoush and all of us would have got into hot water."

UP TO BERKRI-GHALA

Thousands of Vaspurakan refugees were ordered to do their utmost to reach Berkri-Ghala as soon as possible for there was the threat of Kurdish onslaughts. That ominous news spread among the multitude at lightning speed and flew from mouth to mouth like the roar of a fierce storm.

The deportees were panic-stricken: they had to make superhuman efforts to escape in all haste and get rid of the impending evil.

–Դժոխք էրթայինք, ատելի շուտ կը խասնէինք, էս ինչ զուլում են (“We’d reach hell sooner! What a calamity this is!”)

–Գրողը տանի էդ անիրաւ տաազակներին: Ես խօսեալ, վերջացայ: Ի՞նչ ընեն: Տիգրանիկս մէկ ու կէս տարեկան ի: Ծանրացեր ի: Խոզիս բերանս խասաւ թէ որ ուժ ունես, մէքի էլ դու չլկիր տոյի, որ կրնանք ատելի արագ էրթալ (“May all those criminal bandits go to blazes! I’m already half-dead and can’t bear this anymore. What am I to do? My Tigranik is a year and a half years old and has become heavier. I’m already worn out, hug him a little if you can so that we’ll go faster.”)

–Բա էս էրկուսին ինչ կանես հազիս խոնց պոչիցս քաշ կուտամ (“What ‘bout these two? Hardly can I drag them after me.”)

–Տղա Կիրակոս, վզէտ պաց արա դէն թալ էտա անտէր եօրդանը: Քեզ թերցու, ոտ վերցի: Չե՞ս տիսնա, որ հըմէն պաց արին ու թալեցին ինոնց էլած-չէլածը: Պիտի վազել, շուտ էրթալ: Պիտի փախնել, թէ չէ հիչ ու փուչ, էշ-նահատակ պիտի էլնենք (“Old man, Kirakos, untie that damned blanket from your neck, make your burden lighter and move on! Don’t you see everybody’s thrown away their belongings? We’ve to hurry up and be quick, or else we’ll fall victim to our own folly.”)

–Էլ ուժ չունենմ, բալէքս տոք կնացէք, վազէք, փախէք: Տուք ինձ համար իզոր տեղ անօրէնների արին ու թրին տեմ չ’առնէք: Ես իմ պաժին ապիրենմ: Իտրից ալիլին իմ պաժին չի: Վազէք, փախէք, էլ իտրից ալիլի ձեր տատի խամար մի ուշացէք: Գնացէք հեռացէք, ձեր բոյին մատաղ (“I’m absolutely worn out, my kids, you go, run away, don’t fall prey to those criminals’ sword because of me. I’ve already lived my life and nothing is left for me. Run away, don’t be late anymore because of your granny, run away, my darlings.”)

All the refugees were talking in that great chaos and worried turmoil: they were eager to run away and escape, but it became completely impossible for them.

The overwhelming majority of the deportees or even more had to walk or, better to say, run away on foot for they were devoid of the vehicles of the time, carriages, vans and horses. Some of them had only managed to load their food, bed items, goods and chattels onto the domestic animals, oxen, cows, donkeys, mules and even goats. Consequently, under those circumstances the distance between Janik and Berkri-Ghala amounting to thirty *parsakhs* (a unit of length equal to three miles), or a hundred and eighty kilometers was too great.

More than half of the refugees were from Kaghakamej and Aygestan; just like us, most of them had not had any opportunity to have a rest and sleep for about two to three hours since they started and now they faced an endless and weary way.

They had been told to quicken their pace within their power: fear, horror, the enemy’s merciless persecution and the threat of the Kurdish assault had extirpated that “within their power” and they were in terrible haste and absolutely panic-stricken trying to escape.

THE ROUTE OF VASPURAKAN'S FIRST DEPORTATION IN JULY 1915



The comparatively stronger part of the refugees, those able to walk fast, had succeeded in reaching Kharakonis Village on the evening of the second day. I supposed that we had to be in the middle of that escaping multitude, and that thanks to our strangely dexterous burro, that expressed its protest of weariness only with its once shrill and continual bray.

However, that small animal seemed to realize the danger hanging over those crowds like the sword of Damocles and was eager to perform its duty properly. It continued drawing deftly its precious luggage on the cart to which it had been harnessed.

OUR IRREDEEMABLE LOSS

Despite our comparatively great speed, we were still a long way from Kharakonis Village. The stony, bumpy road was flooded with the refugees' endless caravan, while the stifling, thick dust rent the air so as later to cover our heads and bodies with its clouds. Despite the cool of the approaching evening, it was almost impossible to breathe freely.

My sister, who had climbed up the cart a few minutes before to help Haykanoush drink water, suddenly cried out in an extremely worried and trembling voice, "Sergei! Karapet! Hurry up, stop the burro, Haykanoush is dying!"

Karapet and I ran and blocked the animal's way stopping it. I told my brother and father that we would have to move the cart away from the general road and lay Haykanoush down to decide what we were to do. So did we: we put poor Haykanoush with her blanket and pillow on a comparatively smooth place. Now she was suffering the very last minutes of her agony and we tried to make her talk for the last time. Araksi ran to fetch some water from the jug, I dipped my handkerchief in that water and put it on my dying relative's forehead, face and lips in turn. At once all of us burst into bitter sobbing, weeping and crying with entreaties, "Haykanoush, dear Haykanoush, sweet Haykanoush! Talk, please talk, say something, don't leave us in such an insulted and hurt way, don't you pity us to leave us so silently?"

Haykanoush opened wide her big, black eyes as if moved by our weeping and supplications and perhaps to bid us her last farewell. Looking around at us for a couple of seconds, she again closed them, this time to plunge into eternal sleep.

We went into great mourning for our dear, noble and unmatched Haykanoush. The sudden sorrow had rendered us completely unconscious and uncertain about our future situation. We were brought back to the reality only when our ears caught the reports following one another.

"Karapet, Araksi, there's absolutely no point for us to stay here anymore. Let's put our unfortunate Haykanoush on the cart again and try to reach Kharakonis as soon as possible.. There we'll find some suitable place and bury her."

None of my kinsfolk opposed that and when we again set out, with the burro drawing this time its lifeless luggage, I asked Araksi to sit on the cart, beside her dead relative.

"Araksi, you're completely exhausted, and it's impossible for you to continue the way on foot. Sit on the cart and accompany your dear, sweet sister-in-law for the last time."

Araksi did not agree first of all because she thought the burro's burden would become heavier and then because she wanted our father to sit there for he was in a state of even greater fatigue. Eventually, I managed to somehow persuade her and place her on the cart, beside the dead body. In that way, I wanted to redeem myself with our kind-hearted relative and rid Araksi of the possible illness that heavy weariness was sure to cause.

When we resumed our way, the refugees' rows had considerably thinned out, and the road was mainly covered by those who were late like us and moved with difficulty. Probably, they had had losses, too and had been busy performing the sad duty of the eternal parting with their relatives.

THE TERROR OF THE KURDISH ASSAULT

It was already past midnight when we eventually reached Kharakonis and found ourselves in the sea of refugees, exhausted, worn out and grief-stricken. The sorrow of our relative's loss and fatigue had rendered us somewhat indifferent to the threat of the Kurdish offensive.

Before reaching the village, we had almost grown deaf by the whistle and roar of the volleys and, absolutely helpless, we had reconciled ourselves to the possibility of falling victim to the enemy bullets. We might have fallen out of the defensive line, but what could we do? It was our fault for we were late.

We were astonished at the panic and confusion that had permeated through Kharakonis: every person, even the members of the same family had separated from each other and were running away, horrified at the impending carnage and having completely forgotten everything, even the duty of mutual help.

The most dreadful and cruel aspects of human life surface with all their infernal features only when human mind ceases functioning and gives way to animal instinct that instigates humans to escape and save themselves at the moment of inevitable danger. Unfortunately, the first escape of Vaspurakan Armenians' vast multitudes in the direction of Kharakonis-Berkri Ghala was the full reflection of that sinister aspect because of the chaos and indiscipline dominating among the refugees at that time.

THE FUNERAL

I did not dare to think that our family now consisting of four members was able to resist that blameworthy self-salvation, the animal instinct of saving only one's own self. However, each of us was ashamed to leave our very dear, beloved Haykanoush's body to be trampled underfoot by that egoistic and selfish multitude turned into a mere mob: thus we would put a heavy burden of curse and revenge upon our conscience for the rest of our lives.

"Children, let's go far from this crowd, this unbearable tumult and if we don't manage to find a cemetery, we'll at least find some suitable place and bury our daughter-in-law, who left this world without seeing any of her wishes come true," Father said in a trembling and stifled voice, wiping off the flood of tears pouring out from his eyes.

I fulfilled Father's will silently and pushed the donkey away from the sea of refugees with great difficulty holding it by the rope tied round its head. We headed for the small hill located very near the village and quite by chance the village graveyard turned out to be beside that hill.

We managed to find a ditch-like place, apparently, dug a long time before, near that small hill. Completely lost in sweat and with grave difficulty, my brother and I dug the ditch with pointed stones and our nails and interred our unfortunate relative.

We tried to pour much soil on the corpse to cover it properly. We also brought many stones and accumulated them on the tomb, while my excited father administered the brief funeral ceremony. We prayed fervently and each of us scattered a handful of soil over the grave. I could hardly tear Araksi away from her dear relative's grave with thousands of entreaties and supplications and we returned to the village inconsolable and with aching hearts.

ON THE WAY TO BERKRI-GHALA

The bandits attacking the helpless refugees were the members of the Kurdish gangs of "Mamghooli" and "Shamseddin" dwelling in Zilan Ravine and the Tzaghkants Mountains. The main objective of their assault was robbery and plunder, but the terrified deportees were fully convinced that those offensives were launched on the special order of their Turkish enemies, longing to shed the Armenians' blood.

Forty-five long years have elapsed since that tragic and disastrous escape in 1915. There are people who righteously believe that that hasty and chaotic retreat was false and had been organized with the aim of stripping the industrious and hard-working Vaspurakan Armenians of their native land and nature scattering them all over the world.

If there is at least a very tiny shred of truth in this supposition, we may state that the Russian Tsarist Government completely carried out the mean anti-Armenian policy of the Turkish Government.

In the course of those subsequent calamities, there occurred something that actually saved and liberated the thousands of refugees, running away in crazy, panic-stricken confusion. In order to secure the retreat of the Russian troops and volunteers' groups attached to them, the military authorities were obliged to leave a certain number of armed forces in the rear of the withdrawing army. And that was something real, for while the persecuted and panic-stricken Vaspurakan population was running away in infernal turmoil, the detachments of the Russian armed forces were guarding the whole territory from Arjak, the Monastery of the Holy Mother of God to Berkri-Ghala and Kotur, with the task of patrolling the area and defending it.

Those detachments entered into several-hour fighting against the armed Kurdish gangs and defeated them putting them to flight very easily. Thus, it was by that stroke of good luck that the panic-stricken Armenian deportees gained their salvation.

Our delay had placed us at the very end of the refugees' caravan escaping the enemy in great tumult. After our dear relative's loss, my father, sister and elder brother, who had not recovered from his wound in the arm yet, sat on the cart in turn so that their

worn out feet could have some rest. Following my father's and sister's entreaties, I sat on the cart at intervals, for three times, and had some sleep which refreshed me a little. The only thing exhausting all of us was the fact that we were completely devoid of any opportunity to get some sleep: sometimes we went to sleep while walking and fell down.

AFTER BERKRI-GHALA

We passed through Gortzot while sleeping on the cart. Completely worn out and exhausted by extreme weariness, I had slept on the cart for about three hours so that when I woke up I felt ashamed for myself because my sleep had made my family members walk for a long time.

Rubbing my eyes I got down the cart and asked for my family's pardon for having made them walk for such a long time.

At last on the evening of the fourth day of the retreat we reached Berkri-Ghala seeing that the majority of the refugees had already reached there. It was evident that, despite the last Kurdish attack on the river Bandi-Mahur, their panic and confusion had been considerably reduced. Perhaps, they thought that they had already escaped the most threatening danger or probably, they believed that they would soon reach their destination, that modern Golgotha. However, the most encouraging fact was that many of the companies of the Russian army were still stationed in Berkri-Ghala: it goes without saying that their presence was very reassuring.

Whatever it was, it stuck out a mile that the refugees who had got rid of their horror and panic were now breathing freely, eager to sleep for several hours and have a rest.

When we arrived at Berkri-Ghala, all of us were so exhausted that we did not even wait to eat anything. All the four of us immediately fell asleep, absolutely worn out and without deciding what we were to do. My sister and father somehow accommodated themselves on the cart while my brother and I slept right on the ground.

At dawn Father, who had been the first of us to rise, woke us up in a troubled and anxious voice, "Ay, my children! Be quick, our burro has disappeared, somebody has untied that dumb animal from the cart and taken away."

My sister, brother and I jumped to our feet almost simultaneously, but being still half-asleep, at first I could not realize the great disaster that had befallen us.

Opening and closing my eyes for several times and rubbing them, I learned about the great calamity at last.

"Wait for me here, I'll run to find our burro." And without waiting for my family members' answer, I began running like a madman through the wide, straight street of the large village town with the aim of reaching the caravan and finding the stolen burro.

It was absolutely foolish of me to make such a reckless step for I would never reach the animal that had been stolen and driven away some eight to ten hours before.

Throughout two hours I ran about the road, buried in thick clouds of dust, and fell down on its edge, totally exhausted and almost entirely out of breath. The vexation induced by severe fatigue and the loss of the only vehicle we had had plunged me into such great despair that I was thoroughly rooted to the ground without the slightest desire to get up and return to my family. Every drop of strength and will power seemed to have been squeezed out of me.

Powerless and at a loss, I was cursing our fate and misfortune addressing swear words to the villain who had meanly deprived us of our only hope and support in those hard days. I was particularly upset and downcast at the thought that my father and sister would be forced to continue the way on foot, exhausted and worn out as they were.

That grave calamity came to add to the number of the disasters and sufferings that had already fallen to our lot.

It took me quite a long time to recover from the stupor caused by my fatigue and inconsolable despair.

The vivifying sun had abundantly spread its golden rays on the horizon, the clouds of dust that had appeared on the refugees' way made the birds hovering in the air fly away with piercing cries. Not far from me the deportees' noisy and endless caravan was passing along the road.

I rose to my feet trying to suppress the stupor aroused by my futile despair. I was even ashamed of myself for having yielded up to discouragement: if I was to give way to despondency every time a calamity befell me so easily, how was I to bear and endure it?

"Shame on you, Sergei, you should really be ashamed of yourself," my inner voice kept blaming me.

"But it is not about me that I am worrying, it is my father's and sister's pitiful fatigue that troubles me," I was trying to justify myself against that reproaching voice.

"But you consider yourself the strongest in your family, you should not yield up to desperation so easily and should encourage them, particularly your weak, little sister and exhausted father, becoming their leader on that infernal way," the voice continued.

That inner voice was fully right and very dear to me, for it came from the depths of my heart. It was my heart's noble call and I was obliged to follow it.

After a long hesitation, I decided to go back to find my kinsfolk. When I was leaving them, I told them to wait for me in Berkri-Ghala, but at least four hours had passed since then and I was not sure that they would still be waiting for me, particularly taking into account the fact that they themselves could not be fully convinced that I would certainly return.

The refugee who has resorted to terrified escape cannot retain his cold-heartedness: he loses his logic and sound reason at the very moment of taking the first step of flight, with which he consigns himself to the ever changing whims of fortune and opportunity.

I started advancing in the opposite direction of the deportees' route, my attention undivided. I was returning to Berkri-Ghala next to the chains of refugees trying to see some familiar faces among them, but in vain.

It was already afternoon when I again found myself in Berkri-Ghala, having met neither my family nor any acquaintance. With great difficulty, I found the place that had sheltered us the previous night, but my family members were not there. Thinking that I might have been mistaken I started looking for them in other places, too, but with no results. The large township had emptied of the flood of refugees of the previous night

and only small groups could be observed here and there. Those who had fallen back of the caravan were wretched people, unable to move forward because of their illness, old age and labour pains... .

Hardly can I find any words to describe how terribly exhausted and worn out I was. Despite the fact that I had promised the voice erupting from the very depths of my essence not to give way to despondency, it turned out impossible.



Ванскіе бѣженцы-армяне по' дорогѣ въ
Эчміадзинь.

Van refugees on their way to Echmiatzin (photo "Kavkaz I Vayna")

Having lost all hopes of finding my family in Berkri-Ghala, I had to cover the way I had already passed once again. But how was I to do that? I was in a state of complete fatigue, with all my body ready to be torn to pieces. My highly strained nerves and the utter weariness of my feet doomed to walk, walk and sometimes even run endlessly had completely squeezed every drop of strength out of me. The most terrible thing was that I was completely deprived of any means to refresh: I was hungry, with not a single piece of bread in my bag.

What could I do? Where could I get at least a single piece of bread? To go to those late wretches who had fallen behind and ask them for bread seemed impossible and shameful for me. Besides, whence could they have food and even if they had, how could they agree to share it with anybody else under those vague, inconsolable circumstances? No, I would rather starve to death than beg for bread. Beg for bread, and that among those wretched, helpless, sick refugees, gradually converting into mere shadows and desperately struggling against the threat of death.

Plunged into those depressing thoughts, I was suddenly struck by a hopeful conclusion: well, there was no bread and food, but that large township had houses and gardens after all, had it not? Was it totally impossible to find any food and fruits in those houses and gardens to at least slightly satisfy my hunger?

I entered many houses and gardens, but the thousands of starving or semi-hungry refugees had completely wiped out everything, like grasshoppers longing for food.

Having lost any hope of finding anything, I decided to leave the village, to cover the road the deportees had passed for the third time, but exactly at that moment I heard the continual victorious cackle of a hen that had laid an egg in one of the houses at the end of the village.

I was thoroughly filled with a feeling of sudden joy: probably, the hen that was cackling so happily and triumphantly, had laid an egg. I entered through the half-open door and started walking in the direction of the sound. Passing through the first yard I came into the second where the barn was located: however, the hen that had become a refugee and deserter, did not like the sound of my footsteps near the lumber-room and ran away cackling, frightened to death.

What an unexpected, great pleasure it was for me! Instead of one, I found three snow-white eggs on a small haycock. It was a mystery to me how the escaping house owner could not have noticed the eggs of the previous two days. Perhaps, he had forgotten about them or was in terrible haste: whatever it was, that was an exceptionally happy discovery for me. I immediately took the three fresh eggs and broke and swallowed them one after another. At that moment I was terribly afraid that if I did not devour them at once, somebody might turn up unexpectedly and seize them from me.

I left the barn yard under the impression of someone who had just gone away from a luxuriant feast table and returned to the first, larger one with the intention of going out to the street. While traversing the yard, I heard some deaf voices resembling moaning. My first reaction was to run away in order not to hear that sinister whining anymore, but I somehow suppressed that feeling to find out what the matter was.

The heart-rending moaning was again heard: there could be no doubts that one of the refugees was desperately struggling against the nightmare of agony, completely lonely and abandoned.

Trying to pluck up courage, I moved forward to find the helpless dying man. Feeling strangely horrified, I entered the tonir room whence I could hear the dying person's moaning. I went up closer to the man, struggling against the agony that stifled him in order to find out his identity.

Suddenly my blood froze as if I had been struck by lightning: that person was Ohanes Agha Kuloghlian, my own uncle.

What an amazing, inexplicable mystery was it? That man could not have started way all by himself; where were his wife, daughter and two young, grown up sons? I approached the dying man: the dirty mattress and blankets smelled of disgusting bloody flux that completely stifled me. That cast light upon the whole tragedy of my wretched relative: I was facing the picture of the refugee's animal instinct to flee and save himself as soon as possible as well as his instinctive egoism with all its meanness and shamefulness. His own wife, daughter and sons had left him all alone to struggle against his agony and had vanished, having lost any hopes of his recovery... .

What a shameful selfishness, what blameworthy cruelty and what real betrayal! I could hardly make myself believe that whatever I saw was true to life, but it was the vulgar and merciless reality. His own family had appeared reluctant to wait and bury the

man, who had been toiling hard for the welfare and happiness of that same family for more than thirty years and was now dying, inconsolable and lonely.

Displacement, escape and the people's eagerness to rid themselves of the horror of death... . Alas, how dreadful, formidable and at the same time merciless that deportation-escape was!

A little while later, however, I began blaming myself for such extremely pessimistic thoughts. Ohannes Agha, that utterly wretched man, might have fallen behind his family during the chaotic, terrified and panic-stricken escape or at the Kurdish invasion on Bande-Mahuri, which had rendered him unable to reach his kinsfolk and doomed him to that tragic fate.

I called him by his name for many times, eager to squeeze at least a few words out of him and find out what really had happened to him, but unfortunately, all my efforts proved futile. For several seconds he writhed about in agony and breathed his last breath, his heart aching with anguish.

ON THE WAY TO TAPAREZ-GHEZEL DIZE

Throughout an entire day and night, I was under the grave, depressing impression of my uncle's tragic death. Even my extreme fatigue was not able to blur the agony of his dreadfully inconsolable and humble death in my mind. Plunged into my thoughts, I was covering that accursed road to Golgotha like an indifferent, unconscious shadow. Sometimes my mind was struck by the bitter supposition that I might fall down with the sad end of never rising to my feet again.

I had covered the way in that unconscious, almost half-dead state, like an exhausted automatic machine under the threat of being rent to numerous pieces at any moment. That wearisome, forced walk lasting for thirty hours seemed incredible not just for any person, but even for me. That unbearable way to Golgotha beginning from Bayazet-Agha and extending up to Taparez and Ghezel-Dize was more than a hundred kilometers and I had passed through that distance, although I myself considered it a sheer miracle in which I could hardly believe.

After all those unspeakable difficulties and sufferings, I finally reached Ghezel-Dize, but when and what time, I could not say. The only thing I knew was that having reached that township, I fell down somewhere plunging into a sound, saving sleep.

I did not know how long I had been sleeping when I felt somebody shaking me all over my body. I had the impression that I was being rocked, but that rocking grew gradually stronger and I heard somebody calling me by my name, "Sergei, Sergei!"

I made great efforts to open my eyes and look at the person calling me.

"Sergei, what a condition are you in? Why are you lying here, in this sun? Why are you breathing so heavily? Get up, get up."

It was one of my best friends, Hrant Darbinian, who had knelt beside me and was assailing me with questions.

“Why did you choose to sleep amidst this mob? Couldn’t you find a more comfortable and peaceful place? Get up, get up.”

“My dear Hrant, I myself don’t know why I fell down here. The only thing I know is that I’m terribly exhausted and worn out, perhaps I’m seriously ill. Please, give me some water, I ‘m very thirsty; besides, I haven’t eaten anything for almost two days, that is to say, I haven’t had anything to eat.”

In a minute Hrant fetched me water in a clay jar and I began gulping it. Removing the jug from my lips with great difficulty, he said, “This is enough for the time being, afterwards you’ll drink some more water.”

“Dear Hrant, thank you very much. If you hadn’t happened to come across me by this miracle, I’d have certainly died right here. That water vivified me and I’m deeply thankful to you.”

“You’ll still have time to thank me, now let’s go to my family members, you’ll eat a piece of *bagharj* (*unleavened bread*) and have some rest. Perhaps, Mother will manage to give you a cup of tea.”

I rose to my feet with Hrant’s help and began walking with difficulty. Morning had already broken and the fresh air vivified me. I was very happy feeling that even if I was extremely exhausted, at least I was not ill.

We began telling each other about the troubles and sufferings we had gone through during those five days. Hrant’s family had shared all the shocks and confusion that had befallen mine: unable to endure the panics of the road, his mother and sister had fallen ill. However, they had been a little luckier than us, for they had a dexterous mule: Hrant’s father, who was a draper, had bought it two years before, in order to travel freely from Aygestan to Kaghakamej and vice versa. Hrant told me that they had had a narrow escape from losing that saving animal. Two nights before, somebody had tried to steal the mule, but Hrant’s far-sighted father, who had been guarding it, had raised panic thus preventing the bandits from doing so.

When I told Hrant the sad story of our burro’s theft, he burst into his usual laughter and said, tapping me on the shoulder, “Sergei, we were so much absorbed in our troubles and disasters that I completely forgot to tell you some extremely happy news. After you left them, your brother Karapet set out to look for the burro whose loss caused so much suffering to you. And what a good luck!”

I suddenly interrupted him, “Good luck? Do you mean they’ve found the burro?”

“Yes, yes, he managed to find the stolen animal, but it took him hard efforts to get it back. The soldier who had stolen it insisted that it had belonged to him for a long time and even threatened your brother addressing him with swear words. To your brother’s good luck, his fellow fighters came to his rescue, gave the thief a severe beating and seized his pistol, which made him so conceited.”

“Hrant, my dear, you can’t even imagine how happy I’m to hear that news. Now I’m fully sure that my sister and father will be able to reach Igdir.”

That news which was so important for me made me so happy and enthusiastic that I embraced Hrant and kissed him warmly for several times.

“Your family members may have advanced by several hours,” Hrant said in order to calm me down and added, “We were obliged to fall behind because of my mother’s and sister’s exhausted state: they were in bad need of some rest.”

“And how are they now? By the way, are they very far from here?”

“No, it’ll take us just a couple of minutes to reach them. I know that you’re worn out and hungry, and I’m sure that they’ll be very happy to see you.”

“I myself will be very glad to meet them,” I answered.

Hrant’s noble mother and innocent, ever shy sister were very happy to see me. The former, who was a thin, lean woman, had completely faded away as a result of the road troubles and, particularly dry dust. Hrant briefly told them what calamity had befallen me and asked his sister to give me a cup of tea with a newly-baked bagharj as soon as possible.

When I was parting with them, Hrant made me accept four round bagharjes that his mother had made from pure flour, oil and eggs. I did not want to take it under the excuse that I would thus reduce the food resources of their family, but his kind mother interfered nicely in our argument, saying, “Sergei, my son, you’re our child, too, you needn’t refuse accepting these four bagharjes. We still have food for three days and that’ll be sufficient till we reach Igdir. As for the later period, we rely on our Omnipotent God: He won’t leave us hungry and helpless. Take them, my son, take them. A friend in need is a friend indeed, and a true friend is just for such hard days.”

Yielding up to the mother and son’s expostulations, I took the bagharjes that attracted me like magnet.

Expressing my gratitude to Hrant and his mother for several times, I cordially hugged and kissed my dear friend and resumed my infernal way. I was very glad for that meeting; but for Hrant, I would have probably never risen to my feet. What is even more important, even if I had got up, I would have been again knocked down because of my unbearable hunger and thus would bid final farewell to my young life full of hopes and dreams. Not only did my noble friend save my life but also supplied me with food for the rest of my way.

Now I was truly thinking that even the greatest misfortune had its end hidden somewhere: it is not surprising that my inner voice blamed me for my desperation. There does exist a saving hand that comes to our rescue at the very last moment of the most severe misfortune and hopeless calamity, saving and ridding us of the final fall... .

With the utter carefulness, I arranged my bagharjes in the bag I always carried on my back and incredulously checked for several times if it was properly tied. I was afraid lest those bagharjes that were an absolute treasure to me under those circumstances might disappear from my bag. Oh, how terrible the horror of the loss of life is and how dreadful the fear of remaining hungry is in general!

MY LAST MEETING WITH KHANJIAN

The hope of reaching Igdir, the border village town of the vast Russian Empire, in maximum a day and getting rid of the threat of massacre by the Turks and Kurds had

begun glittering on thousands of exhausted and persecuted refugees' faces. The nightmare of being slaughtered by the mean enemy was being gradually uprooted from those panic-stricken people's hearts.

At last the sea of deportees who had had a miraculous escape from the accursed, infernal blazes and their stifling smoke could breathe freely and have some tranquil rest, exhausted and worn out by the tumultuous escape of the previous five and a half days.

I was a drop in that sea of refugees escaping under the threat of the enemy's sword and fire, and in my turn, I was eager to stop and have a short rest.

The news concerning my family that my friend Hrant had told me considerably calmed me down and I was convinced that if I did not come across my family members on the way to Igdir, I was sure to meet them there. That supposition made a heavy burden fall off my shoulders and relaxed my strained nerves. Consoling myself with the lucky chance of finding my family soon, I found a comfortable corner in Orgov, the last station to Igdir, in order to have a tranquil sleep there.

To ensure myself against the possible robbery, I tried to sleep on my stomach, hiding my bag, i.e. my whole treasure, under my chest and arms and putting my small pistol in it.

I cannot imagine such a sweet, peaceful and refreshing sleep I had ever had during that tumultuous period of my life. When the terrible turmoil of the leaving refugees woke me up early in the morning, I could hardly recognize myself: I seemed to have become an entirely other person. I was particularly glad that nothing had disappeared from my small property.

In a very high mood, I was already leaving Orgov, that last station to Igdir, when I heard a very familiar voice calling me from behind, "Sergei, Sergei!" It was my dear friend of youth and best companion Aghasi, who was running towards me. In my turn, I began running to him and the two of us, two loving and close friends, embraced and kissed each other for several times.

"How glad I am to meet you," Khanjian said.

"You can be fully sure that I am very happy to see you, too. And where is your family?" I asked.

"They are not far from here," Aghasi answered, "and will reach us soon. I was with them, but I recognized you from afar and ran up to you. I can say that we, that is to say, our four-member family including me, were lucky enough not to fall into any great trouble on this wearisome, accursed way. My father succeeded in obtaining a good horse at the very last hour thanks to his great number of acquaintances in Van and the respect he enjoyed among different classes of the population. If I am not mistaken, Shaghoyan and David Papazian helped him in that affair, too. But for that horse, Father and, especially Mother would not have been able to continue the way. As you know, Mother suffers from rheumatism and cannot make twenty to thirty steps one after another. Father's condition is not good either. Well, what has been done cannot be undone."

Then paying attention to the fact that I was alone, he asked, "And where are your kinsfolk?"

"My family members... . We, better to say, I have had a true Odyssey on this way: I have twice lost my family and again found them. At present, I am again looking for them."

I told my friend in detail about what had occurred to my family and me also telling him about the death of our sister-in-law. He was deeply moved by our sufferings and profoundly regretted our loss.

“Sergei, my dear, I do not know how to express how really sorry I am,” he said. “Such losses could not have been unexpected taking into account the dreadful panic and trouble to which all of us have been subjected. Strange as it is, some invisible, criminal hands kept meanly emphasizing and increasing the dreadfulness, panic and turmoil of this withdrawal. Indeed, there was the constant fear and threat of the fraudulent enemy and Kurdish robbers’ attack and slaughter, but was it really impossible to organize this retreat in a way that would not render it so panic-stricken?”

“You are right, Aghasi,” I replied, “your viewpoint is completely righteous. An entire people, in this case Van Armenians who were able to put up valiant defense and resistance against the enemy armed with all kinds of weapons and continually launching fierce attacks, endure the rain of volleys and disastrous bombardment could have certainly been dislocated safely and peacefully, paving their own way of withdrawal.”

“Yes, unfortunately, we have to confess that certain unknown, alien and treacherous hands aimed at squeezing every drop of life out of Vaspurakan’s industrious Armenian population and trampling them underfoot. To my mind, our authorities and leaders cannot be accused of this criminal plan. I am fully sure that this treacherous anti-Armenian plan has been worked out by certain intriguers and provocators, and we can state without any exaggeration that they achieved their harmful goal.”

For several minutes, Aghasi and I walked silently side by side, each of us plunged in his own thoughts that were similar and even identical to each other. Both of us silently accused the visible and concealed enemies who had meanly placed our powerless and helpless people’s existence at stake. One of those enemies was longing to slaughter and exterminate us in broad daylight, extirpate us from our own land and strip us of our ancestors’ centuries-old houses. The other was attempting to take possession of our land, sunny country and our dear homeland stealthily, silently, employing demonic fraud so as to enjoy them without the trouble of our existence.

Aghasi was the first to come back to the reality from those sad, heart-rending thoughts. He meditated in the following way, “Vaspurakan’s self-defense with its heroism, magnificence and nature taught us unmatched lessons. The first and most precious of them was that at the most crucial, fatal moments the Armenians can unite and work together committing themselves to the defense of their common interests, with party and group self and benefit completely put aside. I have now come to the conclusion that there are many, many patriots like Kuloghlian, Yekarian, Terlemezian, Bulgharatsy, Shaghoyan and others both in the former Armenakan Party and the present-day Dashnaktsutyun. Before the outbreak of the April fighting, we thought that apart from our friends and followers, all the others were group-addicted, egoistic, self-complacent and imprudent people: however, the reality and real work showed that they were as fervent, noble and devoted patriots as we considered ourselves.

“If we and the other Armenians can work together at the critical moments, when the existence of the entire nation is put at stake, and if they can unite with us in their turn, why cannot we cooperate forever and try to rid ourselves of our common enemies long-

ing for our extermination.”

I admired and was amazed at the prudence and sound logic manifested in Aghasi's words. I knew that in those severe days he was very young being about nineteen years old. I admired him because at that time all young men viewed and perceived life from the standpoint of the universal, all-human approaches we had learned. As I have previously said, once we belonged to the Social-Democratic Students' Organization and were carried away with dreams of universal doctrines. However, the April fighting and subsequent displacement-escape brought us to our senses making us realize the real life with all its rude aspects.

Both Aghasi and I had justly forgotten those all-human aspirations, for before achieving them, we were faced with the primary necessity of ensuring the existence of our people as a collective entity. How could we be engrossed in dreams of a world revolution and universal happiness in those days and under those circumstances, when we were being deprived of our native land and lives, with the enemy carrying out demonic plans to exterminate us?

“Yes, my dear friend,” I said, coming to myself from the meditations raging in my mind, “you are fully right. Under the current conditions we are obliged to give up our universal, all-human aspirations and return to the painful reality. First of all we have to think about the unification of our collective forces and then try to gain all the necessary means to secure our nation's existence.”

“And we shall achieve those necessary means only by the unification of our common national and party forces and our collective ambitions.”

Walking silently for some minutes I again broke the silence asking Aghasi, “And what are you thinking to do after you cross the border?”

“Well, what am I to do after having reached Igdir, which is the frontier? Dear Sergei, this is a general question that all the refugees will wonder about: thousands are asking themselves the same question in this sea of Armenians. I do not think that once we reach Igdir, that is to say, once we have crossed the border of the Russian Empire, our misfortunes are to come to their end. There can be no doubts that a new stage of tragedy is sure to begin for our deportees: those surviving this infernal escape are to be exposed to new calamities and unspeakable difficulties. Loneliness, need, starvation, diseases and finally, unemployment will continue the massacre of many people who will be lucky enough to have a narrow escape from the horrors of this displacement.”

“Yes, our tragedy is only to begin after we have crossed the border.”

“I think our wretched refugees will be saved only when they get a guarantee to return to their homeland. Indeed, this is a beautiful dream and I do not have the slightest belief that it will ever miraculously come true. People say, ‘A drowning man will clutch at straws’ and this is completely true: a person exposed to the danger of getting drowned will grasp even at straws. Especially in the last decades, the Armenians have become accustomed to thinking that their salvation depends on foreigners.”

“Don't you think that if by a stroke of good luck, Russia wins victory in this disastrous war together with its allies it will open the door to salvation for us?”

“Dear Sergei, I feel embarrassed to give you explanations over such issues, for I

know how broad your horizons are, but I think you would like to know my opinion, which consists in the following:

“Our centuries-old enemies, the Turks, have a mutilated state structure and Russia as well as its allies are desirous to finally shatter that state representing a “sick person”. Just like us, numerous Balkan peoples are suffering under the lethal yoke of that selfish, arrogant and sick tyrant. There can be no doubts that throughout many years those enslaved peoples, who have been totally stripped of all their rights, have deafened England, America and, particularly Russia with their entreaties and cries for help.

“If after a possible victory, these three states come to agreement by any miracle and do not sell their souls to the devil preoccupied with their private, egoistic interests, undoubtedly, that sick tyrant will be extirpated, and the Balkan peoples as well as our suffering Armenians will get rid of his dominion.

“After all this, dear Sergei, as I have already told you, I have come to the firm conclusion that the very first prerequisite of the Armenians’ salvation and liberation consists in the cooperation of all our national forces and parties. It is the most precious and irreplaceable lesson that the April fighting taught us.

“It would be very pleasant for me to have such an exchange of thoughts on the way to Igdir, it would be a great consolation to both of us, but I have to part with you, my dear friend, to whom I will always remain thankful for the guiding advice he gave me during these years. I have to wait and go back to find my parents, if necessary: I fear that Mother’s rheumatism pains may have again begun.”

We kissed each other for several times, both of us feeling instinctively and regretting that we would never again have the golden opportunity to meet.

A FEELING UNKNOWN SO FAR

Parting with Khanjian with infinite regret, I had two wishes: to find my family and come across Anoush. I have to confess that I had never forgotten her even at the most dreadful minutes of our escape. At that time I still did not know how to name the powerful attraction that made her a magnet for me.

I was very, very fond of Maro, but that was pure love for a dear person, just like what I felt towards my sister Araksi. In contrast to that, the feeling I had towards Anoush seemed to be a little different: my love for her was more reassuring, alive and enchanting.

In those sinister days of retreat, I was about to be twenty years old in but two months. Before the outbreak of the April fighting, I had thoroughly dedicated all my leisure to reading, writing and, particularly the arrangement of our student lectures, meetings and other organizational activities.

Anoush’s small family was a remote relative of ours and the two families met only perhaps once a year. Before the escape, when I was appointed a teacher in my Alma Mater, Yeramian School, I plucked up enough courage to go to their place for several times without any of my kinsfolk. At first I was very afraid of Sahak Agha and even avoided meeting him in their house: I did not know why I had the impression that he was a conservative and even despotic father. However, that impression gradually abat-

ed so that during my last two to three visits, I dared to go to their place without any fears.

Now I awfully regretted that I had not been able to meet them before the escape so that they could join our family. I was particularly sorry for the reason that Sahak Agha, who greatly relied on the Russians' rapid return, had flatly refused to flee with his wife and daughter.

Everywhere, every minute I was constantly longing to meet Anoush and her mother and my complete fiasco in my efforts caused me a lot of worry and anxiety. I was very sad about my failure for I had moved forward and fallen behind for a few times in my strenuous efforts to find both them and my family. What a frustration, what a misfortune it was that I could not find them!

Plunged in my thoughts, totally indifferent to the turmoil raised by the sea of refugees and lost in the heavy clouds of dust, I continued walking and walking, sometimes quickening and sometimes slowing down my pace. I did not feel any weariness although in fact I was extremely worn out and exhausted. An invisible force automatically kept pushing me forward and I was eager to reach Igdir as soon as possible, an hour, half an hour or even ten minutes earlier. I was thoroughly imbued with a strange, unknown feeling, a hidden longing I had never felt before, and that ardent desire, that burning anguish was rending my soul.

I was quickening my pace, surprised at such a rapid change about me. I knew that I had to be weary and exhausted, but I kept increasing my speed. Could the parting of but two days induce such great panic in my inner world? Was it really to be explained by that separation or another wistful feeling? I was ashamed of myself to confess the truth.

IN IGDIR

I reached Igdir on the morning of the seventh day of the retreat, in a state of utter fatigue and moral depression. I had a single wish - to find a tranquil corner so that my worn out body and desperate soul could have some peace and rest. Before coming to Igdir, I had done my utmost and made strenuous efforts to reach that desirable shelter as soon as possible. I was in a hurry and endured everything anxious about reaching there, but alas, what a great pity, I was totally emaciated and only thought of resting and having a sleep.

The countless shocks of the displacement-escape had caused me such great sufferings that despite my burning desire, I was not able to make a single step, let alone carry out the search I had intended.

The vast, countless number of refugees had flooded the houses, roofs, streets, gardens, public utilities, boulevards and tea-rooms, in a word, every place and corner in that village town called Igdir. I huddled up beside the first group of people I saw like an unwelcome guest.

—Աղջի Աշխէն! Էդ պարտնին ասա իրա համար մէկ ուրիշ տեղ փնտրի: Առանց ինոր մենք էստեղ, քանտի մէջ ինկածի պէս, խեղդած ու շնչակտոր ենք էլել (“Old woman, Ashken, tell that mister to find another place for him. Even without him, we’re stifling here as if in a cage.”)

“Father, please, let me have some rest,” I answered to the complaining refugee. “I’m very ill and worn out. I’ll get up and go away in a little while.”

—Չես տիսնա ա՛յ մարդ, էսս խեղճի ջանին նֆաս չի մնացե: Իրիսի կոյն էլ հեռ իրնից, մեռելի կոյնի: Թող մէ քիչ նաֆաս առնի, էլնի էրթայ իր պանին, -կուշտեց կինն իր մարդուն (“Don’t you see, old man, this miserable wretch is almost half-dead; his complexion doesn’t differ from that of a dead man, God forbid. Let him rest a little and then follow his own way,” the woman scolded her husband.)

Encouraged by the protection of the kind-hearted woman, who had been reprimanding her husband, I huddled up in my seat and stretched myself out on the ground still fearing the man. He continued grumbling, but hardly had I heard a couple of his words when I fell asleep.

I would have certainly slept for a longer time in that tumultuous chaos if my protector, that kind woman, had not woken me up taking pity on my loneliness.

—Վեր կաց ա՛յ քալամ, վեր կաց: Մի՞թէ դու տեր ու տիրակաճ, հեր ու մեր, ընտանիք չունե՞ս: Վեր, վեր, առտանից մինչև կեսօրս էս ժամին, քաղցած, ծարաւ վեր ես ինկած: Վեր էս մէկ բաժակ չայլը խմի, մէկ նաֆաս քաշի: Մէկ պատտառ էլ հաց-պանիր չայլող կողքին դրած եմ, էս էլ հետը կեր (“Get up, my son, get up. Don’t you have any close people, parents, a family? Get up, get up! It’s already past midday and you’ve been lying here since morning, hungry and thirsty. Get up, drink this cup of tea and have some rest. I’ve put a piece of bread beside your tea, eat it, too.”)

It took me great efforts to wake up. I rubbed my eyes and arranged back my hair lost in dust and lying on my forehead in a disorderly mass. Then I sat up and tried to concentrate to determine how I had appeared in my present state and why. At last I recalled that I was in Igdir, where I had reached with unspeakable difficulties. I also remembered that when I wanted to sit down there, completely emaciated, I heard somebody scolding me, but I was unable to go away because of my utter exhaustion, and immediately fell asleep. Thank our merciful God, who always delivers help to the most unfortunate and abandoned person leading him to the way of salvation! It was thanks to that same supernatural being that I met the compassionate woman who helped me and somewhat alleviated my sorrows. May our Omnipotent Lord be ever glorified!

I shook the pitiful woman’s hand with profound gratitude, thanked her and went away to search for my family.

My search lasted very, very long. I supposed I could come across my family members in the Armenian church of Igdir, school and other public places. Darkness had already descended while I still continued my heart-rending search which lasted for many long hours. My family had disappeared, so had Anoush and her mother. To my misfortune I did not meet any of my relatives, acquaintances and neighbors and returned to the church hoping to get some news there: my father was a priest and he must have certainly come there at least to pray, if he had not needed anything else.

The people gathered in the church were like herrings in a tin: the refugees’ families had literally occupied all the space, having accommodated themselves side by side. It being past ten o’clock at night, almost all of them were tired and had fallen asleep.

I found it futile to continue my search, particularly because I was terrified at the thought of again getting emaciated. I considered it expedient to find a convenient corner and sleep till the next morning hoping to get refreshed as much as possible. I still had a bagharj, the last of the ones that Hrant's mother had given me. I took that bagharj, which was my last hope and support, divided it in two equal parts and ate one of them: it seemed as delicious to me as barbecued lamb. I had a great appetite to eat the other half as well, but I made a strenuous attempt not to yield up to the temptation: who knew still what calamities and troubles awaited me? Perhaps, I would not be able to find my family the following day either, and even if fortune smiled on me and I did find them, who knew, they might happen to be completely devoid of any food. How could deportees like us have food resources?

WANDER AND SEARCH

I woke up very early in the next morning, even before sunrise, terrified at the thought of my possible utter exhaustion. General fatigue and complete reluctance to get up - this is what I felt at that time.

“Sergei, you will put yourself and the creature you are so ardently longing for into a very hard situation if you do not rely upon your will power. Even the slightest despondency will finally crush you, putting an end to your blossoming youth and all the dreams of future happiness,” again I heard the same saving inner voice that challenged me to live and struggle.

I rose to my feet with steadfast determination and replied to the challenging voice, “Yes, I do want to live.”

The sun was about to rise: the blue summer sky was glittering with the golden rays of the rising sun. The air was fresh and vivifying: at last we had got rid of the unbearable thick and dirty dust of the road of escape.

I was wandering in search of my family. I saw hundreds of women and girls in a place and approached seeing them pushing each other. Water, that was, apparently, drinking water, fell from a semi-circular wooden trough, but it was poorly scanty and each of the women and girls gathered around it was trying to jump the queue.

–Աման Աստուած, էլ էս ի՛նչ դժբախտութիւն է- բարձրաձայն բողոքում և զանգատում էր մի տարեց կին- էս մէկ պոստ ջրի համար քիչ կը մնայ իրար սպանեն: Բա, ափսոս չէր մեր Վան քաղաքի գետի պէս վազող զուլալ աղբիւրները: Վա՛յ, վա՛յ մեզի, ի՛նչ օրի ընկանք: Անիծես դու, տաճիկ, որ մեր գլխէն էլ աստծու բերքն ու բարիքը չը կտրեր ու մէզ էս բախտին չը գցեր (“Alas, my God, what a calamity this is!” An elderly woman was complaining loudly. “They’re ready to kill each other for a drop of water. Alas, woe is me, how sorry I’m for the pure springs of our Van City running as fast as a river! Woe betide us, what a day befell us! May you, Turks, be damned! You seized the Lord’s blessings from us, subjecting us to this fate.”)

“Don’t despair, mother,” I said, trying to encourage the pain-stricken woman, “soon, very soon we’ll return to our beautiful Van and will again drink abundantly the waters of its sweet and resonant springs.”

–Վա՛յ, սալիկը մեռնի քո բերնին: Բերան չի, անտարան ի: Ե՛հ՞շտ կըսես, եարար կէլնի էլ երջանիկ օրը (“Oh, what a sweet tongue you’ve got! If only it were true! Will we live to see that happy day?”)

“You will, mother, you will certainly live to see that happy day.”

A little while later, I asked in great desperation, “Dear mother, I’m sorry, could you please tell me when you reached here?”

–*Էսօրայ խեղ հաշիւած երեք օր ի: Ի՞նչ կայ բալէս: Բայքի կորցրած ունեւ* (“It’s already three days, including today. Why are you asking, my son? Have you lost anybody?”)

“You’re right, I lost my family three days ago and now I’m vainly looking for them. My father’s a priest, he was the priest of St. Hakob Church.”)

–*Կայ նանէղ չը բօռանա: Ս. Յակոբայ կարմրամիրուս տէրտէրը քո խէրն ի* (“Woe is me! Is the ginger-bearded priest of St. Hakob your father?”)

“Yes, mother, do you know that priest?”

–*Բա՛, ինչպէ՞ս չեմ ճանչնայ: Մենք Ս. Յակոբայ եկեղեցու ծովսն ենք: Կարմրամիրուս տէր Յարութիւնը մեր տէրտէրն էր* (“Why, indeed I know him. We were the members of St. Hakob’s community and ginger-bearded Father Harutian was our priest.”)

Unaware of the worry burning inside me, she began chattering and praising Father’s good features.

“Mother, I’d like to know if you’ve seen or met them during these days.”

My interlocutor did not answer at once: it was evident that she wanted to say something, but hesitation did not allow her to. Suddenly my blood circulation was quickened and my heart began beating rapidly: could any disaster have occurred to Father? Every second of suspense was intolerable for me.

–*Ես Հօրդ երկու օր առաջ տեսա: Խեղճ մարդը խիւանդ էր: Կասէր փորութ ռնի: Մի՛ վախենայ բալէս: Էսա մեր գաղթականների կէսից ալիլին էսա անիծած փորութն են պրնէ: Կնայ էսա ծառաստան, են երկէն դալամստանը, ենտեղ խիւանդանոց են շինէ: Բժիշկ ու ճար կայ, ինոնց կը նայեն կը խնամեն: Մի՛ վախենայ, աստուած ողորմած ի* (“I saw your father two days ago. Poor man, he was ill and said he had diarrhea. Don’t be afraid, my son, more than half of our refugees are suffering from that cursed diarrhea. Go to that school; a hospital has been built there with medicines and doctors who are looking after the sick. Don’t be afraid, God will have mercy upon us.”)

I could not wait anymore, for everything was clear: proving unable to endure the dirty dust of the road and intolerable exhaustion, my poor father had got infected with diarrhea, dysentery. The distance between where I was standing and the sanitary tents was about one and a half kilometers and I would hardly be able to cover it within half an hour, given my extreme fatigue. While I was going towards the tents, eager to reach them as soon as possible, I began worrying about my sister and brother. What if they were infected with diarrhea, too? What was I to do? We would then appear in a truly hard situation.

At last I came up to the numerous sanitary tents extending for about a kilometer. I began shuddering all over my body: were there really so many sick people lying under those tents? What a calamity was that?

Addressing the very first nurse I came across, I asked, “I’m sorry, Miss! Who can give me information about the sick people? I think my father must be lying somewhere under one of these tents.”

“Go to those three tents that stand farther from the others. Every morning the nurse on duty gets the list of those sick people who are still alive.”

“Are there many people who die?” I asked, panic-stricken and frightened to death.

Amazed at my question, the nurse looked at me from head to toe, then shook her hand and continued her way without answering me.

Poor, wretched Van people! You succeeded in resisting the barbaric, fierce enemy throughout an entire month and saved yourselves only to come to live in this foreign, alien land, after having passed the road of escape with unspeakable sufferings.

I am unable to describe the dreadful panic that began raging in my heart. I wanted to go to the three tents shown by the nurse, but my knees were bending and I could hardly stand on my feet. I advanced for several steps, but was forced to stop in order not to fall down. Several more steps and again a forced expectation. Finally, I somehow reached those tents and wanted to enter, but I was afraid: my heart again began beating fiercely. And what if the nurse told me that there was no sick man by that name? What was I to do? Would I be able to bear that heavy blow? Finally, trying to pull myself together and suppress my panic I entered the first tent and asked a comparatively elderly woman - apparently, the nurse on duty - sitting at an old, shabby table, "I'm sorry, could I know in which tent my father, Priest Harutiun Sarhadian is lying?"

Arranging the numerous sheets of paper heaped on her table in a disorderly mass and reading the names written on some of them, the nurse threw them away and said, "Do you think we can find your father's name so easily? We have to read several hundreds of names to find his for we have no time to arrange them in alphabetical order. Thus, you say that your father is infected with dysentery, how do you know that detail without knowing his exact place?" And without waiting for my explanation, she added, "The sick infected with dysentery are lying in tents N 26 to N 50 and if your father is still alive, he must be in one of them."

"Thank you," I said to suppress the expression of my discontent. Leaving the tent without further questions, I immediately headed for the aforementioned tents bearing numbers.

WITH MY FAMILY

Despite my extreme fatigue, I directed my steps towards the tents located side by side, next to a thin row of trees, in a field-like place without any delay.

It would soon be midday and the summer sun was burning with its extreme heat. I was walking on with but great difficulty: for a couple of times I was knocked down because of my shabby shoes that plunged me into the soil and dust accumulated on the ground. However, I resumed my way, sighing and cursing my fate.

"Will all these sufferings ever end?" I was asking myself. Not far from the tents I could see small groups of refugees who undoubtedly were the unfortunate families of the sick. Their conditions were truly tragic, their only home from the baking sun being every kind of rugs, clothes and sheets.

Eventually, I came up to the tents sheltering the sick infected with bloody flux. Despite the fact that they were in the open air, they stank terribly. What a formidable, intolerable situation! Could anybody recover and get rid of the widespread threat of death under those conditions?

Poor Vaspurakan Armenians, who were trying to escape the threat of a sure death,

were now writhing in the jaws of a most certain, real death. What a dreadful and inevitable end! What an accursed fate! While I was absorbed in those depressing thoughts, having completely forgotten my exhaustion, helplessness and everything, I was suddenly brought back to the reality by an unexpected scream: it was my sister Araksi.

Having recognized me from afar, she was running to meet me, completely out of breath.

“My dear brother, sweet brother, where’ve you been? We suffered to death while waiting for you.” And she embraced me firmly and warmly, kissing my dusty face for many times. In my turn clasping her to my chest, I kissed her cordially, in great anguish.

In a few minutes, when we somehow recovered from the anguish of our several-day parting, I asked, “Dear Araksi, why on earth have you appeared in this hell?”

“What a hell are you talking about, my dear brother?” In a little while, after having observed me from head to toe, she added, “Well, we’re in true hell, but what about you? You aren’t coming from hell, are you? What a state is this? In what condition are your shoes and clothes? Why’ve you thinned down so much and why’re you so exhausted?”

While I was trying to find an appropriate answer, my sister burst out weeping bitterly, the flood of tears flowing down her completely faded eyes and clothes.

“We entered hell on the very day we left our house and garden,” she continued in tears, “let the day perish when we were forced to leave our parents’ dear, beloved home.”

She was crying like a child, bitterly and in a heart-rending manner.

I again clasped her to my chest, kissed her and tried to caress and comfort her with rambling words in whose truthfulness I myself did not believe. When I had calmed her down a little, I asked her about Father’s health condition.

“Today he’s better, the writhing of bowels and pains have abated. But for the noble doctor treating him, Father - God forbid - would have certainly died. This Armenian doctor’s a very conscientious and honorable person, who seems to be a saving angel sent from heaven for such sick men as Father.”

In a little while, I entered Father’s tent with my sister. My God, how deplorable and wretched those people scattered side by side were! Almost all of them were lying on dirty rags, very few being lucky enough to lie on a dirty mattress. There was not even the apology for what is known as a white sheet and the stink of the bloody excrement had spread everywhere. My sister whispered in my ear that within two to three days tens of dead people had been taken away from those tents to be thrown into a ditch serving as a communal grave.

We approached the place where Father was lying looking extremely pallid and withered: I saw that he had been honored by a mattress and pillow. Catching sight of me, he opened his eyes wide and complained in an insulted and hardly distinguishable voice, “Sergei, my son, you left me all alone so that I would die without seeing my wishes come true, like our poor Haykanoush. Alas, how much we suffered on this cursed road! After all these, as if we had not suffered enough, this disease befell me to kill us and calm us down forever.”

“Be sure that disease won’t kill you, dear father. I won’t leave you in this loneliness and right now I’ll ask the doctor to let us move you at once. It’s completely useless and dangerous to stay here.”

“I cannot continue the way on foot in my condition. I am totally exhausted and unable to move.”

“Don’t worry about that, dear father. Don’t be terrified at the thought of continuing the way on foot. We’ll do something and if we don’t manage to find a van, we’ll move you by cart. Every person who wants to survive has to escape from here in all haste.”

TO ECHMIATZIN

I decided to move Father from that hellish Igdır, that had become the center of bloody flux, typhoid fever and malaria killing people with high temperature. Finding Father in agony, my sister having turned into a ‘walking skeleton’ and my brother totally fever-stricken, I dared to make the logical conclusion that if the rest of my unfortunate family, those three members, lived in those morbid conditions for several other days, they would be sure to become prey to death leaving me an utter orphan.

Coming out of Father’s tent I asked my sister when I could meet that noble doctor and she told me that he was to visit the sick after midday, somewhere about five to seven o’clock. Indeed, the doctor started his visits at exactly five o’clock and in half an hour he was already coming to Father’s tent. Despite my being dressed in shabby rags and torn shoes, I dared to approach him and ask for permission to move Father from that tent and take him to another place.

“But moving your father in his condition equates to consigning him to a most certain death. It is not prudent at all.”

“Dear doctor, I beg your pardon for disagreeing with you. I do not know why I think that if Father stays in this tent for another two or three days, he is sure to die. My sister has told me about your great care of him and devotion to your work, but I am convinced that if you do not permit us to move Father, he is sure to die amidst this dirt, stink and infectious microbes.”

The young doctor hesitated to take a final decision, then stared at my sister and me and said, “Your father is dearer and irreplaceable for you than for me. If you insist upon conveying him from here, I will not oppose it. I will give him some pills and syrup necessary for three days. May God help you.”

Very happy about the good-hearted doctor’s compassionate agreement and ignoring my extreme fatigue, I asked my sister to take Father out of the tent with my brother’s aid and help him dress till I returned.

“Dear Araksi, I’ll return maximum in an hour. I’ll try to rent a van or cart and come here to move you to Igdır and thence to Echmiatzin. It’s a pity I’ve so little money on me.”

“Sergei, my darling, I’m afraid lest you might again disappear for several days. Be sure that if you’re again late, you’ll find your sister dead upon your return.”

“Araksi, you’re again talking like a small child. I promise I’ll return in an hour and will certainly keep my word. Be sure of it, sister.”

It turned out impossible to find a van in Igdır: there were many of them, but their rent was completely fabulous for me. All my fortune comprised a Turkish gold coin and a *majidie* (a Turkish monetary unit), whereas the price for the van to Echmiatzin was two gold

coins. Eventually, I had to rent a cart promising its owner to pay him half a gold coin and a mejidie upon reaching Echmiatzin. Observing me from head to toe and seeing my shabby shoes and miserable clothes, the owner demanded that I should pay the whole price beforehand. I had to show him the gold coin I had persuading him to take half of the price as a prepayment.

I explained to the carter from Igdirdir that my father was seriously ill and we had to leave for Echmiatzin immediately hoping that he might be cured there. The carter, who seemed a peaceful man of fifty, again observed me with a mysterious look and said, "My boy! The master of the destiny of all of us is the Lord and He'll control everything according to His own will. If your father isn't predestined to die, he won't, don't worry. And if...". Apparently, he did not want to upset me and paused, telling me in an almost ordering tone, "Sit down next to me as you're in a hurry. Let's go to pick up your kinsfolk. So you say they are four people, including you: take into account if they're more than that, you may consider we haven't reached any agreement and you'll lose the money you've given me."

"Be sure, my friend, I've told you the truth."

Upon reaching the tents, we placed Father on the cart and the three of us somehow huddled together on it. Fortunately, it was encircled by an inner wooden frame, three to four meters high, and the horse harnessed to it was rapid and dexterous. For the first time on the escape road, I felt quiet and calm firstly because I had managed to rid Father of a most certain death and then, by a happy chance, we had hired a cart drawn by such an adroit and rapid horse.

Before setting out for Echmiatzin, the carter went to buy barley for his horse and advised us to procure fresh, sweet *matzoon*, strain off its water through a pouch and give it to Father to eat so as to stop his diarrhea. He also advised that we should give him strong tea instead of water and that was of great help to Father, although I remained of the firm opinion that the main reason for his recovery was his exposure to the fresh air and his removal from that unbearably dirty atmosphere.

Whatever it was, as my sister kept assuring me Father's health condition was changing for the better. Despite the endless jerks of the cart, his bowel writhing and diarrhea abated, while his resistibility comparatively grew. Learning that Father was a priest, the carter became more careful so that the jolts would not be so violent.

In about sixteen hours, we reached Echmiatzin: morning had broken and we were glad we would be able to find a comfortable place for us in broad daylight.

The carter took us to the neighborhood of Echmiatzin Cathedral, where we were petrified at the sight of the vast multitudes of countless refugees gathered there. Those confused and perplexed crowds were storming like the rising and falling waves of the raging sea. The scene represented a true chaos: the young and the old, men, women and often even the domestic animals had flooded the area, huddled together. Cries, screams, weeping, swear words, the cows' bellow and donkeys' bray were mixed so that one might think that sea of people was preparing for another retreat-escape.

I parted with the carter, paying him the rest of the money and thanking him for his help.

The crowds of deportees had poured into the parks and areas belonging to Echmiatzin Cathedral so that we had great difficulty in finding a place a long way from the Cathedral. We spread a two-meter rag that had been preserved and sat down on it: besides that cloth, Araksi had also carried two color chintz table-cloths on her back with great difficulty.

We carefully helped Father lie on the rag and covered his exhausted and thinned down body with one of the sheets.

At last after all the hard, unfortunate days we had experienced, we were lucky enough to freely breathe at least for a few hours. There could be no doubts that we had got rid of the severe persecution of the mean enemy and the attacks of the avaricious Kurdish bandits. Our hearts that had been completely devastated of any kind of bright hopes were again beginning to beat with probable expectations of the vague future. The fact that the danger threatening our father's life had been reduced was a particularly sweet comfort to us.

Night had already fallen; we were absolutely deprived of any chance to get the relief allocated to the refugees and unfortunately, had no food left while all of us were very hungry. Luckily, the last half of the bagharjes that I had got was still in my bag; taking that piece, which was like a gem to me at that moment, with great pride and pleasure, I gave it to my sister saying, "Araksi, divide it into three parts. I think this half of bagharj will be a wonderful remedy for us not to starve to death. Give the last piece of the matzoon I strained to Father."

We had already woken up very early in the next morning: but for our extreme fatigue, we would not have been able to sleep because of our hunger.

I supposed that the whole fortune of my family consisted in the half of gold coin I still had on me: if we bought sugar, tea, bread and cheese with that money, we could gain food for maximum two days. What about the period after that...?

Now Father was in bad need of a cup of tea and a little matzoon: fortunately, the change of atmosphere, the fresh air and the peace of the previous night had refreshed him a little, and the only thing he needed was at least a cup of tea.

Not far from us a refugee family, who had evidently reached earlier than us and managed to accommodate themselves, were making tea on a primus. We were looking in their direction timidly and stealthily thinking how really happy they were to have sugar, tea and probably bread.

"Araksi, what if you try to ask them for a cup of tea for our sick father," I said to my sister.

"I'll die of shame: I'll be ashamed to death to ask them and then I'll be even more embarrassed if they refuse me."

"You're right: these emergency conditions have rendered people selfish and stone-hearted."

Then addressing my brother, I said, "Get up, brother! Let's go to the Cathedral, where we'll probably find a body established to help the refugees. Be quick, let's go: if we don't manage to get food till midday, all of us will die of hunger."

THE STATE OF THE REFUGEES

In half an hour, we managed to find the center of Echmiatzin's Refugee Relief Body. It is hardly possible to describe the general chaos and tumult prevailing in the sea of deportees: nobody thought of making the slightest concession to the other wretches like them. The horror of remaining hungry had deprived everybody of the most primitive human feelings: they were pushing, knocking down and trampling each other underfoot. The warnings, threats and shouts of the Body's officials and their assistants to keep the queue were of absolutely no avail since everybody was making strenuous efforts to slip into the door of the Relief Body as soon as possible and get their food.

Being continually pushed, crushed and squeezed throughout four hours my brother and I were finally granted access to that kingdom. Each of us was given a coupon and all our entreaties that we had two more people in our family who needed food like us, proved completely futile. We were answered that in a couple of days the refugees were to be inspected and each of them would be given a coupon.

After a four-hour ordeal, we succeeded in getting round loaves of bread weighing two kilograms, a hundred grams of sugar and twenty grams of tea. At about midday, my brother and I returned to our family members armed with bread, sugar and tea like "heroes" coming back from a battle.

Blushing and growing pale for several times, my sister had finally talked herself into



A group of Van refugees in Echmiatzin (photo Garegin Hovsepien Fund, Matenadaran, Yerevan, RA)

asking the neighboring refugees for a cup of tea for Father. She had not been refused and when she saw the two of us “armed” with the precious trophy of bread and sugar, she began jumping for joy.

We needed oil and a primus to make tea, but we did not have either of them. In general, we were completely devoid of the most vital means of living. The numerous difficulties and panic of the road had made us throw away all the light utensils we had taken from our house in Van, and upon our arrival in Echmiatzin the entire property we had consisted of two color chintz table-cloths, a two-meter rag, a small jug, two cups and a small copper tea-pot kept for drinking water. Thus, we were naked refugees in the strict sense of the expression.

Noticing the exhausted state of her two brothers, Araksi began gathering withered barks and branches to boil water on them and make tea. At one o’clock she treated us to half of the food we had been extended to.

“We’ve to confine ourselves to this semi-hungry state,” she said, “I’ve kept the rest for the night. Tomorrow morning I’ll have to join you to get the food.”

“If we’re again to be crushed and trampled in the queue only for that meager amount of one-day food,” I grumbled and added in a tone of a person insulted to the very depths of his heart, “Unfortunately, today I noticed that injustice dominates even in the allocation of relief. While we were being pushed and squeezed in the queue for long hours so as to slip into the “door of that kingdom,” the others, the so-called deportees belonging to the class of the privileged, entered through the other entrance peacefully and without the slightest panic, holding some mysterious cards in their hands. Then they went out



The refugees in Echmiatzin receiving their meager food (photo Garegin Hovsepián Fund, Matenadaran, Yerevan, RA)

loaded with the food supply abundantly allocated to them. Such a distribution of food is sheer fraud and meanness.”

“Don’t be very upset, my son,” Father said in a faded voice, “such an insolent discrimination and merciless attitude should be quite expected now. Everywhere we boast that we are civilized, progressive nation endowed with praiseworthy advantages. Then why do we trample upon our people’s dignity in such fatal days, mutually violating each other’s rights?”

“I hope,” continued Father in the same weary voice, “that these gloomy days will soon fleet; God forbid, our nation becomes accustomed to begging. It is a crying shame for the Armenian people to live on relief. They were not born to become beggars. They are accustomed to hard, diligent and creative work. Yes, these heart-rending days are sure to elapse soon and the Armenians will again manifest their high dignity and creative abilities earning their piece of bread through honorable work. I have no doubts about that.”

“In any case, we can’t remain in these vague conditions with the status of beggars,” I said to my family members, “I’m going to obtain some information that will guide us in deciding what we are to do in the future. I’ll try to return soon.”

THE NECESSITY TO ESCAPE

Returning to my family, I attempted to persuade them to escape from Echmiatzin telling them briefly what I had seen and heard during a few hours.



The refugees on the bank of the lake of Echmiatzin Cathedral (photo Garegin Hovsepian Fund, Matenadaran, Yerevan, RA)

“Our unfortunate refugees,” I said, “are now subject to a new and more dreadful calamity. The panic-stricken escape has yielded its disastrous, pernicious results: the exhausted multitudes have now become prey to lethal diseases. The dirty waters of the swamps that they were forced to drink have infected them with malaria, dysentery and typhoid. The crowding here and there, filth, dirty dust, lice, filthy and deteriorated food, insufficient and unfavorable nourishment, in a word, all these evils together have mercilessly drained them of energy and strength, and are wiping out these poor people who have been madly escaping the enemy’s fire and sword.

“It is particularly bloody flux that causes the greatest devastation: the sucklings, children, youngsters and elderly people are all dying of it. That disease is rapidly mowing down hundreds of wretches like a monstrous scythe.

“Weeping bitterly and tearing their hair, the relatives of those dying consign their unmatched, beloved children, irreplaceable husbands who once shared all their sorrows and happiness, their dear fathers and mothers to the carts and vans that draw them away. The number of those dying is so great that they do not even manage to bury them and people say the corpses are thrown into ditches and canals so that those alive will not see them.

“Eventually, all the rascals planning the infernal, impertinent actions of burying our people alive, suffocating, exterminating them and depriving them of their dear homeland covered with its heroes’ blood have fully succeeded in it.”

My family members had begun silently crying, but I did not know whether it was due to my own excitement or the depressing impression of my account. My sister, who was the most sensitive and vulnerable of us, burst into sobbing and I felt tears flowing from my eyes as well.



An Armenian mother whose children fell victim to famine and exhaustion (photo Garegin Hovsepiyan Fund, Matenadaran, Yerevan, RA)

Our weeping somehow alleviated our sorrow and anguish-stricken hearts. My brother asked in a downcast tone, “And what are we to do?”

“What are we to do? Eventually, that question will worry all of us,” I replied and added after some hesitation, “The whole territory from Igdir to Echmiatzin, all the regions, villages up to Sardarapat, Ararat Valley and the highlands, including Yerevan and Ghamarloo, are flooded with the multitudes of refugees. It’s very difficult, if not impossible, to provide them with food and cure the infectious diseases threatening their very existence. I’m thinking of leaving Echmiatzin as soon as possible and going to Tiflis.”

My sister cried out, “I fully agree with Sergei, especially because our brother Armen’s there, isn’t he? We’ll stop at his place, stay there for several days and decide upon our future quietly, without any hurry. Bravo, Sergei, what a wonderful idea!”

“I agree, too,” my brother said, sharing our opinion.

“So do I,” Father said, “but I have a strong desire to see the Cathedral and Monastery of our historical Echmiatzin. I would like to kneel down and pray under the vaults of the Cathedral for a long, long time, pray for us and these poor refugees. But this damned illness has completely drained me and I cannot make even two steps.” Meditating for some time, he added, “My children, if by a stroke of good luck, I happened to meet any of our relatives, my sister or your aunt, I would stay and you would go to Tiflis... .”

“That’s completely impossible,” my sister said, “we can’t entrust you to anybody in your sick and withered state. It’s enough for us to mourn for our dear sister-in-law. Curse that tongue of mine, but if another misfortune befalls us, I won’t be able to bear it. Wherever we go, we should be together.”



Corpses of some famine-stricken Armenian refugees in Echmiatzin (photo Garegin Hovsepian Fund, Matenadaran, Yerevan, RA)

“Araksi is fully right,” I added. “It’s impossible for us to part with our father; besides, it would be foolish of us to leave you here, in this place of general infection. Your disease that hasn’t been completely cured yet, will repeat itself endangering you.”

Father, who had grown very pallid, had actually turned into a “walking skeleton” so that I could hardly discern the traces of bitter, grief-stricken smile on his pale face. Shaking his head with painful sadness, he said, “Thus, we are so unfortunate that even after so much suffering and all this road to Golgotha, we will not be able to see Echmiatzin Cathedral, of which we have been dreaming all our lives. We are doomed to die without seeing this sacred wish come true.”

“The most fervent believer among us is Father,” my brother said. “He’s a clergyman and has the right to visit the Cathedral of the Holy See at least once after having experienced all these sufferings. He’s fully entitled to pray ardently realizing his sacred desire. In this case, we’ll have to stay here for a couple of days so that he’ll be able to soothe away his anguish.”

FURTHER SEARCH

I agreed to my brother’s suggestion that we should stay in the place at a distance of half a kilometer from the Holy See, under the tall poplars, for some more days.

I was mainly anxious about the fact that in that general turmoil I would not be able to find the people whom I respected and loved so much. Upon reaching Echmiatzin, we had hardly managed to procure some corner to shelter us where we had slept for two nights, huddled together like homeless semi-wild gypsies. We should thank our lucky stars that those hard, severe days coincided with the warm summer nights, or else we would have appeared in rather a hard situation, devoid of any blanket or mattress. Indeed, the baking sun of the afternoon was a great trouble to us, but at least we did not worry about refuge at nights.

My sister told me that on reaching Igdirdir, they had sold our saving burro to an Igdirdir inhabitant at twenty-five roubles, which remained intact on her. Handing that money to me, she asked me to find a place closer to the Monastery, if possible, and move Father by hiring a cart. In that way, we would realize our sick father’s wish providing him with a chance to see the Cathedral. Araksi also assigned me to buy some food for us since even if we were supplied with nourishment it would again be insufficient and we would remain half hungry.

Together with my elder brother, I headed for the Monastery determined to fulfill my sister’s assignments and Father’s wish. I strongly hoped that the crowd of refugees might have somewhat thinned out, but I painfully noticed that the situation had not changed at all.

The rows of the multitude seemed to have grown even thicker around the Monastery, with the people confused and thronged together in a disorderly mass. The peasant deportees had mixed with the cows, sheep, goats and donkeys they had brought, and the stink of the garbage caused nausea about us even in the open air.

Some petty merchants and peddlers from among the local population of Echmiatzin and neighborhood were wandering about the refugees selling various items and often

violently abusing the pernicious and helpless state of those wretches without any remorse. They sold bread, sugar, tea, matzoon and cheese at very high prices and bought the last animals and things the deportees had at extremely low prices. The latter often entered into argument with them cursing and swearing at them.

Paying five roubles to one of such peddlers, we managed to buy five pieces of lavash, a little matzoon and a small piece of cheese. Both my brother and I thought that the person who sold that food to us was comparatively kinder and we were very glad about our successful purchases.

“Brother Karapet, the food supplies we’ve bought will suffice for us for a day. Please, be kind enough to return to our family members with this food and I’ll walk about here trying to find a suitable place near the Monastery. Who knows, I may come across some of our acquaintances or relatives.”

Parting with my brother, I decided to walk round the place as much as possible, be everywhere in search of those I was eager to see. There were still about two hours before it grew dark, but I did not cherish any bright hopes concerning my search. On the other hand, I could not forgive myself for the pangs of conscience I was sure I would always feel if I did not make every possible endeavor to find them.

The people I was looking for fell in two distinct groups and I did not want to give preference to either of them leaving everything to the determination of destiny.

I did not know how to explain it. A premonition told me, “Sergei, if you do not manage to find them in these places, they will be totally lost for you.”

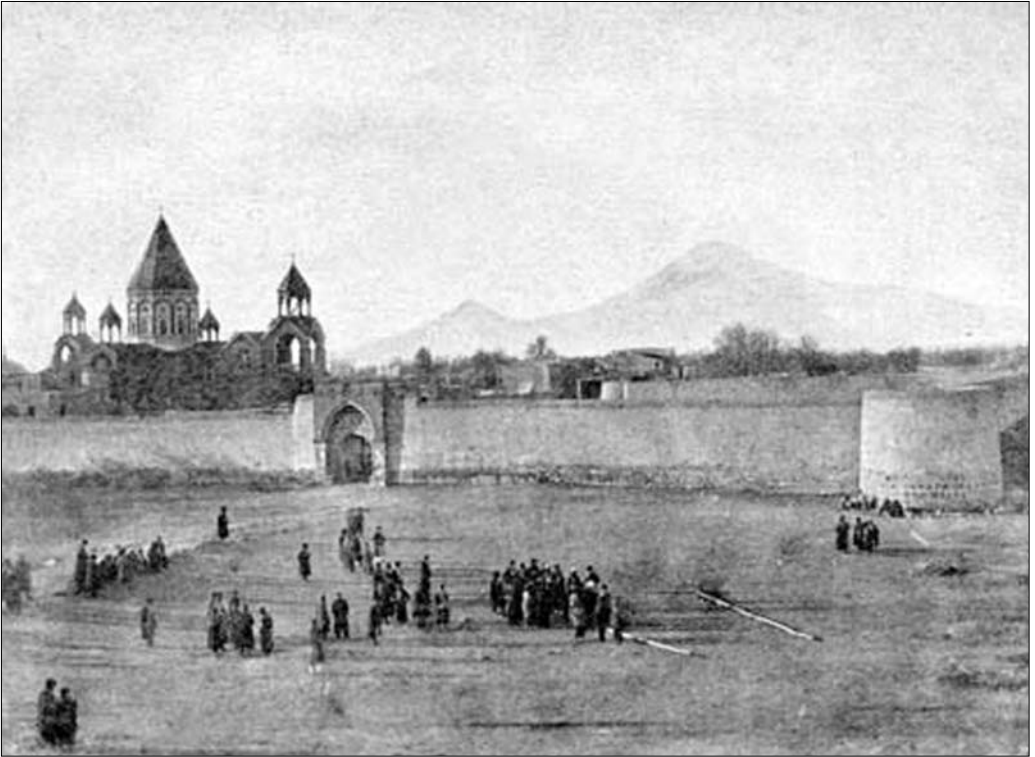
How heavy and unbearable is the loss of all those people towards whom you have cherished feelings of love and respect in the depths of your heart for many days, months and years!

Parting, loss, disappearance... What merciless and cruel words! Thus, my dear, close friends were to be lost for me forever and I would not have the luck to see Maro, who loved and caressed me like my adorable mother. How could I believe that my heart would not beat sweetly anymore while meeting my sweetheart, bewitching Anoush, whom I infinitely loved?

I walked and meditated till midnight suffering in an agony of endless, unbearable anguish and continuing my way on the dusty routes devoid of any ray of hope and consolation... .

AT ECHMIATZIN STATION

All my search and wander proved absolutely futile for I did not have the luck of finding any of the people I loved so much. We sacrificed half of the twenty roubles we had in order to realize Father’s yearning for a pilgrimage and prayer. Eventually, a pious and good-hearted carter agreed to rent us his horse-drawn cart by half a day. We came to Echmiatzin Cathedral, with my father and sister sitting on the cart and my brother and me walking beside them. While Father was praying under those sacred domes for two hours, sending his entreaties to heaven, we paved our way through the sea of refugees gathered there, walked about the Monastery, watching its different parts with the utmost interest. Unfortunately, the exhausted deportees like us were denied access to certain sections of the Cathedral.



General view of Echmiatzin Cathedral at the foot of Mount Ararat

When we left the Monastery with Father, who had soothed his anguish of pilgrimage, I advised my kinsfolk not to return to our notorious shelter anymore. Taking pity upon our inconsolable state, the kind-hearted carter agreed to take us to the railway station, being paid seven roubles out of the ten roubles we still had. All of us were very grateful to the good carter for the favor he had done to us and when we reached the station Father blessed him by the ‘Te Deum.’

Utter confusion dominated at the station, which represented a true babel. The calamity consisted in that here the refugees were considered as merely an unnecessary and repulsive headache being treated as filthy beggars spreading microbes of dangerous diseases. Everywhere they were treated rudely, with despise and sometimes even swear words.

If the soldiers returning from the front in a state of discontent, fatigue and half-wildness did not take pity on the wretched deportees, the latter would have probably become targets of merciless machine-gun fire.

Fortunately, the representatives of the Refugee Committee came to the rescue of those abandoned, helpless multitudes: employing careful policies, sometimes also requests and entreaties, they persuaded the station master and his assistants to be compassionate towards those throngs of starving refugees, who had been violently banished



Echmiatzin Cathedral

from their homeland and become prey to different diseases.

The Russian troops coming from Julfa and Igdirdir, who had flooded the station, were restlessly and impatiently pouring into the passenger and freight cars leaving for Alexandropole, eager to depart as soon as possible. Nobody knew where they were going and why they were in such an extraordinary haste and confusion. One or maximum two cars in each train consisting of thirty to forty-five carriages were given to the cargo that was regarded utterly unnecessary, in other words, the wretches who were called 'refugees' and still breathed.

After having stayed at the station for two unbearable days and nights, we eventually managed to slip into the "saving" freight car, where we had to stand on our feet so that our sick father would be able to lie down on the floor.

The steam boiler drawing the train emitted shrill whistles carrying the numerous cars attached to it with great difficulty. Despite the slow pace of the train, our carriage that was at its very end constantly shook the ignored refugees crowded like herrings in a tin with ear-shattering clatter.

Notwithstanding the stifling summer heat, the car door was locked from outside and air seemed to be reluctant to penetrate into it through the four narrow vents. We were

almost stifling, completely unable to breathe: the stink of dirt and sweat, mixed with the suppressed, thick air, made us feel absolutely suffocated. Indeed, we would have certainly suffocated under those intolerable conditions if to our luck the steam boiler did not stop to take supplies of water.

It was already about half an hour since the train stopped, but nobody seemed willing to open the door of our infernal carriage. The deportees, who did not differ from prisoners at all, began crying for help and knocking at the door and walls with any hard object at hand. At last we managed to arouse the conductor's 'mercy' and he deigned to open the door of our prison.

Despite the announcement that the train moved in ten minutes, the refugees - except my father and sister- who had been imprisoned in the car for hours and were almost stifled to death immediately poured out and rushed to drink water, get some food, satisfy their natural needs and, if possible, breathe some fresh air.

Everybody had returned when the train began moving. When they again attempted to lock the car door, the deportees who had grown out of patience unanimously raised a great noise and did not let them do so.

IN GHARAKILISA

Having stopped in Alexandropole for seven hours, our train resumed its way, more than half of the freight cars having got rid of the soldiers they were carrying; most of them who had taken the train at Echmiatzin Station got off in Alexandropole.

It was one of the sunny, fascinating summer mornings of August when our train reached Gharakilisa Station, where we were told that we had to get off and wait for another train leaving Alexandropole for Tiflis.

Although we were greatly desirous to continue our way to Tiflis without changing trains, that accidental occurrence proved a stroke of good luck for our family and, especially Father. The violent jerks of the freight car had again worsened his health condition: the writhing of bowels had again begun and what is even more dreadful, vomiting had been added to it. The heat and stink of the carriage had induced nausea and then vomiting about him, and for that reason we had to stay in Gharakilisa for several days.

Fortunately, the number of the refugees who had reached there before us was but insignificant and the local national bodies had not grown tired of people like us yet: that was the reason why we were treated in an attentive and compassionate fashion.

We were led to the church, while Father was moved to the city hospital. It was the first time we had seen a pitiful and sympathetic attitude ever since we fled from our native land. On the very first day, we were given an opportunity to get rid of our torn clothes, teeming with parasite lice, and free our bodies of the thickened, tar-like filth and layers of dust mixed with sweat, all that having accumulated during the about twenty days of the escape-retreat. Only the powerless, helpless deportee persecuted by the horror of death can realize and imagine the infernal, dreadful state we were exposed to in the dark days of that displacement-withdrawal.

Our Armenian compatriots of Gharakilisa who gave us a chance to have a warm bath, put on white underwear and have some hot meal, in a word, to get rid of the twen-

ty-day fast and penance, were true benefactors for us. Thanks to such fraternal affection and care, we were finally able to go to bed with our bodies clean and sleep on a neat mattress with fresh blankets and pillows, after all those infernal days and nights. It was only then that I was convinced I was in a new world of true people, kind-hearted people who were Armenians. I was assured that the new, wonderful world we had found ourselves in was the land of our own compatriots. That day, when my heart was beating rapidly with pride and I was in heaven, can never fade away from my memory. Happiness had permeated through the entire essence of mine penetrating into the very depths of it and trumpeting itself proudly.

It does not matter how violent and bloodthirsty your people's enemies are: even if they plot thousands of formidable frauds and intrigues for the slaughter and extermination of your nation, they will never succeed in it since the Armenians are endowed with the capacity and power of surviving and obliterating the hell devised by the Turkish criminals. They have inexhaustible energy and steadfast will power to survive like a phoenix, that rises again from its ashes.

Having had a peaceful, refreshing and tranquil sleep, I woke up rather late in the following morning and saw that my sister and brother had already got up. Araksi led me to wash, her face shining with a happy smile.

“Dear brother,” she said, “the local Armenians are very honorable people; there're mountains and valleys between them and the Armenians we saw in Igdir and Echmiatzin. These are exceptionally good-hearted and pitiful people. In the morning two women came in the name of the Refugee and Charity Committees and brought us a large amount of food. They also told me they had arranged everything necessary for Father and assured me that in a few days his health would be restored.”

“Really, I think the locals must be very noble people, their care is very praisewor-



A group of Turkish Armenians in Gharakilisa (photo "Kavkaz I Vayna")

thy. But you know, dear Araksi, we shouldn't blame our compatriots of Igdir and Echmiatzin for the complete neglect we were consigned to in those places. Even if they had worked miracles, they wouldn't have been able to meet the needs of thousands of refugees who had poured there like the countless waves of a stormy sea. We shouldn't blame them much taking into account this extraordinary fact.

"After all this, dear sister, I'll be very happy if Father recovers soon and we're able to go to our brother in Tiflis."

When we were going to have breakfast, I said to Araksi the following, careful enough not to hurt her self-esteem, "Araksi, we should do our utmost to rid ourselves of this state of deportee-beggars as soon as possible. It's very difficult and unpleasant for me to live on the supplies received from others."

DECIDING WHERE WE HAD TO SETTLE DOWN

Five days after we had reached Gharakilisa, Father was told that he was able to leave hospital. He was given the medicines necessary for several days being assigned to go to hospital in three days for final examination, in case he stayed in Gharakilisa.

When Father came to our room in the church yard, we met him with cries of joy: he looked quite refreshed and what is most important, he himself was content and encouraged.

The National Departments of Gharakilisa proposed my father and brother to work as respectively a priest and teacher in Gyoolizard Village located at seven kilometers from the city. After a brief family consultation, they agreed to settle down temporarily in the aforementioned village.

"The air and water of this place seem quite similar to those of Aygestan," Father said. "I think it convenient to stay here in the positions offered to us till by God's will we return to our homeland."

"I fully agree with it," my elder brother added, "Who knows if we'll be able to find any work in Tiflis or not? Besides, I don't think our brother Armenak, who himself immigrated into that city some three to four years ago, will be able to procure food and housing for the four of us till we find work."

"Your decision is logical," I said in my turn, "Our brother, who left us several years ago, will hardly be able to sustain the four of us. Let's settle down in the village offered to us: as for me, I'm leaving for Tiflis in a few days to see in what state our brother and his business are. Then I'll inform you about it."

"And what about me?" My sister asked in a crying and despondent tone. "All of you decided where you're to be and what you're to do, what about my condition? In any case, I don't share the idea of parting with Sergei. Those several days, when we were looking for him, were days of anguish and suffering for me. I've been so closely attached to him for many years that it'll be completely impossible for me to part with him even for a month."

"Look here, dear Araksi," I said, trying to comfort my sister, "your despair doesn't have any grounds at all. Be sure I'm very fond of you, too and it's difficult for me to live without you. The present situation forces us to part for some time. Upon reaching

Tiflis I'll write to you a detailed letter telling you everything. In case I decide to stay there and find work, if not all of you, you'll certainly move to me. Please, stay with Father and your elder brother till I've some opportunity to realize my promise."

"Let the day perish when we were compelled to abandon our dear country and beloved house. Driven away from our forefathers' house and our heavenly garden by the merciless, criminal enemies, we're now to be separated and scattered in various unknown, alien cities and villages following the refugee's dark fortune. I know, I'm convinced once we're scattered like this, it'll be very difficult, if not impossible, for us to gather again." And with that heart-rending protest, my sister again burst into desperate, inconsolable and helpless sobs.

IN GYOOLIZARD VILLAGE

Thanking sincerely the members of the Refugee Committee who had kindly offered us such a pleasant hospitality during five days, we left for the Armenian village of Gyoolizard, as we had previously decided to. It was situated at seven kilometers from Gharakilisa, on a smooth, green plateau, its inhabitants amounting to about seventy Armenian families. The houses, built side by side, along a straight line, comprised several double-story buildings, all the others being single-storied. At a height of one meter from the foundation, they were built of stone while the rest of the walls were of mud. The roofs were laid with beams, matting and mud covers.

The main street of the village was edged with willows, ash-trees and different poplars of rich foliage. The houses most of which had their small kitchen gardens were distinguished for their cleanness: nowhere you could see the cow-shed or stable mixed with the dwelling parts, those two sections having their separate entrances. We could say that the buildings of the village were of the recent type.

We reached Gyoolizard on the horse-drawn cart we had been given in the city. The village head, who had, apparently, been told about our arrival beforehand, gave us a most courteous and nice welcome. Accompanied by two other peasants, he led us into quite a large, tidy room, evidently prepared for us. The floor was covered with matting, with a carpet placed on it. Near the two walls four wooden ottomans stood opposite each other.

"Father Harutian," the village head said, addressing Father, "please, somehow accommodate yourselves in this room till we create some amenities for you. Be sure you will not feel bad with us: unlike the merciless Turks regarding you as alien and odious, we consider you close and dear people." After a short pause, he added, "We shall secure your nourishment and you will have a rest for several days. It is a long time since we raised our urgent demand of having our own priest, for we have always had to call priests from the city to perform our religious ceremonies. Sometimes we need a priest in the dead of winter, at an inappropriate time, and now we are glad you are staying in our village.

"We had a teacher last year, but he refused to return to the village for this school year, disagreeing to work at the salary we could afford to pay him. Well, perhaps, it was for the better: you yourself came to our village willingly."

My father and brother deeply thanked the village head and peasants accompanying him saying that they were very happy, too about such a course of events.

“One of our family members,” Father said pointing to me, “is going to Tiflis, to his brother in a couple of days, and the three of us will remain here. It is not difficult to keep three souls and we shall somehow make both ends meet.”

“Alas, father,” one of the peasants accompanying the village head said, “of course, you’ll somehow survive: God is merciful towards the poor, persecuted Armenians and He won’t tolerate that the people’s hearts are totally devastated of any rays of hope.” Then he added in a joke, “Father, you’re really a pious priest, start your duties from your own family. The cruel, cursed Turks are ruthlessly slaughtering the Armenians, for which we must take our sacred revenge by carrying out the commandment of the Holy Scripture reading, “Be fruitful, and multiply.” For example, you’ve two good-looking young boys and a beautiful girl, just a picture; you should first of all marry them and only then our children. Don’t be afraid, we’ll find you two brides and a bridegroom, will beat the drum and play the zurna of the wedding party, also providing the wine and barbecue. What else do you want...?”

Exactly after a week, I visited my family members. Gyoolizard Village had but fascinating air and climate: despite the fact that summer was about to come to its end, the village breathed freshness thanks to its pastures, parks and foliage. I was delighted at its natural beauty and, especially cool water.

Although the youth of the village had been recruited, their parents, sisters, sisters-in-law as well as the youngsters and girls were harnessed to work with the industrious diligence so typical of Armenians, cheerfully occupied with the harvest and storage of the crops all day long.

Early in the mornings, even before sunrise, Araksi and I often went to the fields, climbed the nearby hills and gathered multi-colored field flowers, that had still preserved their freshness. Our general impression was that the sinister and all-ruinous war had spared that small village and its lovely surroundings and had not stifled them in its accursed, pernicious jaws.

The village was still rich in small livestock: the surrounding hills teemed with cows, sheep, goats, grown-up, fat lambs and few horses. Everywhere the noise of their bellow, bleat, roar and neigh imbued you with profound rejoicing.

I mentally regretted that soon I would be obliged to take leave of the magnificent scenes and vivifying freshness, trees, flowers, water and foliage that nature itself had lavishly endowed that village with.

Gyoolizard had hired my brother as a teacher for a year while Father had been approved in the position of performing his religious duties.

TO TIFLIS

On the morning of September 2, 1915, I prepared for leaving my family members. It being the first time I had parted with my dear family for a vague period of time, that

farewell was hard and severe for all of us, as if the sufferings and privations of the retreat had rendered us closer and more attached to each other.

My parting with my sister Araksi turned into a true tragedy: she sobbed bitterly holding me tightly in her arms and reluctant to tear herself away from me at any cost. I fully understood her and realized how profound her grief was. Since both of us lost our unmatched, beloved mother being still very young we had tried to soothe the anguish of her love and caress with our love for each other. Rendered motherless, we had silently agreed to always defend and love each other in the depths of our hearts and that pure love had been converted into great devotion and adoration.

That unspeakably sad and heart-rending parting somehow ended with my father and brother's mediation and my soothing, convincing words, amidst weeping and repeated kisses. Together with a villager going to Gharakilisa to sell agricultural products, i.e. milk, *matzoon*, cheese, butter and groats, I left for town sitting beside him on his cart.

In order to alleviate my sadness and sorrow, the peasant told me some invented story. It was about a much depressed unfortunate villager, who had experienced many privations, but had unexpectedly achieved good luck. I concluded that through that story the noble peasant wanted to appease the storm raging in my heart and encourage me with bright expectations for the future.

Upon reaching Gharakilisa, I asked the good-hearted villager accompanying me to lead me to the railway station. He willingly agreed, sincerely wished me success and a good journey saying, "My son, I know people like you who've become refugees have lost whatever they had. Take these five roubles: who knows what can happen? It is this accursed money that's most helpful to a person in a foreign land. You'll need it to get a ticket or for other expenses."

"Brother Avet," I said to him, "Thank you very much for your care and frankness, but I've some money on me and don't need your kind help."

"Well, you needn't be so ashamed. So what if you've some money? Keep this, too. If you don't need it you'll return it to the owner. Take and keep it and consider I'm lending it to you... ."

I could no longer refuse the present that generous peasant had offered me so nobly and sincerely and thanked him warmly shaking his hand, toughened through hard, honest work. I decided to send him some suitable gift from Tiflis. I was about to enter into the struggle of life in a foreign land. Alas, how difficult it is for a young, inexperienced man to start life struggle in a foreign country and fight against all kinds of hardships and accidental occurrences!

At the station I was told that the Tiflis passenger train arrived there at eleven o'clock at night. Having bought a third-class ticket, I still had sixteen roubles with me, together with the five roubles given by the kind-hearted peasant. Overcoming great difficulties I had managed to exchange my Turkish *majidie* for roubles at Echmiatzin Station, and I thought that those sixteen roubles would suffice for two days after I had reached Tiflis.

Beside the entrance to Gharakilisa Station, water fell from a white, iron pipe. It was

so cold and clear that for a moment I thought it took its source in the resonant, milky waters of our Van-Aygestan. I sat beside that sweet, resonant and slowly waving water for a very long time, washed my hands and face with it for a few times with infinite delight. I thought that the land of the small town called Gharakilisa was our homeland and the people living and creating on it were our compatriots. Then why should I wonder that that piece of our bewitching, magnificent motherland had resonant, silver springs and waters in its bosom, in its earthly womb?

AT THE STATION AND IN THE CARRIAGE

I still had to wait for six hours till the arrival of the train at eleven o'clock at night. I was glad that I was about to travel by a passenger car for the first time in my life. I did not care a damn that it was a third-class car since I had been told that in war time, when the military were constantly moved, it was but very difficult to get tickets for passenger trains. I was even surprised that I had been lucky enough to procure one without any trouble. I took the ticket I had bought out of my pocket and checked it for several times sometimes doubting whether it was genuine or not. For a few times I even thought of showing it to the people about the station asking them whether it was false or not, but the fear of being made fun of kept me from doing so.

The six-hour waiting was gnawing at my heart: for a person forced to wait impatiently every hour becomes tenfold long. Indeed, how intolerably slow were the long hands of the big clock hanging on the station wall! The hands moved on so lazily that sometimes I thought the clock might have been infected with some of the diseases of the wretched refugees.

I felt my stomach was completely empty and only then remembered that I had eaten absolutely nothing since morning. It was only then that I paid attention to the fact that the tragedy of our parting had made my family members and me forget altogether about taking anything to eat from the village: I was now very sorry about that. Thinking that I could eat something at the station buffet, I headed for it, but I stopped before reaching it. No, it was not prudent of me to do so: there can be no doubts that everything sold at that buffet was a few times more expensive, which would deprive me of a considerable part of the meager amount I had in my pocket.

"There's still a lot of time till the train arrives," I said to myself. "I'd better go to the quarter not far from the station and buy something to eat and some food not to remain hungry in the carriage."

Finally, my heart-rending waiting came to its end: at a quarter past eleven o'clock, the train rushing to the station stopped with a loud whistle and breathless sigh.

Holding the ticket tight in my hand, I climbed the step of one of the third-class carriages. The conductor standing at the door or his assistant blocked my way and shouted rudely in the Russian language, "Show your ticket."

Being anxious about the genuineness of my ticket for many hours, I timidly extended it to him. While he was examining and checking it moving his glasses backward and forward on his big, swollen nose, I was trembling in the depths of my heart. Actually unable to make out anything in my ticket, he watched me from head to foot and ordered with suppressed fury, "Enter." The ticket he gave back to me had been pricked all over.

Even after I had entered the carriage, my heart was still beating for several minutes. The unnecessary rudeness of the train official had both surprised and infuriated me. If my ticket was false how did he agree to let me in, and if it was genuine and appropriate, how could his savagery be explained? Did the state officials treat the Armenians just like our centuries-old enemies, the Turks, even there, in Russia inhabited with Armenian population? Then what was the difference between them? We considered the Russians our close friends and called them our uncles, did we not? Then how could such an attitude be explained? Perhaps, by the fact that we were a small nation devoid of any means of defense.

The carriage, where I accommodated myself and which was called a passenger car, was overcrowded and in a state of chaos. Its difference from a freight car consisted in that the former had long, board seats fixed in cabins called compartments. The travellers who had entered earlier had managed to occupy all the seats whereas those coming later had to stand alternately leaning on their feet like weary hens, taking hold of the boards with their hands and arms to support their exhausted feet.

Undoubtedly, I was to add to the number of those doomed to stand and when I calculated that I would have to bear that position for eight to nine hours, I felt too unpleasant. Why, had the retreat not come to its end yet? How long were we to endure the ill fate of deportees?

Unfortunately, having no things or parcel with me to somehow sit on I had but one remedy: to console myself with the thought that I had not reached my destination on the road of retreat yet. How could a person violently driven away from his homeland restore his tranquility so easily?

Wandering about the carriage, I came across travellers whom I did not know, but I concluded they were refugees going to Tiflis, Baku and Northern Caucasia. Their vernacular indicated that they came from Vaspurakan and also helped determine what village and region they were from. Sometimes I even tried to be engaged in conversation with them attempting to obtain some information concerning their future plans.

However, just like me they were going towards the uncertainties of life, totally left at the whims of their turbulent fortune.

IN TIFLIS

Before sunrise, early in the morning, our train stopped at Tiflis Station with whistles and a loud hissing noise. I was in heaven: although having the status of a refugee, after long, long years, I could finally see my brother Armenak, who was about four years older than me. Exactly a day before I left Gharakilisa, he had sent me his latest address and I knew that Havlabar Quarter where he lived was not far from the station. I got off the carriage with great pleasure: all my fatigue resulting from having been on foot,

being squeezed and crushed throughout eight hours instantaneously disappeared. I had no belongings, all my property comprising a pair of underwear and two pairs of socks.

The first rays of the rising sun began shining, the air was cool and peaceful. I started walking in the direction of Havlabar Quarter, that had been shown to me at the station. Here was Havlabar, with single- and double-storied houses huddled together like herrings in a tin, its streets untidy and narrow. I knew that was the quarter of the working class and common people called *kintos* (*peddlers walking with big wooden plates in the streets and selling fruits, fish, cheese, etc.*).

For the first time in my life, I heard the people walking in the streets speaking a language absolutely unknown to me and concluded that they must be speaking Georgian. At last I came across a group of Armenian-speaking workers in their working uniforms, who were evidently going to work. Showing them the address I was holding, I asked them to tell me the way to the street I was looking for. Luckily, I was not far from it for I was told to go up to the second crossing and turn to the right: what I was looking for was in that street.

I entered the street I had been shown and began moving forward, checking the house numbers. The one I was searching for must be somewhere near; my heart had begun beating rapidly at the thought of the forthcoming pleasant meeting when I saw my brother calling up my name and running towards me. At some distance he had noticed a young man walking and checking the house numbers and had recognized his brother even before approaching me closely.

“Sergei, my sweet brother! At last you’ve come! How glad I am to see you!” With those words, he hugged me and started showering me with kisses. In my turn, I clasped him to my chest with joyful cries and assailed him with kisses.

When our exchange of embraces and exciting greeting was over, we started watching one another from head to foot, unable to tear away our looks from each other. We were busy analyzing each other’s state and making conclusions about it. He was standing before me, dressed in quite decent, well-ironed clothes while I was in my shabby, partly mended garments of a refugee bearing but a remote resemblance to proper clothes.

“Well, why are we standing in the street? Let’s go home.”

“Let’s go,” I answered mechanically.

When we entered my brother’s house, he led me to his room. It was one of average size, with board flooring and modest furnishings comprising an ottoman with a blanket and mattress and a wardrobe standing beside it. Even at first sight I was struck by the order and accurate cleanness reigning in the room.

There was an armchair and two benches in the room: my brother asked me to sit in the former while he himself sat on one of the latter drawing it closer to me.

“Well, now please, tell me about the scanty information the Armenian newspapers wrote on Van retreat. Apparently, however, the disaster that befell Vaspurakan Armenians was a thousandfold more dreadful than that written about and described by these papers. I came to this conclusion in the recent twelve to fifteen days when all the newspapers published appeals for help. The Refugee Committee, which has been established here, has started raising money for the deportees reaching Tiflis.”

“Raising money and relief,” I repeated with profound sorrow and pain. “Is the number of the refugees coming here great? Where have they been accommodated and when did those wretches arrive?” I asked my brother.

While he was going to answer that shower of questions, the door was repeatedly knocked at with finger-tips and a young girl appeared on the threshold without waiting for an answer.

“May I?” The girl or lady asked in Russian, evidently having no intention to wait for an invitation.

“Please, you’re welcome,” my brother answered, obviously a little embarrassed.

The person who entered started speaking Georgian with my brother: even more perplexed than before, he answered her in Armenian and introduced her to me.

“Miss Thamara, this is my brother. I came across him while he was looking for my apartment in our street. He and my family were among the refugees who fled from our country towards Russia.”

“I am very glad to meet you,” the Georgian girl replied in broken Armenian and extended her thin, bony hand to me. She began watching me carefully perhaps for the tenth time: she was persistently and somehow pitifully looking at me with her jet-black eyes arched with long eyelashes. The comparison of my rags and her beautiful dress carefully encircling her small breasts and slender waist made me blush crimson. As if immediately noticing my embarrassment, the girl apologized and left the room, but she instantaneously approached the door, exchanged several Georgian words with my brother and went away.

In his turn, Armen was a little anxious and at a loss, probably, feeling what I was thinking. Both of us wanted to speak out and explain everything, but we somehow avoided directly touching upon the problem worrying us.

Finally, my brother was the first to break the silence and said, “Dear brother, I guess I know what you’re thinking about and I think I’m not mistaken. Probably, you’re blaming me for living in a Georgian family instead of having settled down in an Armenian one. First of all, you should know that in Tiflis the Armenian and Georgian families are so mixed and often have such close bonds that it’s regarded indecent and even shameful to draw line of demarcation between them.

“Then I’ve to tell you that upon reaching Tiflis I lived with an Armenian family for two years, but it so happened that I was discontent with them. That family comprised five members, the father, mother, their son, daughter-in-law and a new-born baby. After the child was born, the mother of the family was constantly complaining of the insufficiency of their rooms. Her son, the baby’s father, had become nervous and often had scandals with his mother and wife so that I found it expedient to leave that Armenian family.

“You may certainly be interested in how I found myself in this Georgian family. I think I’ve twice written to you about my occupation here. When I reached Tiflis, I was just like you’re now, a refugee and foreigner. The only difference between us is that I came here willingly, without any panic whereas you were violently driven to these lands under the threat of death. Yes, when I came to Tiflis, I had no hopes of getting any help from any national or non-governmental organizations. Well, I never even thought about it and never tried to get anything from them.

“I was absolutely devoid of any means to receive secondary and then higher education and did not have the slightest intention to make any attempts in that regard. I faced the alternative of either learning a craft and becoming a master or starting some business. I tried several things, but in vain.

“This city and this vast country in general teem with Armenian immigrants coming mostly from Persia and Turkish Armenia. Many of them had arrived at their finger-tips by the time they came here, but they succeeded in accumulating riches in a surprisingly short period of time. One needs special gifts and capacities even for making a fortune, but those longing for it never discriminate among the means to achieve their goal. They agree to do their utmost, to resort to any kind of methods and are even ready to employ meanness with the single desire of achieving their objective, that is, accumulate money.

“Being first a teacher and now a priest, our father has always held himself aloof from practical, actual life. He’s never been engaged in trade or any bargains of profit or loss, never looked for means to amass a fortune; that’s why, he’s never taught us how to live a business life. Its consequence was that I don’t know fortunately or unfortunately, I didn’t get involved in commerce, trade and all kinds of business activities, thus remaining devoid of the aforementioned base, fraudulent capacities to accumulate a fortune, but I don’t regret it.”

Suddenly my brother cut the thread of his story. Eager to learn the story of the years he had spent separately since he parted with us, I was listening to him with the utmost attention, despite the worried and impatient waiting of the previous day and the fatigue of having been on foot in the carriage during the night.

“I’m very sorry, dear brother,” he said, “I’ve completely forgotten that you must be tired and hungry after your journey. You’ll now have breakfast and a little later I’ll take you to the bath, where you’ll have a proper shower ridding yourself of the filth and dust of the road. Then you’ll sleep and rest and we’ll continue our talk. I’m eager to learn the story of your escape with the account of an eye witness like you. I know it was depressing and tragic, but it’s interesting for the Armenians. It’ll serve as a guide and unforgettable lesson in our wandering lives. And yes, let me tell you that the baths in Tiflis with their facecloth workers enjoy world fame.”

I could not tell my brother anything for I was again plunged in turbulent and raging thoughts. A few minutes later my brother put a silver-like shining plate on the round table in the room, with a loaf of round, white bread, cheese, butter and honey in it.

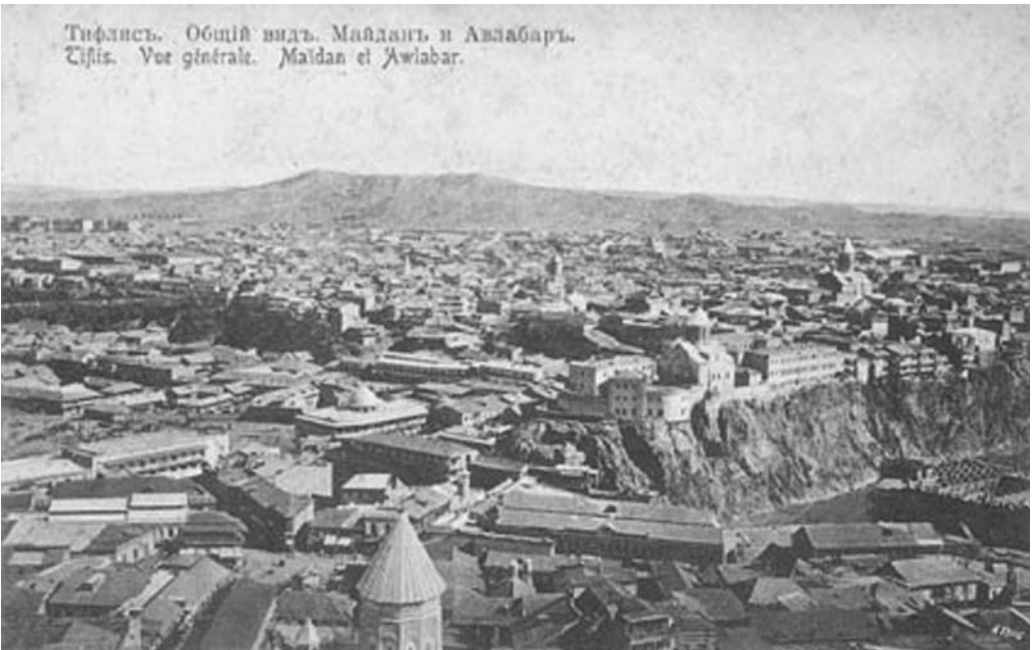
“If you want to wash your hands, the wash basin isn’t far: it’s right next to this room.”

“I’d like to with great pleasure: at least my face and hands will get rid of this dirt and dust.”

IN THE GEORGIAN BATH

Accompanied with my brother, I went to a Georgian bath which was an utter novelty to me. Each of us was given a piece of color cotton cloth, two meters long and about half a meter wide so that we would cover our nakedness. Some years later I again saw such color cloths in the Persian baths: they were called ‘long’.

The Georgian bath was a large, hall-shaped building, with hot and cold water show-



General view of Havlabar Quarter, Tiflis

er-baths put next to the walls. Beneath them stood long, board benches, on which those coming there to take a shower sat or lay. I counted that there were twelve showers along either of the two tall walls and eight ones along the low walls, the total amounting to forty shower-baths and forty benches, half of which were occupied. My brother told me that after midday, beginning with five o'clock, all those showers were usually occupied and the people had to queue outside. The shower-baths were common and no wall or screen partitioned them.

On my brother's order, two Georgian bathing workers approached us, but when one of them came up to me trying to begin his work, I began trembling involuntarily. In contrast to my thin body, he seemed a giant with his stout back and arms. He uttered some Georgian words, but I could not make out anything. My brother came to my rescue explaining to him that I was a newly-arrived refugee who had had a narrow escape from the Turks. The Georgian burst out laughing aloud surprising me with his sudden joy and laughter. He again told something to my brother, then almost forcefully made me lie on the long bench and began his work and ceremony of bathing me.

Despite his powerful arms and rude hands, he bathed me with the utmost care and rubbed my body with the facecloth cleaning it properly.

When my brother and I left the bath, I could hardly recognize myself, feeling as if I had nothing in common with the exhausted, worn out refugee I had been an hour before. I felt I was totally another person who had experienced a bodily revival, with my blood circulating in my veins easily so that I breathed freely, without any difficulty. Thanking my brother for that hasty kindness, I asked, "Why did the Georgian bathing me burst out laughing and what did he say?"

In his turn laughing cheerfully, my brother said to me, "He said that indeed, the Turks considered themselves heroes while fighting against such thin and famine-stricken people as my brother. If they did really regard themselves true heroes, they had to come and fight against the Georgians so that the latter would teach them a good lesson."

"These Georgians are quite firmly established," I answered with bitter, mournful sadness. "If these men boasting in the bath were in our shoes only for an hour, exposed to the bombardment and volleys the Turkish barbarians rained upon us, smashing and reducing everything to flames and ashes! They, these conceited Georgians wouldn't even dream about these hot baths, nor this heavenly city called Tiflis."

On returning home, I saw another wooden ottoman, with a clean mattress, a white starched sheet and a blanket. Pointing to that bed, my brother said, "There are still three and a half hours till two o'clock, when we usually have dinner. Lie down, have a sleep and rest well till I come back. I'm now going to attend to my work."

MY FIRST DAY IN TIFLIS

It was half past two in the afternoon: standing at my ottoman my brother was rubbing my forehead trying to wake me up in a quiet, mild voice.

"Sergei, dear, don't you want to get up to have dinner?"

"Just a minute, brother," replied I and sat in my bed.

"I could have left you sleeping, but I thought you might be hungry and what's most important, our hospitable neighbors wouldn't have dinner without you. You may again have a sleep if you wish."

"But are we having dinner with the neighbors?" I asked, trying to hide my anxiety.

"Since this is the first day of your arrival, they asked us to have dinner together with them. If you don't like it we'll have our dinner separately from tomorrow onwards."

Not waiting for my answer, my brother put a chair near my ottoman, with a brand new suit, a white shirt and a pair of shoes.

"These have been bought for you. I hope they'll fit you. Now try them on, please."

"So you want to refresh the refugee, dear Armen, I'm very grateful to you. Really, I would be ashamed to leave the house in my present shoes and clothes. Thus, after all this, my presence caused you another headache."

"A headache? Do you think such an ordinary help to my brother can be regarded a headache to me?"

I put on the shirt, suit and shoes my brother had bought for me, all of them fitting me like a glove. The suit was a little larger, but it fitted me. I kissed my brother for several times in token of my gratitude. In his turn kissing me, he told me the following in order to encourage me, "Now you somewhat look like a gentleman and we only need to have your hair cut and properly done." Then looking at his watch, he said, "There are three hours before half past five when the evening papers are published. We'll go to the barber's after dinner and then will see the main avenues in Tiflis."

"I'm sorry, brother, strangely enough, I'm impatient by nature and I'm always eager to satisfy my curiosity as soon as possible. What do you have to do with the publication of the papers?" Waiting a little, I added, "You've never written to us about your occu-

pation, that's why, I'm very curious about it. If there's nothing embarrassing... ." While I was about to finish my sentence, Armen replied, "It's a long story. I've already told you about my searches and doubts I've had ever since I reached Tiflis. We'll still find time for the rest of that story. At present I have a small bookstore called 'kiosk' in the local dialect in this part of the bridgehead leading to Sololak, in the escarpment of Havlabar Quarter. I sell the recent literature and newly-published newspapers there: this is my present occupation. It doesn't yield a tangible profit, but it secures my living."

Havlabar Quarter was situated in an elevated flat area, with the actual city of Tiflis extending below it. We descended the road, bending below Havlabar: my brother showed me his small, board mobile bookstore, that they called 'kiosk' located at the end of the road, on the quite wide and long iron bridgehead.

That kiosk, occupying an area approximately two meters long and half a meter wide, abounded with books, booklets, journals and dailies. Beside it stood a young man, the member of the Georgian family neighboring the house my brother lived in. He greeted us in Georgian with a smiling face.

As my brother explained to me, it was two and a half years since he made friends with that fellow, embarking upon business together with him. It was at his suggestion that Armen had gone to live with the three-member family becoming their boarder.

Now the story of how my brother had begun living with that Georgian family as their boarder was clear to me. Becoming the companion of that Georgian fellow and being in constant interaction with his family, that is, his mother and sister, and sharing their table, my brother had learned Georgian and spoke that language freely and fluently as I had noticed.

We got on the tram and walked about the principal avenues in Tiflis for four hours instead of the two promised.

SEARCH FOR EMPLOYMENT

The three-member Georgian family hosting my brother showed a very kind attitude to us. The father of the family had died of severe pneumonia three years before. The house where they lived was their property: it was a small building comprising four small rooms, two inner rooms and a yard, with three tiny beds sown with edible greens. Three of the rooms were sunny: one of them was allocated to my brother, the other to the family while the third one served as a dining-room where the young Georgian slept on an ottoman.

The family's means of existence were very limited and modest: on the very first day I did not fail to notice that they hardly made both ends meet. The mother and daughter knitted socks and were occupied with needlework thus trying to meet some of the urgent needs of their family.

They generally spoke Georgian, but sometimes, especially with me they also spoke Armenian, although the Armenian they knew was broken and imperfect. As I later

learned, the young lady had been unable to continue her secondary education after the preparatory school because of the insufficiency of financial means.

Both the mother and the daughter were modest and courteous, and the family lived in solidarity and mutual love and respect. They were very delicate and attentive towards my brother.

Beginning with the morning of the fourth day after my arrival in Tiflis, I started looking for some work supposing that it would be easier in Tiflis than in Gharakilisa. I decided to apply to Tiflis Refugee Committee, whose meeting place was Khojivank: twice a week the Committee convened meetings attempting to supply the deportees reaching Tiflis with food, clothes and employment.

When I went to that Committee for the first time, they asked me numerous questions concerning my former work and occupation in general. I told them that about a year before the outbreak of the April fighting, I had worked as a teacher in Yeramian Secondary School, my Alma Mater. I also told them that during the April Heroic Struggle, I had been in charge with the food storehouses and had worked as a secretary in the City Municipality after that.

Having heard me very attentively, one of the Committee members, whose name as I later learned was Barseghov, said to me, "Write a petition tomorrow on behalf of the Tram Department and bring it to me at the Central Station. Perhaps, I will be able to procure some work for you."

I was in heaven: thanking the person who had promised me work I returned home with a tranquil heart.

I did not have the slightest desire to live on account of my brother's modest budget and strove to find some employment as soon as possible to cover at least my expenses. I calculated that if I got enough payment for the work I had been promised I would be able to help my brother so that he would extend his work and make it more profitable. I also thought of allocating some monthly amount for my dear sister's clothes and her other expenses.

Sitting at the supper table, I told my brother and the Georgian family that a person from the Tram Company had promised me to procure employment for me. Watching me in a criticizing way the Georgian fellow asked, "Do you remember the name of the person who promised you work?"

I immediately responded, "Barseghian."

The young man recognized him at once saying, "He's not Barseghian, he's known as Barseghov. If it's he who's promised, he'll certainly do something."

I did not know that the person who had promised me employment held such an important post and was glad about it although I tried to look cool-headed. My brother was very happy, too that I had almost managed to find work in Tiflis. He wanted me to stay with him for at least some time and was sure that if I did not succeed in finding anything I would never agree to become a burden for him.

The following day I wrote my petition without any delay. I knew Russian very poorly so that it was not often understandable at all. I thought of asking somebody else to write that request for me, but then changed my mind and decided to confine myself to what I knew; if they examined me and revealed how much I actually knew, I would appear in an embarrassing situation and most probably, would suffer a fiasco in my work.

When I went to the Tram Central Station to see Barseghov, the porter did not let me in, addressing me with the following rude and impolite words in Russian, "He's busy, sit down and wait till I get an order."

I had no other remedy but sit down. One hour passed, then two, but the door-keeper, who was, apparently, a Georgian as his accent indicated, still would not let me in. Other visitors came and went while I was still waiting endlessly and rather helplessly. Every time I asked that rude and clumsy porter to let me in to the Manager, he gave me the same answer in his broken Russian and Georgian accent, "Don't you see that he's busy?"

Exactly after two and a half hours, seeing my persistence and, probably, thinking that I would not leave and he might find himself in a bad situation when the Manager came out in the afternoon and saw me waiting, he angrily seized my petition from my hand and took it inside, grumbling something in Georgian and presumably, swearing at me. A little while later he came and again said, "Wait."

"Wait, wait, damn your father, insolent, shameless creature, how long am I to wait?" I muttered, having hit the roof and very discontent with that so-called doorkeeper.

Another hour passed: I was in utter despair and supposed that worthless man had not given my request to the Manager.

Eventually, the porter, who had been called inside by the telephone, came out and said to me the following in a completely changed tone, "Please, come in!"

I entered, being a little excited and anxious. The Manager, the very Barseghov I had seen, was all alone in the room sitting behind a large, beautiful writing table, laden with numerous folders and sheets of paper. Asking me to sit on the bench beside his table, he said, "Have you written this petition yourself?"

"Yes, myself."

"All right. Unfortunately, you do not know Russian and it is not surprising at all. It is but miraculous that a Van refugee like you knows Russian as much as you do. I am going to give you a questionnaire: fill it in and bring it back tomorrow or the day after tomorrow. I do not think it necessary for you to mention that you are a refugee-immigrant: you need not do so. Write that you have come from Gharakilisa. If you know other languages - provided, indeed, that you know them better than Russian - mention it." After a short pause during which he was watching me closely, he added, "In any case, do not hope to get office work since you do not know Russian. From now on try to learn that language as soon and as well as possible: after all, this is the Russians' country, with Russian as their official language. The very first prerequisite to work in all the state and semi-state institutions like ours is the knowledge of Russian. My parents, who were among the Armenian refugees from Yerznka-Erzroom, perceived the situation very well; that is why, they provided me with Russian education. If you manage to learn Russian well within a year and if I still hold this position at that time, probably, I will succeed in finding some paper work for you."

“I am so very obliged for your kindness and advice. I will fill in this questionnaire right tomorrow and will bring it to you. Only... .” I was thinking of finishing my sentence in a proper way when the Manager asked, “Only what? Tell me everything you would like to.”

“I am physically so exhausted that probably, I will not be able to do the heavy work of a worker. Would it be possible to find some employment for me in the trams. And then, would you be kind enough to tell this doorkeeper to let me in tomorrow. Today he has kept me waiting for three long hours.”

“Very good, I will again think of your work.” Barseghov rang up and called in the porter ordering him, “Tomorrow or afterwards, always let this man in without any delay.”

WAITING AND SEARCHING

The following day I took the questionnaire I had filled in to the Armenian Manager of the Tram Company. This time the doorkeeper answered my greeting properly.

“Do you want to see the Manager? Just a minute,” he said and entered Barseghov’s room. In a minute he came out and said, “They are having a meeting, give your paper to me, I will hand it to the manager and then you will come for the reply.”

At once my forehead was covered with cold sweat and I instantaneously felt bad thinking that I had suffered a complete fiasco. In order to retain my equilibrium, I sat down on one of the benches intended for those waiting. I involuntarily put my hand into my inner pocket, took out the questionnaire filled in with the answers to the questions given and extended it to the porter saying, “Please, ask when I am to come for the reply.” Despite my supposition, the door-keeper was not rude and fulfilled my request politely. Entering the Manager’s room and leaving it in a moment, he said, “Come to the Manager at eight o’clock on Monday morning.”

I was a little encouraged and even blamed myself for having given way to despair so rapidly. Indeed, it was not an easy thing to find work for a foreigner, let alone a foreign refugee. Why on earth should I be so strict in my demands? Did I have any right to such a thing? How could help and support be obligatory and administered so fast even if the person promising them was an Armenian?

Thanking the porter and attempting to encourage myself, I left the Central Tram Station.

It was Wednesday and as I checked the time on leaving the Station, there were still two hours till midday. Besides that day, four others were to elapse before I could hear the decisive ‘yes’ or ‘no’. Alas, how hard it is to wait, especially when it is a matter of life and is to play a determinative role in your struggle for existence! I did not know why I was eager to find some employment in Tiflis at least temporarily. Perhaps, that was due to my striving to get rid of the status of the wandering refugee as soon as possible. Besides, I did not have the slightest desire to become a heavy burden on my brother’s modest budget even for a day. Perhaps, however, the most important reason was that I cherished a hope that my stay in Tiflis would enable me to look for the person whom I had lost, but who could never fade away from my memory.

I started seeking for her from the very first hour of the retreat-escape, but all my search proved absolutely futile. The subsequent sufferings, privations, intolerable exhaustion, severe insomnia, the irreplaceable loss of my close people I experienced on my way squeezed every drop physical strength out of me, but never did they manage to veil, hide and tear her innocent, modest and poppy-like face away from the ever-awake sight of my heart and soul even for an hour.

That girl, Anoush, who was hardly seventeen years old, went away, vanished leaving her brilliant and sunny traces in the depths of my heart like a bewitching, sweet dream. However, I persistently thought that she would return to shed light on the long-ing, panic-stricken depths of my heart that was in an agony of anguish.

I was looking for her everywhere, every hour, endlessly and incessantly, but alas, I could not find a single trace of her.

At the very last moment her father Sahak Agha told me that Anoush had gone away with her mother. They had a horse on leaving Van; therefore, they could not have stayed on half way because of fatigue.

“They could not have stayed on half way because of fatigue,” I kept repeating, but then I asked myself, “Both the mother and the daughter were all alone and helpless, were they not? What if their horse was seized from them or stolen on that accursed road of chaos, panic and thefts so that they had to huddle together in some corner, worn out, despondent and helpless? Or could they have become prey to the barbaric enemy?”

The last dreadful supposition burnt and roared in my heart making me utterly furious. Constantly suffering in the pangs of those formidable thoughts I first of all blamed myself for my carelessness. I had learned about the withdrawal a day before, had I not? Why on earth did I not do anything for my dearest people’s salvation instead of going to work up to the last day and working up till the very last hour?

The only person responsible for my parting with Anoush and her mother as well as their probable loss and death, was me, only me. If I had gone to their place some two to three hours before, I would not have parted with them and would not have gone through such a terrible ordeal for their probable loss.

MY APPOINTMENT IN THE POST OF CONTROLLER

A little earlier than the appointed time on Monday morning, I went to the Manager of Tiflis Tram Company to receive the answer to my petition. During all the days preceding it, I felt extremely anxious and was eager to be admitted.

I did not know why I thought that if I happened to be unsuccessful for the first time, I was to suffer other frustrations in the future. It was a quarter to the appointed time, i.e. eight o’clock, but I did not want to go to the Manager earlier than it. That quarter seemed even more unbearable than the four to five days of suspense: I was in panic, my heart beating rapidly.

Finally, the big clock of the Central Station struck the decisive hour with slow, but strong strokes. On that day I tried to look as impressive as possible so that I went to Mr. Barse-

ghov dressed in a carefully ironed suit and newly-painted shoes, my face well-shaved.

This time he received me even kinder and shook hands with me warmer than before. I could even discern a slight smile on his ever thoughtful, serious face.

“Mr. Sergei,” he began, “I told you last time and now I am repeating if you want to occupy a position in this country and hope for a future career, you will have to learn Russian and learn it well.”

I felt as if I was suddenly showered with ice-cold water and all my body began trembling severely: thus, I thought every hope for success was lost. Timid and with a beating heart, I was waiting to hear the sinister conclusion.

“After all this,” he added, “I have managed to appoint you as a controller on one of the tram lines. You will get seventy-five roubles per month and I hope you will not be dissatisfied with this appointment.”

“I am so thankful, Mr. Manager, I am so very obliged for your support.”

Truly, I was so happy that I thought the Armenian Manager was giving me the entire city of Tiflis as a present.

I had no exact idea about how much that monthly seventy-five roubles was, but I immediately concluded that it was a very high salary for such a newly-arrived helpless refugee as I was.

“Now listen attentively to what I am telling you. You certainly realize the essence of your work: you are to check the numbers of the tram passengers’ tickets in accordance with the conductor’s list to find out if the tickets sold are fixed in the ticket series on the list. This work requires great attention and responsibility. The tickets that cannot be found in the series fixed are certainly false.

“At first you will have some difficulty, but hopefully, once you realize the essence of your work you will soon get accustomed to it.”

“I hope I will cope with the work entrusted to me perfectly. I would like to express my profound gratitude to you once again.”

I was about to leave when the Manager called, “Wait, Mr. Sergei!”

He wanted to say something, but I noticed he was in hesitation and found it difficult to speak out. Eventually, he decided what to say and looked directly into my eyes.

“What I am now telling you must be kept secret up to the end, that is to say, forever. I am sure that it will not be otherwise.”

Then he proceeded calmly with accurate words, “The overwhelming majority of the Tram Company staff are Georgians and most of them, particularly these conductors are untrustworthy, rude instigators. Unfortunately, they are flagrant chauvinists and hate foreigners. When in any predicament, they are ready to resort to any meanness: they will not hesitate to do everything to defend each other.

“Try not to incite them against you, especially in the initial period. You are to be a bit careful and diplomatic. I think I managed to make it clear to you what I mean. Now go to the Manager of the Traffic Section: he is to determine the traffic line you are to work on. I will ring him up.”

A little perplexed, I again thanked Barseghov and went to the Manager of the Traffic Section. Under ordinary circumstances I would quicken my pace to get the appointment of my line as soon as possible, but quite the opposite occurred. I slowed down my steps

to mentally analyze the last advice and instructions of the kind-hearted Manager, who certainly wanted to help me.

I was in a grave predicament: if I were on my guard and employed diplomacy, I would have to shut my eyes to the conductors' probable thefts. Otherwise, I was to be subjected to their provocation and the danger threatening me on their part.

Before entering the Traffic Section, I tried to find out who the Manager of that important section was. I had left the General Manager's room a little perplexed and dissatisfied, the reason for my mood being that I had to deal with a number of rude instigators, as I had been told. I thought how wonderful it would be if there were Armenians instead of all those Georgian conductors. The only thing that made me desperate was that I did not know a single Georgian word whereas communicating with people in their own language somehow fosters the establishment of closeness with them.

There was still another inconvenience, even more serious and discouraging than the first one: I did not know Russian. In Van when I was on the last form of Yeramian School, I attended the Russian lessons held two hours a week and thus managed to learn by heart about two hundred words together with very common sentences. Afterwards, during Van's brief, two-month self-government and the period I worked in the City Municipality as a secretary, I somehow learned to write a few ordinary sentences with the help of the dictionary.

Before I entered the Traffic Section, I was told that its Manager's last name was Mouradov. I was in heaven: I supposed that, fortunately, I was to deal with another Armenian there and could switch to Armenian whenever in a predicament explaining everything in my mother tongue.

Timid and in a disturbed state of mind, I entered the Section where I came across about twenty employees. I approached the first of the writing tables and said that I had to see Mouradov. With his index finger the worker pointed to an official sitting at the end of the large hall, on the right. Going up to the table of the section head I told him that Barseghov had sent me to him. Smiling a false smile revealing an untrue politeness and rising from his chair for about five centimeters, he welcomed me in Russian and immediately asked, "Indeed, you know Russian, do you not?"

"Yes, a little."

"What about Georgian?"

"I do not know it at all."

As if taking infernal pleasure in showering me with questions, he continued, "What about Armenian?"

"Every Armenian knows that language."

I was trying hard to make my answers too short and brief so that he would not reveal I did not know Russian at all.

"It would be better if you knew at least Georgian: almost everybody knows it here. It is surprising you do not know it. You are going to deal predominantly with Georgians in your work and it is of the utmost necessity to you to know that language. The common workers in this company are mostly Georgians who, unluckily, do not know Russian."

Then he added with a burst of somewhat sinister laughter, "What can we do? These people are reluctant to learn Russian... "

Tapping at his writing table for many times with the pencil he was holding, he finally said in a false tone of unwillingness, "Very good, I agree to your admission since you have been recommended by Barseghov, the Manager General. Come to this room in three days, at exactly half past five on the morning of the 15th of this month and get the list of the tickets of your line from the person on duty. The trams begin working at forty-five minutes past five."

I could hardly make out anything from the last sentence of that Mouradov, but I understood the fifteenth and half past five in the morning well.

On leaving the Traffic Manager's room, I came across two Armenian-speaking workers in the corridor and taking advantage of that opportunity, I asked, "I'm very sorry to interrupt your talk. Would you please tell me if the head of this section, named Mouradov, is an Armenian or...?"

"He is not an Armenian, my friend, he is a Georgian and one of the most flagrant Georgian chauvinists."

"Thank you! It is exactly what I wanted to know," I said and went away again apologizing.

I was imbued with some strange sadness. What unfortunate people we are to have such bitter, chauvinist neighbors! On the very first day, at the first opportunity my brother told me that in Tiflis the Armenians and Georgians who were mutually kind lived in friendship, mixed with each other. Very good, it was very nice that they were friends: two neighboring peoples having shared almost the same fate for centuries should be close friends. But why on earth did they oblige even us, the Armenians, to know Georgian and what is even stranger, to speak Georgian to them? Did they think that they were more advanced in their culture, literature and finally, language than we were? And did they strive to endow us with any of their prerogatives by doing so?

It was hard for me to make any conclusion, but one thing was evidently clear to me: those semi-educated officials and, especially their half-polite or absolutely impolite petty employees thought high of themselves, regarding themselves privileged and superior than us.

AT WORK

My brother and I continued having dinner at the same table with our neighboring Georgian family. It was customary to have dinner at two o'clock, but we had breakfast separately in our room. Busy with his work, my brother did not come home earlier than eleven o'clock in the evening; that is why, being all by myself I often confined my supper to bread, cheese and greens adding butter to them once or twice a week.

It was already twelve days since I arrived in Tiflis and began sharing my brother's room. I regarded the twelfth day one of the luckiest ones in my life, for that day I received my job appointment although I was not sold on it for reasons indicated above. I was not sure if under the given conditions I would cope with the work I had been

charged with or would be obliged to resign it in a few days. In any case, everything would be clear in two days when I was to start work. When I left the study of the Tram Traffic Section head, there remained four and a half hours till dinner at two o'clock and I decided to spend that time by walking about the city and making preliminary observations. I still had some of the roubles I had brought from Gharakilisa; spending half of that money I could somehow study three to four traffic lines, getting at least a slight idea about the work carried out in the trams. I managed to make a thorough study of three tram lines within three hours: for either of the two lines a single ticket was sold to me and I had to buy two tickets for the third one.

During my observation, I particularly tried to steal a look at the conductors' work without attracting attention. I noticed two of the conductors, who worked carefully and dexterously, gathering the tickets thrown away by the passengers getting off the tram at the stop; then they put them in the pockets of their trousers with the same caution in order to sell them again.

I breathed a sigh of relief concluding that even if the controller was a devil incarnate, he would not be able to catch the conductors red-handed and prove their theft since the tickets dropped by the passengers and picked up by them had exactly the same numbers as those fixed on the list. I encouraged myself with the thought that no controller could verify and insist that those tickets had been sold twice: therefore, he would not have any pangs of conscience and would not bear any administrative responsibility.

I came across only two controllers during my three-hour observation: they got on the tram together with the passengers, cut their tickets in two and took one half returning the other to the owner.

I was rather surprised to notice that those controllers did not exchange any Russian words with the conductors and spoke Georgian all the time. I also saw that they were on nice and even close terms with each other, my surprise gradually turning into a sort of envy. I wondered if those Georgians were truly such chauvinists and so fond of each other that they enjoyed their meetings so much as to forget their relationships and duties... . Perhaps, they plotted certain tricks together. However, I tried to drive away that thought from my mind blaming myself for such great mistrust.

At dinner on that day, I told my messmates about my appointment: my brother began dancing for joy and hardly escaped falling down from his seat. The mother and daughter of the three-member Georgian family emitted cries of delight, but the young man was not glad at all. Moreover, I even discerned a sneer of envy and hatred on his face and involuntarily concluded that he thought I had got a position which would otherwise be occupied by a Georgian young man.

My brother asked the landlady to fetch a bottle of Cahetian wine on the occasion of the happy news I had told them and she fulfilled his request kindly and hastily. When the bottle of Cahetian wine was opened he filled in the glasses, took his and said pointing to me, "Unfortunately, I don't have the gift of making speeches, but I know my brother's good at it." Then pointing to the Georgian girl, he continued, "May God grant good health to Tamara. My brother will make a brilliant speech at her wedding and

we'll have a magnificent feast. Now I'm proposing a toast to my brother's success, good luck and young life."

Everybody clinked their glasses with mine and emptied them, the Georgian fellow being obliged to drink a toast to me.

In my turn, I made a short speech in high appreciation of the landlady's care and worry that our presence had caused her and proposed a toast to our hostess and her two children. The Cahetian wine made the meal that was always tasty even more delicious and we left the dinner table in extremely high spirits.

I started work at six o'clock on the morning of September 15, being entrusted with the ticket lists of traffic line N 11. That line comprised eight trams with bilateral seats resembling rather wide, long, light and mobile rooms.

During the first several days, I tried not to enter into conversation with the conductors. Getting on the tram, I greeted them in Russian for the sake of mere etiquette. Having checked the passengers' tickets, I immediately stood on the lower step of the tram without a moment's delay: almost always the conductors braked the tram within a second and I got off. At first I was afraid to jump off the tram during its movement, but I gradually became accustomed to it so that I managed to jump off without any fear of breaking my legs and calves even when the tram was running comparatively faster.

The trams worked for eighteen hours daily, from six o'clock in the morning till twelve o'clock at night. That period was divided in two parts comprising nine hours so that both the conductor and the controller appointed on the given line worked for nine hours. It took me an hour and a half to go to work and return so that I spent about eleven hours daily on my work and way, having three to four free hours per day apart from sleep and rest. In order to avoid the difficulty of working dumbly and silently, I decided to learn the most common Georgian words used in short conversations. Drawing up the list of those words, I asked our neighboring Georgian girl to translate them. On the whole that vocabulary comprised about two hundred words which I wrote in Armenian striving to learn as soon as possible. Following the advice of the Tram Company's Manager General, I spent all my leisure on learning Russian and to my mind, the results were quite satisfactory, for I was able to speak a little Russian in three months.

LONGING TO BECOME A CITIZEN AGAIN

After I had started work, I counted the passing days with pleasure supposing gladly that my work took me a long time. During the first days, I thought that I would not be able to succeed in and continue the work I had been charged with by a stroke of good fortune and a favorable course of events. Indeed, I had firm grounds to think so since I did not know Russian, nor a single Georgian word.

When the days elapsed and I was lucky enough to meet the conductors - their overwhelming majority being hot-tempered, rude, clumsy people, as Barseghov had told me - without any incidents and scandals, I felt happy. However, I have to confess that I employed extreme caution not to provoke those people's envy and hatred.

All of them already knew that I was an Armenian and, moreover, was not from Tiflis. It stuck out a mile that they could not stand me and hated me terribly mostly because I did not or could not speak their own language.

“The person living and working here is obliged to speak Georgian,” they complained spitefully.

In general, the Georgians’ extreme and narrow-minded chauvinism was something I could not tolerate at all. In those days they completely resembled the present-day selfish, chauvinist Turks living in Turkey who swear at the Armenians living in Turkish Armenia in broad daylight only because they dare not to speak Turkish.

There were but very few Armenian conductors on the tram line I was working; once one of them said to me, “Mr. Sergei, these Georgians cannot bear you and are plotting intrigues against you. Be on your guard. For a few times they even addressed petitions to the Traffic Section head to replace you with another person, but they were told that they could not achieve it as you had been appointed by a top official. In any case, be very, very careful of their bad tricks.”

“Thank you for that information and kind advice. I suspect something of the kind for I face their malicious attitude every day. But what can I do? It is absolutely impossible to bring them back to their common sense.”

One thing seriously worrying me was that they could resort to any kind of meanness and slander me by say, accusing me of bribery or demanding illegal payment of them. They could weave any kind of base intrigues to shatter my reputation.

I was looking forward to the expiration of my first month because I had been burdening my brother’s modest budget for a month and a half; besides, I was eager to send some amount of my salary received in a foreign country to Araksi.

Soon it would be forty-five days since I parted with my dear sister: in that period she had written me six to seven letters laden with anguish-stricken love. Her latest letter read, “Dear brother, I can’t live without you! If you really do love me - and I know you love me infinitely - please, take me to you or return to us. This foreign country is a true prison and hell for me without you.”

Finally, the first month of my work expired and I was paid the seventy-five roubles I had been promised. In those days that was not a small amount for such a newly-arrived refugee as I was. I gave thirty roubles to my brother: at first he refused to accept it, but I asked and then made him take it as I knew he hardly earned fifty to sixty roubles per month, working hard for about fourteen hours daily. I sent another thirty roubles to my sister, spent the rest of my salary on buying some clothes for me and kept several roubles for the petty expenses of the coming month, although I did not have any since I did not pay any fares in accordance with the tram employee’s certificate.

My life had assumed its usual course: I was not displeased with my condition; moreover, I was self-sufficient and financially secure. However, my happiness was not to be explained by the fact that I had got rid of my financial predicament: rather, it was due to the fact that I had finally rid myself of the status of refugee.

In those days, the word “refugee” implied pity and humiliation to many people. Not only had we been violently driven away from our dear houses, gardens, our beloved country, precious homeland, but we had also been branded as “refugees”. At that time a refugee was a homeless, neglected vagabond, in a word, a creature arousing only pity and compassion. Alas, how odious and disgusting that status was! But were we to blame for having been reduced to that status? Had we been the instigators of all the impertinent outrages, deportations and violent murders? Was it pleasant for us to become homeless, neglected and perplexed refugees? That is why, the second month of my work brought me some relief: I was not a refugee anymore and no longer bore that hated title.

Truly, day by day I was becoming more and more self-confident, the fear and doubtfulness that gnawed at my heart before I started work gradually disappearing. Having ceased to be a refugee, I was becoming a citizen again striving to turn into an individual citizen.

From psychological standpoint that was of the utmost importance to me. Having settled down in new surroundings deportees like me had to prove that the mean enemy who had rendered us homeless and stripped us of our motherland had not managed to kill our zeal and resisting power. Those who had planned to send our entire nation to an infernal slaughter-house would certainly grow blind seeing our revival.

I made hard attempts to prove that the Vaspurakan Armenian - be he a citizen or a villager - was sure to survive as a true, noble Armenian, live an independent, honorable life creating new means of existence. And if that Vaspurakan Armenian failed to return to his native land, he would erect “a sacred Armenian home” in his heart, in the depths of his soul. Nobody, nor even the anti-Armenian Turkish beasts and barbarians would ever succeed in destroying that house and reducing it to fire, ashes and dust.

In those days, I lived imbued with that sweet, triumphant feeling.

EXTREME CHAUVINISM

A whole year had passed since I assumed work in Tiflis Tram Company and my fellow conductors who were forced to stand me as a controller had somehow reconciled themselves to the situation. Desperate by the frustration of their intrigues, they now tried to establish friendly terms with me.

For several times I caught them in swindle and minor thefts, but I had to yield up and not inform the proper section about it meeting their entreaties and the requests of those who interceded in behalf of them.

However, once I decided to tell Mouradov, the head of the Traffic Section, about a case of theft by a Georgian conductor. Having read the report and checked the numbers of the tickets sold by theft he thanked me for my alertness, but two days later he asked me to withdraw my complaint.

“I have checked the trustworthiness of your report. At first Gougoushvili - that was the conductor’s name - tried to deny everything, but then he was obliged to confess it. You are completely right, but your report will certainly bring trouble upon his head for he will be fired from work. That morning his mother came to me in tears begging me

to forgive her son. She said that he had been the only breadwinner in his family since his father died and sustained his three little sisters and mother unable to work with great difficulty," Mouradov said to me very kindly.

I was at a loss; on the other hand, I could not forget the kind advice given to me by the Manager General of the Tram Company.

"I was obliged to fix it in the report," I replied to Mouradov, completely cool-headed, "since I had no other way out. That man's evident larceny can compromise me as well."

"I have already told you that you are totally right and explained that the man will fall into great disaster together with his family. I feel absolutely no pity for him, but I pity his poor mother and three small children."

"Mr. Mouradov, if you are convinced that he will not ever cheat us again, I will tear the report to pieces right in your presence."

"Thank you for not rejecting my request. I will give him a strict order not to dare to resort to such fraud from this time onwards."

With suppressed anger, which I think Mouradov did not fail to discern, I tore the report and threw the pieces beside his table, preparing to leave the room. While tearing the report, I could observe extreme joy and victory in Mouradov's eyes.

I was meditating on that incident for a long time, surprised that the Georgians shut eyes to all kinds of fraud perpetrated by their compatriots out of their greatest desire to defend them at any cost. I wondered whether their chauvinism reaching such an extremity was not strange at all.

WORKING AS A FRENCH TEACHER

It was the end of September 1916 and the year of my work had already expired. One day, while in the Traffic Office, I was told to go to the Manager General. Within that year I had met Barseghov for several times in his study and Refugee Committee, my first meeting with him occurring two months after I had started work. I knew that after midday on Thursdays, he attended the gatherings held by the aforementioned body. At our first meeting he received me with enthusiastic joy and said in an intimate tone, "Bravo, my son! To tell the truth, I did not cherish great hopes that you would endure your work and continue it without knowing Russian and, especially Georgian. Now I am fully convinced that you, the Van people, are energetic and able to adapt yourselves to the new surroundings."

"I am so very obliged to you for your kind protection and, particularly praise which I have not been able to justify so far. It is only thanks to your infinite care and protection that I have been able to bear everything up till now, despite these very hard conditions."

"Your modesty is praiseworthy. Indeed, perhaps, but for my private recommendation, your immediate manager, who is a fervent Georgian, would not have agreed to keep you in your post even for a week. However, if he or anybody from his circle had caught you in any minor shortcoming or imprudence and managed to prove it, I would have been absolutely powerless in my further protection of you, even despite my wish. In any case, I am very glad and congratulate you warmly."

Thanking him over and over, I parted with him.

When I was told to go to Barseghov that day, I felt some excitement thinking that probably, new intrigues had been plotted against me. Having completed my control work an hour earlier, I went to his study at two o'clock after midday. Rising to his feet from behind his large writing table, the Manager General cried out for joy, "You are welcome, Mr. Sergei, take a chair or bench and sit down." His kind and cheerful reception fully encouraged me.

"Are you learning Russian or not? It is rather difficult to learn a language without a teacher." After a short pause, during which he seemed to be trying to arrange his words in a proper way, he continued, "A few days ago my daughter saw you speaking French in Khojivank. She liked the way you were speaking very much, made inquiries to find out your identity and learned that you were one of Vaspurakan refugees and worked for us. In a word, she got a very favorable impression of you without being familiar with you. She has been bothering me with her request for already several days: she wants you to give her French lessons. I think if you agree it will be good both for you and her. She knows Russian quite well and you can exchange lessons. Will it not be good?"

The proposal of the Manager General being quite unexpected for me, I was immediately perplexed, but I tried to concentrate and somehow answered, "If my manager's daughter has honored me so highly I have absolutely no right to reject it. Only I do not know how I can arrange the hours of the lessons."

"That will not be difficult, here is our address: we live on the second story at N 142, Sololak. Call on her between five to seven o'clock one of these days and arrange it with her. I will let her know about it."

And the manager gave me his visiting card, with his home address written in Russian on it.

At five o'clock the following day, I rang the doorbell of our Manager General, Mr. Barseghov. Almost immediately the door opened and a very young, pretty girl of fine figure and impressive features greeted me on the threshold.

"You are welcome, Mr. Sergei, I already know you by face and was waiting for you," she said in a resonant voice and with a sweet smile, "Father told me that you would probably visit us today."

"I am very glad to meet you, dear Miss. It is a great honor and luck for me to get acquainted with you."

"Come in, come in, you have already begun storming me with your modesty."

Accompanied by the young girl, I entered their living-room and immediately recalled the magnificent, expensive crockery and, especially the crimson curtains in the reception-room of one of the rich people in Van, Gapamajian. Drawing a mental comparison between those two waiting-rooms, I at once came to the conclusion that, apparently, wealthy people resembled each other everywhere and fortune abundantly endowed most of them with all possible blessings.

"I already know your name and now it is my turn to introduce myself to you." Extending her tender hand to me, she said, "Alice Barseghian, a student of Tiflis

Gymnasium. Now you will think - and you certainly have the right to do so - what a daring and unbridled girl she is to introduce herself so hastily."

Being gradually infected with the young girl's straightforward sincerity and simplicity, I was encouraged and tried not to fall behind her.

"Sergei Sarhadian, a Van refugee, who arrived in Tiflis thirteen months ago." I uttered the words "a Van refugee" with a bitter smile.

"Never mind, Mr. Sergei, you cannot terrify me by introducing yourselves as a refugee. I have already got my first good impression of you in Khojivank. Not a single French-speaking person could be found in the multitude gathered around the European visitor and you came to their rescue answering all the questions of the visiting foreigner."

"I have not had a single opportunity to speak French for already two years so that I cannot boast about my knowledge of French."

"Never mind, you will teach it to me and revise everything. I hope you cannot reject a girl like me who wants to learn by her own will."

"How can I refuse your request? First of all, you are so kind and pleasant that I do not dare to reject you. Besides, I am so very obliged to your father for his exceptional support. Who knows in what corner of what factory I would have been thrown if I had not met him?"

"How happy I am that Father did not let you be thrown into a corner in some factory, as you yourselves are saying. However, he is so strange and peculiar by nature that he has never told me anything about you at all. It was by a stroke of good luck that I came across you in Khojivank and please, do not consider me indecent, but I found out who you were and where you worked only thanks to my dexterity."

"Then I must be doubly thankful both for your father's kind-heartedness and your personal attention. Truly, I consider myself very lucky to have met such a noble and modest family as yours in this foreign country."

Miss Alice treated me to tea and pies entertaining me for almost two hours with her diverting, interesting conversation. She told me that her parents had been invited to post-midday tea at one of their relatives' place. Eventually, I promised to visit her at five o'clock the following day to begin our lessons.

TWO FRIENDS

Alice and I made very good friends. At first we met four times a week for our mutual lessons, but in a month Alice asked for an additional one. Her father had told Mouradov, the head of the Traffic Section, to arrange my work from six o'clock in the morning till three o'clock in the afternoon and so it was done. Every day I was absolutely free from three o'clock till twelve at midnight. After noon I had dinner, rested a little, sometimes drowsed and reached Alice's at exactly four o'clock.

In accordance with our arrangement, first I taught her and then she had Russian lessons with me. Our mutual lessons were to last for two hours, but we often consciously forgot the time confines that we ourselves had fixed. We enjoyed being together: we read and talked, exchanged ideas concerning various subjects and sometimes even argued with each other.

My inner world had undergone a strange change, which I could not understand at all.

Surprisingly enough, I became a fervent patriot, even a chauvinist after Van's sinister retreat. The universal, all-embracing Social-Democratic aspirations I had been carried away with during my studentship, till the April self-defense, seemed to have vanished altogether. Those ambitions had given way to newly-born chauvinistic feelings and strivings: in a word, I had been converted into a pro-Armenian chauvinist.

When all by myself, I tried to analyze the reasons for such a change, but I could make no final conclusions. Sometimes I thought that my chauvinism was due to the outrages, persecutions and all kinds of inhuman attitudes perpetrated against us. If the Turks could violently and ruthlessly uproot us from our homes and expel us from our own land with insolent impertinence, out of their blind selfishness and chauvinistic hatred for us, why on earth should we feel pity for those beasts in human disguise and show a human attitude to them? Why should we always be philanthropic, humble and meek?

My new friend Miss Alice did not share those newly-born chauvinistic feelings and ambitions of mine at all. She was imbued with exactly those universal, all-human aspirations which as I have already said I admired and worshiped before the deportation, before we were stripped of our native land.

"If the nations succeed in fostering these universal feelings and ideas, they will thus put an end to all this hatred and enmity, and the communities and peoples will live as good friends and kind neighbors," she would usually say to me and I knew she deeply believed in what she said.

Sometimes, when I was totally powerless to make her take off her rose-colored glasses, I would tell her in mild malice, "You should have been reduced to refugees like us to understand what actual life is and what its true orders are. Under the current circumstances, when the earth is inhabited with such cannibal beasts as Jemal, Talaat, Enver and Jevdet, all-human feelings and strivings are not worth the candle."

NOSTALGIA

By the second half of January 1917, my desire to return to Van had grown particularly fervent and the infinite, unbridled anguish called nostalgia had already begun rending my heart.

It was already about three months since I began following the Armenian papers of Tiflis devouring the news about the liberation of the Turkish Armenian provinces and, especially Vaspurakan with great pleasure. The Russian troops and Armenian volunteers' regiments had re-conquered the Eastern Armenian provinces and districts one after another, ridding them of Turkey's monstrous clutches and reaching Erzroom. I took great delight in reading that again a self-autonomous Armenian government had been established in liberated Vaspurakan. Having learned that Grigor Bulgharatsy, A. Terzibashian, Shaghoyan and the other friends of mine were in Van, I wrote a letter to the two of them asking for brief information about the current situation there. I did not cherish very bright hopes that my letters would reach their destination, but all of a sudden I got answers from Bulgharatsy and Terzibashian in late January, forty days later than they must have arrived. The latter was inviting me to work as a secretary in the Russian Section of the City Municipality.

I was in heaven: the brief letters breathed optimism calling me back to my homeland. Terzibashian's letter, that was particularly impressive, ended in the following lines, "I am looking forward to seeing you. Young fellows like you should return as hastily as possible to prove that they are true patriots, ready to sacrifice even their lives for the reconstruction of their destroyed motherland."

After I had got those letters, my nostalgia, that had been burning me in the last several months, was kindled like a blazing fire. All my meditations and hesitations about creating a comfortable life in Tiflis were totally shattered. Despite the fact that I had gained a firm foothold in my work and would be able to secure a more favorable position for me in the future thanks to the new course of events, Tiflis and all possible favorable conditions connected with it could no longer present a temptation to me.

I determined to go back to my homeland, to my dear birthplace, my sweet and magnificent Aygestan. Van, my motherland of resonant, cold springs, evergreen trees and flowers, gardens abounding in sweet fruits, the sky-blue, superb sea and Varag, towering at the top of the mountain like an eagle, bewitched, enchanted and attracted me like a magnet. I could no more resist that charming and entrancing aspiration.

BEFORE MY RETURN

I decided to arrange my affairs so as to leave Tiflis by February 15. I had to visit my kinsfolk in Gyoolizard Village, Gharakilisa, for the last time before I started for my homeland.

I had managed to win a small circle of friends and acquaintances in Tiflis, but it would not be difficult for me to part with those new surroundings. However, there were two people to whom I thought I would not be able to bid farewell easily: the first or, perhaps, second of them was my own brother, the other was Alice who had become very close and intimate to me.

It was a little less than a year and a half since I came to Tiflis, stopped at my brother's and began sharing his room. My presence made him happy and quite optimistic about life. Recently he had told me about his love tragedy which was very depressing. Before moving to the present Georgian family, he had been living with an Armenian one. One of that family's relatives, a young girl, frequently came to visit them and my brother got acquainted and made friends with her. He liked the girl very much and that feeling was mutual, for they even agreed to marry.

Unfortunately, they were to go through a love tragedy that befalls so many people and my poor brother added to their number. Some people talked the girl out of marrying him, making her understand and convincing her that my brother was a penniless refugee. And that was really the case, for Armen was working with the head of that Armenian family, a tailor named Sargis, receiving a small salary. The latter talked that girl, who was a remote relative of his, out of marrying my brother.

"Why the hell do you need that wretched refugee, get rid of him and I'll find you a rich, well-to-do match," he said.

Indeed, tailor Sargis managed to find a wealthy match for the girl marrying her with his own son.

My brother, who had suffered a severe fiasco in his very first love, was obliged to leave their house a short time after tailor Sargis' son's marriage, also leaving his master and refusing to continue learning his craft.

Desperate by the frustrations he had suffered in life, Armen had become an utter pessimist. He would frequently say, "Sergei, if you're devoid of money and riches, happiness, success, honor, good reputation and a high position are like a golden-plumed bird of happiness, which incessantly avoids being caught by such common mortals as we are. It is absolutely futile to run after it, for we can't ever reach it."

I made strenuous efforts to save my brother's young life of the nightmare mercilessly gnawing at his heart, but I had to confess that I was not able to do so.

It is dreadful for a person to suffer frustration and disappointment in the bloom of life, when he is full of bright, flowering hopes. It is very hard, if not impossible, to heal the despondency that shattered hopes cause about a person.

I would often find my brother thoughtful, reserved and in a melancholic mood at his free hours, that were but very few in general. I somehow tried to expostulate him, "Armen, your infinite sadness will eventually shatter your health and squeeze your energy. At your age you've no right to subject yourself to such severe mental suffering and should have enough will power to resist the misfortune. Thousands like you undergo frustrations in their lives, but never yield up, don't get tired of life like you and don't deliver themselves up to despair."

"I'm not to blame, dear brother, woe betide anybody having such sensitive and vulnerable nerves as me. Believe me, I've made many attempts to rid myself of this continual sadness, but alas, of no avail. And now I've come to the conclusion that in order to regain liveliness and happiness after a failure, you need iron nerves, of which I'm unfortunately completely devoid... "

With infinite sadness and compassion, I noticed that physical strength had been completely squeezed out of my brother, his features obviously reflecting general fatigue. His work took him a long time, made him irritated, but provided no tangible profits: he worked incessantly for thirteen to fourteen hours daily and had very little time to rest down. Sometimes I was terrified to notice him coughing and doubted that his lungs might be ill. I was horrified to reconcile myself to that thought and was even afraid to suggest him that he should be examined lest my suggestion might put him into a mental crisis.

WITH ALICE FOR THE LAST TIME

It was a little more than four months since I began exchanging lessons with Alice and our teaching each other yielded considerable results. We had entered into a sort of competition while learning our lessons: both of us tried to perform the duties connected with our lessons with flawless conscientiousness. Very rarely, when either she or me failed to do the written part of the assignment, we were embarrassed and bitterly ashamed. However, the duties of our lessons did not hinder us from exchanging ideas about the current topics and news we were interested in and sometimes we also made innocent jokes.

It was Alice's simplicity and modesty that I appreciated particularly highly: although she was the only child of one of the most prosperous Armenian families of Tiflis, she never descended to make me somehow feel that fact.

An unusual intimacy now marked our relations: we met each other at the appointed time five times a week and during those four months and several days, we broke our appointments only for three times. There was nothing pretended about our lessons: we attended them with great love and pleasure. Our meetings and lessons had been converted into mutual aspirations and necessary obligations: each of us felt an attractive desire to study side by side with the other, enrich our linguistic knowledge, talk, make jokes and amuse ourselves. After the lessons, we went to a performance or ballet together once a week.

It was the afternoon of February 8: I had decided to tell Alice about my determination to return to my homeland. I was in a grave predicament: being very excited, I had to confess that a heavy storm was raging in my inner world and I did not know how to tell her about my decision.

Our lesson was over at its usual hour, but Alice's attentive eyes had not failed to discern my unusual perplexity and excitement. Finally, growing out of patience, she said, "Sergei, you're in an unusual state today, you're anxious and thoughtful. Will you let me know the reason?"

"You're right, Alice. Today I'm unusually excited and it's due to our coming undelayable parting."

"I don't believe, Sergei, please, speak clearly. What does parting mean? What parting? Have I given any grounds for that? I can't understand. Perhaps... I don't remember. Have I displeased you anyway? But... ."

"No, Alice, no, a thousand times no! You aren't the reason for our parting. If you wish to know I am to blame for it. Please, calm down and listen to me. After I came to Tiflis, the greatest blessing fortune sent me was my meeting with such a wonderful, dear and if you let me put it so, extremely beloved girl as you are. The reason for the excitement you noticed about me today is the decision I've made after months' hesitation.

"The love and anguish for my homeland have been rending my soul in the last several months, and I've decided to go back and harness myself to its reconstruction and prosperity. I can't tranquillize until I again see my country, its soil, water, trees, flowers, the emerald waters of its blue sea, its high, proud mountains, our unsurpassed, victorious Varag and proud Aghtamar. They're constantly calling me when I am both asleep and awake... ."

Alice was listening to me. I noticed how rapidly she changed her complexion turning pale and then blushing alternately. She was breathing, but she was completely out of breath. She wanted to speak out, but her excited throat was stifling her voice and words. Unable to bear the blow of my unexpected news, she burst out sobbing like a small child.

Such an eruption of Alice's feelings was not unexpected for me: within a short time, I had grown convinced of the sincerity, intimacy, silent, mute liking and love that had

begun putting down roots in the pure, immaculate depths of our hearts. Without a single word our pure love attracted us like a powerful magnet. Her weeping gnawed at my soul and all my efforts to persuade and calm her down were of no avail.

“Dear Alice, that’s enough. Such a sobbing before our parting can be fraught with sinister results, don’t worry. Speak out, I’ll be happy if you give me clever advice and instructions instead of crying. Tomorrow morning I’m going to tender my resignation to your father and thank him cordially. I still have some five to six days before my departure from Tiflis and we’ll again meet.”

“Sergei,” Alice said through bitter weeping and a bewitching smile, “I’ve absolutely no right to pose any obstacles on your way. I’m so very sorry, profoundly sorry to part with you. Although it may be counted as indecency and immodesty for such a girl as me, I’ve to confess I feel attached to you with all my soul and heart... . All my future hopes and happiness were connected only with you... .”

“Alice, darling, be sure I feel attached to you with exactly the same bright and pure feelings and cherish great hopes that the happiness we both are dreaming of will become a reality one day.”

My farewell to Alice was shocking and depressing: having completely forgotten the confines of decency which we had been strictly observing so far we embraced each other, our lips meeting in a warm anguish.

Alice did not cease crying like a small child and was able to suppress her weeping only after my repeated humble entreaties. Helping her sit down on the chair she usually sat on during our lessons, I said, “Alice, I could never think that we would become so closely attached to one another involuntarily and silently. Neither of us is to blame for that: doubtlessly, both of us were able to appreciate our mutual respect which has grown into the pure love we feel today. I’m so very sorry that our love erupted like a turbulent, beaming spring only at the very last moment of our parting.”

“Sergei, I’m to blame for that: the unexpected news of your sudden departure almost struck me like lightning. I couldn’t suppress my feelings and hide the love and anguish that began blazing in the depths of my heart. Please, forgive me for being so sensitive and sincere.” After a few seconds of depressive silence, Alice finished, “I’m so deeply sorry that I’m the only child of my parents: I suppose I’ve no right to leave them alone. I’m their only consolation and happiness, the object of their love and affection. But for this fact, I might perhaps look for another way out.”

“You’re fully right, Alice, I realize and appreciate highly the sacrifice you’re making. If you had a sister or brother I myself would beg you to follow me towards the homeland that would be dear and beloved both for you and me. That land has always been ours and it must certainly be ours.”

THE LAST DAYS IN TIFLIS

At that stage of life every young man is sure to be carried away with the inclinations and aspirations of his heart and soul parallel with his everyday work. The period you are dominated by your heart and soul is the dearest and most beloved in life, laden with sweet heartbeats: that phase is commonly and briefly called love and a feeling of love.

Naturally, I could not avoid that noblest feeling. Born on October 7, 1896, I had already entered upon the twenty-first year of my life. Before Van's April Heroic Struggle, when I was absorbed in active party and student work, I had almost no free time to pay attention to my inner world, its feelings and the aspirations that they gave rise to.

Strange and surprising as it may sound, I paid attention to my inner world and mental life when I arrived at the conclusion that I had no party and public work to do for the time being. It is very painful and depressing for a young man to see and become convinced of the fact that his desirable goals and the work he has been selflessly devoted to have been shattered, extirpated and have fallen flat in the bright, blooming and promising stage of his life. Our aims and the work we had been devoted to were ruined and broken when we, thousands of people like me and I, were forced to leave our fatherland, our dear houses, our fertile soil and sweet, resonant springs.

Our newly-blossoming, beaming young lives and all the bright hopes and happy future connected with them were ruthlessly shattered, falling prey to the lethal storm while we were driven away from our country under the threat and horror of death.

Truly, what hopes for work could be cherished by a homeless, neglected refugee, deprived of his homeland? Yes, such a refugee as I was.

Then, it was not strange and surprising at all if under those inconsolable and desperate conditions I thought of seeking for another person, such a homeless, neglected deportee as I was.

For many times I tried to analyze the motives making me recall Anoush's existence only at the very last moments of our escape. If I truly did love her, why on earth did I begin looking for her only at the last and heaviest moment of danger? Perhaps, I thought of helping and defending her, but why at the last hour? Probably, I made that attempt to soothe, alleviate the sorrow of seeing all my hopes and strivings fall flat or perhaps because I was sorry for her. However, I was most of all terrified at the thought that such an innocent, beautiful Armenian girl as Anoush might have become prey to the kidnapping and rape of the Turkish barbarians or Kurdish bandits. Every time I remembered her that sinister, dreadful supposition rent my heart to bleeding.

I continually made inquiries in search of Anoush during the year and a half I stayed in Tiflis. Her father had told me in Van that he had told his wife and daughter to go to Tiflis and stop at his own brother's, in Sololak Avenue, but unfortunately, my haste and perplexity hindered me from getting the full, exact address from him. All my hopes of again finding Anoush had almost totally vanished, but I could not reconcile myself to the thought of her final loss.

Every time I remembered her my heart was burned with infinite, bitter anguish. Very frequently, when all by myself, I was plunged into the memories of the near past, her

beautiful face always appearing in my mental mirror. I had the impression that she was grief-stricken, helpless, in tears, her freedom chained and her happiness seized from her so that she blamed me for my selfishness and carelessness silently, but reproachfully... And all that occurred to me not only in my dreams but also when I was awake.

With powerless pain and heart-breaking despondency, I came to the conclusion that the Turkish barbarians or Kurdish bandits had kidnapped and raped her burying her alive, in the prime of her life.

The last several days of my stay in Tiflis turned into a true ordeal to me. Having already tendered my resignation, I was eager to leave as soon as possible.

Probably, the majority of young people have experienced the severe panic I was in at that time. I made every possible endeavor to forget Anoush's unfortunate loss, but of no avail. When the first curtain of my mental tragedy dropped, the second one rose and the second Anoush, i.e. Alice, stood before the eyes of my mind. The former made me suffer from her loss and absence whereas the latter from her immediate presence. The former blamed me with her silent, helpless look while the latter fascinated and attracted me with eloquent, almighty power. Alice's resonant, hearty call was constantly appealing me to return to her, have lessons with her for endless hours and hear her silvery laughter. Her bewitching, enchanting appeal seemed to be permanently sounding in my ears, "Sergei, don't go, don't leave me. Listen to your heart's voice and don't abandon your unmatched, sincere friend. Don't trample down her pure love."

The sorrow of one's heart and soul is much more serious and heavier than physical pain. Having endured the sufferings of several tens of days, the constant fatigue of the deportation road, its filth and dust as well as the danger of the enemy threatening us hour after hour, I proved unable to bear the meditations and mental frustrations that had assailed me. I fell ill and was consigned to bed: I was in fever running a temperature that was getting higher and higher. The medical aid and prescriptions that my brother provided for me proved absolutely futile and I did not have the slightest desire to get any nourishment.

My brother, our Georgian landlady and her daughter were very worried: they had used all possible kinds of remedies to alleviate my high temperature, but all their attempts were unsuccessful. My health condition was troubling especially my brother: I was getting thinner and thinner and fading away day by day. I often lost consciousness falling into fits of delirium.

Very early on the morning of the eighth day of my illness, I woke up my brother. Poor Armen, who was always exhausted and worn out due to his hard work, now had to spend sleepless nights and his cough fits had become even more severe.

"Brother," I said to him, "if I stay here, my recovery will be absolutely impossible under these conditions: day by day I'm fading away still more and more. If you love me - and I've no doubts that you do love me very much - get a ticket for the night train right today so that I will leave for Gharakilisa, to our family members. I'm sure the change of air will foster my quick recovery without any doctor and remedies."

“What’re you talking about, dear brother? Is it possible for you to get up from bed in this state of yours and be taken to the railway station? If I agree to your suggestion and carry it out, it’ll surely have disastrous results. Stay for some more days, by God’s will you’ll recover and then will leave.”

“Brother Armen, please, don’t refuse to do what I’ve told you. I’m fully convinced that my salvation depends on my departure and the coming change of air; I know it from Father’s experience. If you don’t want me to die here, in this foreign country, far from my relatives, fulfill my request and you’ll see that I’m fully right.”

Armen could not refuse my entreaty anymore: besides, he himself was not sure that I would recover soon if I stayed. Obligated to agree, he immediately went to the station to buy a ticket for the train leaving for Gharakilisa at the same night.

I made strenuous efforts to sit up in my bed and write several lines to Alice. With trembling hands I told her about my illness and promised to write her again letting her know my new address. I also expressed a hope that soon we would again meet and continue our precious, irreplaceable friendship.

TOWARDS GHARAKILISA

At seven o’clock in the evening, Armen and I went to the railways station. After having overcome a number of difficulties with strenuous efforts and my brother’s help, I finally managed to somehow accommodate myself in the compartment corresponding to my second class ticket. After those hard attempts, I was covered with abundant sweat which, indeed, was of favorable influence to me.

Being very worried for me, my brother insisted on going to Gharakilisa with me, but I was sure that his unplanned departure would be simply impossible. I asked him not to be anxious about me at all and put off his departure till a more suitable occasion. I also explained to him that his return from Gharakilisa would cause him great difficulties due to the confusion of the times and the extraordinary overcrowdedness of the transport.

The one-week high temperature had squeezed every drop of strength out of me: I had terribly thinned down and grown pallid, feeling as if all my body had been severely beaten. I could not remain sitting for a long time. The proverb says, “Every cloud has a silver lining”: fortunately, my compartment neighbor turned out an Armenian who was going to Yerevan with his eight years old son. He was going to reunite with his wife and the other child, whom he had lost a year and a half before, during the ominous escape-retreat, and had found only about fifteen days before. He was in a very high mood and as he himself insisted, was extremely happy since after a very long search, he had been lucky enough to find his wife and child, whom he had considered completely lost.

My heart was assailed with and rent by an infinite grief and leaden, dark sadness: I recalled my unmatched, innocent Anoush, whom I had lost and never found. She again appeared before my eyes with her wonderfully beautiful appearance and supple stature resembling an evergreen willow. I sighed a heart-rending and bitter sigh so that my neighbor asked compassionately, “What’s the matter, mister, have you lost any relative, too?”

“Yes..., but no, I’m very ill and tired. If you permit me, I’d like to lie down for an hour: I ‘m too weak to sit. I’ve been running a high temperature for a whole week, being unable to sleep. I’m going to my family in Gharakilisa. If I happen to sleep long, please, wake me up so that I won’t cause you any inconvenience.”

Oh, what a treasure and blessing hope and self-inspiration are! But for that hopeful expectation, the human being would, perhaps, be the most unfortunate creature on the earth. When I got ill on the last days of my stay in Tiflis, I was sure that my illness was not a physical but a mental one connected with my heart and soul.

Mental sorrow and sufferings are almost always much more wasting and exhausting: I was now in their clutches and knew the reason for that. Having but a single way out, I was sure that if I continued remaining in the jaws of that mental fatigue, I would soon be obliged to bid farewell to light, the sun, my life as well as all the hopes and aspirations inseparably connected with it. Indeed, that would be utter nonsense and folly.

Lying in my bed, completely worn out due to my fever, I decided to resist the hopelessness and despondency threatening to devour and exterminate me. I made up my mind to leave the current discouraging, deseperating atmosphere as soon as possible, in order to rid myself of my mental frustration. The immediate realization of that decision, which brought change of air or rather, change of place and surroundings, shifting the focus of my thoughts and feelings, saved me and restored my hopes for happiness.

The jerks of the train alleviated the tension of my nerves and they relaxed a little. The eight-hour sleep tranquilized and refreshed me: my good-hearted neighbor had taken pity on me, unwilling to disturb such a helpless sick person as me for his comfort. If I had not told him that I had to get off in Gharakilisa, he would have certainly left me sleeping.

“Compatriot, wake up, you’re already at Gharakilisa Station.”

I immediately jumped to my feet: truly, the train had stopped at Gharakilisa Station.

“Thank you for your exceptional indulgence and nobility. I occupied your place and didn’t let you have a rest. I beg your pardon and will never forget your gentlemanly attitude.”

WITH MY FAMILY MEMBERS

Upon getting off the train, I immediately approached the tap of ever-running abundant water in front of Gharakilisa Station and drank that vivifying water as much as I could. For a moment I seemed to be drinking the magnificent water of Mokhri Keahriz in our quarter of Aygestan. Then I sat down beside the water fleeting with sweet gurgling. The cool, silvery water of my native land had a miraculous influence on me. The fragrant morning breeze of spring almost revived me: I was not running a temperature anymore while the pain and disease emaciating me seemed to have vanished by some great miracle. After many, many days, for the first time I felt I was hungry. Alas, I wished I had reached my family members in Gyoolizard as soon as possible for there I could eat our traditional refreshing buttermilk soup.

The hope and belief born in my mind only twenty-four hours before, proved powerfully salutary: by coming to Gharakilisa I had saved myself of the inevitable death.

Human life is full of strange and surprising coincidences. I was waiting impatiently for a lucky chance to meet any of the carters from Gyoolizard who came to Gharakilisa to sell their dairy products. As if by some incredible miracle I came across the kind-hearted carter from Gyoolizard, Avet, who had taken me to the station when I was leaving for Tiflis. Noticing and recognizing me before I could see him, he called out loudly, "Oh, our boy, at last you've missed our village and your family! You're welcome. You're lucky enough to have met me. Why, I'm myself glad to meet you. It's boring to travel alone so we'll go talking together. Oh yes, I forgot to say, why did you take the pains to send me the cigarette case leaving me in shame? Your sister gave it to me saying, 'My brother has sent this case as a present to you. It's the handicraft of Van silver-smiths.'

"Indeed, what a beautiful antique work it is! May the fingers of its maker be as young and supple as a green branch. I've shown it to everybody in our quarter."

"You deserve it, brother Avet. It's a pity I couldn't send you something better than that."

At that moment I felt I had received the greatest present in the world: for extreme joy I even began stammering. I should thank my lucky stars that I had met that noble-hearted villager without waiting long so that I would be with my kinsfolk in half an hour.

Hardly had forty-five minutes passed when Avet and I reached Gyoolizard: the cart horse that was as cheerful and joyful as its owner had been galloping all the way, in its turn eager to reach its dear house as soon as possible.

We pulled up at exactly the door of the house where my family lived and brother Avet shouted in a most piercing voice through a cheerful, happy laughter, "Hey, hey, Father, Araksi, teacher, come out quickly, see what a precious guest I've brought for you!"

All my family members ran out almost simultaneously. They did not expect to see me so soon although I had let them know about my arrival.

The short but extremely wasting disease had emaciated me squeezing all my strength, but I was able to jump off the cart and embrace my sister, who was already running to fall into my arms. I had hardly got free of her hugs and kisses when I fell into Father's and my brother's arms.

The scene was very exciting: all of us seemed to be burning with the bitter anguish of long, long years.

Araksi was the first to discern my evident physical emaciation and pallidness of my face that stood out a mile. She cried out, "What's the matter, brother? Why've you grown so thin and pale? Are you ill?"

"Never mind, darling. Yes, I was ill, but it's now a thing of the past. Don't be sad."

When the first touching moments of our meeting elapsed, we entered the house and

I immediately noticed that the villagers of Gyoolizard had done their utmost for my kinsfolk' comfort. They had been given a very neat one-story building of three quite large rooms, a kitchen and other facilities.

"My dear Araksi," I said to my sister, rolling down on the first seat I saw like a drunkard, "I've been hungry for eight days now: I was ill and had totally lost my appetite. I'd be so obliged if you made our Van's buttermilk soup for me: only now I feel that I'm really too hungry."

I quickly recovered with my family members in Gyoolizard: the fascinating spring scenes of the village, the rising green shoots of the reawakening nature, the field snow-drops raising their heads from under the snow, the grass, the vivifying mountain air as well as my sister's attentive and affectionate care restored my health and liveliness.

My mental turmoil and grief gradually gave way to a new fixed idea, i.e. to leave for my dear, infinitely beloved homeland as soon as possible. Reminding me about the numerous sufferings and dreadful panic we had gone through during our retreat-escape, my sister kept talking me out of returning to Van.

"Dear brother, where're you hurrying?" She kept saying. "Reading so much you see the situation is still chaotic: the war isn't over and our country is still surrounded by Turks. Why're you again voluntarily putting yourself into trouble when nobody makes you do so? As if all that wasn't enough, all the papers are now writing about a new revolution in Russia: you yourself read it the other day. Who knows what may happen tomorrow? Wait for at least several days till we see what occurs."

"Araksi, dear, it's good you mentioned it. Up till now we've been suspecting the Tsarist Government of fraudulent policy, but at present all our suspicions and fears have been dispelled. The Tsarist Government endlessly hating the Armenians has ceased to exist: it's been overthrown succeeded by democratic powers. They've promised to recognize the Caucasian people's and among them the Armenians' self-determination. Never even think that these authorities will ever agree to deliver up our native vilayets conquered at the cost of thousands of their young people's lives. This particularly refers to Vaspurakan, that's the threshold to their borders and the most important of the significant security barriers of the vast Russian territories. As they've promised, Vaspurakan will certainly be yielded up to the Armenians."

However, all my speeches were absolutely powerless to convince my sister. Seeing that she could not make me change my steadfast decision she cried out hopelessly, "Well, if you're so sure that no calamities will befall Van anymore, take me with you. I want to go back to my motherland, too. I'm missing it, too. I don't spend a single night without dreaming about our home, garden, trees, flowers, our sweet fruits and the unmatched water of our gurgling spring."

"I've promised Father to get acquainted with the current situation and conditions on my reaching there. He's suffering from nostalgia, too and is eager to return as soon as possible. Receiving my letter he'll certainly come back and you'll come with him."

"Very good, then both you and Father are going to give me your words of honor."

MY RETURN TO MY HOMELAND

On the morning of February 26, 1917, I left Gyoolizard for Gharakilisa Station, where I was to catch the Echmiatzin-Julfa train departing that night. I was going to return to my homeland Van via Persia.

Our parting was both exciting and impressive. Besides my father, sister and brother, the village head and outstanding people in Gyoolizard had come to see me off, everybody cordially wishing me a good journey and asking God to help me.

My friend, brother Avet, again put his cart at my disposal like a volunteer.

Araksi had wept so much that her eyes could not find any more tears to shed. As usual, she did not want to part with me and asked to accompany me at least to the station. However, I did not know why we found it expedient not to fulfill that innocent request. I could not explain why her heart persistently predicted that we would never again be able to see each other; unfortunately, her premonition was true.

About a month and a half after our parting, Father joined me in Van. The parishioners of our quarter had addressed him a decent petition to return and resume his service in Hankusner Church, to which he had willingly agreed. I met my elder brother right in Gharakilisa eleven years later when I went to Tiflis, entrusted with the task of holding negotiations on the immigration of those anguish-stricken Persian Armenians who were longing to return to their fatherland. My brother, who had married, had a pretty daughter and a naughty son. He had managed to acquire his own house in Gharakilisa with Father's and my financial assistance. Unluckily, the lack of time and unfavorable circumstances hindered me from seeing my only sister, my beloved Araksi, who had been inseparable from me in my childhood, youth and adolescence. Having got married she lived in Gyanja and had a son and two daughters. By that time my poor brother Armen had already died, having hardly entered upon the thirty-fifth year of his life.

On the day of my return to Van, we did not let my sister accompany me up to the station without any grounds and that gnawed at my heart for quite a long time. My father and brother, who had come to see me off at the station, had to wait for very long hours till the Echmiatzin-Julfa train arrived. Embracing and kissing me warmly on the train, they returned to Gyoolizard with the carter, brother Avet. Giving me a small pillow decorated with beautiful handicraft, the latter said to me with infinite kindness, "Whenever you're tired, put it under your head to rest down and remember me."

The train had already started for Echmiatzin-Julfa when I checked my pockets to see how rich I was: I had only forty-five roubles on me. Before my departure, I wanted to give Araksi fifty roubles which she refused to accept saying that I had to cover a long way and would need it. Before leaving Tiflis, I had left ninety per cent of my savings accumulated within a year and a half to my sick brother, convinced that he needed that money more than I did.

Sitting on the train, isolated and completely indifferent to all the passengers, I began analyzing the reasons for my return. I did not have the slightest doubt that the main rea-

son was my patriotism, that had grown into bitter nostalgia. Another reason was that being a young Armenian, I was longing for progress and finally, I had determined to become one of the humble voluntary advocates of the liberation of my homeland, its rebirth and independence.

My return coincided with Kerenski's February Coup D'etat; like all the suffering Armenians whose rights had been flagrantly violated, I thought that with the overthrow of the Tsarist Government the ruling power had been vested in a government which had committed itself to recognizing the Armenian People's right to freedom and defending them against the vandalism perpetrated by the anti Armenian Turkish Government. Like many, many other people, I was filled with enthusiasm and cherished hopes which, unfortunately, proved to be nothing but the same fraud and perfidy of the former Tsarist Government. However, just like all the Armenians, I could not predict that.

Among all those chaotic meditations, the most real one was that I was resolutely going to Van-Aygestan, my beautiful, sacred homeland attracting me all the time. I was going there cherishing a faint hope that I might find Anoush, that girl, who endlessly fascinated and enchanted me having become a bewitching dream to me: she might be living with her father, saved by some miracle.

The second volume of my book is dedicated to my seven grandchildren, i.e. my two sons Levon and Harutiun Sarhadians' three children and my only daughter Medik Harutiunian's four kids.

Sharing the prominent poet's blessing, I exclaim, "Live children, but not so as we did!"

from the AUTHOR

VOLUME TWO

PREFACE

Immediately after the publication of the first volume of the book "My Memoirs," I received cordial congratulations and encouragement from the Armenian readers from Teheran and, especially my friends and acquaintances. A few months later I got a great number of reassuring letters from my compatriots in the Diaspora, particularly the literate and intellectuals who were congratulating me on the plain, heart-to-heart and, especially unbiased account and recollections reflected in my book. In this regard I express my profound gratitude to poet Dev (Mr. Margar Gharabekian) for his precious contribution to the spreading of my book abroad.

We, the sons of the Armenian nation, went through many massacres, sufferings, privations and humiliation both during World War I and after it. Just like me, hundreds of thousands of Armenians long to live to see the happy day all the outrages perpetrated against our creating people will be reconsidered and the lands seized from us through any kind of violation will be restituted to us.

The only way of achieving this sacred ambition is the unification of our national endeavors and strivings. Our national unison and solidarity are the only way to our salvation. We, the Armenians, should sacrifice all our private, separate and even party interests for the sake of our national benefit and our forefathers' integral homeland. My conclusion calls upon all Armenians to follow the daily imperative of the Armenian nation with steadfast will and the word of honor of a noble person. Hundreds of thousands of my worried compatriots share this appeal stating, "Armenians, the door to your salvation is your unity."

SIRAK SARHADIAN

PART ONE

ON THE EVE OF MY RETURN

On the morning of February 27, 1917, our train stopped at Echmiatzin Station. I was thinking of continuing my way up to Julfa: the travelers had been told that the train left for Julfa in three hours so that I had enough time to go to the station where I hoped to come across any of my acquaintances and discuss the route of return. I had been told that the immigrants chose either the way Julfa-Khoy-Arjak-Janik or Echmiatzin-Igdir-Berkri-Timar to go back to Van-Vaspurakan.

Echmiatzin Station was overcrowded and there was nothing surprising about it: all the stations I had seen in wartime had been thronged by different travelers. I was pushing my way through the crowd moving backwards and forwards in an absent-minded state for more than an hour. Suddenly I heard a voice calling me by my name for a few times. While I was looking for the person calling me, perplexed and with a beating heart, one of my closest friends, Hrant Darbinian, finally succeeded in paving his way through the mob, came up to me and hugged me.

“What a miracle!” Both of us shouted almost simultaneously.

Despite the pressure of the crowd, we were reluctant to free ourselves from each other’s embrace.

“Hrant, my dear Hrant, really, it’s a miracle,” I said.

“It’s the miracle of miracles, my precious friend,” Hrant answered.

“What’re you doing here, Sirak?”

“And what about you?” I asked.

“I think I won’t be mistaken if I say both of us have come here for the same purpose,” Hrant replied.

“Dear Hrant, do you really want to return to Van?”

“And you? Haven’t you come here to go back to Van?”

We, two close and dear friends, hurried to get rid of the pushing throng of the station as soon as possible in order to find a quieter corner. It was twenty months since we parted after the first retreat and we had not heard from each other all that time.

We sat down on a long, shabby, old wooden bench at the edge of the alley adjoining the station. It was a sunny day, the air was pleasant and the fragrance of fresh spring grass had permeated everywhere.

Throughout many years, Hrant and I had been close friends, selflessly devoted to the same ideas. We had never expected any financial aid from one another: well, Hrant did not even need it, for the finances of his family were quite satisfactory. As for me, I was too shy to even think of such an expectation.

My friend asked, “Sirak, what’s making you return to Van?”

“What’s making me return? It’s rather a difficult question. I’d probably hesitate to give a true answer if anyone else asked me that, but dear Hrant, I’ve to be as sincere with you as ever and should tell you the truth.

“Perhaps, so far you’ve managed to notice that I don’t like monotony in life. It may sound immodest, but I’ve to confess ever since I entered upon the conscious stage in my life I’ve always striven to be ahead, rise in the world gaining at least a little superiority over common individuals. I know it’s a kind of selfishness, but what can I do? Characters and modes of perception vary. Perhaps, some day this nature or striving of mine will reduce me to a poor state or ruin me altogether since it’s generally accepted that the camel going to seek horns loses his ears. However, I think, moreover, I’m sure that a person devoid of any ambitions and strivings for progress isn’t worth a red cent. One had better not exist at all rather than be a common mortal.

“My dear friend, if I only wished to confine myself to ordinary life and living I needn’t have subjected myself to still new calamities and adventures. I had already achieved that life in Tiflis, where I’d probably even manage to rise higher than common people. However, the expectations I cherish seem likely to come true in my homeland, below the horizon of my native land rather than in foreign, alien surroundings.

“Yes, my dear, within more than a year, I bitterly experienced the whole alienation of the foreign environment. I felt that aloofness on my own back with lethal pressure in Tiflis, in that magnificent capital of Georgia. My brother and many other people kept insisting that there was no difference between the Georgians and Armenians in Tiflis, that there existed no discrimination between them. They even blamed and reproached you if you looked for such discrimination. However, that’s not true at all; that’s merely false self-deception.

“I managed to hold the post of the controller of the tram conductors in Tiflis for about a year thanks to the exceptional patronage of a noble Armenian. The conductors extremely hated me because I wasn’t a Georgian; moreover, I didn’t speak Georgian to them, for I didn’t know it. I was often afraid to speak Armenian or Russian and for many times those Georgian conductors made bitter remarks for my not speaking Georgian.

“I’ve to confess for the sake of sincerity that if those Georgians’ bitter chauvinism and alienation hadn’t caused me so much suffering, perhaps, I wouldn’t have decided to return to my homeland.

“I learned about the second and third retreats of June and November 1916 from the Armenian papers published in Tiflis. The Armenians - including both of us - who had experienced the bitterness and sufferings of the first disastrous withdrawal couldn’t easily agree to again return to Van.

“We’re going back to the foot of the volcano of Van, erupting burning, fiery lava because we prefer it to the comfortable life in foreign countries that’s full of detachment.”

I paused for a moment: I had many things to say, but my erupting excitement and emotions had been converted into a lump in my throat. Realizing how turbulent my state was Hrant began calming me down and answered me very mildly, “Dear Sirak, I was able to notice and appreciate your strivings for progress when still in Van’s Students’ Union. I particularly remember that during the year preceding the great panic-stricken and horrified retreat, you made every possible effort to foster the intellectual

and cultural development of our young friends.

“You’re fully right being of the conviction that a person, especially a young one should strive to rise higher than usual, in other words, become a perfect person within his power.

“If by a stroke of good fortune and in the course of favorable external circumstances, our people, the industrious, creative Vaspurakan Armenians, get the chance of again living in their fatherland freely, they’re sure to become the glory and pride of the Armenian nation within several years. And the young people longing for progress like you will turn into the pillars of that glory through their hard, indefatigable toil.”

Before choosing the route of our return, my friend and I decided to immediately check the ease and advantage of one of the two roads. We attempted to find some of our compatriots willing to immigrate, but the turmoil and overcrowdedness of the station did not allow us to do so.

Coming out of the station we began walking in its vicinity. Having wandered and checked the environment for about an hour and a half we were exhausted and wanted to go back to Echmiatzin when we came across a man accompanied by two children and a woman, her head covered with a kerchief.

Leaving me behind, Hrant went forward for a few steps and addressed them in Armenian without any hesitation, “It’s nice to meet you. I think you’re our compatriots. Wish you all the best.”

“The same to you. We’re from Alyur Village, Van. We’re coming from Yerevan to leave for Van. The Refugee Committee gave us a little money and food and advised us to return to our village as soon as possible. Some of our neighbours went there via Igdirdir two weeks ago. They must’ve certainly reached there. They’ve promised that on our reaching Alyur they’ll give us a ploughshare, a plough, draft oxen, seeds, flour and I don’t know what else, helping us till the harvest.”

Taking a breath for a minute, the man continued, “Well, we’ve been unemployed for such a long time! It’s very difficult to eke out your existence in foreign lands together with your kids and family; that’s why, we decided to go to our country relying on God. If we’re to die, let’s die in our fathers’ homes, at our own hearth. Alas, mister, you can’t understand how difficult and unbearable it is for us, the villagers, to live in foreign lands. I’ve lived quite long on this earth; I’m over forty now. May God spare even our bitter enemies the privations and sufferings we saw during this year and a half.”

Paying attention to my presence and shaking his head, the man went on sorrowfully, “Well, I shouldn’t bother you, misters; you aren’t fugitives, so you can never realize our grief and pain and put yourselves in the shoes of such poor deportees as us.”

“You’re wrong thinking we aren’t refugees,” I got involved in the talk trying to comfort that villager, our hard-suffering compatriot. “We’re deportees from Vaspurakan just like you. The only difference is that we’re a little younger and aren’t burdened with a family like you.

“We deeply realize that families like you find it too intolerable to live and earn their living in foreign lands. Having gained everything in your village, in our country with hard toil and the sweat of your brow, without ever having needed the foreigners’ help

all your lives, you should certainly live gruesome lives eking out a meager existence in foreign countries, having no employment at all. It's a miracle you were able to endure those dreadful conditions and at least survive."

The family we had come across by chance was the embodiment of abject poverty and extreme privations. Its members were covered with rags, while the spouses had grown thin and hollow-cheeked. Their children, a girl and a little boy, seven to ten years old, looked pallid and faded, too, their eyes begging for help and reflecting an entreaty, thus making a formidable impression. Our interlocutor, the father of that wretched family, who seemed to have been utterly moved by my last words, wiped off the tears flowing down his face with the palm of his right hand and answered, "Alas, mister, what survival are you talking about...? If this is what survival is, we'd better not survive at all. I wish my kids, wife and me had died together with my father and mother or a little later to get rid of this unfair, worthless world."

Deeply impressed by that truly exciting, tearful meeting, Hrant and I attempted to somehow calm down our unfortunate compatriot and promised to render him whatever aid possible if he agreed to share our way back to Van. Thanking us for the help we had offered, he told us regretfully that they had to wait for his wife's and his relatives for a day or two so that all of them would return to their native village together.

Considering it a stroke of exceptionally good luck that we, two close friends, had come across each other having the intention of going back to Van, we went to Echmiatzin from the station and decided to spend that day resting.

After having consulted the secretary of the Immigration Body in Echmiatzin, we made up our minds to leave for Van via Igdir very early the following morning.

IN OUR BIRTHPLACE THE FIRST IMPRESSION

At four o'clock after midday on March 5, 1917, Hrant and I arrived at our dear Aygestan. Fortunately, a military van took us from Igdir to Berkri. As for the way from Berkri to Arjak, we had to alternately travel on donkey, horse, cart and sometimes on foot changing our vehicles from village to village. We arrived in Van on the van belonging to the Armenian Agricultural Union, which had got free of its luggage, i.e. ploughs, wooden ploughs, wheat and barley seeds allocated to the villagers and precious for them.

Our hearts were in infinite rejoicing at our unsurpassed Aygestan, which we had left about two years before. However, our first impression was too wistful and inconsolable: unwilling to confine themselves to having violently driven us away from our beloved native city two years before, the criminal, demoniac enemies who apparently had no hopes for their return had burnt down and demolished all the buildings and houses on Aygestan's main avenue Seghga and the nearby important streets in order to satisfy their diabolical delight. Our famous, beautiful Aygestan resembled a half-dead, hardly moving, shadow-like mourning person who had buried his dear children, with his clothes all torn, his hair dishevelled, his face scratched and grown pinched because of weeping and lamenting. Many of the tall, evergreen trees had dried off, while the others had faded.

The running waters of the resonant springs had slowed down and the edges of the canals were all mossed and covered with silt.

Our heavenly Aygestan was neglected and abandoned: the black ravens, towering on the sooty walls of the burnt and ruined houses protruding here and there, rent and broke our hearts with their sorrowful croaking. The dogs reminding of skeletons wandered about the streets seizing the pieces of mouldy bones from each other with furious bark and bloody fighting. The lonely, famine-stricken cats roamed from one semi-destroyed house to the other, while the vivifying breeze and fragrance of the verdure had vanished altogether... .

My soul was torn to pieces at the sight of those tragic changes and heart-breaking scenes, and I spat out a revengeful curse at the Turks, “ May you be cursed and always remain wretched and unfortunate! You, base enemies of our nation, you have inherited only murder, destruction, violence and vandalism from your sanguineous forefathers, who could not have handed down anything else! You suffocated our valorous, lion-hearted warriors in blood in their centuries-old homeland, in their magnificent ancient homes. You slaughtered our heroes in the mountains of St. Bartholomew Monastery, Bazi-Daz and Garahisar, in Shapin Garahisar, in the Plateaus of Moosh and Sasun, at the summits of Urfa and Mount Musa! You stifled them to death in Adana and Constantinople, you hacked to pieces thousands of them in prisons and in exile, but never did you succeed and never will you succeed in smothering and exterminating the Armenian people, a nation boasting thousands of such heroes as their ancestor Hayk, Tigran the Great, Commander Vardan, David of Sasun, Andranik and others.

“Struggling against enemies like you throughout thousands of years, the Armenians have always been able to endure, resist and defeat them defending their very existence. There can be no doubts that they will survive, eventually taking possession of the lands and water, i.e. the homeland built at the cost of their forefathers’ blood and usurped from them.

“The Armenian nation will survive even if they are subjected to massacres and slaughters for a million times. The skills of survival are their indisputable, supernatural gift thanks to which they have risen over and over from the heaps of ashes like a phoenix striving to fly higher and higher towards the sky.”

OUR DESERTED HOUSES AND GARDENS

The neglect and abandonment of two years had come to add to the obliteration perpetrated by the enemy. The second- and third-class houses and buildings in Aygestan had either grown shabby or ruined as a result of the snow and rain of Van’s two severe winters and dereliction.

Hrant’s and my houses had fully shared that fate. I saw our semi-demolished house with profound sorrow: our large green garden with its numerous fructiferous trees had almost dried off. If I was not ashamed of Hrant, I would sit below my most favorite apricot-tree and weep for a long time over the destruction and desertion of our family’s

hearth of joy and happiness. Our garden, all decorated with foliage and abounding in fruits, as well as our vineyard had always been the greatest source of delight and enjoyment for both our grandparents and our family, especially my sister and me. That beautiful, dear garden had been our most beloved place of walk, rest and self-oblivion. With infinite pain in my heart, I witnessed the demolition and tragic state of the hearth of our delightful childhood full of tenderness and affection.

Hrant's house and garden were almost in the same condition with only slight difference: having stronger foundations they had suffered less damage by dereliction and natural hazards.

Taking into consideration the fact that Hrant's house was situated on the continuation of Norashen Street and was closer to the institutions engaged in the re-foundation of Aygestan, Van, we decided to settle down there temporarily. Well, we could not do otherwise, for it would cause heart-rending sufferings to either of us to live separately in our ruined, semi-destroyed and abandoned houses.

Hrant explained to me the reasons for his return to Van and his plans for the future. Unlike me, he did not cherish any illusive intentions: I had gone back to seek for a field of progress and secure a position, while his aim was to check the current situation and study the possibilities of free work and activity.

"My dear," Hrant said to me at the first night after we had reached Van, "there's no point to hide my plan from a friend like you. Following Father's order I've come back to check the real conditions here. You know he's a draper and a person of business. He isn't the sort of man to suffer from nostalgia like Mother, my sister and perhaps me. He's looking for a safe place and conditions to continue his work. If he doesn't become convinced of the safety of our birthplace Aygestan and the stabilization of its market, he won't return to Van; moreover, he made me promise that I'll go back to Yerevan."

AT MARO'S PLACE

It took me heavy pains to persuade my friend to join me in visiting Grigor Bulgharatsy and Avetis Terzibashian, two of the active and important public figures in those days.

I found it expedient to see the former at his place and the latter in his place of work. I cherished great hopes that at Grigor's I would also meet Maro, my most beloved, dear friend of childhood. Making inquiries I found Bulgharatsy's house and calculated that most probably, it would be easier to find him at home early in the morning.

I introduced myself to the young fellow seeming a military man with the Mauser hanging from his belt and told him I wanted to see the hosts. The soldier, who was from Shatak in origin, agreed to tell his boss about my desire with a kind of contempt and reluctance. However, he immediately returned and invited us to go in with exceptional kindness.

Hardly had I made one or two steps into the house leaving Hrant behind me when my beloved Maro, my sweet foster sister, rushed to meet me, although I had no hopes to again find her under those circumstances. She immediately hugged me without any hesitation and kissed my cheeks and forehead for several times. Despite my embar-

rassment, I answered her affection by a few kisses on her beautiful cheeks.

“My dear brother, what a miracle returned you to us? I last heard of you from Tiflis and what nice news... !”

“My very dear, beloved sister, I’m very sorry. First of all, let me introduce my close friend Hrant Darbinian to you. I’ve to tell you that it’s my nostalgia and the enchanting, alluring striving to see my dear, precious friends that made me come back to Aygestan.”

While Maro was assailing me with questions about Araksi, Father, my brothers and other friends and acquaintances, her sweet child, whom I had not forgotten knowing that he had to be about two and a half years old, ran up to us and clung to his mother’s skirt crying, “Dear mommy, dear mommy”.

“You haven’t forgotten my child Koryun, have you? You see thanks God, he’s grown up and talks sweetly and nicely.”

“How could I forget him, your really sweet kid? Now he must be two and a half years old. As for talking sweetly, I’ve never doubted that the nightingale’s baby talks as he’s bred. Don’t you have other children besides Koryun?”

“It’d be very nice to have another child, but is it possible to think of it under our conditions when we’re constantly retreating and returning experiencing fear, horror and having gruesome feelings?”

“You’re fully right, dear Maro, but we hope our sufferings have come to an end now. After all, our fortune is obliged to smile on us at least now. We’ve the right to have our piece of land, a small homeland in this world, don’t we? Don’t we, the Armenians, have the right to enjoy our share of a single vivifying ray of this sun, moon, the light of the stars, this beautiful nature and the fascinating twitter of nightingales? How long are the barbaric enemies to deprive us of that indisputable, sacred right to existence? How long are the “civilized” and “believing” peoples of the world to continue burdening their conscience and human feelings with their unfair attitude?”

“God is our only hope,” Maro went on to put an end to the eruption of my emotions. “Indeed, a gigantic mountain in our place would crack to thousands of pieces, unable to endure these infinite horrors and sufferings.”

“By the way, Maro, is your mother alive or...?”

“How could she bear the new ordeal of the deportation after all the sufferings she had seen in her life? Hardly had we reached Igdirdir when my poor mother was infected with dysentery and died a few days later. Alas, how sorry I am! She sacrificed herself for my sake. She was absolutely exhausted toiling hard endlessly and incessantly for the purpose of making me lucky. I was her only comfort and happiness, but it was because of me that she died such a cruel death... ”

“Your precious mother was a rare, noble, good-hearted woman. Maro, you’re truly right to be proud of having had such a modest but unsurpassed mother. I can never forget her self-denying sacrifices. At the very last hour of the retreat when I was still absent from our house, she made us and even begged to take the burro given to her to convey our sick sister-in-law Haykanoush.”

Maro led us to their living-room, that was modestly furnished, but shone with cleanliness. She told us that her husband Grigor Bulgharatsy had returned home after mid-

night the previous day. She apologized to us and went to the other room for a minute to wake up her husband. Coming back she again complained of his hard work and constant weariness as in former times.

In a quarter of an hour, Grigor Bulgharatsy came to us: he was in an exceptionally happy mood and welcomed us very kindly.

"How happy I am to meet my friend of the days of self-defense and my wife's friend of childhood again," he said sincerely.

"I'm so very obliged for your kindly feelings and I'm also glad to introduce to you one of my best friends, Hrant Darbinian."

"I'm very, very happy to meet you. And what about your other friend Aghasi? What became of him? Where did he go? Didn't he want to come back?"

"Mr. Bulgharatsy, I haven't had the luck to meet my dear friend you've mentioned, Khanjian, since the last days of the retreat."

"Well, you're welcome! Let's sit down and have a talk. First of all, I've to say that Vaspurakan is desperate for such hard-working and energetic young men as you. We need great enthusiasm and devotion to settle our problems. The economy of our country is in the same breakdown as the whole country itself. Several institutions established in Tiflis, i.e. the Union of Cities, the Refugee Committee, that of Reconstruction and I don't know what others have promised to help us, that is our peasantry. I'm glad they've already started realizing their promises, and now we need patriotic, zealous, devoted partners and officials. I shouldn't forget to say I'm convinced that the contribution made should be thoroughly selfless: we'll be successful only when we're united, selfless and fair... ."

"Dear Mr. Bulgharatsy, I've told all my friends and relatives about your devotion and self-denial. The Armenian people, in this case, our Vaspurakan Armenians who've gone through much suffering would be very happy if they were lucky enough to have about twenty such patriotic and devoted figures as you. I'm sure you're the Armenian nation's true, dear and self-sacrificing son, devoted to all your compatriots without any exception. I know you show no ideological discrimination; you're seeking for your personal happiness in the Armenian people's happiness."

"I don't consider myself worthy of so much praise," Bulgharatsy answered modestly and went on, "I've always stated on various occasions that the interests of the Armenian nation as a collective entity are higher for me than any party, private, kinship or other interests, whatever name they're given. I'm sure that under the present circumstances, when the grand question of our people's existence is at stake, we, all the Armenians, should unite without any party discrepancies, just as we did in the days of the April Heroic Struggle. We should defend our common national interests, those of the Armenian people's existence and survival."

"Mr. Bulgharatsy," Hrant began, "your ideas are absolutely praiseworthy and we as well as others like us are very happy to have such a patriotic, self-denying and devoted leading figure as you under our current conditions."

We parted with Bulgharatsy under a wonderful impression, and I promised Maro to visit her at least once a week.

TRUE COMPATRIOTS

My friend Hrant did not have the chance to deal with Bulgharatsy directly and get acquainted with his sound, convincing ideology in the days of Vaspurakan's April Self-Defense.

When we went out to the street having left Bulgharatsy, Hrant said to me, "I couldn't ever think that Bulgharatsy might be so simple and modest despite the high reputation and popularity he's gained. His words breathe true patriotism; well, if the spirit of sincere patriotism wasn't so dominating about him he wouldn't be so frank with us. He couldn't expect anything of us, could he?"

"You're fully right, dear Hrant; he's a true Armenian and noble patriot. I don't know his exact birthplace, but judging from his family name, he must be a Bulgarian Armenian. I always forget to ask Maro about it. I'm not so very interested in his nationality, but I don't have the slightest doubt that he's a pure Armenian and flawless patriot.

"Can you imagine that our dear friend Aghasi Khanjian was of the same opinion about Bulgharatsy after the very first meeting with him? Both he and I had many opportunities to meet this humble, indefatigable patriot and listen to his vivifying words breathing great belief in the days of the self-defense."

"Then," Hrant continued, "Janik villagers, whom we came across on our return and with whom we had a talk in the hut, our night shelter, had firm grounds to praise so high this man and Levon Shaghoyan, almost always accompanying him. You certainly remember how much the villagers were exalting these two. I can't forget the words of one of them, 'We've heard about revolutionaries and patriots a lot. We've seen them, but we haven't been able to get to know them well. As for Grigor and Levon, we've seen them and know them properly. We've to say they're true patriots and revolutionaries as their actions speak louder than their words. Their absence from Vaspurakan was but very short time after the first great retreat. Returning almost immediately, they started travelling from region to region, from village to village always trying to encourage the peasants so that they wouldn't despair and leave their soil, houses and hearths. They didn't agree to leave the country to save themselves from the danger of the enemy's constant attack.'"

AT AVETIS TERZIBASHIAN'S

Before noon on the same day, I took Hrant to the City Municipality of Van and its Region almost forcefully. To tell the truth, at first I could not imagine the role and duty that body was to perform, but in a short time it became clear to me that it carried out gigantic work for the reconstruction of the city and its vicinity thanks to hard-working Mayor Avetis Terzibashian²⁷.

Entering the building of the City Municipality, we ascended the second floor: I was very surprised that the building, which was located at the street of our Yeramian School and had been the former center of the Catholic Mission, had housed one of the enemy institutions, thus being spared the burning down at the very last hour.

I introduced myself to the porter: he left the room and returned telling us that the mayor had asked us to wait for several minutes. Fortunately, we did not have to wait

long: Terzibashian, who was a tall and stout man, respectfully showed out his guest seeming a foreigner, then extended his hand to me and said, "I am very glad to see you here, Mr. Sarhadian. I have been waiting for you for a long time."

"I am so very obliged for your kindness. Let me introduce one of my best friends, Hrant Darbinian, to you."

"I am very glad to meet you, please, come in."

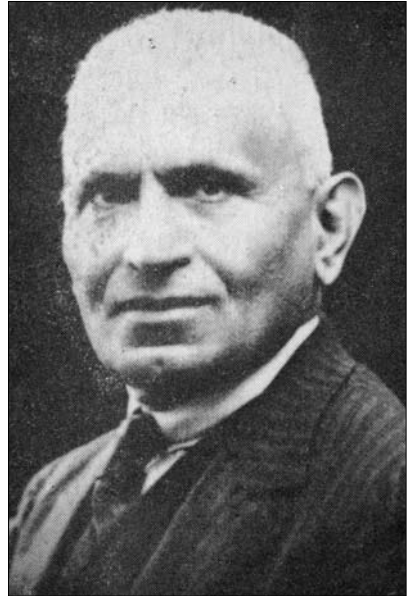
When we had entered the room and taken our seats in the armchairs Terzibashian continued, "Is it a long time since you left Yerevan? What route and vehicle did you take?"

"Can you imagine, Mr. Terzibashian," I replied, "I was able to see Yerevan neither during the retreat nor this time? Yes, so far I have not had the luck of going to Yerevan, but my friend has been there and to Echmiatzin all the time."

"Yes, that is true," Hrant confirmed, "I have seen no other places except Yerevan and Igdir. As for our return, we chose the route Igdir-Berkri-Arjak and had some difficulty: apparently, the way Julfa-Khoy-Saray is more convenient for our immigrating compatriots."

"Yes, it is true: everything necessary for our agriculture is conveyed via the road Khoy-Saray. Our big organizations involved in the reconstruction of the country buy some of the most important things, i.e. wooden ploughs, ploughshares, sickles and metallic items in Tiflis and the adjacent regions. Others, such as draft oxen, dairy cattle, donkeys, horses and finally, corn and food, especially wheat and barley seeds are purchased in Khoy and its regions. All these are conveyed on draft oxen and vans thus providing great chances for the immigrants."

Terzibashian paused and I noticed tangible anxiety and mental turmoil on his face. After a short time, he continued, "Both the Russian Government and the economic, construction and agricultural organizations as well as the Refugee Committee are desirous to foster Vaspurakan's reconstruction. Regretfully, however, there seems to be no agreement and cooperation in all these attempts of aid so that the re-building of our homeland suffers and goes on slowly. I'm sorry, I am much older than you: hot temper and unrestraint are typical of the youth. People like us should be more patient and reserved



Avetis Terzibashian

²⁷ **Avetis Terzibashian** (1873 Van to 1943 Paris), the alumnus of Van's Jesuan and Yeramian Schools, was a playwright, public figure and one of the members of the Ramkavar Azatakan Party. One of his plays entitled "The Truth" was staged in Van in 1900. After the declaration of the Ottoman Constitution in 1908, Avetis was elected Van's mayor. During the forced deportation of 1915, he went to Caucasia, then returned to his birthplace and according to S. Sarhadian, resumed the mayoralty of Van City. Early in 1921, Terzibashian participated in the negotiations of the Ramkavar and Azatakan Parties (united as Hnchakian) held in Constantinople, Turkey. In 1924 to 1926 he worked as the editor of the "Apaga" (the Armenian equivalent for 'future') newspaper, Paris, France. He also published the memoirs dedicated to Catholicos Mkrtych Khrimian ("The Eagle in Its Nest", 1938), Poghos Nubar Pasha ("Nupar", 1939) and Commander Andranik Ozanian ("Andranik", 1942), as well as a collection of stories entitled "Athos' One Hundred and One Stories" (1945) and the novel called "Two years in Addis Abeba".

in political issues. What can I do? It is a matter of nature and character. To my mind, any person committed to fulfilling some public, collective and national work, should do it flawlessly. If he is not able to do it he does not have any right to assume it. The person severely abusing the others' trust and expectations is absolutely merciless. Well, we shall live and see: the human being always lives inspiring himself with bright hopes. If our fatherland and, particularly Vaspurakan, which is its beating heart, are lucky enough, this cursed war will soon end and our nation's centuries-old sweet wish to have their own free motherland will come true."

Our conversation lasted for quite a long time and we parted with Avetis Terzibashian, Vaspurakan's active mayor at the second, fervent stage of the Region's autonomy, our spirits having somewhat sunk.

Addressing me at the moment of our parting, he said, "Come to me as early as possible tomorrow morning and we shall decide upon your position."

I went to Terzibashian's Office at half past nine the following morning. Although he looked extremely tired, he received me respectfully, with a smiling face.

"Mr. Sarhadian," he began, "it is about two months since we started negotiations with Mr. Kosti Hambardzumian²⁸ over Vaspurakan's Provisional Autonomous Administration staff. We, the Armenians, are surprisingly selfish. We proved able to closely unite during the self-defense of Aygestan, Kaghakamej, Hayots-Dzor, Shatak and Timar: however, now we find it difficult to get along and establish some Provisional Government or better to say, a superintending body of our affairs under the current conditions when we have not got rid of the enemy's claws yet, when their barbaric sword is hanging over us and we have thousands of problems and wounds to attend to and heal."

"I'm very sorry, Mr. Terzibashian, but I think there are very modest, yielding and true patriots among Hambardzumian's friends. I personally know Bulgharatsy and Shaghoyan, who rendered invaluable services and manifested great devotion during Vaspurakan's Heroic Struggle. Are they not instrumental at present or have they become conceited and uncomplying?"

"I greatly believe in and respect the two people you have mentioned. Mr. Hambardzumian and I are the plenipotentiary representatives of respectively the Union of Cities and the General Benevolent Union. Our present conditions are utterly intricate and complicated, while the political situation is very unstable. The head of this

²⁸ **Kosti Hambardzumian**, born in Shushi (nowadays Republic of Nagorno Karabakh) in 1882, studied agriculture in Belgium and performed the assignments of his party, the Hay Heghapokhakan Dashnaksutyun, in Bulgaria, Izmir, Western Armenia, as well as Salmast and Khoy, Persian Armenia (nowadays Iran). Before the outbreak of World War I, he occupied the post of Director General of the schools in Kapan District, Kharberd District, Western Armenia. In 1915 Kosti joined the Araratian army unit and went to Van, where he made a great contribution to the resettlement of the refugees, later succeeding Aram Manukian in the position of the head of the Provisional Administrative Body of autonomous Vaspurakan. During Van's second withdrawal (1918), he was among tens of thousands of deportees who found refuge in Persia. At Sayin Kala, however, one of the agents of the Turkish counterespionage, who was disguised as an Englishman, managed to kill 36-year Kosti.



Kosti Hambarzumian (Ukhtavor)

Provisional Superintending Body is to be a great, far-sighted politician so that another storm will not break out over our immigrating people.”

“Mr. Terzibashian, I am still very young and cannot boast any experience in political affairs. It would be insolent of me to express any opinion in this regard; nevertheless, I think we should seek for a way of mutual concessions trying to alleviate the tension, if any, with all possible means, taking into account the present unstable political situation - as you have just said. Otherwise, our handful of tortured immigrants who are totally exhausted are sure to be finally exterminated. In case of such a calamity, Vaspurakan will be completely lost for all the Armenians.”

Terzibashian and I had a long conversation over my work and duties in the City Municipality. He suggested that I assume the post of translator/interpreter and secretary promising to give me a satisfactory salary within his power. I asked him for a couple of days to think over that and make a decision.

I was under a depressing impression upon leaving the City Municipality: what glittering hopes and enthusiastic aspirations had made me return to my homeland! I had gone there with a fervent desire to rise from the level of the ordinary mortal and reconstruct my fatherland...

Alas, how profoundly I regretted... Undesirable as it was, my infinite belief and confidence in the restoration of my motherland had been shaken. Our national unity was being extirpated with the lethal poison of envy and hatred. Terzibashian’s words had shed light on the current unenviable situation: Hambarzumian and he had entered into a vague but most dangerous internal conflict over leadership in Vaspurakan’s superintending body.

ATTEMPTS OF RECONSTRUCTION

In those days, comparatively few of our compatriots had returned to Aygestan and Kaghakamej, but the number of the immigrants indicated that day by day more and more people re-settled in Vaspurakan’s north-eastern districts and villages. The overwhelming majority of those coming back via Khoy took up residence in Sara, Arjak and the adjacent villages.

The number of those returning to Hayots-Dzor, Shatakh, Vostan, Artamet and the nearby regions was very few, too: on the whole, by the spring of 1917 about 20,000 to 25,000 Armenians had immigrated into Van-Vaspurakan.

The Provisional Administrative Body of Autonomous Vaspurakan was established under Kosti Hambarzumian’s leadership. At first its staff comprised seven people, but in some two or three months their number grew to ten, as far as I remember. Grigor

Bulgharatsy, Dr. Ter-Tovmassian and Armenak Maksapetian had been appointed Supervisors of respectively Military, Public Health Care and Agricultural Affairs.

In those times the Administrative Body was liable to the superintendence of the two plenipotentiary representatives of the Dashnaktsutyun and Ramkavar Parties functioning in Van: they participated in the assemblies of the body helping it with their advice and instructions.

The center of the Provisional Autonomous Body was in the vicinity of a cool spring, in the Catholic Syrians' building, Pokr Kyandrchi Avenue.

The institutions of Reconstruction, Agriculture, Public Health Care, Education, etc. were located in the central and south-western parts of Aygestan.

Reconstruction gradually assumed new course and intensity in Van. The hopes for the future success and happiness had imbued the people's hearts with belief and rays of joy.

Our magnificent, evergreen Aygestan had lost its beauty and charm as a result of the two-year dereliction. Some of the resonant springs had lost almost half of their waters, the others were on the verge of absolutely drying up, while the abundant waters of the river Semiramis seemed to have grown insulted and unwilling to reach Aygestan. The City Municipality found it primary to save Aygestan from the wide-spread lack of water, for which purpose a great number of digging workers were employed: it was necessary to purify the underground spring ways of the soil, mud and the rotten and mossed verdure as soon as possible.

The Administrative Body issued a special order permitting the citizens and peasantry returning to Aygestan and its vicinity to till the numerous abandoned gardens and take all the harvest received from them. Conditional terms had been set for that so as to avoid any future misunderstanding and unpleasant incidents in case the true landowners came back.

Agreements on the Van Sea were signed with several contractors, who intended to go into salt and niter business as well as fishing and shipbuilding. The number of various undertakings increased day by day.

The large building of the German consulate was reconstructed and turned into a central hospital. The craftsmen and shopkeepers had already opened their shops and started working.

Spring had set in and nature was reawakening, while the immigrants had dedicated themselves to energetic creative work: the people harnessed to the reconstruction of their birthplace did their utmost to be instrumental in it. The citizens, villagers, public figures and officials, in a word, everybody was sincerely eager to reconstruct and revive their beloved Vaspurakan and Aygestan, that had been reduced to ruins.

HESITATION AND HEART-RENDING SUFFERING

I received three job proposals from different places, i.e. the post of the translator/interpreter and secretary in the City Municipality, that of the agricultural controller on the route Van-Alyur and the supervision of the ammunition depot.

It was five days since I returned to Van and I went to see Maro and Grigor for the third time. The affection I had felt for Maro since my childhood had made me attached to Mr. Bulgharatsy as well and both of them received me cordially in their family, always showing an attentive and loving attitude towards me. Bulgharatsy had asked me on my previous visit, “Sirak, *oghul*, what do you think about your job? Where’d you like to work?”

“Mr. Grigor...”

He interrupted me saying, “Oghul, forget that ‘mister’ and I don’t know what else. Call me Grigor for short just as I call you by your name.”

“If you don’t allow me to address you as mister I’ll call you comrade if you agree.”

“All right.”

“Comrade Grigor, you’ve already offered me the post of the head of the ammunition depot. Thank you very much for your confidence in me, but that work’s boring and monotonous.”

“Perhaps, it’s so, but that work is very important for our reviving economy as well as the armed forces and military staff. At present the food kept in our military depots amounts to several millions. It’s impossible to charge just any person with that great fortune which is our only hope and support for the rainy days. If you agree to commit yourself to it you’ll render a great service to your homeland. I’d like you to give it some serious thought before you refuse it for you to appreciate its usefulness and importance.

“Now that post’s occupied by a young man, Artavazd, our famous poet Tumanian’s son, but I’m sorry to say it’s not his cup of tea. Indeed, he’s a good, reliable fellow, but he doesn’t want to realize the importance and responsibility of his work. He’s often absent for a long time without any serious reasons. They say he spends his time with a young nurse. It’s an unforgivable crime to sacrifice your work for the sake of some flirting and pastime. Everything should be done at its appropriate time. It’s a great, impermissible sin to enjoy oneself at the expense of work.”

“And what if I’m carried away with that crime, too,” I answered joking. “What’ll you say?”

“I’ve known you since our self-defense. I don’t believe you’re as light-headed as him. Otherwise, we’ll think about it later. Anyway, I’d like you to assume that post at least temporarily.”

“Very good, let me think over it for a couple of days and make a decision,” I said to Grigor.

DESPONDENCY

I was always very busy before Vaspurakan’s self-defense, during it and afterwards. Having a circle of close friends sharing my mode of thinking, I lived and worked in encouraging and reassuring conditions so that I never knew what unemployment and mental idleness were.

After my return, I found all the former conditions and surroundings completely vanished: only Maro and Hrant had remained out of my former friends and relatives, which put me in a mental and spiritual void surrounded by ramparts reminding of a precipice.

I went to see the state of Sahak Agha’s house two days ago. Suddenly an unspeak-

able shudder penetrated all my body: his house, the building of the former Russian consulate, had gone up in smoke being reduced to ruins through special care. The Turks seemed to have given full vent to their hatred by violently wreaking vengeance on the inanimate, unprotected building.

Maro turned out unable to give me any information about Sahak, his family and, particularly his daughter Anoush. That tragic course of events with their unknown outcome left heavy imprint upon my mental state and magnificent Aygestan, my beloved birthplace, became alien and unpleasant for me.

What great grief! What bitter frustration and what endless void...!

There seemed to be absolutely no means to console, encourage and reassure me and my heart was weeping silently but bitterly... All the possible hopes of finding my unmatched Anoush had been totally crushed... That mental vacuum hindered my mind from functioning properly: I wanted to select some work and made a decision, but I immediately repented it and could not make any conclusion. Blaming myself for my irresolution and unstable will power I was thinking of turning to my two friends for help and explaining to them my mental turmoil, but the feeling of strange self-esteem and inexplicable pride did not allow me to do so.

Eight days had passed since my return and I continued living with Hrant in their house. He nobly forbade me to share our everyday expenses without ever making me feel that I had no money: I had told him that I had left my meager savings, the result of my work, to my sister and sick brother upon leaving Tiflis and Gyoolizard.

One day seeing me in an extremely sad and depressed mood, he said to me, "Sirak, my dear friend, you've no right to hide anything from me. I see something's troubling you very much as if some secret's gnawing at your heart. You're suffering mentally, while your usual cheerfulness and enthusiasm are disappearing day by day. You've become sad and lost in thoughts. Please, don't be confused and tell me what's making you suffer so much; you're talking to your best friend."

"Hrant, you're fully right. I'm not the person I used to be. All my essence has been filled with an infinite sadness that seems to have created an empty, bitter precipice in my heart. My heart and will power have entered into a stormy struggle: I'm eager to heal the deep wound of my heart through my will power, but unfortunately, so far I haven't been able to.

"Such a close friend as you should know about the pain rending my heart. My heart's been suffering from incurable grief since our first retreat. I'm blaming myself for having allowed the loss of a wonderful girl, my sweetheart, because of my carelessness. Both my mind and conscience are constantly reproaching me for that loss. Yes, I've returned to my homeland under the influence of my nostalgia, but besides that, there was also another inseparable duty for me.

"After all my endless and futile search, I cherished a last glitter of hope to find Anoush's father Sahak Agha, who had stayed in Van hiding himself somewhere. If he was alive he might perhaps give me some information about his daughter, but alas, neither he nor any trace of his house can be found now. The barbaric enemies have levelled his house with the ground as that building was once rented by the Russian consulate."

“Now I fully understand you,” Hrant said. “Perhaps, I can find some remedy. Indeed, I don’t mean I can miraculously find Anoush, your lost sweetheart whom I knew, too, but we should somehow alleviate your pain.

“It’s Sunday the day after tomorrow; let’s go to Varag Monastery and its cool mountains for a couple of days. The change of air and walk in the mountains can be very useful first of all for you and for me as well.”

WITH PETROS IN VARAG

Hrant kept his promise and almost made me go to Varag with him very early on Sunday morning. We came across several other pilgrims on our way there and reached the slopes of Varag when Aygestan’s golden sun had already begun spreading its bright, glittering rays around.

Here was Varag Monastery. Towering on the slope of mysterious Mount Varag like a proud eagle as ever, it had retained its sacred spirit and singularity for us, the pilgrims. However, the Monastery was in a semi-ruined state and hardly had a few rooms survived out of the building surrounding it.

Petros Agha, Varag’s invincible guard, hurried to meet us: imbued with sadness and despair as he was, he tried to hide and stifle those feelings meeting us and the others kindly, with a smiling face just as he had done throughout half a century.

He answered our greetings with a smile, “You’re welcome! I’m in heaven to meet the pilgrims, my compatriots, whose visits console my grief-stricken heart, after the three subsequent retreats.”

“We’re even happier to again meet such an indefatigable and invincible supervisor as you,” Hrant answered. “But for you, nobody would agree to come back here and resume this difficult and dangerous work demanding unspeakable efforts.”

“You’re right, mister,” Petros Agha replied, “the enemies caused all possible damage to the Monastery, while nature and the severe winters came to add to the demolition of this sanctuary adored by all of us.

“My feet could hardly support me during the retreats; they had no desire to drag my body. During the first two withdrawals, I mixed with the rows of the deportees like a voluntary hostage, but then I came back without having reached Igdir. I didn’t want to take part in the other retreat organized four months ago and decided to stay here and hide myself in the mountains and clefts of this sanctuary. I said to myself, ‘It’s all the same; I won’t be able to live without this sacred, adorable Monastery. Let me die or be killed in this impregnable Monastery handed down to me by my unmatched spiritual father Khrimian Hayrik or in one of the fissures of its proud mountains instead of suffering to death on the deportation road.’ Now I’m about seventy; perhaps, I’ll live for several more years. I don’t have any children or a family and this Monastery’s my only fortune and treasure, my pride and happiness. I was a fifteen-year-old fellow when I came here and I’ve dedicated all my life to this glorious fort since then. I was educated and brought up by Khrimian Hayrik, our and, particularly my father, who filled us with the spirit of patriotism. My life’s absolutely dark and senseless without Varag*. Without ever belonging to any party I’ve always been the humble, loyal servant of this sacred



Mr. Petros, the guard of Varag Monastery

Monastery, the Armenian people's pride and subject of worship, and I'll try to continue so as long as I'm alive."

Inviting us to his room to have some rest, Petros Agha treated us to fresh, warm milk and newly-baked *gata*. Surprised that the former custom had apparently been preserved there, I could not help asking, "Petros Agha, how do you manage to retain the former traditions? How do you procure the fresh milk and *gata*?"

"Hey, hey! As long as your old man Petros is alive he'll do his best to keep the light burning in this beloved sanctuary adored by everybody. Coming back after the second retreat, I went to the "...Charity...", explained to them the inconsolable state of the Monastery and said to them, 'I beg you not to refuse me if you don't want to bury me alive. Please, don't leave our Hayrik's sacred home derelict, give me two cows and two sheep. I'll find some of our former ploughmen and try to keep Lousa-

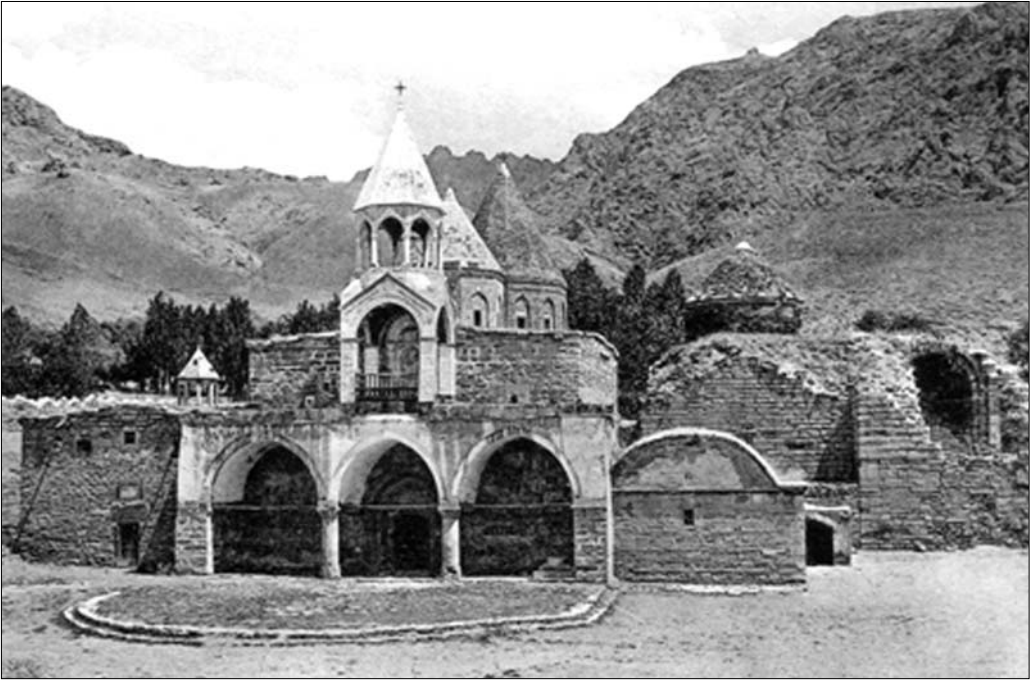
vorich's** light burning.'

"I'm very thankful to them; they didn't refuse me and gave me what I had asked them for. Now I do all my work with the help of two ploughmen and pay their meager salaries on account of the Monastery's petty income. Our compatriots come on pilgrimage to their beloved sanctuary quite often - just like you. You can't imagine what great joy it is for me to treat them to a piece of bread and a cup of milk."

Petros lost the thread of his conversation and his eyes were filled with tears, a few of which flowed down his withered cheeks. He continued with a heart-rending sigh, "Truly, this Monastery's been an impregnable fort, where the most valorous and courageous was our Hayrik. Both when he was here and afterwards, the lion-hearted heroes struggling for their homeland's liberation came here to find shelter and rest in his land. I've spared nothing for the hospitality and nice entertainment of the brave sons of our fatherland; that's why, the Turkish gendarmes often gave me a severe beating so that once I hardly had a narrow escape from death. They wanted to kill me, but our all-gracious God hurried to send the guardian angel of this sanctuary to my rescue. While they were taking me somewhere to kill me, the sky suddenly grew dark and the lightning broke out with thunder. It began raining cats and dogs, the heavy wind started howling so that all the mountains roared with some formidable roar. The gendarmes were panic-

* Petros Agha righteously predicted that his life would become dark and gloomy once Varag Monastery was seized from him. After Van's last retreat in 1918, he wandered about here and there like a madman for about four to five years and finally, yielded up to despair consigning himself to the fierce waves of the Mediterranean Sea and committing suicide.

** Petros means Gregory the Enlightener.



Varag Monastery (photo 1913, by W. Bachmann)

stricken while their infuriated leader grumbled swearing at me, ‘This damned infidel’s God is displeased, let him clear out.’ ”

Petros Agha went on, “It was a miracle which I can’t forget as long as I’m alive. I know, I’m sure it was the grace and power of the guardian angle of this sanctuary that saved its devoted servant.”

“Petros Agha,” I asked again, “I know you were inseparable from Khrimian Hayrik being his right-hand man and even close friend when he lived in this Monastery. There’s something I wonder about: they say the heroic revolt of Moosh and Taron as well as their valorous resistance against the countless Turkish troops were the result of Hayrik’s order and encouragement. What can you say about that?”

“My son, it isn’t accidental that Khrimian’s called “The Armenians’ Father”*, for he’s really been the Armenian nation’s father. His compassionate heart was filled with love and anguish for his motherland and outraged people. He constantly suffered from the Armenians’ pain and sorrows; every news of abuse, robbery and violence made his paternal eyes shed bitter tears. On the other hand, every heroic uprising of the Armenian nation and our valorous sons imbued his heart with pride and happiness. Then, can it be surprising that he encouraged Taron’s heroic resistance? The robberies and all kinds of outrages perpetrated by the Turks and Kurds didn’t know any boundaries and the suffering people could no more endure them. Every day we received news of violence and kidnapping, which rent the great patriot’s heart. If you want to live you’ve to resist and struggle. The Armenians have no other remedy but resist, struggle and take revenge on the barbarians wishing to exterminate them.”

* ‘Hayrik’ is the Armenian equivalent for ‘Father’.

We stayed in Varag for three days. Hrant kept making me climb the mountains with him, reach their summits and watch Aygestan enjoying its natural beauties. He would often repeat, "Our magnificent Aygestan has two sanctuaries which are its glory, pride and beauty of beauties: one of them is Varag with its proud, glorious mountains and the other is Aghtamar with the sky-blue glittering waters surrounding it."

Leaving the little amount of cigarettes, tea and sugar we had taken with us to Petros Agha, who had shown us the kindest hospitality, and thanking him cordially for his extreme sincerity, we returned to Van. Hrant proved absolutely right: my spirits had risen and I was quite refreshed. My mind had acquired peace and I felt a disposition to work.

AGAIN AT MARO'S

I felt a tangible change about me after my return from Varag to Van: having almost overcome my melancholy and perplexity I went to see Maro and Grigor. I had decided to visit them at dinner time since she had asked me for several times to share that meal with them at least once a week.

My visit made Maro very happy: putting naughty and lively Koryun into my arms, she hurried to phone her husband to tell him about me and ask him not to be very late for dinner. Jumping for joy like a small child, she came back to me and resumed her innocent inquiries, "Please, my dear brother- I'm your own sister, aren't I? - tell me what's happened. You've completely changed and I think something's troubling you. Are you unwell or is there anything making you suffer so much?"

"Maro, my dear, beloved Maro, nobody's completely happy. Anyone can be in trouble and even have some sorrows. I'm mostly dissatisfied because now I'm missing my numerous friends, close people, my sister, father, in a word, the lively, vital atmosphere and circle of friends, who were my source of delight and enthusiasm before our disastrous retreat, that robbed us of everything. I've seen nobody except you and my friend Hrant ever since I returned. I feel absolutely lonely, devoid of and indifferent to everything as I can't find the former conditions and surroundings that encouraged me. I feel I've appeared in an alien, tiresome vacuum and idleness. I could never suppose I might find myself in such a situation... You can't imagine, dear Maro, how dreadful and intolerable mental and spiritual void is... ."

"My brother Sirak, if I'm not mistaken the situation you've just described is typical of people suffering from some blow in a love affair. Are you suffering from your lost love?"

After a minute of a silent pause, she continued bitterly, "Oh, yes, I'm so very sad! My endless care and attention towards my child and husband have made me alien and indifferent to my close people and friends so that I feel no interest in them. Now I understand your grief and suffering very well: perhaps, you've lost your sweetheart Anoush whom I once unjustly blamed... ."

"For what?" I immediately interrupted Maro.

"I'm sorry, perhaps, I didn't express myself correctly. I wanted to say that you had forgotten me -your sister as you yourself always say - for months because of her."

"You're mistaken, my noble Maro, absolutely mistaken. It wasn't because of her that I had forgotten you: no, it was my own fault due to my carelessness. I had forgotten both

you and her being involved in general public, party and other activities. The only difference is that you had somebody to protect and support you and save you from danger and death, while Anoush was absolutely deprived of anybody to defend her against that formidable loss that has remained vague to me up till now. I was to be her patron and saviour, but unfortunately, I did nothing; that's why, I'm constantly suffering from the pangs of conscience and find nothing to somehow justify me. I went to look for her only at the very last moment of the retreat, but I wasn't able to find her. I lost her and my heart's rent because of that dear, irreplaceable loss."

"Brother, you say you lost her, but did you make any attempts to find her again? Didn't you manage to find trace of her in Igdirdir, Echmiatzin, Yerevan, Gharakilisa and finally, Tiflis, in all the places where our compatriots had settled down? Was it impossible to get any information about her with the help of our and their friends and acquaintances?"

"No, no, dear Maro, I did my best to make inquiries, search for her and even turned to several of my friends and relatives for help. I had a few announcements issued in two Armenian papers published in Tiflis and being in great demand, but in vain. All my efforts were futile."

Maro's ever smiling face grew dark. That girl, who had been a precious, unmatched sister for me in my childhood and had always protected me like a guardian angel, sighed a deep sigh and turned pale with profound grief. Hugging me like an affectionate mother she caressed my hair and said in her enchanting voice, "Don't despair, my sweet, precious brother, you shouldn't do so. It's completely useless to struggle against destiny. Try to forget that sorrow rending your noble heart."

After having left Maro's place, I repeated her consoling, encouraging words for many times, "You shouldn't do so, it's completely useless to struggle against destiny." If those words had been uttered by another person they might perhaps have no influence on me: however, those were Maro's words and I again felt their surprising power after so many years.

Maro had meant so very much for me since my childhood: strange as it may sound, I enjoyed obeying her orders, instructions and even wishes. I was sure she was my closest, benevolent friend; I often even supposed she had been predestined to substitute for my loving mother. Sometimes I thought she might have been sent by the soul of my prematurely dead, unfortunate mother so that she would protect and guard me...

"You shouldn't do so." Maro's words rang in my ears endlessly and that was but strange: at my age her words had still preserved their fascinating, enchanting and bewitching meaning for me. I again felt I was perforce subjected to her words and influence without daring to cast doubt on her affection, sincerity and benevolence. Yes, she was again right saying, "You shouldn't do so." Having hardly entered upon adolescence I had no right to yield up and suffer from the very first blow inflicted by fortune. I had to resist in my life struggle and inspire myself with strength and vitality in order not to be crushed.

While having dinner at Maro's, I had a heart-to-heart talk with Bulgharatsy. I was particularly interested in his opinion regarding the Armenian territories liberated by the Armenian volunteer regiments of the Russian army. Bulgharatsy, who had rather a negative estimate of the current situation, said the following, "Unfortunately, I can't hide my suspicions of the sincerity and disinterestedness of the present-day Russian state policy. Kerenski's Government's policy on the Armenians seems to be the continuation of the former Tsarist authorities'. It's very surprising that the present-day government lavishes promises on us following the former authorities, while the reality reveals quite the opposite.

"Two years ago, in the critical days of Vaspurakan's April Heroic Struggle, the Russian army could have easily crushed Khalil Pasha's Turkish troops thanks to the exceptional valour of the Cossack cavalry. However, despite our courageous Andranik's requests and Armenian Commander Nazarbekian's mediation, they didn't want or better to say, had no instructions to advance beyond the line of Julfa-Khoy-Salmast to come to the rescue of Vaspurakan Armenians, heroically resisting the horror of death every minute and living in a formidable crisis. At last they came for which we're so very obliged to them. Thanks to the selfless aid of our volunteer regiments they rid us of our sanguineous enemies' claws, but it's a great pity that liberation lasted so short. The Russian Tsarist Government didn't seem pleased with our liberation and regretted having done so."

"So, do you think the Russian army's retreat was deliberate and groundless...?" I interrupted Grigor impatiently.

"There can be no doubts about it. In those days the Turks were horror-stricken and didn't dare to return to their lands left by the Russians. They confined themselves to only committing every kind of outrages on those territories. They gave the Kurds, Circassians and the local bashi-bazouks numerous weapons presented by the Germans encouraging and inciting them to rob the helpless Armenians and kidnap their wives and daughters.

"The situation was as clear to me as day: that's why, during the second and third retreats, Levon and I tried to keep the majority of the deportees in Berkri's valleys and Abagha's plains. That story of frauds couldn't last long. The final retreat wasn't of vital necessity at all: to cut it short, there've never existed any Turkish forces or organizations compelling the Russian army to retreat. All the retreats were merely the result of fraud and political maneuvers."

Our conversation lasted quite long. I did not know what education Bulgharatsy had received; anyway, he was a far-sighted, experienced military figure and a skilled politician.

Before our parting, he exerted a kind of moral pressure upon me so that I would promise to assume the supervision of the Central Military Depot forming part of his Military Administration.

"The City Municipality and Agricultural Department can find other employees. Our work is much more responsible," he stated, summing up our talk.

A WISTFUL PARTING

I continued living in Hrant's house. My friend provided me with irreplaceable support during all my struggle to alleviate the mental frustration and despondency I had been suffering since my return. Blaming me for my depression he kept imparting will power, strength and energy to me repeating Maro's words by some strange coincidence. He would often say, "Sirak, such weak will and resignation don't suit you at all. Remember how enthusiastic you were two years ago, when you had a leading position. Remember the inspiring and encouraging speech you made in Echmiatzin two weeks ago. If you wanted to be only an ordinary mortal devoid of any will power, why did you come back to Van from Tiflis? Wasn't it you who insisted that 'by dedicating myself to my homeland's reconstruction I have a fervent desire to rise higher by the route of its prosperity and development...' ? A young man filled with such aspirations has no right to yield up to despair."

"Hrant, my dear, close friend, I needn't say in what discouraging conditions I am; you're well-aware of that. First of all, now I'm absolutely deprived of my former thirty friends. Only you are with me now, and, unfortunately, you've decided to leave me soon. Then ... The last glimmer of my hope and happiness has faded away."

My friend fully put himself in my shoes and sympathized with me: a cloud of sadness suddenly veiled his cheerful and ever bright look. He wanted to speak out and console me, but it was difficult for him. Finally he said, "If you suppose you can't overcome your despondency, I find it expedient for you to return to Yerevan with me. You'll stay with us for a couple of days and then go to your family members either to Gharakilisa or Tiflis."

Hrant was impatiently waiting for my answer. At last I said, "Perhaps, your suggestion is suitable for acquiring temporary mental peace, but by doing so I'll consider myself humiliated, like a deserter refusing to fulfill his duty and running away because of his weakness. No, Hrant, I can't behave so. I'll first of all humiliate myself.

"I'd better crush my heart together with the objects of its love and affection rather than become a deserter deprived of homeland."

Hrant's eyes began shining with joy and delight: being my close friend, he did not have the slightest desire to witness my resignation. He said the following in a tone of encouragement, "I knew, I was sure you wouldn't abandon your beloved native land and hearth so easily. I'm also convinced your enthusiastic devotion to your work will help you alleviate and perhaps finally overcome your mental pain.

"As for me, you know my case's quite different. Father's already grown old and I'm Mother and my sister's only hope and support. The outcome of the war together with its consequences and future circumstances is rather vague to us. Will we be allowed to live in our native hearths or will we again be persecuted under the threat of violent outrages and slaughter, being driven away from our forefathers' land. In any case, this disastrous, formidable war's still going on and every day, every hour we're likely to be subjected to still new retreats fraught with gruesome danger.

"Besides, there also exists another extremely painful possibility. I think you haven't forgotten the incidental revelation of the Tsarist Government's fraudulent policy. Yes, the settlement of the Russian Cossacks in Alashkert, Sarighamish, Abagha and even

Kars was but premeditated. At present painful rumors have spread that Kerenski's new Government has adopted the same policy. These authorities, who came to power only yesterday, have promised the Cossacks large provincial territories from the Armenian lands and those conquered from the Turks in order to please them."

"Well, I've no intention to contradict your mode of thinking," I answered my friend, "Unfortunately, your thoughts and suppositions may be true. Then why did you come back here? Did you think otherwise before that?"

"Your question's quite natural. A greenhorn like me can't be truly realistic and farsighted. Well, I think under the present circumstances even the politicians far more experienced than me can't determine the future and, especially the possible course of our people's fate and destiny. The only thing I can say is that now I realize the situation better than when in Yerevan, a long way from Vaspurakan."

"I'm sorry, my dear friend, it's hard for me to understand you. These two years have completely changed you. Your way of thinking and horizons have broadened. Please, don't complain and don't think I'm praising or joking with you. I've always been sincere and respectful to you. As far as I could conclude from your words, you're very doubtful and pessimistic about our Vaspurakan's future safety. Isn't my conclusion right?"

"Unfortunately, it's so," Hrant replied.

Hrant had already made up his mind to go back to Yerevan. He told me he had managed to sell a great amount of wool and silk they had hidden in their house in the days of the self-defense to a merchant from Kaghakamej at a good price, as he himself thought. He was very glad; that money could help his father start new business in Yerevan and secure their family's welfare. He gave me an exceptional present by making me accept some cloth, for which I was very thankful to him.

Hrant's decision to leave came to add to my depression: my only friend was to depart soon. A cruel, wistful parting... I was horrified at the thought of remaining all alone.

Fortunately, in those days I received a letter from Father telling me about his coming arrival. My compatriots who had resettled in Aygestan's St. Hakob and Hankusner Quarters wished to have a church and priest of their own. They persuaded me to write Father about it inviting him to come back.

I was very surprised at Father's firm consent, which followed my letter immediately. He had experienced unspeakable sufferings during the first retreat and had had only a miraculous escape from the clutches of death. Had he forgotten all that so soon? No, he could not have forgotten the dreadful ordeal of that accursed road to Golgotha. I knew he was highly appreciated and respected in Gyoolizard Village, Gharakilisa, where he lived a peaceful, tranquil life. Then what had made him give his consent so hastily? What could have been the true reason, but for his nostalgia, his infinite, burning and heart-rending anguish for his native land and hearth, our Aygestan's trees, flowers and resonant springs with their brilliant waters...?

A PERIOD OF REVIVAL AND RECONSTRUCTION

April 1917. In those days exactly two years ago Vaspurakan people were struggling a heroic, unmatched struggle of life and death against the ruthless enemies wishing to usurp their sacred native soil and exterminate them altogether. Thanks to their valorous, lion-hearted sons' voluntary, heroic sacrifice the Armenians worked a true miracle saving thousands of their compatriots' lives.

The tsarist regime was overthrown being replaced by Kerenski's Government, which established a separate commissariat for the occupied lands in Turkish Armenia. That body was headed by Commander Avetianov, whose assistant for the Civil Affairs was Armenian Doctor Zavrian.

The rough calculations made in May 1917 revealed that 25,000 Armenians had immigrated into Vaspurakan by then.

The Armenian General Benevolent Union convened a meeting in its center in Khach Poghots, Aygestan. It was attended by the representatives of the Armenian companies and political, non-governmental and cultural organizations functioning in Van. The participants made nice, encouraging speeches with detailed explanations of the hopeful plans of Van's revival and reconstruction. The assembly approved Van's Provisional Supervising Body comprising the party representatives. In the end other speeches were made and many reassuring promises of free, happy and independent life were given.

Life tended to resume its natural course. People were in great fuss everywhere: the shopkeepers, craftsmen, big and petty merchants, cafes and casinos had embarked upon active work. The destroyed and burnt houses were being repaired. The gardens, Aygestan's pride and glory, were re-cultivated and covered with foliage. Work in the hospitals, clinics and health care posts located on the roads was gradually arranged. Library-reading-halls were established, with about twenty secondary schools having reopened their doors. The underground and overground spring ways were being purified: in a word, Aygestan was striving hard to regain its former charm and magnificence.

Yerevan Consistory and the Armenian institutions provided our immigrating compatriots with certificates to facilitate their return. Food stations and military guardhouses were founded in Gyolu, Janik, Berkri, Souk-Su and Safali Villages on the route of Igdir-Van and in Arjak, Sara, Kotol and Khoy on the road of Khoy-Van to secure the immigrants' food, health care and safety. They were provided with shelter and food, whose amount was generally determined per capita. The immigrants should thank their lucky stars, for in those dangerous days of the war all the guardhouses and food stations kept in touch with Van's Administrative Center by telephone.

Every possible endeavor was made to encourage the peasantry: the General Benevolent Union and the Union of Cities conveyed the tools necessary for them from Tiflis. The draft animals and dairy cattle as well as wheat and barley seeds were continually transported from Khoy. The fields sown in the autumn and, especially spring were gradually covered with verdure, promising to yield rich harvest. The villagers were delighted and enthusiastic about all that, witnessing the fertility of their fields after so many days of bitter famine and sufferings.

No efforts were spared to make the peasantry cling to their land and hearths: carpenters, blacksmiths, nurses and even teachers were sent to all the village centers.

The Armenian organizations' aid did not leave out the Assyrian and Yezidi minorities always living side by side with the Armenians and sharing their fate.

Unfortunately, the mountainous Kurdish tribes who had always been incited by our centuries-old enemy somewhat avoided dealing with us and did not show the slightest desire to live in fraternal peace with us. We even made attempts to establish friendly relations with them, but unfortunately, we did not get the results we had been expecting. The Kurds, whose main dwelling place was the mountain range stretching on Persia's borderline, had almost ringed our Vaspurakan, living in Moks, Shatak, Gyavash, Khoshab as well as at the foot of Mount Sipan and in Zilan gorges.

During the last retreat in March 1918, Smko, who lived in that very mountain chain, attacked our wretched deportees brutally slaughtering hundreds of them.

FATHER'S RETURN

My dear friend Hrant went back to his family in Yerevan in late April. Our separation was heart-rending: we were able to part with each other only after many hugs and kisses, our eyes full of tears. I gave him three letters written to my sister, my brother Armenak and Alice, asking him to send them to their addressees as soon as he reached Yerevan.

A week later I met Father with unspeakable delight, his arrival being quite a surprise to me. Tears of extreme happiness and affection flowed down his cheeks, disappearing in his long, thick, fair beard, while he was incessantly embracing and kissing me. Finally, he said, "At last by the grace of our God I am lucky enough to see my homeland, my dear, beloved Aygestan again, before my death. I have been constantly dreaming of its sweet scenes, both when awake and asleep. Every time I drank water I remembered our Mokhri Keahriz and felt bitter anguish for it. I have been always dreaming about our house and garden with a strange but persistent desire to see them and, especially St. Hakob Church at least once again. I cannot understand this strange love and anguish!"

"Dear father, there's nothing to wonder about; all patriots suffer from that anguish. That nostalgia is sometimes so strong and heavy that it can completely ruin a person, squeezing every drop of strength out of him. I can't say how strong others feel it, but for us, Van Armenians, it's something common.

"Well, we've much time to discuss this issue again. Now I'm first of all interested in our family members' state. How are Araksi and Karapet? What about Armen?"

"I got a letter from Armenak a few days before I left. He complains of his health and finances. He is writing he cannot afford to receive proper treatment. He has spent the money you left him, but unfortunately, neither your brother Karapet nor I was able to help him. We ourselves could hardly make both ends meet. I am very worried about him. May God spare his young life.

"As for your sister, she is all right, but she is missing you terribly. She thinks about you day and night and suffers from burning anguish. She begged me to bring her here

and I could hardly persuade her to stay there till I reached Van. I have promised to write to her as soon as there is any possibility for her to return. Take this letter and read it: it took her two days to write it. For several times she tore it up and then began writing again. The only thing I can say is that she is very sad and displeased with her separation from you. Sometimes she cries secretly because of it.”

“She’s fully right: I’ve been unfair and selfish towards her. I never thought of her while arranging my own affairs. She’s always relied on me and my support ever since her childhood, being deprived of mother and rendered completely helpless. Under our conditions it’s very difficult for a young child, especially a little girl, to live without mother, as a half-orphan. Poor my sister, dear Araksi, I shouldn’t have left her so lonely, to the whims of fate. Alas, this cursed war doesn’t seem to end at all for us to get a chance to arrange our fortune.”

“And what about our house and garden? Have you lived there or in another place since your return?” Father asked with particular interest.

“Father, I’m sorry to say our house is semi-ruined while the garden’s almost entirely dried up. I live in my friend Hrant’s. He was in Van, but unluckily, he had to leave for Yerevan a few days ago. He had promised his family to go back soon.”

“The news about our house and garden is very painful; so, our beloved, rich garden and vines, the objects of our entire family’s caress and its sources of joy, have dried up... I’m so very sorry...!”

I led Father to my friend’s and told him we could move to our quarter if he wanted to be closer to Hankusner and its parish. I also told him that my brother Karapet’s father’s-in-law brother Gabriel Agha had invited me to live in their house and I had promised him to do so.

THE BOREDOM OF LONELINESS

We moved to Gabriel Agha’s in our former street. Father began performing his priestly duties and went to Hankusner Church every morning and evening. His community also comprised the Armenian Apostolic parishes of St. Hakob, Khach-Poghots as well as Metz and Pokr Kyandrchi. Apart from being a clergyman, he was a fervent believer and as far as I can remember, both he and the believers were pleased with one another.

I was occupied with my post of the head of Van’s military depot, although I was not very pleased with it. I was almost always busy and I was somehow sure that work could not secure any progress for me. I regretted having refused the position of the secretary in the City Municipality for the sake of that boring, monotonous work. I often thought of resigning it, but I was too ashamed to do so: Bulgharatsy treated me with great respect and confidence so that his moral influence somehow bound me.

Strange as it was, I felt lonely and abandoned: none of my former friends was with me. Surprisingly enough, I did not try to acquire new friends or close people, despite the fact that I had no relatives except for Maro’s family. The regrettable loss of my dear, beloved people depressed my soul like a nightmare and I had completely lost all my former liveliness and enthusiasm.

I spent my leisure reading: I took any book I could find although I could not find many since all the former libraries and bookstores had liquidated. Recently a library named "*Azatutyun Luys*" (the Armenian equivalent for 'Light of Freedom') had opened at Pokr Kyandrichi, but it could not boast a rich collection. I often turned to Miss Anna Kocharian for books: being the supervisor of the secondary schools she almost always gave me the books she had with particular kindness.

THREE LETTERS

Araksi's letter that Father had brought to me was quite long and interesting.

She had written, "My dear, beloved brother,

I haven't heard from you ever since you left. I thought you'd be able to write at least a few lines to me as soon as you reached Van, but all my expectations were in vain. It's already a little more than a month and a half since you left Gyoolizard; this cruel indifference to me is very strange and surprising. While leaving, you assured me you'd write to me immediately after reaching Aygestan to tell me about the current situation and conditions and, if possible, give me permission to return. To tell the truth, brother, I'm very hurt; you take absolutely no interest in me, nor have you written at least several lines about the possibility of my return.

I think your former warm, pure love for your sister has faded away, but I can't explain why. I often cry because of this intolerable suffering.

I begged Father to take me to Van with him, but I couldn't persuade him to. He'd always give me the same answer, 'If your return was expedient, your brother would have certainly written about it. Besides, the current conditions aren't suitable enough for that. Why should we bring trouble upon you?'

Two weeks before Father's departure, a young man from Avants Port, who had been to Gyoolizard for several times, proposed to me. I answered him I wanted to go back to my brother in our country and I still had much time to get married. In a word, I refused him; perhaps, Father will tell you the rest.

Please, write to me immediately. I'm waiting impatiently for your permission to return to my dear, beloved homeland. I can't ever forget our house and garden, that green, fruitful garden, the unmatched water of our Mokhri Keahriz and, finally, my precious sister Maro.

With warm, anguish-stricken kisses,
always loving you very much and ever missing your love
your sister Araksi."

Hardly had a month passed since Hrant's departure to Yerevan when I simultaneously got two letters from Alice and my brother Armenak.

Taking into consideration the fact that in those times ordinary letters were often ignored and did not reach their destination, I had found it expedient to give Bulgharatsy's address, too with an addition below that it should be handed to Sarhadian. That proved a very convenient way and I received the answers to both my letters at the address given.

I opened the letters one after another with trembling hands and a beating heart. Armenak had been briefer than Alice so I preferred to read his letter first. He was writing, "My very dear brother,

I read your letter with infinite delight. I can't describe how really happy I was! I've to confess it was quite unexpected for me. I know in these hellish days of war letters usually reach their destination with difficulty and delays from the places near the enemy front, especially the occupied lands. Except the military ones, all the others are often simply burnt or just disappear after having gone through the crucible of censorship.

You're very interested in my health condition; it couldn't be otherwise. My dear, noble brother, I'm so very grateful to you for your special attention. I wasn't able to be cured with the money you'd given to me, but I managed to somehow alleviate my disease. This is at least the opinion of the doctor who's examined and treated me.

A few days ago, he assured me that my disease isn't dangerous at this phase and, most probably, I'll be finally cured if only I'm able to be quieter, receive good nourishment and, particularly not think of marrying for the time being. What do you think, dear brother, am I not a totally unlucky person...? Do you know that my work's heavy and takes a long time? I don't have any savings to go on a temporary holiday and, especially get the good food I've been advised. My neighbours, the Georgian mother and daughter, sympathize with me and help me in my housework as much as they can.

Both of them are giving you their best regards and are very sorry you left Tiflis. Thank you again very, very much for your affection and attention.

With deep love,
Your brother Armen."

I started reading Alice's letter with a beating and panic-stricken heart.

It said, "My very dear Sirak,

Don't be surprised at such a beginning. I can't describe how profoundly happy I was learning that the letter I'd got was from you, that is to say, the first young man in my life whom I infinitely love and respect in the depths of my heart.

Your completely unexpected and hasty departure was a great blow to me. For two months I was consigned to bed running a high temperature and often falling into delirium. Father and Mother had almost gone crazy out of the horror of losing their only child. They were endlessly consulting doctors and trying various remedies.

Seeing that neither my parents nor the doctors would leave me alone, I was forced to confess Mother the reason for my illness. I asked her to tell Father about it and, if possible, move me away from our house. I'd spent the illusive and fleeting hours of my first pure love and happiness there, although that didn't last very long.

They immediately fulfilled my request by taking me to a summer house in Sochi, where I stayed for a month. Mother, my angle-like mother, felt and realized the heaviness of the blow I'd suffered and did her utmost to console and calm me down with her kind, motherly advice. Her cordial entreaties and heart-breaking words yielded their results and I tried to analyze the possibility of my hasty but self-denying love. First I laid the blame on you and then criticized myself for my weak will power. Finally, I

came to the conclusion that both of us were guilty of our silent but enchanting love. I didn't dare to put the responsibility of the frustration of our immaculate love and our temporary parting on you, although I thought of its possibility.

At present my wounds have healed, although not thoroughly. The love born in the depths of my heart is still burning. Obligated to stifle the protest of my self-esteem, I've to tell you sincerely, without any hesitation that I still love you. Love isn't a crime or shame for a simple girl like me to try to hide it or tell a lie...

Even Mother, whose heart is just as noble and frank as mine, has agreed to sacrifice her maternal happiness for the sake of my own simply because she deeply sympathizes with me. She's even resorted to self-denial agreeing to my absence, if I ever wish to do so. Mother, my adorable mother, has even promised me to persuade Father to grant me freedom so that I'll find you and we'll forge our destiny.

I'm waiting for your reply impatiently, with a beating heart. My happiness or misfortune thoroughly depends on it.

With numerous warm, anguish-stricken kisses,
Alice, ever loving you."

A turbulent storm of excitement broke out in my heart after I had read the letter: I had crushed the happiness of an immaculate, wonderful girl, imbued with pure love, only because of a hasty decision. But for what...? I had consigned myself to the whirlpool of the vague future where I sought for glory and a social position only because of my egoistic aspirations.

Having already read Alice's letter for many times, I still continued doing so, but I could not decide how I was to answer her and what I was to do.

MY ANSWERS TO THE LETTERS

Having consulted Father, I immediately replied to my sister Araksi.

My letter read, "My very dear sister Araksi,

I find it quite appropriate and expedient that Father didn't fulfill your wish and didn't take you to Van. Our situation is still rather vague here; nothing can be decided while the war's going on. Of course, now we aren't subjected to the enemy's immediate threat, but unluckily, they're not far from us. They're in the north, south-west and west of our Van Sea. Besides, Vaspurakan Armenians' security is also endangered by the Kurds who've thoroughly surrounded us, as I've already written. They're well-armed and are constantly incited by the Turks.

Our autonomous authorities have sent some people to the Kurds. Their aim is to make them understand that the Armenians have no reasons for enmity towards them and are ready to be friendly with them only if they prove the same willingness on their part. The greatest duty of our representatives sent to the Kurdish chieftains was to make them understand and convince them that the Armenians and Kurds should attempt to enter into sincere, friendly relations, as both these peoples are considered alien and dangerous for the Turkish Government. If the Turks succeed in exterminating the Armenians today, tomorrow the Kurds' turn will come and they'll share the same ill fate of being extirpated.

Dear Araksi, I'm writing my letter in detail so as to give you a full picture of our situation. I'm sure as soon as you read this, you'll stop blaming Father and me. We've been unable to fulfill your wish to come back to Van simply because we want to keep you away from new dangers and all the subsequent sufferings.

As for your personal life, you're to decide everything. Never make hasty decisions and always give them a second, serious thought. Your future happiness depends on you and your decision. Choosing a match is one of the most complicated and vulnerable issues in life and, to my mind, you yourself should make a decision concerning it. I don't know your suitor and can't give you any advice. Father says he's never met that fellow and doesn't know him either, so he can't express any opinion.

Our brother Karapet's with you; he can help you in your choice and give you some piece of advice after having collected the necessary information about that young man. My dear, precious sister, I myself again advise you to think seriously and never jump to decisions before taking the final step.

Always loving you sincerely,
your brother Sirak."

I immediately answered my brother Armen, too. After some compassionate expressions, I asked him not to despair in any case, for despondency and depression are the greatest enemies of the human being's health and mental state. I promised to render him financial aid as soon as I had the slightest possibility to do so. In the end I asked him to give my thanks and best regards to the Georgian girl and her mother.

After a few days of hesitation and heart-rending suffering, I finally made up my mind to reply to Alice's letter. I attempted to convey to her all the bitter experiences I had had ever since I parted with her. I have kept her letter and the copy of mine with great affection, like sacred relics. Perhaps, some day I shall be lucky enough to read my answer to that girl together with you, my dear reader.

THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION AND WE

With the outbreak of the October Revolution in Russia, the war moved from the fronts to the interior of that spacious country, and the majority party gradually took the reins of government. The Russian troops and their commanders were ordered to leave the fronts and return home immediately.

The Russian soldiers and the high-ranking officials, who had grown heavily exhausted constantly experiencing the shuddering danger of being killed at any moment, set their hearts on that order. They started leaving the fronts to return to their homes, to the bosom of their families with extreme pleasure and delight.

Indeed, the Russian troops and servicemen stationed in the lands occupied from Turkey shared the general enthusiasm and happy mood: they were hastily leaving the conquered areas to go back to Russia. What were we to do? What could our authorities do?

By a stroke of exceptionally good luck, unsurpassed, invincible national hero Andranik was in Karin Region. Being the commander of one of the Russian volunteer regiments, he had to obey the aforementioned order, but he decided not to comply with

it and stay in the occupied lands assuming the entire responsibility for all the subsequent results. That hero, the pride of all Armenians, did stay in Karin Region saving thousands of his compatriots' lives.

Another stroke of good fortune was nature's precious gift: winter had set in and the snow and frost hampered the enemy in starting hostilities immediately. For the time being no tangible danger could be observed for Vaspurakan resettlers' physical safety. Meanwhile, the Supervising Body of our autonomous authorities endeavored to create possibilities for the fortification of the Region's main borders.

The defense of Vostan, that was of primary importance from the standpoint of self-defense, was vested in Levon Shaghoyan. Unfortunately, the Fifth Armenian Volunteer Detachment stationed there had left that region of great military significance early in spring. Only three officers, Hambardzum Melkonian, Rouben Zhamharian and M. Gasparian, did not go back and stayed there to help Vaspurakan's population. Melkonian manifested invaluable devotion during the last retreat, particularly in Kotur and Salmast.

The self-defense of Siarka-Gyali was vested in Tigran Baghdasarian, and Misha Gasparian assumed the defense of the front of Arjesh-Arnis.

The draft was introduced through Grigor Bulgharatsy's efforts and Vaspurakan's young men, aged between eighteen and forty, were recruited to receive military education and serve in the army. Within three months, about 2,500 men received proper training and were sent to the northern and south-western fronts. A two hundred-soldier company was sent for the defense of the front line of Berkri-Savali.

An Officers Training School was founded: although it proved unable to yield the desirable results within two-three months, we boasted of having such an institution.

A PAINFUL ERROR

Vaspurakan's fourth, last retreat took place on March 28, 1918 according to the old calendar. Unfortunately, through some painfully wrong calculation it had a delay of at least fifteen days, which cost the lives of about 7,000 Armenians. What is even more regrettable, more than 30,000 Armenians were forcefully driven to foreign countries, unable to return to their compatriots in Igdirdir and Yerevan. We shall later see how that happened.

With the Russians' complete abandonment of the Turkish front after the October Revolution, the commanders of the crushed Turkish army were revived and filled with enthusiasm. Re-assembling their hopeless and scattered forces, they resumed their offensives with fierce intensity.

Andranik, who had remained all alone in Karin, realized the situation and foresaw the impending formidable danger. He made heroic attempts to resist the infuriated, revengeful enemy at least temporarily, thus thinking to give Vaspurakan's population an opportunity to leave Van-Vaspurakan safely for Yerevan and Eastern Armenia. In February Andranik sent Hamo Ohannessian to Van's Supervising Body suggesting that

all Van and Vaspurakan inhabitants should be moved to Yerevan. In the last days of February, the great devoted patriot sent an urgent telegram repeating his suggestion of evacuating Vaspurakan. Another telegraph of the same contents was received from Commander Hovsepian, but in vain.

Later Van's last retreat turned out to have been due to an order from Yerevan: those in the city wanted to linger it out as long as possible, hoping to escape Vaspurakan's irredeemable loss. Unfortunately, however, they were slow in their actions. It had been decided to raise money and form an army comprising Vaspurakan inhabitants for the Region's defense, but it took them rather a long time to organize the conscription. When the late army reached Igdır to head for Ghezel-Dize, the tragedy of Van's retreat had already become a reality.

AT MY FRIENDS' FOR THE LAST TIME

A few days before the order of the last retreat, I went to see Maro. I had always tried to visit them once a week since my return. She first asked and then demanded (in case I did not agree) that I should be at their place on a certain day, generally on Sundays, to have dinner with them.

To tell the truth, at the bottom of my heart I wished to see them at least once a week, but as usual, I was too shy to cause them any trouble, although both Maro and Grigor were very friendly and affectionate towards me.

My last visit was again at dinner time on Sunday. I was very surprised to see that Maro was not at home: she had never been absent from home at that time. Before entering the dining-room, I asked the servant about her and learned that she had left Van three days before.

As usual, Grigor received me with great kindness and exclaimed, "Oh, oghul, where've you been? Why didn't you come to see off Maro? Well, you aren't to blame as you didn't even know she was leaving. I sent her to Berkri with our child early in the morning last Friday. She'll stay there for a couple of days till I tell her what to do. Probably, she'll have to go to Yerevan and stay there for some time."

Taken aback by that unexpected news, I said, "You'll certainly forgive me if I ask you about the reason for that. Can I know why she's left so suddenly? Are we in danger? Are we again threatened by another retreat?"

Bulgharatsy hesitated to give a straightforward answer to my direct question, as if instantaneously entering into a heavy mental struggle. On the one hand, he did not want to unveil the reality, on the other hand, he did not want to deceive me. He was a very frank person, sincere with all his friends. Finally, he told me the following, "At present we aren't in very good and safe conditions; you know the Russian troops and even the volunteers have left Vaspurakan. The enemies have sieged us in all possible directions and we're subjected to still new attacks. Our great patriot, brave Andranik, will hardly be able to resist the insolent and encouraged enemy all alone for a long time with his small number of armed forces and scanty munition.

"Nor have we got any reassuring news from Caucasia: the local Turk-Tatars and those in Baku, who've got rid of the horror of the Russian army, are now in great fuss. Our centuries-old enemies have ringed us in a bloody ring in the north, south and west.

“Now we’ve absolutely no hope of help from anywhere. At the April Heroic Struggle, we were fighting and defending ourselves being convinced that finally, we’d receive aid. Unfortunately, under the present circumstances, we don’t have any hopes for any kind of support. The Turk-Tatars in Caucasia have started troubling the local Armenians: they can’t hide their threatening howling and enmity. Their attitude to our compatriots is rather hostile.”

“If our situation is so serious,” I answered with hesitation, “how can we resist that danger with our small number of forces? What do you think of that? Won’t we subject our meager existence to still new adventures and calamities if we insist on staying here?”

“You’re fully right, my dear friend. Our Supervising Body has two opinions in this regard. Let me tell you without entering into details that some people believe we’ve to evacuate our powerless, helpless people from Van and entire Vaspurakan immediately, moving them to the areas near Igdir. Others insist on sending them to Yerevan, thus securing that city’s future resistance with their help. Still some others suppose that by evacuating Vaspurakan we’ll finally lose our former and future homeland, for whose liberation thousands of Armenians sacrificed their young lives.

“By the way, I’ve to tell you we’ve received demands from everywhere to evacuate Vaspurakan’s helpless people. Andranik from Karin, our Armenian troops’ leader, Commander Silikian from Echmiatzin, the Security Council from Yerevan are constantly requiring that we should move our population to Caucasia as soon as possible.

“I myself don’t oppose this viewpoint, which is shared by two other members of the Supervising Body.”

Bulgharatsy seemed reluctant to mention those two people’s names, but I had no doubts that one of them was Van’s Mayor Terzibashian.

PART TWO

VAN'S LAST RETREAT

By six o'clock on the evening of March 28, 1918 according to the old calendar, darkness had already begun shrouding our magnificent Aygestan, that had hardly commenced breathing and being reconstructed. At that very time the population read a sinister order on the walls of the city's main streets. It said, "Compatriots, in accordance with the decision of the Supervising Body, made after noon today, you are to leave the city immediately and retreat hastily towards Janik. Do your utmost to reach there by tomorrow morning. You will get further instructions in Janik."

Thus, the tragedy of the first great withdrawal repeated itself.

The urgency of the order perplexed and petrified the people, whose minds had been completely clouded by the unspeakable terror and horror of the first retreat. Again rumble, tumult, turmoil, curses and swear words.

Haste and panic seemed to have driven Van inhabitants crazy; the only thought they had was to leave, run away and get rid of the evil and calamity they had already experienced once. Everybody had entered into mourning and crazy, breathless haste. Nobody seemed willing to recognize the others around them, even if those were close people. Indeed, how could they think of the others if they had been deprived of the ability to worry? They had been ordered to cover a distance of about fifty-two kilometers within some ten to twelve hours and reach Janik Village, Timar District. The wretch, who would not manage to somehow get there within that short time, was doomed: helpless and powerless, he would fall prey to the predators.

Only an hour before the order of the retreat appeared on the walls, ten military vans stopped at the depot with great noise and fuss. One of them was crowded with soldiers, whose head approached me in extreme haste, gave me a military greeting and handed me a sealed envelope saying, "It is from Mr. Bulgharatsy."

The speedy arrival of the vans and soldiers seemed rather strange to me, for I had not been informed about it beforehand. Perplexed and very anxious, I quickly tore the envelope open, thus dividing its contents in two. Putting both pieces together, I read the following, "Comrade Sirak,

Immediately give an order to load all the vital food, such as rice, flour, sugar, oil and meat products, onto the vans and burn the rest. Soon the order of the retreat will be declared. I know you'll be a little late. I've ordered the soldiers' head to give you a rifle for your self-defense. I've sent you 1,200 roubles on account of your salary. You've to keep the food under strict control. Let your father take one of the vans.

See you after reaching Janik,
Grigor."

There was a great amount of food in my depot so that we hardly managed to load about one thirds of it onto the vans. By the time we finished it, our dear Aygestan had almost been deserted, its newly-arrived beloved inhabitants having again left it. Obeying the order I had been given, I burnt down the depot together with its precious contents with infinite regret.

While we were loading the vans, I sent one of the soldiers I knew to bring Father to me. He was in utter despair; his continual mourning and sighs rent my heart. This time it was me who had become the reason for his sufferings and despondency. It was me who had sent him the invitation to return to Van and meet the parishioners' suggestion.

At ten o'clock at night, Father and I left for Janik on one of the vans loaded with food.

Two pairs of horses had been harnessed to each of the vans, whose drivers had entered into a competition steering at a breakneck speed. For a few times, I asked our driver to reduce his velocity so that we would not fall down.

“Karo, (this was our driver's name) my friend, slow down, please. You needn't hurry so much. You see most of the deportees have fallen behind us. It's all the same, we'll have to wait for them on reaching Janik.”

–*So, խէր օրխնած, քա չե՞ս տըսնի որ խըմէն ընկերներս ինձմէ առաջ ին ընկի: Ինձ ամօք է ընոնցմէ յետ ընկնել. էս է ճանիկ կը խասանենք, մէ լաւ կը խանգատանանք: Մէկ էլ դէ մենք ստիպած ենք դիցիպլինով վարել: Մեզ էլ 4 ամիս զինորական դասեր տած են: Մեզ սովորցուցած են գլխատրին ենթարկել, խնազանդել: Էնոր կարգադրութիւններին էկանջ կախել: Էն է մեր խրամանատարը մէկ ֆարսաղ ընձնից էռաջ ընկածի (“Good heavens, don't you see all my friends are overtaking me? It's a shame for me to fall behind them. We'll soon reach Janik and have a good rest. Besides, we've to follow the discipline. We attended a military course for four months and were taught to obey our head. We've to listen to and fulfill his orders. Here's our commander; he's outrun me for a whole *parsakh*.”) (A unit of length equal to three miles).*

“Okay, but I don't think your commander's told you to drive your van so fast as to make us fall down or fly in the air. You can easily stay in your place by holding tight the reins, but it's difficult for us to cling to this van all the time.”

In the long run I managed to persuade Karo to stop the van for several minutes. He manifested his ingenuity by opening some space among the sacks for us with my help.

–*Տնաշէն, դէ մի քիչ շուտ ասած էլնիր: Դու էլի երիտասարդ ես, քեզ պահել կարող ես, քայց էս մեր խեղճ տերիայրը դէ էնքան էլ ջահել չի, ջանել չունի: Էնոր խմար ճիշտ որ դժարի գլուխ պահել: Հիմա թող էս մէշոկների արանքը նստի, պառկի, ինպէս քէֆը կուզենայ վարի: Քու գործն էլ կը խեշտացնեն: Ձիերէն էրկուսի սանձը քեզ կը տամ, որ չասես ինձ խմար խանգիստ, իսկ քեզ դժարի (“By God, why didn't you tell me that earlier? You're young and can hold yourself, but our poor priest isn't so young; besides, he's all skinny. Of course, it's difficult for him to stand this. Now let him sit or lie down as he feels like. As for you, I'll give you the reins of the two horses so that you won't say I'm comfortable and you aren't.”)*

Having accommodated Father in the middle of the van, I calmed down a little and even somehow made friends with Karo. I convinced him that the greater part of the

THE ROUTE OF VASPURAKAN'S DEPORTATION IN MARCH 1918



refugees' caravan had fallen behind and no danger threatened us for the time being. Besides, as we had seen on our way two hours before, a large group of mounted soldiers was coming behind us to protect the rear of the retreating people, and they were a long way from us.

At sunrise our vans of food reached Janik, where we saw only part of the deportees, those who were lucky enough to have horses and horse-drawn carts. The village was flooded by thousands of fugitives from Timar and the adjacent areas, having converted into a crater of erupting lava. Although the overwhelming majority of the population had not got to Janik yet, confusion, fuss, rumble, tumult, cries, searches, weeping and mourning had permeated through the whole village. A nervous tension of suspense and infernal uncertainty. Nobody knew what they were to do.

THE TRAGEDY OF JANIK

It was almost midday: the columns of the retreating deportees killed by extreme fatigue were getting to Janik one after another, but a huge number of them had not managed to reach their destination yet. How could they do so if those falling behind had to cover more than fifty kilometers within fifteen hours with their wives and children?

The people had almost gone crazy by the unspeakable confusion and haste. Part of the refugees who had reached Janik at sunrise immediately hurried towards Berkri on their own vehicles.

About three hours after midday, the deportees got the tragic news that the Kurds had occupied Berkri barring the way of the retreating people. Mourning and lamentation reached their height when the soldiers in the vanguard, who had been sent there, returned with the confirmation of the tragedy.

The shower of protests, complaints, swear words, threats and curses permeated through the vast multitudes of those withdrawing. They roared and shouted like the turbulent waves of a stormy sea, but that was of no avail. The unexpected, formidable tragedy was a reality and the people longing to save themselves were stifling in its lethal claws.

Apart from the aforementioned, a natural calamity befell us as if to make our misfortune even severer. A dreadful, howling storm broke out being immediately followed by heavy rain. Fortunately, it did not last long: the downpour and fierce tempest stopped, the people having got soaked to the very skin.

It was ordered to change the route of the retreat and head for Dara-Beg-Arjak-Sara, a way that was unspeakably difficult of passage: the thick layers of the snow, that had set in a few days before, had completely barred it. Having returned to their dear homeland and beloved hearths with such great enthusiasm, delight and bright hopes for the future, Vaspurakan's unfortunate people, who had begun reconstructing their ruined houses with hard work, were again abandoning their precious fatherland by a stroke of ill fate, under the threat of the base enemy's persecution.

They were abandoning their homeland... Their tongues refused to pronounce those ominous words, while their hearts were rent by that mortal reality. They, Vaspurakan's

ever persecuted Armenians, did not want to be torn away from their native land, their forefathers' centuries-old motherland, and that being deprived of the slightest chance to rely on their adjacent compatriots' care, support and affection. At present they had to change their way, hoping for another country's mercy, grace and hospitality.

While in Janik, we allocated more than half of the food loaded onto our vans first to the soldiers and then the poor refugees. But how many people could be found in that huge multitude who were not truly desperate for it? Desperate by the uncertainty of their future state, the crowd had gone crazy and grown infuriated. Having lost their sound reason, they did not know what to do. Taking no notice of the soldiers charged with the protection of the food resources, thousands of them poured into the vans and stole the rest of the food. They had become so spiteful and furious that they even wanted to attack the empty vans and take away the horses harnessed to them. However, they did not manage to, for the soldiers had to fire in the air to disperse them.

The throng who had lost human reason having flown into unspeakable rage resembled stormy sea waves roaring dreadfully and threatening to crush and crumble everything they came across on their way. They were even powerful enough to extirpate rocks.

Apart from their attempts to steal and rob, the retreating multitude, who had completely grown out of patience, also wanted to crumble and crush all those who had proved unable to think of their security in due time, taking proper measures for their salvation. They had already faced numerous similar disasters in the past, had they not?

Everywhere you could hear shouts of protest, complaints and swear words.

—Ընչի՞ խամար մեզ մինչև էսօր խաբար չարաք: Ընչի՞ մեզ Իգդիր չէք տանի: Տաճկից կուզէք ազատել, մէ ուրիշի ձեռքը տալու խամար: Վայն իկէ մեր գլխին, որ ձեզ պէս առաջնորդ-գլխատրներ մնենք (“Why on earth didn’t you let us know about this? Why aren’t you taking us to Igdir? Are we to get out of the frying pan only to find ourselves in fire? Woe is us to have such leaders as you.”)

Undoubtedly, none of the leaders could predict such a calamity and unenviable course of events for their compatriots. The people, however, were unable to judge properly and endure the new sinister blow, having faded away under the burden of numerous sufferings and lost their resisting power and vigor altogether.

Yes, they had gone mad out of despair and powerlessness: everybody had become spiteful to each other, compatriots were considered to be enemies. Yes, that was the formidable state and psychology of the retreating, panic-stricken fugitives running away from the enemy's immediate danger...

ON THE WAY TO ARJAK-SARA

The vans, carts and mounted soldiers were ordered to set out immediately in order to clear the snow-covered way for the multitude of refugees withdrawing on foot, their number making up several thousands. They had to change their direction against their wish. The blow they had suffered was dreadfully merciless, but there was no other way out. The conclusion was but fatal: those who did not want to be violently slaughtered by the enemy had to escape, run away without a second's delay. Anyone who would not manage that was doomed to certain death...

The road was intolerable: the cloudburst had softened the melting snow layers mixing them with mud. Under those conditions the exhausted retreating population, who had already covered many kilometers hastily, did their best to shorten the distance for another several hundred steps. In one place desperate, pleading cries of help, in the other totally powerless falls and utmost efforts to rise again. In some other corner, a despondent attempt to regain vigor and resisting power, all that intertwined with cries, shouts, swear words, curses and, finally, the last shuddering moments of agony.

Besides, the retreat by the route of Arjak-Sara was terrible because none of those withdrawing on foot was able to help even their closest people. Those having any vehicle had left in crazy haste a long time before and were now quite far ahead. The wretches covering the way on foot were writhing in the struggle of life and death, being helplessly knocked to the ground so as never to rise again.

Those fugitives, who were lucky enough to have vehicles, had already reached Sara, but the majority of the deportees were still on half way.

A rather large number of Vaspurakan immigrants, 7,000 people, remained unaware of the organized retreat and stayed in Alyur, Timar, Berkri and other places, totally abandoned, neglected and scattered here and there.

Both in Arjak and Sara numerous attempts were made to enter into telephone connection with Berkri, but in vain. The situation was getting worse minute by minute: in the past two to three years, a tragic period for us, the Kurdish chieftains had added to the evil and massacre perpetrated by the Turks, with whom they were always in friendly cooperation.

We were constantly getting depressive news: chieftain Smko was moving from his seat in Khoshab towards the Kotel Mountains with a large group of his armed fellow tribesmen. Evidently, they wanted to bar the last way of our escape and we could do nothing about it. The greatest tragedy consisted in that thousands of deportees had not reached Sara yet.

After a two-day stay in Sara, the refugees were told to set out for Kotel. During those two days, the number of those retreating had come up to 30,000, including the Assyrian population in Sara and the adjacent areas, who shared our ill fate.

At the very last moments of our departure from Sara Levon Shaghoyan and Colonel Melkon Gasparian reached there by some miracle and joined us with a group of their mounted comrades-in-arms. The former had been injured and it had been very difficult to move him.

Shaghoyan, Melkonian and Gasparian had succeeded in resisting the immediate danger of the enemy attack by fighting heroically in Vostan, Vaspurakan's south-western front, with their soldiers, most of whom were from Hayots Dzor and Shatak. Their valorous deed was truly something great and praiseworthy from the standpoint of the protection of the rear of the retreating population.

Hambardzum Melkonian, an experienced officer, whose instructions were often very useful, was a true patriot. The eloquent proof of his patriotism and self-denying devo-

tion was his disagreement to join the volunteer regiments, departing from Vaspurakan. Realizing that thus they would leave the local Armenians to the mercy of their tragic fate, he stayed there, consciously and selflessly consigning himself to the calamities overtaking his compatriots. May that noble patriot be ever glorified and honored! He manifested unsurpassed valour and devotion during the whole retreat, especially in the defensive fighting in Vostan, Kotol and Salmast. Later we shall again have chances to witness his courageous deeds.

Our economic institutions and national organizations as well as the reconstruction companies and charities had their representatives in Khoy, a border city in Persia, but unfortunately, we had lost touch with them. It was found vital to send a few mounted messengers to both Khoy and Salmast to study the local military situation and procure the necessary information.

Having reached the plain at the western extremity of Kotol Gorge, Vaspurakan's Armenian and Assyrian population amounting to 30,000 was in suspense for several days. The messengers had not returned and there was absolutely no information on the location of the Turkish troops and the permission of the Persian Government.

It was a long time since we ran short of the food resources we had taken in Aygestan, and famine had struck the fugitives even before leaving Sara. The situation was but tragic: a small amount of barley was somehow procured, seeming to be manna from heaven. A handful of barley was allocated to each person who boiled and ate or, better to say, devoured it. People had to gather roots and newly-grown grass and boil them to eat so that they would not starve to death.

In contrast to Vaspurakan Armenians' heroic and magnificent resistance against the enemy, thousandfold stronger and possessing the best munition, their first and last retreats were chaotic and unorganized. Our authorities were not to blame for the panic and chaos of the first retreat: it was unexpectedly imposed on us basely, through mean political manouvres. It was us, however, who bore responsibility for the delay and panic of the last withdrawal. If we had followed Andranik's and his colleagues' instructions, as well as the orders of Yerevan Security Council and Military Commander Silikian, Vaspurakan inhabitants would not have suffered such heavy damage at their last retreat. Moreover, they would not have been deprived of the chance to go to their compatriots in Caucasia and would not have been obliged to eke out meager existence below foreign horizons.

Our several days' waiting at the entrance of Kotol Gorge was completely futile and senseless. The vague, tumultuous military situation and the instability of the enemy forces had stripped the local authorities of Tabriz and, particularly Khoy of the right to make independent decisions. Even if the Persian Government did have a kind wish to allow our immigration into that country, they would not be able to do so. Finally, that meaningless waiting proved disastrous for us, ending in the tragedy of Kotol Gorge.

ON THE EVE OF KOTUR'S SELF-DEFENSE

Eventually, it was decided to take the huge multitude of deportees to Salmast helping them pass through Kotel Gorge under the defense of the armed forces. The waiting of those days yielded absolutely no results, for the Persian authorities of Khoy and Tabriz did not grant permission to immigrate into that country.

Before moving away, Hambardzum Melkonian made a patriotic speech calling upon the armed Armenian and Assyrian youth to fight and, if necessary, sacrifice their lives heroically for the protection and salvation of their close people, their mothers, fathers, sisters, children and all their powerless, helpless compatriots. The noise and fuss of the vast throng of the refugees almost hindered me from hearing his short speech and I could hardly hear the challenge uttered with a thundering shout, "My brave and patriotic young compatriots, if any of you is reluctant to fight this struggle for his relatives' defense, he will have thus betrayed his dear, beloved people and their just liberation struggle.

"Valorous sons of Vaspurakan! Throughout two years you struggled heroically against the huge Turkish forces armed to the teeth. Now it will be a shame for you to be defeated by gang leader Smko and the mob of his robbers."

Melkonian's speech breathing patriotism made me enthusiastic and stirred my blood. I was a young Armenian armed with the weapon Bulgharatsy had given me by some strange stroke of fortune. Then, I concluded I was obliged to fight and defend my poor compatriots, including Father.

The conscription began at once: I decided to become a volunteer and devote myself to my people's defense, since I had no work or occupation.

Exchanging cordial hugs and kisses with Father, I got off the van to join the armed men, who were going to ascend the Kotur Mountains to struggle against Smko's bandits. Exactly at that time I heard Father calling me in a pleading voice and turned back. He begged me, "Where're you going, my son? You've never fought in your life and have not taken part in any struggle to defend at least yourself... ."

"Dear father, why are you so angry? So far I've had no chances to fight... Every time I was charged with some other work during the fighting and was obliged to perform my duties. Now the question of our existence is at stake. I've nothing to do and should try to help my people within my power."

I could not listen to Father's supplications anymore although I myself was sure that my participation would be of no avail in our defense. Despite my hot temper, up till that time I had not even dared to harm a fly, let alone committing murder. I always mentally cursed those who had unleashed that disgusting war and violent slaughters. Although I hated both the Turks and Kurds because they were mercilessly exterminating our people without any grounds, I had not had a single chance to kill at least one of them.

AN INCREDIBLE MEETING

Hardly had I made a hundred steps to join the soldiers, who were going to climb the Kotur Mountains, when I heard a pleading cry, "Please, wait... Just a minute... ."

I could not believe my ears thinking that it was a misunderstanding and somebody had taken me for another young man. I was about to continue my way hastily, but this

time the person begging me to wait called me by my name, "Sirak, Mr. Sirak, I beg you, wait a little, please. I've just a few words to tell you."

I turned back: somebody was moving forward to reach me making extremely hard, supernatural attempts. I thought I was dreaming and rubbed my eyes with my palms to see better: what I had seen was an unexpected, incredible miracle.

"Is it you, Miss Anoush?" I could hardly stammer. In my turn, I began running to meet her and alleviate her physical and mental suffering.

"Yes, unfortunately, it's me..."

She threw herself into my arms and fell down, unable to stand on her feet. I hugged her and asked, "What's the matter? Are you ill or are you fainting because of hunger...?"

"Don't ask anything... I'm both ill and hungry as well as lonely and helpless."

Anoush wanted to continue, but she was not able to and burst into heart-rending, mournful weeping. I began crying with her: I did not remember having ever shed such bitter, heart-breaking tears. Our weeping was not merely that of two unlucky people: it was the entire suffering, persecuted, tortured and crushed Armenian nation who was crying. Both of us had undergone through the ordeal and privations of that tormented people and still continued suffering...

I found it completely useless and inappropriate to ask Anoush further questions: she was so exhausted and emaciated that she could not even talk. Fortunately, the unarmed people had not been granted permission to continue the way of retreat yet and everybody was waiting for the soldiers to ascend the mountains to defend them. Our boys had to climb the mountains opposite those where Smko and his companions-in-arms were to occupy positions.

I took Anoush to our van on my back wondering how she had managed to reach there being so sick, wasted and worn out. I had so many questions to ask her, but it was not appropriate to ask them; besides, it was impossible to get their answers at that time, for I had to help her immediately. Anoush's fine figure had faded away, and the physical sufferings had distorted her features, robbing her of the first flush of youth. I asked our driver Karo (I had somehow made friends with him on the way) to help me accommodate Anoush in the van. Father could not remember her, and when I told him who she was, he asked me painfully and with incredulity, "Is she really our relative Anoush? What's the matter with her? Where're her father and mother...?"

"Father," I hurried to reply to him in order not to aggravate Anoush's grief and suffering, "you shouldn't ask such questions now. She's sick, hungry and exhausted. We should do our best to somehow refresh her."

Karo, who was an astute, far-sighted man, had managed to hide a wooden box containing a few pieces of bread, sugar and even five tins of canned meat below his seat, convinced that we would soon run out of the food loaded on his van. I could not understand whether it was out of his compassion or respect for women that he confessed it. He also assured me that he would feed and take care of Anoush properly. "If you've decided to climb the mountain, you're really a patriot. Don't worry, may God be with you. Don't be anxious about your friend. I'll try to look after her till you come back. Don't worry about your father either; I'll take care of him, too."

I instantaneously flew into terrible rage and even wanted to break that man's face with my fists. Throughout two and a half years I had been dreadfully tormented and tortured because of having lost that girl. Now that I had finally found her, with an illusive happiness stirring about me, an uncouth and brutal carter wanted to send me to the battle-field cunningly so that I would commit murder. Abusing my patriotism, that man-like rude, merciless carter wanted to separate me again from the girl I loved and adored so much. Oh, how unfortunate I was! What sin had I committed to be mocked by fortune so insolently? Alas, I wished I had not made a decision to become recruited half an hour before... .

How strange and amazing such a course of events was! Was I to sacrifice and trample upon my duty of defending my people, my compatriots for the sake of my personal happiness? On the other hand, by defending my people I would also protect the honor, happiness and existence of my father and the girl, who was the main object of my dreams, would I not? If others like me and I did not fight who was to protect us?

I had appeared in a critical situation: my heart and reason had begun a fierce struggle in the depths of my soul. The former told me to stay there, with the creature of my dreams, whom I had once lost by some ill fate and then had found by an incredible miracle and happy stroke of fortune. My mind and merciless judgement, however, ordered me to perform my duty and realize the decision I myself had taken.

Indeed, I could renounce the duty I had imposed on myself, but thus I would be funny and condemned in my own eyes. Besides, I would become a wretched deserter for all those whom I had told about my decision. Yes, a fainthearted, miserable deserter for everybody, beginning with that rude carter Karo.

My mind, honor and self-esteem won victory and I decided to ignore my complaining heart's command. With profound sorrow I knelt beside Anoush lying without consciousness in the van, moved back her muddy hair from her forehead and kissed her withered cheeks with great anguish. Despite her extreme fatigue and exhaustion, she tried to raise her head to draw her face closer to my forehead, but she proved unable to. Attempting hard to open wide her big eyes, she cast an anguish-stricken look to mine. I could hardly hear her words uttered disconnectedly, with mortal mildness, "I'm an unfortunate girl... It's a pity, such a pity that I'll die with great anguish in my heart, without seeing my dreams come true"

"No, my dear, precious Anoush, you won't die, you shouldn't die. You shall live, you must live. I'm sure all your sufferings will soon come to an end. Try to encourage yourself with the near future. By God's help I'll return to you in a few hours. Upon my honor, from now on I'll always be with you, beside you... ."

I did not know if Anoush had heard my words spoken with cordial sincerity or not, for she was without consciousness and totally emaciated. It was only with extreme reluctance and difficulty that I separated with her. Before getting off the van, I begged Father and Karo, "Father, master Karo, please, help and take care of her till I come back. I'll try to return as soon as possible."

I left Anoush with infinite grief in my heart, my eyes full of anguish-stricken tears...

THE SELF-DEFENSE OF KOTUR GORGE

Bulgharatsy was in complete despair because of the uncertainty of his wife and child's fate. The utmost despondency, however, did not hinder him from fulfilling his duty of a patriot and he made up the plan of the self-defense of Kotur Gorge with Melkonian.

The groups of our armed forces led by the mounted spies had to ascend the mountains opposite those occupied by Smko and his companions-in-arms. Our soldiers mainly pursued the aim of hampering the Kurds in descending the gorge for the purpose of robbery and slaughter so that the multitude of the refugees would be able to traverse it safely.

It was extremely difficult to realize that plan, since our armed forces were totally unfamiliar with the area and the location of the Kurdish positions. However, they had no other remedy but to somehow help the persecuted and endangered deportees.

It was two hours after midnight when our armed groups gathered on the right of Kotur Summit. The glitter of the half moon lit our column making it noticeable for everyone.

"My dear boys," somebody said, whom I did not know and who had apparently been charged with that fighting, "let's divide into ten-soldier groups and move to the right carefully and noiselessly. I've been told the gorge is about twenty kilometers. As I counted our selfless soldiers while climbing the mountain, they amount to more than three hundred. Thus, if the groups accommodate themselves at a distance of six hundred steps from each other, the whole gorge will be under our control. We've thirty mounted soldiers to keep the groups in touch with one another and convey the necessary instructions. There's no point in reminding you that the salvation of your 30,000 retreating relatives and compatriots depends only on you. If you fail in your noble patriotism and brave defense, you'll doubtlessly betray them by making them prey to bandit Smko and his companions-in-arms, longing for robbery.

"You should once again prove through your devotion that you're Vaspurakan Armenians, the courageous representatives of the warriors of the April Heroic Struggle.

"Long live Vaspurakan Armenians, who're the Armenian nation's true sons! You know how to protect and save your fathers, mothers, sisters, wives and children at the cost of your noble blood. May you be honored and glorified!"

By sunrise we had already accommodated ourselves and occupied positions: I had entered a position as a soldier defending his homeland.

At sunrise the fugitives were granted permission to traverse the gorge: the huge multitude of the Armenian and Assyrian deportees, who had managed to get to Kotur Gorge within those several days, set out. The entrance to the gorge lasted for five hours, that being easier for those having some means of conveyance such as carts, horses, donkeys, oxen and cows. All their belongings had been loaded onto the animals which often carried the people as well. Those retreating on foot, however, were in a dreadful state and moved forward with panic and horror.

Incessant rumble, cries, shouts and quarrels. Even close people, the members of the same family, often had quarrels and arguments with each other. They hurried one another

er, making hard efforts to cross that infernal gorge as soon as possible and be saved. They knew that the enemy was lying in ambush to rob and slaughter them; that is why, overtaken by the horror of death, they only thought of having a narrow escape from them. They were fully right, for all their expectations came true: when all the retreating deportees had entered the gorge, Smko's Kurds opened diabolical fire on those unarmed people. The bullets were flooding the area from every corner and in every direction. The miserable wretches had grown panic-stricken, running headlong here and there. The fathers and mothers were carrying their children here and there, seeking for shelter behind the huge stones and rock crevices. The panic and tumult were but formidable.

When our soldiers commenced fire from the opposite mountains, the Kurds were taken aback and directed their bullets towards us. Learning that the retreating population was not totally armless and defenseless and they themselves were endangered, too, they increased the intensity of their fierce attack, this time our position becoming target for them. Those bandits' ammunition and, particularly bullets seemed to be countless: they were firing constantly and incessantly, perhaps, also operating machine-guns.

The furious fighting lasted long and an hour after midday, the Kurds were caught in a new trap. Twenty mounted soldiers had selflessly agreed to hit Smko's Kurds in the rear by opening fire on them from behind the mountain chain they had occupied. Suffering many fatalities, the Kurds took advantage of the coming twilight and began withdrawing, thinking that the number of their victims could still grow. By that time the turmoil of the retreating multitude had been reduced.

Our armed groups were told to advance towards the end of the gorge while it was getting dark. At first that order seemed rather strange, but later we learned its reason. Our soldiers supposed that the Kurds, who were well familiar with the local conditions and, in addition, had the night darkness on their side, could ring our forces and exterminate them.

Before reaching Salmast, we learned that the tragedy of Kotur Gorge had been rather shocking: unfortunately, the retreating people, especially those devoid of any vehicles, had been forced to leave the children unable to walk together with their old fathers, mothers and relatives in the gorge.

Another tragic consequence of the unnecessary delay was the massacre of about four hundred people and the capture of twice as many hostages in Kotur Gorge. Fortunately, Smko granted pardon to the Armenian captives and returned them to us in Salmast.

DILIMAN CITY, SALMAST

In the first half of April 1918, the exhausted Armenian refugees crossed the Persian border and took up temporary residence in several villages in Salmast, mostly in Haftvan, Ghalasar and Payajook. The Assyrians mainly joined their local compatriots in Khosrova Village.

In the days of our arrival in Salmast, Diliman, the district's principal city, was sieged by the Assyrian irregular forces and an Assyrian tribe called *Jelo*. They were assisted by a group of Russian soldiers, about a hundred in number, who had not managed to "return home". That group had three field guns.

The armed Jelos, who amounted to over two and a half thousand, convinced the Russian soldiers that Diliman had provided shelter for their common enemies, i.e. the Turks and Kurds. If their resistance was not crushed as soon as possible, the Turkish army would come to their rescue, and the Russians “returning home,” the Assyrians and Jelos would appear in rather a grave predicament.

Strangely enough, the Assyrian leaders succeeded in persuading some of our soldiers to take sides with them. “The sanguineous Kurdish bandits, who have butchered your defenseless fathers, mothers, sisters and children, are now concentrated in Diliman,” they declared. “If those criminal villains’ den is not destroyed immediately, thousands of your refugees, who have had a narrow escape from them, will share our massacre and nobody will be spared.”

The Jelos’ declaration, however, did not correspond to the reality at all, something we found out only later. Smko and his men-in-arms were at bitter enmity with the Assyrians and Jelos, their hostility being, perhaps, still more formidable than the Turks’ towards us, the Armenians.

In the years of World War I, the Central Persian Government had rather a weak influence on Salmast and Urmia, Western Atropatene. Those two districts as well as Persian Julfa, Khoy and the adjacent areas had turned into a theater of hostilities for the Russian and Turkish armies, being trampled upon and shifted back and forth between those two countries.

One day Smko invited Marshimon, the Catholicos of Jelos and Assyrians, to a lavish dinner, under the plea of signing an agreement of friendly relations, but actually for the purpose of realizing his base, fraudulent plan. Marshimon was killed by Smko’s men lying in ambush for him, when he was returning home after the glorious feast. That incident stirred up bitter enmity between Smko, his men-in-arms and the Assyrian Jelos. Marshimon’s sister, lady Serma, and the Assyrians’ leader Petros Agha assumed the Jelos’ military leadership, swearing vengeance on Smko and his companions for their killed Catholicos.

THE FALL OF DILIMAN

It was already a week since we reached Salmast. Diliman kept resisting and the guns left by the Russians roared incessantly, having almost ruined the city ramparts. The fires breaking out one after another had shrouded the city in smoke, rendering it invisible.

How dreadful and heinous the infuriated man’s ruthlessness is! The fierce instinct of revenge humiliates him, making him sink to the level of sanguinary predators, while conscience and sound reason vanish without any trace.

There could be no doubts that ninety-eight per cent of the sieged population comprised unarmed, wretched women, children and old people, just like our Aygestan inhabitants in the days of the April resistance. Those who had laid siege to the city knew that they had not committed any crime and were just as unfortunate and miserable as we were. They wanted to survive and had the right to stay in their country, live in their own houses, beside their hearths, enjoying life and the sun, that are heavenly gifts, together with their family members... . The enemy’s longing for vengeance, however, had completely blinded them.

Alas, how horrible that cursed war was! How diabolical and ill-fated were the man-like beasts who had unleashed it...! When were we to get rid of that blood bath and true hell?

The news spread that the Turkish army would soon come to the rescue of those sieged in Diliman. The situation grew even graver, for the city, more than half of which had been reduced to ruins, continued resisting with the desperate vigor of a person doomed to death. It was vital to find a way out before the arrival of the Turkish forces, and the following suggestion was sent to the people and their warriors through messengers, "You have only twenty-four hours to either deliver up your arms and surrender or leave the city. We give our word of honor and swear by everything sacred we have not to persecute you and do you no harm in case you leave the city. You may leave for Keohna-Shahir or Tabriz."

The population, who had lost all hopes for self-defense, immediately gave their consent to abandon the city. Jelos' leader Petros Agha strictly ordered his men-in-arms not to persecute and kill those leaving, and the night darkness settled over the city to see it being evacuated of its protectors. The next morning found Diliman deserted and defenseless. Those longing for robbery, particularly the Jelos, poured into the city.

SINISTER NEWS OF DEATH

At last I found Father two weeks after I had separated from him: he was in a painful state and told me a tragic, heart-rending story.

"When the Kurds began showering bullets on us in every direction, carter Karo, that mean, vulgar man, lost his head and started whipping up the horses harnessed to the van violently. One of the poor animals was injured in the thigh and began limping. Seeing that it couldn't run anymore, Karo got off the van and let it free by unharnessing it. Hardly had half an hour passed when, unfortunately, the other horse was wounded in the head and fell down on the spot. This time Karo hit the roof and began shouting at me, 'You, priest, if I continue this hellish way with you, I'll be killed, too. I don't want to die a silly death because of you. No wonder people refer to priests as whited sepulchres. No, by God, to tell the truth, I won't make a single step. Get off, hide yourself somewhere behind these stones, it'll be dark soon and you'll quietly follow us on foot without any fear. See, thousands have fallen behind and are coming on foot. You should thank me for having carried you so far.' "

"Then, then?" I asked impatiently.

"Then what? Seeing that rude, clumsy man would surely throw me out of the cart without any hesitation, I thought it senseless to flog a dead horse with that vulgar person. I had to get off. He burst into diabolical laughter and threw two of the loaves of bread he had stolen to me saying, 'Take it, or else you'll starve on the way.' Then he added impudently, 'Priest, don't curse me... Well, you've already cursed me by your presence. No wonder two of my best horses were killed. Go in peace. May God be with you.' "

"Then, then?" I asked involuntarily in confusion, without knowing what I actually wanted.

"Then...? Alas, how hard that 'then' was...!"

"Please, continue, Father, tell me the rest."

"The rest is very long and sad..., my son."

Unable to suppress the question gnawing at my heart, I said, "And where's Anoush, our Anoush?"

Father shook his head, hit his knees with both his hands, but he could not answer me at once.

"Do you mean she died? Did she die?" I burst into tears.

"My son, she died exactly at the moment you left her and us. I could hardly give her a few drops of water. She was too tortured, emaciated and faded away to bear the jerks of the cart that brutal man drove so violently. Her agony was tragic and formidable. I'm sure she fell victim to some frustrated love affair."

Father sighed a deep sigh of sadness and gave me a small, folded, crushed copy-book consisting of several pages.

"I found it in her blouse pocket together with some money."

ANOUSH'S JOURNAL

Having received the tragic, sinister news of death, I secluded myself from the whole world and went to the gardens surrounding Haftvan Village, where we had taken up temporary residence. Coming down the fence of one of them, I sat on the thick stump of an old tree.

I was burning with a desire to be in complete privacy and not meet a single person: if possible, I would be glad to consign myself to a hermit's rock-cut cell. My heart was rent, as if ready to be torn away from my chest. After thirty months of torture, I had come across that bewitching, unmatched girl by a miraculous chance and a capricious, ruthless trick of fortune to only lose her immediately and irrevocably.

A turbulent storm was raging in my soul and I wanted to weep bitterly and heartily. However, the tears accumulated in my eyes seemed to have come across a barrier, a rock, being unable to flow to alleviate and comfort my burning heart and soul.

The greatest misfortune for a person tormented by formidable mental suffering is that he needs to cry, shed tears to soften his severe pain and torture, but he is not able to...

I did not know how long I had been in that dreadful state when I recollected my beloved mother's death and my orphanage. A terrible pain stirred in my heart and I burst into tears, into a flood of tears.

My excited soul gained peace and my extremely tense nerves somehow relaxed.

I opened Anoush's journal and tried to read it attentively. Part of it was written in ink and the rest in pencil. Her handwriting was clear and intelligible, but in some places the text was totally deleted, certain sections being completely covered with ink. The jour-

nal was folded and crumpled, which made it difficult to read. I supposed she had made special efforts to keep it secret. Its contents were not long, but some lines were unintelligible and I could not read them, despite my repeated attempts. The journal stated,

“I was born in Hankusner Quarter, Aygestan, Van City, on January 30, 1900. I was my parents’ only daughter. Mother was a very pleasant, quiet woman. Father, whom our family members called “Sahak Agha” and the others “Cossack Sahak,” was a noble, good-hearted person by nature, although he seemed rather strict and even despotic. He didn’t like any errors in the fulfillment of his orders. He was rather a nervous man, fond of making noise around him.

“My poor mother and I didn’t dare to contradict him before I entered upon the fifteenth year of my life. We had some relatives, but Father didn’t like having any intercourse or exchanging visits with them with the exception of some three to four. He often forbade us to retain friendly relations with them and answer their visits.

“Aygestan had female Armenian schools, but Father made me go to that of the Catholic missionaries, although he didn’t like them either. I suppose if the Russians had had a school in Van, he’d have sent me there.

“Father, who was a flagrant Russophile, believed and trusted only the Russians. It was his extreme love for them that eventually brought misfortune upon us. He didn’t join us in the retreat, having made a steadfast decision to stay in Van and guard the Russian consulate.

“Our family lived a monotonous life and I always thought that my circle of friends was but too narrow. In the last several years preceding the war, Father allowed me to have friendly relations with a few of my school friends, and that on condition that we should do our lessons together. He didn’t have a favorable opinion on the Armenian young men, except for one who was our remote relative. Father’s extreme liking for him seemed surprising to me, although by some strange coincidence I liked and believed in that young man, too.

“By the war in 1915, I had grown into a good-looking, beautiful girl, as people would often say. Father wanted me to learn Russian besides Armenian and French, which were taught at our school. For that purpose he asked the secretary of the Russian consulate (it was in our place of residence) to have one-hour lessons with me three times a week. He was a very unsympathetic, insolent young man; that’s why, I often avoided those lessons making Father displeased with me.

“I supposed the year 1915 was to bring good luck and happiness to me, as the young man, whom Father and I liked, seemed quite nice and kind to me. I expected him to confess his love for me and propose to me at our meetings, which weren’t very frequent. My heart told me certainly I’d soon hear the happy confession and proposal I’d been looking forward to. Perhaps, I’d be the first to confess my love, but for my female shyness... .

“Unfortunately, very few people achieve the good luck and happiness they expect, and I wasn’t to be one of them. I wasn’t predestined to enjoy that happiness; Providence had prepared a grave calamity and sufferings for me instead of felicity and good luck, while I had been dreaming of them so very much. Alas, all that was futile and in vain...

“Broke out the war, that accursed war, and we, the wretched Van Armenians, appeared on the verge of extermination. Good heavens, how strongly I wish I had been killed right there: at least I'd have got rid of all the torture and torment I had to suffer later.

“Throughout an entire month, my compatriots fought heroically against the mean enemy wishing to uproot us. We were saved only to be overtaken by another calamity, that was still more dreadful.

“Began the disastrous retreat, which turned out a road to hell for our family. All of us found our deaths on that way: Father's egoism and stubbornness caused first his, then mother's and finally my death. He flatly refused to withdraw with us and made us set out without him. We agreed, but I wish we hadn't. Our entire misfortune consisted in that Mother and I were helpless and all by ourselves. We were waiting for S.'s aid up till the very last hour. But what am I talking about? The retreat, especially our hasty, chaotic retreat, was the evil of evils and the calamity of calamities. Nobody was able to think of helping the others: everybody was striving to run away and save their souls headlong, like madmen... .”

Anoush's memoirs were interrupted in this part. Something had been written on two opposite pages, but it had later been erased with special care. I tried hard to read those lines, but it proved impossible. Probably, those pages would have been torn away if the ones preceding and following them had not been written.

I thought those two pages contained deleted reproaches and accusations against me, and my soul was again assailed with heavy recollections. I began blaming myself for my carelessness and indifference. Yes, I was guilty: having learned about the retreat a day before, I ought to have helped the girl, whom I regarded as my future life and happiness.

There could be no doubts that the letter S. indicated me. Poor, unlucky girl! All her expectations had proved futile and I had remembered about her existence but very late. She had set out, desperate and disappointed, having no other alternative but to start that mortal journey. I attempted to blur out the sad thoughts in my mind and resume the reading of Anoush's memoirs. I had appeared in a strange state of mind: I was not able to understand what I was reading. The recollections of the last moments of the sinister retreat poured into my head accusing and reproaching me, “You are to blame... You were the reason for that unsurpassed, beautiful girl's loss.”

Tears are the only weapon crushed, frustrated love possesses. I again started weeping, the tears flowing not from my eyes but from the depths of my heart.

Evening had already set in and soon the night darkness would permeate everywhere. I heard repeated bombardment that was often interrupted: however, I took no notice of the reports ever threatening with danger. I was eager to continue reading Anoush's recollections, the rest of which was in a chaotic state. Although the text was deleted in many parts, I endeavored to read as much as possible.

“When Mother's and my requests proved useless to persuade Father to retreat with us, we set out on our own, forced by Father's supplications. We were among those who left the city very late.

“We hoped to come across any of our acquaintances, particularly S.’s family, but to our misfortune, it proved impossible. Our tragedy consisted in that the multitude of those withdrawing was too huge. The greatest evil was that everywhere you could witness panic-stricken crowds, unable to move forward. Very often even the members of the same family lost each other; so, it was no wonder at all that under those circumstances we could not find any of our relatives.

“Although Mother and I had a horse which facilitated our retreat I often had to walk: Mother, who was already in years, did not boast good health and was unable to cover that infernal way on foot. When I grew too tired, I rode the horse, our only hope and salvation, together with Mother. Sometimes I shuddered at the thought that the animal itself could get weary leaving us on half way.

“We somehow managed to reach the vicinity of Berkri, being totally fear-stricken, like all the fugitives. Suddenly some dreadful, unspeakable panic permeated through the crowd: the word spread that the Kurds had barred the way to Berkri with the intention of ringing the withdrawing crowd within two hours and extirpating all of them.

“Taking advantage of the general panic and wide-spread robbery, four armed people seized our horse, our only hope and support, in broad daylight, threatening us with pistols. Mother and I begged them in tears not to deprive us of the only means of our escape, but in vain...

“Why on earth do you need this horse when the Kurds will soon attack and kill all of us in less than half an hour? It’s we who should have this horse to be able to defend you. We’re going to fight against the Kurds. We’re going to climb the mountains to break the siege and attack the enemy. If we manage to drive them away, you’ll be saved; otherwise, both you and we will be exterminated and robbed of our belongings... .”

“That was the true beginning of our misfortune: nobody was willing or able to help us in that formidable panic and disorder, and our weeping and mourning were of no avail.

“The horror of the attacking enemy and the danger of carnage made us walk and run away on foot. Run away not to be slaughtered, run away to save our miserable lives and lamentable existence. Run away not to fall prey to the merciless, sanguinary enemy. A chaotic, instinctive escape ... to be saved and survive... .”

The fierce violence committed against Anoush and her mother aroused a heavy storm in my mind and I began burning with powerless rage. The so-called brutal “soldiers” who had deprived them of the horse, that was their only hope of salvation, did not differ much from the enemy raping the poor, helpless girls.

Alas, how formidable that disgusting, cursed war was! It had converted people into merciless, violent and blood-thirsty villains, had robbed many of sound reason, compassion, conscience and nobility turning them into fierce, sanguinary beasts.

I felt extreme fatigue, as if my body had been crushed by thousands of blows inflicted with iron whips. I was absolutely unable to continue reading the journal, perhaps, because I was too terrified to read about the true tragedy hidden in those lines. I was convinced its revelation was to be heart-breaking and would destroy all my inner world.

Probably, I wanted to restore my strength to be able to endure the mental shock that gruesome calamity was sure to cause.

I closed the journal, put it carefully into my inner pocket and tried to rise, but I could not. My general despondency and exhaustion put me into a kind of slumber, and I woke up only at about midnight. Although I still wanted to sleep, I had to return to our temporary residence in Haftvan Village so that Father, ever waiting for my return impatiently, would not worry a lot. The poor man, who was aware of my mental distress, had been waiting for me without getting a wink of sleep. He said to me mildly, but in a tone of reproach, "My son, you know I worry when you are late. If you do not spare yourself, spare at least me... ."

OUR ATTEMPT TO GO TO JULFA AND SALMAST'S RESISTANCE

While we were in Salmast, our national unsurpassed hero Andranik rushed to our rescue, advancing towards Khoy with great difficulty. Unfortunately, he got no news from us and concluded that we had left Salmast for Urmia. Besides, one of the gravest calamities was that we were absolutely devoid of any chance to somehow get in touch with Julfa or Yerevan: the enemy had surrounded us in all directions.

Taking advantage of the Russian troops' absence, the Turks soon restored their crushed army and began invading the west of Persia. Turkish commander Ali-Ehsan Pasha conquered most of the territory of Persian Atropatene beginning with Julfa-Khoy. He decided to siege us and make us lay down arms thus getting even with us. In late June, he suggested that our warriors should disarm themselves, in which case he promised not to bar our way to Julfa so that we would be able to get to Yerevan. Our military authorities did not believe that promise; indeed, they were fully entitled not to have confidence in the pasha's words. The Turkish commander sent another delegation reconfirming his consent to unblock our way. The refugees could be divided into groups each comprising fifty to a hundred people and leave for Yerevan via Julfa. Our leaders, however, again turned down that suggestion.

Early in July, Ali-Ehsan Pasha made another suggestion. Since our military leaders did not believe his promise and were unwilling to leave for Julfa-Yerevan, they had to depart from Salmast within two days heading for Urmia and the interior districts of Persia. Otherwise, he would have to resort to arms. Our side again refused to agree and the infuriated pasha ordered his troops to start the offensive: once again we entered into battle against our former bitter enemy.

On the morning of July 2, our spies told us that the enemy was advancing in the direction of Salmast. The order "To arms" was given and our armed forces were commanded to occupy positions to put up resistance against the enemy. How could we think of occupying positions when our soldiers were crushed, emaciated and unprepared for it?

We faced the alternative of either engaging or relying upon the enemy's mercy. We were at a loss and confused: consulting the Commander General of the Assyrian armed

forces, Petros Agha, our military leaders, who were to determine our destiny, decided to fight and resist.

Fight and resist... The decision had been taken, but it was too difficult to realize it. An important part of our soldiers had gone to Igdır from Berkri Kale, another section had suffered fatalities at Vostan's self-defense and was in a state of complete fatigue. As for the small number of soldiers who had stayed with the retreating deportees, they were exhausted and desperate. In a word, Vaspurakan Armenians' former vigor, belief and enthusiasm had oozed away.

"For whom am I going to sacrifice my life in these foreign lands?" That was what every homeless, derelict fugitive thought on his way of escape.

I have to confess that Petros Agha, the leader of the Assyrian armed forces in Salmast, was of remarkable instrumentality in helping us to overcome our general dependency and stupor. He committed himself to defending Diliman's front through his men-in-arms. To the left of Diliman lay Haftvan front, whose defense was vested in Colonel Melkonian. That experienced and patriotic military figure rendered a praiseworthy service in the final, decisive battle of Salmast. He had only one of the two or three (I do not remember well) field guns left by the Russian army at his disposal. Unfortunately, his soldiers, a hundred to a hundred and twenty in number, were absolutely inexperienced. After that battle, I often wondered where our former skilled and famous soldiers were and what had happened to them.

Colonel Melkonian made a brief but impressive speech explaining the seriousness of the situation and suggesting that the armed people gathered around him should voluntarily form a fifty-member group for the defense of the right wing, at a distance of half a kilometer from Haftvan. Everybody seemed to have grown as silent as Zechariah and Melkonian cried out desperately, "Isn't there a single person in this crowd deserving to be called an Armenian patriot? Where are the soldiers and their compatriots who took part in our heroic struggle?"

Without giving a serious thought to what I was doing, I rushed forward and cried out, "Mr. Colonel, I'm from Van and I'm ready to obey your order."

"Bravo, my son, come here!"

In his turn, Melkonian came forward to meet me, hugged and kissed me on the forehead. Within a few minutes, I was surrounded by thirty to forty people of different ages, the majority of whom was unknown to me. Melkonian said, "I'm appointing this young man as your leader. We're very short of time and can't dig trenches. You've to take positions in the ditches of the stream bed located exactly in this direction, at a distance of five hundred steps. Begin shooting as soon as the enemy opens fire and be quick so that they will think they are really dealing with warriors."

"Mr. Colonel," I protested, "it's only a few days since I became a soldier and I'm totally inexperienced. You'd better charge another, more skilled soldier with the group's leadership."

"I'm fully convinced your group can't be very influential in this fighting. The most important thing for us is to make the enemy believe our defensive front is quite large. Besides, one needs courage and bravery rather than experience in fighting. If the enemy

persevere in their attack, we'll open gunfire and also use automatics to counterattack them. Now go and may God be with you!"

I was going to continue my complaint against that unplanned appointment when my companion-in-arm Mkrkich from Sedrak's family rushed to me, gave me a nudge and said, "You, guy, don't flog a dead horse, agree to it. You'll soon see there's no true man here and we can't find one who'll be able to provide some remedy for our sorrow, as if the earth opened and swallowed all of them. Don't worry, I'll always be with you. God's all-merciful and, perhaps, He'll rid us of this calamity as well... ."

Then he told the men around us to cry out, "Long live our young leader! Long live our "heroic" leader!"

Although the people around me were armed, I doubted they could fight and resist properly, just as I doubted my own military skills. They put me in the center and pushed me forward with cries, shouts and bravos. We went to occupy the so-called position which was but a dry canal. Its depth could hardly hide us from the enemy's view, and that on condition that we should squat.

Our food, consisting of a round loaf of bread, half a kilogramme of canned meat and a vessel of water, could hardly suffice for a single day. Before we left, Melkonian told me to place my soldiers in the canal at a distance of twenty-five steps from each other. If our group had forty members we would occupy a distance of a kilometer, but checking the number of my companions-in-arms, I saw that they amounted to only thirty-four, including me.

DESPERATE RESISTANCE AND ESCAPE

It grew dark after we had occupied our positions. Our state was but deplorable: the canal serving as a shelter for us was wet and cold. Perhaps, we could make a fire by gathering wood and dry grass, but we were afraid to, in contrast to our enemy, who had lit many fires at a distance of but a few kilometers. In the night darkness the mild breeze brought the light and deaf noise of the burning fires to us.

The enemy's self-confident courage spoke of their numerical superiority. Our unorganized group, consisting of people who had incidentally come together and were devoid of any means of defense, was to put up resistance against minimum a company comprising experienced troops who had fought in many a long-lasting, fierce battle and were armed with every possible weapons and means of defense.

Although the so-called soldiers gathered around me realized the dreadful reality, they did not dare to confess it and talk aloud about it merely because they did not want to discourage one another. Finally, Mkrkich, who had encouraged me to assume that infinitely difficult task, spoke out, "Sirak, I was an utter fool to support you in accepting this heavy, dicey burden. There's no doubt that we can't resist even their very first attack. We'll drop like flies."

"Dear compatriot," I replied to Mkrkich, "now it's very late to think about that. First of all, it's me who's responsible for this risky undertaking, for I poked my nose into this affair without giving it a serious thought. Then you're to blame, as you made me assume this heavy responsibility. Anyway, I think our good fortune changed for the

worse at the very moment those predestined to forge it postponed our retreat. That delay actually became the true reason for all the disasters we've been suffering.

"If we had withdrawn at least several days before, Berkri road wouldn't have been barred before us and we wouldn't have been thrown into this alien place together with our compatriots. Now we'd be with our compatriots in Igdir, Echmiatzin, Yerevan, Gharakilisa and other parts of our homeland, sharing their destiny. Now we'd be fighting selflessly for our final freedom and salvation together with our compatriots, instead of being put to sword, starved to death, dying of various diseases and experiencing privations in foreign countries... ."

"Our leader's fully right." The man who had said that meant me, but I did not know him. The word "leader" began worrying me. "Just think, why on earth should we die a silly death here, for whom?"

"Compatriots," I interrupted, wishing to stop my friends' complaints, "now we've to think about the coming sunrise. I see this canal, which is to serve us as a position, is but very inconvenient. I think we'd better try to somehow deepen the places we're standing to defend us as much as we can. The soil's soft and I don't think it'll be difficult to dig and deepen it. By this work we'll warm up our bodies, that are beginning to freeze. Isn't my suggestion expedient?"

"Yes, it's vital," everybody said, "but how are we to dig? We don't have spades and hoes."

"We've no other choice. We've to dig with our posts," I answered and started digging into the place I was standing so that the others would be morally obliged to do so. In fact, the people around me were not liable to any military duty before me. They followed my example reluctantly.

I spent a very restless and troubled night. My compatriot Mkrtych, who had saved me from an inevitable bullet in Diliman a couple of weeks before, entertained me with both work and conversation. That man, whom I had come across quite by chance and who was my senior by some six to seven years, became my sincere and compassionate companion-in-arm. In order not to fall asleep and freeze we went to see our fellow soldiers, who had occupied "positions" with us, repeating our "visits" at an interval of two to three hours. The so-called position, i.e. the canal we had occupied, extended for about a kilometer, and each soldier had dug the soil under his feet, the pitches varying in their depth. So had done Mkrtych and I deepening the ground by half a meter and making a shelter-trench for us. I told my companion that I had worked in the rear in the days of our self-defense and afterwards. It was only by chance that I had become a volunteer. He gave me his word of honor to help me in my responsible task as much as he could so that I would not feel ashamed of myself.

"Reaching here and seeing the incomparable numerical superiority of the enemy stationed opposite us, I realized the mistake we had made. Now I understand why nobody agreed to come here. Everybody seemed aware of the danger awaiting them except us," Mkrtych said.

"Yes, my friend," I confirmed his supposition, "perhaps, you're right. Doubtlessly, there were some reasons forbidding everybody to meet Colonel Melkonian's entreaty.

His hasty appointment didn't give me an opportunity to perceive the seriousness of the problem."

Before sunrise the horizon turned crimson and reddish rays began spreading in the east of the vault of heaven. I asked Mkrtich to count the soldiers to the right of the place we were standing, while I moved to the left for the same purpose. Four of the fighters, who had come with us at night, turned out to have escaped and become deserters. What could I do?

We heard occasional reports from the opposite side, where the enemy had stationed themselves. The Assyrian and Armenian soldiers, who had fortified themselves in Diliman, answered them and the shooting intensified in a quarter of an hour.

The enemy's offensive was rather fierce. As usual, it was accompanied by various battle-cries and shouts approximately of the following contents, "Allah, allah! Hurray! Kill those gjaurs (infidels)!... Exterminate all those blockheads!" They were advancing in rows, following each other in a chain, while their firearms rained bullets upon us. Their guns, meanwhile, opened infernal fire to assist them and create panic among us by showering us with exploding bullets: in a word, our positions came under heavy fire.

Apparently, noticing how powerless the resistance in the direction of our canal was, the enemy immediately decided to break into our defensive line, penetrate into the rear and lay siege to our two main defensive positions in Diliman and Haftvan. Our canal-position, devoid of any means of resistance and defense, had appeared in a dreadfully critical state. Hardly had an hour passed when four soldiers were killed, while five were lying along the canal having been heavily wounded. I was injured in my left knee and within several minutes my knee, shin and foot were blood-soaked. Mkrtich came to my rescue bandaging up my knee with both his and my handkerchiefs: it was of no avail, however, for blood was still oozing from the wound.

Fortunately, exactly at that time happened a rare miracle, one of those exceptional ones that people witness very seldom, if ever. The small number of armed forces under Melkonian's most praiseworthy leadership launched a fierce onslaught and the field guns and machine-guns started raining fire and flames on the enemy, who were attacking like madmen. The Armeno-Assyrian forces in Payajook and Ghalasar as well as our warriors concentrated in Diliman hurried to support Melkonian selflessly in his counterattack.

In the open field our soldiers showered the crazy Turks with bullets, which made them drop like flies. The intensity of their fierce offensive abated and they ran away in the direction of their former positions, panic-stricken at the sight of their numerous killed companions-in-arms knocked to the ground. We were saved by some unexpected, unspeakable miracle.

"There's absolutely no point in our staying here. If I don't manage to take you to our soldiers within half an hour, you'll completely bleed to death," Mkrtch said. Without waiting for my answer he took me to Melkonian in our central position by holding me by the arm and dragging me on the ground with extreme difficulty.

"What about our injured companions-in-arms, who are lying in this cursed canal and can still survive? What are we to do with them?"

“The sooner we reach the Colonel the sooner we’ll be able to tell him to help them,” my friend answered, who was trying to save me.

BEING WOUNDED

Contrary to all my expectations, Colonel Melkonian received me cordially, again kissed me on the forehead like the first time and said, “Bravo, my boy! Your risk and courage are worthy of great praise!”

“But, Mr. Colonel, I wasn’t able to do anything with the boys under my leadership. I feel guilty and ashamed of our failure... .”

“No, my son, no, you’re mistaken. I repeat your self-denying commitment is worthy of great praise. Being a serviceman I’m well-aware of the organization of the attack and resistance. Sometimes the slightest manifestation of good tactics can yield remarkable results. The Turks were deceived by launching their attack in the direction of the canal under your defense. They primarily thought to kill the defenseless warriors gathered there (they thought they were greater in number than it really was) and thus create discouragement among us. It would facilitate their penetration into our rear and their siege of us. While they were attacking in your direction, we took advantage of that excellent opportunity and hit them in the front and rear, slaughtering their soldiers, who were busy with that unplanned, risky undertaking. Our counterattack together with that by our warriors in Payajook and Ghalasar terrified them and made them take their heels.

“Well, I don’t have any right to force you to stay here. Your wound should be dressed immediately. Perhaps, your knee will have to undergo some minor operation. I’m sure you won’t lose your bravery because of this.”

Before parting, I said to Melkonian, “Mr. Colonel, please, somehow move those lying in the canal we’ve been defending. Perhaps, we can still save some of the injured among them.”

“You shouldn’t worry about it at all. I’ll immediately give the necessary orders for their transportation.”

Accompanied and assisted by my selfless friend, I set out for Diliman on a small military ambulance, that was actually a small lorry, with Colonel Melkonian’s letter of introduction addressed to Diliman hospital’s surgeon. By the time we reached hospital I had almost bled to death being extremely exhausted. The only thing I was able to feel was that I was being put on the operation table. I remained without consciousness for two days.

Opening my eyes on the third day, I saw Father and Mkrkich at my bed-side. The former cried out for infinite joy, “Thank goodness! Thank God for a thousand times! You had mercy upon me returning to me my dear son, my only hope and support at present.”

“Father, your and our God is very merciful and gracious,” Mkrkich said. “He listened to our entreaties and revived our dear Sirak.”

“What’s the matter? Why are you so excited and desperate? I was too exhausted and bloodless; that’s why, I rested by having a sleep.”

“But your rest by having a sleep cost us a heavy price. We didn’t get a wink of sleep for three days and nights,” Mkrtych said.

I was told that my operation had been rather serious and had lasted very long: for more than half an hour the surgeon and his assistant had made hard efforts to remove several big and small fragments of the exploded bullet from my knee. Fortunately, my knee bones had not suffered any fracture and I had fainted because of the long hemorrhage.

ANOTHER WITHDRAWAL AND ESCAPE

It was already four days since I was taken to hospital. Twice a day the nurse bandaged up my wounded knee kindly and carefully. She insisted that it healed rapidly and I would finally recover within seven to eight days; Father, meanwhile, did not leave me alone.

It was around midday when my friend Mkrtych, who had left my bed-side only the previous night, broke into the room, being completely out of breath. Confused and panic-stricken, he said the following, “We’ve again heard sinister news of retreat and escape. The rumour’s spread that the Turks are going to attack us again, this time with a greater number of troops and better preparations. I’ve also heard that the Assyrian warriors’ leader Petros Agha, who’s been against withdrawing so far, has given his consent to it. Our leaders have declared that they’ll leave Salmast for Urmi* without him if he doesn’t agree.”

Retreat, escape. Those words aroused hatred and disgust in all my compatriots and me. This time I was terrified at that thought: in my present state I was not even able to rise to my feet, let alone running away. That meant that I was to be taken captive by the enemy, being totally abandoned and defenseless. I was overwhelmed by discouragement and endless sadness and all my body began shuddering.

“Then I’m to fall prey to our merciless, violent enemy,” I whispered hopelessly.

“Don’t worry at all. I’ll now rush to Melkonian. I’m sure he’ll give you some vehicle.” Sedrakian ran out without waiting for my opinion and reply.

The re-formed Turkish army had all the advantages in the rear and in all the other directions. The Russian troops and the mounted regiments of the horrifying Cossacks had returned to their homeland, while Andranik, who was a true scourge for the Turks, had left the Persian borders, completely unaware of our existence and place of residence. The English had vanished from those areas without any trace so that the Turkish military figures and army had got a wide and safe area of free activity. Eventually, time had come to get even with several thousands of inexperienced Armenians and Assyrians, who had entered into cooperation with Turkey’s enemies. It was high time they exterminated and wiped them out thus wreaking vengeance upon them.

The order for the retreat was given on the night of July 6, 1918. Another period of wanderings so familiar to us. The same calamity and tragedy, the same withdrawal and escape, this time towards Urmia.

It was half past ten at night when Sedrakian came in, proud and triumphant.

“See, my friend, I told you Mr. Melkonian is a true patriot and brave man, didn’t I? He even thanked me for reminding him about you. He immediately ordered to give those heavily wounded and you a good van, I mean one drawn by good horses. It’s now at the entrance and this is for the head of the hospital.” A little later he added, “I’ve also found a good burro for our priest and me. He’s both your and my father and we won’t quarrel over the animal. We’ll somehow get along.”

IN URMIA

After a two-day hard trip, we finally reached Urmia. My knee wound had again begun bleeding as a result of the incessant jerks of the van and all my strength had oozed away because of the severe pain.

Fortunately, we managed to get to Urmia before I finally bled to death: the injured and I were taken to the local American hospital, where our wounds were hastily bandaged up and all the necessary measures were taken for us. The hospital was a clean building with airy and light rooms in the Surgical Department.

The surgeon, who seemed very attentive and pitiful, was either an American or Englishman, but he spoke Turkish fluently, having lived in Urmia for many years. Attempting to encourage me, he said, “Do not worry, young man. You will completely recover in a few days and will begin walking freely as before. Luckily, your wound is not a serious one and, what is most important, it has not festered causing blood poisoning in your organism.”

The surgeon's reassuring words gave me hope and I became very happy thinking that I would not have any problems with my leg. My bodily wound, however, had not discouraged and depressed me so much as the grave one in my heart, caused by Anoush’s tragedy. That incurable pain had inflicted a ruthless, intolerable blow to me: I had sunk into depression, my soul having turned into a void. The surgeon had assured me that my injury would heal in a couple of days, but who could give me any promise or guarantee that I would overcome the severe pain in my heart? In those days, life seemed to be of absolutely no value to me...

Urmia City (at present it is called Rezayie) was wonderfully beautiful with its nearby villages. If I was not born and reared in Aygestan, I would certainly regard the city and the adjacent countryside as the most beautiful and liveliest ones I had ever seen. Bewitching freshness, abundant vegetation, beautiful, evergreen trees and, especially vines, vivifying verdure, resonant waters, endless gardens and alleys breathing life and vigor. In a word, a vast heavenly area amidst whose rich verdure human beings, animals and the lifeless houses were merely lost without any trace. Truly, human tongue and pen are hardly able to describe the unspeakable, luxuriant beauties of that paradise!

It was but natural that the population in that city, so lavishly endowed with nature’s beauties, particularly the small number of Armenians inhabiting Rahva and Geardabad Villages, had fully inherited the fine qualities of that land. Urmia’s good-hearted, gen-

erous and hospitable Armenians received us, the tortured, exhausted, starving and half-naked refugees driven away from their homes and native hearth, cordially, with smiling faces. They seemed to be welcoming their own parents, sons, sisters and brothers, who had finally returned to their homes after a bare existence in foreign lands. They did not spare their bread, food, sweet grapes and apples for us, providing us with everything they had without ever thinking that they might be as hungry as us in a few days. The local Assyrians displayed almost the same attitude to their newly-arrived compatriots.

May the unsurpassed inhabitants of that heaven be ever honored and glorified!

THE HEART-RENDING JOURNAL

The unusual freshness of nature in Urmia with its vivifying air and water was of great contribution to the healing of my wound. I was released from hospital two weeks after I had been taken there. At first I relied on the walking stick for several days, but then it became rather unnecessary for me and I began walking without any support, although I limped a little. My knee troubled me especially when the air was damp: for many years I was not able to overcome that pain, which became an inseparable and undesirable legacy for me. I should thank my lucky stars to have had such a narrow, miraculous escape from death, but to my great pain, it was not so. Some invincible sadness and dissatisfaction had permeated all my essence. Anoush's heart-rending journal, containing the description of her sufferings, did not vanish from my mind, and her recollections gnawed at my heart. That heart-breaking journal continually plunged me into infinite depression and despondency so that sometimes I even regretted having survived the battles I had taken part in. Knowing that the reader of my book would like to get acquainted with the contents of that journal and, especially learn its end, I allow myself to read its most important parts once again.

"... After the horse, our only hope and support, had been violently seized from our powerless, defenseless hands, Mother and I were forced to continue the way, moved forward by the horror of death. But how long could we endure that dreadfully tiresome way? Mother was ill and absolutely unable to walk. Unfortunately, nobody could be found to help us during that retreat-escape. For many times Mother asked and begged me to leave her and continue the way on my own, but how could I do that?

"Suffering unspeakable torture, we somehow managed to pass through Berkri and reach the beginning of Abagha Plain. Mother's condition was getting worse and worse: if I made her continue the way, I'd kill her with my own hands. We were forced to stop there and stay in Abagha Plain.

"Very often the human being becomes strangely selfish and malignant. Having been reduced to the state of an unlucky wretch, he cordially wishes others to share his misfortune. Perhaps, Mother and I were happy seeing that we were not alone in suffering our ill fate: the others around us were just as sick and powerless as we were, unable to continue that accursed way.

"The most formidable thing about all that was that those wretches, amounting to several hundreds, also suffered another intolerable nightmare besides that of the enemy's attack and extermination. Everybody shuddered at the thought of starving to death. How long could they survive living on grass and roots?

“Sometimes fortune smiles even on such miserable wretches as we were. About two weeks later, the word spread that the Russian troops were coming back to reconquer the lands they had abandoned, first of all Van and Vaspurakan. We, the helpless fugitives, were happy beyond any description...

“Really, that miracle did occur and we saw several groups of mounted Russian Cossacks moving towards Berkri. However, we did not see any troops following them. They were said to be advancing by the route of Igdır-Alashkert.

“We, the abandoned, lonely refugees, can never forget the day Grigor Bulgharatsy and his loyal companion-in-arm Levon reached Abagha Plain, accompanied by some twenty soldiers. Immediately after their arrival, we saw some vans loaded with flour, Jerusalem artichoke and sugar, which were allocated to the fugitives. Hunger had squeezed every drop of strength out of us, and we revived, having almost appeared on the verge of certain death.

“... Unfortunately, Mother proved unable to bear the mental and physical torture she had been exposed to. She was consigned to the refugee’s thin mattress for an entire month and yielded up her spirit to God, her heart burning with anguish for life, her eyes reflecting the grief and sorrow of her irrevocable parting with Father and me.

“That marked the true beginning of my tragedy. I was all by myself, deprived of all my close people and, what’s even more dreadful, I was young and inexperienced. What was I to do? On whom was I to rely...? Only the person who has ever found himself in that helpless, lamentable state can realize the whole misery and despair of my condition. In those days, under those circumstances such a lonely, helpless orphan as I was resembled a precious treasure, a shining diamond thrown into a large square in broad daylight, before people’s very eyes. Everybody hurried to seize and take possession of that lonely, neglected treasure violently. Good heavens, how intolerable, dreadful and deplorable my state was...!

“I was young and, as my unfortunate mother and others insisted, beautiful and charming. Alas, how strongly I wish I wasn’t so attractive. Many people were eager to tempt and even take possession of me violently because of that beauty.

“For several months after Mother’s death, I had to live a life of a vagabond, going from Abagha to Berkri and thence to Timar. An important part of the fugitives, especially the peasants who had come back in the spring of 1916 and later, lived in Timar’s villages.

“Having a misgiving of her coming death, my unfortunate mother gave me twenty-five gold coins hidden on her body. She was very frightened and secretly told me the following, ‘Anoush, my only, precious child, these are twenty-five gold coins. I’ve saved them for a rainy day. Take and hide them somewhere very carefully. If you happen to go back to Van and find your father, take care of him; he doesn’t have any other relatives except you. Fulfill your filial duty nobly. Although your father was strict and stubborn by nature, he had a kind heart. Try to keep high your honor and never be deceived. Alas, what a terrible calamity struck us...! I’m sorry, so sorry to die as an unlucky wretch! What an unfortunate mother I am...! I wish I remained alive till I married you with a noble husband... .’

“Having become very timid, I suspected and feared everybody. I was constantly haunted by the thought that I’d be soon stolen and kidnapped. My brain had only a sin-

gle fixed idea: I was incessantly thinking of finding a protector and a haven. This had put me into a strange, inexplicable state, making me intolerably nervous.

“Sometimes I even thought of committing suicide. Why on earth should I suffer so much, crushed under the burden of all those horrors and nightmares when I could put an end to all that within a single minute, by making a final decision to commit suicide...?”

“I was in that unnatural, extraordinary condition when I came across and got acquainted with a group of six young men by chance. As they told me, two of them were agronomists, the other two were servicemen, one was an assistant doctor and the other a teacher. One of the agriculturists, who was apparently younger than the other, told me that the teacher and he had been appointed to settle the agricultural and educational problems in A. Village. The teacher suggested that I should join them and go to that village to work with him. He also promised to provide me with whatever moral support I needed.

“I supposed I had finally met someone, ready to patronize me: on the other hand, it was a golden opportunity for me to get rid of the torturing nightmare of loneliness and unemployment at least temporarily. I agreed and left for A. Village with the young men. The preparatory work at school was over in two weeks and I began teaching there. I was gradually getting over my fears and my extremely tense nerves were already relaxing. My pessimism was gradually vanishing and the heart-rending impressions of the most hated retreat were unable to gnaw at my soul with the previous intensity.

“The teacher I had got acquainted with assumed the post of the school inspector. He made hard attempts to enter into friendly relations with me, attract my attention and win my favor.

“Two months later, the two servicemen, the assistant doctor and agriculturist, returned from Aygestan. Van’s Supervising Body had appointed them in certain positions in accordance with their profession: thus, one of the two military figures, Misak Nourijanian, who was from Alexandrople, had been charged with the supervision of the Refugee Stations in Berkri and Timar Regions. He was a semi-literate and very conceited person. He would often introduce himself as a skilled military figure, who was Bulgharatsy’s close friend, something I doubted very much. Not only did he attempt to create illusions of a despotic commander for himself but also strove to spread his imaginary authority to his friends.

“The inspector of our school, who also taught there, Artashes Bagratian (he was from Artamet in origin), hid secret hatred for his friend, his hostility being shared by the region’s agronomist and assistant doctor. For reasons I could not understand they concealed their antipathy and discontent. I supposed they were afraid of their friend from Alexandrople.

“One day inspector Bagratian said to me, ‘Miss Anoush, being your true friend, I worry about you. I have to tell you to be careful with that Misak. He is a crafty, cunning fox and makes every possible effort to catch you in his trap and take possession of you impertinently. Do not be deceived by his flattering tongue and sly plans. He often boasts about the traps he sets time and again for naive, inexperienced girls, playing insolent tricks on them.’”

“Our school broke up for Easter in 1917. It was already the second year since I started working as a teacher. The secondary school in A. Village, which was going to establish six more classes, had become the most important one in the district. We even had pupils coming from the other villages, and the teaching staff now comprised six teachers instead of the former two.

“Misak Nourijanian, who had been appointed chief of police of the same district, wore a military uniform, with a pistol hanging on his right side. He came to visit us on the occasion of Easter (as he himself insisted) and stopped at our inspector’s, not far from the school and the village head’s brother’s house, where I lived. My hosts, noble peasants having two children, held me in great respect. Their son Zaven, a ten-year-old boy, was my pupil. He would constantly follow me, like a butterfly ever hovering around a lamp, enjoying buying the food necessary for me and sometimes performing my orders.

“One evening Zaven came to tell me that our inspector had asked me to go to them for half an hour. ‘Miss Anoush,’ Zaven said, ‘the inspector has asked you to go to them for half an hour... .’

“He paused, bent his head and stammered without looking at me, ‘That chief of police, who wears a pistol on his side, is with him... .’

“That small clever boy knew more than he had said, but he was reluctant or, better to say, ashamed to add anything and ran out of my room, his head again bent... .

“‘That chief of police, who wears a pistol on his side, is with him... .’ The child instinctively predicted some evil coming from that man wearing a pistol.

“At first I wanted to turn down the inspector’s invitation, if I did so they might come to my room, whereas I was not able to entertain them properly; I did not have any facilities for that. My whole furniture comprised a bed, a small table and a seat.

“I was obliged to go to the inspector against my wish and will. Oh God, I wish I had not gone there. Seeing me, Nourijanian, who was as drunk as a skunk, failed to control himself and attacked me. He hugged me tight with the violence of a hungry man longing for food, but I made superhuman efforts and rid myself of his arms just as he was trying to kiss me. I ran back in the direction I had come, being utterly terrified.

“The next morning Nourijanian sent me a note, apologizing for his indecency. I concluded that besides being a rude and insolent rascal, he was also illiterate.

“The following day our inspector Bagratian told me that he had seriously quarreled with Nourijanian over the latter’s violence done to me at night. They had hardly kept themselves from beating each other.

‘You’re the only reason for my failure and you’re to blame for that,’ Misak had said to the inspector. ‘You’re always hindering me from realizing my plan. If you hadn’t poked your nose into it, I’d have taken possession of her, achieving my aim, just as I’ve done with other girls so far.’

‘You’re absolutely wrong,’ our inspector answered, ‘Anoush isn’t like the girls you’re used to. It’s totally impossible to take possession of her with such base, rascally means. She’s very noble and virtuous. It’s sheer impertinence to have such dishonest and mean intentions for her.’

“That insolent villain, however, would not give up his base plan so easily and would not agree to leave me alone. Four days later he wrote me another note of the following fraudulent contents, ‘Miss Anoush, there’re still several days before the reopening of the school and we should take advantage of that organizing a nice walk. Lim Island represents a bewitching scene during this season of the year. I’ve procured everything to make a three-four-day trip to that beautiful historical place. Please, don’t reject me. If you agree, Bagratian will accompany us.

Ever respecting you deeply,
Nourijanian.’

“It stuck out a mile that the letter had been written by another person and the chief of police had only signed it. I had already formed a certain idea about that adventurous man’s illiteracy while reading his first letter, which he himself had written. I wrote the following at the bottom of his sly letter, ‘I am very sorry to turn down your suggestion. I am ill and do not feel like going on a trip.’

“Receiving my reply, Nourijanian grew infuriated and hit the roof. Before leaving the village, he declared to Bagratian, ‘It’s all the same, I’m not going to give up my plan. I’ll resort to any means to break that conceited girl’s senseless, inappropriate resistance and achieve my goal...’

“I had appeared in an intolerable situation. Suffering from the nightmare of continual fear and horror, I thought of leaving for Van immediately and going to Bulgharatsy to tell him everything and ask him for help to defend myself.

“I consulted Bagratian, who advised me to wait till he wrote to Bulgharatsy and explained to him everything in detail as an eye-witness. He assured me that the latter was a noble, resolute man and would, perhaps, release that rascal from his position, at least making strict remarks against him. I agreed. Bagratian kept his promise and wrote to Bulgharatsy about what had happened in all details. In my turn, I wrote a letter to Bulgharatsy’s wife Maro (I had got acquainted with her through S.) asking her to help me to get rid of that villain. However, the answers to those letters and the expected influence they were to exert were very late and both Bagratian and me were very surprised at that...

“The chief of police continued visiting us. Once he attempted to kidnap me through his guards, but fortunately, my host and his son, my pupil, came to my rescue. Those trying to kidnap me had to give up their infernal plan seeing that it would only disgrace them...

“At eleven o’clock at night in late December 1917, the shameless chief of police, who was as drunk as a lord, broke into Bagratian’s flat with his guards. They gave the inspector such a severe beating that he fainted, his whole body in bruises. ‘You, insolent teacher, you’re such an ungrateful villain that you sell your old friend for the sake of a bitch. You’re spying on me and writing letters to Bulgharatsy for her sake... I’ll kill you, dirty dog, and that bitch and then I’ll go to Bulgharatsy in Van to protect myself,’ Nourijanian shouted, infuriated.

“Woe is me! What an ill-starred fate I have got! That noble, wonderful young intellectual, the most beloved and highly respected inspector of our school, was violently killed to save me from dishonor and misfortune... . He died, his heart burning with anguish for life... . He died with an honest striving to save me... .”

MARO'S LETTER

This was the end of ill-fated Anoush's bitter recollections. Unluckily, I could not understand how her unfortunate young life had come to such a tragic end. I found a battered, crumpled letter in her journal. The letter, that had been written by Maro, helped me to guess the deplorable end of that young life, that had begun blooming and blossoming again.

The letter, which was dated March 17, 1918, read,
"My dear sister Anoush,

I answered your letter immediately about three months ago and I am very surprised you have not received it. I think our post service has not overcome this general chaotic situation yet. I am very sorry my letter did not reach you. There are two things I am very interested in. First of all, I would like to know if you have got rid of that shameless police chief's persecution. I suppose you must have got rid of him, as Grigor has assured me that he has been released from work. Then, I would like to tell you something about Sirak, who is almost like a brother to me. I decided not to tell him that you were in A. Village, for I am not aware of your present state. I thought there was absolutely no point in causing my brother further sufferings in case you turned out to be married or there was somebody you were interested in. I am fully aware of his feelings and love for you.

Unluckily, I cannot invite you to come here, as again rumours have spread about unrest. Grigor does not want to tell me anything about it, but he has told me that I have to leave Aygestan with my only child one of these days. He would never agree to our undesirable parting, but for the possibility of some serious danger.

Anyway, I hope you will get at least this letter, as I am sending it through a reliable person, who is coming to your village. Once you are convinced the conditions are favorable you can come to Aygestan and find our people here, if you wish. I am sure my brother Sirak will be extremely happy to meet you.

With sincere love,
Maro."

Once Anoush had received that letter she should have made two decisions immediately. Firstly, she must have determined to return to Aygestan to meet me, secondly, she must have run away after the school inspector's tragic death, horrified at the thought of persecution.

Anyway, it was clear that Anoush had come across the multitude of deportees on her way to Janik Village and had added to the number of those escaping people.

The most incredible and, moreover, painful thing about all that was that I could not arrive at a certain conclusion. Why was Anoush so physically emaciated and exhausted? She could not have been so worn out even if she had covered the whole way from Janik to Kotur on foot within several days. Had she again been subjected to the persecution and terror of that villainous chief of police on that way? Had that rascal managed to kidnap her finally...? What could have happened? Her journal did not contain a single word or letter to shed light on that tragic, mysterious end... Who was the so-called Misak Nourijanian, who had played such a diabolically merciless role in the darkening of the sunny life of such an innocent, wonderful, unmatched girl as Anoush...?

MY LAST MEETING WITH BULGHARATSY

The last days of July 1918. My knee wound having healed, I had started walking without crutches, although I limped a little. My only consolation was that in case we continued the withdrawal I would be able to walk, indeed, overcoming some difficulty. Everyone was in suspense over the outcome of the situation. We were sure that our revengeful enemy would persecute and drive us away from Urmia, that magnificent city, that had become our temporary haven.

Ever since we retreated from Arjak Village I had not had a single opportunity to find Bulgharatsy alone and unoccupied to have some talk with him, something that had always been pleasant and interesting for me. I greatly believed in his patriotism and disinterestedness. First of all, I wanted to get some news about Maro, his unsurpassed wife and the guardian-angel of my childhood. Besides, I was eager to obtain certain information on Misak Nourijanian, the chief of police in Timar District. Once in late July I went to see Bulgharatsy around four o'clock, knowing that he was in the habit of resting between two and four after midday. As usual, he received me with great kindness.

"Sirak, oghul, how could you not visit me for such a long time?" He asked and immediately added noticing that I was limping, "Why are you limping? What's happened...?"

"I've been wounded in the knee, Mr. Bulgharatsy."

"How many times have I told you to forget that 'mister'. Just call me Grigor. OK, now tell me how you were wounded."

"I was fighting during Smko's offensive."

"What do you mean? I don't remember you fighting."

"That's right, I didn't have the slightest idea about fighting before that offensive. When the news spread that he was going to attack us, I became a soldier voluntarily hoping that I'd defend my compatriots by shooting several bullets."

"Logically you were right, but I'm so sorry all our efforts and sacrifices were finally of no use. The abandonment of the fronts by the Russian army was fraught with many calamities for the Armenians, particularly the Turkish Armenians. And what awaits the Caucasian Armenians? I can't predict anything. To my profound pain, I've to confess that we made a fatal error: we should have obeyed our great patriot Andranik's and Yerevan Security Council's instructions retreating from Van a few days earlier.

"Our delay caused us extremely great damage. Being thrown into this remote land, we were totally deprived of the chance to join our compatriots in Caucasia and cooperate with them. Besides, there's also another disaster, which makes me utterly anxious: I mean the hopeless state of those 7,000 Vaspurakan inhabitants, who failed to join us and remained in the Turks' claws. Who can doubt what dreadful torture and sinister death await them?"

Bulgharatsy wanted to continue, but he proved unable to: his unspeakably bitter excitement had created a lump in his throat and for the first time I noticed that firm man of iron turn pale. The sorrow gnawing at his heart was well-known to me: foreseeing the impending danger, he had told Maro to leave Aygestan with their only precious child to save themselves from the turbulent retreat, about which no official order had been issued yet.

When the Kurds attacked Berkri, the military detachment charged with the defense of Berkri Bridge proved unable to put up resistance against them and left for Igdir. Timar District shared the inevitable danger threatening Berkri, and Bulgharatsy's wife and child found themselves in the zone of immediate danger, it becoming completely impossible to get any information about them.

Bulgharatsy was plunged into chaotic thoughts, as if having completely forgotten about my presence. Unwilling to cut the thread of his deep meditations, I silently rose from my seat and was about to leave when he came to himself, rubbed his forehead with the palm of his right hand and woke up from his stupor. In his turn, he hastily rose to his feet and said, "I'm sorry, Sirak, recently I've often been in this state, I mean in such a stupor. I'm suffering terribly because of Maro and my Koryun. Sometimes it seems to me they're kept captive in the Turks' or Kurds' criminal hands... . I'm in a very, very unbearable, restless state. I'm not in the habit of dreaming, but now I often spend sleepless nights and see only nightmares in case I fall asleep. Sometimes I dream about my wife and child having the impression that they're begging me for help... ."

"Well, to my mind, you shouldn't worry so much, for Maro and Koryun set out some three to four days before the retreat and must have certainly left Berkri before the conquest of the bridge."

"You're right. Under ordinary circumstances it would have so happened, but look here, I told them to wait for me before entering Berkri. Here's the mistake. I made numerous attempts to phone Maro from Janik and Arjak, but unfortunately, I did not get through."

"That very fact comes to prove that they've passed through Timar and Berkri Districts and have left for Igdir. So, you shouldn't worry so much."

"Alas, I wish it was so, but my suspicious heart is constantly busy with evil suppositions. Good heavens, I wish I hadn't seen them off beforehand! If we had been predestined to die or be killed, it would have been far better for us to get rid of this hell together, at once. I always ask myself what sin we, the Armenians, have committed to be so heavily persecuted by these cursed, insolent Turks. They've driven us away from our native soil, our heavenly homeland and, still, they don't leave us alone even under this foreign horizon for us to breathe freely. This world, its air, sun, water and verdure, trees and flowers seem to exist only and only for these villainous rascals, while we are to see only their barbaric swords and flames... . I'm fully convinced, however, that after all, these vandals will be stifled in our exterminated people's protesting flood of blood... ."

Before parting with Bulgharatsy, I asked him about Timar District's chief of police Misak Nourijanian. Being well-aware of the sinister adventures of that villain, he told me the following, "Conducting an investigation into the unrestrained affairs of that Nourijanian through a most reliable person, I released him from work and sent him to Vostan. That notorious Misak was killed during the latest fighting in Vostan, thus paying for A. Village teacher's innocent blood."

TOWARDS SAYIN-GHALA AND BIJAR

The head of the Protestant Mission in Urmia, Doctor Sheyd, who was also the representative of the English Government, kept assuring the leaders of our retreating multitudes that the English troops would soon come to our rescue from Maragha, Miando-ab, Sayin-Ghala or Hamadan, defending us against the Turkish offensives and the local Kurds. That good, believing missionary's promises, however, turned into a voice crying in the wilderness: not a single Englishman came to at least encourage us, to say nothing of defending us. On July 31, we were forced to leave Urmia, that beautiful, lively city, bearing an illusive resemblance to our magnificent Aygestan.

The horror of the Kurdish attacks again started haunting us. The armed people were ordered to ring the refugees, but the caravan of the Armenian and Assyrian deportees, already amounting to 70,000, was so long that it was utterly impossible to fulfill that command.

Withdrawing human throngs are very likely to go crazy out of the horror of being attacked and butchered. Their brains lose all their sound reason and equilibrium and they turn into merely escaping mute, lifeless shadows, with all their feelings of compassion absolutely deafened in them. Is it possible to introduce order and discipline into those escaping crowds under such conditions?

The armed people themselves, who were to protect that long caravan, were not far from going mad and, naturally, their collapsed nerves had totally deprived them of resisting power. The fighting of many years had rendered them exhausted, emaciated and worn out.

On the third day, the wasted, breathless fugitives reached Sayin-Ghala, where they were told to continue their way immediately in the direction of Bijar. They had to hurry as soon other army units would be brought from Mosul to strengthen the Turkish troops, busy with the conquest of the western regions of Persia.

Again fuss, panic, confusion, cries and mourning. Still more curses and swear words. Again hasty, panic-stricken escape.

Was that accursed, infernal withdrawal to come to an end or not? If yes, where was it to reach its destination...?

The retreating refugees were attacked by the armed Kurds for several times in Sayin-Ghala and on the way to Bijar. We were assured that those bandits also comprised Turkish servicemen disguised in Kurdish costume. The latter were to spy on the number of the warriors and armed people in the withdrawing multitude. They had been particularly charged with spying on the military leaders of that sea of fugitives having been ordered to kidnap them right on the spot and kill them, if possible. Those disguised Turkish military men, who were also terrorists, were to kill first of all Petros Agha, the commander of the Assyrian armed forces, then Bulgharatsy, Kosti Hambardzumian and Melkonian. Fortunately, they failed in realizing their diabolical plan, but they killed Hambardzumian by some tragic course of events.

It happened in the following way. Artavazd Tumanian - I had been told that he was our prominent poet H. Tumanian's son - was lost with a nurse, and Kosti went to look for them with a few soldiers. The enemy, who had been incessantly persecuting them, took advantage of the opportunity by surrounding and butchering them. Tumanian and the nurse were not found: doubtlessly, they had been killed.

The caravan of the unlucky deportees, expelled from their native land, suffered about two hundred fatalities before reaching Bijar. That number, fortunately, was comparatively small taking into account the inevitable, severe danger threatening us.

For conscience sake I have to declare that Bulgharatsy, Shaghoyan, Melkonian and Petros the Assyrian rendered invaluable high services for the protection and salvation of the Armenian refugees, driven away from their homeland for three to four times under the threat of fierce violence and carnage. Those outstanding patriots never had a slightest desire to earn breath-taking fame and reputation, unlike many others, whose names are written in gold letters and whose praise has reached the vault of heaven.

May those modest patriots be ever honored and glorified!

SEARCH FOR FATHER

I had taken part in all the latest battles of our self-defense. I did not have any special difficulty in walking, although I still limped a little. The utterly tragic end of Anoush's unlucky life still rent my soul and nothing could console me. I kept denouncing myself roundly for my extreme selfishness. I had abandoned her in agony, on the verge of grave. Why? I simply did not want to change the decision I had taken, but did I do any good to my compatriots, whom I intended to protect? Perhaps, I might have somehow saved Anoush if I had not left her all alone in the decisive struggle of agony. Endless questions and infinite self-reproach, which were already late and futile... .

If our self-defense and resistance lasted for many decades I would voluntarily participate in them because I was looking for adventures; in other words, life had absolutely no value to me.

While taking part in the self-defense of Sayin-Ghala and Bijar, I left poor Father all by himself. I am ashamed to confess that I did not take heavy pains to help him and secure his life safety and existence. Strange filial ingratitude... . That ingratitude, however, was quite understandable, for I did not think and worry even about myself: in those days being alive or dead was all the same to me.

It was already five days since I lost Father. Reaching Bijar, the deportees got rid of the terror of the enemy's incessant persecution and butchery: at least it so seemed to those wretches.

The Englishmen in Bijar, who had troops, guns, airplanes and all possible means of resisting the enemy, started delivering food to the worn out fugitives. The poor people finally sighed a sigh of relief and the hope of remaining alive again glittered on their faces. The hope of survival is the most precious and invaluable among all the desires and ambitions human beings cherish.

The real hope of survival makes man extremely happy. The desire and striving to live are like an invincible magnet and even the person breathing his last on the threshold of hell cannot resist their strong and firm attraction.

The thought that they had been saved from the enemy's sword and flames began to stir in the multitude of deportees. But where was Father? How could I not find him after that long waiting of five days? The very thought that he might be among the fatalities horrified me. Unfortunately, it was me who had subjected him to still further calamities and sufferings after all the torture of the first retreat. If I had not written him about his return he would not have come back and would not have again found himself in that infernal fire. What was I to do? How was I to justify myself if any disaster turned out to have befallen Father?

MY DISARMAMENT AND CAPTURE

It was already five days since I parted with Father, and I was about to go crazy out of despair and powerlessness. A kind of feeling of hatred for my own self had begun stirring in me and I kept criticizing and reproaching myself for my self-will and egoism. I had already sacrificed my unmatched Anoush because of my imprudent, unwise selfishness and now I was losing my dear, beloved father for the same reason. I was ready to do my utmost to find and save him. It was that unbridled longing for self-denial that incited me to the following risky adventure.

After midday on the fifth day, I came across some late Armenian and Assyrian families of deportees by a stroke of ill fate. I asked an elderly woman, the member of one of those families (she was evidently from Van) if she knew Father and had seen him or not.

—Այսին իկէ իմ գլխին: Էդ քո սասած տէրտրոջը, կարմրամիրուս Տէր Յարութիւնը շատ լաւ կը ճանչնաս: Էնոր էրկու-երեք օր էռաջ տեսած եմ: Խեղճ տէրտէրը հիւանդ, նազած էր: Քու խմայր ախ ու վախ կը քաշէր: Ինձմէ և ուրիշ շատ տեղերէ հարց ու փորձ կընէր: Կասէր տղէս, Սիրաք անունով տղէս տեսած չէ՞ք: Խեղճ խէր. տղէն ըստեղ վազած ի, ինքը հիւանդ տեղով ընկած, էնոր կը փնտրի: Հէ՛յ, սպերախտ աշխարք, ի՞նչ սեւ օրի ենք խասի (“Woe is me! I know that priest, ginger-bearded Father Harutiun, very well. I saw him a couple of days ago. Poor priest, he was ill and worn out. He was mourning for you and asking the people around about you. He kept saying, ‘Haven’t you seen my son Sirak?’ Poor father! His son has rushed here, while he was looking for him, being very ill. Alas, what ingratitude! How miserable our lives have become!”)

“Well, mother, I admit I’m to blame, but please, tell me where he’s now.”

—Ի՞նչ գիտնամ, որդի՛, ի՞նչ ըսեմ: Էն խեղճը խիւանդ էր: Կարող է մեզ պէս յետ է մնացած: Էն անխիղճ քրդերի գեղի մէջ տկար, խիւանդ գաղթականներ են մնացէ: Ո՞վ կիմանայ, կարող է խէրդ էլ էնտեղ մնացած էլնի (“How do I know, my boy? What can I say? Perhaps, he’s fallen behind just like us. Some sick and exhausted refugees have stayed in the village of those merciless Kurds. Who knows, maybe, your father’s among them.”)

I did not have the slightest desire to ask further questions to that ill-tongued virago. I had passed through the village she had mentioned (as far as I knew it was called Marjan) two days before, and according to my rough calculations, it was located at a distance of ten to twelve kilometers on the way to Bijar. I decided to return there to find Father. I was already quite a long way from that sinister harridan when she cried back to me.

–*Լսի՛ր, բալեւ, եթէ կուզես խօրդ ճարելու էրթալ, էլ խրացանով մի՛ էրթա: Քրդերը քեզ կսպանեն* (“Look here, my son, if you want to go to find your father, don’t take that gun. The Kurds will kill you.”)

“Why on earth did I come across this damned ill-tongued shrew,” I muttered to myself thinking that if I went there armless, the Kurds would kill me with still greater insolence.

Absorbed in thoughts, I was striding hastily to reach the village as soon as possible. My supposition about its location proved wrong: I had already covered more than ten kilometers, but I had not seen it yet. Unfortunately, the night darkness had already descended and the road was almost desolate: hardly could I meet one or two travelers every ten to fifteen minutes. Probably, all the passers-by, who were dressed in the local costume, were Kurds and I did not see any fugitives.

I had been covering the way for two hours with all possible speed and I already felt tired: it was especially my left knee that troubled and hurt me. I wanted to sit on the roadside and have some rest, but I was afraid to: the vixen’s ominous croak was still ringing in my ears, “Don’t take that gun... .”

I was trying hard not to slow down my pace thinking that if I managed to reach the village safely, I would, perhaps, find some of the late deportees and make inquiries about Father.

At last I was infinitely delighted to catch sight of the shining lamp light spreading from the village and began consoling myself with the hope that I would get to the village within half an hour maximum.

My delight, unfortunately, lasted very short and I saw a group of horsemen rushing past me at breakneck speed. They were talking aloud and one of them was singing a Kurdish song. Suddenly they stopped, came back, ringed me and dismounted from the horses.

The Kurds were five in number: two of them were armed with a gun and three with pistols. My blood froze in my veins. They did not even allow me to take breath: one of them, apparently, their leader, stood opposite me in a position ready to shoot, while the other attacked me at lightning speed and knocked me down, seizing my gun from my shoulder. Tying me to one of the horses with a rope, they took me to the village within several minutes, dragging me behind them. I fainted, horror having put me in dreadful stupor.

The Kurds entered the village via some dark roads and went into a large yard through a gate opened wide by one of their friends. Leaving me tied onto the horse, they disappeared in the direction of the rooms at the far end of the yard.

The extremely formidable minutes seemed hours of torture to me and the calamity, that had struck me half an hour before, gnawed at my whole essence like a terrible burden. My brain refused to function, my sound reason and judgement had been dumbfounded as if I had been injected with hashish for many times incessantly. I had appeared in a state in which it was totally impossible to make any predictions concerning my condition and its outcome.

Strangely enough, life, that had seemed absolutely devoid of any attraction a day and even an hour before, suddenly gained value in my eyes, becoming precious and priceless. I began regretting my situation profoundly.

At the moments of torture, frustration, despondency, mental and physical suffering the human being longs for death, seeks for it, begging, supplicating the heavenly powers to save him from his dreadful life. However, as soon as agony overtakes him, he repents and begs for ruth and mercy to the supernatural beings so that they will allow him to continue living.

The formidable omen that I might lose my life had shocked me and I began shouting and crying for help. One of the Kurds, who had captured me, came up and ordered me to keep silent, using threats and swear words. A little later, however, he started undoing the ropes my hands were tied with. Being utterly emaciated, I fell down, but the Kurd set me on my feet and took me to one of the inside rooms holding me by my left arm.

I immediately guessed that I had to deal with a Kurdish chieftain. The floor was covered with expensive carpets. Five people were sitting in the depth of the room leaning on pillows, beautifully embroidered with silk threads, their legs crossed in the Turkish fashion. The chieftain smoking nargile ordered me to sit down.

While I wondered how I was to speak to them, one of the people, who was sitting beside the chieftain and was dressed in a Kurdish costume like all the rest, asked me in Turkish, which I understood very well, "Young man, where're you from and why have you come to our village with that gun? Who's sent you here and for what purpose? If you tell us the truth, we'll set you free; otherwise, we'll shoot you as a spy."

Despite my being stupefied and dumbfounded as a result of the adventure that had befallen me all of a sudden, I immediately pulled myself together guessing that I was dealing with a Turkish military spy, disguised in the Kurdish costume. Concentrating as hard as possible, I tried to lie and cheat them as much as I could.

"I'm an Armenian villager from Urmia. When the escaping refugees from Turkey and Salmast came to Urmia, they robbed us of our food resources within several days so that we didn't have any means of existence. When they were forced to leave Urmia, they made us join them. They terrified us saying that in a couple of days the Turks would come there and slaughter all of us, for they're the Armenians' bitter enemies. Horrified on the one hand and left hungry on the other, we're obliged to leave our country, our houses and gardens. Very soon, however, we regretted deeply having done so. Our family comprises three members, my father, sister and me. Mother died two years ago. Yes, we're very, very sorry: we'd better stay in our village, being even hungry and naked, and rely on the Turks' mercy instead of experiencing all these sufferings and dying in foreign lands, lonely and helpless."

The Turkish spy interrogating me translated briefly what I had said for the Kurdish chieftain. Again addressing me, he said, "But you're lying, you, crafty Armenian. Your Turkish speech indicates that you aren't from Urmia. You're from Van: Urmia Armenians don't speak Turkish as you do. If you want to be saved, you've to tell us the truth without hiding anything."

“I’ve nothing to conceal. As for my knowing Turkish, I should say that although I’m a peasant, our village, that’s called Rahva, is under the very nose of Urmia City. It’s almost attached to it. Eh, we’re not in poor conditions a month and a half ago. We had a large vineyard and many fruit-bearing trees so that Father could afford to send me to our city school. I learned the Turkish language at the missionaries’ school. Almost all the lessons were conducted in Turkish there, so it’s no wonder I know it well.”

The disguised Turkish spy again translated my words into Kurdish and continued questioning me without listening to the chieftain’s opinion.

“I repeat you’re lying. You’re one of Van fidayis and, therefore, our Kurds and their friends, i.e. the Turks’ enemy. You and the others like you butchered our friends, the Turks, both in Van and Salmast. You aren’t leaving us alone even in Persia, in this Kurdish region. Now you’ve come to join the Englishmen, your patrons, to kill our Kurds with their help. However, we won’t leave you alone, we’ll persecute you as long as there’s a single Armenian alive. You certainly know we’ve begun with your leaders. We’ve already sent your Kostis and several of his friends to the kingdom come and soon the others’ turn will come, even if your friends, those Englishmen, take you to their capital London.”

“But, my agha, what you’ve said has nothing to do with me and people like me. We’re poor people. We haven’t been in enmity with anybody and have lived on friendly, fraternal terms with the Turks and Kurds for hundreds of years.”

“I repeat, wretched fellow, you’re deceiving me, you’ve stayed here as a spy.”

I wanted to contradict the Turkish spy again, but he cut me short and shouted, this time even more infuriated, “If you’re telling me the truth and haven’t come here as a spy, why on earth do you need that gun? Urmia inhabitants don’t have the slightest idea about guns, let alone being armed with them.”

“The vast multitude of fugitives, with whom Father, my sister and I were running away, were attacked on the way to Sayin-Ghala and Bijar. They were panic-stricken and went into weeping and mourning, accompanied by horrified shouts. Thousands of people were confused and puzzled, everybody running here and there. Close relatives, fathers, sons, sisters, brothers, mothers and children lost each other in that formidable panic and turmoil. I lost my poor father and sister. Reaching Bijar, I found the latter: she was endlessly crying and mourning, hitting her head and knees, asking and begging me to return and find Father... .”

“What the hell has all that to do with your being armed?” The Turkish spy shouted, interrupting me. “Are you taking me for a blockhead? Do you want to arouse my mercy?”

“No, I don’t. I just wanted to explain everything that’s happened to me. If you don’t think it’s necessary why’re you questioning me...?”

“Well, go on, only cut it short. Explain to me why you’re armed, although everything is clear to me,” the spy said, apparently, having grown out of patience.

“Well, as you aren’t interested in the details of my misfortune, I’ll tell you briefly that I came back to cover this cursed road once again to find Father. A few minutes before meeting you, I found this gun on the road, right below my feet.”

The Turkish spy burst into an extremely nervous and long laughter, after which he said, "It's a pity you're in the house of this respectable chieftain. Following their centuries-old custom, they don't kill even the murderers in their homes. You deserve not only being shot but being trampled upon and hacked to pieces under my feet... Later we'll see."

After a short consultation with the Kurdish chieftain, they took me out of the room I had been interrogated in and made for the last of the rooms situated side by side. It was small and had modest furnishings, comprising a carpet covering the floor and a wooden ottoman, with a carpet and a pillow on it, extending next to the wall. In the upper part of both opposite walls two small windows could be seen, almost attached to the ceiling. I supposed that room had been built for people like me, who were subjected to the Kurdish chieftain's wrath and punishment.

The elderly Kurd, who had led me into the room, uttered some Kurdish words in a compassionate tone, pointing to the ottoman beside the wall, but I could not understand anything. Waiting for a couple of minutes and seeing that I could not make out anything in his language, he shook his head mysteriously and went away, without forgetting to lock the door.

Hardly had half an hour passed when the same Kurd opened the door and came in, bringing bread, buttermilk soup and water for me. He also brought a chamber-pot and again said something, which I failed to understand. Leaving the room, he again locked the door.

Thirty hours had passed since I was taken captive. During all that time, I was imprisoned in the same room, where nobody entered, except the Kurd, who brought water, bread, *matzoon* and buttermilk soup for me. I was in a formidable situation: I did not understand the Kurd's language and we communicated with one another by gestures, which could not help me find out anything about my fate.

Once using gestures and several words resembling the Turkish ones, I attempted to learn something about the Turkish military man from the Kurd. The latter, who had apparently understood my aim, made some expressions of discontent, which I again failed to make out. Nevertheless, that revealed a hopeful fact for me, namely, that the Kurdish guard did not have any liking for the Turkish spy. Then I pronounced the words "agha, agha, beg, beg" trying to get some information about the Kurdish chieftain. The Kurd moved his hand upwards and downwards for several times making me understand that I had to be patient and wait. Did I have any other alternative besides that? However, that was panic-stricken suspense: my life, that had been put at stake, depended on the Kurdish chieftain's decision.

For a person standing on the very verge of grave the twinkling golden rays of the dawn of his life are invaluable and precious. He wants to hug those glimmers of hope, clasp them to his bosom in order to survive. He is terrified at the thought of losing them.

Standing on the threshold of certain death, I was trembling at the thought of being killed or stifled to death. But why? Was it not me who supposed that life was of absolutely no value...? Perhaps, I regretted dying a silly, senseless death without any purposes...

That nightmare was gnawing at my heart when the key turned in the lock of my door at about midnight. I was waiting totally breathless and terror-stricken, when my Kurdish guard entered and made me understand that I had to leave the room. I thought they were taking me somewhere to get even with me, to shoot or stab me with a dagger.

Suddenly I was petrified: three people were waiting for me on the threshold of the room. I recognized one of them: it was the Kurdish chieftain, and the other two were women.

The Kurd was the leader of the group that had captured me on the road and seized my gun. Apparently, he was also the head of the house and village. He put his hand onto my shoulder pitifully and said a few words, hardly making me understand that one of the women was his wife and the other his daughter.

"I'm setting you free for my wife and daughter's sake," he said. Turning to the guard, he gave him some assignments, of which I could make out only the word Bijar.

Following the Kurdish custom, I put my hand on my chest and bent my head thanking the three of them in Turkish. While we were parting, the chieftain wished me a nice trip, and his daughter said the following through gestures and with a pleasant smile, "Come here after the war." Helping me mount the horse, my Kurdish guard told me to hug his back with both my hands so that I would not fall down. He had been ordered to take me to Bijar and he fulfilled that errand flawlessly, with the utmost frankness.

That strange fact came to prove that the Kurds were a generous and indulgent people. Should they not be incited with hatred, they would be in most friendly relations with the Armenians. I had no doubts that I had been saved from the Turkish spy's claws only thanks to the Kurdish chieftain's wife and daughter. I can never forget their noble attitude to me.

IN HAMADAN

By the first half of August 1918, about 70,000 Armenian and Assyrian refugees had reached Hamadan City, where I heard Persian speech for the first time in my life. At first I thought it was a variety of the Kurdish language, but later I understood I had been mistaken.

The Englishmen disarmed all the Armenians and Assyrians in the village town of Bhar, located on the way to Hamadan, declaring that those hiding weapons would be liable to heavy responsibility. The armed men protested against that demilitarization, but in vain. "In case we need your military aid, we shall first of all provide you with military education and discipline and only then give you the arms we prefer," the Englishmen answered to their complaints.

I found Father on arriving in Bijar for the second time. As he told me, by some strange coincidence he had reached there at exactly the same time I left for Bijar in search of him, without giving a serious thought to the danger my action was fraught with. Our meeting was very sorrowful: instead of enjoying our seeing each other again, we were crying bitterly, having suffered a complete nervous breakdown after all the torture and fatigue we had been exposed to. We were weeping over the ill-fated course of our destiny and the disasters that had befallen us. We were weeping because we had vol-

untarily sacrificed the peace of our lives, hardly gained after the sufferings of the first withdrawal, for the sake of our nostalgia. We swore to never part with each other anymore till death separated us. And we did remain loyal to that solemn promise till my unfortunate father yielded up his spirit to God, his heart burning with anguish for his family and homeland.

The Englishmen had decided to send the deportees, amounting to several tens of thousands, to Baghdad, but we did not know what direction we were to follow afterwards.

Vaspurakan Armenians, expelled from their native land and burning with anguish for it, were eager to join the Caucasian Armenians, huddled together at the foot of Masis. The Armenians, violently driven away from their centuries-old motherland, had a strong desire to return to their merciful, hospitable compatriots in Yerevan. The anguish for their compatriots and native soil rent their hearts and they strove to use all their mental and physical power to join those thousands who still cling to their sacred land, resolute to defend it even at the cost of their lives.

Our new friends and protectors, however, had quite different plans. They were reluctant to be separated from the young Armenian and Assyrian warriors coming up to 20,000 to 25,000. And there was nothing surprising about it: we faithfully bore whatever destiny had predicted for our nation, that eventually rendering us unable to overcome the calamity befallen us and rid ourselves of the capture imposed on us throughout centuries. The name of "Armenian" had been omitted from the journal of the diplomatic duties and obligations of the grand countries and powers, which did not have the slightest desire to include it in the list of those entitled to put forward demands and lodge petitions.

On the evening of the second day of our arrival in Hamadan, Armenak Maksapetian's brother Vardan Maksapetian came and told me to see the former immediately. When I went to meet Armenak, he said to me the following in an intimate tone, "Sirak, tomorrow or on the morning of the day after tomorrow, our friends (he meant the Englishmen) are taking us to Baghdad and thence to the dry, sandy deserts of Mesopotamia. Although we are compatriots, I've met you only for several times and have never had a chance to get to know you better. I know your father well and I respect him as a good, unselfish priest. I'm sure neither he nor me will be able to bear that climate, totally alien to us. I've decided to leave this city for Sultanabad with my brother and several of my friends before sunrise this night. Then I intend to leave for Teheran, if possible. You can join our group with your father if you wish."

"Thank you very much for your kindness and benevolence," I answered. "You're making a useful and expedient suggestion. I'll consult Father and reply to you within half an hour. I suppose he'll gladly accept it, for his feet can hardly drag him."

Father and I found Maksapetian's proposal quite convenient and I went back to him to convey him Father's words. He had told me the following, "Sincerely thank Mr.

Maksapetian in my name and tell him I'll always be obliged to him for that useful suggestion. I'm convinced I'll die on half way if I'm forced to cover that intolerable way."

ON THE WAY TO MALAYER

Two hours after midnight on the same day, Father and I left Hamadan with Maksapetian brothers and four other compatriots of ours. We had kept our decision of departure in secret and left the city with great caution thinking that we might fall into trouble and even be forbidden to go away if the others around us learned about it. Our small group, separated from the caravan of refugees, comprised eight people, all of them men. We plucked up courage only when we were at a distance of five to six kilometers from Hamadan. We were not very anxious about the security of the road firstly because two of our fellow travelers were armed with Brownings and then, we knew that the route we had planned to cover, i.e. Hamadan-Malayer-Sultanabad, was the safest in Persia in those times.

After noon the following day, our unmounted group reached a semi-Armenian-populated village called Safayie, that was located at a small distance from Malayer. Despite our being exhausted and emaciated, we got there safely.

The villagers, who were aware of the deportees in Hamadan, led us into the house of their village head Sahak Avetian, who gave a most cordial welcome to our eight-member group. First of all, we had a warm bath in a place attached to the stable and resembling baths: it was not far from his house. I do not know what impression that bath made on my friends, but I myself can never forget it. Having constantly been in dust and filth for more than a month, I took it for a true blessing and gift of fortune. The same was true of Father, who fervently blessed our good-hearted host after the bath.

Village head Sahak Agha entertained our group of deportees and showed us a most generous and lavish hospitality for two days, providing us with every possibility to sleep and rest down. When we were thanking him for his kind attitude, he modestly got hurt and said, "We're Armenians, aren't we? How can we not help our Armenian brothers who've fallen into such suffering and trouble? You're my precious guests and can feel quite at ease in my home."

The village head allocated us two rooms in his comparatively large house, where we were to have our meals, rest and sleep. The tranquility and nourishment we enjoyed during those two days and nights almost blurred out the recollections of our bitter, tragic state of fugitives.

GAMBLING AS A PASTIME

There have been a lot of exceptionally remarkable events in my life. One of them is the following which I can never forget.

It was the second night after our arrival. We had decided to leave kind-hearted and hospitable Sahak Agha's house early in the morning and continue our way in the direction of Sultanabad. Father, who was sort of restless, was running a slight temperature. Armenak Maksapetian suggested that they both should move to the next room for Father to go to sleep as soon as possible and have a good rest.

“Father,” he said, having primarily dropped a hint for us, “these fellows are younger than us. If they don’t sleep till morning, it’ll be all the same to them. They’ll be able to walk without any difficulty all day long tomorrow, while for us the situation is harder. It’s important for us to have as much rest as possible.”

“You’re right, Mr. Maksapetian, I’m in bad need of a good rest, too. Let’s go to the next room: we’ll have some talk and then try to go to sleep soon.”

Father and Maksapetian went to the other room, being followed by two of our elderly fellow travelers half an hour later. Now there were only four of us in the room, i.e. Maksapetian’s younger brother Vardan, two other guys and me.

“Sirak,” Vardan said, “there’s no point in going to bed so early. Let’s do something.” With those words, he took a pack out of his inner pocket, tore the paper on it and spread playing cards on the ground.

“Let’s play the game called “twenty-one” for an hour or so,” he said, addressing the two fellows and me. “We’ll fix a small sum, say a *kurus*, for the winner for the game to become interesting. Don’t you think playing this game’s better than lying sleepless in our beds?”

The two people agreed, but I did not. “So far I’ve never played cards in my life; nor do I wish to. Besides, I don’t have the slightest idea about the type of game you’ve mentioned.”

Vardan burst into loud laughter and said, “Look here, you don’t need any skills. It’s not difficult at all. I can teach it to you in two minutes. After all, we aren’t to remain refugees all our lives. We’re going to deal with different people and take part in entertainments. It’s a shame not to have a certain idea about such innocent pastimes.”

“You shouldn’t laugh at me in that way, Vardan. I repeat I’ve never played cards and I don’t want to learn such games. I’ve heard and read that playing cards is one of the most dangerous predilections and thousands fall into trouble and ruin themselves being addicted to it.”

“You’re fully right,” Vardan replied, applying the skills of an experienced lawyer and trying to persuade me with all possible crafty and diabolical means, “You control everything in that game. If you play just for pleasure, you’ll enjoy it greatly. In this case, it’s not dangerous at all. Try it for a few minutes. You won’t go on if you don’t like it. Besides, we’re staking a very small sum. Well, I don’t want to oblige you: we’ll begin and you just follow us. Then you may take part in it if you feel like doing so.”

That was some infernal temptation and I could no longer control myself.

“Ok, let me see what a game it is,” I said.

“I’m very glad you agreed to play. This game is very interesting when four people play it.”

Vardan explained to me the principle of the game called “twenty-one”: really, it was very simple.

“Thus,” he concluded, “the trump is equal to eleven in this game, but two trumps together come up to twenty-one. The knave is two, the queen is three and the king is four. The rest of the cards are played according to the figures they indicate. According to the principle of this game, either of the two players should reach the figure twenty-one. It’s the chance of winning. In case he can’t, he’s to do his utmost to approach that figure. In case both players gain equal figures the banker becomes the winner.”

“Okay, I understood,” I answered. “Go to blazes for your tricks and this diabolical temptation.”

We began playing and I won for several times. In comparison to Vardan’s skills, however, our own knack for the game was not worth a red cent. Hardly had half an hour passed when I lost a Turkish *majidie*, i.e. twenty *kuruses*. Noticing that our passions were running high and we were unable to control the game, Vardan enlarged the stake. Carried away with the game, I had lost all my equilibrium and self-restraint. By the time two hours passed I had already lost a gold coin and a *majidie*, the other two fellows having lost more than twice as much as I had. Vardan held his elder brother Armenak in great respect and was even afraid of him: otherwise, he could totally rob us of all the money we had. Fearing the possible scandal and, especially his brother’s presence, he stopped the game. Seeing that I was troubled, he said, “Sirak, I can return your money if you wish so.”

“No, I don’t need it,” I said angrily and added, “I don’t need your charity. But never dare to involve me in this game again when we resume our way.”

I spent a very restless and nervous night. I did not get a wink of sleep and kept blaming myself and severely criticizing that astute Vardan, who had tempted me into playing cards. The extremely negative impression that night’s game had left on me made me not touch cards for thirty years. I started playing again only in 1948 for the sake of ‘entertainment’ and in order “not to fall behind” my friends.

By the way, I have to state that cards have, unfortunately, permeated through certain layers of the society in Teheran, becoming a kind of invincible and inevitable evil for people. Nobody praises and supports it, but many are irrevocably addicted to it. “Eh, what else can we do?” This is what everybody says powerlessly, the game having turned into a predilection, which can hardly differ from addiction to hashish. Unfortunately, I myself often prove helpless to resist the fascinating evil of playing cards.

FROM MALAYER TO SULTANABAD

Early in the morning, six of our eight-member group left, but Father and I had to part with our fellow travelers and stay with our noble host. Father’s condition had changed for the worse and his temperature had grown higher at night so that Sahak Agha declared, “Father, I won’t let you go till you recover. This is a Christian Armenian’s house and I’ll only be lucky to have a guest like you. You needn’t hurry. You’ll stay here till you thoroughly get over your illness. I’ve sent one of my people to Malayer to hire a good mule for you.”

“May God bless your family, your house and you, Sahak Agha,” Father answered. “We’re so very obliged to you. We can never repay you for your nobility and affection.”

“Please, father, don’t make me ashamed with your words. I’m simply fulfilling my duty of an Armenian. What’ll my peasants say if I allow you to leave in this state? Just feel at home.”

Over a week village head Sahak Avetian looked after Father and me just as if we were his very close relatives. As he had promised Father, he hired a good mule and an Armenian muleteer, who was to take us to Sultanabad. In our presence he ordered the

muleteer to be very attentive and not to cause any inconvenience to Father by the mule's quick pace.

“Woe is you if I happen to learn that our father's displeased with you. I'll give you a very good dressing down. These people are our honorable guests and we shouldn't spare anything for their comfort. Even without that, the torture they've suffered in those brutal Turks' hands is more than enough... .”

Expressing our profound gratitude to that noble man for many and many times, Father and I left his hospitable hearth.

Thirty-eight years later I was lucky enough to employ Sahak Agha's elder son Khachik Avetian as Accountant General in the company I myself had founded. I took immense delight and pleasure in that fact, especially because Khachik's two younger brothers graduated from the University of Medicine in the USA and became a surgeon and doctor honoring the Armenian nation, thanks to his lavish financial aid.

ON THE VERGE OF GRAVE

Father had almost recovered by the time we reached Sultanabad, but this time I fell seriously ill. The restless life of a vagabond, lasting for several months incessantly, had completely ruined my health. The physical collapse was accompanied by depressive mental torture, whose burden gnawed at my heart.

For many days, I was constantly running a temperature, which often grew so high that I lost my consciousness and fell into fits of delirium. The Church-Loving Women's Union in Sultanabad, particularly two of its members, affectionately took care of me doing their utmost to restore my ruined health. Doctors were called in for many times and various medicines prescribed, but all that was of no avail. I had grown as thin as a rake and could hardly get out of bed in case of the utmost necessity. Father was in utter despair: for several times a day he would go to church for a few minutes under the plea of praying, while actually he escaped to hide his tears of despondency. It was already two weeks since I got ill and my strength was oozing away day by day like a burning candle.

One day in the last period of my illness, my temperature grew so high that I lost my sound reason, unconsciously got out of bed and somehow went to the abundant, cool spring running from below the church yard. I threw myself into the water, but fortunately, my body was hit by a big stone. Father, who had been constantly following me, kept running about the church yard and calling me by my name, confused and panic-stricken because of my unexpected disappearance. The sexton, who had been running here and there, too, approached an opening in the canal and began shouting my name. I could hardly answer him saying, “I'm here, I'm here.” At last they found me in the canal and took me out of the water: I had totally frozen and was trembling with cold.

Suddenly occurred a miracle: apparently, my extremely frozen state changed the course of the illness and my temperature dropped. A week later I was able to get out of bed, to which I had been consigned having appeared on the very verge of grave, and began walking slowly. Father told me the following, his eyes full of tears, “On exactly the same day and at exactly the same time you were in the water almost without consciousness, I

lay below the image of the Holy Mother of God, hanging near the church altar, begging and supplicating Her and our omnipotent, all-merciful Lord with weeping and mourning to spare your young life for your and my sake... Our gracious God answered my prayer and entreaties. May You be ever glorified, my Lord, may You be glorified... .”

“Yes, dear father, but for your fervent prayer, I might be lying lifeless now. I don’t doubt that God had mercy first upon you and then me. My being saved from the ruthless claws of death is truly a rare miracle.”

TOWARDS TEHERAN

My recovery lasted very long. Two of the church-loving women in Sultanabad made every possible endeavor to foster it, perhaps, doing all that in honor of my priest-father. After a kind and attentive hospitality of three weeks, we started preparations to leave for Teheran. In those times you could travel in Persia by donkeys, mules, horses and vans. Two seats had been booked for Father and me in one of the vans ready to set out for the Persian capital.

We started. Four horses had been harnessed to the van driven by a Turk from Tabriz. The road was very bumpy and the endless jerks of the van troubled us severely. Reaching Hazrat Abdol-Azim, a suburb in Teheran, via Ghum City after a four-day trip, we left for Teheran.

We were unspeakably terrified to come across coffins moving hundreds of corpses. Utterly panic-stricken, we thought we had had a miraculous escape from carnage and blood bath only to come to an unknown city, overtaken by either plague or cholera. Being extremely troubled and indignant, we repented having come to Teheran from Sultanabad and kept asking ourselves, “Could Sultanabad’s Armenian community have been unaware of this formidable cholera? Why didn’t they warn us against coming here? Why did they allow us to fall into this new dreadful hell after all the torture we had experienced?”

Our Turkish driver, who was very surprised, too, was unable to provide us with any explanation.

“I came to Teheran and immediately returned two weeks ago, but then I didn’t have the misfortune of seeing these numerous coffins.”

What were we to do? We had already reached our destination. Could we now escape from our destiny? Perhaps, it was the will of Providence that we ran away and rid ourselves of the enemy’s sword, fire, fierce persecution and butchery only to fall prey to most certain and inevitable death.

One of the members of the Church Department in Sultanabad had given us a letter addressed to his relative, a serviceman living in Teheran. To our ill fate, it was already late when we reached the city and we could not find the addressee. Being foreigners there, we had to make inquiries to find the way to the church, but to our evil destiny the priest was absent. We accidentally came across a man in the church yard and introduced ourselves to him. The person who got acquainted with us as a certain Abraham from Charmahal Region, Isfahan, kindly invited us to spend the night in his house located in the vicinity of the church.

“Once we, Charmahal inhabitants, were fugitives, too. Indeed, we didn’t suffer like you and didn’t escape from the enemy’s sword, but we saw many hard days, too. For years we lived like captives under the rule of our greedy landowners and village heads. During the whole year, we ran here and there like dogs, toiled hard like slaves, worked as ploughmen, farmers, gardeners, kept animals and as a result, remained naked and hungry. Thus, we were forced to come to town to work and somehow eke out a meager existence.”

PART THREE

IN TEHERAN BECOMING A TEHERAN INHABITANT

Father and I reached Teheran in the last days of 1918. When we had taken up provisional residence in a room allocated to us in the church yard, we were told that the Armenians in the city and the Persians had not been spared the formidable evils of World War I either. Horrified at the impending arrival of the Turkish army, the former had sold all their belongings, i.e. carpets, copper articles, bed items, in a word, all their goods and chattels and even food to the Jews at meager prices and run away to the north, towards Gilan and Mazandaran. Just like us, all their hopes and expectations for defense were connected with the “*Great Uncle*” (a metaphorical name used with reference to *Russia*). They would say time and again, “The Ottoman Turks won’t dare to approach the Russians. The Uncle will crush them to pieces with his heavy clutches in such a way that even their past generations will regret it.”

Thinking that no immediate danger threatened them anymore, Teheran Armenians returned to their homes. Unfortunately, however, they had already sold all their expensive carpets and house utensils, especially food such as flour, rice, oil, cheese, etc. at very low prices (all that had been once earned with the sweat of their brow and was the result of many years’ hard work), which made them victim to famine in their desolate houses.

The accursed war had rendered the whole country hunger-stricken. Due to the imprudence of the authorities, flour, rice, oil, cheese, milk and butter had been stored up in some illegal fashion. The rich, village heads and those in power had taken possession of all the storehouses, increasing the food prices tenfold and even hundredfold at the cost of hundreds of thousands of people’s lives. The number of those starved to death in the entire country and, particularly Teheran soon made up tens of thousands. The hundreds of corpses we had seen on our way to the capital represented the victims of famine and not cholera or plague, as we had previously supposed.

In 1918, the year of our arrival in Teheran, the local Armenian population constituted but a very small number. The Armenians, hardly forming 500 houses or about 3,000 souls, were scattered in the central quarters of contemporary Teheran, whose inhabitants did not exceed 250,000.

The most remarkable thing that struck my attention at the very beginning was the Persians’ generous and respectful attitude towards the Armenian minority. There was

absolutely no trace of the brutal, inhumane and malignant attitude we had been shown by the Turks on our own land, the legacy of our forefathers, throughout several centuries. Later, when I was lucky enough to deal with private individuals representing the Persian nation, I got firmly convinced of that fact. On many and many an occasion I delighted in witnessing their praiseworthy features and, especially their noble, sincere and affectionate attitude. May that ancient generous and brotherly nation be ever honored and respected!

Over many centuries the Persians have not changed their kind, fraternal attitude to the Armenian minority living side by side with them, and that despite all the frequent incitements. They have maintained respectful relations with them, something highly pleasant and reassuring. The problem with our national schools was merely the sad outcome of some misunderstanding, perhaps, instigated by others. Fortunately, soon it was thoroughly smoothed away.

I beg my reader's pardon for my deviation from my memoirs. I just wanted to share my strong impressions of Persia with him.

On the first evening of our arrival in Teheran, Abraham from Charmahal treated us to supper in his modest house, having only the most necessary accommodations. We had breakfast in the morning, but it is the evening supper that has lodged in my memory. Abraham treated us to Persian barbecue called "*Loola-kyabab*" accompanied by fine wine made just in his house, all that being but a very pleasant novelty for us.

The next morning we told our host we wanted to go to church. It was particularly Father, who hurried to go there and get acquainted with the priest, but Abraham insisted on our having dinner before that.

"Father, I told you yesterday evening that you're my guests for a whole day and that day hasn't expired yet. I myself will take you to Priest Khoren after dinner. He's our compatriot; I mean we're not very remote neighbours. He's from Peria and is a very noble person. He's a cheerful person as if he isn't destined to wear the priest's cassock at all. I mean he shouldn't have become a priest. Well, he doesn't even need it. It was the Armenian peasants in Peria Region who forced him to become a clergyman. But why on earth is it necessary for him? He's quite a rich man, having a large land and estate in his village. Unluckily, he doesn't have children and lives with his wife. I repeat Father Khoren is very noble and generous. He isn't stingy and tight-fisted like others."

IN THE REAL LIFE STRUGGLE

Going to the church in Darvaze-Ghazvin Quarter, Father and I got acquainted with Priest Khoren Kirakossian. To state my opinion about him briefly, I should say that he was one of the noblest and most generous people I had ever met in my life. He received us, the persecuted father and son, and placed us in his custody as if we were his dear, beloved brother and nephew.

The Church Department allocated one of the sexton's two rooms to us for temporary residence, but Father Khoren flatly refused to let us settle there. Over a month, Father and I were his inseparable messmates. He would be very displeased if we happened to have dinner or supper with others by some chance (as far as I remember that occurred for only three times). In a word, Priest Khoren was a very benevolent and good-hearted man.

Strange as it was, that noble clergyman's kind and sincere attitude was becoming a kind of moral burden to me and I was thinking of getting rid of his lavish hospitality as soon as possible. My state, resembling that of a disguised parasite, was worrying and troubling me all the time.

Within a month, I got acquainted with the living conditions Teheran offered to such refugees as we were. On the whole, the country did face the problem of unemployment, but my tragedy consisted in that I did not know Persian at all. Nor did I know English and what is even more intolerable, I was a foreigner, unfamiliar with the local conditions. The whole fortune Father and I possessed amounted to seven Turkish gold coins, which was far from forming capital. I did not have the slightest idea about commerce and could not enter into service because I did not know Persian. As for the local six-year Armenian school, I could not even think it possible for anyone to employ an unknown refugee like me as a teacher there. I did not know any crafts; nor could I work as a ploughman.

I was in that dreadful situation when our first host Abraham from Charmahal made the following suggestion, "Sirak, such deportees as you and we can find only a single occupation in Teheran: it's viticulture. Now it's high time we bought grapes. If you've any money and wish to join me, we'll buy grapes and make wine. I've got the necessary pitchers. This is a good opportunity for you to start business. You're constantly complaining of your unemployment saying you don't like sitting with your hands folded, aren't you?"

"Mr. Abraham, I've received secondary education and worked as a teacher or official so far. I returned from Tiflis to serve my people, achieve a certain social position and become a public figure through my compatriots' help... Am I to become a viniculturist after all this?"

"Brother, I can't make you do anything. It's up to you to decide: I just want to help you as you're unemployed. Nobody has any idea about the work you've mentioned. If you happened to have a wide circle of friends and acquaintances and knew English, you could, perhaps, be hired by some English bank in Teheran or another city for a small salary. Eh, my son, if you're born under lucky stars, you wouldn't have been driven away from your prospering, thriving motherland! The tree firmly clings to the soil and stands steadfast only thanks to its roots. It dries up as soon as its roots are torn away."

"Okay, Mr. Abraham, let me think for a couple of days and then make a decision."

"All right, only you should be quick, for if you don't agree, I'll have to find another partner. I myself don't have the necessary money to go into that business."

IN SARE GHABRAGHA

I decided to leave the church yard and start some work to avoid idleness. After a very long meditation and strong inner struggle, I made up my mind to accept Abraham's suggestion, that decision marking the commencement of a struggle that brought chaos and tumult into my life. The desire and striving to make progress and rise above the level of ordinary man was burning in my inner world. I always attempted to gain the best and be ahead in my incessant life struggle which never lacked troubles and frustrations.

Abraham, who was to cooperate with me in viticulture and the sale of wine, said, "I've lived in Teheran for about four years now and know almost all its quarters. We should start our business in a place, absolutely lacking any shop or house dealing in wine and gin. I know such a quarter and if we manage to find a two-three-room house there, you can have no doubts in our success. That quarter, called Sare-Ghabragha, is the center of merry butchers and those occupied with slaughtering sheep, cows, oxen. However, I've to tell you beforehand that those butchers are semi-wild and dangerous people rather accustomed to blood. Many people have been stabbed by dagger in that quarter. To tell the truth, I myself wouldn't dare to settle there. I'll give you a strong, handy fellow to assist you and will tell him not to meddle in your affairs. You'll control and decide everything and the young man, whose name's Michael, will be your guardian-angel. I think I explained everything clearly and briefly. Now it's your turn to make suggestions."

"Thank you very much for your sincerity and the truth you told me," I answered Abraham, "I've seen a lot of blood shed in my life. Even if I'm afraid of it, I'm not horrified at it. Although I'm still young, I've arrived at the conclusion that destiny determines how long you're to live and how you're to die. So far I've escaped death for three times and as you see, I'm still alive and talking to you. Strangely enough, I'm very stubborn by nature: once I make a decision I can't give it up and this character of mine costs me rather a heavy price. Well, what can I do? A human being can't be absolutely perfect: the more I get to know myself, the deeper grows my conclusion that my obstinacy is one of the drawbacks of my nature. Perhaps, it'll be foolish of me to deal with such dangerous people after your explanation, but I'll try to be on my guard."

The following day Abraham, Michael and I went to Sare-Ghabragha Quarter to see the house that was to be allocated to us for our work. The sight of that dwelling made me shudder with fear, but I hid that feeling. In a vast area in the center of the quarter extended a large cemetery. I was told that one of the famous high-ranking Persian clergymen was buried in the mosque not far from that grave-yard; that is why, the place was called Sare-Ghabragha, i.e. the upper part of the agha's (*here the word 'agha' means 'a spiritual leader'*) grave. The working-place we were to rent was in the south-east of the cemetery, at a distance of three hundred steps from it.

We arranged our work within a week, although there was no special difficulty in organizing such a simple working process. I sold wine and gin that Abraham brought me, filled in corked bottles, with the certificate of the state tax fixed on them.

From the very beginning I assumed a kind of “privileged” position: I wore a flat cap made of lamb hide and spoke Turkish to the buyers: well, I could not speak Persian even if I wanted.

I gradually forced the butchers, whose majority was Turkish-speaking, into showing a respectful attitude towards me. All of them addressed me as “Fidayi Effendi,” since Michael, who had changed his name into Abdollah, had told them that I was a “fidayi” coming right from the battle-field.

In a couple of months, I fortified my position, but the young man Abraham had recommended to me turned out depraved and insolent. He would secretly drink gin and go to the brothels with our client butchers at nights. For several times he was taken to our dwelling-place at midnight and even after midnight being as drunk as a lord. That being both compromising and dangerous for me, I demanded that Abraham should immediately dismiss Michael from work.

“Now I don’t need that depraved, corrupt drunkard’s help anymore,” I said to him, “apparently, he can’t get rid of his spoiled friends. Give him the sack till we find another fellow.”

Abraham could not contradict me and I rid myself of the evil of that heinous assistant.

For about two months, I remained all by myself at my work in Sare-Ghabragha, that highly dangerous and adventurous quarter. It would be foolish of me to continue working all alone. I suggested that Abraham find me another assistant. After rather a long delay, he finally sent another man called Daniel. That new fellow was not a drunkard: instead, he was very far from being handy and skilful. He was in constant stupor and seemed asleep even when awake.

Thus I worked for a year. I could not complain of the profitability of the job, but I was worried about my being completely alone. I did not rely on Daniel at all: although he was strong and stout, he was lazy and, especially timid. In case of any serious danger he would be of no help to me, let alone defending me.

There was another thing I was very indignant about: the trouble was that I had not got rid of Michael or Abdollah (as his friends called him) dismissed from job. Once or twice a month he would come to our place with his perverted friends he had found in our quarter and elsewhere and would start talking nonsense beyond any boundaries. Sometimes he would even rain threats on me. The point was that he always came with four to five people, all of them being blind drunk. Every time I somehow persuaded those accompanying him to take that shameless pervert away not to give rise to any scandal. Seeing that those noisy and boring incidents had no end at all, I told the quarter police about it and, fortunately, they agreed to follow him. For the last time my former assistant Abdollah was caught in debauchery and taken to the police-station, where he pledged himself to give up his life of depravity: otherwise, he would be exiled from Teheran. That was the last time we heard from that nefarious Abdollah.

It was two years since I started dealing in spirits. It was quite profitable, but I was displeased with the character of my work. I asked Abraham to find a more dexterous assis-

tant for me, but he failed to and told me I could employ anybody I wished. He was noble enough to resign from his partnership with me, taking into account the fact that he himself was not able to take part and be of any use in our business. Thanking that conscientious, candid person cordially, I suggested that he continue procuring wine and gin at a certain fixed price. He agreed and frankly assumed the cooperation I had offered.

As I have mentioned, I was discontent with my work and I did have firm grounds to complain. I worked in one of the worst (from the contemporary moral standpoint) quarters in Teheran and the people I was unlucky enough to deal with belonged to the very dregs of the society. Almost once a month somebody was stabbed at night and sometimes in broad daylight, most of those murders being committed out of debauchery. A group of perverts constantly worked at a distance of a hundred to two hundred steps from the house I lived in. Once they caught a beautiful prey they would rape the unfortunate wretch, who had fallen into their brutal clutches, even at the cost of their lives. Woe to the unlucky victim who would dare to resist: she was destined to be thrown into one of the old pits of the cemetery, stabbed by dagger and all blood-soaked.

Indeed, it was extremely difficult for me to live in safety and tranquility under such conditions, the aforementioned outrages leaving a heavy imprint upon my mental state.

GOOD PARTNERSHIP

I was in the aforementioned hard, inconsolable situation when I met an unknown person by a lucky stroke of fortune. He was a young man named Samuel Maroutian from an Armenian-populated village in Burvar District. Here is his story.

He had come to Teheran a year before and started wandering in search of some work. Soon he had found employment in the house of a rich man in the city, but had had to give it up in several months, unable to bear the haughty hostess' caprices. Then he had tried to learn the carpenter's craft, but in a few months he had been obliged to quit it, too because he received no payment, thus being unable to make both ends meet.

While he was busy looking for another job, he was accidentally told that I needed an employee. Coming to me, he said in a simple, modest tone, "Mister, I've been told you want to hire somebody. I'm ready to serve you if you wish."

For several minutes I watched carefully the fellow asking me for employment in such a plain and humble manner. Then I asked, "Where are you from and who's sent you to me?"

"I'm from Burvar District, Sultanabad Region. Perhaps, you don't know the person who's sent me to you, but the one who told him about you was Priest Khoren. He ordered that man to send you a reliable worker."

Samuel made a very good impression on me at our very first meeting and I said to him, "Okay, you can stay here and work for a couple of days. Then we'll discuss the working conditions."

The first month of work proved that the young man I had met had very good features: he was serious, hard-working and, especially trustworthy. At the very beginning of our cooperation, I ordered him to be kind to the customers but show a strict attitude to them in case of any disorder and outrage.

One of my clients was a butcher called Abbas, who received great income from his business, as I had been told. However, he was corrupt, spoilt, conceited and haughty, because of which I sometimes had some minor incidents with him. On the whole, he respected me and, perhaps, was even afraid of me. Once, while quarreling with him, I shouted infuriated, "Abbas, try to control and pull yourself together. If you love boasting of stabbing, do it with others. I've seen enough war and blood in my life and your dagger will meet the bullet fired from my pistol. So, be very careful and don't show off your dagger in my presence."

My serious threat put him on his alert, alleviated his fury and he started flattering me like so many of his colleagues. He said, "You're right, Effendi, I'm your humble servant. I'll never do any harm to you. You're right, Effendi, you're right. Please, forgive me if I've committed anything wrong. I'm always ready to serve you."

In politics power and threats have always had their desirable influence and they perform the same indisputable role in human relations.

Once after noon, at the initial period of Samuel's work with me, I went to see Father. That same Abbas, who had started flattering me having appeared in a tight corner, grew drunk in our dwelling and began swearing at my assistant. On my return, Samuel told me everything in detail and I said to him, "You know, dear Samuel, if we smile at people like Abbas, they become a true headache and nuisance to us. We'd better teach him a good lesson at once."

"Well, what do you advise?" Samuel asked.

"Look here, every day he rushes here after work to have two-three cups of that damned drink. Let him devour it as much as he wants. As soon as he comes here, I'll enter the next room so that he won't know I'm home. When he begins drinking, go and lock the outside door silently, without attracting his attention. He'll probably again begin his senseless swear words. Just slap him severely for several times without any hesitation so that he won't manage to think of defense, knock him down to the ground and seize his dagger. Give him a good beating trying not to cover him with blood and kick him on his shoulders for a few times. Then threaten him by saying, 'If you don't want to die like a dirty dog, get up and clear away from this house.' I'm sure his impertinence won't allow him to tell anybody about it, as that'll be a great disgrace and compromise for him.

"I'll follow everything attentively and interfere, if necessary. Don't worry and don't be afraid. Throw him into the street after that lavish beating and say to him, 'Be careful not to swear in this house anymore; or else I'll send you to the kingdom come.'"

The following day conceited and self-confident Abbas, the leader of the villains in Sare-Ghabragha, received a severe beating he had never dreamt about and vanished from our house silently, hardly dragging his feet and body, bent under the fear of falling into disgrace. Samuel had fulfilled his duty flawlessly and dexterously. I congratulated him on his skillfulness and bravery saying, "Thank you, Samuel, you taught that rascal a praiseworthy lesson. I'm fully sure he'll never dare to swear in our dwelling again. He won't dare to tell his friends about the beating he's just enjoyed out of fear of losing his reputation of a "skillful hero". He'll never trouble us anymore with his villainous actions."

My supposition proved completely true: Abbas disappeared for months and when he again came to us after that long absence, he swore by bread and salt that he would be

our devoted, candid friend. Indeed, he had changed his attitude and made use of every opportunity to prove that.

I was very pleased with Samuel. Three months after I had employed him, I decided to move away from that dangerous quarter, full of adventures. I realized my intention and bought a small house in a comparatively safer street at a distance of five hundred steps from Sare-Ghabragha. I paid the seller of the house eight hundred *tumans* (a Persian monetary unit) - a sum I had earned at the expense of my life within a year and a half - promising to pay the rest, six hundred *tumans*, within two years. Let me not forget to add that in 1920 a *tuman* was equal to the present-day twenty *tumans*.

GRADUAL WITHDRAWAL AND REAWAKENING ASPIRATIONS

It was already two years since Father and I arrived in Teheran and seven months since I entered into cooperation with Samuel. Within that comparatively short period of time, I had tried and tested my partner in all manners, getting convinced that he was a reliable person and a man of business. I decided to give up viticulture, charging Samuel with all the procurement, purchase and sale connected with that work. Under the contemporary conditions, I considered trade in spirits inappropriate and unsuitable for me and thought of somehow getting rid of that occupation.

The last days of August 1920: soon the primary and secondary schools in Teheran were to open. Van's last withdrawal had broken all my hopes and strivings, forcing me to leave everything in my motherland, including my Graduation Certificate received in Yeramian School and the documents of my position of a teacher there. So, I was merely an unknown, wretched, poor deportee in Teheran, in surroundings completely alien to me. My misery that kept troubling me all the time had rendered me totally reserved, although sometimes I thought I was still too young to accept my fate with resignation. I had to somehow break into the path leading to progress.

In 1920 there were but very few schools in Teheran so that you could count them on the fingers of your hand. The most famous among them was a Persian science school called Dar-ol-Fonun. I strongly wished to enter it and continue my education, gaining the graduation certificate of that institution, but unluckily, I did not know Persian. My constant nervous state and the highly dangerous work I had assumed had deprived me of the opportunity to learn the language during those two years.

Teheran also had an American College and a French School named Alliance-Française. My lack of knowledge in English was a major obstacle for me to enter the former so that I could apply only to the latter. I started attending its courses and revising what I once had learned, the instruction being conducted mainly in French. Within two years I finished the courses in all the four higher classes. In those times the school provided all the clever pupils with a chance to take two to three exams within a year and move up to a higher class.

In late May 1922, I took my final graduation exam, the exam commission comprising the representatives of the Ministry of Education and the French Embassy in Teheran. I was the only Armenian among the pupils, including about a hundred Persians

and seventy Jews. Getting nineteen and a half for my composition written in French within forty-five minutes on the subject we had been given, I won priority and passed the exam with honor. The French Embassy presented me with a book and a note of high appreciation. After the summer holidays in the same year, school inspector Silvester appointed me a teacher in that institution. It was a very great, reassuring victory on the path to progress for such an unknown fugitive as me.

TEACHING AT THE FRENCH SCHOOL

Thus, I again became a teacher: a person who had once taught in Van's Yeramian School had been appointed in the same position in Teheran's Alliance-Française School. Human destiny sometimes takes very strange courses, but the changes in the life conditions of the Turkish Armenians and, especially Van and Vaspurakan inhabitants, deprived of their beloved native soil and homes and driven to foreign lands, were even more amazing.

It goes without saying that the Armenian nation, living on the earth for many, many centuries, have still retained their vitality, creative mind and building power. Turkish Armenians' ability and strength to revive having appeared on the very verge of grave is truly exceptional.

The miserable Turks, wishing to stifle us in blood bath and carnage, and all our enemies who did not differ much from them were sure that they had already exterminated the Turkish Armenians together with all their abilities and creative wisdom. However, they were absolutely mistaken. Their policy of slaughter and butchery spread the Armenians' genius and constructive power all over the world, as a result of which they grew even stronger. Should I prove this by facts? All right. The blood-soaked Turkish Armenians, once suffering in utter agony, are now kindling the ever burning fire of their industry and genius in the countries of the Orient, the Middle East, Europe as well as South and North America.

All this is a real slap in the face of all our enemies, is it not...?

Yes, I became a teacher in the third class of Teheran's Alliance-Française School. Although it was a little more than two years since I came to Teheran, I had not learned Persian yet because of the lack of time and, especially my mental intransquility. I was to conduct my lesson in French, but sometimes I was forced to explain certain things in the pupils' mother tongue. I often found myself at a loss and the pupils themselves came to my rescue, finding the necessary word for me. Thinking that it was impossible to continue in that way, I decided to learn Persian as soon as possible. I had two able pupils in my class: one was a Persian, the other a Jew. I suggested that they teach me Persian after classes on alternate days and they kindly agreed to. I usually prepared for the lessons by adapting the teaching material and writing down the difficult words and explanations, which yielded even better results than I expected.

Studying the Persian language by hours at home, I considerably increased my vocabulary in three months, and was very happy about my progress.

Our Turkish teacher in Van had told us that the word stocks of both that language and Persian contained a vast number of borrowings from Arabic, and now I was getting sure of it. I came to the conclusion that in order to learn Persian and have flawless pronunciation I had to study its grammar, which actually represented the modification of the Arabic roots. Our school supervisor and guard Sheik Abbas, who was an Arabian Persian in origin, agreed to give me three lessons a week teaching me grammar and the fundamentals of Arabic on condition that I should pay him.

I rolled up my sleeves and began working hard and persistently. In six months, I achieved tangible success. Sheik Abbas, who lived in a semi-dark cell near a mosque (I had to go there for my lessons) always praised my diligence, saying, "Bravo! Good for you!" I should state, however, that I took his words for flattery.

By the end of the school year I had gained enough skills to write words of everyday use and pronounce them almost perfectly. Those familiar with Persian know that spelling and pronunciation in that language differ and the letters are not perfect enough to express the exact sounds of the written words. I shall adduce an example to illustrate the aforementioned: a word, such as 'Mohammed' may be written in four letters, but pronounced in eight sounds. In order to smooth away that difficulty you primarily have to make your eyes accustomed to the words and then learn the Arabic forms called "Vazn," which is of great help to the spelling and pronunciation.

My initial study of Persian made me closer to my pupils, which resulted in the strengthening of my moral influence on them. The first prerequisite to establish close terms with people is to communicate with them in their mother tongue. This is an indisputable fact.

A TEACHER AND A PRIEST

Early in June 1922, the examination session was over in Alliance-Française School and I was finally able to breathe a deep sigh of relief. I went on holiday, having worked at Teheran's French school for a year, to my mind, something really to be proud of. Yes, being a young Armenian deportee, I had found shelter in the capital of a country, totally alien and unfamiliar to me, and had managed to find a teacher's position at one of its first-rate schools in but two years. My heart swelled with self-esteem and mental satisfaction at that achievement, but I have to confess that post, so flattering for my dignity, had kept me in constant tension for a whole year. Although my salary was not high at all, I did not worry about that: it was the moral significance of my work that encouraged and filled me with enthusiasm.

Very few people had taken interest in me ever since I got to Teheran. Well, the local Armenians did not have any opportunities to do so, nor did they need it, and the same was true of me. To tell the truth, I even avoided making any acquaintances: in other words, I did not have the slightest desire to become known among the city's Armenians as a viticulturist, thinking that my business was inappropriate and unsuitable for Father's title and position.

By some strange coincidence, two months after I assumed the work of teacher, Father was appointed priest at Teheran's main church Darvaze Ghazvini and became spiritual leader of Teheran Diocese.

Over two years, Father Khoren Kirakossian had diligently paved the way for Father's appointment. He had made many acquaintances in the public bodies and the cream of Teheran's society through that noble priest. For the last time Priest Khoren told Father the following, "Father Harutiun, I'm very happy I'm handing over my place of work to such an able, noble priest as you. You fully deserve to succeed me in my post. My term of four years has already expired. I've many relatives and a family in Peria District; besides, our own estates, gardens and household need my presence."

"I'm so very obliged to you, Father Khoren," Father answered. "I'd never win such liking and a wide circle of acquaintances, but for your constant assistance and fraternal concessions. Words are powerless to express my cordial gratitude to you. I can't forget your kind, frank attitude as long as I'm alive. It's a pity I can't repay you anyhow."

At that time Teheran had only two churches, the central one being Darvaze-Ghazvini, where Father was appointed priest at the approval of the city's Church Department and Isfahan Diocese. He fulfilled his priestly duties for many years. Three years before his death, a special bull of the Holy See of Echmiatzin conferred the title of senior priest on him, that having been suggested by Isfahan Diocese. Father, who was held in great respect by his flock, preached a sermon before the congregation and officiated at the divine service fervently on every festive day.

ALICE AND I

Several months after my return to Van in 1917, I got a letter from Alice and answered it hastily, although I did not receive any reply. Anoush's tragic death had left a severe imprint upon my mental state, the wound caused by that ruthless blow remaining incurable. Despite the extreme fatigue the endless physical torment had put me in, her innocent image begging for help could not blur out in my mind. All my endeavors to consign to oblivion that face breathing angel's innocence were futile. Futile and in vain...

I was horrified at the thought that my soul would now be rent by another heart-breaking wound, one that Alice was likely to cause. What was I to do to avoid it? I did not know why I supposed the second blow of fortune might spare me more than the first one: after all, I did not bear all the responsibility for my parting with Alice.

My earnest desire to participate in the reconstruction of my homeland had turned into a sacred, inevitable duty for me. I had not committed any sin by bringing trouble upon me for the sake of realizing that duty. It was not for the purpose of rejecting Alice's pure love and trampling upon that sacred feeling that I had returned to my fatherland. I had sacrificed my comfort, position and Alice to be of some instrumentality in the restoration of my native land.

A week after the beginning of the school holidays, when the exhaustion caused by a year of intense work abated a little, I decided to fulfill some sweet duty, i.e. write a letter to Alice after so many years of silence. Although there seemed to be very little possibility for it to reach its addressee, I encouraged myself with the thought that it would reach its destination anyway.

The letter said, "My precious Alice,

It's already four years since I wrote you a letter, having received the one you had written, forced by your sweet heart. I wrote it in my magnificent homeland Aygestan, Van four years ago. Now I'm writing to you in Teheran, the capital of our neighbouring country, which is very benevolent towards our fatherland. These two cities are rather far from each other, and our living conditions and surroundings are very different, too. However, both the letter written in Aygestan and the present one I'm writing here actually have the same contents.

Just like precious metals, true, pure love can't be perverted. Our friendly relations and intercourse linked our hearts with irresistible, magnetic attraction. We grew attached to each other in exceptionally immaculate love, which filled our hearts with enchanting, heavenly fragrance. The human being, however, can't determine his fate and just like so many other people, we failed to mould our destiny according to our own wishes. I'm sure you won't agree to this. Perhaps, you think I'm to blame for our failure in achieving good luck together. I've to repeat I'm not to blame for that frustration. I was kind of obliged to be separated from you, I mean to leave Tiflis. I was fully sure Tiflis was alien and foreign for me and I'd never succeed in making progress and realizing my ambitions there. Returning to Van, I supposed I'd be able to serve my country properly. I was young and very optimistic. I believed in my zeal and strength. I didn't wish to accumulate riches. I simply wanted to work in the social sphere, although I've to confess I strove to rise higher above the level of the common individual.

Human reason leads men in different directions: some people want to grow rich and take delight in their wealth, enjoying the so-called blessings of life. Others attempt to become scientists, poets, writers, composers, inventors, etc. By working close to my nation, side by side with them, I aimed at making progress through their contribution and becoming a national figure, a member of Parliament, newspaper editor, party leader, a minister, etc. The desire to rise higher and make progress isn't to be condemned; on the contrary, it should be appreciated and praised. It's one of the precious priorities of the human being.

Very often it's your heart that obliges you to act in a particular fashion, but apart from that emotional factor, there exists another which is even more powerful and can sometimes overcome your heart. It's your sound reason, which directs and orientates your logic and judgement properly.

Yes, my very dear Alice, I don't know how to express myself. Fortunately or unfortunately, when I decided to leave Tiflis, my heart and reason entered into a turbulent struggle. The former was reluctant to forsake you, to part with you, but the latter told and even commanded me to agree to that separation, for as I've already explained, the alien surroundings in Tiflis did not provide me with the possibility of gaining what I had planned to.

Later I was to count the cost of the struggle between my heart and mind: proving unable to endure the merciless blows of my broken heart, I fell ill and was consigned to bed for many days.

Bodily diseases can often be easily cured, but mental ones have no remedy at all. They're very difficult, if not impossible, to be overcome, sometimes proving absolute-

ly incurable and pernicious. I was cured of that mental pain of mine only by some rare miracle. While lying hopelessly in bed, I thought of letting you know about it, but my inexplicable pride didn't allow me to. Besides, deserting the path I had stepped onto would be equal to damaging my self-esteem, something even more difficult and unrealizable.

Alice, my unmatched Alice, here's the account of all my experiences and feelings. I should have written an extended letter of many, many pages to give you a full picture of all my torment and torture, but I think these brief lines will suffice for you to read between them and arrive at a certain conclusion. You're my judge; it's up to you to justify or blame me.

Now I earnestly wish you to get this letter: I'd be very happy if your beautiful fingers opened it. I'd be still luckier if I was able to read the reply to this letter.

Loving you with candid, profound love,
Sirak."

With a beating heart I sealed the letter and wrote Alice's former address on it.

A COUP D'ETAT AND IRAN'S RECONSTRUCTION

In the first year of my working as a teacher, on February 21, 1921 Persian capital Teheran was shaken by an event of immense historical and political significance. As usual, at seven o'clock in the morning, I reached Topkhane Square and saw it overcrowded, something extraordinary. Our school was located at the beginning of the street of the Telephone Station, attached to the square, where the vast multitude was talking and expressing opinions on something. Several guns had been placed in the middle of the square, surrounded by soldiers and ready to fire. Pushing my way through the multitude with great difficulty, I got to the school, where my Persian colleagues told me that an hour past midnight a coup d'etat had taken place in the country and Teheran had been occupied by the military.

An hour later newspaper boys began selling the urgently published issues of Teheran's papers, which gave a brief account of the coup d'etat that had struck the country the previous night.

An hour after midnight, Sardar Reza Khan arrived in Teheran from Ghazvin City, located at a distance of about one hundred and forty-four kilometers from the capital. His 3,000-soldier Persian army unit, well-equipped with guns and armour, occupied first the main barracks, then the secondary ones, arsenals, the police-station, telegraph exchange and the other state institutions at lightning speed. All that happened within four hours so that by five o'clock in the morning the coup d'etat had already become a reality in the country.

In those times Persia, now called Iran, was under the rule of Ghajar Princely Family, whose last representative was king Mohammed-Ali. His and his predecessors' reign marked a period of total collapse and ruin for Persia, the country being obliged to submit to tyranny and despotism. Different parties and tribes had established their independent principalities in numerous provinces in the north, south, west and north-east. They refused to be subdued by the Central Government and endlessly subjected the cit-

izens and peasantry to severe exploitation, oppression and robbery. The population did not dare to protest, for the slightest hint of complaint was stifled in the very blood of those resorting to it.

Before the coup d'etat, the military power in the country was vested in the servicemen appointed by the Tsarist Government. They attended to all the affairs in accordance with their own desires and preferences, determining the military budget, salaries and all the other expenses. They were even entitled to appoint military figures, promote and demote everybody they wished.

Persia did not play any important role in the diplomatic and political domain. The Persian ambassadors and embassy employees were appointed on the order and by the consent of the country's foreign ambassadors. The legal cases connected with Russian, English and foreign citizens were beyond the jurisdiction of the state courts: even the foreign criminals and murderers were tried only in the embassies representing their countries.

Persia's economy was dominated by the English and Russians. The country did not have a State Bank and the banknotes in circulation belonged to the English Bank. Persia was divided into Zones of Influence between Tsarist Russia and England: all the northern provinces were dominated by the former and all the southern ones by the latter.

Justice and jurisdiction were merely meaningless words, while tyranny and despotism gradually squeezed every drop of strength out of the population.

Since 1890 social unrest had been observed against the authoritarian kings of Ghajar Dynasty, the discontent being born in the middle class, with its core amidst the craftsmen and traders, although it was supported by a number of intellectuals and clergymen of principles as well.

In December 1905, the social mutiny reached its height being mainly directed against Mozafer-ed-Din Shah's Prime Minister Ein-od-Dovle. In July 1906, a few thousand demonstrators gathered in a foreign embassy requiring that the Prime Minister should abdicate and constitutional order should be introduced into the country. On October 17, 1906, Mozafer-ed-Din Shah was obliged to give his consent to the establishment of constitutional order by convening the first Constitutional Assembly (Mejlis) in Iran. Immediately after that, on December 30 the king died, being succeeded by his son Mohammed-Ali Shah, whose rein lasted but for two years. Supported by a foreign state, he endeavored to abolish the constitutional order his father had established and disband the Assembly. He even resorted to the bombardment of its building with the intention of terrifying the members of the Mejlis.

The Armenian volunteers led by Yeprem Khan made a selfless contribution to the heavy struggle of introducing constitutional order into Persia. The country's progressive people feel ever obliged to that noble, valorous revolutionary, who sacrificed his life in Iran's liberation struggle. The grateful Persians hold Yeprem in high reverence and appreciation, ranking him among their outstanding, prominent, brave martyrs of the revolution.

May that lion-hearted hero be ever glorified!

After the coup d'état in February 21, 1921 (Esfand 3, 1299 according to the Iranian solar calendar), Reza Khan became Commander General of the Persian armed forces with the title of Sardar-Sepah. He also held the position of Minister of War in the Cabinet headed by Seid-Zia-ed-Din, his strenuous efforts and persistency soon earning him high honor and a proper position in the country. The number of his followers gradually swelled in the influential upper layers of the society and Mejlis. Hardly had a year passed when he was already at the height of fame and popularity.

On October 31, 1925, Iran's Constitutional Assembly stripped Ahmad Shah Ghajar of the royal title and vested the country's provisional government in Sardar Sepah. Forty-three days later, on December 13, the Constituent Assembly declared Sardar Sepah king with the title of Reza Shah Pahlavy and introduced changes into articles 36, 37, 38 and 40 of the Constitution. Thus, the royal dynasty of the Ghajars was overthrown and a new regal family was founded in the person of Reza Shah Pahlavy and his descendants.

During his rein of almost twenty years, lasting from Esfand 3, 1299 till Shahrivar 24, 1320, Reza Shah Pahlavy realized gigantic work and rendered a great number of praiseworthy services to the country he loved and adored. I would like to make mention of the most important of them.

The very first step the king took immediately after the coup d'état, on February 26 to 28, 1921, was the abrogation of the agreement signed with the English: by the way, it had never been officially approved. The majority party, which had established its domination in Russia, defeated the tsarist armed forces in the north of Iran and scattered them in all directions. The representatives of the party concluded an agreement of alliance with Sardar-Sepah's Government, in order to strengthen their position in Persia, gain more supporters and neutralize the great influence the English enjoyed there at that time. They agreed to carry out the following in compliance with the aforementioned agreement, which had forced them to make very important concessions: 1. to withdraw their troops from Iran and declare non-existent the Northern Republic, whose domination had permeated through Enzeli, Rasht and various parts of Gilan; 2. to recognize the repeal of the once existing law of foreign citizens' cognizance; 3. to renounce all the monopolies they used to hold and relinquish all the claims the Tsarist Government had on Iran; 4. to hand over all the estates the Tsarist Government had in the country, the boats in Lake Urmia, the railway stretching up to Tabriz, the roads, and so on and so forth. One of the clauses of the agreement obliged the Iranian Government to forbid the activity of any elements, Russian or foreign, alien to the government of the majority party.

In April 1926 on the initiative of Reza Shah, Iran, Turkey and Iraq concluded a treaty of alliance and security, in compliance with which the three states pledged themselves to settle the border disputes among them and provide the security of the border regions with joint efforts.

On November 22, 1927 began the construction of the Iranian railway stretching from the south to the north, from Bandar Shahpur up to Bandar Shah. In the same year the authorities declared that they did not recognize the English dominion over a group of

islands named Bahreyn, located in the south of Iran and serving as the sheik's residence. From that time onwards it belonged to Iran forming an inseparable part of the country.

One of Reza Shah's greatest achievements was the abolition of the law of foreign citizens' jurisdiction. On May 10, 1928, that privilege was abolished since it violated the country's sovereignty. Having been declared equal to the Iranian people, all the foreign subjects were to be tried in the country's courts for all the crimes and legal cases they would be involved in. That extremely important law was soon put into effect being recognized by Russia, England and other states.

About three months before the aforementioned law came into force, the far-sighted king, who was well-aware of the situation in the country, had charged lawyer Davar with working out a new legal code on the basis of the laws adopted in the advanced countries. It was to be handed to the Mejlis for approval, after which it would be put into application in the newly-established court.

In 1928 the following three vital bills were adopted in Persia: 1. New laws on taxes and customs were to be drafted. 2. Iranian students were to be sent abroad to receive a higher education. 3. A National Bank (Bank Melli) was to be founded with the monopoly of issuing banknotes which were to be cast out of gold and other precious stones.

In the same year the Persian and Russian Governments signed an agreement on fishing: so far the Government had not been able to collect any revenue from that profitable business.

Another very important event marking Reza Shah's reign was his decree stating that certain changes should be introduced into the Iranian people's national costume. Men were to follow the fashion of dressing accepted in all the civilized countries, while women were to take off their black yashmaks. In 1929 (1307 according to the Iranian calendar) the king, queen and two young princesses were the first to walk in Teheran's main avenues, dressed in modern clothes, which pursued the aim of encouraging the people to follow their example.

In January to February 1931, two important laws were adopted. The first forbade foreign subjects to buy land in Iran for farming or other purposes and become proprietors. The second entitled the Iranian Government to take control over the Telegraph Exchange and its property, headed by the English and belonging to the Indo-European Company up till that time.

In January 1932, the Iranian and Turkish Governments settled their border dispute over the areas at the foot of Mount Ararat by realizing final border division and concluding a new agreement on frontiers.

Early in 1932, a sugar mill was founded in Keahrizak (up till that time no factory had existed in Iran for sugar industry) and a textile factory was established in Chalus. Later it turned into a famous clothing factory.

In late November 1932, Persia repealed the agreement on the exploitation of the oil mines in the south of Iran. In 1901 a certain Darsi, a subject of New Zealand, gained monopoly on Iran's southern oil deposits, paying 20,000 English gold coins to the contemporary government. Over eight years Darsi worked and spent a lot of money trying to discover the oil mines, but in vain. In 1908 oil mines were discovered in Masched-Suleyman and in 1909 the Anglo-Iranian Company gained right to their exploitation. In August 1914, the English Government purchased the oil shares the English subjects had

in that company and became one of its shareholders. After the revocation of the Oil Treaty, the Iranian and English Governments commenced negotiations, which proved absolutely futile so that the former had to enter its protest at the meeting of the League of Nations in Geneva. That body told both governments to resume talks and reach an agreement: as a result, the Oil Treaty was declared valid and the term which was to expire in 1961 was prolonged by thirty-two years. The Company pledged itself to decrease the area of oil industry in the course of time, pay Iran a tax of 225,000 English gold coins annually during the coming fifteen years and then 300,000 gold coins within the subsequent fifteen years. Apart from that, the Company also committed itself to paying the country at least 750,000 gold coins yearly for its right of being a stockholder.

In 1932 and 1933, cement mills were built in Rey City, a suburb in Teheran, the new road to Chalus, extending to the north of the Persian capital was repaired and tarred. The authorities also founded a Teachers Training *Jemaran* (an institution of higher education).

Agreements were signed with some Danish and Swedish companies for the speedy construction of the Iranian railway, stretching for a very long distance.

Another significant event marking Reza Shah's reign was the foundation of Teheran University. In 1935 the solemn foundation ceremony of that great center of enlightenment took place. Over twenty-five years, that institution of higher education provided Iran with a great number of doctors, architects, lawyers, pharmacists, veterinarians, dentists, etc.

The year 1935 also marked the establishment of three other mills: two of them were to contribute to sugar industry in Shahi and Varamin, while the third one was to promote silk industry in Chalus. A few months later a chintz mill was founded in Ashraf. On March 21, 1935 (Farvard 1, 1314 according to the ancient Iranian calendar) the use of all the names denoting Persia up till that time, such as "Pers", "Persia" and others, was banned, "Iran" becoming the country's official name both at home and abroad.

In 1936 Iran's *Farhangistan* (Academy of Sciences) was founded, its first achievement being the purification of the Persian language of the words of Arabic origin and the restoration of the word stock used before the Arab dominion and dear to the Iranian people. Although those efforts yielded considerable results, the intellectuals in that home of science did not reach any agreement concerning the modification and Latinization of the Arabic characters so that no changes were made in the former complicated and hardly understandable system of the teaching of Persian.

In 1936 Dey 17 (Dey 17, 1314 according to the Iranian calendar)* was officially proclaimed Day of Women's Emancipation, the basis for that declaration being the document stating the females' freedom and equality of rights in the country. First of all, the Iranian women were to throw away all kinds of yashmacks and covers, symbolizing their slavery.

One should write hundreds of pages to give full account of all the various projects Reza Shah, that great man, realized. I shall now try to summarize this part of my recollections.

* In order to avoid any mistakes and misunderstanding, I have compared the dates in my memoirs with those provided by a book entitled "Ketabe-Sal" and published by the newspaper "Keyhan" in 1962. I express my deepest gratitude to its owner, doctor Mustafa Mespah-zade, who enabled me to make use of that work. Taking advantage of the opportunity, I would like to advise all those knowing Persian to read that rare book.

Reza Shah established Iran's independent army under the command of the Iranian military figures, thus the Central Government acquiring full power over the whole country. That put an end to the chieftains and gang leaders' tyranny in the provinces and remote regions of the country, the once independent areas now being forced to recognize the government's authority.

All the foreign subjects, who were now under the Iranian jurisdiction, had to possess certificates of residence to be entitled to live and work in Iran. The foreign organizations had absolutely no rights to intervene in Iran's interior affairs.

Apart from the foundation of the barracks and university, that were the country's pride and glory, the king also embarked upon the improvement of the ancient capital of Teheran. The old narrow, crooked streets were destroyed and reconstructed into wide, luxurious avenues, the people being encouraged to build fine, light shops and houses there. The country provided secure working conditions for the merchants who started large-scale import and export, the wide, straight highways and tarred roads facilitating their activity. Magnificent hotels, equipped with all conveniences, were founded in different parts of Iran, particularly in the northern and coastal areas. The railway, the pride of the country, which linked together the south and north, was finally accomplished with all its numerous tunnels, long, huge bridges and the necessary equipment, all that being carried out without the slightest amount of foreign credit.

Farms, villages and houses were built and the rotten, corrupt state institutions were totally revolutionized; in a word, that great man's constructive and revolutionary activity is beyond any account.

All Iranians, irrespective of their tribal and religious identity, feel profound gratitude to that outstanding personality. Being his country's true son, he served his homeland with great belief and devotion, making an immense contribution to his native land's revival and reconstruction: that is why, the Parliament conferred the regal title of "Reza Shah Keabir" on him after his death.

THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF RETURN

The fierce enemy's bloody arms expelled us from our adorable homeland Vaspurakan: horrified at the carnage the Kurds had prepared for us entering into base, false alliance with the Turks, we changed our way and found refuge in Persia. Many thousands of Vaspurakan Armenians were forced to rely on the Englishmen's protection, whereas we, just a few Van inhabitants who could be counted on the fingers of your hand, voluntarily turned down that defense, consigning ourselves to Persia's hospitality.

Many years had passed since those dismal, critical days. Sometimes we cast hopeful looks to our Eastern Armenian compatriots living a long way from us, wondering about the fatal outcome of their cause. We learned that our centuries-old enemy had put them into a tight corner, holding them in the lethal clutches of their infernal arms. Finally, they oppressed and threatened our people into dismals, making them sign the ill-boding, pernicious Treaty of Alexandropole. Not only did the Turks usurp our ancient homeland, taking advantage of our defenseless, abandoned and worn out state, but they also stripped us of the large territory we had possessed under the tsarist rule.

After the collapse of the Republic of Armenia, the Armenian Communist Authorities proved unable to restore the territories, annexed to our neighbouring countries. Fearing its foreign and internal enemies, the Central Communist Government in Moscow had entered into alliance with our centuries-old enemy, the Turks, and was reluctant to break its new ally's heart for the sake of a handful of Armenians. Every time they found some pleas to justify themselves before the self-denying Armenians, voicing their protest against that flagrant, crying injustice.

The establishment of the Soviet rule burnt all the bridges of return for the anguish-stricken Armenians for many decades: hundreds of thousands of our compatriots, who had had a narrow escape from Turkish Armenia, were denied access to the haven of their hopes.

“We have no place, no houses and facilities to receive the newcomers,” the Soviet authorities would always declare to the Armenians burning with a desire to repatriate.

We were tormented by nostalgia, too. It was particularly Father, who severely suffered from the long distance separating him from his close people, anguish for them rending his heart terribly.

He would often repeat, “I’m afraid I’ll die without ever seeing my dear people at least once. I’ll yield up my spirit, anguish for them gnawing at my heart.”

His nostalgia inspired him to write many poems, the majority of which was published in the local and foreign press, especially the periodical entitled “Hayastani Kochnak”.

I had overcome my dismals and isolation ever since I assumed the work of teacher, which opened the door to a wide circle of acquaintances amidst the intellectuals of the time. I was invited to be admitted to the Union of Teheran Graduates, who comprised many young people, amateurs in the fields of music, poetry, singing, painting, etc. Once a week literary and artistic parties were held and lectures delivered, I myself giving several ones there. I was very content and happy about my membership, for I was respected and appreciated there. That Union, headed by contemporary poet Dev (Margar Gharabekian) and Mrs. Satenik Aserian, a reverend member of the Church Department, has left me a legacy of sweet memories.

However, I profoundly regretted that I had absolutely no possibility to at least enter into correspondence with my former friends. It was especially the state of several of them that worried and troubled me very much: I was eager to learn something about Hrant, Aghasi, Vahan and Alice. Absolutely no news about any of them. Painful loneliness and hopeless state of complete ignorance, far from my beloved native land and my dear, honorable friends...

CALAMITIES

All revolutions seem to be married to bloodshed: no nation has ever been able to escape fatalities and innocent victims while in a state of social and political upheaval. Unfortunately, the carnage, that goes hand in hand with every revolution, often involves

trample upon human conscience and sound reason, which is sometimes closely connected with clarification of old personal problems. Peaceful negotiations give way to passion, flagrant hatred and vengeance, with all fierce, beastly human instincts rising to the surface with the utmost violence. The same misfortune befell Armenia, whose best lands had been usurped by our centuries-old enemies, our so-called “lion-hearted” neighbours.

On May 28, 1918, our country, that had grown very small being totally rent to pieces and crippled beyond any reason, declared independence. That newly-born state, however, was not predestined to live a long life: convinced that they would not be able to resist the enemy forces coming from the north and south, the authorities preferred to yield up the country to the Armenians’ majority party, whose reign was far more preferable than that of our ancient enemies, the Turks. Unluckily, however, quite the opposite took place: the majority party, which had taken possession of the country, turned out to consist of such human-like sanguinary madmen as Avis Atarbekov and Moughdsi. Actually, it was they who caused the fall and extirpation of our collective force. Instead of unifying all Armenian fighters and putting up resistance against our known and disguised enemies, and expelling them from the usurped lands of our fatherland, they imprisoned all Armenian military figures, warriors and outstanding intellectuals, exiled many others and exterminated tens of hundreds of them labeling them Dashnaks, anti-revolutionaries, puppets of the imperialists, etc.

I have never been affiliated with the Dashnaksutyun Party; nor have I ever been its follower: on the contrary, being always involved in struggle both in Van and Teheran, I could not reconcile myself to the thought that people, moreover, those fighting for the sake of our people and their salvation for many years, could or should be hacked to pieces under the charge of being Dashnaks...

Where on earth was the majority party when the Armenakans, Hnchakians and Dashnaks were struggling a struggle of life and death for the liberation and salvation of the Western and Eastern Armenians? I did not think and could not even believe that those crazy Avis and Moughdsi’s numerous intelligent friends had agreed to the slaughter of those people only because they were not affiliated with their party and had a different mode of thinking. Were the victors of the ideological struggle to retaliate against their opponents by butchering and shooting them? Indeed, no. Those crazy beasts were merely spawns, marring their party members’ high repute. Shahumian, Miasnikian, Khanjian and others belonged to that same party, too, did they not? Would they ever agree to resort to such outrages? Would they ever tolerate such barbaric extermination and annihilation of our national forces? Throughout our history the criminals, bearing responsibility for the elimination of our national unity, did not have any pangs of conscience while sacrificing their noble compatriots, whom they regarded their enemies, for the satisfaction of their base passions.

The illiterate savages like Avis and Moughdsi were completely unaware of the Armenian nation’s liberation struggle and our self-denying warriors. They knew absolutely nothing about the sacrifices of their people’s devoted sons. Those miserable wretches did not know that the Armenians had suffered thousands of victims to reconstitute the freedom and independence they had been violently stripped of. What could those silly spawns

know about the exploits of the Armenian heroes in Vaspurakan, St. Bartholomew Monastery, Aygestan, Zeytun, Taron and Sasun? Did they have any idea of the carnage of many thousands of patriots hacked to pieces, hanged and shot in Vaspurakan, Constantinople, Adana and other places? They were silly, crazy blockheads, totally unaware of the Armenian revolutionaries. They were criminals and traitors, because they had stifled and shot the patriots devoted to the Armenian people's liberation.

It would be but logical and fair to single out all the notorious elements, turned into deserters and robbers in the war-time, and shoot them altogether.

Yes, the inappropriate, unfair executions and murders, perpetrated during the revolution, destroyed our national unison and collective force, inflicting an irrevocable blow to our nation's vigor and resisting power.

Those infamous, barbaric scoundrels' names are written in indelible black letters in the list of the mean traitors of the Armenian nation.

ARMENIAN REFUGEES

It was spring, and the year was 1921. I went to the church on Sunday to see Father. After the morning service, Artashes Garagash, who had been the choirmaster of that church for many years, came to Father's room to see me, greeted me as usual and said, "Mr. Sirak, two Turkish Armenian fugitives have been lying in the yard of my house for several days now. They're ill and all alone, in a very inconsolable condition. I've helped them within my power during these days, but I can't afford to provide them with the necessary food and medical aid."

"All right, Mr. Garagash, didn't you tell the Benevolent Union about that?"

"I did, but it was useless. They answered they couldn't do anything to help them. Lately quite a number of deportees have come here from Baku via Pahlav City and from Armenia through Tabriz, so that they can't afford to provide for all of them."

Memories of Father's and my very near past were immediately reawakened in my mind and I remembered all the torment we had experienced as refugees. How really unlucky all of us were! How ill-starred our lives were! What sin had we committed to be subjected to such endless torture and persecution? Yesterday it was the Turks who maltreated us, now Baku Turks were slaughtering us, while our own dear compatriots were driving us away in all directions. Were our calamities to have an end after all?

While I was plunged in those heart-rending meditations having completely forgotten about my interlocutor's presence, the door opened and Father came in. He was extremely happy to see me and cried out, "Sirak, my son, where've you been? You haven't come here for two weeks and I was very worried. Don't you know you're my only consolation, for I'm a long way from all our relatives?"

"I'm sorry, dear Father, I know I'm to blame, but I've been very busy lately."

"Father, I've just told Mr. Sirak about those two young wretched fugitives who're ill and completely helpless," Mr. Artashes said, interfering in our talk. "I don't know how they came to me a few days ago. Unluckily, I can't afford to cure and feed them."

“Mr. Garagash,” I interrupted, knowing what a chatter-box he was, “if you don’t have anything to discuss with Father, I’d like you to lead me to those two wretches. I don’t know where you live.”

“I can speak to our priest later,” Garagash said, bursting into loud laughter and, obviously, taking great delight in my words. Apologizing to Father and promising to visit him in a couple of days, I got on a carriage with the choir-master to go to the two deportees.

Artashes Garagash lived in a street adjoining the crossing called Charrah Aziz Khan. On entering, I saw two people lying side by side in a state of utter fatigue in poor, dirty bed, arranged on two mats in a corner of the small yard. I blushed, hit the roof and could hardly restrain from swearing at Garagash, who was already rather advanced in years. I asked him with hidden fury and impatience, “Mr. Garagash, couldn’t you allocate one of your rooms to these miserable wretches? These young fellows are sure to fall ill even if it’s only slightly cold. They’ll die of pneumonia in this state of emaciation.”

“Talking is easy, Mr. Sarhadian,” Garagash answered with a kind of contemptuous sneer. “You’re blaming me instead of thanking me. It’s already four days I’ve sheltered them, however comfortable or uncomfortable it is. Now it’s your turn. Take them and look after them better, if you can.”

“You’re right,” I replied, “I’ve come here with that very intention and don’t need your words. I’m going to take them to my place immediately after they’re examined. Do they have anything or are they utter beggars?”

“Each of them has a bag and an old, worn out cover,” my interlocutor answered.

I helped both of the unknown, sick and emaciated young fellows get on the cab with great difficulty and took them first to the doctor and then to my place.

Before reaching Doctor Hamo Ohanianian’s (coming to Teheran from Armenia, he stayed there for several months), I asked them to introduce themselves.

“I’m Vanian from Van,” one of them said. “I ran away to Tabriz after the coup d’etat in Armenia and saw the city all flooded with refugees. Realizing that it would be completely useless to look for any employment there, I decided to come to Teheran. I met this friend of ours, Aram Mazlounian, in Ghazvin quite by chance. In his turn escaping from the turmoil in Baku, he had made up his mind to come to Teheran, too.”

“And what about you, Mr. Aram,” I asked the second fellow.

“I’m a Bulgarian Armenian from Varna City. Hearing about Armenia’s independence, I came to Batum. While in Tiflis, I learned about the latest events that had taken place in Armenia and decided to go to Baku and then to Persia. Unfortunately, I came out of the frying pan only to find myself in the fire. To my good luck, I managed to somehow escape the tumult of the upheaval, skirmishes and butchery in Baku and joined the fugitives. First we went to Enzeli and then Ghazvin, where I met this fellow, who had decided to come to Teheran, too. We had turned into true beggars, as poor as a church mouse. The only consoling fact is that both of us belong to the same ideology and party.”

“I guess you mean both of you’re Dashnaks.”

“Yes, we are,” Vanian answered at once and then added, evidently, a little perplexed, “Aren’t you one?”

“Does it matter anyway? The most important thing is that you’re expelled Armenian deportees just like me,” I answered them.

IN THE DOMAIN OF SOCIAL ACTIVITY

In the first months of 1922, I again devoted myself to social activity, just as I had done in my birthplace Van in 1914. My personal problems and aspirations sank into oblivion, while the striving to spend all my leisure on useful social affairs had again revived in me.

Thanks to my hard work of a year and a half, I had gained satisfactory command of the Persian language and the methods of instruction at the French school; that is why, I did not need any extra hours for preparation before classes. While away from home and school, I completely forgot them and entirely plunged myself into my social affairs with fervent enthusiasm. I had entered into intercourse with several cultural organizations and NGOs functioning in Teheran. I was particularly enthusiastic about my cooperation with the Union of Teheran Graduates, headed by Margar Gharabekian and Satenik Aserian, the Union of the Progressive with Hovsep Mirzayan as its honorary director (although it was actually headed by architect Alek Galstian) and the Committee of Relief to Armenia, director Doctor Karo Minassian.

I was fascinated by Hovsep Mirzayan, a prominent expert on Persian studies and the unsurpassed translator of Omar Khayam, whose exceptional features and great nobility attracted me like a magnet. I enjoyed having long, long hours’ talks with him: being a modest, self-denying person by nature, he willingly shared his world outlook with me.

It was the preparatory stage of the elections of the legislative body of Persia, revived after Reza Shah’s coup d’etat. The Armenians of Teheran and the southern regions had put up three candidates, Hovsep Mirzayan, Doctor Alek Aghayan and Aram Movel.

In those times a group of young Dashnaks had founded the “Dzakh Hosank” Organization, having broken off the party over some conflict. Within a very short period of time it was divided in two parts: the majority joined us in supporting Hovsep Mirzayan, while the others backed up Doctor Alek Aghayan’s candidature. The Dashnaks seconded Aram Movel.

I was appointed secretary of the Election Committee, chaired by Doctor H. Stepanian. The supporters of the three candidates had commenced an active, vigorous campaign.

Our candidate won a brilliant victory, which incited Hakob Hovhannissian, the leader of the “Dzakh Hosank” Organization seconding Doctor Aghayan’s candidature, to siege our election commission in Abdol-Azim Quarter with his friends. They attempted to break the ballot-box and eliminate the votes. Having been appointed chairman of the quarter’s election commission, I became the main target of the attack, launched by Hakob and his friends, armed with huge bludgeons. To my luck, my faith-

ful friend Samuel Maroutian and three other men charged with my defense were able to counterattack them in due time by giving them a good beating and taking them to the quarter's police-station.

After a heavy struggle of two and a half months, our candidate Hovsep Mirzayan, the pride and glory of the local Armenian community, won a decisive victory by the overwhelming majority of the votes and was elected in the post of Armenian deputy in Iran's Parliament.

Our total success in the parliamentary elections earned us victory in all the other representative bodies of the Armenian community. After those elections, our followers won a decisive majority in all the public and social bodies, especially in the Community Department and Board of Trustees. I was appointed secretary of the Community Department.

MY GUESTS

I found out my guests' political credo at our very first meeting: Vanian and Mr. Aram Mazlounian were Dashnaks and, therefore, my opponents. I am happy to state that I have never been carried away with party fanaticism and even loathed all those blinded by flagrant hatred and vengeance, that are the product of that fanatical devotion. I have always believed that any person, irrespective of his party, deserves respect if he has merits for that.

Regretful as it is, it is customary for the Armenians to compromise and humiliate their party opponents in a most indecent manner. Passions often run so high that the adherents of two different parties label each other as traitors, deserters, betrayers, base men ready to sell themselves to the foreigners. While referring to or addressing each other, they use names and labels so humiliating and shameful that you blush hearing or reading them. Other nations have different parties, too, do they not? Can you mention any civilized people enjoying developed culture who are as blinded by party fanaticism and flagrant hatred as we are? Take all the Armenian newspapers belonging to any party and published abroad, in the so-called Diaspora, and try to find at least one referring to its party opponents without indecency and swear words. I regret to say that you will hardly find one, indeed, without regard to certain exceptions. What are we to achieve by sowing hatred and enmity in our nation? All of us strive for national unison and the protection of our nation, while our hostility will only destroy and finally extirpate the very grounds of our national existence.

Begging my reader's pardon for having given vent to my emotions and patriotic feelings, I want to return to my brief account of the two deportees whom I had given shelter. They were completely emaciated so that they had to be treated for two months to overcome their utter exhaustion. Doctor Hamo Ohanjanian and Professor Khachikian manifested extreme nobility by rendering them medical aid gratis. I had to pay only for the medicines.

Mazlounian and Vanian had a miraculous escape from certain death: the former stayed with me for fourteen and the latter for sixteen months. Being unemployed and as poor as a church mouse, they found free hospitality and shelter in my house.

Mazlounian turned out a very able and hard-working fellow. He took a correspondence course in engineering, then married a girl named Varduhi Mazlounian and went to Europe. For two years he studied architecture at a European university and returned to Teheran. Starting his professional activity as an engineer first in Bandar-Pahlavy and then in an Iranian Construction Company called "Etkā," he later became one of its shareholders. He chose me as godfather of his wedding and first daughter. A noble, grateful man by nature, he never forgot what I had done for him.

Vanian failed to find employment for a long time. Finally, I insisted that he assume a position in an institution, although he was always discontent with his salary. To his luck, I did not know whence and how his cousin came to Teheran. Being unemployed like Vanian, that young man was eager to start some work and I helped them within my power to open a small shop. That cousin proved a man of rare commercial skills so that in a short time, he began working as a middleman for a European company. Soon Vanian's condition improved, too: by the time World War II broke out they had earned a great fortune. Vanian, who turned out to be completely different from Mazlounian, displayed a very bad attitude to me. Two years before World War II, he had accumulated riches and grown self-conceited, while I continually failed to overcome my financial predicament. Once meeting my friend Samuel Maroutian, the very person who had saved him from the jaws of death and taken care of him, he asked with a sneer, "How are you, guy? ... What about your Sirak? What does he do...?"

"Mr. Vanian, listen to me very attentively," Samuel answered indignantly. "One should be just as merciless and ungrateful as you to forget someone whom he owes his life. When you're lying sick and ignored in Garagash's yard, Sirak was your dear Sirak, your friend and compatriot. When he did his best to save you from death, he was your Sirak. Now that he's in a fiasco he's my dear, noble friend. It's Okay. I'm not as ungrateful as you."

Indeed, my good, candid friend Samuel, who was not my compatriot unlike Vanian and was not so intelligent as the latter, was noble and grateful enough to hide Vanian's indecent attitude from me for many years. He told me about that only when I had overcome my financial predicament.

Over thirty-two to thirty-three years, Vanian never made any inquiries about me; nor did he ever visit me to at least greet me and see how I was. He had become rich and grown extremely arrogant. What is even more astonishing, before going abroad he wrote me a letter asking me to help his son to go to Europe to receive a higher education. Consigning to oblivion his haughtiness, I took all the necessary actions to fulfill his request.

As I have already mentioned, Aram Mazlounian was totally different from Vanian: he never forgot me and always felt obliged to me. He was a very able young man: completing his study of architecture at the university, he achieved an important position through his hard efforts.

TAKING OVER TENANCY OF A PUBLISHING-HOUSE

In late June 1922, Aram Mazlounian, who had just got married and was busy with his correspondence course in engineering, came to me. He said the following, "Dear

Sirak, I'm eager to somehow repay you for all the favor you've done to me. My wife's relative Mr. Simian has suggested that we start some joint business together. I've told him I'm busy with the written tasks of my course and don't have enough time to accept his suggestion. Later learning what kind of business it was, I said I'd agree to it on condition that another person should join us."

Pausing for breath, he continued, "I don't know Mr. Simian well enough, but my wife Varduhi praises his skills and dexterity very much. She's ready to allocate my share of the initial capital. You know I'm a newcomer here and don't make out anything in Persian at all. Besides, I'm unfamiliar with the local conditions. I'll be very happy and grateful if you agree to join us. Simian has given his consent. He told me he knew you by name. What do you think of this?"

"Dear Aram, thank you for your kindness. Well, the salary I get at this French school isn't satisfactory at all. When I assumed that work two years ago, I was very glad and pleased. Then I was interested in the moral aspect of my position rather than my payment. I was proud of my work: could a foreign refugee like me expect anything more than that? At present everything has changed, as I've already said. I've somehow earned myself high reputation in the local Armenian community and now I'm really thinking of some other work. But... "

"No buts, please," Aram interrupted. "I know what you're thinking about. You don't have the necessary money to start business. You see you don't need a large sum for that, as Mr. Simian says."

"What business is that?" I asked impatiently.

"It's connected with a publishing-house. Its tenant is a European who wants to hand over his contract to another person at a small amount of money. He's decided to return to his fatherland. The agreement he's signed with the owner of the publishing-house is valid for three years. The latter has agreed to future money transfer saying he'll take only one-thirds of the amount we're to pay. The present-day tenant demands 6,000 *tumans* for that transfer as well as the Persian characters, necessary for the publication of dailies, consisting of three to four pages."

"Then, I've to pay 2,000 to become an equal shareholder, don't I?"

"Yes, you're right," Aram answered enthusiastically.

"All right, I'll talk to Samuel and Father to get that money. Perhaps, I'll manage that. Only I don't know what we're to do in that publishing-house."

"As Simian says, it's a contract with the Post Department and carries out all the printing necessary for it. Besides, four of the six dailies issued in Teheran are published there."

I had great difficulty in procuring my share of the money, necessary to take over tenancy of the publishing-house. Putting my faithful friend Samuel in charge of the trade in spirits, I said to him, "Dear Samuel, I'm not interested in this business anymore. I was lucky enough to meet a noble, candid partner like you quite by chance. Now it's up to you to arrange this business. You're entitled to have the total income received from it. I'll only take a certain amount equal to the house rent. Try to save some money to pay me the cost of the house. As you see, I've found another, more decent occupation."

“Thank you very much, brother Sirak,” Samuel said. He called me his brother, for which I was very glad. “You’ve helped and supported me even more than a relative would do. I’ll never forget what you’ve done for me. I’m always ready to put everything I have at your disposal.”

Samuel gave me a thousand *tumans* of his savings. Father was hardly able to procure five hundred *tumans* and I had to borrow the rest, another five hundred *tumans*, from Mrs. Mazlounian.

By late August, our publishing-house had already been established and we started work. Early in September, I tendered my resignation to inspector Silvester of the French school “Alliance-Française”. For conscience sake I should express words of profound gratitude to that honorable, generous and kind-hearted Frenchman. I suppose he must be dead now, for in 1922 he was about forty-five years old. In the first year of my work as a teacher, when my poor command of Persian gave rise to certain conflict with my pupils, our inspector always came to my rescue and encouraged me so that I would not despair.

At first we had great difficulty in arranging the affairs of the publishing-house. We had enough work which did not provide us with poor income, but the Post Department, our main partner, could not afford to make its monthly payment sooner than forty-five days. On the other hand, the dailies we published, that were in great demand and had serious influence in Teheran, agreed to pay us only within a week after the publication. The printing expenses, including the cost of paper, ink, salaries and the rent, made up a large sum so that the three of us were often obliged to sign bills of exchange and borrow another 5,000 *tumans* at rather a great rate of interest.

In the first months we could hardly make both ends meet: it was only six months later that we were able to pay back the 5,000 *tumans* we had borrowed at interest. Simian and I worked for twelve to fourteen hours per day and received a salary of two hundred and fifty *tumans* monthly, but we failed to get even that amount because of the heavy expenditures. Both Aram and I were very displeased, but Simian kept giving us promises of future brilliant success.

We endured that inconsolable state for eight months. In the last two months I began doubting Simian’s sincerity and told Aram about that, asking him to find some way to check his work. Aram assigned me to carry out check-up with all possible caution, something very difficult, for any compromise lacking firm grounds was fraught with heavy responsibility. I had to be extremely careful and patient enough to do it properly.

NEWSPAPER PUBLICATION

Having appeared in the field of printing with wide chances to publish whatever I wished, I thought of issuing a weekly. All the influential members of the “Arajadimakan” gathered around me always kept emphasizing the necessity of having one, and now we had a suitable opportunity and favorable conditions to do so. Consulting Alek Galstian, Harutiu Petrossian, Hayk Ghoukassian and several others, we got Hovsep Mirzayan’s consent, too. At first we decided to publish the newspaper under the name of “*Ashkhatank*” (the Armenian equivalent for ‘labour’), but we were told that a paper under that name had exist-

ed or existed at that time. Finally, we decided upon the name of “*Banvor*” (the Armenian equivalent for ‘worker’), and I was appointed its editor-in-chief.

The most serious and difficult problem was the procurement of the budget, necessary for the publication of the weekly. Those engaged in that work comprised only two people who could boast financial security. We somehow raised the budget of the first twelve issues of the paper. Some of the members of the “Dzakh Hosank” Organization, who had cooperated with us during the elections, promised to assist us financially and contribute to the sale of the “*Banvor*”. We started the publication, but hardly had eight months passed when we had to cease it: nobody kept the promises they had given us.

THE COMMITTEE OF RELIEF TO ARMENIA

In mid-1922 an organization was established in Teheran under the name of “Committee of Relief to Armenia”. Its members belonged to different classes of the population, most of them being conscientious and progressive people, who did their utmost for their homeland’s welfare. The Committee Administration comprised seven people: director Doctor Karo Minassian, Miss Victoria Yesayan, Mrs. Mari Arakelian, Rafael Movsissian, Sedrak Avagian, Hayk Ghoukassian and me. The aim of the Administration was to keep the Persian Armenians in awareness of the reconstruction and progress underway in their reviving fatherland. Lectures were often delivered and parties held for that purpose, the income received being allocated to poor families as a subsistence allowance.

The main objective of the Committee was to provide Iran’s poor villagers and citizenry with a chance to move to Armenia. It worked hard to path the way for the realization of that goal: thanks to their endeavors, about 10,000 semi-starving, miserable Armenians were taken to their native land.

Since the very beginning of their formation as a nation the Armenians have always been patriotic, ever ready to struggle, fight for the sake of their soil, its independence, freedom and existence even at the cost of their lives. Being first and foremost concerned about the defense of their lands, the Armenians have always supported all those making every possible effort for the protection of their country and hearths, and not infrequently sacrificing their lives for that purpose. It is that fervent patriotism and infinite devotion that makes this nation cling to all those prioritizing the reconstruction of their country, its prosperity, progress and victorious achievements.

The torture-stricken villagers and hard-working citizens, persecuted, outraged, enslaved and robbed over many centuries, were not interested in what colour their beloved country’s authorities’ clothes were. They strongly believed that those men, wearing all kinds of clothes, were true Armenians to their very backbones. The people were first and foremost attracted by their native soil and its water, their birthplaces, mother tongue, dear schools, theaters, songs and dances; in a word, everything, whether animate or inanimate, Armenian in appearance, voice, dialect and spirit. That was the main reason why the Persian Armenian peasants, workers and common people displayed profound liking and infinite sympathy for their reviving motherland.

The Committee of Relief to Armenia did not stand aloof from all that activity. The preliminary work it conducted laid the grounds for the fugitives’ repatriation.

SELF-COMFORT AFTER THE BLOW

Beginning with late 1919, the Soviet regime was introduced into all the three Transcaucasian countries. In the first two to three years of the Soviet reign, postal communication among those countries was broken down; perhaps, that was the reason why I did not receive any answer to either of my letters addressed to Alice.

In late August 1922, we got letters both from Araksi and Karapet, those being the extremely late replies to the letters we had sent them. My anguish-stricken father and I were very happy about that. Father said, his eyes full of tears, "Oh, my Lord, will we live to see the day we'll be able to hug our relatives and kiss them?"

My two brothers and my only beloved sister had got married. Unluckily, Armen's illness had changed for the worse and in my sister's opinion, pneumonia had already started inflicting its irrevocable blows on him, threatening him with the slumbering danger of death. Father and I decided to send Armen two hundred roubles. Fortunately, an Armenian merchant, who had commercial ties with Tiflis, agreed to take that money at the address we had given him. Forty days later we were told that the money had reached its destination, which made us very happy.

In my latest letter to Araksi I had asked her to make inquiries about Alice at the address mentioned in it; unluckily, however, she had failed to get any information about her.

My pure love was finally and irrevocably ruined. The last pillars of the sunny altar collapsed with a discouraging crack. The freezing wind of my heart's void dispelled whatever had once been love, heavenly dreams and ambitions of youth.

My heart, once so full of illusive love, had now turned into an utter vacuum. My anguish-stricken inner world was burning with the sorrowful fire of my two frustrated loves...

I was suffering day and night. Beginning with early 1923, I had a strong desire to return to Gharakilisa and Tiflis. I made every possible effort to realize my wish, but in vain: just like many thousands of Armenians, I was banned to go back to my homeland.

A grief-stricken, desperate person, shocked and upset under the overwhelming burden of mental torture, always seeks for remedies for self-oblivion and consolation, like a breathless man eager to find fresh air and oxygen. I was deliberately prolonging my work in the printing-office, but that boring occupation failed to give me mental satisfaction. After we stopped the publication of the newspaper "*Banvor*," that work seemed even more monotonous and intolerable. Moreover, its unprofitableness and my mistrust in my partner made me tired, angry and upset.

In those days the workers of our publishing-house, whose majority were Armenians, asked me to teach the Armenian language, history and literature in the courses they themselves had organized. I agreed, for I was eager to be of some use to them and have some interesting occupation. The number of those attending the courses gradually increased: workers from other printing-offices joined us willingly and voluntarily. Soon their total number exceeded fifty, and we faced the necessity of finding a larger and more convenient place for our lessons. I succeeded in gaining the consent of Teheran's Armenian Schools' Board of Trustees to move our courses to the Armenian school. Miss Gharabekian and Ghazar kindly agreed to help me in teaching there.

Several months later, those attending the courses in literature and history embarked upon establishing the Union of Workers and Craftsmen. I was happy I could help them within my power.

AN ACCIDENTAL MEETING

I generally went to either the school or the Armenian club to meet the members of the Union of Graduates, especially M. Gharabekian and S. Aserian. It was Thursday night and I supposed I would certainly see them in the club. Friday being a day-off, an evening party had been organized there, apparently, having quite a rich program, that included music, songs and dancing. I decided to go there and rest for a few hours.

That night the Armenian club had more visitors than usual. I wanted to see Margar or Satenik to find out the place of the coming evening party held by the Union of Graduates. While looking for them, I came across a young girl named Helen. I had accidentally seen and got acquainted with her at one of my acquaintances' a few days before. She was a plump girl of middle height. I greeted her and we engaged in conversation. Now I cannot remember which of us was reluctant to part, but our talk lasted very long that night. We walked in the club's alleys and sometimes sat down on the benches to have a rest. Strangely enough, we became attached to each other very soon. When both of us got tired of chattering like magpies, the young lady said she wanted to go home.

"Mother doesn't allow me to stay outside after half past seven in the evening. I'm her only daughter and she worries about me very much. It was something extraordinary she let me come here today without my elder or younger brother. Our house is very near the club. Mother said she'd send my younger brother Elik to take me home in an hour. It's surprising he hasn't come."

"Miss Helen, I don't think he was late. I suppose he was walking about here, following us, better to say, you."

"You don't say so! How couldn't I have noticed him?" Helen said, astonished.

"There's nothing to be surprised at, Miss," I answered. "You're carried away with our conversation. Yes, carried away with the conversation... and, perhaps, me."

"What're you talking about? I'd never expect you to say such things!"

"There's nothing to be hurt for, Miss, it was a joke. After all, a young lady like you has all the rights to talk cordially and attentively with a young man for a couple of hours, forgetting her brother, who's constantly before her eyes."

I suggested I should accompany her to their house, and she did not mind it at all.

OUR CRAFTY PARTNER

I was not satisfied with the work in the publishing-house we had rented. Being constantly busy with secret check-up of our accounts for many months, I finally found out that our partner Simian, whom Aram and I had appointed manager, had been falsifying sums and accounts during all that time. We had a paper seller named Agha-Reza, who supplied us with paper and ink. He turned out to have deceived us during all that time by adding fifteen per cent to the market price of the goods in behalf of our manager.

After a careful and secret check of the price lists the Post Office had submitted to us, I found out that the prices mentioned there had a deduction of twenty-five per cent, whereas the price lists presented to the Post-Office, on the contrary, contained an addition of twenty-five per cent. Our manager had pocketed the lion's share of our profit through such falsifications and craftiness and without any scruples of conscience.

We raised the alarm over those revelations. Aram's wife and her elder sister's husband interfered, trying to smooth away the problem without further trouble.

"His falsifications are a crying shame and disgrace for our family," they said. "Please, don't make his archness public for the sake of our honor. By suing him you'll merely flog a dead horse at the expense of your own nerves. We'll make him pay the money he's appropriated and thus we'll put an end to this story. If you wish him to be tried after getting your money, we'll take the necessary measures for that."

Both Aram and I had no other remedy but spit in the face of our sly manager and break up partnership with him, getting a little more than half of our money. Simian attempted to justify himself by saying that he had given that amount to some people as a "present" for the sake of our success.

AN INVITATION TO DINNER

It was August 1923. One day a young woman came to me and said, "Mr. Sirak, Helen's mother, Mrs. Nunia, is asking you to dinner on Friday. She wants you to accept her invitation very much. Some of their relatives, whom you probably know, will be present, too. It's about a month since Helen's family moved to their summer house in Darus."

"But, ma'am, I'm not on close terms with Helen's family and can't promise to come to that dinner."

"Well, Mr. Sarhadian, what close terms are you talking about? Do we get to know each other well on the very first day of our acquaintance? Friendship and affinity are born as a result of repeated meetings."

I again tried to turn down that invitation, the woman's entreaty not to do so seeming rather strange to me. Later I learned the true reason for that: that lady was eager to attract a young man's attention without knowing that Helen was his only ideal.

Helen's mother could not bear her only daughter's suitor at all. Later I learned that I had won her liking at our very first meeting, which had filled her with inexplicable optimism. Once she told her daughter, "Helen, my girl, the only young man who can be a good match for you is Sirak. Do your best to attract him and stir up interest in him. So far I haven't liked any of your suitors."

I went to Mrs. Nunia's dinner on the appointed day in order not to break my promise. Among those invited was Doctor Alek Aghayan, against whose candidacy I had struggled during the parliamentary elections: Helen's mother was his sister-in-law. Those present, including the aforementioned man, gave me an unexpectedly cordial and inexplicable welcome. I noticed I was being treated with strange attention and affection, something I could not understand at all. The dinner, accompanied by fine wine, was delicious and pleasant.

Toasts were drunk, the most remarkable of them being that proposed by Doctor Aghayan to me. He made a speech on my "good features" and diligence. It was most flattering for me to listen to him telling those present about how I had overcome my state of refugee, carving out a new life and entering a new field of activity without any help. I responded to that toast through a short speech thanking everybody.

We spent a wonderful time. The guests returned to town in the evening, but I stayed in the summer house in Darus, being first asked and then forced to do so by Helen's mother.

"The air and water are just wonderful here. I was suffering from indigestion, but I've finally got over it during this month. Now I feel very well. Stay here and enjoy the water and cool air of this summer house at least for a single night. Don't worry: we've extra bed-clothes and all the facilities for you. Your presence is very pleasant for all of us."

Helen and I enjoyed that evening greatly. We walked about Darus' alleys and springs, having an intimate chat till midnight.

After dinner the following day, Helen told me to ask her mother to let her go to Teheran with me.

"I want to go to my aunt Taguhi's and stay with her for a couple of days. I'm bored here."

Then she added, stammering and feeling ashamed, "Besides, I'll get rid of our neighbour and a young man for some days."

"Who're that woman and young man?" I asked out of curiosity.

"That lady keeps a tight rein on that young man and is very jealous of him. I don't know why that fellow gives her an account of everything he does and is even afraid of her."

"But I think that woman's far older than the lad, isn't she?"

"You're right," Helen replied. "As far as I know, that woman has money and it's what makes it easy for her to hold that young man captive," Helen added a little later with a mysterious tone and smile.

Before leaving Darus, I said to Helen's mother, "Mrs. Nunia, thank you very much for your kind hospitality. I'd like to ask you to let me take Helen to Teheran with me." Then I added in a joke, without waiting for her answer, "I'll take her right to Father and introduce her as my fiancee and future wife. Do you agree?"

"Of course, I do. I'd be very happy to have a son-in-law like you. I don't know why I liked you as my own son at our very first meeting. Perhaps, Helen's told you it's hardly a year since I buried my first child, my poor Emil, in the bloom of life with these wretched hands of mine in Ghasre-Shirin. I spent all my fortune on my unfortunate son's university education. He graduated from Agricultural University in France and returned to us. He failed to find work here and was soon sent to Ghasre-Shirin as a customs inspector.

"His work lasted very short. He was infected with typhus. I wish my legs had been broken and I hadn't gone to see him. The Kurds asked me to allow them to cure him with their herbs and remedies, but I didn't let them save my child, blinded by maternal love. I consigned him to the doctors. Those godless rascals injected my young child

with quinine, gave him wrong treatment and finally killed my poor son in the prime of his life.”

While telling me all that, the poor woman was weeping bitterly, hitting her head and knees. I sympathized with her grief at the bottom of my heart. When she calmed down a little, I attempted to console her somehow.

“Take my girl wherever you want,” she said with tears in her eyes. “From now on you’ll replace my precious son for me.”

The bitter recollection of her dear son’s loss had made that woman pallid and shaking within several minutes. Drawing my forehead closer to her with trembling hands and tearful eyes, she kissed me for several times warmly, in great anguish. Perhaps, at that moment she thought she had found her lost child and was kissing him.

MARRIAGE AND WEDDING

As I had promised Helen’s mother, I took her to Father after noon on the same day. When I introduced her as my fiancée, Father was taken aback, being a little surprised. Despite that, however, he congratulated us happily and gave us his paternal blessing. Being a parish priest, he knew almost all the families in his community, and Helen’s family and numerous relatives were not an exception. His surprise was well-grounded, as he had sometimes spoken to me about some girls, including one of Helen’s closest relatives, but I had always answered him that I still had time to think over marriage and make a decision.

We fixed August 17, 1923 as the day of our marriage. The wedding party was to be held in Darus after dinner at three o’clock, with fifty to sixty invited guests present. Strangely enough, all those preparations were completed so hastily that I did not manage to send invitations to my friends and relatives. Among those present were Father, my good friends Samuel and Aram Mazlounian. Doctor Aghayan willingly suggested that he be the godfather of our wedding and we gladly agreed to it.

Our friends chose St. Minas Church in Vanag for the wedding ceremony, and Father and the godfather as well as Helen and I accepted it kindly. The only unsettled question was our trip from Darus to Vanag. All the women and young ladies cried out almost at the same time, “Let’s hire donkeys and go to Vanag on them. We’ll get off on the way, play the *zurna* (an Oriental wind instrument) and *saz* (a stringed Oriental musical instrument), beating the drum and dancing. Then we’ll get on the donkeys again and reach Vanag. After the wedding ceremony, we’ll return to Darus in the same way.”

The women and young ladies forming a majority, their suggestion soon grew into shouting demands and was finally accepted by applause and hurrahs.

The caravan of people on donkeys set out for Vanag from Darus. We covered the fifteen-kilometer distance in an extremely festive mood, playing the *saz* and *zurna*, beating the drum and singing. We reached Vanag at around six o’clock and Priest Sahak officiated at the wedding with Father. We returned to Darus on our humble donkeys, in the same high spirits, dancing and singing. We enjoyed ourselves greatly, the wedding party lasting till morning, with many a toast proposed to us and many kind wishes expressed. Our guests left us with infinite regret.

EMBARKING UPON NEW BUSINESS

Two weeks after my marriage, my friend Mazlounian went to Europe to complete the correspondence course in architecture at the university and receive his graduation certificate. He had made great progress during those two years and supposed he would get it within a maximum of two years.

After Mazlounian's departure, Simian suggested that I again enter into partnership with him in the business of our former publishing-house. I was eager to do so in order to avoid unemployment, but I rejected him since my confidence in his honesty had been destroyed.

Two months later, during the preparation of an evening party organized by the Committee of Relief to Armenia, I met one of my friends, Levon Tadevossian. Learning that I was unemployed, he said the following to me, "Sirak, there's a vacancy for the treasurer in the Embassy. The person occupying that post returned to Russia a week ago and now I'm obliged to fulfill his duties, although I'm very busy even without that. Our accountant in charge is a Russian. He's a very honorable man, but the official position isn't his cup of tea. The trouble is that he's very fond of drinking and I've to do most of his work, too. I've been assigned to find an appropriate employee among the locals. As you know, three-four of them have been employed there in the recent two to three years. Write an application immediately. I hope it won't be rejected, especially because our Armenian friends working for the Embassy, Avagian, Arakelian, Orbelian and Aghabekian, know you well and can give you a good recommendation in case it's necessary."

"Well, I'll try," I answered to my kind friend Levon.

My application was accepted and fifteen days later I assumed the post of treasurer in the Embassy. I did not have any special difficulty in performing my duties. It was only my imperfect Russian that caused me a lot of trouble.

MY LONGING FOR REPATRIATION AND ATTEMPTS OF IMMIGRATION

The year was 1928. The Armenians spread all over the world, including the peasantry and citizenship in Persia, were extremely enthusiastic and happy about the news of the prosperity and development of their dear homeland. The overwhelming majority of Iran's Armenians, who could hardly eke out a bare existence in that country, gradually grew more and more impatient to return to their homeland.

Naturally, the special immigration institutions in Armenia often responded to those strenuous strivings for return. They gave promises to open Armenia's doors before its anguish-stricken sons and daughters to welcome them into the bosom of their affectionate motherland.

Every day hundreds of applications flooded the Department of the Armenian Affairs of the Soviet Embassy, that in its turn consulted the Committee of Relief to Armenia to find a possible solution to the problem. It was finally decided to take some measures to study the situation in Armenia and check the possibility of repatriation. Early in April 1928, I was given a very decent recommendation with an assignment to go to Yerevan, then Tiflis and, if possible, Moscow on a one-month business trip to find out the possi-

ble means of immigration and tender the necessary applications. Plat, then Soviet consul in Iran, who was from Latvia in origin, was of great instrumentality to me in my mission.

IN YEREVAN

On reaching Yerevan, I stopped at a hotel, where I had some rest and then rang up one of my best friends, Kheranian. He immediately came to me and made me move to their house with both my light bags. Our meeting was really exciting and heart-breaking: we hugged each other, unwilling to release ourselves from one another's arms. Kheranian was the first to speak out, "What an incredible miracle! Thirteen years have passed since our parting, and we, two close friends, have been out of touch all this time. How couldn't you write me even a single letter telling me you're safe and sound?"

"Dear Vahan, first, I didn't know your address. Then, the blows we suffered during both retreats were so heavy and severe that we've hardly got over them. There's much to talk about. Please, tell me about your family members and yourself. How are your parents and sister? Have you got married or not? What about our friends? Which of them is here...?"

"Wait a little. Don't shower me with questions. Let's go to our place. I'll tell you everything you want on the way and at home."

I had a bag and a small suitcase, which were not heavy. Taking them, we left the hotel, got on a carriage and went to Vahan's place, located on Abovian Avenue. It was a cosy, light flat of four rooms. Its furnishings led me to the conclusion that my friend was quite well-off.

"I've got married," Vahan said, "and have a son and a daughter. Mother and my sister are all right. Unluckily, Father's dead. Both my wife and I are working in the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment. I also collaborate with some of Yerevan's papers, especially the *"Khorhrdayin Hayastan"* (the Armenian equivalent for *"Soviet Armenia"*) daily. I'm satisfied with my conditions."

I was devouring my friend's words with great interest, but he said nothing about what I was eager to learn. Hardly had he taken breath when I asked, "What about our dear friend Aghasi?"

"You mean Khanjian, don't you? You're right. I should have told you about him. So, please, listen to me attentively.

"In Van Aghasi was one of the most diligent and conscientious members of our Students' Union. Despite that, however, I've to confess I'd never expect him to make such rapid intellectual progress and achieve the position he has today. Of course, you've heard that now he's First Secretary of the Party. Very few manage to acquire such a high, honorable rank. By the way, I've to say he's very hard-working and extremely able to learn everything. He's graduated from two universities and is a party theorist. Lenin likes him very much and appreciates him highly. What's even more important, despite his present position and great progress, he's the same modest and decent Aghasi we once knew. He hasn't betrayed his own self at all. He isn't self-conceited and inaccessible. He's an indefatigable worker and is always busy. He doesn't reject a single per-

son and receives everybody in his own study, listening to the people's complaints and trying to find some remedy for their pain, if possible. It'll take us quite a long time to speak about his good features. To cut it short, I've to reveal the essential trait of his character. Despite his position and responsible work in the party, he's remained a true Armenian patriot... .”

Vahan paused. Apparently, he wanted to add something more, but hesitation hindered him from doing so. Eventually, he decided to tell me what he was worried about.

“Dear Sirak, you told me on the way that the main aim of your arrival and planned trips to Tiflis and Moscow is the issue of immigration. Therefore, you should be very interested in what I want to tell you now. It's closely connected with the goal of your mission.

“As a true Armenian patriot, Aghasi regrets profoundly the injustice done to the Armenian nation. He's very displeased with present-day Armenia's wrong, unfair division of borders. He finds it unjust and merciless that our Armenian-populated territories have been partitioned from our main borders. He considers Akhalkalakh, Akhalkalak, Nagorno-Karabakh, Nakhichevan and all the other lands as inseparable parts of our fatherland. He thinks it but natural and logical that they should be within the borders of our motherland. That's why, he's gone to Moscow and Leningrad to speak to the authorities and demand amendment for that flagrant violation of the Armenian nation's rights.”

“You mean Aghasi isn't in Yerevan,” I said regretfully, taken aback at the news.

“No, he isn't. It's already fifteen days since he left to settle the issue that constantly worries and troubles him.

“All his strivings and selfless attempts pursue a single aim, to see Armenia enlarged and densely-populated with Armenians. His patriotic heart suffers greatly from his anguish-stricken compatriots' painful supplications to be allowed to return to their homeland. ‘Open the doors of our motherland. Welcome us into the bosom of our native land. We wish to live, work and die on our own soil...’

“I'm sorry, my noble old friend,” I said to Vahan, “I'm surprised at what you've just told me. Of course, many years ago I knew our younger, hard-working friend Aghasi Khanjian as a noble Armenian, devoted to his work and duties. I'm amazed at the following. Over twelve to thirteen years, our former friend's mentality and character were forged in the crucible of your present-day party of Communists. All the party members, who have gone through the same crucible, have been brought up with all-human principles acknowledging only what is universal for the entire mankind. They think the representatives of all the nationalities, the Armenians, Georgians, Azerbaijanians, Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Kazakhs, Turkomans, Tartars and others should have a single homeland. I mean all the nationalities in the countries of Communist rule should have one and only one fatherland. Under these circumstances, can a famous Communist like Khanjian, who has earned himself the position of the Armenian people's leader, be a devoted patriot, as you insist?”

“Your question's quite understandable,” my friend hurried to answer me. “Please, be kind enough to listen to me again. Communism doesn't renounce the self-determination right of the nationalities living under that regime. On the contrary, according to the

Communist ideology, the free intellectual, cultural, social and economic development, progress and prosperity of all the different nations are the prerequisites for the fortification and final victory of Communism. All the peoples living in this big family should be equal. None of them should be privileged to exploit the other. Therefore, it's no wonder that our dear and respected friend Aghasi wants to secure legal equality for one of the members of that family, in this case, the Armenian nation. Aghasi is the protector of the Armenian people's rights that have been flagrantly violated. It's he who voices our just demands: in a word, he's our people's true son, the pride of the nation who gave him birth. He's an unsurpassed patriot."

That evening Vahan introduced me to his wife. All their family had gathered at the supper table, his mother and sister welcoming me with unspeakable delight. My meeting with Vahan's mother after so many years reopened the poor woman's severe wounds and she burst into bitter weeping. Her first daughter, my sister-in-law unlucky Haykanoush, had fallen victim to our first withdrawal. Her son and I attempted to console her and somehow alleviate her old pains and sorrows.

"Mother, there're people even unluckier than you," I said. "The war turned out a true scourge for our Vaspurakan Armenians."

Suddenly filled with bitter recollections of Anoush and her parents, I continued, "You certainly remember Cossack Sahak, living not far from our street. His entire family fell prey to the retreat, their prospering house being levelled with the ground. All of them lost their lives... You should thank your lucky stars that now you've three children instead of one, your beautiful, sweet grandchildren and their mother."

Vahan's wife was a young plump woman of an attractive appearance. Being a university graduate, she was quite a developed person and a pleasant interlocutor. The supper was lavish, the table being decorated with the renowned wine of Armenia's "Ararat-Trust". During that very pleasant evening, I did my best to satisfy their curiosity and answer all their questions.

To my luck, the next day was Sunday. My friend and his wife promised to show me alternately the sights of the Armenian capital Yerevan. The city, which I had failed to see during the first retreat, was being reconstructed and enlarged very rapidly. My friend told me the following in that respect, "Before 1920 this ancient city, that enjoys the pride and glory of being the capital of our homeland, had only a number of shabby houses in crooked, narrow, dusty and dirty streets. That miserable city has completely changed during the past seven to eight years. All these wide avenues with the houses and buildings erected on them, the squares and gardens, alleys and beautiful pools full of water, the monuments and institutions have been recently built. If we don't face another war, our newly-founded capital will be beyond recognition within ten years. Many architects and constructors are busy with the design of hundreds of institutions and public places. Our Yerevan will surely become a beautiful "bride" among the Caucasian cities. The magnificent buildings and chambers of theater, opera, cinema,

singing, dancing and ballet, the museums and *Matenadaran* (the future Armenian depository of ancient manuscripts after *Mashtots*), the centers of national culture and fine arts will become beautiful decorations for our capital, that's growing and improving day by day. Soon our dear Yerevan and its large surroundings will be suffused with bright light, produced by the electric power stations.

"Now we're walking along a beautiful avenue called after Abovian, the outstanding advocate of the Armenian nation's struggle for freedom. Soon this avenue will extend up to Kanaker, the great patriot's birthplace. His huge monument will tower in the heart of this avenue in a short time."

Walking silently, I was devouring every word of my friend's account with insatiable curiosity, Vahan's optimism filling me with great enthusiasm. I was eager to see every corner of our newly-erected capital: that is why, we walked for three hours, without taking any means of transport.

It was around midday when Vahan said to me, "I suppose you must be tired. Let's go home. We'll have dinner and you'll rest till four o'clock. Then you'll continue your walk in the city with my wife. We can go to the Writers' Club at seven o'clock, if you wish. By some coincidence the Writers' Union is to hold a meeting there at that time. If you manage to reach there before seven o'clock, I'll introduce you to our literary geniuses. The *Master* (Vahan means Avetik Isahakian, a prominent Armenian poet, prose writer and public figure, 1875 to 1957), Charents, Demirjian and many other young and old writers will be there. We'll steal away at about eight o'clock or half past eight and go to the State Theater.

"Now young able actors have joined the old ones. Our Theatrical Ensemble is our pride and glory. The difficult musical pieces they perform are a great success. Even foreign visitors take great delight in their artistic skills and talent. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has been running in the Theater for already a month. Despite that, however, it's very difficult to get tickets for it. In the morning I phoned one of my friends working there and asked him to book three tickets for us. At first he wouldn't agree, but when he learned I had a guest from abroad he couldn't reject me anymore.

"In 1918 Yerevan's population didn't exceed 25,000. Now that number has grown tenfold and is still increasing year after year. The authorities have started a great struggle against illiteracy. The people's educational level has grown higher. They themselves are eager to improve their knowledge and mental abilities. The theater, cinema, concerts, opera, ballet, dances and songs are just as important for them as their daily bread."

The capital of my reviving homeland made an infinitely deep impression on me and I was very enthusiastic about it. Everything was so full of life, everybody attempting to keep up with the general progress. Every person had his own work and strivings, the people's endeavors pursuing a single aim, i.e. to reconstruct their native land so that it would thrive and prosper again.

I would never expect the Writers' Club and State Theater to make such a strong impression on me. What was even more striking, I constantly felt the purely Armenian



Astafian (nowadays Abovian) Street in Old Yerevan (photo 1920s)

spirit so dear to me, in all those centers of culture. The magnificent Armenian language and speech dominated everywhere.

It was Monday. Vahan was to meet and consult Sahak Ter-Gabrielian at half past twelve so that I still had four and a half hours at my disposal. Both my friend and his wife being obliged to stay in their places of work at that time, I decided to walk in Yerevan. I remembered my friend's home number well in case I was lost. After eight o'clock in the morning, comparatively few people could be seen in the streets, where nothing reminded of the overcrowdedness of the previous day and, especially night. It was something quite understandable, for the state and administrative employees, workers, students and pupils, in a word, people of every occupation, had already gone to their destinations an hour before.

After so many years, I was truly delighted to hear the sweet Armenian language everywhere. I could see Armenians and hear Armenian speech in every corner. It was only for a few times that I heard Russian during all my four-hour walk.

Those securing order and discipline and controlling the traffic in the city were all Armenians. I approached a policeman and asked him to tell me the way to the city market. He gave me all the necessary information with great kindness in pure literary Armenian. I found both the free market and the shops and commercial centers of the collective farms easily. The former abounded in every kind of goods and, particularly food products, something I was astonished at. At that time of the year, when summer was already nearing its end, the market was flooded with all possible sorts of fruits, such as pears, apples, peaches and grapes.

The sight of the market whetted my appetite and I bought pears, apples and grapes, a kilogram of each. Comparing the prices with those in Teheran's market, I concluded that they were even a little cheaper.

Soon, however, I regretted my purchases, for the burden of three kilograms would certainly make me give up the idea of walking in the city. I took the sweet fruits of my homeland to Vahan's, greatly enjoying carrying them in my hands.

A MEETING WITH SAHAK TER-GABRIELIAN

At exactly half past twelve, my friend and I were in Sahak Ter-Gabrielian's²⁹ office. Vahan introduced me to him, explaining the aim of our visit. Ter-Gabrielian, a person enjoying great popularity with the people, was Director General of the Committee of Immigration and the Central Department of the Committee of Relief to Armenia.

"Comrade Gabrielian," Vahan began, "Sirak Sarhadian is one of our respected old friends from Van. All of our friends from Van, including our senior friend Aghasi Khanjian, are deeply indebted to him. It was under his guidance that we received our first lessons of social democratic ideology. He has arrived here from our neighbour Iran's capital Teheran to apply to our state and party authorities with a request to settle the issue of immigration as soon as possible. As Sirak himself insists, tens of thousands of peasants and workers in Iran are looking forward to getting permission to immigrate into their beloved motherland. He has all the necessary documents confirming his mission."

"I am very happy to meet your respected old friend," Ter-Gabrielian said. "Indeed, I am well-aware of the problem you have mentioned. At present the issue of immigration is of great importance. In the past two years we have got many written petitions from foreign countries, especially from the Armenians who had a narrow escape from the provinces and cities of Turkish Armenia. Now large-scale work is underway to make our compatriots' immigration a reality. Our First Secretary Aghasi Khanjian and other influential officials are really making every possible endeavor for that purpose. The settlement of the issue of immigration has become a fixed idea for the former. He is a famous theorist and statesman, having a wide circle of acquaintances. All that, however, have not hindered him from being a true patriot. Before his leaving for Moscow, I had a long consultation with him on the necessary and possible means of immigration."

²⁹ **Sahak Ter-Gabrielian** was born in Shushi City (in the present-day Republic of Nagorno Karabakh) in 1886. In 1902 he acquired membership of the Communist Party. He was one of the organizers of the general strike Baku workers went on in 1904. In the years of the Russian Revolution, i.e. 1905 to 1907, Ter-Gabrielian cooperated with Stepan Shahumian, Suren Spandarian and other Bolshevik leaders. In 1918 he met Lenin to settle the issues concerning the supply of oil from Baku, Azerbaijan to Soviet Russia. In June 1918, Baku's Council of People's Commissaries appointed him president of the Ad Hoc Committee struggling against the anti-revolutionary elements. In late summer 1920, Ter-Gabrielian assumed the post of advisor in Soviet Russia's mission to the independent Republic of Armenia. At the end of the same year, he was appointed accredited representative of Soviet Armenia in Russia. In 1928 to 1935, he was the president of the Council of People's Commissaries in the Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia. At the same time, he also performed the duties of vice-president of the Council of People's Commissaries in the Transcaucasian Federation. In 1937 Ter-Gabrielian fell victim to Stalin's repression.

Ter-Gabrielian cut the thread of his speech. I was eager to listen to the continuation of his account, that was very interesting for me. In the meantime he kindly treated us to cold syrup, made from Armenia's sweet-smelling roses. Then he went on, trying to weigh every word and sentence, "Aghasi, that great statesman and patriot, attempts to amend the unjust border division of our country. He does not spare any effort to restitute the territories, illegally usurped from us."

Ter-Gabrielian paused for a moment and went on in strange self-oblivion and discontent, erupting from the bottom of his heart, "The first blow of the unfair border division of our country was inflicted on us by our centuries-old enemies, the Turks. They forced us to sign a peace treaty under violent pressure. By that sinister treaty they took possession of the fertile, prospering lands of so-called Russian Armenia.

"That barbaric usurpation was followed by another "friendly and fraternal" conquest. Karabakh, Akhalkalak and Akhaltskha were illogically partitioned from our historical motherland, being put under the "auspices" of the neighbouring autonomous republics. Moreover, Nakhichevan was annexed to Azerbaijan with the status of "autonomy"."

In those days, thousands of our compatriots were troubled by the expressions of discontent, erupting from the depths of that noble patriot's heart. The utmost sincerity of his protest made a great impression on me.

When Ter-Gabrielian calmed down, I plucked up courage and asked him, "Do you think the hard efforts made by such patriots as Khanjian and you will yield any positive results?"

"It is very difficult to answer that question. We need hard work and, especially political patience. Lenin holds Khanjian in great respect and trusts him. If his favorable attitude is not poisoned by any outside influence, Aghasi will, undoubtedly, achieve the desirable results.

"A number of people outside our fatherland consider themselves sincere patriots and regard us as humble puppets for foreigners. They should not think so. Our trouble consists in that we have inherited a ruined country with scattered lands in the aftermath of the war. The present political situation is extremely unfavorable from the standpoint of restituting the territories, violently usurped from Armenia. The Turks have now become an apple of discord amidst all this political rivalry, and we simply cannot take back our precious diamonds, our thriving cities and townships from them.

"As for the unfair usurpation of lands within the borders of the Soviet Union, undoubtedly, sooner or later that issue will be reconsidered and when it happens we should do our utmost to protect our indisputable rights. Our people thoroughly deserves it. Even if Khanjian and other patriots fail to do it today, the Armenian nation will certainly live to see the day their violated rights are restored.

"In any case, the immigration, you and thousands like you are now calling for, shall become a reality. Armenia is the motherland of all Armenians and every Armenian is fully entitled to return to his native land.

"We have already started preparations for the immigration. I am convinced soon the anguish-stricken multitudes will be lucky enough to come back and resettle in the country they love so much."

My conversation with Ter-Gabrielian lasted for more than two hours. I explained to him the following, “Persia’s economy has been gradually overcoming its grave predicament since Reza Shah took up the reins of government. Indeed, no miracles can occur in a country that was very far from progress and development for many centuries, even if the king works day and night. Despite their diligence and hard work, the peasantry face serious financial problems. The taxes imposed on them always keep them in debt to the village head. Besides, the poor villagers cannot afford to send their children to school and provide them with proper education.

“The same is true of the workers. Life at factories is very monotonous, although serious steps have been taken to improve it. Construction is underway all over the country, but it is merely impossible to provide employment for everybody.

“These are the main reasons making the Armenian workers and peasants immigrate into their motherland. They are very enthusiastic about its revival and prosperity. What is essential for them is their children’s future. Those longing to repatriate wish to secure literacy and hopeful future for their children.”

Finding my explanation logical, Ter-Gabrielian told me to make every possible attempt to meet Khanjian, explain my mission to him and ask for his support.

When we were parting, he said to me, “Perhaps, you had better speak to People’s Commissar Stalin, too, although I do not cherish great hopes for that.”

Soon after he added, “I repeat, I do not want to disappoint you, but I am not very optimistic about that.”

After bidding farewell to Sahak, I said to Vahan, “That man seemed very sincere and noble. He didn’t even try to veil the problem and possibility of immigration.”

“You’re fully right. He’s a truthful, honest person. Our friends trust him greatly. His plans of immigration are always highly appreciated.”

“I’m sorry, dear Vahan, I couldn’t catch what you meant. What does “our friends” and “their friends” mean? Doesn’t Ter-Gabrielian belong to your party?”

“Not yet, but he’s a candidate for membership. I suppose he’ll be admitted to our party in the near future. As I’ve already told you, Aghasi trusts and believes him greatly.”

My friend’s family generally had dinner at two o’clock, but that day we involuntarily made them have it an hour later. They promised to show me the vicinity of Yerevan after midday and take me to the opera at night. We were to watch “Arshak II” by Choukhajian.

MY LAST DAY IN YEREVAN

Having stayed in Yerevan for four days, I decided to leave for Gharakilisa, now renamed Kirovakan, by train. Before noon on the fourth day of my stay, Vahan’s wife Clara kindly accompanied me to the institutions under the jurisdiction of the People’s Commissariat of Enlightenment and, especially the departments of the State University. My heart swelled with extreme joy and happiness. I was happy about and surprised at the rapid progress and breath-taking development of the great capital of our small homeland. Truly, we are an able, talented nation. For the past several centuries the men-

tal, creative skills and abilities as well as the constructive genius of our people had been barren of the chance to grow, develop and bloom. Within eight years, which is a very short period of time, our people's wisdom and genius succeeded in making immense progress thanks to the peace and tranquility of the time. What else could they do, say, if they were able to live and create in peace for thirty to forty years! Our national tragedy consists in that all the manifestations of our diligence, creativity and genius have always disappeared in foreign lands without any trace as a result of neglect and lack of support. Then why should we not join our talented poet in crying out, "I wish I had a thousand lives to sacrifice all of them for you. Let me keep only one of them to praise and glorify you in my songs!"

After midday Vahan, his sister Goharik and I went for a walk in the city. We strolled along the bank of the resonant Hrazdan River. In some places it got furious, ran rapidly and made moans, as if complaining against the robbery that had overtaken its motherland. It seemed to be spitting in the faces of our base enemies, who had seized Masis, the magnificent symbol of Armenia's eternity.

We still had some time and I asked my friends to lead me to Kanaker. The desire to see unsurpassed patriot Khachatur Abovian's house attracted me like a magnet. I could not help seeing that outstanding Armenian's hut. The valorous man, born and reared in that cabin, had found enough moral strength to break the iron chains of his people's centuries-old slavery, giving them a brilliant chance to speak and write freely, without any bonds. He had dared to voice his protest against the injustice and outrages done to hundreds of thousands of his compatriots with cruel violence.

While entering Abovian's cabin, I seemed to be stepping into some sanctuary. I had not prayed for a very long time, but the great writer's eternal fame made me kneel and whisper some words of prayer.

"People criticize us for not being good patriots," my friend said. "We adore those fighting for our liberation, concerned with our people's survival and salvation. We hold our literary and cultural figures and musicians in high respect. See, the great patriot's hut is protected by guards. Nobody dares to take anything, even a small item, from here."

IN KIROVAKAN

On Wednesday morning I took a train to Kirovakan, formerly called Gharakilisa, having spent four days at my dear friend's in Yerevan. On the evening of the fourth day, Vahan and his wife took me to the large, splendid hall of the Ensemble of Singing and Dancing. The group's performance of songs and dances made a deep impression on me, all their movements being the true embodiment of typically Armenian art, so dear to us. The Armenians' hearts trembled at the sight of the dances, performed with truly Armenian grace. Absolutely torn away from the reality, we were listening to the solos, which made our hearts swell with excitement. Consigned to the chair for three hours, I was enchanted by the Ensemble's bewitching songs and fascinating dance movements.

My farewell to my friend's family was very exciting. The four days of my stay seemed four months, that had made us closer and more attached to each other. I regret-

ted profoundly that I had to leave my magnificent fatherland's capital, so full of life, at the same time also parting with my noble friend and his kind family.

I was also sorry I could not do anything in return for Vahan's kind hospitality and precious support. My repeated requests could hardly persuade his family to accept one of the two light, beautiful covers made in Kazrouni Factory.

Despite the overcrowdedness of the means of transport so typical of the war-time, the first- and second-class carriages had unoccupied seats. Having booked a ticket for a second-class one, I had only two fellow travelers in the compartment. One of them was an Armenian going to Tiflis, the other was a Russian returning to Moscow. The latter immediately made friends with me with the frankness and kindness so characteristic of his nation and entertained me with his jokes on the whole way to Kirovakan.

I reached Kirovakan after noon the same day. My heart began beating violently: I knew my brother Karapet had come to the station with his family to meet me. I had sent a telegram about my arrival from Yerevan.

The train stopped. Hardly had I got off the carriage when I saw my elder brother running towards me and calling up my name. While we were hugging and kissing each other, I noticed two rosy-cheeked children of splendid beauty. They were jumping around me, applauding and shouting, "He's our uncle, our Uncle Sirak!"

Then they clung to their father's suit and mother's skirt asking them, "Mommy, Dad, he's our uncle, isn't he?"

In her turn my sister-in-law repeated in a very happy and delighted mood, "Yes, my children, he's your uncle."

I embraced and kissed my nephew and niece, shining with flower's freshness and poppy's redness. The former was a five-year-old boy and the latter a seven-year-old girl.

Getting on a carriage my brother had hired beforehand, we reached his house in a quarter of an hour. The cabman and his horses seemed to be sharing our festive mood. The animals took us to our destination at a gallop. Karapet paid the cabman and, obviously, gave him much more than he should have, for the latter parted with us in very high spirits, his carriage almost flying in the air. Turning his head to us for several times, he shouted, "May you always be fine, brother Karapet! May you always have good guests like your brother, bringing success and good luck to you! May God grant health to you and your children!"

Surprised at the cheerfulness of that city's inhabitants, I immediately remembered the noble, generous carter I had met there many years before.

Karapet's house and the garden attached to it were located at one of the central streets in Kirovakan. The former was a single-storied fine building. The latter was quite large and abounded in fruit-bearing trees, fresh flowers and verdure that decorated it splendidly. I was going to ask my brother how he had managed to obtain all that when he cried out with unspeakable happiness, "Dear brother, I see you don't want to believe this house and nice garden are ours. Yes, luckily, whatever you see now is ours, better to say, yours and Father's, as I bought them at the money both of you had sent me. But for Father's and your continual persuasion and my wife's persistence, maybe, I wouldn't

have bought them. You know me well: money burns a hole in my pocket. Well, I'm to blame for that. Eh, what can I do? Well, characters vary. As for me, I'm fond of spending money and being well-off..."

Suddenly a cloud of deep sadness appeared on his happy, cheerful face, which instantaneously grew dark with some tragic recollection. Taken aback, I asked him, "What's the matter, Karapet?"

"Never mind it. Sometimes it so happens to me. When I'm extremely happy, I suddenly grow sad. Luckily, these fits of grief and sadness don't last long."

His explanation seeming untruthful to me, I again asked him in a timid and doubtful tone, "Has anything happened to our brother Armen? Don't hide anything, tell me the truth. How's he?"

I did not dare to ask Karapet whether Armen was dead or alive. He made a great effort not to give me any final answer and conceal the reality from me. Perhaps, he took pity on me, unwilling to make me grief-stricken and sorrowful at the very first moments of my arrival.

I stayed in Kirovakan for a whole week, being always treated with sincerity, deep love and extreme kindness. My comfort and cheerful mood seemed to be their only source of happiness. My sister-in-law Anahit and her daughter Hasmik incessantly hovered around me like butterflies. They kept a careful, affectionate eye on me even when I was asleep. Sometimes I had to complain of their extreme tenderness and utmost attention. Hasmik would hug me, caress my face and hair with her small, tender hands and kiss me warmly. Every day they accompanied me in my fascinating three to four-hour walks in the cool alleys and parks in the vicinity of the city.

Kirovakan had changed almost beyond recognition. The wide avenues, fine new buildings, schools and parks had converted the former village town into a magnificent city full of life. I could hardly recognize the Gharakilisa I had seen eleven years before.

Just like then, I admired the city's air, water and bewitching, vivifying nature, probably, because it bore a striking resemblance to my birthplace Aygestan. When you lose your adorable, affectionate mother, your sister becomes the main object of your love and caress. Your beloved dead mother's true embodiment, her tender daughter, who is her living image, is with you...

I was filled with the same feeling at that time. I had had the calamity of losing my lovely, splendid birthplace, but I was happy and delighted to have a city, that was the small but beautiful and enchanting image of my Aygestan.

Kirovakan revived me and imparted me new spirit and vigor, giving me bright hopes.

My brother had a shop on one of the city's central avenues, not far from his house. Indeed, the permanent capital invested in it was not great, as my brother was in the bad habit of squandering away money. The products sold in the shop comprised a few pouches of rice, several cans of cheese, oil, a little fresh butter, vegetables and fruits.

During the week I spent with Karapet's family, our meals were lavish, with wine always accompanying them. Despite the fact that he did not adhere to any party, he had a wide circle of friends and acquaintances, being held in high esteem. He gave a farewell supper before my departure, inviting about twenty people. We had a wonderful time at the supper, which was delicious and bounteous. The guests were endlessly drinking toasts and making speeches, one of which lasted very long. The speaker said the following, "Before concluding, I'd like all of my messmates to fill their glasses with our beloved Armenia's sweet, honorable wine and drink for the health of our dear host Karapet, his wife and their lovely children. Although Karapet doesn't belong to any party, all of us love and respect him as a noble and sincere person. We consider non-party-affiliated people like him our friend and even brother, and we won't spare our support for him. Long live our Karapet! Long live his wife and precious brother! Long live his family!"

In the end one of the guests drank a toast to me, wishing me good luck and success in my work and goals.

When I started scolding Karapet for his heavy expenses the following day, he said to me, "Dear brother, don't worry about my extreme generosity. You've seen my shop. I don't even think of raising my capital. I'm only trying to keep the small one I have. The people you saw last night frequent my shop. I get almost all my profit from them. It's very necessary for me to win their favor and friendship."

THE SINISTER NEWS OF MY BROTHER'S DEATH

I decided to leave for Tiflis by the seven o'clock morning train. The week I had spent with Karapet's family had been so pleasant for me that I thought I had seen my family members only a day before.

We finished supper at half past nine on the last evening of my stay. The impending separation was, indeed, highly undesirable for all of us. Unlike the noisy meals of the last several days, full of laughter and happy chatter, that supper made a depressive impression on us and we involuntarily kept silent all the time. Each of us seemed to be absent from the table, plunged in his or her own thoughts and meditations, and upset by the sad parting, awaiting us.

My ominous, sinister thoughts would not leave me alone. I gave only short answers to the questions and words addressed to me. My reflections had taken me to my brother in Tiflis. I knew, I was almost convinced that poor Armen, who had been suffering from pneumonia for many years, must have died.

Hardly had we finished supper when my niece Hasmik came up to me, sat in my lap, kissed me for several times, as she would often do in those days, and asked, "Uncle, why do you want to leave us so soon? Why don't you want to stay for some more days...?"

I was surprised at and fascinated by the prudence and sensitivity of that child, who had hardly seen seven springs in her newly-blossomed young life. Her cleverness and high mental development made her twice as old as she was, like a grown-up girl.

Clasping Hasmik to my bosom tight, I warmly kissed her rosy, brilliant cheeks and forehead for several times and said, “My dear Hasmik, my little but very clever Hasmik, I wish I could stay with you for many, many days. It’s a pity I can’t. I’ve some other work to attend to and finish. If I do it soon, I’ll come to you again. Tomorrow morning I’m going to your Uncle Armen in Tiflis.”

Hardly had I uttered that sentence when I noticed tears in Anahit’s eyes and saw Karapet crying bitterly, all that auguring ill for some hideous calamity. Proving unable to control myself, I shouted, “Why did you hide my poor brother Armen’s death from me? Why on earth did you do it? Sooner or later I’d learn it somehow, wouldn’t I?”

“Sirak, my beloved brother,” Karapet answered, wiping off the flood of tears with the palm of his right hand, “by telling you that tragic news I’d spoil the happiness and delight you felt during these several days, having seen us after so many years. I just wanted to spare you and not to give you that cruel blow just immediately after your arrival. I don’t know, if you consider it a crime, please, forgive me...”

I rose from my seat at once and hurried to the garden to lament over my young, unfortunate brother’s untimely death in complete privacy.

Several minutes later Anahit and Hasmik came to me to console me with their sweet words and caress. Soon Karapet joined us.

Truly, life is nothing but a great tragedy. Fortunately, people dear to you always come to your rescue to help you consign to oblivion that heart-rending tragedy with their love and comfort. My affectionate relatives hurried to console me with my grave sorrow.

It was almost midnight. Kissing warmly Anahit and my little, angel-like Hasmik, I asked them to go and have some rest. Karapet and I spent another hour talking about Armen’s death and discussing some family problems.

I spent a very troubled, restless night. I could hardly sleep for a couple of hours, and that dreaming about very depressive nightmares. When I got up the next morning, I was pallid and utterly exhausted, my temples swollen. I was still overwhelmed by the gruesome impressions of the previous night.

IN TIFLIS

The morning train took me to Tiflis. My parting with my brother and his family was very touching. Hasmik and little Arnik had clung to me, unwilling to tear themselves away from me. Kissing warmly those two lovely children, I promised to return to them soon.

Taking my seat in the second-class compartment of the train, I attempted to somehow overcome the nightmare of the ruthless blow my brother’s death had inflicted on me. I tried to divert my attention by recollecting the events of my twelve-day journey. I started thinking about the possible successful realization of the main objective of my mission.

Yerevan held quite a favorable position on the issue of immigration we had raised. What viewpoint and attitude awaited me in Tiflis and, particularly Moscow? Would the petition of thousands of Armenians longing to repatriate be listened to and met? The

more I approached Tiflis, the more that question started troubling me. The Armenians' demand for permission to immigrate was quite natural and legal, but I knew it would not be an easy task to satisfy it. The benevolent attitude and approval of both Tiflis and Moscow were of primary necessity for the settlement of that issue.

The following day of my arrival in Tiflis, I applied to the Department of the Nationalities' Commissariat. My reception was appointed at half past seven in the morning and I was glad I would not have to wait long. Having lived and worked in Tiflis for about two years, I was eager to walk about the city and visit its various avenues and public places to see what progress the Georgian capital had made.

SEARCH FOR ALICE

I decided to start my walk by going to Sololak and looking for Alice. Approaching the building they once lived in, I stopped. My heart began beating rapidly, as if that part of my organism, which is very vulnerable to experiences and feelings, wanted to tear itself away from my chest. My extremely panic-stricken suspense lasted rather long, my heart still beating violently. I had to find a quiet corner in that crowded avenue and wait for several minutes for my disturbed heart to tranquillize. It took my breath a long time to improve, after which I got up and made for the entrance of the building. I went in and was struck by an amazing surprise. By some strange coincidence, in front of me, before his cabin was sitting the same Turkish porter from Zangezour, whom I had seen many, many years before. I asked him about Alice and her parents. He did not reply at once and stared at me with the utmost attention. He seemed to have grown deaf so that I had to repeat my question, this time in a louder voice, "Do Mr. Barseghov and his daughter Alice live in this house?"

The door-keeper shook his head sadly and cried out with a sigh, "No, unluckily, no..."

I thought I had heard some other shuddering, sinister news of death after that of my brother's. I could hardly keep from falling down. The first "no" uttered by the porter had sounded ordinary, but the second one had horrified me. While I was striving hard to control myself and make further inquiries, the porter added with still more emphasized sadness, "They've left this house and this city."

"Where've they gone? Couldn't you tell me where they've gone?"

"Barseghov didn't want to tell me anything. His daughter, wonderful, good-hearted Alice, kissed me on the forehead with tears in her eyes and said they were going to Constantinople."

"Constantinople? The former Turkish capital?" I repeated automatically. Then I made a strenuous attempt to ask the porter, "Do you remember when they left?"

"I do remember it very well, sir, very well. I felt I was losing my own family with their departure. You can't imagine, sir, what good-hearted, kind people they were. All the three of them were very kind and nice. It was thanks to those noble people that I managed to feed, dress and send my three children to school. Ah, what an honorable, tender-hearted girl their daughter Alice was! Alas, I wish my own child had gone instead of her. That girl was even dearer and more pitiful to me than my own kid."

"Sorry, you forgot to say how long it is since they left."

“It’s exactly eight and a half years since they went away. Their departure deprived this house of all the success and good luck its inhabitants used to enjoy. I always think of quitting this damned job, but I’m afraid of remaining unemployed.” Then the porter added, lowering his voice so that I could hardly hear him, “Good heavens! These Georgians don’t even consider others as human beings, let alone giving them any employment.”

A little later, watching around with great caution and coming up closer to me, he whispered in my ear, “It was they, these Georgians who made Barseghov depart. Coming to power, they appointed Barseghov’s assistant Georgian in his own post and wanted Alice’s father to become his assistant. Being very hurt, he decided to leave the city.”

The porter’s revelation was very painful for me. An unspeakable grief commenced gnawing at my heart mercilessly. I wanted to weep, to shed a flood of tears to alleviate my sorrow. At that moment I was burning with a strong desire to go away and find a remote corner, far from any people so that I would be able to give vent to the stream of tears, overwhelming my soul. When I extended my hand to the porter to bid him farewell, he held it tight in both his hands and asked, “I’m sorry, sir, I think I remembered you. Well, it’s no wonder. I’m already growing old; besides, more than ten years have passed since then...”

“What do you mean?” I asked impatiently, interrupting the old man.

“I’m sorry, sir. I’m very sorry to make you anxious with my words. Aren’t you the man who used to come here almost every day some ten to eleven years ago to teach Alice French? I’m not mistaken, am I?”

“No, you aren’t. You’ve a very good memory. But why did you remember it? Those happy days are in the remote past...”

“Yes, you’re right, but happy memories are impossible to be forgotten.”

The porter’s recollections made my tears, suppressed with but extremely hard efforts, flow from my eyes in a flood. I tried to get my right hand out of his hands and run away from that house, but he would not let me do so. He said, “At the very last moment of her departure, Alice gave me a letter to hand to you. She was sure you’d come back in six months or a year maximum. The poor girl couldn’t even think you’d come only ten years later, and that not to find her, but simply to make inquiries about her and get some information.”

Then the door-keeper added in a pitiful tone, “I’m so sorry for that kind-hearted girl!”

“And what’ve you done with that letter,” I asked hopelessly, my heart panic-stricken.

“She told me to tear and burn it if you didn’t come within a year.”

“So...you fulfilled her order,” I whispered in powerless despair.

The door-keeper did not answer me at once. I was sure he must not have kept the letter. Thrusting some banknotes into the old man’s hand, I moved forward, disappointed and utterly depressed. I had already made some twenty steps when I saw the porter running after me and crying, “Sir, I don’t remember if I’ve torn and burnt away Alice’s letter, but I don’t remember where I’ve hidden it either. If you wish, come here around this time tomorrow and I’ll try to find it.”

“I’ll be so very grateful to you. I’ll give you a nice present if you find and give it to me.”

Desperate and exhausted, I went to the hotel I had stopped at: it was not far from Sololak Street. Grief-stricken and depressed, I remembered that I had had the calamity of losing all my dear, close people one after another. While in Yerevan, I had attempted to get some information on Bulgharatsy's wife Maro, the guardian angel of my childhood, who loved me like her own brother. I had tried to find her through Vahan's family and their acquaintances, but all my efforts were in vain: she had vanished without any trace and nobody was able to tell me anything about her.

My adorable Anoush's life had come to a tragic end, which was still cloaked in mystery for me. Alice had abandoned Tiflis, anguish-stricken and sorrowful after having lost all hopes of waiting for me. According to Vahan, my noble friend Hrant Darbinian, to whom I was so attached, had left for Brazil with his family to seek his fortune there. So, I had managed to meet only one of the selfless, devoted friends of my youth.

An immense, heart-rending void, utter despair and loneliness. Oh, how hideous and gruesome all that was!

A MEETING WITH THE SECRETARY

I spent a very disturbed night, full of torment. I was in great suspense over the outcome of two facts: I was impatiently waiting to see if I would succeed in my mission, and I was also eager to read the last lines and words of my wonderful love story, reflected in Alice's letter. Both of them were so very important for me that I could not prioritize either of them. "My duty doesn't admit of any delay. I've always sacrificed my personal feelings and strivings for the sake of common interests and professional duties. I should attempt to be faithful to that principle," I concluded and prepared for the meeting appointed at half past seven in the morning. At the time fixed I reached the Chamber of the Nationalities' Commissariat, located in one of Tiflis' wide, splendid avenues, renamed after Stalin, if memory serves me right.

The same building, which was under strict control, also housed the offices of the Secretariat of the Communist Party. Getting permission for admittance through the telephone, I took an elevator to go up to the fourth floor. I was led to Urashvili, Secretary General and Representative of the Nationalities' Commissariat.

A man was sitting all by himself behind a very big writing-table in the upper part of a large, light, richly furnished office. He rose from his armchair and stepped forward to meet me. Urashvili, who was a tall, stout and handsome young man, received me with great politeness and a smiling face. Inviting me to sit down on a chair beside him, he started speaking about my mission in Russian without losing a second.

"You are citizen Sarhadian, are you not? Six days ago Sahak Ter-Gabrielian had a telephone conversation with me from Yerevan and asked me to meet your petition and use every single chance to support you. I expected you to come even sooner. Why are you so late?"

"I was in Kirovakan. I had not seen my brother for more than ten years. I am a Turkish Armenian from Van. I returned to my birthplace after the first withdrawal. Only my brother is in Kirovakan of all our family. He is married and has two children."

“Now everything is clear. You are right. And what about the other members of your family...?”

“My sister is now in Kirovabad, formerly called Gyanje, and Father is in Teheran.”

“I beg your pardon for my inquiries into your personal life. I am doing that just out of curiosity. Please, could you tell me how your father and you found yourselves in Teheran?”

“During our last retreat, the Kurds blocked our way and hindered us from returning to Armenia. A huge number of Van inhabitants and Armenians in general as well as Assyrians had to rely on Persia’s hospitality. It was only after a number of bloody battles that they succeeded in having a narrow escape from the massacres, premeditated by the Turks and Kurds.

“It will take me rather a long time to give you a full account of all the torture and ordeal we had to go through. I think you are aware that the English led that vast multitude of tens of thousands of fugitives to Mesopotamia. Thousands met their death in the sandy deserts, unable to bear the scorching sun and terrible heat. More than a million Armenians were exterminated in the Armenian-populated provinces of Turkey, on the deportation roads and in exile. In a word, World War I almost proved to be the last nail in the entire Armenian nation’s coffin.”

“Indeed, I am not unaware of the formidable carnage the Armenians were exposed to. I love and respect that people. I have had many Armenian friends since my childhood. Armenia’s present-day First Secretary Aghasi Khanjian was my close university friend. I like and hold him in great respect. He is an excellent leader and a true patriot devoted to his nation. Our Georgian chauvinists do not like him and consider him a chauvinist, but he is a noble, honorable person of high reputation. Our party leaders have great belief and confidence in him.”

The Tiflis representative and Secretary General of the Nationalities’ Commissariat paused. My impression was that he wanted me to say something on the subject of our conversation, but I found it expedient to abstain from expressing any opinion. I had decided to avoid getting involved in party affairs and political issues. Seeing that I kept silent, Urashvili went on, “Now let us pass on to the question you are interested in. At present the problem of immigration is under general large-scale consideration. We can even state that it is beyond any national boundaries. All the Soviet countries attract vast multitudes of every nationality. It is not only the Armenians who have posed that issue: the Russians, Byelorussians, Ukrainians, Azerbaijanians, Georgians and representatives of still other nationalities have put forward the same demand.

“Our much respected senior friend Stalin, the People’s Commissar, is working very, very hard to study the problem circumstantially and find some expedient solution to it. His good will will certainly play an immense role in the settlement of the issue of the Armenians’ repatriation. Comrade Aghasi will be of significant influence in this matter, too. He can consult Comrade Stalin and win his benevolence. If you succeed in explaining to Khanjian the urgency and importance of this question and gain his support, you can be convinced that you have already achieved considerable success in your mission. I had a brief meeting with Aghasi before his departure for Moscow. He was worried about the utmost necessity of immigration even before your arrival.”

“And you, Mr., I am sorry, citizen Urashvili, could you support me in my petition?”

Urashvili did not answer me at once, my question having, obviously, plunged him into thoughts. Drawing back the hair from his forehead with his right hand and looking directly into my eyes, he said, “At present I cannot tell you anything with that regard. As I have already told you, I greatly sympathize with the Armenians and sincerely wish to help them somehow. I shall do everything in my power to be of some instrumentality to you. Come to me at exactly this time tomorrow.”

I thanked the Secretary, said good-bye to him and left the office.

ALICE'S LETTER

I decided to go to Sololak Avenue at once to meet the old porter. Being eager to reach there as soon as possible, I went to him, being almost completely out of breath. On seeing me, the door-keeper exclaimed, “I’ve found it, sir, luckily, I’ve found it! It’s really a miracle! I was afraid lest my wife and children might discover it in my small chest in my absence and tear it up.”

With those words, he gave me a crumpled letter that had turned yellow in the course of time. Strangely enough, I immediately grew pale, my hands started trembling and my heart began beating terribly so that the old man became very worried about me. I recognized Alice’s handwriting: the letter was really addressed to me. Giving the porter the present I had promised him, I carefully put the letter into my inner pocket and went away. Realizing that I had forgotten to thank the old man and bid him farewell, I went back and shouted, “Thank you very, very much, my friend! I’ll keep this letter as a precious, ever living memory for me. Good-bye.”

On reaching the hotel, I immediately stretched myself out on the bed. Despite the fact that I had got there by carriage, I was utterly exhausted, as if I had covered several kilometers on foot. I tried hard to appease my extremely tense nerves and control myself. I could not understand what had happened to me: why should a lifeless sheet of paper have excited me so much after a ten-year parting? I began reading the letter, which said, “My unmatched Sirak,

I can’t describe what I feel while writing these several lines. I’ve been impatiently waiting for your return every minute, every day, burning with infinite anguish. I’m trying to convince myself that you’ve already forgotten me, but my heart raises a violent protest against that thought. It shouts at me, ‘Don’t try to cheat yourself in vain. He loves you just as much as you love him, perhaps, even more.’

Sometimes I prove physically unable to bear the struggle of my heart and often fall ill. Once I appeared almost on the very verge of grave so that my parents and relatives started mourning over my probable loss. I myself don’t know how I survived, what miracle saved me. Sometimes I console myself with the thought that fortune and destiny spared me only to keep me alive for you.

My heart’s still struggling for my love. Strange as it is, I still believe that you shall return. I think you’re already coming, you’re on the way and will soon reach me. You’ll come today, tomorrow or, perhaps, now, just in an hour. I can’t understand why I still

love you so desperately. I can't explain why I continue loving you with the same firm belief and warmth, after such a long time of waiting for you...

Alice.

P. S. I deeply regret we've to leave Tiflis, the city where I was lucky enough to meet you. I'm my parents' only child and shouldn't leave them alone. Father didn't agree to his demotion, proving unable to bear that insult. So, we're going to my uncle in Constantinople. Our new address is N 57 Ghalata, Istanbul."

While I was reading the letter, each word seemed to inflict a blow on my heart with a steel hammer. Having finished it, I burst into bitter tears, crying like a little child. I knew Alice, that wonderful girl, loved me, but I could never suppose her love had been so strong and firm. Her feeling for me had been even more powerful and valuable than just ordinary love. Steadfast devotion and self-denial. Having concentrated all her self and essence, all her feelings and experiences on her love, the poor girl had suffered from it severely.

Alice had not made the slightest mention of my letter: perhaps, she had not received it. She had waited for me endlessly and persistently, as if waiting for a sun that was sure to bring her happiness and realize her sacred dreams. But why was I to blame? What was my fault?

During our last retreat, the only haven and destination of thousands of deportees was Caucasia. Then, anyway I would have returned to Tiflis, even if I had not known anything about Alice's inflexible, adamant love. I would have certainly returned to her, getting convinced of her unshaken devotion. Unfortunately, however, by some ill stroke of fate I was thrown into remote foreign lands where I started a cruel struggle for existence. The sinister, deplorable conditions I had found myself in forced me to give up everything, even my expectations of felicity and good luck.

MY SECOND MEETING WITH THE SECRETARY

At the appointed time, at half past seven, I went to Secretary Urashvili. He received me with the kindness and courtesy he had shown me at our first meeting and started speaking without losing time. He said the following, "Two hours after you left me, I had a telephone conversation with Comrade Stalin. He is now on a ten-day holiday in Sochi. He told me that at present the issue of immigration is under general consideration, just as I told you yesterday. He also told me that the grand question of the Armenians' immigration will not be settled sooner than two to three years. The Armenians can find all kinds of employment on the vast territory of the Soviet Union, but Comrade Stalin is convinced that they wish to settle down and live in their own country."

Urashvili paused, as if to check what impression his words had made on me, although he himself understood very well that neither the huge multitude of peasants and workers nor I could be enthusiastic about the possible settlement of the problem within two to three years. That was merely an evasive promise.

Perplexed and dissatisfied, I said the following, being hardly able to stifle my discontent, “That two to three-year term is rather long and unfavorable for thousands of Armenians longing to repatriate. They are convinced they do have the right to return as soon as possible.”

My last sentence, especially the words “They are convinced they do have the right...” irritated the “pro-Armenian” Georgian secretary. Failing to suppress the secret antipathy he had been hiding so long, he cried out, “Tell me please, did those Armenians have any rights to overthrow our Soviet regime in Armenia, take up arms against us and kill our soldiers for the sake of restoring their chauvinistic government? Those Armenians, headed by their Dashnak leaders, did not confine themselves to presenting the Turks with half of our territories, in this case, your own land, by the Treaty of Alexandropole. They even rose in rebellion on February 18 trying to seize the rest of our lands and give them to the Turks as well.”

“I am sorry, citizen Urashvili, I have not come here to argue with you. I have come to ask for your and your leaders’ support for the immigration of the true Armenian patriots. I do not consider myself entitled and able to be engaged in political issues. The only thing I would like to say (please, do not be insulted) is that the so-called Dashnaks you have mentioned would not have agreed to sign the Treaty of Alexandropole, which was, indeed, imposed on them by merciless violence, if they had not been under the Turks’ and your allies’ stifling pressure. As for the February Rebellion, they would have never resorted to it if they had not been arrested without any investigation and trials and killed by tens of hundreds. Life is precious for every single person. Everyone tries to avoid silly, senseless death. It is but natural and instinctive for all animals and living beings to defend their own existence. Therefore, it is not surprising that some people, who had other principles and viewpoints, rose against their own execution trying to save themselves.”

“Citizen Sarhadian, you forget that every revolution and overthrow of regime is accompanied with bloodshed. The white army soldiers together with thousands of imperialists and their humble puppets, including the Musavats, the Georgian chauvinists and your Dashnaks, had planned to exterminate us. How could we be indulgent towards them? We were forced to kill our blood-thirsty enemies, stifling all possible demonstrations of hostility.”

“But it was those very hated Dashnaks (as you consider them) who agreed to yield up power to you, I mean the Armenian Communists, without any resistance and bloodshed on December 2. They even put all their armed forces and arsenals at your disposal. Then why should you take revenge on them by exterminating them mercilessly?”

“No, a thousand times no,” Urashvili cried out, this time even more infuriated. “They were not sincere towards us and did not stop their plots and intrigues even after they had delivered up the reins of government. They regretted having yielded up the destroyed and ruined country to us. They had entered into constant alliance with our enemies, the imperialists, who were their old friends.”

There was absolutely no point in continuing the argument with that Georgian, pretending to be the Armenians’ “friend.” Attempting to somehow smooth away the unpleasant impression of our conversation, I tried to squeeze a promise of aid out of

Urashvili. "Can I hope that after all this, you will keep the promise you have given me and do everything within your power to support me in the issue I have raised. If you are really the Armenian people's friend, please, be kind enough not to reject the request of thousands of anguish-stricken villagers and workers. Your favorable mediation in this question can be of great significance. The Armenians wishing to immigrate have only a single desire, i.e. to secure their means of existence, their families' health condition and provide their children with education. They are ready to dedicate themselves voluntarily to the reconstruction and prosperity of their motherland. They will never pose any obstacles for the building of a happy future for their country," I said.

Urashvili answered with his original kindness, his face smiling (It was difficult for me to decide how sincere he really was.), "Be sure that I shall do my utmost to contribute to the favorable settlement of this issue. I repeat Khanjian is my best friend. I am deeply convinced that he is very concerned with the problem of his compatriots' immigration. I find it my friendly duty to support him as much as I can."

I thanked the Secretary politely and said good-bye to him. I had already reached the door when he asked me to come back and again take my seat in the armchair.

"I beg your pardon for causing you any delay. I am very interested in the Georgians who immigrated into Persia together with the Armenians. Early in the 17th century, Shah Abbas deported a great number of Georgians to Persia. What could you tell me about them? Perhaps, they want to immigrate into their country, just like the Armenians... Could you say anything about this...?"

"The Georgians you have mentioned are not Georgians anymore. It is a long time since they ceased representing a minority and got assimilated into the local population. At present it is very difficult, if not impossible, to determine their identity. They are merely lost elements for the Georgian nation."

Urashvili did not ask me any further questions, but I noticed a tangible cloud of sadness on his face. After a brief silence, he said the following, as if concluding our conversation and giving me final assignments, "Khanjian, that great Armenian patriot, can play an important role in the favorable settlement of the issue of immigration. Our veteran friends, particularly Lenin and Stalin, love and respect him greatly. His words and petitions are of great weight. Do not forget to meet him and discuss this question with him."

Leaving the Chamber of the Nationalities' Commissariat, I commenced analyzing mentally my two meetings and argument with that important Georgian official. I knew that man, who was the representative, moreover, *Tiflis* Representative of the executive branch of the nationalities' supreme body, was to play an important role in my mission. His position, either favorable or unfavorable, could be decisive in the settlement of the issue of immigration. Being still very young at that time, I was not very pessimistic about people's sincerity and frankness.

Urashvili outwardly represented himself as the Armenians' friend, insisting that he held Khanjian in great respect. He promised to support me in my mission, but... That "but" was very important. That high-ranking Georgian official proved unable to hide his antipathy for our nation up till the end of our meeting.

Although his hatred was mainly focused on the Dashnaks, he failed to refrain from spreading it to all Armenians in general. I could not forget the following part of his speech, full of accusations, "They, those Armenians, took up arms under the leadership of their Dashnaks to overthrow our Soviet regime and seize the other half of their country from us to present it to the Turks..."

Now I cherished a forlorn hope that my former friend Aghasi Khanjian might be of some help to me. I had not seen him for twelve years; nor had we been in correspondence during all that time. The three important people I had met had praised his patriotism very highly. He had become a very important person, who was held in great respect by the Soviet leaders. Had he retained the modesty and nobility so characteristic of him in his youth? Would he be willing or able to fulfill his former friend's request? I would get the answers to those questions in the very near future if I went to Moscow and met Aghasi there.

While I was in Yerevan, S. Ter-Gabrielian told me that the representative of the nationalities' executive body in Baku was an Armenian, whose family name was Apressian. I knew him from Teheran: he had been the consul of the Soviet Government in Iran two years before. Knowing that he was a good Armenian and an honorable person, I found it expedient to meet him in Baku before going to Moscow and discuss the issue of immigration with him. While in Teheran, he had got acquainted with the problem and was well-aware of the Armenians' feelings and longing for repatriation.

IN BAKU

On reaching Baku and stopping at a hotel, I tried to get Apressian on the phone, but unluckily, he was not in his place of work. Being told that I would be able to see him no sooner than seven o'clock the following day, I decided to leave for Kirovabad (formerly called Gyanja) that night and spend some days with my sister Araksi's family, enjoying the delight and happiness of seeing her. After long meditation and calculations, however, I changed my mind. Alas, how strongly I wish I had not done so. I have always been a strange man with a character, inexplicable even for myself. I have always sacrificed my feelings and happiness for the sake of common, collective and public interests.

Thus, I decided to postpone visiting my beloved sister till I returned from Moscow. I thought I had better see her after I had performed all the duties within the confines of the mission I had committed myself to, so that I would thoroughly enjoy my meeting with her. I supposed I might be able to meet Aghasi in a maximum of five to six days, speak to him about my mission and spend the remaining six to seven days with my sister. It was already seventeen days since I started my journey, whose term was to expire in thirteen days, so I would manage to attend to both my official and personal affairs without any haste.

At seven o'clock in the morning I went to see Apressian, who received me immediately, without any delay. The very first look I cast to his office revealed that it had nothing in common with Urashvili's splendid one. Apressian's small room had but modest furnishing, and nothing reminded me of the luxurious writing-table, armchairs, chandeliers and dark curtains I had seen in the Georgian official's office.

On seeing me Apressian gave me a most cordial welcome and cried out in utter surprise, "Sirak, what a miracle to see you here? I would never expect you to come here. Ok, tell me what has brought you here...?"

"My strong desire to see you," I answered, myself having become very happy.

"Well, I do not doubt it, but tell me the true reason."

I told Apressian about my mission in all details, also mentioning the meetings and conversations I had had, as well as the oral promises I had been given. Having listened to me patiently and attentively, he said, "Yes, I got acquainted with that problem while in Teheran. I am well-aware of the poor Persian Armenians' eagerness to return.

"The very first prerequisite for the favorable settlement of the issue of immigration is the consent of the nationalities' supreme body. Besides, we have to solve the house-building problems in Armenia. Unfortunately, the overwhelming majority of those eager to immigrate are poor, destitute peasants and workers, who will come to Armenia, being totally deprived of any financial means. Moreover, the country is in bad need of land, which is a true scourge under these circumstances. Vast territories have been partitioned from our motherland for various reasons.

"Aghasi Khanjian, who is very concerned about this, makes every possible endeavor to amend the violent injustice done to the Armenian nation. Whether he will succeed in his efforts or not is not clear yet. The settlement of such issues is connected with a number of serious difficulties.

"The reconsideration of the question of Armenia's borders and the amendment of the mistakes made will certainly mean to play with fire. The slightest tension in the relations between and among the Soviet countries is fraught with grave danger. In that case the problem will, probably, get a solution unfavorable for the Armenians..."

Apressian cut the thread of his speech. The anxiety noticeable on his face indicated that he could hardly bear the terrible burden of his people's pain and sorrows. He concluded in the tone of an experienced, far-sighted politician, "Under the present circumstances, Armenians like Khanjian who have acquired responsible positions need infinite patience and extreme caution. The slightest error is sure to spoil and ruin everything, doing more harm than good."

Apressian took breath and continued in a little while, "Aghasi has gone to Moscow. Probably, he will be in Leningrad, too. You should meet him. To my mind, he is the only person able to meet your petition."

IN MOSCOW

I was in Moscow, the famous capital of the former Russian Empire and the present-day Soviet Union. It was the first time I had been to that large city. Unfortunately, I had not seen any of the great European and American capitals and cities to draw comparison between them and Moscow. The various parts of the city I managed to see during the three days of my stay were an amazing revelation to me with their large quarters extending far, far away. The kind guide, who showed me the city's main avenues, quarters, adjacent areas, especially the buildings and institutions, squares, parks, monuments, universities, museums, theaters, opera houses and public places, told me that I needed a month minimum if I wanted to see Moscow properly.

One of the Embassy officials in Teheran, Penkaytis, had kindly given me a letter of recommendation, which made it possible for me to live in his house while in the Russian capital. It was a true blessing for me, firstly because I stayed there for eight to nine days without paying any money. Besides, what is even more important, Penkaytis' elder sister manifested exceptional nobility and kindness by accompanying me during my walks in the great capital for several hours a day. Those days, that fled one after another, have lodged in my memory.

Now I cannot remember exactly from which Baltic country Penkaytis brother and sister were, but I can state without any hesitation that both of them were very noble and kind by nature. I can surely declare that they were two of the best representatives of mankind. I always remember them with infinite excitement in my heart.

Two days before my arrival in Moscow, Aghasi had left for Leningrad, which made me very anxious. I failed to get any information on the objectives of his trip to Leningrad. I supposed such data were considered highly confidential in the Soviet countries in general, and all my efforts to learn something would be futile.

I encountered great difficulty while trying to find out the approximate date of Aghasi's return in the Chamber of the executive body of the Nationalities' Supreme Council. My only consolation was that I was assured that Khanjian would stay in the Chamber for at least one or two days before returning to Yerevan.

I was in an extremely worried and nervous state of suspense. I was perplexed and at a loss. I could not afford any unprecedented expenses, as I did not have enough money on me. I was not even convinced that I would succeed in seeing Aghasi if I went to Leningrad.

I was in rather a grave predicament. I knew myself very well. Borrowing money was still more intolerable for me than penal servitude. After long meditation and analysis of the possible course of my further activity, I decided to stay in Moscow and wait for Khanjian's return.

The decision forcing me to wait against my wish and will was rather unpleasant for me, but I had no other alternative. Perhaps, I would manage to make my face as hard as flint and borrow some money from Penkaytis' sister or even Aghasi, but all that seemed improbable for me, being incompatible with my character.

AT AGHASI KHANJIAN'S

Aghasi returned to Moscow at the beginning of the week, as I had been told. I learned about his arrival on the same day. Thinking that he might be tired or have some appointments for that night, I fixed a meeting with him by telephone for eleven a.m. the following day.

I met Khanjian in the Bureau of the executive body of the Nationalities' Affairs, attached to the Nationalities' Commissariat of Foreign Affairs. On my entering the office, Aghasi rose from his seat, came up to me hastily and clasped me to his bosom. We exchanged cordial kisses.



Aghasi Khanjian

“Dear Sirak, this happy meeting is a true surprise for me,” Aghasi said. “What miracle made you remember me after thirteen years and what a lucky stroke of fortune has brought you to Moscow?”

“Aghasi, my very dear Aghasi, one of my greatest wishes was to meet my noble, respected friend at least once again. I’m so very happy to see my wish come true,” I said to my former friend, who had, apparently, remained loyal to me.

“I’ve no doubts about that. Naturally, you’re eager to meet your little Aghasi, whom you lost many, many years ago. You haven’t changed at all. As for me, I can’t guess what impression I’ve made on you.”

“You’ve grown taller and become mature. What’s most important, your cleverness and exceptional skills have earned you the fame of a very, very important and respected person. It’s a great

pride and glory for me that my former friend, my little Aghasi, as you’ve just said, has won the position of the first person in our motherland, occupying an outstanding political and social rank. I congratulate you from the bottom of my heart on this great success. May your family and your birthplace Aygestan be ever honored and glorified!”

“Thank you for your sincerity, but your words are making me even more enthusiastic about my work. Now tell me, please, about yourself and the purpose of your arrival. What’s the matter? Why have you been waiting for me impatiently for a whole week? Why didn’t you stay in Yerevan to see me there? By the way, where’ve you stopped?”

“If you’ve enough patience and, especially time, I’ll tell you everything.”

“Please, I’m all ears. I’ve both patience and time to listen to my senior old friend.”

I gave Aghasi a circumstantial account of everything. He was listening to me with the utmost attention during all the time. When I had explained to him the main objective of my mission, he asked, “And about how many Persian Armenians want to immigrate?”

“I can’t tell you the exact number. Anyway, I suppose they’ll constitute a minimum of 10,000.”

“Ten thousand... That’s not a small number. I’m a little aware of the problem. I’ve read the petitions sent by the Committee of Relief to Armenia. As one of your best friends, I’ve to tell you sincerely that for the time being we face a number of difficulties. The most important problem is the housing of so many immigrants. We should also secure normal living and working conditions for them, which isn’t less important than the aforementioned issue. There’re still other questions, whose settlement is of primary necessity.

“I assure you frankly that I’ve focused almost all my efforts on the solution of these questions and the smoothing away of the existing difficulties. I’ll continue my attempts for the sake of the prosperity of my country. I’ll do everything within my

power for the realization of my anguish-stricken compatriots' dream to resettle in their homeland."

"My dear friend," I said to Aghasi, "I'm very happy to hear your sincere words. I've already heard about your utmost devotion to your beloved people and your efforts for the reconstruction of our homeland. Now I'm infinitely delighted to hear all this from your own mouth. If you do succeed in meeting your old friend's request, your memory will be ever living in all Armenians' hearts."

After an hour and a half of intimate talk with my noble, modest friend, I left him promising to meet him in the Universal at two o'clock to have dinner together.

After dinner Aghasi made me promise that I would meet him again at half past eight so that we would go to Moscow's famous Bolshoi Theater together.

To tell the truth, I did not expect Aghasi to show me such a kind attitude, breathing gratitude and modesty. I thought my old friend, who had reached a high-ranking position becoming a very important person, would hardly deign to exchange several official sentences with me. My heart swelled with pride when I thought on his extreme intimacy and affectionate attitude to me. Aghasi had grown into a very skillful politician of wide experience. He carefully weighed every single word and sentence he uttered, something I was not very surprised at, taking into account the heavy responsibility he bore as a prominent socio-political figure and a party member. His prudence was of the utmost importance and necessity for him.

Despite all his sensible caution, however, Aghasi failed to hide his antipathy for the Georgian chauvinists. While sitting at the dinner table with him, I told him about my two meetings and conversations with Urashvili. Khanjian said the following, "You've come to a right conclusion. Unluckily, all the Georgians are now filled with that chauvinism. They consider themselves a privileged, highly developed nation and don't tolerate the very thought of regarding other peoples as equal to themselves. They think Stalin belongs only to them* and consider him the symbol of their national genius. They're infinitely proud of him."

I tried to take advantage of the opportunity to learn Khanjian's opinion on something I was very interested in. "I think these Georgians abused Stalin's position while determining Armenia's borders in such an illogical, unfair manner. What do you think about it?"

"My dear, I'm sorry I can't tell you anything in that regard. I think the very near future will give us the answer to that question. I can only tell you that I'm myself very concerned about Armenia's unjust border division and will do everything within my power to amend the mistakes made."

I parted with my old friend Khanjian with profound regret. After the performance, he took me to my temporary dwelling in his car. After long and warm hugs and kisses, he said, "My dear, respected friend, be sure I'll try every possible means to make the

* My dear, unsurpassed Aghasi, killed with brutal meanness, but ever living in all Armenians' hearts! Alas, how strongly I wish that accursed genius had belonged only and only to them, to those Georgians, blinded by their chauvinism. In that case, he would not have been able to achieve his despotic position, which he abused barbarically, exterminating you and thousands of talented Armenian intellectuals, writers, patriots, the cream of the Armenian intelligentsia, through his criminal berias and traitors.

anguish-stricken Armenians' immigration a reality. I'm one of the most fervent adherents of my party, but I never forget that I'm an Armenian and should serve my people and motherland. I attempt to contribute to the Soviet nations' family's general prosperity and progress through the Armenians' development and happiness. Nobody can blame me for chauvinism, as to my mind, the big family of nations of our state can thrive and be happy only if its member peoples thrive and prosper both physically and culturally. The prerequisite for our nation's revival and progress is their complete physical security. The Armenians' constructive skills, mental abilities and creative genius are stifled and lost without any trace in the foreign lands."

"Dear Aghasi, I can't find any words to express my sincere gratitude to you. I'm especially proud of the fact that you've remained just as noble, modest and virtuous as thirteen years ago. Hundreds of thousands of Armenians and I are proud of having a compatriot like Aghasi Khanjian, an Armenian who hasn't betrayed his true self and has remained the dear son of his nation, having reached the height of glory."

MY RETURN

The following morning I left Moscow by express. Sitting in the train compartment, I had enough time to recollect and analyze the meetings and impressions of my twenty-eight days' journey. The happy hours spent with my friends and Karapet's family had left me a legacy of pleasant memories and feelings. The eight to nine hours spent with my unsurpassed old friend Khanjian had been particularly impressive for me. My heart was filled with infinite pride when I remembered how modest, sincere and close to me he was. I was particularly happy about the fact that Aghasi had remained loyal to his people and country, having reached the zenith of glory. He worked without sparing efforts for their prosperity and progress.

The only trouble was that I was very short of time: my visa was valid for only thirty days. I would reach Baku on the twenty-ninth day, but it would be absolutely impossible to reach from Baku to Gyanja (renamed Kirovabad) within a single day to see my beloved sister Araksi. I had been obliged to wait for six days in order to see Aghasi, and that had cost me a heavy price: I had been deprived of the pleasure of visiting my very dear sister and alleviating the anguish burning in my heart for so many years.

While in Moscow, I thought of asking Aghasi to mediate for the extension of my visa, but I supposed my request might be late. Undoubtedly, that late intercession might have yielded certain results, but I refused to abuse my friend's influence for a personal affair.

On arriving in Baku, I immediately went to Apressian. I was thinking of asking him to prolong my visit for some more days when he showed me a telegram received from Teheran. It had been sent to Apressian's address from Moscow. All my hopes were instantaneously destroyed, as if I was suddenly showered with ice-cold water. The telegraph was ordering me to leave for Teheran immediately, as it had proved impossible to extend my visa. I had no other alternative but to obey the instruction received. All my expectations and hopes to see my sister and alleviate my bitter anguish after so many years of separation turned out futile. It was only in Teheran that I was able to find out the reason for that urgent order.

IN TEHERAN

I got on a steamboat to return from Baku to Teheran. Stepping onto the Iranian land in Bandar-Pahlavy, I felt extremely happy: after a month of absence, I was returning to the country, which had become a dear homeland for many refugees like me. Iran's people and government had generously and nobly given us, the Armenians driven away from their magnificent native land by the merciless Turks, permission to take up residence in that country. Unlike the Turks, the Persians did not show the slightest trace of discrimination against us. We are ever grateful to the Iranian people and state for that noble attitude. We can never forget Iran's compassionate and affectionate attitude to us, something that was even more important than our welfare in that country. Can the Armenians ever forget it?

I hurried to reach Teheran from Bandar-Pahlavy in all haste. I had terribly missed my only son, two-year-old Levon, whom we called Edik by a name he himself had invented. I was eager to hug and kiss him endlessly as soon as possible. Strange as it is, my absence of a month had aroused bitter anguish in my heart, perhaps, because it was the first time I had voluntarily parted with my child, family, father and friends.

My friends and relatives received me with great enthusiasm in Teheran. I gave a detailed account of my meetings in Yerevan, Tiflis, Baku and Moscow to the Department of the Committee of Relief to Armenia and the people connected with it.

My report-lecture, held by the aforementioned body, was attended by a great number of people. Touching the question all of them were very concerned about, I said that our authorities and, especially the most outstanding person in Armenia, Aghasi Khanjian, were making every possible endeavor to receive the multitudes eager to be welcomed into their country's bosom as soon as possible. My revelation was met with extreme enthusiasm and a storm of applause. I told those present to be patient and prudent and avoid any action fraught with tension. I told everybody very clearly that they should continue their work and business till the day the Armenian Government would send its representatives to organize the former fugitives' immigration.

The most encouraging fact was that the Iranian authorities had agreed to grant permission to the Armenians to repatriate.

All the Iranian Armenians were very pleased with the course of the settlement of the issue of immigration. Father was very happy, too, but unfortunately, cruel death buried him with all his sacred wishes and dreams.

THE OBSTACLES OF IMMIGRATION

The settlement of the issue of immigration was postponed by a few years, and that time gave me an opportunity to ponder on the reasons for that delay. Nobody had ever given me any explanations, but I was able to reach a certain conclusion, having addressed many petitions and met different people for that purpose. I shall try to explain briefly how I came to realize the true reasons for the postponement of the resolution of the question of immigration.

All the officials I had met had given me gentle hints of the various difficulties connected with that issue. At that time it was Stalin, known by the name of the People's Commissar, who held the reins of government in the executive branch of the supreme body of the Soviet peoples. Although Lenin was still alive and retained his position of the most important person in the Soviet Union, Stalin had already begun spreading his tyranny over everybody, including even the former, with whom he was extremely careful.

Urashvili, Tiflis representative of the Nationalities' Commissariat, told me that the issue of immigration was being considered at all-Soviet level. He even said he had had a telephone conversation with Stalin, who had confirmed it. In his turn, Aghasi acknowledged Stalin's authority, too, although he stated it with the caution and prudence typical of him as an experienced political figure. Taking into account all those facts, I easily arrived at the following conclusion.

Our "friends," i.e. the Georgians, did not have the slightest desire to see Armenia's population getting multiplied. They had launched a silent, secret struggle against the numerical growth of the Armenian nation, the amendment of the country's border division and enlargement of its frontiers.

The following fact came to prove the truthfulness of my conclusion. Two days after my return to Teheran, Plat, then the Soviet consul in Persia (I have already mentioned his kindness and willingness to help me), invited me to his place of work. When I entered his study, Plat cried out jokingly, in a sincere and cheerful tone, "Bravo, Sarhadian!"

Then he asked his wife, an Armenian woman named Asia, to leave us alone for several minutes and added, "Really, well done, Sirak! You seem to have worked with great persistence."

Waiting a little, as if trying to arrange his question properly, he said, "Were you told about the telegram for your return?"

"Unfortunately, yes. I was greatly annoyed to receive it."

Taken aback, Plat asked in a panic-stricken tone, "But why?"

"It did not allow me to visit my sister for at least a couple of days. I have not seen her for twelve years."

"I do not understand anything. Could you not find two to three days during that month to see her?"

"Well, it is rather a long story. No, unluckily, I could not. I wasted many days in Moscow while waiting for Khanjian."

Plat said with noticeable sadness, "I am really very, very sorry about that."

He again became silent, as if a serious problem was troubling him all the time. Finally, he said, "Have you kept the recommendation I gave to you?"

"Yes, I have kept it with great care. It was of great instrumentality to me during my journey."

Truly, Plat's written recommendation had been highly useful for me. But for it, perhaps, no doors would have opened before me and nobody would have listened to me.

I carefully took the recommendation out of my wallet in my inner pocket and returned it to the consul, saying, "Please, take it. I am so very obliged to you for your nobility and kindness."

Plat rang up and told an employee, who entered, to fetch two cups of coffee. Then he continued, "Apparently, the petitions you addressed to different officials were a little early. In some circles such an "untimely discussion" of the issue has even caused discontent. But never mind all that. The favorable settlement of the problem may be a little late, but you have already paved the way for it."

I again thanked Plat cordially and was going to leave, when he said, "I got acquainted with the Armenian people's unlucky, bitter past through my wife. I sincerely sympathize with and highly appreciate that hard-working nation of builders and creators. Be convinced I will not spare my endeavors only if I am able to somehow help them."

The consul's words that "In some circles such an "untimely discussion" of the issue had even caused discontent," uttered with diplomatic prudence, finally led me to the conclusion that Stalin, Chairman of the Nationalities' Supreme Council, had become very displeased with the fact that I had raised the issue of repatriation so "untimely". The telegram demanding my immediate return had been sent out of that very "revenge" and "discontent".

MY CANDIDACY FOR BANK OFFICIAL

A month after my return from the countries of the Soviet Union, it was suggested that I should go to Shiraz City, where "Rus-Iran" Bank had planned to establish a branch. The position and payment offered to me were satisfactory and I had no reasons to reject that proposal. Besides, I thought it would not be bad for me to live in Iran's famous "city of roses" for two to three years. It was already ten years since I settled in Persia and I had seen only Ghazvin, Rasht and Pahlavy during all that time. The splendid beauty of Shiraz had earned it the fame of Iran's queen city. It had given birth to two outstanding Persian poets, inspiring them with creative genius. Shiraz enjoys the pride and glory of being the birthplace of Saadi and Hafez.

For conscience sake I have to state that my new appointment was again something dictated from the higher circles.

Selfish Stalin, who hated all foreigners, and his conceited chauvinist compatriots made use of every single opportunity to remove all "undesirable" individuals of Armenian origin from various fields of activity. Moreover, they made every possible attempt to stifle those people so that they would never voice their problems and national interests. An Armenian had found enough strength and courage to speak about the Armenians' desire to repatriate. That same Armenian had demanded that his compatriots be allowed to return to their country, and that demand had been regarded as something "risky that revealed Armenian chauvinism". It had been found highly important to make silent "risky Armenian chauvinists" like me, drive them away as far as possible and resort to any means to get rid of them even if they lived in foreign countries. It had been considered particularly necessary to dismiss them from work, even if they occupied merely some technical post, something insignificant and unimportant. Together with me and a month after my removal, other Armenians were dismissed in a very crafty and polite way. One of them was my respected partner Levon Tadevossian, who was later employed as accountant for the "Melli Bank" and became the manager

of one of its branches. Ilusha Tovmassian got the post of accountant general in an airplane company. Several months later S. Arakelian, the head of the Department of Armenian Affairs, was dismissed from work, too.

I do not have the slightest intention to exaggerate anything. Nor am I entitled to insist that the dismissal of Pranziony, the accredited representative of the Soviet Union in Iran and an Armenian in origin, was connected with the aforementioned anti-Armenian policy. We faced the fact, however, that the Armenian official, who had been performing his duties perfectly and whose term of office had not expired yet, was called back to the Soviet Union.

Pranziony was a very respectable person. In childhood he had been a shepherd in his village, then he had worked at a factory during the Revolution. He had joined the party and had soon been promoted to the representative of factory workers thanks to his exceptional skills and diligence. He had entered the university and completed his studies in the Faculty of Mechanics and Engineering with honor. He had achieved high rank occupying various responsible positions.

What is even more interesting, having lost his parents in childhood, he had been reared in his aunt's. Once smallpox had almost led him to the verge of grave, but fortunately, death had spared him, although the disease had completely spoilt his face. Pranziony was a very noble and modest person. He had been lucky enough to enter into happy marriage with an educated Armenian woman from Karabakh.

Taking advantage of Pranziony's departure, I asked him to take my wife to Baku and thence send her to my sister in Gyanja. It was still on my conscience that I had failed to see Araksi. I wanted to alleviate her grief by sending my wife to her. Pranziony and his wife, who had been staying in the summer house we had rented in Zargeande for about a month before their departure, kindly agreed to fulfill my request and took my wife and little Levon to Baku. The only thing troubling me was that my wife did not know Russian.

IN SHIRAZ

Early in September 1928, I left for Shiraz with two people to establish the branch of the "Rus-Iran" Bank there. One of my companions, who was a Jew coming from Russia, was to hold the post of manager and the other, an Armenian from Teheran named Arsen Frendian, was to occupy that of accountant general. I myself was to work as an interpreter/translator and treasurer.

I was very happy about my cooperation with the aforementioned people, who showed a very respectful attitude to me. During the three years of my stay in Shiraz, I made very good friends with Arsen, our families living in the same flat in concert and peace. As for my Jewish colleague, who did not have any children, he would not pay any official or semi-official visits without me. His beautiful, plump wife was very kind and respectful to me, too.

Shiraz has a temperate climate marked by very mild winters. The city is adorned with affluent, evergreen verdure, variegated flowers, beautiful roses, sky-high platanos

and, especially fruit-bearing trees. After Urmia, I regarded Shiraz as the queen of Iran's beautiful cities with its natural beauties, lavish vegetation as well as the ever shining, vivifying sun, enchanting air and water.

The local population seemed to be born only to enjoy thoroughly the blessings of nature their birthplace had generously bestowed upon them. They were extremely cheerful and fond of a pleasant pastime. In the evenings the entire population seemed to abandon the city. Thousands of people poured out into the streets, the adjacent gardens and fields so that a foreign newcomer thought they had parties and weddings every day. Carousals and orgies in the bosom of the city's bewitching nature were but a commonplace. To cut it short, people lived in Shiraz to enjoy bliss and the gifts of nature. Even those eking out an impoverished existence did not reconcile themselves to the thought of being deprived of the general delight and merry-making. As far as I can remember, there were very few, if any, beggars in the streets.

The only trouble was that I lived in separation from my friends and the intellectual circles in Teheran. I was particularly upset by the fact that I could not see Father, my only close relative in Iran.

Spending thirty-two months in Shiraz, I got tired of my monotonous life and went on a two-month holiday in Teheran. Two months before my departure, I sent my wife and child to the capital on one of the airplanes, belonging to the "Unkers" Company, Germany. Unfortunately, hardly had the plane reached Isfahan when they met with an air crash, being forced into an untimely landing in a bumpy area, my wife and child having but a miraculous escape from that gruesome danger.

A month after my return to Teheran, I tendered my written resignation to the consul so that he would send it to Shiraz. Having read it attentively and finding out that I had no reasons to complain of my work, he returned it to me, saying, "The manager of Shiraz Bank is very pleased with your work. It has been decided to give you a salary increase of fifty per cent. You have a week at your disposal to reconsider your decision. If you finally decide not to return to Shiraz, you will submit your resignation to me. I myself would advise you to abstain from realizing your decision."

RESETTLEMENT IN TEHERAN IN LORRY BUSINESS

A week later, I again offered my resignation from the post in the "Rus-Iran" Bank with great regret, as I appreciated highly my close friends gathered around me in Shiraz, especially Arsen Frenidian and the noble manager of our branch. I was very pleased with my partnership with them and felt kind of morally attached to them.

In June 1931, I resettled in Teheran, the first and foremost reason for it being my strong desire to send my only, beloved son Levon to the Armenian preparatory school in the capital. Besides, I did not want to be separated from Father anymore. There were still other reasons, too: my wife was pregnant with our second baby and both she and I were eager to return.

Later, unfortunately, I had to count the cost of my resettlement. I had to face certain frustrations in my work, suffering great material losses, all that eventually ruining my

health. Before leaving for Shiraz, I had taken foolish risks believing one of my relatives' promises of golden hills and lending him a large sum of money I had been saving for many years. He was an engine driver and worked for an Italian company. He had come to me for several times before my departure and employed all his eloquence to persuade me to lend him money for the purchase of two lorries. I repeat it was silly of me to believe in his high-flown promises and the illusive profit he alleged we would receive.

On returning from Shiraz, I demanded that my relative pay his debt to me and give me my share of the income he had promised to. However, I gained nothing: the only tangible profit was the two outdated lorries, produced by "Benz" German Company, which had been incessantly driven for three and a half years. Part of the money received had been spent on paying the debt for the trucks, the rest, that was, indeed, three-four times as much as the debt, had been wasted and squandered away by my relative and his younger brother. After some unpleasant and futile argument, I was forced to take the outdated lorries in return for the money I had lent him.

Good heavens, how strongly I wish I had presented those sinister lorries to my "pitiful and faithful" relatives or had just burnt them with petrol right in the garage. It would have been so very good for me.

Unluckily, I did not have the slightest idea about cars in general. Employing two chauffeurs, I embarked upon the repairs of those accursed lorries. The trouble was that I could not procure the parts necessary for them so that I had to arrange the conveyance of one of them through the representative of a German trade company, wasting almost more than half of my savings on it. Finally, the lorries started operating and I myself followed their route and transportation of goods sitting next to either of my chauffeurs.

For two years and eight months, I toiled hard like a drudge in the very proper sense of the word. I spared no efforts to somehow cope with that work, but the trucks had already operated to the uttermost and I proved absolutely unable to get back at least a meager percentage of the money I had spent on them. They resembled two prostitutes, who did not give me anything and instead, emptied my pockets insatiably, robbing me of the uttermost farthing. I worked hard for more than two and a half years, but I failed to find any way out in that dead end.

I constantly deprived my family of the vital means of existence so that I would cope with the endless repairs of the trucks and the chauffeurs' salaries. Once it so happened that I could not even pay them in due time, and one of them stole a wheel, disappearing in the cloak of night darkness. That wheel cost four-five times as much as the money I owed that "honorable" man, but what could I do? How could I find him? Where could I complain? Yes, there were even such "conscientious," I mean, indecent chauffeurs. I was not the only person who had had the misfortune of dealing with such rascals. The theft having occurred in Yeazd, I had no other remedy but to turn to the garage owner, who was a benevolent, noble person. He agreed to give me a wheel on condition that I put my signature to a written promise to pay for it soon. My chauffeur having left me, I myself was obliged to sit behind the steering wheel and drive the truck. All my physical and mental torment had given me some knowledge of cars and little experience in driving.

I was to convey the luggage to Kerman. The road being smooth and straight, my utter fatigue made me fall into a deep slumber, of which I woke up only when I felt some clamour and jerks. The truck had sunk into a shallow ditch off the road. I thought I must have some fractures, but I had miraculously escaped any injuries. I was all by myself, without anyone to help me so that I had to wait till the following morning. By a stroke of good fortune, my second lorry reached me at sunrise: my chauffeur, his assistant and some passing peasants helped me put the upset truck on wheels and move it onto the road through the other vehicle. I had to thank my lucky stars that the lorry engine had ceased functioning immediately after it was upset: thus the vehicle had escaped the danger of being set ablaze. It started operating, but it would not move away: the ball bearings in the gear-box turned out to have broken. I had to leave the truck just on the spot and return to Yeazd, where I procured ball bearings exactly similar to the ones broken with extreme difficulty.

Such accidents and misfortunes became a commonplace for me during the two years and a half, when I “enjoyed” the status of “car owner”.

One day I went to the seaside in Bandar-Pahlavy. I was in utter despair so that for a moment I even thought of consigning myself to the waves, thus putting an end to my notorious and hopeless life. Fortunately, however, I remembered my two children, Levon and Medik, who saved me from realizing that gruesome decision.

While I am writing these lines, full of bitter, painful recollections, a flood of tears of sorrowful memories is flowing down my face, making the paper all wet... Oh God, how really disastrous and agonizing the formidable memoirs of those tragic days are...!

People often criticize and reproach those who put an end to their inconsolable, hopeless and grief-stricken existence by committing suicide. I am not surprised at such tragic occurrences at all. Human nerves are very far from being iron. Even the hardest metal is sometimes crushed yielding up to immense tension.

For conscience sake I have to state that diligence and resisting power were still alive in me. I have always striven to complete everything I begin. Perhaps, it was that very nature of mine that made me bear that dreadful drudge for two and a half years. I just wanted to arrive at a comparatively successful end and then quit that accursed work, but I proved unable to...

I had spent all my and, unfortunately, Father's money on that unprofitable work, which had made me sell my own valuables and property. Having lost all hopes of help from anywhere, I was obliged to liquidate the business that had plunged me into total bankruptcy. I sold one of the lorries to a tinsmith and the other to my chauffeur. Upon my word of honor, I did not receive a single penny from those ill-boding vehicles.

FATHER'S DEATH

In the second half of November 1933, Father fell ill first with diarrhea and then pneumonia. Within ten to twelve days, the course of his illness changed for the worse and his condition became rather serious. The contemporary Armenian doctors in Teheran took care of him with the utmost attention and did everything within their power to save him from the clutches of death, but unluckily, in vain. At that time peni-

cillin had not been discovered yet and pneumonia was considered one of the most dangerous and hardly curable diseases, that was mankind's bitter enemy.

Priests having been entitled to marry again, about four years before his death, Father was joined in matrimony with widow Siranuysh Ghazarian on the suggestion of Teheran's Church-Loving Women's Department. Her husband, the sexton of the same church where Father served, had died many years before, leaving the widow completely helpless with two children under age. That was the main reason why the Department had found it expedient for her to marry Father.

Siranuysh did her utmost to look after her new husband and rid him of the lethal disease threatening him with certain death. Beginning with the second week of the disease, I almost did not leave Father's bed-side. In the last two days, some deceptive change for the better could be observed: his diarrhea and cough remitted a little, but later we learned that illusive alleviation had been caused by the general exhaustion of his organism.

I was desperate for money. A garage owner in Ghazvin City, located at a distance of one hundred and forty-four kilometers from Teheran, owed me two hundred *tumans* and I decided to demand it back. Having a maximum of twenty-four hours at my disposal, I reached there and returned immediately, having hardly managed to get back half of my money.

Reaching the yard of Darvaze-Ghazvin Church, where Father had been living over fifteen years, I saw an unusually large crowd. The majority of the multitude was women, who were crying silently.

Everything was as clear as day. Father, that noble person and clergyman, had yielded up his spirit to God. Bursting into bitter sobs, I entered his room, threw myself onto him and began kissing his lifeless face like a madman. It was only with great difficulty that the people around me tore me away from him.

Poor Father turned out to have died an hour before my arrival. While struggling a struggle of life and death in agony, he had called me for several times, "Sirak...! Where's my Sirak? He must be here. Call him. I want to kiss him at least once, for the last time... Alas, why should I live such an unfortunate life, dying far away from my dear people...?"

Father's funeral was held with the utmost solemnity. A vast multitude, representing all the classes of Teheran's population as well as the members of all the NGOs and cultural organizations had come to pay tribute to their beloved spiritual shepherd. Nine people made funeral orations, praising Senior Priest Harutiun Sarhadian's good qualities, conscientious work and compassionate attitude towards his flock. Those sincere, grateful words of high esteem and consolation were my only comfort with my grief.

Father stayed in Teheran for fifteen years, serving in Darvaze Ghazvin Church, the assembly center of the city's Apostolic Armenians for twelve years. He delivered a sermon before his congregation at all the religious festivals. A few years before his death, he received a bull from the Holy See of Echmiatzin, which conferred the title of senior priest on him. I have preserved it up till now.

Apart from being a clergyman, Father was also a poet: some of his poems had been published both in the local and foreign press. A few tens of them had been issued by the "*Hayastani Kochnak*" periodical, most of those works breathing patriotism and great anguish for his homeland.

SEARCH FOR EMPLOYMENT

The accursed truck business turned out a complete failure for me, causing me great material losses and ruining my health for thirty-two months. Father's untimely and extremely painful death came to add to my depression. I often decried my unpremeditated business and continual frustrations as something that had made him suffer both physically and mentally, thus presumably, hastening his death. My supposition, which did not seem far from probable, gnawed at my heart and I felt completely drained of moral strength.

My total bankruptcy, accompanied by despondency and physical exhaustion, did not hesitate to consign me to bed. I was in a state of utter fatigue, my health having been destroyed to the uttermost. All my efforts to somehow impart vigor and strength to myself were absolutely futile: I had grown so weak that I could hardly get out of bed.

While I was in that inconsolable, hopeless state, my spirits completely broken, my wife was pregnant with our third baby. Our second child, my daughter Medik, was born in another period of frustrations and failures, i.e. August 12, 1931. Now we were to meet our third child in rather unenviable conditions. Thirty-four days after Father's death, on New Year's Eve, my second son was born in our family, weathering grave calamities and misfortunes. We baptized him Harutium in perpetuity of Father's name. Thus, the number of our family members grew from four to five, i.e. my wife and I, our two sons and only daughter. Although my sadness and depression were beyond any account, I kept persuading myself to be happy at the presence of my newly-born child, who seemed to have come into our family to fill in the terrible gap Father's death had created in our lives.

My relative, who was still in debt to me, had severe scruples of conscience for the harm he had done to me. He could not afford to repay me the financial loss I had suffered: it exceeded 25,000 *tumans*, which was quite a large sum in those times. Instead, he succeeded in giving me some moral support.

As I have already mentioned, the late Reza Shah Pahlavy had embarked upon a very large-scale project without any foreign aid. It was the construction of the Iranian railway, that was to traverse the whole country extending from Bandar Shahpur (a newly-built harbor at the Persian Gulf) in the south to Bandar Shah, another newly-built one at the Caspian Sea. The theoretical, economic and technical supervision of the realization of that project, requiring vast amounts of money, was vested in the "Kamsax" Danish Company, whose representative in Iran was an architect named Black. That Danish specialist loved and appreciated highly my relative, who was his chauffeur. Learning that I was desperate for some employment, he promised to find work for me

in the near future. Once I read in the Persian "Etelaat" daily that "Kamsax" Company had established a Health Care Center along the railway for the workers engaged in the realization of Reza Shah's project. The head of the aforementioned Center had been told to announce vacancies for doctors, assistant doctors, nurses, pharmacists, surgeons and accountants.

The Health Care Center belonging to the southern railway had three vacancies for accountants with good command of Persian and French. I took part in the examinations held to test the candidates' knowledge in the aforementioned languages. The number of the participants was five times greater than that required, but only three were admitted. One of those lucky people was I, something I was very happy about. At last fortune smiled on me and I gained the post of accountant without any mediation and protection, being in extremely bad need of employment.

TOWARDS MY NEW PLACE OF WORK

It was the end of February 1934. I was told that I was to go to my new place of work on March 1. Unfortunately, however, my disease had grown worse so that I was not even able to get out of bed at all, my feet refusing to support me while I stood. While trying to stand for a couple of minutes, I had the impression that they were being pricked by thousands of needles. I seemed to have fallen seriously ill with rheumatism and was in an absolutely intolerable situation. My arms troubled me, too, something quite understandable for me: I was suffering the consequences of the extremely meager, impoverished conditions I had been living in during the last thirty-two months. I had mercilessly wasted all my strength and vigor on a business that was not worth a button. I had ruined my health with my own hands, always spending my days in damp, muddy garages, on the roads rain or shine and in tea-rooms, completely lacking any comfort.

Despite my being worn out and emaciated, however, I had no other alternative but to leave for my place of work. Fortunately, a small lorry going to Salehabad agreed to take me to the south of the country. It had some luggage loaded, but there was a vacant seat in the front, beside the driver. Some people took me to the vehicle in their arms and accommodated me inside with the utmost difficulty.

I can never forget those gruesome days. Except for my two-month-old baby, all the three members of my family could not help weeping: it was especially my elder child, little Levon, who was crying bitterly. I caressed them and tried to somehow console them, but instead, I myself burst into sorrowful tears. Pulling myself together immediately, I kissed my family members for many times and asked the driver, who was an Armenian, to start. Some of my friends, including my old friend Samuel and his wife, had come to see me off. Our parting was very impressive and touching.

IN GEARMABDAR-GHALE-SHEIK

We spent a day and a half on the road and half a day in Salehabad. On the morning of the third day, we left for Gearmabdar Village, where the first newly-built hospital of the southern railway was situated. I reached there at eleven o'clock in the morning.

The weather had changed for the better while we were still in Salehabad, but it was so hot in Gearmabdar that we thought it was summer there. That fine weather turned out a stroke of exceptionally good fortune for me: the pricking, crippling my feet, vanished without any trace so that I began moving without any severe pain and was able to stand on my feet freely. That unexpected change in the course of my illness really seemed akin to some miracle.

When I showed my working document to the hospital doctor, he found it difficult to read it, as it had been written in Persian and French. He blushed, apologized in broken Persian and said, "I have been working for the Oil Company and cannot read in any other language except English. Please, get off. We shall read it later."

Hardly had a couple of seconds passed when he added, "Please, read yourselves, but indeed, only the Persian part."

I read the following, "The Supervising Body of the Health Care Section of "Kamsax" has appointed Mr. S. Sarhadian accountant of the hospitals in Gearmabdar and Ghale-Sheik, belonging to the Southern Railway. Further details will follow by post."

The doctor asked me in Persian in an incredulous tone, "Is Sarhadian an Armenian family name? Are you an Armenian?"

"Yes, it is. Is there anything surprising about it?"

The doctor almost shouted for joy and said, "By God, could you not tell me that a little earlier? Why did you make us suffer so much? I am an Armenian, too. Moreover, I am from Jugha."

Then he called up his wife in unspeakable delight, "Hranush, come here, be quick! They've sent an Armenian accountant for us."

In her turn, Doctor Johannes'* wife, a tall young woman of a fine figure and a pleasant face, hurried to meet me. She said to me with a happy smile, "How glad I am we are to deal with an Armenian." Then she added kindly, "Well, you are welcome! Let us go in. You must be tired after your trip. You see it is still the beginning of March, but the sun is shining brightly. Woe is us! What are we to do in a couple of months if the sun is parching us so terribly even now? The trouble is that we have a little child. He can hardly stand this heat."

Without losing time, I answered in a joke, "Why are you so afraid of it, ma'am? Your child's father is a doctor."

"Yes, that is right, but our doctor will hardly be able to do anything against sunstroke and terrible heat."

We entered. The hospital was a newly-built single-story clean building with a wide corridor dividing it in two parts. The one on the right consisted of a comparatively spacious hall and four rooms of average largeness. The other section, that had been allo-

* That was the doctor's surname. In general, Isfahan Armenians tend to shorten their names and make them similar to the European ones.

cated to the doctor as a dwelling place, comprised three rooms, a kitchen and a bathroom with its facilities. There were two other rooms at a distance of several meters, which the doctor said had been prepared for the accountant as both a habitation and working place.

An hour after midday, the doctor's wife asked us to dinner. They had not been informed about my arrival beforehand, but the meal turned out sufficient for all of us. I was surprised to see greens on the table. In response to my question how they usually managed to procure them in that dry area, the doctor burst into loud laughter and replied, "Salehabad is not very far from here. Our ambulances go there on alternate days and fetch the food necessary for the sick and us."

A few days later, I got a short letter written in Persian from Doctor Torphe, the head of the Central Section of the Health Care Center located in Teheran. I had not met him before my departure, which seemed to have caused his discontent. Apparently, I should have done so, but I did not think I was to blame for that: firstly, it was the first time I had been employed by an Iranian institution and what is still more important, even if I had been aware of it, I would not have been able to visit the managing doctor because of my illness. In the end Doctor Torphe was telling me to spend half of the week in Gearmabdar and the rest of my time in Ghale-Sheik. I also got the hospitals' book-keeping documents, edited in French: they had been attached to the letter. I immediately answered it, apologizing for my neglect of duties and explaining to the doctor the reason for that.

Having stayed in Gearmabdar for two days, I sincerely thanked the doctor and his wife for their kind hospitality and left for Ghale-Sheik. On seeing me, the former accountant of the local hospital became very happy and told me he had been looking forward to my arrival. He said, "I sent my resignation to Teheran a week ago. I am not satisfied with my work. I have already been employed by a building company, which has offered me quite good working conditions."

Then he added in a mysterious tone, "This work is not worth the trouble at all. You cannot even earn your piece of bread on the salary they give you. I am not a madman to stay in this hell and live on bread and cheese instead of working in Teheran."

Ghale-Sheik's hospital resembled that in Gearmabdar. The doctor, a young Indian with fresh university education and his wife, a young Indian lady of a pleasant appearance, were very happy to learn that I was an Armenian: the Armenians in India had made quite a favorable impression on them. After the departure of their former accountant, they complained to me of his attitude and behavior.

The severe pain and pricking in my arms and, especially legs had completely disappeared, as if I had never fallen ill with that accursed disease. The warm sun of the south had saved me with its invigorating influence.

My work being light and easy, I had enough time to rest down so that I had the impression I had gone there on holiday. The very recollection of the ordeal I had experienced for thirty-two months while engaged in the lorry business caused nausea in me. Sometimes I dreamt about the dreadful days of that nightmare, which made me shud-

der in stifling sleep and jump to my feet, my body all in sweat. Waking up, I was happy to discover that all that suffering had been merely a dream.

I had brought some books and dictionaries with me from Teheran and spent my leisure reading and enriching my vocabulary of foreign languages. I had arranged my work in such a way that I stayed in Ghale-Sheik for four days a week. I was almost stifling with terrible heat in Gearmabdar, where the temperature often exceeded 43°C in the shade. The weather in Ghale-Sheik was better, with quite cool nights. The Indian doctor was very happy about my sojourn with them. He was very fond of playing chess and took immense delight in exercising his mind with me through that game.

IN TANGE-DO

I lived a very peaceful life for about six months. My extreme nervous tension gradually remitted and I regained my former comfort and tranquility.

The only thing troubling me was my separation from my family and children, whom I was missing terribly. It was the first time since my marriage that I had been away from them for such a long time, and I was very worried about their health condition. Once a week I exchanged letters with my family through the postal service of the “Kamsax”. By a stroke of good luck, almost once a month I got all the news about my family members from my brother-in-law Edward, who brought Black, president and architect-in-chief of that company, to the south in his own car so that he would keep control over the process of the railway construction.

Doctor Torphe, the head of our Health Care Center, belonged to the first generation of doctors in the post-coup d’etat period and was one of Doctor Loghman-Dovle’s most favorite pupils. He came to visit the hospitals for three times during the six months of my stay. At first he showed rather a cold and unsympathetic attitude to me, but then it completely changed for the better. During his third visit to the railway hospitals, he said to me, “Mr. Sarhadian, the head of the book-keeping section within our Central Department, Hamid Tehranchy, has expressed his written content with the monthly reports you have submitted. I have decided to appoint you accountant-general of all our hospitals in the south. We intend to raise your salary to a considerable extent. From now on Bishe’s accountant Gharavy will be under your control. You are to check up his accounts only once a month, as it is difficult to cover that long distance on our bumpy roads.”

“I am so very obliged for your confidence and kindness, dear doctor,” I answered, my self-esteem flattered with his words, “but our section has two other bookkeepers besides Gharavy. What about them?”

“Together with the decree of your new appointment we shall send them written statements about the expiration of their terms. Indeed, it is something *we* are to attend to and decide.”

I could not contradict, for Doctor Torphe had politely implied that it was not my business. I was inwardly displeased that my work had been highly appreciated at the expense of the dismissal of two accountants, but what could I do? I was particularly sorry for the bookkeeper in Tange-Do: I had made friends with him and was well-aware

of his inconsolable financial predicament. However, I had no other alternative but to obey the instruction I had received.

A few days later, I got the written order of my new appointment and moved to my new place of work the following day. Doctor Johannes and his wife as well as Ghale-Sheik's Indian doctor and his wife were very happy about my new appointment.

Tange-Do's hospital was the central institution of medical aid along the southern railway. It was quite a large building, equipped with all facilities. Apart from the six wards allocated to the sick, there were also rooms intended for the doctors, nurses, pharmacists, accountant, laundress, cook and other employees. Another separate building, provided with all conveniences, had been erected for the head doctor and his family.

Another comparatively larger hospital had been built at a distance of twenty-one kilometers, on a high mountainous plateau called Nuzhian, the summer residence of the tribe of the Lor, also known under the name of "Papy." The hospital, which was under the control of the one in Tange-Do, had a spacious surgical hall, supplied with all possible instruments and equipment. It was there that the workers, injured while building roads and digging tunnels, were operated on. Those seriously ill with fever, dysentery and other grave diseases were taken there, too.

Truly, that hospital, the fresh air and wonderful climate of the area were true blessings for the workers, heavily wounded and wasted away by different diseases. That place could even be considered as a kind of sanatorium, towering high on the mountain summit in the stifling heat of the south.

Having been charged with the duty of auditing the accounts and economic affairs of the six hospitals belonging to the southern railway, I stayed in Tange-Do for twenty-seven months.

The head doctor in Tange-Do, who had formerly worked for the southern Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, was from Pakistan. He was called Khan, which was, apparently, his pseudonym, and neither the hospital personnel nor I was able to find out his true family name. The medical staff, comprising over fifty doctors, many assistant doctors, nurses, a surgeon and a pharmacist, as well as the chauffeurs and other employees had a particularly respectful attitude to me. I did my utmost for the confidence and frankness marking our relations to be mutual. The Central Health Care Department in Teheran was pleased with my work.

An Iranian company named "Edka" was charged with the construction of the railway section stretching from Tange-Do to Tange-Se. The chief engineer of that company was a certain Shaghaghy, whose assistant was my friend Aram Mazlounian. I saw him every time he came to Tange-Do to check up work on that line. Having accomplished his studies in Europe, he occupied an important position in Teheran. Before assuming his post in "Edka," he had worked for the harbor of Bandar Pahlavy as chief engineer for several years.

In late 1936, when I was going to Bishe, the last center of the southern Health Care Institution, I heard about Aram's untimely, tragic death with profound regret. A pustule had burst in his ear, making him undergo an operation. Unfortunately, the surgeon's

carelessness and neglect of duties had caused blood poisoning in his organism, that eventually becoming the last nail in his coffin. What is even more painful, Aram had just started carving out a comfortable life for his family after so many sufferings and privations, and premature death came to put an end to all his strivings.

IN BISHE

Early in 1937, our hospitals in Tange-Do and Nuzhian closed and part of their staff, including some of the head doctors, assistants and nurses, moved to Bishe. I followed their example and went to the local hospital, whose accountant had already been dismissed.

In accordance with the plan worked out previously, the construction of the railway should have been completed by March 21, 1938, when the Iranian people saw in the New Year. Due to some additional work, however, it was postponed by a few months and Bishe's hospital, that was the last on the railway line, had to work till the project was carried out thoroughly.

That hospital, which was distinguished for its well-organized work, was the best of all the others from the standpoint of the treatment of diseases and conducting of operations. It was something quite understandable, for the best specialists and equipment of the closed hospitals had been concentrated there. The hospital's head doctor was named Nazery and the surgeon Baher, both of them being prominent specialists in their fields of activity. There were two other hospitals north of Bishe.

Bishe really justified the name it had been given: 'bishe' means 'a small forest'. Truly, it was an oasis in the south of Iran, with its parching sun. Sky-high Oriental platanos, wild ash-trees and woods of cherries, growing side by side. Abundant waters and endless virgin verdure. Thousands of birds of every species, including sparrows, starlings and nightingales, hovering here and there. Summer heat seemed too timid to penetrate into that region, where the air was ever cool and fascinating.

The engineers, technical staff, clerks of the construction companies and workers constituted a single community in all the centers of railway construction, including Bishe. Their places of residence teemed with shopkeepers supplying them with food and the vital means of living.

It was three years since I last saw my family. I had found it merciless of me to take them to me before I moved to Bishe: the summer temperatures in Gearmabdar, Ghale-Sheik, Tange-Do and Tange-Se exceeded 42° to 44°C so that we did not dare to touch our iron beds for fear of burning our hands. It would be convenient to move them to me in winter, but thus I would deprive my two schoolchildren of the chance to attend their classes.

Those of my partners and colleagues who lived together with their families often criticized and even blamed me for my voluntary separation from my family members. However, I thought I had better experience all those privations and inconveniences myself, instead of making my family share them with me. I did not have the slightest

desire to tear my children away from their lessons just for the sake of my own comfort and satisfaction.

My family visited me during the summer holidays in 1937 and stayed in Bishe for about three months. I was in the seventh heaven to meet my family members again after three years' separation. My elder son Levon, whom we often called Edik, and my daughter Medik had grown up and become taller. My Artushik, whom I had left when he was merely two months old, was now three years and a half. Having got rid of her predicaments and privations together with all the mental suffering inevitably accompanying them, my wife looked refreshed and lively. I clasped all my three children to my bosom in turn and kissed them incessantly.

Yes, destiny had prepared that very course of events for my life. I had been obliged to doom myself to voluntary wander, after all the torture I had weathered while engaged in the truck business. I was happy my hard, persistent toil had finally enabled me to rise to my feet and carve out a new social position for me.

Twice a day I took my children for a swim in a large swimming pool, thirty meters long and twelve meters wide. Within a week I taught my elder son and daughter to swim. Holding my Artush tight by the left arm, I gave him exercises with his right arm. After the swimming lessons, which my kids enjoyed greatly, I followed them attentively drying their bodies properly and lying on the sand, warmed up by the gentle rays of the sun. At my leisure I took them to see the adjacent beautiful sights and enjoy nature's virgin freshness and purity.

My children were provided with all the conveniences of dwelling during their sojourn with me, but the days were fleeting. The one hundred and one days spent with my family are the happiest period in my life, which can never be blurred out in my memory. Fortunately, at that time the families of Drs. Nazery, Levasany and Najem-Abady were in Bishe, too. Nearly every day the four families gathered in the evenings, had a chat and made jokes, having a wonderful time together. It was especially Najem-Abady who always kept us in high spirits with his humor and jokes.

I sent my family members to Teheran with great regret. My colleagues tried hard to talk me out of being separated from them, but in vain. Indeed, it would be very pleasant for me, but I knew it would be selfish of me to do so. It would take us an entire year to bring our work to an end, while that was rather a long time for my children to be away from school because of me.

Unfortunately, I did not have any compassionate relatives or friends in Teheran to put my kids under their charge and keep my wife with me. In general, I have never thought it logical and expedient to place children in other people's custody when they have their own father and mother.

THE LOR AND THEIR INCREDIBLE REMEDIES

The region where I lived for four years and whose heart was to become one of the intersection points of the Iranian railway, was called Loristan. The whole territory from Salehabad-Gearmabdar to Dorud was the habitation of different tribes of the Lor. Like all the other large provinces and regions of Iran, Loristan was an independent entity

before Reza Shah's rule: the Lor did not acknowledge and obey any other authorities except their chieftains.

Loathing work altogether, the Lor were mainly occupied with stock breeding. Their remote ancestors were mostly bandits, who concentrated all their efforts and energy only on theft and robbery. Loristan was considered an unsafe, dangerous area, its inhabitants being ready to slaughter their opponent in case of the slightest resistance on the latter's part. Committing murder was just as easy a commonplace for them as cutting a hen's throat. The road Burujerd-Khorramabad-Salehabad was called "Ghatel-Gah" or "slaughter-house" because of the incessant robbery and murders taking place there. The lorry drivers had to pass that road in groups, accompanied by gendarmes so that they would not be attacked by the Lor bandits. However, sometimes all those security measures proved absolutely futile, for the Lor would not give up their "sacred" custom easily. They carried out their "knightly deeds," i.e. robbery and assassination, with the utmost dexterity and adroitness. Luckily, great Shah Reza put an end to that compromising self-will, autonomy and gangsterism in the entire country, including Loristan. He charged his Commander Ahmady and the latter's Armenian Colonel Gigo with the task of introducing peace and order into that region. Eventually, the Lor were subjugated and peace settled over their territories.

As I have already mentioned, the Lor did not like any other occupation except cattle breeding. They hated experiencing any hardships and formed but a meager percentage in the number of the workers employed in the railway construction. The members of that tribe, known for their extreme laziness, did not even grow crops to earn bread for themselves. Instead of wheat and barley, they boiled or roasted wild acorn and lived on it.

The Lor used amazing family and tribal medicines and remedies in the treatment of various diseases. They did not believe in contemporary medicine, doctors and hospitals at all. If any of them happened to fall ill or get injured in an adventurous accident and was taken to hospital, his or her relatives would apply to the head doctor with a request to discharge the patient.

That tribe had weird remedies, with which they often cured the sick, something outsiders could neither understand nor explain. I can never forget two especially astounding, incredible cases of miraculous recovery. A Lor was taken to our hospital in Nuzhian with some injury in his right leg. Soon gangrene set in the wound and the doctors were obliged to decide upon amputating his leg from the thigh.

The patient's relatives, however, did not agree to the operation and refused to sign the paper they had been offered. Instead, they demanded that the sick Lor be released from hospital and put their signatures to the document obliging them not to blame the hospital staff in case of any future complication. They took their relative home carrying him on their backs in turn. Hardly had two weeks passed when the Lor, once seriously ill with gangrene, came to the hospital all by himself and said without any revenge in his tone, "I should really thank my lucky stars my family members didn't agree to my amputation. Only the devil knows if I'd become one-legged or completely legless."

After detailed inquiries, the doctors found out that the injured man's leg had been wrapped in the warm, bloody flesh and hide of a newly-killed sheep, which had cured him together with other traditional remedies.

Another astonishing case of miraculous recovery occurred in Bishe. A Lor had been hit by a falling rock, which had resulted in fractures in both his legs and right arm. While the perplexed surgeon was wondering how to bandage up his numerous cuts and fractures, the Lor's relatives came and took him away on their backs.

Three weeks later, that man, whose whole body had been covered with bruises and injuries, came to the hospital, limping a little. Both the surgeon and the staff were amazed at that strange, miraculous way of healing.

AGAIN IN TEHERAN

The construction of the railway having mostly been completed, we finished work in the Health Care Center, closed all the accounts and handed in the equipment. Early in September 1938, I returned to Teheran. I was very excited with past memories, overtaking me one after another: it was exactly twenty years before that I had arrived in that city, then absolutely alien and unknown to me, with my late father, both of us derelict refugees, homeless and abandoned.

I came to Teheran by a passenger train belonging to the railway. The train, running on the newly-built smooth road, passed through numerous tunnels on its way to Dorud, whence it rapidly moved to Teheran.

My heart swelled with joy and happiness at the railway, built in unusual speed on the initiative of talented Reza Shah, the great leader of my second reviving homeland, only and only with the financial means of his country. I was also delighted because I thought that project had been realized through a scruple of my own contribution, too. Sitting in the fine, modern train compartment, entirely plunged in meditations, I thought I should really thank my lucky stars to have had a narrow escape from our centuries-old enemies, the Turks, who hated the Armenian nation intensely. I had been successful enough to resettle in a country, where the local people did not loathe us. Moreover, they willingly accepted every form of contribution we were able to make and kindly cooperated with us. They did not stifle and weaken us, but provided us with every opportunity for the free manifestation of our intellectual and constructive power.

My heart infinitely delighted, I was trying to recollect all the large-scale projects Reza Shah, that great personality endowed with inborn genius, had carried out for the sake of Iran. Thanks to his extraordinary wisdom and, particularly steadfast determination, he had turned the country, stifling in the clutches of mediaeval feudalism, into one beyond any recognition. The other projects he had completed were not less significant than the construction of the railway.

The fineness and modern appearance of Teheran Railway Station fascinated me. I hired a carriage and gave the cabman the address of the house my family lived in.

My impression was that a magic stick had changed Teheran beyond recognition during the five years of my absence. The former narrow, crooked streets had been built into wide, straight avenues, edged with numerous nice shops and houses.

I reached home at six o'clock in the morning. Although I had informed my family members about my arrival, they did not expect me that day. Both my family's and my own delight and happiness were beyond any account: we incessantly exchanged hugs and kisses, reluctant to release ourselves from each other's embrace. My twelve-year-old son Levon had already completed his studies in the six classes of the Armenian school.

On the second day of my arrival in Teheran, I went to see Doctor Torphe, with whom I had made good friends in the last three years of my work. When I entered his room, he met me with a smile breathing satisfaction, shook my hand and said, "Mr. Sarhadian, I am very pleased with your work. If you wish, I can send you to either of the two centers of the Health Care Institution of the northern railway. We shall still have to work in the north for at least two years. I can also appoint you assistant of accountant-general in the Central Department in Teheran, but you should know that your salary will be comparatively reduced if you stay here."

"Dear doctor, I am so very grateful to you for your kindness and friendship," I answered. "I would like to be dismissed from my work by your permission. Please, give the necessary orders for me to receive the certificate of my five-year work."

"You will certainly get it, but I would like to know why you do not want to continue your cooperation with us."

"To tell the truth, I have got tired of this five-year separation from my wife and children. I am thinking of starting some independent business, if possible. I am convinced you will not strip me of your friendly aid and moral support in the future."

"You can be completely sure of it. I will not spare my efforts to help you in case it is within my power."

Doctor Torphe promised to give me the certificate of my five-year work and also see to it that I was paid a salary for five months.

Very pleased with the doctor's sincere attitude and promised aid, I thanked him and went to see Hamid Tehranchy, Accountant-General of the Central Department of the Health Care Institution. He regretted my decision to resign, too and promised to retain our friendly relations in the future.

Thus, I got a chance to rest down for at least two to three months and ponder on my future activity.

I find it my duty to repeat that during my five-year work in the south, my partners did not give me the slightest reason to complain of anything. Except surgeon Baher, who was a Jew of wonderful character, and three Armenian doctors, the rest of the staff, comprising about fifty doctors, surgeons, pharmacists and nurses, were Persians.

I have to confess that before dealing with the intellectual class of the Persian nation, I did not suppose they were so polite, benevolent, respectful and, particularly kind. I often think how wonderful it would be if the Armenians were endowed with these positive traits and got rid of their notorious envy.

ON THE EVE OF WORLD WAR II

A week later, I got both my certificate of work and five-month salary from the Health Care Center of the Iranian Railway.

I was quite in high spirits. My absence from Teheran having kept me in separation from my friends for such a long time, I decided to hold an evening party with them. It turned out a true carousal, with a musician playing the saz and about forty-five guests present. We enjoyed ourselves greatly at the supper during which many toasts were drunk so that our guests parted with us in a very high mood.

May 1939. Europe faced the slumbering danger of the impending terrible war. Having already devoured Austria and Czechoslovakia, crazy Hitler was threatening entire Europe with the same fate.

The Iranian Railway was equipped with steam-boilers and freight cars that were the last word in technique. However, it being the only means of transport in the country, it was necessary to build motor roads, extending from Sultanabad-Ghom-Teheran to Zahedan, Iran's western border with India (present-day Pakistan). Those highways were of the utmost importance: in case of war they would enable the authorities to secure the safety of Iran's oil-rich regions in Khuzestan and the vicinity of the Persian Gulf. Besides, the maintenance of permanent communication via the route Iran-India was prioritized, too.

The Government embarked upon the construction of new roads and repairs of the highways on the routes of Ghom-Isfahan-Yeazd-Kerman-Mil and Nadery-Bam-Zahedan, a vast amount of money being spent on the rapid accomplishment of that work through cooperation with a few building companies.

FOUNDING A CONSTRUCTION COMPANY

While in Bishe, I got acquainted with a semi-literate Yugoslavian technician of about thirty-five. Coming to Iran as a mason many years before, that man, whose name was Luka Kadievich, had married a girl of Armenian and Assyrian origin and had two children. He had gradually made progress in the field of construction, becoming an assistant technician.

Luka and I often exchanged visits after my return to Teheran. Once he suggested that we found a construction company, saying, "The authorities have undertaken numerous construction projects and still others are being worked out. We shouldn't lose this golden opportunity. You know I'm a specialist in technical work. We should immediately establish a company of several people and assume work. If we don't manage to win the tender as a building contractor, we can become a second-class contractor (*taeheron* in Persian) and make quite a large profit, but before that, we've some work to attend to. I know you've a good command of Persian and a wide circle of acquaintances now."

"Okay, what work is it? How long will it take us and what guarantees of profit do you have," I asked.

"It'll take us five months maximum. Maybe, we'll gain 30,000 to 35,000 *tumans*. We're to build a concrete wall, two meters high and about two hundred meters long, on

the left bank of the river Lashkarak, at a distance of twenty to twenty-two kilometers from Teheran.”

“Well, to whom are we to offer our service?”

“Teheran Department of Motor Roads.”

We applied to the aforementioned body and, fortunately, succeeded. The Engineering Section of that Department was headed by a naturalized Russian immigrant named Chernitsky, whose assistant was architect Nikit Orbelian. Both of them were of great moral support to us and we completed the construction of the wall planned to be built in five months minimum.

Unluckily, we faced grave difficulties while trying to get back the seven percent (about 10,000 *tumans*) of the cost of the whole project, deducted from our income as a guarantee that we should really complete the work. Finally, we gained about 20,000 and were very pleased with it.

Our initial success encouraged us to embark upon larger-scale projects. We established the company we had planned to and had it approved by a body entitled to do so. Apart from the two of us, our joint-stock company included an Armenian named V. Yesayan and an Assyrian called Elias: forty per cent of the shares belonged to me, while sixty per cent had been equally divided among the three friends.

We participated in the tender declared for the construction of the road Mil-Nadery-Bam, which was to be built on the initiative and under the sponsorship of the English. Unfortunately, however, we failed to win it, firstly because our staff lacked an architect and then, we did not have the capital necessary for the beginning of the work. The tender was won by an Assyrian named Aivaz-zade (*'zade' is the Persian equivalent for 'son'*), who entitled our company to build about thirty-five per cent of the road. At first it was decided to complete the project at 1,200,000 *tumans*, but later that figure grew to twelve million. Its capital made up a million reals, of which sixty per cent was to be paid us in cash.

In accordance with the contract, I was appointed our company's accredited representative in Kerman, the heart of the road we were to build. The real center of our activity, however, was in a village at a distance of fifty-four kilometers from Kerman, on the way to Mil-Nadery. We had chosen it because of the quarry located there, near huge rocks. We exploded them by dynamite and moved the stones necessary for the construction by lorries.

All the expenses and payments connected with our work were to be made through me, but the work we had committed ourselves to was highly incompatible with the financial means we had at our disposal. We found it extremely difficult to buy eighteen trucks in Teheran, their price being twice as much as our entire capital. We somehow managed to pay one-thirds of that amount in cash, signing bills for the future payment of the rest of the money. We also had to purchase a great number of spades, hoes, small iron carts and other items necessary for our work. We found ourselves in grave financial predicament at the very beginning of our activity. One of the main reasons for it was that our Yugoslavian friend Luka had become one of the company's shareholders

with twenty per cent of the stocks, despite the fact that he had not invested a single farthing in our business.

THE OCCUPATION OF IRAN

On the sunrise of June 22, 1941, Hitler's army attacked the Soviet Union, whose borders extended from Finland to Romania, and started advancing at lightning speed, conquering its cities, townships and villages one after another. That fierce onslaught was launched by twenty armored cars and one hundred and sixty army units, which were soon joined by Finnish, Hungarian, Romanian and Italian troops.

Hitler was convinced he would crush the Russian army's resistance within a maximum of two to three weeks and conquer Moscow, that strangely wrong supposition being shared by quite a number of politicians.

The total defeat of France, famous for its resisting power, as well as those suffered by the other European countries had dazzled Hitler within fifteen to twenty days. He made a historical mistake under the influence of his resounding success and brilliant victories, giving vent to the poison of hatred devouring his heart and trampling upon the national self-esteem of the peoples inhabiting the vast Russian Empire. Instead of pleasing them and trying to win their liking, Hitler made them scapegoats for the errors the Soviet Government had made. It was silly of him to order the merciless extermination of the Russian, Ukrainian and other nationalities, inhabiting the territories his troops had occupied. Those crazy outrages and violence made millions of Soviet people unite and swear vengeance on Hitler for the sacred purpose of overthrowing his rule of vandalism and tyranny even at the cost of their lives.

Hitler thought that the peoples in Russia were devoid of the feelings of patriotism and self-defense, but he made a fatal mistake in his calculations.

Hitler was convinced that after his attack against the Soviet Union, he would succeed in signing a separate peace treaty with England, thus neutralizing that country on the British Isles. That step would enable him to take possession of entire Europe as well as Russia and the large countries under the latter's dominion.

Hitler's policy, however, turned out absolutely devoid of any firm grounds: on July 12, less than twenty days after the heavy onslaught against Russia, the Soviet Union signed an agreement of mutual aid with England.

I gave a very brief account of the outbreak of World War II in order to touch upon its consequences in Iran. Immediately after the signing of the Russo-English agreement, those two states delivered ultimatums to the Iranian Government, their action being mainly based on the allegation that the country had provided haven for a German espionage organization. About forty-eight hours after the ultimatums had been issued, on August 25, 1941, the Russo-English troops entered Iran from the north and south respectively.

The entire Iranian population was utterly displeased with that occupation, for the country had declared itself neutral many years before the outburst of the war. As for the

German espionage organization, it was simply a good plea for the invading Allies. Iran provided the shortest and safest route for them to supply Russia with every kind of military and economic aid. They had to provide the Soviet Union with food and all possible latest innovations in military equipment to increase its resisting power so that it would be able to counterattack the heavy offensives of the German fascists. In that regard, Iran's occupation was a path leading to the realization of the Allies' military plans.

The greatest calamity which befell Iran after the occupation, was great patriot and outstanding leader Reza Shah's resignation. On September 17, 1941 (Shahrivar 25, 1320 according to the Iranian calendar), that prominent personality, who had rendered his country numerous services, worth of the highest appreciation and had carried out most praiseworthy reforms for the revival and progress of his adorable homeland, yielded up the reins of government to his first son, prince Mohammed Reza-Pahlavy, and left Iran on September 28 to 29 (Mehr 5).

A week before those events, on September 10, 1941, Forughy, then Prime Minister of Iran, a very clever and far-sighted politician, who realized the grave political situation well, had had an agreement approved by the Iranian Mejlis. The document, which had been issued and endorsed amidst a storm of protest and discontent raised by Forughy's opponents, contained the following provisions:

1. Iran's armed forces were to pose no obstacles for the occupation of the country's northern, western and southern areas by the Anglo-Russian troops.
2. The Iranian Government was to imprison all the German subjects and extradite them to the Russo-English diplomatic representatives.
3. Iran was to put its railway and roads at the Allies' disposal for them to convey munition to Russia.
4. Iran was to conduct a policy of neutrality, meanwhile also securing the protection of the Anglo-Russian interests.
5. The Anglo-Russian Alliance was to acknowledge Iran's rights to oil, foster the development of the country's economy and withdraw their troops once the war ended.

Iran's prudent, patriot Prime Minister Forughy had been obliged to make the concessions imposed by the first four clauses of the agreement. He had done it consciously, realizing that it was the only way to make the English and Russians sign Clause 5, recognizing Iran's territorial integrity and immunity. His discretion turned out of immense significance for the salvation of his homeland.

Exactly two years, two months and two days after the aforementioned historic event, the leaders of the Allied Powers, who had come to Teheran to participate in a conference, Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin, made a declaration about Iran's territorial integrity and diplomatic immunity. The announcement, issued through the strenuous efforts of the country's shrewd young king Mohammed Reza Shah, stated the following:

1. The three states, present at the conference, acknowledge and respect Iran's territorial integrity and independence.
2. The conference expresses its profound gratitude to Iran for the roads and railway the country has put at the Allied Powers' disposal for the purpose of facilitating the transit of ammunition to the Soviet Union.

3. The Allies bind themselves to withdraw their troops from Iran as soon as the war came to an end.

4. The Allies also commit themselves to compensating Iran for the economic damage the country will inevitably suffer in consequence of the occupation.

On February 27, 1944, exactly eighty-eight days after the aforementioned remarkable event, the Iranian Parliament convened its fourteenth session. A few months later, on the initiative of the shah and through the attempts of a group of patriotic deputies, the country's legislative body ratified a law of great importance. It stated the following, "It is strictly banned to allow any foreign state to gain and hold a monopoly on Iran's oil mines and the earth layers rich in oil. It is also severely forbidden to even put that issue under consideration."

In accordance with the aforementioned law, the English Oil Company was stripped of its monopoly on the country's southern oil mines as well as all the technical, economic, administrative and other bodies somehow connected with them: all those institutions were now nationalized. Along with that, Kavtaridze, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union, suffered frustration in his mission and the oil treaty on the exploitation of the mines in Semnan in the north of Iran, was annulled.

In that chaotic situation great patriot Reza Shah, who had begun building a completely new Iran, yielded up his spirit to God in Johannesburg, South Africa, on Mordad 4, 1323. His corpse was conveyed to Cairo and given to the Egyptian state to rest there for the time being. Later, when the storm of war ceased raging in the world, the remains of the great patriot, endowed with the title of "Great King" by the Iranian Parliament, were moved to Teheran and interred in a magnificent pantheon.

A FEW WORDS ABOUT MY DEAR IRAN

I am proud to state that the Armenians, who had settled in Iran a few hundred years before, as well as those who had found refuge in that country before the war and during it, enjoyed wide discretion and equality of rights in their new motherland. Both under Reza Shah the Great and his young, wise son, Mohammed Reza Shah, the Armenian minority shared almost all the civil, economic, cultural, educational and other freedoms the fraternal Persian nation had without any restriction and discrimination. In the adventurous, dreadful days of World War II, the Iranian authorities as well as various political and civil institutions did not change their attitude to the Armenians at all. Indeed, some young, inexperienced and imprudent Armenians turned out to have been led into deception under the influence of the propaganda launched by a newly-founded party, working on account of the foreigners. They, however, were not considered as representatives of the Armenian minority and were tried as members of the aforementioned party. On the whole, almost all the Iranian Armenians remained faithful and devoted to the general policy of the protection of Iran's state interests.

Thousands of Armenians, including me, had experienced the entire hell and lethal consequences of the anti-Armenian policy the Turkish Government implemented in the days of World War I. Having had a narrow, miraculous escape from the carnage of more than a million of our compatriots, we had found shelter in Iran, thanks to the country's

kind hospitality. Then, could we suppress our gratitude and stifle the thankful cry, coming from the very bottom of our hearts, "Long live the brotherly Iranian people! Long live their wise, humane shah and authorities!"

IN MIL-NADERY

Entering into contract with two of his compatriots, an Assyrian named Aivaz-zade assigned our four-member company with the task of turning the sandy path - thirty-two to thirty-five kilometers long - lying between the roads to Kerman and Bam, into a highway.

Two of our partners, Elias and Luka, left for Kerman and thence Mil-Nadery to organize the work. I stayed in Teheran to attend to the transportation of some lorries we had already purchased to our new place of work, buy several others and settle the accounts connected with them. Having already sent seventeen trucks, I was about to arrange the conveyance of three others when I got the following telegram from Elias, "Come here at once. We're in serious trouble."

For several years, I had been occupied with the truck business without sparing either my savings or efforts for it. I had lost all my property while engaged in that work, and the same was true of the new area of my activity. Without ever giving a serious thought to what I was doing, I had invested all the money I had been saving with extreme difficulties for six years in that building company. So, it is not hard to imagine what a depressing and discouraging impression the aforementioned telegram made on me. I had no other alternative but to leave for our place of work immediately.

We needed stones for the construction of the road, but the quarry had proved unable to provide us with the total number necessary. Counting our employees, I saw that we had sixty-four chauffeurs, helpers, masons and workers, whose daily payment amounted to about a thousand *tumans*. If I failed to settle the work within ten to fifteen days, those sixty-four people would certainly tear me to numerous pieces in return for their late payment. In that case the only way out from that deadlock would be running away at night, but where could I go from Teheran? What was to happen to the capital my two friends and I had invested in that business?

Elias and I went to Aivaz-zade in Kerman and explained to him the grave predicament we had found ourselves in. The Assyrian, who was a clever man of wide experience, did his best to soften our indignation. He lent us some money and promised to move his office staff and bookkeeping documents from Kerman to a village near the quarry. Then he added, "Dear sirs, do not worry. In case you suffer a fiasco, my own material losses will be even greater than yours. As you are my greatest contractors, I have to provide you with all conveniences of work. I repeat, be sure you will get the stones necessary for your work within three to four days. Today the English captain charged with the immediate supervision of our activity, has allocated us the dynamite we need to explode the rocks. I myself will attend to the work in the quarry."

A little encouraged by the Assyrian's words, my partner and I returned to our place of work.

Aivaz-zade did really keep his promise and we started work four days after my arrival, being able to get three-fourths of the stone we had demanded. I was pleased even with it, as we were to smooth away the road before final stonework.

The only trouble annoying us was our "technician" Luka with his infinite laziness, illusive conceit and airs of a very important person. Having joined us with the right to gain one-fifths of the income received, without investing a single penny, he did not even take any pains for the rapid accomplishment of the work. Eventually, I decided to somehow isolate him from work simply because I loathed creating scandals. Asking Elias to supervise the speedy loading and conveyance of stone, I myself started controlling the work of the masons and other workers. I should admit that my Assyrian partner and the Yugoslavian specialist were as different as chalk and cheese, for the former truly did his utmost to contribute to the work within his power.

I had rolled up my sleeves and was working incessantly, without sparing my time, energy and health. As a result, I began suffering from insomnia being hardly able to get a wink of sleep during four to five hours a day. Seeing that the work was proceeding successfully even without his help, Luka got angry and swore at himself. I tried to persuade him through Elias to return to Teheran, thus thinking to get rid of his undesirable presence: now our relations were far from being friendly. Elias and I promised to pay him his own share of the income even if he went back to the capital. At first Luka agreed, but then he changed his mind: evidently, he did not trust us.

I asked Elias to tell Aivaz-zade to find some other occupation for Luka either in our own section of the construction or in another place, but the Assyrian refused, telling us that he could not trust such a man. I had no other remedy but to reconcile myself to the foolish behavior of that moron till our work came to an end.

Eighteen months later, we completed our work successfully. Before that, we had had some trouble and arguments with Aivaz-zade and his Assyrian architect, our main disagreement being over the payment we were to receive. At first the former had assumed the project at 1,200,000 *tumans*, but the character of the work changed in the course of time. Thus, at first we were to build an earthen road, but later we decided upon a stone one. The English, who had become strangely lavish with money in the wartime, appreciated our work highly and pledged themselves to pay exactly ten times as much as the price originally fixed. Despite that, however, Aivaz-zade was reluctant to increase our payment. It was only after the completion of the project that he paid us almost as much as we required, pleased with our perfect work and unwilling to arouse our discontent. We received quite a large income, although we had been working at the expense of our nerves and health.

It had taken us about two years to build the road: during all that time, I had been thwarted in my eagerness to go to Teheran and see my family. Returning to the capital, I decided to avoid such long separation from my family members in the future. My partner Elias, with whom I was very pleased, attempted to continue our cooperation, but I did not agree to.

THE DEMAND TO WITHDRAW THE FOREIGN TROOPS

In May 1945, World War II had actually come to a finish, with Germany having surrendered without posing any preconditions. That was followed by a number of remarkable events in Iran, whose historic significance make them worth mentioning.

On Mordad 12 according to the Iranian calendar, Potsdam Conference, attended by Truman, Churchill and Stalin, resolved to withdraw the foreign troops from Iran. Unfortunately, it took the alien army units rather a long time to leave the country.

Three days after the aforementioned conference, America exploded the first atomic bomb over Hiroshima, leveling that wretched Japanese city with the ground.

Five days after that unprecedented tragedy, Japan followed Germany's example and surrendered without any prerequisites. Thus, eight days after Potsdam Conference, World War II came to a finish, so that Iran was fully entitled to demand the withdrawal of the foreign troops.

A month later, the Iranian Government sent England, America and the Soviet Union letters reminding them about Teheran and Potsdam Conferences and asking them to respect the resolutions they themselves had made, namely, to withdraw all their troops from Iran within six months and compensate the country for the railway transit and material losses it had suffered in the aftermath of the occupation.

A month later, in order to legalize the Government's demand and support it the Iranian Parliament unanimously adopted a resolution stating, "New Mejlis elections will not be held in Iran until the Allied Powers withdraw their troops from the country."

Three months after the Iranian Government had presented letters to the Allies, a party named "Democrat" was founded in Iranian Azerbaijan, Atropatene, under the leadership of a certain Pishavery. The party, whose center was Tabriz, declared Atropatene "autonomous," electing a government and even assembly for that region.

The Central Government made strenuous attempts to subjugate that principality, but they proved futile. Some representatives of that autonomous province came to Teheran from Tabriz and demanded that Atropatene be officially recognized. The Shah and Council of Ministers flatly refused to meet that demand, the former even declaring bravely that "I would rather cut off my own hand than agree to the partition of my homeland's large, prospering province..."

The Shah ordered that armed forces and ammunition be sent to Atropatene to overthrow that independent principality and imprison its founders. However, hardly had the state army reached Ghazvin City when the Russian army blocked their way in Sharifabad Village and obstructed their advance.

That irrelevant intervention into the country's interior affairs forced the Iranian Government to submit a complaint before the United Nations Organization, which was holding its first session in London at that time.

A month after that event, on February 20, 1946, a representative delegation, comprising political figures and merchants, went to Moscow under the leadership of newly-elected Prime Minister Ghavam-Saltane to negotiate with the Soviet authorities over the situation. They returned exactly a month later, the talks having had a favorable outcome. The Soviet Government had pledged themselves to withdraw the troops and ammunition from Iran within a maximum of three months.

On March 2, 1946, i.e. twelve days after Prime Minister Ghavam-Saltane's departure for Moscow, the English withdrew all their armed forces, thus putting an end to Iran's occupation.

Ala, Iran's ambassador plenipotentiary, who had no confidence in the solemn promises of the Russian Government, again lodged his country's complaint at the United Nations' meeting in New York, requiring that that body order the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Iran. Fortunately, however, the Soviet authorities kept their pledge: on Khordad 1, 1325, the Soviet ambassador to Iran made an official declaration about the withdrawal of his state's troops.

The entire population of the country, irrespective of nationality and religion, were happy to witness their homeland's liberation. However, the country still faced another problem, which had to be settled in all haste.

THE LIBERATION OF ATROPATENE

After all the aforementioned events, the Democrat Party still insisted on the maintenance of the autonomous principality it had founded. The Democrat impostors had subdued entire Eastern and Western Atropatene reaching Maragha and Zanjan, and had even succeeded in establishing an autonomous "Kurdish Republic" on a large Kurdish-populated territory under the leadership of Ghazy Mohammed. Those two principalities, dominating the country's most harvest-rich and prospering areas, had entered into close alliance, aimed at acquiring complete independence and partitioning those lands from the Central Government.

There could be no doubts that their treacherous plans were doomed to frustration. The inhabitants living under the short rule of those rebellious principalities were extremely displeased with them. It was particularly the Democrats' dominion that was alien to the local population: the outrages and violence perpetrated by them had incited bitter hatred and revenge in hundreds of thousands of people.

The Central Government was well-aware of that fact, and while it still hesitated to resort to drastic measures, the courageous, patriotic king took the plunge. He ordered the army to leave for Tabriz and ruin the Democrats' den of high treason totally. The local inhabitants greatly contributed to the troops' advance, supporting their national army selflessly and working with it shoulder to shoulder. Soon the Democrats took their heels and left the country to save their bacon and escape the people's righteous revenge.

On Azar 23, the third day of the state army's attack against Tabriz, the problem of Atropatene, Iran's precious diamond, was finally settled. The entire province, including all its cities and townships, was liberated from the tyranny reigning there. The entire population of Iran, especially Atropatene inhabitants, celebrated that event in a great carousal: since then Azar 21 has ranked among the greatest national holidays in the country.

The three leaders of "Autonomous Kurdistan," i.e. Ghazy Muhammad, his brother Sader-Ghazy and Seif-Ghazy, were tried by the tribunal in Mahabad on Farvard 10, 1326 and sentenced to be shot.

Thus, Iran overcame the danger of partition and disunion.

REMARKABLE EVENTS BEFORE MORDAD 28

The period between the beginning of the third month of the year 1325, when the Allied Powers withdrew their troops from Iran, and Mordad 28, 1332 marked a number of significant occurrences, which left a heavy imprint in all the Iranians' memories. I find it necessary to mention them.

All the events described above pursued the objective of creating tumult and chaos in Teheran and many other important cities and regions. The initiators of all that great disturbance were the members of an organization named Tude, who had anti-Iranian orientation.

On Mehr 2, 1325, a tribe called Ghashghayi rose in rebellion against the Central Government and declared independence in one of Iran's most important provinces, Fars. Following the instructions of their leader Naser Ghashghayi, the members of the tribe entered into fighting against the state army and occupied Kazrun together with Busher City and its customs house within ten days. Fortunately, the Government succeeded in suppressing that revolt fifteen days later.

On Tir 25, 1326, the Parliament convened its fifteenth session, followed by the beginning of the functioning of Teheran's water pipeline system five days later.

On Mehr 29 of the same year, the Iranian Mejlis annulled an agreement, signed between Iran's Prime Minister Ghavam-Saltane and the Soviet Ambassador Plenipotentiary: it provided that an Iranian-Soviet Joint Oil Company would be established. That fact, however, caused the Prime Minister's resignation, as he failed to gain the Mejlis' vote of confidence. His two successors, Hackimy and Hazhir, shared his fate: the former's term of office lasted for only five months and twelve days. As for the latter, mass rallies accompanied by skirmishes were held against him in the Mejlis square, the police and law-abiding forces being obliged to interfere and introduce order into the city. A week later a new government was formed, with Muhammad Said holding the post of Prime Minister.

On Bahman 15, 1327, the Shah attended the solemn foundation ceremony of Teheran University. Unfortunately, some hostile elements, opposing the current regime and striving to create all kinds of turmoil in the country, made an attempt upon the king's life, as a result of which he was wounded in the head and shoulder. The assassin, a certain Naser Fakher-Ara, was killed right on the spot so that the secrets and organizers of the plot would remain unknown. The following day an emergency situation was introduced into the country and the government declared the Tude Party illegal and liquidated.

Two and a half months later, on Ordibehesht 1, 1328, a Constituent Assembly was convened for the purpose of reconsidering articles N 44 and 48, referring to the king's rights and authority. In accordance with those articles, the resolutions made by the Parliament and Senate were to be approved by the king.

THE NATIONALIZATION OF THE ANGLO-IRANIAN OIL COMPANY. NEW EVENTS

World War II left Iran a legacy of highly unfavorable events both in the foreign and interior affairs of the state. Numerous attempts were made to destroy order and disci-

pline and ruin the stability in the economy of the country. Endeavors were made and actions were taken to weaken the Central Government's power and influence. For four years incessantly, from Bahman 15, 1327 to Mordad 28, 1332, every week and even every day the country was struck by tumult, turmoil, skirmishes, fights, uprisings and even murders. Every possible effort was made to degrade the country in foreign diplomatic relations, destroy its interior security and peace, in a word, turn everything upside down in all the spheres.

After having been declared illegal, the Tude Organization continued its secret activity on a large scale, having a permanent leading part in all the chaos and confusion in the country.

On Mehr 15, 1329, Iran's Senate convened a meeting. Five days later, the problem of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company came to the surface, forcing the Parliament to make circumstantial inquiries into the issue, trying to get some information from the Government. Immediately afterwards, on Aban 12 Iran and the Soviet Union signed a commercial agreement.

Razmara, then far-sighted and vigorous Prime Minister and Commander-in-chief of the Iranian army, fell victim to all the fuss and trouble connected with the aforementioned company. On Esfand 3, 1329, a group of Mejlis deputies, headed by Doctor Mosadegh, suggested that it be nationalized. Razmara, who thought it ineffective and futile to pass such a resolution under the current circumstances, was shot dead in Masched-Shah on Esfand 16 by a certain adventurer named Khalil Tahmaseby.

That murder gave rise to new perturbation and confusion in Iran. The workers in the oil mines in Khuzestan went on strike and the country went into an emergency situation. In those days, Doctor Zangeane, the head of the Law Faculty of Teheran University, was killed.

With the expiration of Ala's fifty-day term, on Ordibehesht 7, 1330, the Mejlis elected Doctor Mosadegh, one of the Parliament members, Prime Minister of Iran. He was the leader of the deputies demanding the nationalization of the Oil Company.

Immediately after Mosadegh's election, the following day, the Mejlis adopted a law on the nationalization of the Iranian Oil Company. Two days later, on Ordibehesht 10, the Senate and King approved it, too. A Provisional Oil Supervising Body, established under the direction of Macky, was sent to Abadan to start the nationalization process and get back the different institutions of oil business from the former company.

The English Government sent battleships to Abadan and the Persian Gulf under the plea of securing its citizens' safety, and twenty-five days later, submitted a complaint against Iran's unilateral abrogation of the Oil Agreement to Lahe's International Court. England decried the Iranian authorities for turning down their suggestion that the problem be settled through negotiations and the Court of Peace.

Some destructive elements took advantage of the confusion created by the law of the nationalization of oil and strengthened their position, spreading their pernicious activity everywhere. Destruction, chaos, fights and murders became a commonplace everywhere.

Azar 14, 1330 marked heavy disorder and turmoil in Teheran. The university students and pupils on the one hand and the adherents of different parties and groups on the other attacked each other, suffering rather a great number of fatalities. The publishing-houses of several newspapers were robbed, reduced to ruins and burnt down. The armed forces of the country could hardly disperse the crowd and put an end to all that.

Two months later, the same occurred in the district center of Zabol. Again murders were committed, including that of the district head.

After all those events, the authorities finally managed to discover the center of the underground Tude Party and the editorial office of its press organ, "Mardom" newspaper.

The suggestions and negotiations of the English with regard to the settlement of the oil issue proved futile: that is why, they again lodged a complaint at the United Nations' meeting, held in New York, USA. An Iranian delegation headed by Doctor Mosadegh participated in it, trying to prove Iran's righteousness through speeches and arguments. The UNO postponed the final resolution of the problem till Lahe's International Court announced its own verdict.

The Anglo-Iranian relations grew even worse at the end of 1330, when Mosadegh's government ordered to close the English consulate in Iran.

In the middle of the second month of 1331, the Iranian Parliament opened its seventeenth session.

Early in the third month of the same year, Doctor Mosadegh's delegation left for Lahe to protect Iran's interests in the court, which was to consider the oil issue. The Iranian Prime Minister entered a serious protest against the fact that the English had taken into custody the nine hundred-ton oil-tanker in Aden. Lahe's International Court gave the parties another chance to settle that complicated problem through negotiations.

DOCTOR MOSADEGH'S AUTHORITIES

On his return from Lahe on Tir 25, Doctor Mosadegh demanded that the Parliament confer emergency powers on him for a six-month term. The legislative body, entitled to improve the situation in the country by drafting new bills, refused him, which resulted in his resignation. Mosadegh was followed by Ghavam-Saltane, whose four-day office marked extraordinary confusion and bloodshed first in the capital and then numerous provincial centers. The "National Front" Organization, Mosadegh's followers and the adherents of the Tude Party required the ex-Prime Minister's return so that the Parliament succumbed. Mosadegh again assumed the post of the head of government on the fifth day of his resignation, this time also occupying the post of Military Minister.

It was in those days that Lahe's International Court announced its verdict on the oil issue. It declared that it was beyond its jurisdiction to intervene in that problem, which meant that the English had failed to prove their indisputable righteousness.

Immediately after occupying the posts of government head and Military Minister, Doctor Mosadegh again required that the seventeenth Parliament again grant him six-month powers. This time the deputies were obliged to meet his demand, which implied that from that time onwards the Prime Minister was entitled to draft any bills he liked

and introduce them into the Parliament for adoption after a tentative application of six months. Two months later, Mosadegh's government severed diplomatic ties with the English Government, the ambassadors of both countries being called back to their homelands. Immediately afterwards, Mosadegh turned down Churchill and Truman's suggestion that they should intervene in the oil issue. Exerting pressure on the Parliament, the Prime Minister also made it dissolve the Senate.

Before the expiration of his six-month term, in Dey 1331, Doctor Mosadegh demanded that the Parliament confer one-year authorities on him and succeeded in gaining them by exercising pressure on the country's legislative body.

Diplomatic relations with the English state having been severed, Mosadegh nationalized the entire factory of "Shilat" by abrogating Iran's fishing treaty with Russia: in accordance with it, the latter had been holding monopoly on the northern piscatorial regions of Iran by that time.

Having gained additional powers for a year, Mosadegh, who was constantly incited by certain doubtful instigators, attempted to intervene in the shah's rights and privileges, trying to restrict them and neutralize the king's influence as much as possible. On Esfand 9, 1331, the far-sighted, patriotic king decided to abandon Iran temporarily in order to avoid further tension and turmoil in the country he loved and adored so much.

Teheran's conscientious patriots viewed the king's abdication and absence from the country in that extremely dangerous and complicated political situation as the fall of their fatherland's independence. Thousands of people gathered in the vicinity of the royal palace, asking the king to reconsider his decision and not leave the country to the whims of certain adventurers. The shah met their request and refused to forsake Iran.

The mass rallies, clearly manifesting the people's love for their king, and the latter's decision to stay with his nation were, indeed, highly unpleasant and unfavorable for Mosadegh and the trouble-makers surrounding him. Within a single week, one hundred and seventy people, representing the most influential and outstanding personalities in the capital, were put into custody, charged with creating confusion in the country, weaving plots and initiating all kinds of actions disturbing the population's peace. Among those imprisoned was also commander and future Prime Minister Fazlolah Zahedy.

All the aforementioned led to a number of highly dangerous events. The period between the last fifteen days of 1331 and the first one hundred and fifty-one days of 1332 marked numerous skirmishes, fights and murders. Iran faced the slumbering threat of losing its independence and territorial integrity.

In order to strengthen his absolute authority, Mosadegh ordered his followers, i.e. the members of the "National Front" Organization, who had seats in the Parliament, to resign their membership of the country's legislative body. They obeyed him and the Parliament was stripped of its majority, thus being rendered unable to convene sessions and continue working. In the month of Tir many people, most of them pupils, were killed at the mass rallies, which in its turn gave rise to still new larger-scale demonstrations.

MORDAD 28 to AUGUST 19

After a planned referendum, on Mordad 25, 1332, Mosaddegh dissolved the Parliament, which was having its seventeenth session at that time and promised to hold elections for the eighteenth one after the completion of the amendments to the electoral laws of the country. On the same day, exercising his regal rights, the king issued a decree on the removal of Mosaddegh, who was succeeded by military commander Fazlolah Zahedy. The ex-head of the Government imprisoned Company Commander Nasery, who had conveyed the order of his dismissal to him, as well as a number of army officials on charge of the perpetration of a coup d'etat, whereas in fact, their only guilt lay in their faithfulness to the king. It was those very events that incited all the confusion and upheaval on Mordad 28.

In order to eschew bloodshed and civil war in the country, the king and queen left for Baghdad and thence Italy in their own airplane. Meanwhile, Zahedy was involved in underground activity.

On the morning of Mordad 28, stimulated by the earnest desire to save their homeland from final fall, a vast multitude of Iranian patriots poured out into the streets of Teheran, flooding the city's central avenues with slogans of the following contents, "We want our king!" "Long live Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavy!" "Long live our dear, patriotic king!" "Let Mosaddegh perish!" "May Mosaddegh's government be overthrown!" "May all the traitors of our homeland fall for ever!," etc. Soon new crowds, the police and servicemen joined the demonstrators, whose united forces occupied first the capital's radio station and then the military depots and tanks.

The desperate Iranians, who had risen in rebellion against Mosaddegh's government and had firmly determined to achieve their aim, attacked the ex-Prime Minister's residence, which had sheltered some of the government members. The servicemen, acting in solidarity and unison with the rebels, started bombarding Mosaddegh's residence and raining down infernal flames on it. Almost exactly at that time Zahedy, who had already officially entered upon office, declared about the fall of his government from the radio station. Hardly had dusk settled over the city when the former head of the government hid himself somewhere together with his adventurous ministers and military accomplices.

The following day Iran's patriotic king learned about his nation's selfless devotion with infinite happiness. He immediately decided to return to his adorable country, to his dear, faithful people.

THE STABILIZATION OF THE SITUATION AND RESTORATION OF PEACE

Two days after the glorious victory won by the huge multitude of patriotic mutineers on Mordad 28, the shah returned, the situation was stabilized and peace was restored in the country. Mosaddegh had suffered a most shameful defeat and run away. The same fate had overtaken his treacherous accomplices, who had broken to pieces great Reza Shah's and Mohammed Reza Shah's magnificent monuments, towering in the capital's main squares, just some three to four days before those events. A month later, on Mehr 1,

the authorities managed to discover the hiding places of the Tude Party together with the arms and hand shells they had been concealing all that time. Soon the publishing center of their underground newspaper and books was found out, too.

The majority of Mosaddegh's followers, who had run away and hidden themselves in different places, were found and taken into custody. Mosaddegh himself and Riahy, the head of his officers, were tried at a court martial. The ex-Prime Minister's trial lasted rather long: he was given full opportunity to defend himself with lengthy arguments and speeches, after which the court sentenced him to three-year imprisonment. In Mehr 1333, the court also tried three of Mosaddegh's accomplices, who had been searched for by that time: Doctor Fatemy, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, was condemned to death, while Doctor Shayegan and architect Razavy were sentenced to life imprisonment.

It was in exactly those days that the government discovered an underground organization, comprising some servicemen and the members of the Tude Party. Nine of them were sentenced to be shot, the verdict being immediately put into effect. The others were condemned to either life imprisonment or incarceration of different terms.

Exactly eleven months after Mordad 28, after rather long and strenuous talks, the Iranian Government finally signed a treaty on the country's southern oil mines, formerly belonging to the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. The great English, American and European oil companies had established a consortium, the treaty being concluded on the basis of the principle of equal profit. Apart from the taxes fixed, the Iranian Government was to receive half of the income oil industry would provide. The body, representing the Iranian side at the negotiations, was headed by economist Dr. Aminy, a skilled specialist of wide experience.

Thus, the evil of oil, the reason for all the confusion and upheavals in Iran, that had become a true scourge for the country, was finally uprooted.

A BLOODLESS REVOLUTION. LAND REFORMS

After the Iranians' stunning victory on Mordad 28, the country's patriotic king grew convinced that the overwhelming majority of the population would undoubtedly always support him ardently for the sake of their independence and the country's immunity. Encouraged by that firm conviction, he commenced settling the foreign and interior affairs of the country he loved so much.

Exercising the rights and authority he was vested with in compliance with Iran's constitutional law, the king took a number of important, urgent actions, aimed at 1. the maintenance of the country's interior peace; 2. extirpation of corruption; 3. implementation of land reforms.

In the period between Mordad 28, 1332 and the present year, i.e. 1341, that is, throughout nine years, the first person in the country, His Imperial Majesty Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavy, made every possible endeavor to achieve the completion of the vital tasks he had set before himself. It should be stated with great pride that he did succeed in fully realizing the first of them. The whole Iranian nation is now enjoying peace

and tranquility, that are true blessings. Nobody is afraid lest he or his family should be attacked, beaten or murdered in the street, at the market, in the place of work, field, forest, on the roads and elsewhere by adventurous bandits, something that was, unfortunately, a commonplace under Mosaddegh's rule.

As for the second and third reforms, their completion requires adamant determination and harder, more persistent and strenuous efforts. The king has been trying all possible means to achieve those highly desirable objectives. In the past nine years, several Councils of Ministers have succeeded each other, working under the direct and close guidance of the shah for the realization of the aforementioned goals. Here are the names of the heads of governments, who followed each other: Commander Zahedy, Dr. Eghbal, Sharif Emany and Dr. Aminy.

During his work of over a year, Dr. Aminy took active measures to carry into effect those reforms. His term of office is righteously called a period of *bloodless revolution*. He launched unprecedented, ardent struggle against corruption, carrying out investigation into the activity of different political and military figures, ministers, governors and other high-ranking officials, charged with corruption and abuse of their positions.

It was actually under Dr. Aminy that the authorities started implementing the land reform in full swing. The Minister of Agriculture he had appointed, Dr. Arsanjany, became one of the most fervent advocates of the restriction of the landowners' rights and privileges. From that time onwards no village head was entitled to have estates in more than one village. In accordance with a law passed, all of them were to sell their villages at fair prices to the farmers who had been cultivating the soil there, the buyers being obliged to pay the entire cost of the land within ten to fifteen years.

Before the ratification and application of the law of land ownership, the shah allocated all his own villages to the peasants with legal documents of estate. He has already distributed a considerable part of his patrimonies and will, probably, finally accomplish that process soon. The private village heads' work proceeds rapidly, too and will, undoubtedly, come to an end within two years. The villages, once belonging to the state and called "*khalese*," were sold one or two years ago.

The restriction of the landowners' rights and privileges and the land reform in general were a rare blessing for the peasantry. Thousands of villagers got a brilliant chance to become petty landowners; moreover, convinced that from that time onwards whatever they earned with the sweat of their brow, i.e. wheat, barley, beet, rice, crops in general and their dairy cattle would belong only and only to them, they would not spare their efforts to develop agriculture and industry and increase their income.

Parallel with the land distribution, cooperatives were established in the villages under state auspices. They facilitated the procurement of seeds and the necessary farming tools for the peasants. Soon Iran will also contribute to the foundation of a credit bank on the basis of payment made by the villagers.

The bloodless revolution in the system of land ownership in Iran is a decisive victory in the country's socio-political life. An indisputably magnificent undertaking, whose greatest merit was the gradual alleviation and final abolition of the hatred, hostility, discrimination and essential differences in the standards of living of different classes of the population.

It is already twenty years since intensive work was launched for the improvement of working conditions at Iran's factories. The state has fixed the salaries, the eight-hour duration of the working process, the payment for the additional working hours, days off and holidays, as well as the insurance money and the amount the workers are to receive in case of dismissal. The full rights the workers of Iran's newly-founded industrial and agricultural factories enjoy exceed even those established in many advanced, rich countries.

IRAN'S INTERNATIONAL POSITION

The aforementioned reforms, the country's indisputable interior security, the improvement of the peasantry's and workers' conditions and, particularly the king's strenuous attempts for the sake of progress and prosperity earned Iran high repute and a strong position in international diplomatics. Since Mordad 28 and, especially in the past four to five years, the country has continually fortified itself in international politics, its political significance growing higher and higher. The king's trips to various European and Asian countries as well as his visits to England and the United States of America, his impressive speeches and press conferences, marked by comprehensive explanation of the foreign and interior affairs of his country made a precious contribution to the cognizance of his homeland. Iran, sunk into oblivion and obscurity before the reign of Reza Shah the Great, can now be righteously proud of its rapid progress, economic bloom, newly-established but speedily developing industry, the struggle for the improvement of the peasantry's conditions and the incredible victory won in all these spheres.

All the humiliating treaties and agreements have been torn up and all the bonds of slavery have been broken. Iran has stepped onto the triumphant path of independence, occupying an awesome and honorable position in politics and diplomacy.

Thanks to its far-sighted king's prudent policy, Iran has also fortified its position in international economy and trade. This country, rich in oil mines, fish and various other natural resources, has succeeded in arousing different states' and foreign companies' interest to establish commercial ties with it.

IRAN AND THE WHOLE WORLD DO NEED PEACE

Along with its glorious past, marked by the triumphant achievements and resounding victories of the Achaemenid, Arshacid and Safavid emperors, including Cyrus the Great, Dareh the Great, Shah Abbas and Reza Shah, Iran has also weathered the invasions of various tribes, the Arab rule, the two World Wars and different other grave calamities. It was particularly in the 19th and early in the 20th centuries that the country continually suffered damages, having turned into a theater of hostilities between the great powers.

Iran often faced the lethal danger of losing its independence and territorial integrity. Powerful foreign states frequently trampled upon the country's heavy efforts to make progress and thrive. Still, it has survived all those blows and catastrophes triumphantly.

It overcame the fatal years of World War II with heroic endeavors, escaping the dreadful crisis threatening its territorial integrity.

It goes without saying that even at present the social order and political existence of almost all the countries on the earth depend on the bilateral relations of two great powers, the United States and the Soviet Union. The Iranian Government and nation as well as all the other nationalities in the world are now desperate for peace and serenity, vital for the implementation of any reforms. Hundreds of millions of people are crying out in unison, "We need peace! Let all the wars go to blazes!" "May the instigators of that infernal, accursed war perish...!"

Despite all that, however, in the past several years the slumbering threat of still new disastrous wars has been hanging over mankind like the hated sword of Damocles. Many conferences, meetings and negotiations have been held, many plans and strategies worked out, but unfortunately, of no avail. Vast multitudes of wretches are still horrified at the thought of the possible outbreak of a new war. Almost every day new hotbeds of war, like Kashmir, Vietnam, Laos, Kongo, Yemen, Berlin, Cuba and the Chinese-Indian frontier, come into being so that the angel of peace, who appears every time hearkening to the entreaties and supplications of humanity, escapes horrified.

What immense calamity would have overtaken mankind if Khrushchev, Prime Minister of the Soviet Union, had not issued an order (at half past one on the morning of October 25) for the return of the warships from Cuba - they had, perhaps, gone there for the purpose of conveying munition and, probably, atomic bombs to that country. Determined to secure peace for all the world, on the night of October 29, the Soviet Prime Minister commanded that the Russian specialists send back all the artillery handed to Cuba.

If the Soviet Prime Minister had insisted on the realization of his decision, humanity would have been exterminated in the jaws of the ghastly atomic war within just a few days, beginning with October 25...

On October 24, solemnities were held in Teheran to celebrate the seventeenth anniversary of the foundation of the United Nations Organization (UNO). A special stamp was issued on that occasion and the scouts hoisted the Organization's special flag in Bharestan and Esfand 24 Squares. In the House of Culture an afternoon party and ceremony were organized, during which Court Minister Ala conveyed the king's congratulating message to those present. It particularly stated the following, "We hope that soon an end will be put to the inter-state conflicts and the UN will be provided with a brilliant opportunity to take more vigorous actions for the sake of peace and economic, social and cultural prosperity."

The head of the Iranian Government, the Minister of Education and Dr. Daftar, the head of the UN office in Iran, made speeches, praising the peace-keeping efforts and sacrifices of that Organization and wishing it to strengthen and fortify its position and influence to even a larger extent.

The UN's Iranian Office, which has many followers in the country, has been carrying out wide-scale propaganda for peace-keeping purposes.

REFLECTIONS

From June 15 till September 15 of this year, we hosted four young men, including my second son Artush, one of his two friends, Edik Gasparian and our compatriot and old friend Aghasi Movsissian. Having studied abroad and taken up work there, they had come to Teheran for their holidays. I shall now try to introduce briefly those young men to my readers.

Aghasi Movsissian completed his higher education in France many years ago and resettled in Teheran, where he achieved a secure financial position, being engaged in crafts and commerce. Some eight to nine years later, he emigrated from Teheran to Buenos Aires, Argentina, and again occupied himself with trade in shoes.

My son Artush left for the United States nine years ago to study electrical engineering at a university. Completing his six-year education, he was employed by a big American company.

One of my son's classmates, Zhora Mamikonian, received medical education at a university in Germany and has been practising Medicine in Western Germany for three years now.

Artush's younger friend Hrach Manukian is our relative Tigran Manukian's elder son. At the end of this summer, he is leaving for Brussels to complete the last course at the local University of Music and continue his education in America.

The parties, held on the occasion of the young men's arrival, were always attended by some forty to fifty relatives and friends, comprising people of every occupation, who had widely differing world outlooks and modes of thought. Indeed, our dear guests were in the center of general attention. Once I had an interesting conversation with one of those present at a party. That being quite a remarkable talk, I have tried to recollect it below.

One of those gathered at the big table asked Aghasi Movsissian, "What were your impressions of the country you settled in?"

"That question has several answers," our old friend said. "I'll try to reply to it from the standpoint of the issues you may be particularly interested in. But for the political upheaval and the struggle for power that shook Argentina to its very foundation, that country would, perhaps, now be the second richest and most thriving industrial and democratic state in the American continent, after North America. Unfortunately, it has been stripped of the blessings of peace, tranquility and stability as a result of the collision of rival interior and, especially foreign interests.

"As for the Armenian community in Argentina, unluckily, I'm not aware of exactly how large it is. The entire Armenian population in the country and, especially Buenos Aires, must amount to about 20,000 to 25,000. Regretful as it is, the Armenian community doesn't have national schools. There now exist two hostile sides which are fighting a heavy religious struggle through their own newspapers. Luckily, now that enmity has somehow abated thanks to the peacemaking policy of a diocese archbishop called Abadian, who has recently arrived in the capital. The conflicting parties are now even cooperating with each other.

"If we don't make hard efforts and act in unity and solidarity for the sake of the survival of Argentina's Armenian community, I'm sure its existence will be merely consigned to history in some forty to forty-five years."

“Unfortunately, the same’s true of California,” my son continued. “The Armenians, particularly the Turkish Armenians once embarked upon large-scale undertakings in Fresno, taking advantage of the freedom and security they had been granted. The Armenian multimillionaries in Fresno own large farms, gardens, factories, dairy farms as well as fruit-growing and cattle-breeding complexes. The Armenian families in Los Angeles, San Francisco and California enjoy prosperity, too.

“Unluckily, however, very few of them think of taking any measures for the maintenance of their identity. Each party has its own church, priest and leader. Indeed, there’re also certain desperate people who live in complete isolation. What’s puzzling about all this is how they’re going to share Jesus and Gregory the Enlightener.”

Artush’s joke made all of us roar with laughter, after which we asked him to continue his interesting account.

“There’s still another very painful fact. Having carved out some career and profession for us at the expense of our parents’ long, persistent, hard work and endless sacrifices, we’re deprived of the chance to serve at least our birthplace, our dear Iran, let alone our forefathers’ land. Why shouldn’t my friends, for instance, Edik, Zhora and Hrach, work for the benefit of our beloved country, instead of using their education, knowledge and profession for the foreigners’ profit and welfare?

“Don’t you think this is rather a bitter, inconsolable fact?”

“Still, there’s something even more distressing and regrettable,” I interrupted. “My dear son and you, my respected friends, at present all of you devote all your zeal and energy, your work and efforts to the foreign countries. You’re known all over the world as Armenians. Perhaps, you’re even appreciated as Armenians, but your children will certainly be deprived of the pride and glory of being called Armenians. They’re sure to face the slumbering threat of alienation, which will turn them into merely lost elements for the Armenian nation.”

EPILOGUE

Before finishing my memoirs, I find it expedient to add some concluding remarks.

I hope those kind enough to read both these volumes feel and appreciate the perfect objectivity guiding me while I was giving an account of all the events I have witnessed on the way I have covered.

I think my dear readers have been able to arrive at proper conclusions after having read the story of my struggles, sufferings and ups and downs. I want to believe that they will succeed in attaching value to the sincerity of my opinions and meditations, reflected in this final part of my recollections.

Just like so many people, I hold Mr. Simon Vratsian in great respect as a true Armenian and a devoted patriot. He wrote the following lines in one of his last articles, “ ‘The Armenian radio is on the air’ . Every time I turn on the radio, I start looking for a voice that is infinitely dear to my heart, ‘Yerevan is on the air’...”

“You can often hear swear words. So what? At least those swearing swear in *Armenian*. Swear from the *capital of Armenia*.” (See the Armenian original in “Alik” daily, N 7306)

Probably, Mr. Vratsian is convinced that *Yerevan is obliged to swear*. A generous man by nature, he is not annoyed at that compulsory blasphemy.

Then, a question arises: if a skilled leader, who has passed through the crucible of political upheavals, is ready to be so indulgent, why do his very respected followers not tolerate Yerevan’s obscenities at least temporarily? I am convinced if they followed Mr. Vratsian’s example and listened to those profanities patiently, their indulgence would be considered highly noble and respectable.

Undoubtedly, the teachers and intellectuals who have recently left for Armenia from Syria and Lebanon comprised Dashnaks or their adherents. Ask them to tell you in all conscience if those in power in Armenia (even if they belong to another party of rival political ideology) are Armenians and true patriots.

I find it necessary to remind my reader about certain things before finally closing my book.

My own impressions of Armenia being already in the past, I prefer to present briefly the indisputable conclusions made by some respectable people who have recently visited our motherland.

At the end of quite a long meeting with Vratsian, literary critic K. Polatian said the following to his interlocutor, as if summing up their conversation, “I am sorry to inter-

rupt you, dear Mr. Vratsian. I remember some years ago you wrote somewhere that ‘those living in that country cannot help being patriots.’” Then he added, “I repeat, I am sure there cannot be found a single Armenian who does not love his homeland.

“We should firmly believe in this truth. We have never faced enemies throughout our history. It was our own brothers who had discrepancies with us, making claims to the same paternal legacy. Brothers and members of the same family, akin to each other by history, blood, culture, sufferings and hopes.

“Armenia and the Diaspora should complement each other in the domains of economy, culture and politics. Each of them should follow its own course of actions, indeed, spiritually clinging to a single aim, the preservation of the true Armenian identity.” (See the Armenian original in “Alik” daily, N 6876, April 10, 1961)

V. Hovhannissian’s book entitled “Armenia as I Saw It,” that has been recently published by the “Alik” daily, is a rare summation of the author’s impressions of his fatherland. Every Armenian should necessarily have and read that interesting work of great value.

Himself a clergyman, Hovhannissian has been very careful in his analysis of political issues. However, he has failed to hide his hurt patriotism, just the same feeling I had many, many years ago, when I encountered the Georgians’ ungrateful and chauvinistic attitude towards the Armenians: I have mentioned it in both volumes of my memoirs. Father Hovhannissian is very indignant about the Georgians’ thankless, base treatment of the 200,000 Armenians living in Tiflis at present. The same ill-treatment is shared by the Armenian population in Akhaltskha and Akhalkalak*, to say nothing of the obliteration of Khojivank Church, the neglect and abandonment of the titans of Armenian literature, i.e. Raffi, Tumanian, Sundukian, the displacement and disappearance of the remains of prominent Armenian commanders Loris Melikov, Arshak Ter-Ghukassian, Behboutian and other outstanding personalities.

Summarizing this tragedy, the author writes, “At present the Armeno-Georgian relations are marked by even greater tension than in the times of the tsars. The Armenians do not like the Georgians, the Georgians do not like the Armenians, while these two peoples have been close allies for centuries, always struggling against the invasions of the great conquerors together, in unison. Georgia owes its existence to the Armenian army: we have always acted as a kind of shield for that country. Most presumably, the destinies of these two nations will again be linked together in future.” (See the Armenian original in “Alik” daily, N 7156, March 28, 1962).

In light of the aforementioned lines written by an objective and highly reliable witness, it is quite expedient to ask those blaming the present-day Armenian Government for its lack of patriotism and love for foreigners if their accusations are really firm-grounded. If it is so, why do the leaders of our homeland not establish friendly relations with the Georgian authorities, stimulated by that very love for foreigners? Why do they not send them bunches of roses and show them red-carpet treatment to please and flatter them to a most incredible extent?

I am convinced that all the Armenians living in Armenia are true patriots. How can we hear and read about all kinds of cultural, literary, sports measures taken in our home-

* “You cannot find trace of any Georgians there,” the author says.

land and neglect them? After all, these actions pursue the single aim of maintaining the Armenian identity and fostering patriotism in the nation. Can we not appreciate the praiseworthy solemnities held on the occasion of the 1600th anniversary of St. Mesrop Mashtots' birth, when the prominent inventor of our unmatched letters was honored and lauded in numerous press publications?

We keep stating that Armenia is not an independent country, something not surprising at all. Under the present political, diplomatic and military situation, our homeland simply cannot gain independence and sovereignty.

It is common knowledge that America enjoys a highly-developed system of democracy. The fifty-one to fifty-two states are fully entitled to control their own affairs and make independent decisions, only issues of foreign policy, diplomacy and military problems falling beyond their jurisdiction. All human beings are endowed with the natural rights of shaping their own destinies, deciding their course of action and mode of living. Despite all these declarations, however, U.S. president Kennedy ordered thousands of his armed policemen, supplied with military equipment, to siege the provincial University of Mississippi only because that institution had admitted a black young man named James Mebidis.

What would the Diasporan Armenians undertake if Moscow intervened in such a case in Yerevan? Undoubtedly, all of us would raise a storm of protest against that flagrant violation of our people's rights.

Unfortunately, under the current political situation all over the world, no country can boast of enjoying absolute independence, even if it itself thinks otherwise. Even the great powers' independence and sovereignty have their boundaries and restrictions. None of the states dares to implement the policies they want and achieve the objectives they pursue: let us remember Khrushchev, the very first person in the Soviet Union, who failed to reach the results he had planned to. The countries of the whole world now have no other remedy but to establish relations based on well-calculated considerations and incessant concessions.

All Armenians around the world have to follow a single prudent, far-sighted policy. We are haunted by the thought that sooner or later all of us will face the slumbering danger of alienation and total loss of our identity in the foreign countries, where our compatriots are deprived of national schools even in the areas, densely-populated by Armenians. Therefore, we should make every possible endeavor to appease our intra-national conflicts and party discrepancies, attempting to achieve empathy in our relations.

If we do succeed in this, we shall be able to take the next saving step: the unanimous restitution of the territories, partitioned from Armenia illegally, through various base intrigues.

Then, what is even more important, we should act in harmony and solidarity to foster the Armenians' numerical growth both in our fatherland and Diaspora, in Iran, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and the other countries of the Near East, where we are not threatened by the danger of assimilation.

In a word, we should do our utmost to follow our prominent poet Charents' sacred commandment, which is a precious legacy for us, "Armenians, the only door to your salvation is your collective power."

THE END

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MY MEMOIRS
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