



During the last week in January 1920 two young men -- one a Turk, the other Armenian -- who had grown up as neighbors and friends, found themselves leaders of opposing forces in a deadly battle. For the Turks it was the first battle in their War of Independence. For the Armenians it was a battle for survival.

The northwestern section of Marash -- known as the Koulaghi Kourtluou quarter -- was in flames. The area resounded with rifle and machine-gun fire, with an occasional crash of high explosive shells fired by French 65 mm. cannon on the crest of a ridge above them where troops of the Armenian Legion occupied the Turkish barracks, fighting under the French tri-color.

Turkish insurgents under the command of Bayazid Zade Shukru and Kadir Pasha had already destroyed the Gregorian churches of St. George and St. Stephen and had annihilated all those who had taken refuge in them. Now they were 'cleaning up' the quarter, burning even the houses of Moslems in order to destroy the neighboring Armenians who remained embattled in their walled compounds.

North of the ancient citadel -- at whose gate stood the famous Lion of Marash, covered with undeciphered Hittite characters -- lay the walled compound enclosing the buildings of Evliye Zade Hadji Evliye Effendi, the highest ranking of all the Moslems of Turkey -- the Sheikh -el- Islam. His nephew -- also named Evliye Effendi -- led a group of the Marash fighters from his quarter.

Across the street was the property of the Seferians, a family of Armenian merchants who had always been on good terms with their Moslem neighbors. Six years earlier Avedis Seferian had



graduated from a Turkish military academy, but now commanded a group of volunteers pledged to defend Armenian lives and property in that quarter of Marash. Even during his period of training in the military academy near Constantinople he had maintained friendly contact with Evliye Effendi, who then was practising law in that city.

After three days of fighting the Turkish bands had encircled the Seferian property. From a minaret a Turk called to them:

"Surrender and we shall protect you. If not, you will all be killed!"

The Armenians understood that surrender meant death, for the promise of protection had already been made to thousands, and all had been slaughtered. Avedis Effendi took counsel with his group of fifteen fighters and with the leaders among the one hundred and fifty citizens who had taken refuge in the ^{three} Seferian houses.

"If we could set fire to Evliya Effendi's house, all of the Turkish fighters will try to save it, for his ^{uncle} is the Sheikh-el-Islam!" suggested Avedis. "Then our people could escape."

"Where can they go?" asked one of the Armenian leaders. "The churches near us have been burned!"

"Let them scatter -- some to the Church of the Holy Virgin, or to the Tash Khan (the stone warehouse in the market). If they stay here they will be burned to death."

Avedis and his helpers made several bundles of clothing, each one weighted with a stone, and soaked them in kerosene. One by one these were set on fire and tossed across the street onto the house of Evliye and his ^{uncle} the Sheikh. The house caught fire. Shouting to each other to help, the Turkish fighters set their rifles



aside in order to carry water. Evliye effendi himself directed the fire - fighters.

"Bak -- look! There is Evliye!" shouted one of the Armenians as he fired. Evliye disappeared. "I hit him!", cried the marksman, but none of them really knew.

While this action was taking place, refugees had been slipping out of the Seferian compound to seek shelter elsewhere. Avedis and his fighters remained until the last to cover their retreat. After dark they divided into groups of three or four, altered their head-gear to resemble that of the Turks, and sauntered into the street talking in the manner of the Turks rather than with the somewhat different pronunciation used by Armenians. They found it impossible to reach any of the churches, which were already under attack, but took shelter in an Armenian house near the Bedeater -- the covered bazaar.

Within a few days this too was besieged and set on fire. Those who ran out were shot down, and only a dozen of the three hundred in the building escaped. Avedis and two armed companions made a dash for shelter. Two of them fell but Avedis reached the Tash Khan, and only there discovered that his trousers were soaked with blood from a flesh wound in his thigh.² (Seferian)

The Turkish historian records the following:

"Muallim Evliye Effendi, who had been fighting since the beginning of the Marash events, took with him enough fighters to clean out the French from the Tash Khan and captured it. After this he turned northward and continued the mopping up -- one by one -- of the houses near the barracks where French and Armenians had taken shelter, but an enemy bullet made this son of the Turks a shehit (a fallen patriot)." *1

The historian was in error about the Tash Khan, which remained in French hands throughout the siege. Avedis Seferian knew that Evliye Effendi had been killed during their encounter only from the above passage, nearly fifty years later.