

It is in that hall that I came to know Goumitas Vartabet, the Armenian priest, musician, and composer. He was one of those musicians, actors, and lecturers of fame whom the Ojak invited to address its weekly audiences.<sup>6</sup>

Goumitas had become very famous with the Anatolian songs and the music of the old Gregorian chants which he had collected during years of patient labor in Constantinople and Anatolia. He had trained a choir of the Armenian youth and was considered a great leader among the Armenians.

As he appeared in the long black coat of the priest, his dark face as naïve as any simple Anatolian's, and his eyes full of the pathos and longing which his voice expressed in its pure strong notes, I felt him an embodiment of Anatolian folk-lore and music.

The airs were the ones I had often heard our servants from Kemah and Erzeroum sing. He had simply turned the words into Armenian. But I did not pay any attention to the language; I only felt the inner significance of that tender and desolate melody from the lonely wastes of Anatolia.

The acquaintance that began that day continued, Goumitas often coming to my house to sing. He continued to come even after the Armenians and Turks were massacring each other. We both silently suffered

<sup>6</sup> Opinion was divided in the Ojak about the program for the weekly performances. Some wanted only Turkish things to be given, while others insisted that it would have a more widening effect to have the beauty and the culture of other nations. The latter point of view triumphed at the time.

under the condition of things, but neither of us mentioned it. Mehemmed Emin and Yahia Kemal Beys, both great poets who had always taken a humanitarian view of nationalism, were interested in his personality and came to hear him. Youssouf Akchura also came, prompted by his love of music, but he declared that Goumitas had done a great harm to the Turk by stealing his popular culture in the form of music and songs.

Goumitas came from Kutahia and was of very poor parents. They knew no Armenian, and Goumitas learned it only in later life. His parents were probably of Turkish descent, from the Turkis who had joined the Gregorian Church. The Byzantine rulers had called in Turkish tribes to form a barrier against the Saracenic invasions, and though these were mostly put along the southern frontiers, some might have moved elsewhere.<sup>7</sup>

Goumitas's voice had attracted the attention of the Armenian church leaders in Kutahia, and he was sent to Rome very early to be trained in music as well as to be made a priest. He was an Armenian nationalist whether his origin was Turkish or Armenian, but in temperament and heart he was a real Anatolian Turk if unconsciously. His musical vein was inherited. I remember the very words he spoke which gave me the clue.

<sup>7</sup> A great number of the Christian minority, mostly Greek and some Armenian, spoke only Turkish and looked very Turkish. It was a mistake I believe and not good policy to let them enter into the exchange in the Lausanne Conference. If a Turkish church had been recognized independently of the Greek and Armenian churches, there were enough conscientious Christian Turks, and a very valuable element too, who would have stayed in Turkey.

"I inherited from my parents a pair of red shoes and a song," he said. "The shoes were from my father, but the song was from my mother; she composed the music, and made the words."

It was a simple song about two white pigeons, and in the purest Anatolian dialect. To this day it is the women in Anatolia who compose songs and make folk-poetry. It goes from mouth to mouth, and the best naturally survives.

As a man and as an artist Goumitas was of a quality one rarely meets. His asceticism, the pure and beautiful simplicity with which he taught the Armenians, might well have been imitated by other nationalists. His way of expressing Anatolia both in song and in feeling was profoundly worth hearing.

Goumitas one day sang an Ave Maria in Armenian which belonged to the sixth century, a thing of rare mystical beauty; and the utter ecstasy and religious emotion of the air so fascinated me that I asked him if he had set any of the Psalms to music.

"Yes," he said, "the one-hundred-and-first."

"Are you too tired to sing it?" I asked.

He had thrown himself into the low chair near the piano, and his face was white and full of strange lines of pain.

He began singing without moving from the chair. As he began to sing I felt that the air had none of the sacred and humble beauty of the Ave Maria. It began like a hissing curse, bitter, rebellious, and angry; as he

went on he rose slowly, looking like the apparition of Mephisto in "Faust," drawing himself to his full height as he reached the last words. Then with his arms raised, his face like a white flame, and his eyes like two black flashes, his tones ended like a peal of echoing thunder. It awed me and made me feel strange. I instinctively took the Bible from the bookcase near me and found the last stanzas of Psalm 101.

I will early destroy all the wicked of the land: that I may cut off all wicked doers from the city of the Lord.

It was the cry of the hatred and vengeance of his soul for my people. He had such a look of madness and suffering that I tried to be absolutely calm and quiet, but he looked embarrassed; he knew that we had looked into each other's souls. We were seeing each other, with the Armenian and Turkish blood, and Armenian and Turkish suffering, as an increasing flood between us.

In 1915 the Ojak generously used its influence to have him spared from deportation, but in 1916 he had a serious disturbance in his mind, which gave way under the strain of those horrible times. Dr. Adnan begged Talaat Pasha to allow him to go to Paris for a cure, and this was accorded to him. He is still in an asylum.

He was not the only one to be afflicted by politics, translated into human wickedness. I saw in Angora in 1922 a Turkish woman from Erzeroum, who had pitched a frail tent by the waters of Tchoubouk. She had been a refugee since 1917 and had been wandering all over

Anatolia with her husband.<sup>8</sup> I see her now, tall, her weather-beaten face like a piece of wrinkled leather, only the brilliant blue eyes and their black fringes denoting her youth. I remember her very words as she told me how her four boys, the eldest eight and the youngest two, had been massacred, how she had had to leave them among flames and blood and escape with her life, and how she heard their call every night. She did not sing her pain in Psalms, but it was the selfsame pain of Goumitas in my room at Fazli Pasha. I know a man, an Erzeroum member of the first national assembly, who would not hear of mercy to the Armenians because seven members of his family, including his young wife and his sister-in-law, had been butchered by Armenians. I knew a poor Armenian in Syria who had lost his speech and wandered in the night crying like a dumb tortured animal because he imagined his two boys, who were separated from him, had been shot. I know . . . never mind what I know. I have seen, I have gone through, a land full of aching hearts and torturing remembrances, and I have lived in an age when the politicians played with these human hearts as ordinary gamblers play with their cards.

I who had dreamed of a nationalism which will create a happy land of beauty, understanding, and love, I have seen nothing but mutual massacre and mutual hatred;

<sup>8</sup> I have written her story as she told it to me under the title of "A Woman from Erzeroum." The women of Angora became very much interested in her and visited her and tried to help her. She left for Erzeroum in one of the groups of refugees that were sent back to their country by the government.



I have seen nothing but ideals used as instruments for creating human carnage and misery.

There were great idealists and lovers of humanity in Russia who have suffered and died in order to demolish the barriers between classes and nations and to bring brotherhood and happiness to their kind. The result is just as ugly as what I myself have seen.

When will true heart and understanding come to humanity?—not merely in name and principles. Now I can only say with Kant, “Ce n’est pas sans une violente répulsion que l’on peut contempler l’entrée en scène des hommes sur le théâtre du monde; encore plus grande que le mal fait aux hommes par la nature est celui qu’il se font réciproquement.”