



THE ZORYAN INSTITUTE

THE LIGHT

FIFTY YEARS AFTER . . . //

By Armin T. Wegner

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Could any people have a loftier and
a nobler symbol, than that of Ararat,
which symbolizes Armenia from time
immemorial?

" Good Light, "

These are the words , one of the most ancient peoples on earth,
the Armenians salute each other with, when many others say "Good Morning". The
Armenians praise the light, because they pass, t on their mountainous country, a
hoary winter of seven months in the year. Sunlight does not only disperse the veil
of darkness, but it also brings with it wisdom and faith. I wish first to praise
that light, and then to bring back to memory the misery and the many persecutions
you tasted on the burning sands of deserts, while I remained the mute witness of
your sufferings. The light represents also the mystery of resurrection. We owe
to light, the eternal rebirth of this bitter, but pitifully lovely earth, with the
birth of every life, which is blessed by the light.

Dear friends, when you invited me this spring to the fiftieth anniversary
commemoration of the holocaust, it seemed to me, at first, that the sufferings of
my own country and people, the loss of my family, as well as my long exile, all
these had buried in me everything into silence. But when I began to think again
about your sufferings, which I witnessed with mine own eyes, they came to conscious-
ness once again. They had been stored in my subconsciousness as sad, but at the
same time unforgettable treasury of experience.

I remember still that early summer day, when exile was forced upon your people
by the Young Turks, who extradicated^{you} from your homeland, where you had lived for
thousands of years. Under the orders of the Turkish irregulars and soldiers, the
caravans of confused crowds were moving to the south. Everybody was utterly hope-
less, and only a few peasants had been able to procure some carts, driven by mules,
on part of their way. Strange carts were they, which must have come from ancient
times, and perhaps it was your love of traditions and customs that kept them still
alive. Their huge wheels made a melancholic sound, which, in the past, seemed to
the Armenian peasant a melody, but on their way to death, it sounded like a sad dirge.
In the past those wheels would say: "Work hard, work hard. Work, love and death.
How sweet is life, and why shouldn't people be gay? Dear homeland, we are always
ready to suffer and die for you, Holy Armenia!"

The undeterminable lines of the caravans followed each other, and when the
dusty clouds settled down, one could see on the roads thousands of children, whose
mothers, unable to carry any further, had dropped them down, hoping that some mer-
ciful Turkish mother would pick them up. Some children perhaps were saved, but they
grew as Turks, and eternally ignorant of their origin.

Some six months later, as a member of the army headquarters of Commander Von
Der Goltz, and with part of the Ottoman army, we were despatched from Constantinople



to Baghdad via Konia, Tarsus, Aleppo, Ras el Ain and Mosul. At every opportunity, during a stop over, I would separate from our Turkish and German travelling companions, and resort to the nearby refugee camps, where I would endeavour to encourage the poor souls, but I could do no more than distribute medicines to them.

Near Aleppo, hundreds of Armenian men, women and children, victims of various contagious diseases, were living on the plains of that big commercial city. This is that city the governor of which cabled to the Turkish Minister of the Interior Affairs, Talaat Pasha, saying: "The caravans of the Armenian refugees reached Aleppo. What must we do?" To which, Talaat cabled back the following message: "The purpose of the deportations is annihilation."

A few days later, I continued my way to Mosul with the staff of the German commander, composed of a dozen German officers and civil servants. On the entrance to the deserts, in a watery Ras el Ain, at sunrise, I met a big caravan, which had remained as the saddest and most pitiful scene I ever witnessed in my whole life. I saw a crowd of people exhausted of fatigue. Some of them with little money, and others, little food as provision on their way to death. Outside the camp, I saw a group of children 7 to 10 years old, who had lost their parents, either ~~ka~~ killed by the Turkish irregulars, or by the Kurds, or fallen dead as a result of exhaustion. Huddled together, shivering and frozen from the ~~i~~ bitter chill of the desert in the night, they were all crying aloud ~~like~~ like a chorus. No one was interested with their lot, because everybody had his ~~w~~ own problems. The Germans avoided entering the refugee camps, because they were afraid to contract disease, and then, they would be suspected by the Turks, as everybody interested in the Armenians was looked upon with suspicion. At the cost of my personal safety, I always followed them, but without being able to do something for them. I would silently weep for their sufferings, and depart from them with a sense of shame, cursing the cruelty and barbarism of the human species. In memory of those innocent martyrs, I baptized my daughter, born after the war, with the sweet Armenian name of "Anoush."

When we reached the banks of the Tigris River, I heard of something, which had happened earlier. A group of Armenian girls and women had gathered together on one of the protruding banks of the river. Then holding each others' arms tightly, they had thrown themselves into the water with a mysterious song on their lips. Their ~~high~~ high moral sense, which had come as a precious inheritance from their ancients, urged them to die with honour, rather than be raped or die slowly ending as food to the wild jackals of the desert.

A year later, after recovering from my sickness, I was on my way to Constantinople with some friends in an old carriage, via the banks of the Tigris river, and Aleppo city. From the tens of thousands of refugees I had seen previously in the camps, only a few hundreds were left. All over the desert, there were dead bodies and skulls. When we stopped by night to put up in an ~~inn~~ inn, we had first to clear out the piles of skeletons heaped up at the entrance.

We had to wait for some time at Meskené, our last station before coming out of the desert. I would gaze and gaze with amazement at the patient perseverance of ~~it~~ those miserable creatures to reorganize their dilapidated lives once again. Among them, some had earlier swallowed a few gold coins, and had later recovered them in their refuse. Others started on commerce by using holes in the ground as shops. Turkish guards were distributing the little flour donated by American missionaries. I saw in the middle of a camp, a miserable woman, who had gone mad from the horrible sights she witnessed during the deportations. When the guard put the flour in her palm, she would let it flow through her fingers, mix it with the sand of the ground and then amuse herself with it.

A parish priest told me that he had buried hundreds of displaced refugees, and thirty-one fellow priests. He then added in fluent French:



- "Autrefois j'étais un prêtre; maintenant je suis un mouton qui va à la mort."
(Before I was a priest, but now I am a sheep driven to slaughter.)

The same priest gave me letters of petition addressed to his relatives in America. I carried them, under my belt, to Constantinople, and then delivered them to the American embassy, a few weeks before the entry of the latter country into the war. The destiny of these deported people was unpredictably strange. A youth who had survived the holocaust by working as a shepherd to the flock of an Arab, went to a public house in Aleppo after the end of the war. When he approached the girl, a sign under her arm pit captured his attention. After some questionings, he understood much to his horror that the girl was his sister...

Dear friends:

Fifty years have elapsed from that first summer day. I am now an old man, and perhaps this is the last time I commemorate the spirits of those innocent souls, when I ~~will~~ I'll unite with them in the shadow of the kingdom of death. At this fiftieth anniversary, I don't wish to speak only about the sorrows of the Armenians, as life for them has now regained its natural course. On the high plateaus of ~~Asia~~ Asia Minor, on the elevations of Ararat, according to tradition, Noah's Ark found its rest after the deluge. Patriarch Noah sent a dove to see if water had receded from land, and the bird brought back in its beak, the olive branch of peace. Could any people have a loftier and a nobler symbol, than that of Ararat, which symbolizes Armenia from time immemorial?

The ~~word~~ "Good light", which I mentioned earlier, is reflected to all the world, from the peaks of Ararat. The Armenians have once again their own homeland, where they ~~think~~ think and converse in their vernacular. Although one half of her children are in forceful exile in the diaspora, but they also serve, with their particular intelligence and resourcefulness, in the progress of their adopted countries. The destiny which Talaat Pasha had planned in his cable message despatched to Aleppo - "Annihilation" - finally became your resurrection.

Suffering implies a strong potential energy, which renders the subject humble and surmountable, and it leads the free minds to the full understanding of the unmutable mysteries of life and death. I wish the world to take a lesson from your pains and sufferings, and perceive the horrible results of the persecution of human beings, as it was first the lot of Armenians at the turn of the century, and to which other people submitted some decades later, on the same painful road. Whoever, driven by sheer selfishness and lust of power, disregards the lives of other men, their freedom and self-respect, destroys not only the others, but also himself. As human beings, we have the symptoms and roots of rebirth. The reconstruction on the ruins of life is a mystery, which is achieved by faith and noble vision.

The salutation of "Good Light", which the children of Armenia say to each other, shines brilliantly on their foreheads. They praise the light with gaiety, the light, which tastes like honey on their lips, and under its influence the grapes of the vineyard are sweetened unto wine.

Here, in a foreign country, I listen through the silence of the night, dear Armenian friends, who honoured me with your trust, and it seems to me that I hear once again the sound of those huge wheels of the strange carts driven by mules, just as your people were leaving the Armenian highlands. However, this time the sound is not a dirge, but a song of life, which tells: "Work hard, work hard. ~~Life~~ Life, love and dream. How beautiful is life? Country, Motherland, Armenia - We went far, but we are reborn by the mediation of the 'good light'. We grow, and live forever for your glory, holy Armenia!"

Rome, March 1965

No. 1078



Saint Etchmiadzin
December 9, 1964

Mr. Stephan Srabian
Milano

Dear Mr. Stephan,

I want to bring to your attention a personage - and I want to stress the importance of him - who has given valuable testimonies to the horrible years of 1915-16, when our nation underwent martyrdom in western Armenia and in the northern deserts of Syria.

The personage which I want to introduce to you is a German writer. He is 80 years old now, and lives in Italy. His name is Armin T. Wegner. During the years of 1914-1918, he was a war correspondent in Turkey, writing for German newspapers. During 1915-16 he was a sanitarian official in Von Der Goltz' army, stationed in Mesopotamia, thereby being an eyewitness to the deportations and martyrdom of our people. According to our reports he has approximately 2000 pictures concerning the deportations and martyred Armenians.

In 1919, after the war, he has given public lectures and written articles defending our cause, under the theme "Die Ausstreibung des armenischen Volkes in die Wüste" (The dispersion of the Armenian peoples in the desert). In the same year he has published his famous "Open Letter" addressed to President Wilson. In later years he has published "Der Weg ohne Heimkehr" (The Way to no Return), "Armeniaca" and other writings favorable to the Armenians.

In 1927 he has visited Armenia and on the basis of his impressions has written a book dedicated to Armenia and the rebirth of the Armenian people.

In 1935, as a result of his antifascist activities, he has been jailed, tortured and has miraculously saved himself from the grips of death.

To one of his Armenian friends he wrote: "The detained me in a time when I had finished the paragraph in a novel where I was describing ~~the~~ an Armenian being tortured in a Turkish prison. Very soon I felt and lived the same torments on my body."

¶ Fleeing from Germany he goes to England, and in 1935 he settles in Italy.

He called his first baby-girl by an Armenian name - Anoush, giving evidence of his sympathy towards the Armenian people. Writing to his Armenian friend, this noble German said, "I am calling my baby-girl Anoush, in memory of the thousands of infants, who, together with their mothers, perished in the deserts of Mesopotamia."

Armin Wegner was a talented and fruitful writer. He has many published books, and collaborated with important periodicals. ~~It is true x that~~ he has unpublished writings, documents and particularly personal ~~memoirs~~ recollections on the events of our martyrdom. Publication of these papers, we think, would render a great service to our cause.

Being well aware of the fervour in your heart as a true patriot, I am sure that you will do your best to contact Armin Wegner and find the means ~~to~~ to publish his documents, and republish part of what he has written and spoken on the deportations and torments of the Armenian people.

I think it would be worthwhile to ~~publish~~ publish his "open letter" addressed to President Wilson.



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-2-

I am sure that this German writer's testimonies, ~~memoirs~~ and memoirs will also interest Antranig Zaroukian, who will be glad to publish them in "Naïri".

If Wegner's documents ~~are~~ - as far as quantity and importance is concerned - happen to be of particular value, we think that they can be published as a separate volume, both in Armenian and in one foreign language, English or French.

Awaiting your answer and the result of your efforts, I remain,

Vasken the First

Supreme Patriarch ~~and~~
Catholicos of all Armenians