

Our Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow

*History, Dilemma, and Destiny
of the Assyrian People*



Peter H. Talia

To our President

Peter Talia

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Today,
and Tomorrow*

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Acknowledgment

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*Dedicated to
Rev. and Mrs. William Lytle
who taught me
with love and compassion
the everlasting faith
of yesterday, today, and tomorrow*

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Foreword

The most striking thing about Peter Talia when I first met him was his native language: Aramaic. Aramaic, I thought, had been a dead language for almost two thousand years and here was a live, breathing native speaker! He was receiving letters written in the language of Christ, in the language of David—sent, no less, from Nineveh! It was as if I had discovered a dinosaur eating sycamore leaves in my front yard. Peter Talia is, I delighted to call him, a living fossil. Through Peter I came to know that there is a sizable community of Aramaic speakers, the Assyrians, scattered now far from their homeland; they are still, like Abraham, wandering Arameans.

It is remarkable that they have not lost their culture or language. And all the more so because these people, the Assyrians, have suffered so much persecution because of their Christian faith. Peter Talia's family is an example. His ancestors once lived in Turkey, but many of them were killed there in the great persecution earlier in this century. One of them was killed while he was ploughing in the field. His mother saw her own father thrown in a well and stoned to death in the well. At

night their home was attacked; but because the persecutors could not enter through a door or window, because they were barred, they tore an opening in the roof. Once inside, they hanged Peter's paternal grandfather and carried off a young girl, who was never seen again. Most of the remaining members of Peter's family fled to Persia, where they were eventually killed. Peter's parents fled instead to Iraq. There again they were persecuted. In the massacre of 1936, when Peter was only a few months old, they fled once more, this time to Syria. They left everything behind them except two blankets which were wrapped around Peter. Like Peter, most Assyrians today could name close relatives who have suffered violence because of their faith and ethnic heritage. That these people have survived makes them special. I think God has a certain pride in such people. Like a collection of rare objects of art, he takes an extra pleasure in the rare ones. And so the angels watch with awe as God protects a courageous people and preserves an ancient heritage.

Peter himself is part of the object of art, but even apart from his background he is interesting as an individual. Born in the tumult of persecution, taken in infancy to a foreign country, raised a pilgrim in a strange culture, Peter has acquired the cultural breadth of a Heroditus and the formal education of a Gamaliel. He received undergraduate training in philosophy and theology at Haigazian College, American University of Beirut, and the Near East School of Theology. He came to this country for graduate education, earning a Master's degree in Education, a Master of Divinity degree in Languages and Theology at Covenant Theological Seminary

and a Master of Sacred Theology degree at Concordia Theological Seminary. In 1978 he completed the Doctor of Theology degree at Concordia, writing his thesis on ratification of the Mosaic covenant in Exodus 24. He is the ultimate polyglot, knowing (besides Aramaic) Arabic, English, Hebrew, Greek, Ugaritic, Akkadian, Syriac, Latin, and German. He has three times received the World Mission Grant of the Lutheran Church; and in 1971 he won the Homiletics prize at Covenant Seminary for a sermon that has been widely circulated by the seminary. He has taught in high schools in Lebanon, in Zahleh Junior College, and at Washington University, St. Louis, U.S.A. I count it a special privilege to have him as a friend and to have been asked to write the foreword to his book.

Robert L. Canfield
Washington University
St. Louis, Missouri

Introduction

This little volume is set forth at a particular time to a particular people, with the undaunted hope that it may, in its limited pages, heal some broken heart, or at least mitigate the pain of some wounded soul, or throw some light on someone's darkened status quo. I send it forth with the hope to prescribe some nostrum to a distracted and homeless people wandering aimlessly in the barren wilderness of deliberately negligent mankind, "like sheep without a shepherd," being tossed from shore to shore and from land to land, with one foot in time and another in eternity knowing that they belong to neither.

This imperfect work has for some time been in incubation, but the present writer has hesitatingly withheld his pen and restrained himself from voicing his immature views on such irretrievable issues, problems, and possibilities contained in the scope and pages of this book. The unspeakably deplorable plight—socially, politically, educationally, religiously, ethically, ethnically and culturally—of a people from which I stem has constrained me as I advanced in years. A sense of moral responsibility has overwhelmingly impelled me to play my minor part, either physically, or morally or intellectual-

ly. Hence, this book. The purpose of it is remedial rather than prophylactic. It will be judged more by what it does not say than by what it portrays, more by what it excludes than by what it includes. The reader is my judge.

The present author is neither a diplomat, nor a politician, nor a statesman, nor an orator, and is almost a stranger to many laws and by-laws of the court.

Nevertheless, no conscientious person, particularly a clergyman, ought to retrogress, specifically in melancholic moments as ours when he tastes the ridiculous and the absurd, the ludicrous and the burlesque from the mob in the streets and the monarchs in the high places. These are serious and testing moments. We are fully aware of the invidious and detestable that corrode the young and the old, the just and the unjust. Factions and divisions, dissensions and seditions, animosity and abhorrence, malevolence and repugnance, have in a multitude of cryptic and frank avenues crept into the life of our community and are seriously destroying it. The whole body is sick, and there is no physician to be found in the land. The people is not only in a serious crisis; it is on the verge of disintegration while our so-called prophets make profit. It is a national degeneration that earnestly calls for a national regeneration. This is a time to fall down on our knees that the Almighty may raise a fearless Savonarola to point out our sins and shake us from our spiritual death; a hero like Luther to challenge the corruption of the age; a wise man like Socrates who could question answers and answer questions. This is an urgent moment to sound the tocsin of a renaissance and call the wits together, if there are any.

It is in the light of the above convictions that the author desires to send this little book to many people and friends in this land, and to folks and relatives abroad; hoping to find here and there an abundant soil in the country of their mind and soul. For what is more significant than speaking on the fundamental issues of a people—its problems and possibilities, its fears and failures, its trivialities and torments, and its past, present, and future—provided I have the words to say and you my reader, patience to listen.

Throughout the following pages, the course of the argument may be recapitulated thus: First, we shall fly on the wings of imagination to the land of four thousand years B.C., the country of the “Two Rivers” (Mesopotamia). We shall give reign to our fancy and remember our ancient ancestors. For a while we shall consider Tiglath-pileser I, the founder of the Assyrian empire. Other monarchs will follow him; some may allure us, others may shock us, and still others may move and stir us. We shall overlook their mistakes and failures. However, let us be humble and let the dead teach the living. In the first chapter, a little space is devoted to the history of that nation (Assyria), its collapse and its contribution. Next, we shall be ready to delve into the main subject, namely, the dilemmas of a people. Certain problems will be treated in order to awaken the people to the evils inherent therein. Some of these areas will only be grazed, others will occupy more space.

Then it became necessary to present a “panacea” to the above-mentioned evils. Some time will be given to the education of the youth; self-proclaimed leaders are weighed and found wanting. Purposes, goals, and di-

mensions are presented in their proper perspectives. Then a note is struck about a futuristic hope which we should take realistically and seriously if it is to be nationally realized. Finally, looking over the whole structure of the discussion, we shall bring all the threads together under one compendium and end our tour.

1

*An Excursion
in the Past*

“The life of the dead is in the
memory of the living.”

The readers of this book, and I hope there will be many, will not appreciate its value, nor fully understand their eminent heritage, nor be proud of the glory of their ancient ancestors, nor repletely realize the magnitude of their present degradation, without at least knowing something, no matter how minimal, of their resplendent past, the stock from which they emerged, and the land which their notable forefathers once occupied.

Past is always fascinating with all its blood and vain-glory, with all its delight, honor, and splendor; and sometimes there is even a spirit of pride that invades one and carries him to celestial bliss.

When I stood on the banks of Tigris and Euphrates in 1974, I found it difficult to believe that these two rivers once watered Sumaria, Akkad, and Assyria, and nourished the Hanging Gardens of Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. One finds it hard to believe that today's Kuyunjik (ancient Nineveh) which in its palmy days under Ashurbanipal included 300,000 people, and all the western Orient came to pay tribute to its great King. This capital, once the mistress of the ancient world, produced giants among pygmies, such as: Shalmaneser, Tiglath-pileser I,

Ashurbanipal II, Sargon, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, Ashurbanipal, and many more, among them an illustrious queen, Shamiram (the Greek Semiramis).¹ In a moment we shall turn to these monarchs and their accomplishments.

Unfortunately, I am writing at this time to a dormant, quiescent, listless, and spiritless community, the minority among minorities that only exists but hardly energetically leads an active life—socially, politically, educationally, religiously, either individually or collectively. As Nineveh slept buried beneath the ashes of time for centuries until the spade, the pick, and the pen of scholars resurrected it, thus we Assyrians have slept heavily for centuries, and hardly waiting or hoping to be resurrected. Therefore, I hope that each line in these pages will be used for the realization of an ethnic bond, a national coherence and a physically demonstrated unity of faith, hope, and awakening. Not a single passage, not a single sentence, not a word in this book is conjectured in the abstraction of thought. The totality of our personal existence is at stake. This is no time for pious wishes or meaningless words or mere lofty hopes or a utopia that never comes.

Too often we are fascinated by our past history and even proud of the name “Assyria,” once the most dominant nation of the East. We are familiar with certain names, stand agape and enthusiastically applaud when we read about or hear of Ashur, Sennacherib, Tiglath-

¹On February 24, 1933, and March 20, 1934, *The New York Times* issued an article stating that a tablet recently found in the ruins of Sargon II's library at Khorsabad contains an unbroken list of Assyrian kings from the twenty-third century B.C. to Ashur-ninari (753-746).

pileser, and Shamiram. They allure us. But that is all. There is no sacrifice, no voluntary action, no practical demonstration. It is sheer imagination; and imagination without a notable demonstration is sheer mortification. There is nothing sinful about building castles in the air provided we put some foundations under them. Our ancestors, their kings, their leaders, their priests and prophets were practical men. They built their temples, castles, palaces, and kingdoms, not on vain imagination, daydreaming and wishful thinking, but rather on power and perseverance, toil and sweat.

It is not my intention to make my readers dwell in the past. One can use the past and learn from it without remaining in it. I desire to use the rich past for the sake of the present and as an illustration and edification for the augmentation of the future.

From the pages of secular history and biblical narratives as well, we learn that the Assyrian kingdom was very powerful in the first millennium B.C. No ancient power could rival her at that time. In 1000 B.C. one word was sufficient to describe that epoch: "Assyria." This nation extended on both sides of the Tigris River and obviously included the area of greater Zab where Nineveh the capital once splendidly stood. Sometimes the portions of the plateau of Mesopotamia on the west extended as far south as the borders of Babylon, and north as far as the mountains of Kurdistan. Recent archeology has surprised archeologists and non-archeologists with the same data regarding the influence and might of Assyria and the annals of her kings.

Perhaps this glance at the Assyrian nation and her history takes us back to 1880 B.C. with the monarchs of

the city of Ashur. It is estimated that in that year, Kapkapi, whose origin is rather obscure, was the first ruler who conferred upon himself the title of king. Five centuries later, one of his descendants, Adad-ninari I (1312 B.C.) informs us about the wars Kapkapi waged against the hostile Babylonians, the Kurds, the Arameans in Aram (Syria), and the tribes along the western bank of the Euphrates River. For over five hundred years his dynasty succeeded the Assyrian throne, until a new chapter opened in the Assyrian politics and a new monarch appeared upon the scene. He was Tiglath-pileser I.

Tiglath-pileser I (1116-1078). Shalmaneser I (1265-1232 B.C.) had already brought the little city-states of the north under one rule and made Kalakh (Nimrud) his capital, at a time when Babylon was adumbrated by Kassites. But the first great name in Assyrian history is Tiglath-pileser I. He is considered, and rightly so, the founder of the first Assyrian empire. He burst upon the world as a mighty warrior before God and man. He had a strong character, and if we may believe everything that is written about kings, Tiglath-pileser slew 120 lions on foot, and 800 from his chariot. His fleeting chariots reached Cilicia in the west, his invincible armies crushed the Kurdish tribes in the east. Like a mighty wind, he scattered the Hittites in Anatolia, the Armenians, and about forty other nations. On his return from his victories, he erected a monument on the Tigris River as a token of his historical conquests.

As Tiglath-pileser moved around in his military itinerary, different nations reacted differently; some coalesced against him, others made peaceful treaties with him. Egypt played the policy of "wait-and-see." Being

frustrated by this king's might, she acted wisely—by sending gifts to him. He was particularly mollified by a crocodile.

With the wealth which Tiglath-pileser accumulated, he built temples to the Assyrian gods and goddesses, palaces for himself and his kinfolk. Then twelve years later, Babylon rebelled, defeated his armies, robbed his temples, and carried away his gods and goddesses to Babylon. Tiglath-pileser, we are informed, either burnt himself to death or died of shame.

After Tiglath-pileser's death, the Assyrian empire phantasmagorically dwindled for a period of time until the middle of the ninth century B.C. In Egypt new dynasties under supercilious monarchs emerged with considerable power to wield. In Palestine King Solomon was embracing new territories, accumulating extensive wealth, and increasing the size of his harem to match the size of his empire. In Syria, the Aramean power became a factor to be reckoned with in Middle East politics.

Power is a precarious human phenomenon. It has its youth, middle age, and demise. It rarely trusts anybody, and hardly anybody trusts it. It could be overthrown at any time by other powers either from within or from without. The Assyrian sceptre at this period in history fell into feeble hands; the empire lost its hold on conquered lands. The surrounding nations, even sister Babylon, seized the opportunity of a weak Assyria at every military turn and declared independence. The Hittites in the north were ruminating a total war of independence. The Assyrian power remained stagnant if not reduced until it was revived in the early ninth century in the person of Ashurbanipal.

Ashurbanipal (882-858 B.C.) was a potent and stern ruler who began a period of victorious campaigns that elevated Assyria to the pinnacle of the great powers of the day. He was a great military figure, a determinant soldier, a strategic organizer, and an avid hunter. He made no less than a dozen military campaigns, leading his well-equipped armies throughout Asia Minor, invading the restless sectors of that region, subduing the enemies throughout the north, south, east, and west of Assyria, from the mountains of Armenia in the north down to Babylon in the south, and from the mountains of Kurdistan and Lake Urmia in the northeast to the Mediterranean Sea. He crossed the Euphrates River and the Orantes, swept over the Lebanese mountains, attacked Qarqamish, the citadel of the Hittite empire, invaded Syria, and compelled the cities of the Mediterranean coast to pay tribute. His campaigns reached farther than those of his predecessor, Tiglath-pileser I. Armenia, Mesopotamia, and Kurdistan were conquered time and again. His armies penetrated even into Nizir, where the ark of the Chaldean Noah was believed to have made its abode on a peak of Rawandiz. In Assyria herself, the cities were decorated with the spoils of conquered countries, magnificent palaces were erected and decorated, and Kalakh (Nimrud), which had fallen into decay, was restored and became the favorite royal residence of Ashurbanipal. A library was established at the site of the capital, which became the significant treasure and source for our knowledge of the Assyrian and Babylonian life and culture.

One significant as well as international point has been of primary importance during Ashurbanipal's reign. It

was during his monarchism that Assyria first came in contact with Israel. In his campaign against Qarqamish and Syria (Aram), which probably took place in 878 B.C., Ashurbanipal exacted tribute from Omri, the king of Israel, the founder of a famous dynasty a century earlier. From this point on to the reign of Sargon, the land of Israel is often mentioned in the Assyrian annals as the "Land of Omri."

Ashurbanipal was succeeded by his son Shalmaneser III (859-825 B.C.). His name means, "the god of peace." He was one of the most powerful military leaders of his time. His extensive military activities and successes surpassed even those of his father, and his long reign of thirty-seven years marks the zenith of the first Assyrian empire. A visitor to the British museum will find the annals of this mighty king engraved on three monuments. One monolith is from near Dierbekir, northeast part of Syria, now in Turkey. Another monument, an "obelisk" of black stone which Austen Layard found in the middle of the last century in the imperial palace at Nimrud, shows king Jehu, the son of Omri, king of Israel, actually kneeling before the Assyrian king and offering him tribute. Following the prostrate Israeli king, come Israelites bearing gifts. The inscription reads: "Tribute of Iaua (Jehu), son of Omri, silver, gold, a golden bowl, a golden beaker, golden goblets, pitchers of gold, lead, staves for the hand of the king, javelins I received from him."² The third monument was discovered in 1877 at Balawat, about ten miles from the city of Nimrud. This is a gigantic monument. It con-

²D.D. Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylon*, vol. I (Chicago: 1927), pp. 735, 740.

sists of bronze work, twenty-two feet high and twenty-six feet broad. The monument is highly interesting and significant. Small descriptions are given of places and people that still can be identified.

One of the famous military activities of Shalmaneser was when he confronted a combined military force of king Ahab of Israel and Benhadad, king of Damascus, at Qarqar. The Assyrian monarch describes the battle and how he devastated men, chariots, and cities. He tells us that he killed 16,000 Syrians in one battle.

A second step taken by Shalmaneser III was his military campaign against the mountain tribes of Kurdistan; from thence he swept over Armenia, and compelled the Hittites of Qarqamish to pay tribute.

In 854 B.C., a confederacy was made against Shalmaneser. Irhulini, the king of Hamah, Benhadad, the king of Damascus, and Ahab, the king of Israel, joined in one common effort, with the hope to defeat once for all the undefeatable Shalmaneser. The three kingdoms contributed prodigally to the cause only to find out later that they were too feeble for the mighty king. The armies met at Qarqar for a second time. The battle was one of the greatest in the ancient world. Shalmaneser tells us, and perhaps with some exaggeration, that he shattered his enemy forces; he destroyed 1,200 chariots, 1,200 horsemen, 20,000 men of Damascus; 700 chariots, 700 horsemen, 10,000 men of Hamah; and 2,000 chariots, 10,000 men of Ahab of Israel.

Twelve years after the historic battle of Qarqar, Shalmaneser once again was marching westward. Hazael had succeeded Benhadad, the Syrian king. Hazael desired to prove to his subjects and to the world that a mighty mili-

tary leader had finally emerged in Syria (Aram). Hazel revolted, disturbed the Arameans against Shalmaneser. Shalmaneser did not hesitate to respond. The two armies met at the plain of Shinar. Hazel was humiliatingly defeated and his army decimated. Soon Shalmaneser was at the gates of Damascas. From thence he marched through Hawran and down to Beirut, Lebanon, where his monument can be seen today at Nahr-el kalb (Dog River).

After Hazel's defeat, Shalmaneser's campaigns were very limited. In his later years, this great king no more led legions into foreign soil. Moreover, his eldest son rebelled against him; twenty-eight cities, including Ashur and Nineveh, joined the revolt. The insurrection was put down by Shalmaneser's second son, Shamash-Rimmon.

The famous queen Shamiram (Semiramis), ruled as queen-mother for three years. Although her reign was short, during that span of time she proved to be half goddess and half queen, great general, capable engineer, and mighty stateswoman. Unlike Cleopatra and Hatshepsut, the Egyptian queens who ruled and ruined like unmanageable queens, Shamiram planned, built, and organized. She proved herself a mighty king in every sense but gender.

After the reign of queen Shamiram and her son Adad-nirari III (810-783 B.C.), and Ashurnirari V (754-745 B.C.), there arose in Assyria debilitated monarchs who hardly presented any threat to the west. Under their pre-occupation with problems at home, Jeroboam II of Israel was able to extend his authority in Syria almost unquestioned.

Tiglath-pileser III (745-728 B.C.). Precisely at the time of Jeroboam's death and the assassination of his

son shortly afterward, momentous events were transpiring in Assyria. A mighty warrior and statesman named Tiglath-pileser III elevated Assyria to the status of a great power, and brought the moribund empire to its youthful vigor. Tiglath-pileser I is considered the founder of the first Assyrian empire, and Tiglath-pileser III is considered the founder of the third Assyrian empire.

Upon seizing the throne, Tiglath-pileser encountered the gigantic problem of reasserting the Assyrian power against the Babylonians to the south,³ and against the kingdom of Urartu (Armenia) to the north, at the same time making Assyria a power felt in the west. Tiglath-pileser gathered new armies, invaded Babylon, Armenia, conquered Syria, made vassal states of Damascus, Samaria and Israel. He is mentioned as exacting tribute from Menachem (ca. 745-738 B.C.), who succeeded to the throne of Israel after Shallum, the murderer of Jeroboam II's son Zechariah, who had reigned only one month. The biblical narrative states thus: "There came against the land Pul, the king of Assyria; and Menachem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver, that his land might be with him to confirm the kingdom in his land."⁴

It is interesting to observe that this biblical incident is also mentioned in the annals of the Assyrian kings: "As for Menachem, terror overwhelmed him, like a bird alone he fled and submitted to me. To his place I brought him back . . . silver, colored woolen garments, linen garments . . . I received his tribute."⁵

³In Babylon, Tiglath-pileser was known as "Pulu," or "Pul," and probably known by the same nickname to the Israelites.

⁴I Kings 15:19.

⁵Luckenbill, p. 816.

By a series of military campaigns, which we cannot pause to enumerate in detail at this stage, all Tiglath-pileser's military and national aims were achieved. Babylon was subjected; Sardur II, king of Urartu, together with his allies, was crushingly defeated west of the Euphrates and eventually besieged in his capital. Urartu, its territory restricted, ceased to be a threatening power to Assyria. Further campaigns of Tiglath-pileser against the Medes in northern Iran carried Assyrian legions as far as the south of the Caspian Sea. Tired of war, the king became an excellent administrator, built many temples and palaces, held his empire together, and died peacefully in bed.

Shalmaneser V (728-722 B.C.). This king is the fifth and last bearing the name Shalmaneser. Two notable incidents are involved during his kingship: the siege of Tyre and the fall of Samaria.

Soon after Shalmaneser had left the Phoenician coast, Tyre revolted, instigated probably by one of the Delta kings of Egypt. Also, Sidon and Samaria joined the rebellion. Shalmaneser returned immediately to punish Tyre. The pro-Assyrian Phoenicians offered him sixty ships peopled with more than eight hundred sailors. Tyre had no more than a dozen ships, but the Tyreans fought with unprecedented gallantry, and for five years they withheld the invaders outside their walls. Finally, Shalmaneser made a treaty with them. It remained for Sargon II to conquer them later.

Next, Shalmaneser directed his campaign against Samaria. The inhabitants resisted bravely for almost three years, but finally the blow fell and Samaria disappeared in 721 B.C. never to rise again. Shalmaneser, however,

did not enjoy his victory long, for a few months later, Sargon ousted him.

Sargon II (722-705 B.C.). Sargon enthroned himself king by a Napoleonic coup d'état and established a novel dynasty in Assyria, that of Sargonids. Most of his reign was spent in wars and battles. He is one of the best known of the Assyrian kings.

As in any empire of ancient time, rebellions erupted in almost every region of the land at the ascendancy of a king or emperor. In 720 B.C. Sargon marched south to quell the revolt in Babylon supported by Elam. Mero-dach-Baladan, the ruler in Babylon at this period, proved a constant thorn in the flesh of Assyria.

In the same year, Sargon marched westward where he successfully suppressed revolts in Hamah and in some other cities. Judah was spared by paying tribute to him. From thence, Sargon swept through the Palestinian coast subduing the rebellious cities: Akka and Gaza, and on his military itinerary in the area, he made Egypt for the first time pay tribute to Assyria.⁶ On his return, Sargon completed the siege of Tyre that had been initiated by Shalmaneser, his predecessor. The next two years of his reign (719-718 B.C.) were occupied with campaigns against the kingdom of Urartu (Armenia) and other tribes of the north. In 717-716 B.C. Sargon once again was in the west where he crushed a rebellion at Qarqamish and deported part of its inhabitants.

The last ten years of Sargon's rule (715-705 B.C.) were devoted to extending the northern frontiers of the Assyrian empire. The narrative of his eighth campaign,

⁶The New Catholic Encyclopedia, vol. XII, McGraw-Hill Book Company, (1966), p. 1089.

which was once more against Urartu, is the longest surviving historical Assyrian text: it provides a vivid description of the mountainous terrain over which the Assyrian legions had to travel.

Shortly after the beginning of his reign, Sargon had moved the capital of Assyria from Kalakh to a new city founded by him which he called "Dur Sharrukin" (Fort Sargon, or Sargonburg), at a site now identified as Khorsabad.

Sennacherib (704-682 B.C.). No sooner had Sennacherib ascended the throne when he was confronted by rebellion at both extremities of his realm. In Babylon Merodach-Baladan with the old Elamite ally defied the Assyrian power; in the west revolt flared under Hezekiah, the king of Judah,⁷ fomented most probably by Merodach-Baladan of Babylon and Shabako of Egypt. At the same time, Syria and Palestine formed a coalition against Sennacherib, with the king of Tyre as the ring leader. First Sennacherib subdued Babylon, then crushed Tyre, replacing its escaped king with a ruler of his own choice. He turned to the kingdom of Judah and defeated it. Cities such as Byblos, Arvad, Ashdod, Moab, Edom, and Ammon hastened with tribute to Sennacherib. These military events of Sennacherib fit well in the biblical context.⁸

Sennacherib's son, Esarhadon (680-669 B.C.), snatched the throne from his older brother, invaded Egypt for aiding Syrian insurrection against Assyria, defeated it, and made it an Assyrian province, marched through western Asia with triumphal advance, made As-

⁷II Kings 20:12-19.

⁸II Kings 18:17-19:37.

Assyria the mistress of the Near Eastern world, amazed Babylon by restoring its gods deported by his brother Sennacherib, rebuilt its temples and palaces, and showed great mercy to Elam by supplying its hungry population with food.

Esarhadon was succeeded by Ashurbanipal (668-627 B.C.). During his reign, Assyria reached the zenith of her wealth, prestige, and culture. After him, the empire was almost ruined by a series of wars that lasted almost forty years. No wonder that the empire fell into exhaustion, feebleness, and decay; and a decade after his death, Assyria almost ended her mighty career.

When Ashurbanipal died (627 B.C.), Assyria was fumbling, toppling. In a little more than a decade, Assyria was no more. During this period, we hear of a people called the Medes. Their king, Cyaxares (ca. 625-585 B.C.), seized the opportunity of a weak Assyria and maneuvered every tactic to execute a military attack. At the same time the Babylonians, led by king Nebopolasar (625-605 B.C.), the founder of the neo-Babylonian empire, struck again for independence and for the last time. It was a decisive moment for all the parties involved, but it was a deadly blow to mighty Assyria. In 626 B.C. Nebopolasar defeated the Assyrian armies outside Babylon and seized the throne. The Assyrians in vain attempted to dislodge him.

A few years later, Assyrians were desperately fighting against the combined forces of Babylonians and Medes. At this moment, Psammetichus, the king of Egypt, realizing the weakness of Assyria and the soaring might of Babylon, preferred to have in the arena of politics a weak Assyria than a powerful Babylon. In 616 B.C., Cy-

axares, the king of Medes, took Ashur, the proud ancient capital of Assyria. Nebopolasar, arriving late on the scene of the battle to participate in the victory, concluded a treaty with him. Two years later in 612 B.C., the two combined armies attacked Nineveh itself, and after a three months' siege, took it and utterly destroyed it. The Assyrian army under Ashur-Ubalit II retreated westward to Haran where with their back to the Egyptians, they attempted with vigor to keep resistance continuing. But in 610 B.C., the Babylonians and their allies took Haran. Ashur-Ubalit with the remnant of his Assyrian soldiers made the final attempt to restore Haran, but failed miserably. Nineveh was no more; Ashur failed; Assyria was finished. Providence had sealed the destiny of that great nation, but not for ever. Nineveh is always in the hearts of its descendants, Ashur is ever in the memory of the Assyrians, and Assyria herself shall never be forgotten as long as there are Assyrians living. In God's good time there will be a restoration.

A word should be said about the contribution the Assyrian nation has made to the world.

In 1974, I visited Iraq, the land of the Twin Rivers of the ancient historians, and I was awakened to the fact that this hot and arid spot of the world had produced so much and its ancient dwellers had contributed so abundantly to ancient and modern civilizations, and that I was a descendent of those giants of past generations.

Today not everyone knows that in ancient Mesopotamia rose powerful capitals and nations such as Ashur, Nineveh, Babylon, Sumer, And Akkad, to which other surrounding nations came humbly and paid their trib-

ute. Not everyone realizes that in those “dreary wastes” started astrology, and astronomy was almost created which improved greatly the science of medicine. Between the Two Rivers was the beginning of the word—the writing on clay tablets from right to left and from left to right, an art which greatly advanced the science of language. In Mesopotamia appeared Hammurabi and the first great codes of law, which many people duplicated, basing their laws and bylaws on them, even to this day. From the same antiquated and rich area came the epic poetry and the creation story which other people adopted and introduced into their literature in varying degrees. It was that ancient nation, Assyria, that taught other nations the elements of physics centuries before Aristotle wrote his *Physics* and *Metaphysics*. The Greeks took from the Assyrians the art of sculpture and the beauty of architectural design with which they adorned their temples, palaces, arenas, amphitheatres, gods and goddesses, their athletes and philosophers.

The ivory work of the Assyrians surpassed that of other people. It portrays subjects in a variety of ways: animals fighting together, heroes struggling with wild beasts; the king accompanied by his soldiers, smiling women, gay musicians, scribes, dancers, chariots, and cows suckling their calves in graceful and relaxing moments. And obviously no other nation surpassed the Assyrians in the techniques of warfare. They taught the neighboring people the form of a well-built chariot, the movable towers, engines, and slings; the use of oil fire, torches, and rams. It was the Assyrians who first built the water-wheel for irrigation, and from them it passed to other countries.

The Assyrians also demonstrated great capability in exquisite metal work and diversified work of embroidery. They have left us fine pieces of bronze, gold and silver plates, and vessels of various kinds. The women working in houses wove carpets and rugs of astonishing design, and embroidered with fairy hands as can be seen from the robes worn by the kings and their courtiers.

In Assyria the horse appeared for the first time, and "naphta" was discovered, a burning substance which surprised Alexander the Great centuries later, who tested it by pouring it on a slave boy and igniting it. On the banks of Tigris and Euphrates emerged the oldest inscriptions on stone, dating as far back as 3600 B.C. Toward 3200 B.C. the clay tablets appeared, replacing the stone writing.

A note of clarification ought to be struck at the end. Throughout the centuries, from the books and from the lips of many, there has been a stigma attached to that ancient nation, Assyria. Owing to her military power, expansion, and victories, it has been labelled as a nation of atrocities, murder, torture, ferocity, and cruelty. Certainly, to a great extent, the Assyrian annals glory in their overwhelming victories, but what nation does not glory in her military victories? Even in our modern day, war statistics are highly doubtful. And what king or general does not commit facinorous deeds in his supercilious military arrogance? What about the Roman Caesars and generals? Did not Romans under Scipio Africanus in bitter ruthlessness burn Carthage to the ground, plough it, sow it with salt, destroy the crops, vineyards, orchards, raze the foundations, and sell the captives into slavery? In 307 B.C. Carthage, during a

siege, burned 200 boys of the best families on the altar of the god Moloch. What about Hannibal and his massacres? Did not Alexander, half god and half philosopher, by his own decision and consent, slaughter all the inhabitants of Sogdiana, including women and children, thus visiting the sins of the fathers upon the fifth generation, because two hundred years earlier the inhabitants of the said city had supported Xerxes, the king of Persia? But not many have heard of these incidents. And who can count the sins of Adolf Hitler or condone his Nazi atrocities in the so-called most civilized century of the world, and in the delights of the Gospel of peace and in the age of grace? The Assyrians cut off heads, while the Egyptians cut off hands and the Red Indians of America the scalps; the English rotted heads of traitors spiked on Tower Gate in London; the Romans crucified, and the Church of the Middle Ages burnt Christians alive. These are only a few historical abominations of mankind.

Between the ancient and the modern people, there is an extremely qualitative difference, as there is an extreme difference in the space of time; yet a moral difference I cannot see. Perhaps I will never see. Well has Professor A.T. Olmstead remarked: "There is not an Assyrian atrocity which has not its parallel or equivalent in the civilized history of the last hundred years."⁹

This has been only a short journey to the ancient Assyria. We cannot in a few pages cover all the stretches of time and space of that empire. We cannot in a few pages relate in detail all the accomplishments of all the Tig-

⁹A.T. Olmstead, *History of Assyria* (Chicago: University Press, 1951, p. 646.

lath-pilesers, Shalmanesers, Sargonids, and Ashurbanipals. Nor can we talk about all the mysteries of their gods and goddesses, nor can we delineate all the glory of Nineveh and Ashur, nor the might of their armies, nor shall we attempt to trace all the accounts of their wars. For although there is an animating drama in the details of wars and conquests, nevertheless, there is a woeful eternity in their consequences; such history becomes a gloomy spectator upon the vicissitudes of power, in which victors and victims alike abolish one another into a reverberating nihility.

This has been only a reminder of the past glory. Let the descendents learn and observe that glory and heritage from which they have stemmed. At this moment, all we can do is to hope, pray, and act for the resurrection of that ancient spirit and the ruins of that mighty past after a barbarous interruption of two thousand and five hundred years.

2

*The Dilemmas
of a People*

Every generation has its own problems and every people its own dilemmas; some redeemable, others perhaps irredeemable.

We Assyrians, throughout generations, have had our national dilemmas—more, perhaps, than any other people. To comfort ourselves by pretending that we have no serious dilemmas is to verge on the border of the ridiculous. The first on the list is

The Dilemma of Language

Whether we know the seriousness of this problem or not, we are fighting a losing battle in this cultural arena. Anyone even meagerly acquainted with minority groups in this land or in other lands will realize that these minorities experienced a drastic linguistic dilemma, until they eventually and probably reluctantly gave up the hope of maintaining their mother tongue. To mention just a few: the Germans, the Irish, the Polish, the Swedes, the Norwegians, the Italians, the Spanish; and if we may be generous, we may include the Jews and the

Armenians. By the passage of time, the mother tongue of these minority groups was no longer capable of being preserved.

But these minorities did not consider the disappearance of their mother tongue a terrible loss, if “loss” it should be called. If each of these ethnic groups lost one million individuals in the teeming welter of the American cities, there still would be millions of them speaking their own language in the motherland itself. They know very well that they have a country, a culture they could call their own, and a language preserved somewhere. Relatively speaking, it could not be called a loss or a serious dilemma.

We Assyrians, few as we are, cannot afford that sort of adventure—the adventure of abandoning our most precious cultural heritage, the language of diplomacy in the courts of kings and princes in the ancient world,¹ from Babylon to Elaphantine in Upper Egypt, to Jerusalem in Palestine and Damascus in Syria,² and from Assyria to Judah. It replaced the Phoenician language as the *lingua franca* in the official circles in the Middle East in the eighth century B.C.³ It was the common language spoken by our Lord Jesus Christ and propagated by his disciples and apostles throughout the Mediterranean cities. Unfortunately, about this language, most of us are ashamed, some reluctant, others indifferent, and still others ignorant.

In the past as well as in the present, and perhaps more in the present than in the past, we Assyrians have tor-

¹Cf. i.e. Daniel chapters 2-6, and Ezra 4-6.

²In ancient times and in the Old Testament, “Syria” was called “Aram.”

³II Kings 18:26.

mentingly been noticing a radical decline in our mother tongue. From my observation in the Middle Eastern countries where I was born and raised, our young men and women, and to some degree the older people not excluded, speak our language with an appalling admixture of Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Kurdish. My younger brothers and sisters speak it, but can hardly read it or write it. My nephews and nieces speak it clumsily, but cannot read it or write it. And I think this is a fair judgment to make about other people in different parts of the Middle Eastern countries. This is not an undue oversimplification.

If we lose this, our cultural phenomenon, it will be a serious loss, for we have no country of our own where this ancient heritage could be preserved. We ought to fight assimilation for the sake of preservation.

But what is more aggravating is that we see this inevitable demise occurring before our own eyes in the "Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave," the land of ample opportunities and freedom, regardless of color or creed. Let it be noted that any minority that cannot maintain its language or any other aspects of its culture in the freest country will not maintain it anywhere else. Any minority that will not make it in this land will not make it in any other land. If we Assyrians cannot maintain, act, and make things happen in this country, we will not be able to preserve anything, act, and make things happen anywhere else on this planet. Yet sadly enough, we are not seizing the golden moments and opportunities in the freest country. Within the span of the two years of my sojourn in the city of Chicago, where most Assyrians live, I have met fathers and mothers,

grandfathers and grandmothers, boys and girls of different ages, born of Assyrian parents, living in Chicago in America, and deliberately or ignorantly speaking Arabic, or any other language but their own.

Once I saw six Assyrian boys, ranging from seven to twelve years old, playing soccer and communicating in Arabic with one another. I went to them and asked one of them who seemed to be more outspoken, "Why are you speaking Arabic?" He waved to me in a flippant gesture, which literally translated means, "Who cares?"

I am not certain if there is any patriotism running in the veins of these fathers, mothers, and children; and if there is any, it must be very trivial. These people will not take their mother tongue seriously, even in Nineveh itself. They see no necessity to penetrate beneath the surface. They like existence on the periphery, and let the march of history and culture pass them by. They do not have a sense of the value of their esteemed culture and heritage. Nevertheless, let us not blame parents for the forgiveable sins of their children.

I am not advocating an opposition to learning different languages. I myself happen to have learned a few, and I have used and taught them. But I never sacrificed my own language on the altar of any of the rest. This is an important principle which we ought to maintain in our cultural life.

Now, "What can the righteous do?" We explicitly see the foundation of this cultural phenomenon dissolving before our very eyes, and I do not know what is rising on its ruins. But I know that it is the absence of the dimension of depth; it is the elimination of roots which go back to the ancient past.

For the last ten years, the Assyrian Language and Culture Classes Inc. has conducted evening sessions in our language every Friday night at 7:00 p.m. at Northeastern University, but very few have shown any enthusiasm in attending these classes. In fact, many do not know yet that such a center exists. We are diligent in finding entertainment spots in the city and very lavish in spending therein, yet so negligent in searching to find educational centers in our own language to preserve our own heritage and pass it on to our children.

The Dilemma of Tribal Trivialities

If my reader thinks that this caption sounds hackneyed or does not fit into the framework of the twentieth century civilization, then let me tell you in all sincerity that you are absolutely an alien to one of the eroding evils in our community, and totally unacquainted with human nature. You are an exception; you have not yet been exposed to this ancient malignancy which foolishly, selfishly, and perhaps superstitiously our ancestors have bequeathed to us as a cherished legacy. To speak about “tribal trivialities” is not a matter of sheer imagination, nor unreasonable miscalculation; it is a factual demonstration. I speak from personal experience at this juncture. Personally, I was not accepted to be employed within the body of one of our religious groups solely on this primitive irrational basis. I was not from their tribe, not from their groups, and my dialect betrayed me. In the words of the Bible, “He is not one of us” (Luke 9:49). I have friends who are willing and ready to bear

witness to this fact. This was not many years back; it was only two years ago, in America, the melting pot of all nations. A preposterous sectarianism much deeper and much stronger than patriotism reigns within us and rules over us. This senseless phenomenon which has become a constant impediment across centuries must unhesitatingly be dissolved and something constructive and permanent must rise on its ruins.

I have attended some of our meetings where a Niagara of speeches was delivered, most of them fiery, vehement, impassioned, and passionate. After the meetings I was told that there was a note of tribal antagonism and partite sectarian displeasure in them.

Unfortunately, this old and absurd heritage which thus far we have neither been willing nor capable to eradicate, has served the purpose and fulfilled the desires of our enemies to full magnitude. It has made us suspicious of one another and traitors to the national cause. It has made wolves out of us, tearing one another while the enemy divides the spoil. It has worked effectively.

The Pharaohs of ancient Egypt and the Turkish Sultans of the last century had an effectual policy of ruling their minority groups. In the modern jargon, it is called the "divide-and-rule" strategem. They always gave munificent opportunities to their minorities to fight and kill one another, and then the authorities would punish them for being so "rude," "cruel," and "unmanageable." It worked efficiently.

In my judgment and in the judgment of many who desire to create a bond of unity, it is time to put an end to this antiquated and disastrous phenomenon. Let those responsible and in high places realize and start doing

something about this crippling disease in our national life; otherwise, the time will come when it will be too late to do anything.

Louis XVI of France, seeing in his temple prison the works of Voltaire and Rousseau, said, “Those two men have destroyed France,”⁴—meaning, of course, his dynasty. They had to. A responsible dynasty that does not destroy that which is destructive in the life of a nation ought to be destroyed. A responsible leadership that does not responsibly guide people to a desired destiny ought to be abolished, and some form of a government more responsible and more interested in the affairs of the common people must inevitably rise on its ruins.

It is reported that Abraham Lincoln as a young man made a trip down the Mississippi River to New Orleans. Lincoln and a friend wandered through the city. In so doing they came upon one of the slave marts, where black men, women, and children were lined up in rows to be sold into slavery to the highest bidder. Lincoln witnessed the scene with inexpressible horror mounting to extreme anger. He is recorded to have said, more to himself than to his companion, “If I ever get a chance to hit that thing, I’ll hit it hard.” When the hour of destiny came, Lincoln struck that hated evil, and he hit it so hard that it was never to raise its ugly form again in the life of America and its democracy.

We, too, ought to hit hard and destroy that which has been destroying us, from ancient Turkey to Iran, to Iraq, to Syria, to Lebanon, and to modern America. This calamitous order, too, should be dissolved before

⁴Will Durant, *The Story of Philosophy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1953), p. 154.

we are dissolved, and something efficient and constructive must necessarily rise on its ruins.

The Dilemma of Paralizing Disunity

Benjamin Franklin once remarked, “We must all hang together or we shall all hang separately.” History and human experience have proved these words to be true at all times for all the people of all ages.

I am writing this chapter at a moment when the American spirit of unity, courage, patience, and power are all being austerely tested. As this is written, it is the thirty-first day of the fifty American aides held captive in Iran. Indeed, the Americans have demonstrated an admirable spirit of unity either in the streets, among the public, or at the United Nations forums, or through the speeches by the President and the presidential candidates.

If we Assyrians carefully analyze our dilemmas and scrutinize our problems and permanent shortcomings, we could, perhaps with a certain amount of justification and reservation, say that we can utter a few “good” things about some of our dilemmas and problems of our status quo. But unfortunately, we cannot pronounce one good thing about a sense of unity among us, let alone a strong tie of unity. This, indeed, is extremely serious. In this area we are pathetically destitute. This is a weighty crisis, and on this weighty crisis every other crisis depends. Being disunited or without a sense of unity is absolutely being without hope; and being without hope is being immeasurably confused; and being dis-

united, without hope and confused, is a state ipso facto null and void.

Every leader is against another leader, clan distrusts clan, and organization despises organization. We are in utter darkness, and we do not know where we are going because darkness has forever blinded us. We are the ones who have punished ourselves. We have seriously and deliberately shaken the foundation of our own unity. Any blame to be attached to an external agency is utterly groundless. We are the sole cause of our paralyzing disunity and ought to be the sole cause of our own unity.

A nation is not conquered from without until it has destroyed itself from within first. Rome, once the queen of the world, was destroyed first not by barbarian invasion from without but by barbarian corruption from within. It did not fall because the new faith of Christianity was replacing the old faith of paganism, but because moral decay had already contributed to its collapse. Harassed by internal corruption and military confusion from within, Rome could not withstand the invading power from without. Men fought men to death in bloody arenas, men fought beasts while spectators rejoiced over the shedding of human blood. Let us learn from history, the best teacher of all.

We know quite well from the pages of ancient and modern history that the great leaders of the world, ancient and modern, realized the importance of this aspect called unity in international affairs. Alexander, whom history, in its ignorance of true dignity, calls "the Great," knew perfectly well that the road to victory was first to begin at home. First, he had to unite all the Greek city-states, recover what had been lost, and then

march, strike, and conquer. Napoleon, a military genius, realized very well that if France wanted to become a determining factor in European politics, unification was inevitable. The shrewd Bismark found the solution to the dilemma of his nation in the unification of all the distracted states. But we Assyrians do not know history, nor like to read books to learn about peoples, nations, politics, and important events. Yet we want things and events to happen in our favor by mere chance or by some form of magical formula.

If we Assyrians want to accomplish anything worthwhile, then let us begin from the beginning. Let us unite in mind, efforts, socially, politically, and religiously, and in God's good time the victory shall come, or at least the road to it will open. It calls for a new dedication and a new heroic effort. We may belong to different organizations, denominations, professions, and occupations, but an ardent sense of unity must always bind us together in the unbroken bond of love and national interest. Let it be known that we cannot face any enemy, no matter how trivial, nor even decide on any issue no matter how minor as long as we are disunited and hence disorganized. Our silly order of disunity and disorganization must absolutely be dissolved once and for all, and an order of abiding unity must categorically rise on its ruins.

The Minority Phobia

A psychological restraint has imposed itself upon us, the Assyrians, owing to our minority consciousness. This dilemma of minority phobia has unjustifiably ruptured

our spirit among the majorities in a majority of spots in the world. The unduly line of rationalization has run thus from the common man in the street to the learned in his office. "We are but a few; we are scattered and sparsely so; we are abandoned, ignored, and forgotten." For these reasons and many more, we have become uninfluential, and therefore the world is unaware of us. For centuries we have been heavily crushed with crises, harassed with poverty, wearied with conflicts from country to country, and awfully awed by a sense of mysterious minority existence. We have no modern force—in fact, no force whatsoever upon which we may rely; we do not possess one spot of land we can call our own from which we may start a fresh enterprise. In short, we are unable to do anything to let the world know that a displaced people has been a wandering Aramean for two thousand five hundred years.

The foregoing argument is a two-edged sword; it is both true and false at the same time. It is true that we are few, we do not possess much of this world, we are behind many other peoples in so many areas. On the other hand, being few and poor should not in any way deter us from playing our "minor" part as a community and being influential. Ineffectiveness does not, as a general rule, apply to all minorities. Besides, every nation is a minority in its relation to the whole inhabited world.

Nevertheless, a group should never feel inferior because of its numerical identity, provided it is active, influential, and contributing. The Jews have always been a minority, but have categorically rejected any sense of inferiority; and perhaps it is a fair judgment to pass and say, because they have been active and influential in al-

most every field, they have consciously or unconsciously entertained a certain sense of “superiority.”

Once more, let it be stressed that a number does not always count. Let me illustrate this point from two past historical incidents. We all know the story of Leonidas and his three hundred Spartan warriors. In the fifth century B.C. Leonidas, the king of Sparta, headed the three hundred Spartans to the pass, called “Thermopylae” (Hot Gates) to block it to the Persian army. Xerxes, the Persian king, came with the largest army ever gathered before our Christian era. The two unequalled forces fought. The Persians lost 20,000 men, the Spartans lost their three hundred men. It was their war tactics never to retreat until the last man. However, if the Spartans had not been betrayed by one of their own fellowmen (another serious evil in national morality), the Persians would not have been able to advance one further step. And how many times did Alexander the Great with only a small force defeat massive Persian forces?

Second, in A.D. 1532, Suleiman the Magnificent, the great Turkish Sultan, invaded Europe with a mighty army of 200,000 men.⁵ In the opinion of many in that day, to resist such a force would have been an ignorant suicide. The Sultan came to Güns, a small town well fortified, but had only 700 men. For three weeks these 700 men gallantly fought back every Turkish attack to break through the walls. Eleven times these walls were pierced; eleven times the defenders blocked the openings with

⁵Stephen A. Fischer-Galati, *Ottoman Imperialism and German Protestantism* (Cambridge: University Press, 1959), pp.55,112. Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization*, pt. IV, (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1957), p. 705.

metal, wood, flesh, blood, and desperation. At last the Sultan, defeated, if not militarily, then morally, sent a safe conduct and hostages to Nicholas, the commander, inviting him to a conference. The commander came and was received with great honor for his courage and generalship. The Turkish Sultan sent him back to his citadel under a handsome escort of Turkish officers. This large Turkish army of 200,000 men defeated by 700 soldiers passed on to Vienna. Vienna had a body of 78,000 men, but the Sultan did not even attempt to attack it. He had learned a lesson for his succeeding days, that if he could not defeat a military body of 700 men, he obviously could not defeat a much larger army of 78,000 warriors. He left Vienna untouched. It was a historic moment in the European military tactics and gallantry, that when men, regardless of their number, determine to have victory, victory shall come. When a nation determines to make its presence felt and assert itself, there is enough potency to do so.

Naturalists inform us that in every single drop of water in the ocean there is electricity enough to generate two thunder storms. The power is there latent, nevertheless ready at any moment to leap forth and do terrible execution. So within the soul of every nation there is enough moral and spiritual force lying hidden to leap forth and produce eternal destinies. At the end of these pages, let us remember the words of Montaigne, "Man is capable of all things."

3

*The Destiny
of a People*

“I will find a way or make one.”
Hannibal

Every people looks for some sort of redemption and yearns for some future day in which it may find certain values worth living for. Intellectually as well as emotionally man vividly realizes that in the process of ages and cycles of past and present, he is faced with the questions of security and destiny. He has only to read the signposts leading to that haven. And if there are not any, he has to find them or make them.

We Assyrians have some inevitable roads to cover, or better, some essential ingredients to be thoroughly understood and properly absorbed into our national life if we are to achieve our sense of destiny. The first essential ingredient is

Education

By the term I mean education in its full significance, the fundamental element to any civilization. I do not mean science which is organized knowledge; I do not mean knowledge which is organized data, but education which is organized life. Each is a greater degree of order, sequence, and unity. It is this type of education I earnestly

advocate to our Assyrian young men and women, an education that teaches us not only how to make a living but rather also how to live, an education that teaches us how to organize life and make it worth living at a moment when organization and life demand maximum efforts.

For any people there must be education—some techniques, tools, no matter how primitive, elementary, for the transmission of culture and heritage. Whether through initiation, imitation, or instruction, whether through father, mother, teacher, tutor, priest, or prophet, the lore, the culture, language, heritage, the morals and manners, the knowledge, and art of a people must be handed down to our young men and women as the instruments through which these young people are turned from men to better men, from ordinary to extraordinary men, ready at any moment to perform extraordinary works.

Human knowledge has become unmanageably vast. Every science has begotten a dozen more, each subtler than the rest. The telescope has revealed a host of galaxies and systems beyond the mental capacity of man to number or to name. Geology has spoken in terms of millions and billions of years. Physics has discovered a mighty universe in the atom. Biology has found a microcosm in the invisible cell. Psychology has discovered inexhaustible mysteries in every dream and drama. Anthropology has reconstructed the antiquity of man, and archeology has unearthed buried cities and forgotten states, among them glorious Nineveh and eminent Ashur (never to be forgotten), both once mistresses of the ancient East. Today human knowledge has become

too great for the human mind, and let it be known that there are no short cuts to it, and before one finishes one area the gravedigger will get him. Ours is a science-intoxicated age; it is a wealth-maniac generation, and today, a man is esteemed by as much as he carries in his pocket.

What we need today is an education that is operative in the lives of our people who are in need of a good and true education. We desperately need a nation of educated and educators, a nation of learned and teachers. We do not necessarily need at this time men and women of prize-fighters, weight-lifters, and film producers, esteemed as they are; we are in dire need of understanding minds, educated men and women who weightily consider the basic issues with a total challenge and change, and anything less than a total response to it is a total fraud. And probably the spark of this total challenge and change will come from the educated men and women of today. When that happens, it will be only then that the rest of the people will begin to think. And why not? There is nothing bizarrely new in this concept, or anything unique in attaining it. Voltaire once said: "When once a nation begins to think, it is impossible to stop it." Voltaire was responsible for France's thinking and its resultant revolution. When that process of thinking takes place, many skeptics will be surprised. And who knows, maybe that important process will begin with the thinking and the educated youth of today, and with it a manifested hope will be ushered for the people of tomorrow. Then a new dawn will shine from a distant horizon and a new era of hope will sweep our minds into action.

Leadership

Thomas Carlyle, the English philosopher and writer, once said, “The subjects without king (hero) can do nothing; the subjectless king can do something.”¹ Let me take the liberty of paraphrasing the above statement. In other words it means, when you have a leader he will find subjects and do something, but when you have subjects only, you have a mob, and in a mob you have many heads but little brain. A leader, a hero, a general can find, can do, can create. Someone has said, “There are three kinds of people in the world, those who make things happen, those who let things happen and those who ask, ‘What happened?’” A proper leader makes things happen. He is always equal to the sudden demands made by circumstances. When Hannibal, the great Carthaginian leader and an enemy of Rome for a long time, was told by his general that there was no way to cross the Alps, he replied with the vigor of a determined general, “I will find a way or make one.”

Common sense and previous history indicate quite clearly that it does make a difference who happens to lead a nation at a particular time. Nazi Germany is inconceivable without Adolf Hitler, and the First French Empire cannot be separated from the person of Napoleon Bonaparte; the United States might have floundered hopelessly or turned to an extremist solution in the Depression without Franklin D. Roosevelt, and the bloodless achievement of Indian Independence would probably have been impossible without Mahatma Gandhi.

¹Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, p. 317.

Individual leaders do have a gigantic share in determining national goals and aspirations, and if one wishes to understand in full depth the meaning of a nation's actions at a particular moment of history, it will be useful to understand the personality and aims and aspirations of its major leaders. However, these leaders must also be seen in reference to the groups whose interests they further and in reference to the institutions that allow them their place of power. It is not helpful to exaggerate the role they play.

It seems to me one of the ironies of our modern democratic societies that we are conducive less to the rise of an outstanding man, or a few outstanding men of genius, than to the rising of the general cultural level.

There is always a new lesson learned whenever we turn to history, either religious or secular. Now for a while, let us turn to a biblical passage.

In the days of prophet Samuel, the children of Israel were suffering from the lack of a national leader. They envied other neighboring nations who had kings and princes and wanted to be like them. They must have longed for a leader like Moses. In the past, God had told them that they would not have a king, because God was their King. It was a theocratic society. However, they earnestly demanded a king—anyone, from anywhere. And yet God seems to have granted their request reluctantly.

The prophet Samuel, who was the judge over Israel, had begun to grow old. His two sons whom he had appointed as his assistants and his successors proved unworthy of their father and their high calling to their job, and made a travesty of public justice. The national situ-

ation is described in the book of Judges thus: “In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did that which was right in his own eyes.”² What an indirect description of anarchy! What a national description of a chaotic situation!

Nevertheless, the people demanded a leader. The record shows³ the wrong way to secure something that is right. The people came to Samuel the prophet and asked him to annoint a king over them. It was not the right time, and they did not have the right man. But the people wanted to rush things their own way; they wanted to speed God’s program according to their own human understanding. The people insisted on having a king, but there was not to be found in the entire land one single man worthy of kingship. However, the people insisted on having one, and they chose a man called Saul. They had their way. Such a course involves permission without sanction.

Saul is the most disappointing leader in the Old Testament. Never did a young man enter upon his life work with brighter prospect, and never did a youth so thoroughly prostitute his advantage. He was totally unappreciative of the wise counselor he had in old Samuel, utterly unworthy of the noble son he had in Jonathan, untrue to the friend he had in David, and unfaithful to the trust of kingship with which God honored him. His suicide in the battle of Gilboah is one of the tragedies of the Bible.

After the election of king Saul, Samuel felt terribly grieved. He could foresee the disastrous condition of his

²Judges 21:25.

³I Samuel 8.

nation. In the name of his God, the prophet told the people what sort of tyrannical ruler they might expect. The faults and evils that he pointed out have appeared in unworthy kings during almost every age of human history. Think of Nero, Louis XIV, Louis XV, Attila, Tamerlane, and Hitler. Unlike other historians who dwell on the luxury and wantonness of life at the royal courts, the writer of the book of Judges points out the tragic effects of tyranny upon the common people. Their sons and daughters suffer endless hardship. Because of the king's extravagance, oppression, and militarism, they become virtual serfs. In the end they cry out from tyranny to God. Are there no such scenes in the world today?

We may fairly judge by saying that people often secure a leader as they deserve. In view of this fact, what shall we do? Since we choose our own leaders, let us ask for guidance and restraint, for wisdom and experience in choosing our would-be leaders.

Let it be frankly and explicitly stated that we Assyrians, unfortunately, have no proper leaders and obviously no adequate leadership. This has been one of our major drastic deficiencies in our national life, whether in the mountains of Hakkari in Turkey, or in plains of Urmia, or in the Iraqi-British conflict over the Assyrian question in Iraq, or in modern America. Today, we are so much in need of leaders and leadership that everyone of us is a leader and, of course, assumes leadership—not in the sight of the world, but in his own sight and judgment. Every one of our so-called leaders is rich in prejudices and miserably poor in judgment. Every one of us regards himself completely equipped with extraordinary charismatic gifts of leadership, although no one thus far

has demonstrated one single gift of leadership.

We presume that anyone who knows how to get a few votes or a few members of his clan around him knows how to carry on conversations before world forums, or address general assemblies, or administer the affairs of a needy people. When we are ill we call for a trained physician, whose degree is a guarantee of specific preparation and technical competence; we do not ask for the handsomest physician, or the most eloquent one, but for the most competent. The same principle must apply in administering national affairs. In politics, in business, and in every kind of administration, most fallacies arise because people arrogate to themselves areas of some work that do not fall under their competence.

Leadership requires a unique personality, a man of dauntless energy and reckless initiative, someone skilled in governing the affairs of a community, someone whose decisions can determine the issues of life and death, someone who can transform us from the vale of anxiety to the Garden of Eden. It is often claimed that a national leader is the main determinant of a nation's plans and goal. There is no doubt that a national leader will have an influence in shaping the nation's aims. Let me illustrate the foregoing argument.

You may not like a person or a people, but certainly you must admire him or them when you find out that they are invested with certain charismatic, courageous capabilities of leadership. The story of the Jews is one of the epics in recorded human history. From the very inception of their national history, these people have been scattered by flights, persecuted by succeeding nations and generations, decimated in every age, mobbed by the

people, and robbed by the kings and princes, outcast and excommunicated, insulted and injured without any political structure; yet this diminutive audacious Semitic minority has maintained itself in body, soul, and spirit, has preserved its racial and cultural integrity, has proudly kept with zealous love its oldest rituals and traditions, has patiently and resolutely awaited the day of its deliverance and has emerged greater in number and stronger in faith and hope in body and soul than ever before.

From the beginning of their history, they were slaves in Egypt for more than four hundred years. After their deliverance from the Egyptian bondage, in their homeland, they were:

five times conquered by the Assyrians,
three times by the Babylonians,
four times by the Seleucids,
once by the Greeks,
and six times by the Romans.

Never in living memory have so few suffered so much from so many!

In our own days, by the end of the Second World War, we are told that this despised minority gave six million victims to Nazi Hitlerism. Three years after the Second World War, that is, in 1948, the Jews had a homeland. And in the same year (1948), they fought all the combined Arab forces and announced to the world for the first time after almost two thousand years of wandering, "We are here to stay." They did not have General Electric, or General Motors, or General Bell; they had General Moshe Dyan, and that was enough.

When the Jews were talking about a homeland at the turn of this century, the world leaders, primarily the rep-

representatives at the League of Nations, seriously said, "The Jews need three hundred years to have a country of their own." It took them thirty years. What drama could rival the grandeur of these sufferings and the glory of this fulfillment? It is an indication that number quantity does not always have the preeminence, especially when you have a leader and a leadership that citizens can fully trust.

Today, we Assyrians are desperately waiting to be challenged if we can, to be inspired if we will, to be stirred up, if we are serious, to the basic national issues, when we stand face to face with a personality, with a national leader whose words, deeds, and accomplishments can be heard and taken seriously. We are not necessarily looking for a descendant of chieftains or magnates or princes or kings.

Today, we are looking forward to a national character who can responsibly shape our goals and determine our destiny, who can distinguish better from worse; interested in the living affairs of the people, capable to decide on many national issues, wise in counsel, noble in body and spirit, daring, quick, countering critics, answering objections, resolving difficulties, encouraging the strong and strengthening the weak in faith, hope, and patriotism. The crisis demands such a man, and probably more than one man. Not until that personality appears and acts can we mark the day of our resurrection or behold the utopia of our dreams. Only then history will testify to the achievement of genius.

There are three factors that have always crippled our race. Anyone adequately familiar with our past and present history does not need to be convinced of these

national ills. First, there has always been a malady of factionalism among the leaders, either secular or ecclesiastical, and probably more among the latter than among the former. Second, indifference in the miniscule segment of our educated group; and third, the passivity in the major body of our uneducated. These national aberrations ought to be taken into consideration, and unless something is done about them, I can envision no national progress or social reform or political achievement or religious resurgence.

These are exciting moments; these are important international historical days, and what is decided in them is absolutely historic. During the reign of President Nasser of Egypt, no one in any realm would have ever thought for any moment that the time would come when an Egyptian president would fly to Israel and address the Jewish Parliament. Let us watch, pray, and work; who knows, maybe we will be involved in the next step. In the meantime, let us remember the words of Virgil, "They can conquer who believe they can."

A Proper Understanding of Patriotism

Patriotism runs in almost everyone's veins, but not in everyone's brain. It is closely related to temporal emotionalism and melodramatic sensationalism. It is not chauvinism, but at the same time it is not true nationalism, for it is not subject to reason, and reason is not directed by the will of God. Nationalism is a hearty song; it fills the mind, commingles with the instincts, and tingles in the bloodstream.

I have, on different occasions, met and talked with many of these so-called nationalists, and they seem to be unreservedly for Assyrian nationalism and against everything else, particularly so against God, but specifically against the God of the Old Testament. Many of these patriotists cannot for one moment stomach the God of the Old Testament, and hence they draw a sharp line of demarcation between him and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, a gulf theologically and logically unacceptable.

Out of many references about the Assyrian nation in the Old Testament, these people have haphazardly picked the very few instances where the Old Testament speaks against Assyria. But let me point out a fact of which many of our people are not aware, that the Old Testament says good and bad things about every nation, and more bad things and extremely vituperative words about the Jews than anyone else. Even king David, the greatest king of the Jews, does not escape rebuke and reprobation, when as a national leader he greatly abuses his office. It shows the faults, absurdities, and sins of the Israelite people in glaring absurdities. Their kings: Saul, David, Solomon, Jeroboam, Ahab, Shallum, Manahem, Pekah, are pictured in their darkest apparel; and of almost everyone it is said, "And did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord;" and most of them disappeared through assassination or flight or an unnatural death.⁴

Most of our people have not read these Old Testament stories to find out for themselves their real content

⁴Cf. II Kings 18.

and meaning. They have only heard them distortedly and second-handedly by the hearing of the ear, perhaps from their grandparents.

This, of course, is not a sort of religious education; it is a crippled understanding, not only of nationalism, but it is a distorted view of the Scripture. This is skepticism which always fishes in troubled waters. It establishes its foothold and luck best when misunderstanding and distortion disturb the spirits of men. This is a general principle in agreement with the law of life, that whenever you have a twisted view of some doctrine or subject, obviously you will have a blurred picture of the same; when you have an erring conscience, you will have a wrong criterion.

One of our stumbling blocks in our understanding of nationalism is the story of Nebuchadnezzar in the book of Daniel.⁵ The general distorted view among most of our people is that Nebuchadnezzar became an ox, when the Old Testament never says so. In fact the story ends by singing a doxology in praise of Nebuchadnezzar. At the end, Nebuchadnezzar comes out a better king, stronger in faith in God, before whom you and I would be ashamed to stand.

Unfortunately, we do not adequately grasp the essential meaning of the story. There is a remarkable lesson in it, namely, that even the greatest king must humble himself before the King of kings and the Lord of lords. Kings and princes must acknowledge God as the only King, and they must humble themselves before him, otherwise they will be humbled.

⁵Read the story in Daniel chapter 4.

We Assyrians are a peculiar people; everyone within himself is an authority in every field, but particularly so on nationalism, although I doubt if anyone of us has read any book on the subject or discussed it in respectful forums, or consulted experts whose opinions we consider highly. Yet when it comes to the point in question we are all experts.

Nationalism is a sacred duty; it is learned as well as acquired. We ought to be nationalists; I happen to be one, but at the same time it must be explained, properly taught, clearly understood, and thoroughly appropriated. It is not to be handled at random, or put into the hands of the mob, or thrown before swine and trodden underfoot. In every realm of life, anything that is worthwhile ought to be weightily considered. Things, events, and concepts must fall into their decorous categories, into some systematic pattern. A multitude of misjudgments arise in our minds because we either totally mix things together or put the first last and the last first.

Patriotism must work according to a scheme, to an acceptable pattern. But where are the schemers? Where are those responsible to put some guidelines before us in this matter so important? The following points may not be the best, and the present author would welcome any additional advice; but they may serve as an initiative for further elaboration.

1. Patriotism is devotion to, affection toward, one's own country and people. It should not be equated with chauvinism which is an extreme devotion to one's people and country with equal contempt for other peoples and nations. Nationalism is too noble to bow down before the altar of chauvinism or extreme enthusiastic na-

tionalism. Nationalism is a feeling of duty and loyalty to one's own homeland and people with equal respect to other homelands and people. When German nationalism extended these human boundaries, it ceased to be true nationalism. It turned to vicious Naziism—a horrible revolutionary inversion from good to evil, from sacred to profane. That political philosophy of nationalism, like communist ideology of today, wanted to transform everything human and sacred to selfish ends, by the force of arms rather than by the force of character, common sense, and right reason.

2. Patriotism must necessarily be equated with the public interest and the general good of the whole. It must strive to promote faith, culture, and traditions of the people. Its primary function is to organize and regulate the social, industrial, economic, intellectual, moral, political, and ethical experiences of the citizens. Each one of these aspects must find its roots in the flowering and nourishment of the nationalistic expansion. And the individual citizens must share a common psychological makeup which distinguishes them from the citizens of other nations.

Patriotism covers a terrible vast territory for the sake of its own people, and must do so with skill, wisdom, justice, and foresight if it is to sustain order and peace. Nationalism ought not to be feared as it is in some spots of the world where it absorbs its ill-informed subjects into a violent whirlpool of emotionalism. In a proper nationalism, people must enjoy a hearty liberty and a general satisfaction. It must portray a normal and adequate picture of mutual understanding and respect among its subjects with equal freedom of mutual exchange of dif-

ferent points of views. Many evils in human life are the result of an extreme and distorted concept of nationalism, and many ills in the world would be cured if ill-informed nationalists were adequately indoctrinated in the art of nationalism; and many sins of mankind would be swallowed up and lost in the vast ocean of human love if we practiced the right science of patriotism.

Men by nature love nationalism; we ought to, and rightly so. At times there is nothing more moving, stirring, and inspiring than this “omnipresent” and occasionally “omnipotent” spirit of nationalism. Nevertheless, at times it has turned into uncontrolled chaos, blind bigotry, and mesmeric emotionalism. Instead of becoming an ally, an asset, and an avenue of indoctrination, it has in its unlimited propaganda turned into sheer sensationalism.

Let us, we Assyrians, understand patriotism, love it, respect it, use it for our general welfare, and, if need be, let us willingly and reasonably die for it. For undoubtedly, it is worse than a contradiction in terms to love and die for a cause we do not understand, let alone *fully* understand. It is this psychological process of living, loving, and dying that ensures common emotional reactions and makes a nationalist willing to sacrifice his own interests to those of the whole and to do the things which need to be done for the sake of the nation even when there is no one watching him, or no one at hand ready to pay him for his worthy deeds.

Let us learn from the mistakes, faults, and triumphs of the great and small men, and from the epochs of history, about the proper understanding of patriotism. Let us acquaint ourselves with ancient Greece, Athens,

Sparta, and ancient Rome, in order to learn from their mistakes and failures in patriotism, society, culture, and organization. Let us learn where to stop and when to advance, how to judge, when to teach and be taught before we wain in vain, in number and power, finally to be consumed by the uncontrolled fire of the enthusiastic flame of nationalism. At this point, it is worthwhile to remember the words of Napoleon: "None but myself did me any harm."

The Bounds of Power

The power of a nation is a particularly important determinant of the kind of international goals that nation can afford. While any nation may attempt to raise its own standard of living, only a very strong nation can pursue power competitively with other great nations. Indeed, a great nation is almost compelled to compete for power because of the activities of other great nations. Power is the ability to determine the behavior and actions of others.

It is natural that man should be intensely interested in the physical characteristics of his own species through some kind of power, but the very power, the very strength of this interest is likely to lead to a certain loss of perspective. The study of power has been the most difficult study to diplomats, politicians, and anthropologists.

In dealing with this subject, I must be very cautious, lest I be misunderstood, and lest terminologies be taken out of their proper meaning. To speak of *power* of a na-

tion is to tread upon delicate ground “where angels fear to tread.” No human phenomenon in human history has been so much misused and at the same time greatly abused as power, and perhaps for that sole reason it is the supreme test of any nation in any age.

But if it is the supreme test of a people, it also is the supreme guarantee of a people, provided it is advisably wielded, properly managed, and wisely regulated. Certainly power is for the organization, unification, and safety of a nation; it is not merely to threaten and kill, though unfortunately it has been thus used. Too often it has been feared because of its excessiveness, as for example, in Hitlarian dictatorship by smashing individuals and nations. It has been feared when it has taken the Machiavellian concept of capturing, forcing, manipulating by any means, to justify any desired ends. Or when it has adopted the Nietzschean dictum, “the survival of the fittest.” These men had their complex problems with their theories of power; they and their theories have to some degree fallen into oblivion across the landscape of time. A powerful people in most cases comes to war against another powerful people. Nations, great and small, crouch and watch one another—if not with hatred at least with the suspicion of rivals and evils, depending on their power to seize the great opportunities. In their great undertakings, the powerful nations have lost sight of the lofty principles of morality, ethics, and justice to protect the feeble and the oppressed. Nations across centuries have consecrated their material as the supreme law of the world.

Power knows no law except that of power. That is why man’s modern power has turned into poisoned

power. The atomic bomb brought quick and empty victory to the allied forces, but it resulted for the time being in destroying the spirit and the soul of another nation—Japan. For the last four thousand years only one percent of the time man has spent in peace, and eight thousand treaties have been broken during this period. The dreadful tempest of power which has passed over the earth has left behind many sad and shameful traces of its havoc. The germs of enmities always remain after every war. The very ardor of power and the burning desire—noble in intention and origin—of defending one's fatherland, inflame the soul with an indignation, which however just it may have been in its beginnings, yet in its final consequences can too easily lead to excess by failing to stifle or even strengthening with new life the ancient seeds of social discord which it ought to see remedied by justice and love rather than by power.

Powers of nature act in mysterious ways, and men merely bear witness to the fact. For more than four centuries, the world was in the hands of "eternal" Rome, but that arrogant nation and its power faded by the passage of time to be replaced by Christ's power that empowers men and turns them not only into men, but into men of love and action who can transform the world by means of love from darkness to light, from physical power to moral and spiritual power, and from hatred to love.

A power does not necessarily have to be demonstrated and embodied in physical strength. A nation can be powerful, influential, organized, and peaceful, not categorically through the power of arms and police but through the establishment of its reasonable rules and

laws, gradual formation of its culture and customs, and the maintenance of its proper balanced leadership.

We Assyrians, who once had power but now do not, let us realize that no national power (although very necessary) can last forever. Among the leading names in modern history, that of Mahatma Gandhi, the practical nationalist and a great thinker, is respected, exalted, and immortalized by all who respect and honor great men. His policy of power was its association with high principles of ethics and morality, nationalism, pacifism, war, peace, and foreign policy. To him the major unsolved problems in international relations were powers and wars. He denounced just and unjust wars in all their phases. Speaking of powers that are and would be, he said that military powers would be incompatible with the ideal Hindu state and its democracy. What Gandhi was advocating was an ideal democratic state, an ideal government, and a patriotic realism that would stand all aggression and power in the time of peace and war.

We Assyrians have no physical power; we have no political power, or economic power, or social power, or any power whatsoever. And let it be remembered that no power will be ushered into our national fabric unless we remove the lamentable confusion in the realm of our ideas and thoughts which has produced restlessness, outbreaks, a general spirit of rebellion, dissatisfaction, and resentment. But we can have power if we want to, and choose to be powerful, and influential if we seriously heed the words of the One who said: "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12). This is the kind of power that does not bow be-

fore any other power—a power which Mahatma Gandhi drew from the Sermon on the Mount, from the Christian Gospel and introduced it into the national fabric of India, and through which he achieved an honorable independence for India without shedding a drop of blood on Indian soil. This is the sort of power that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. advocated and desired to implement in the powerless Negro minority if that minority wanted to get its civil rights.

We Assyrians can have moral, ethical, spiritual, and national power fearlessly, actively, and selfishly; affirming higher values within our social, political, and national order, and in the process, reshaping our society and institutions. For us some sort of power is indispensable; a power that embraces not only the structure and operation, but the rules, procedures, civil laws, justice, legislation, administration, and the protection of our diverse national interests. There is no power to defeat a peaceful, resolute soul that has determined to achieve peace and serenity through peaceful methods.

A Deeper Dimension of Religious Understanding

Someone has said, “When faith is lost, when honor dies, the man is dead.” When a church begins to lose its evangelical zeal, then automatically or eventually that church dies.

From the ecclesiastical point of view, from the standpoint of faith, of church enthusiasm, of evangelical zeal, we Assyrians have neither an enthusiastic faith nor an

evangelical zeal of our forefathers. We have lost that fiery spirit of missionary endeavor of our ancestors. In modern history, our church, the Assyrian church in general, has not contributed one iota to ecclesiastical affairs. For the last fourteen centuries the church has not made one inch of progress. In fact, it has considerably dwindled in number, lamentably declined in doctrine and theology, and has miserably fallen behind in clerical education. Once this church⁶ had the most outstanding theologians, and had prominent ecclesiastical centers of education. In the fifth and sixth centuries of our Christian era, the Assyrian church produced scholars like Nestorius, the Antiochene erudite scholar and the Patriarch of Constantinople, Theodore of Mopsuestia, the well-known St. Paul's exegete, Theodorus, another scholar, and many more, among them Tatian, whose name is always connected with Diatessaron: the Four Gospels, John Chrysostom, the golden-mouthed preacher and St. Ephriam whose name is remembered by the Aramaic manuscript from the fifth century now in a Paris museum.

In A.D. 636, Assyrian missionaries entered China. The Emperor Tai Tsung gave them a sympathetic welcome and protected them from persecution. In A.D. 781, these missionaries raised a monument on which they recorded their appreciation of the Emperor's toler-

⁶In the present stage of writing, the space will not allow us to mention the relationships between the "Assyrian," "Syrian," "Chaldean," and "Nestorian." The reader may consult the following sources: J.P. Fletcher, *Notes From Nineveh and Travels in Mesopotamia, Assyria, and Syria* (1850), p. 188; Isabella L. Bishop, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan* (1891), II, p. 237; Hurmizd Rassam, *Asshur and the Land of Nimrod* (1897), p. 172.

ance. They reached India where they established churches, the most known and still standing, the Mar Toma Church in South India. The Assyrian church in the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries had respected representatives that cherished learning and contributed abundantly to the intellectual milieu for which the medieval Muslims became famous. Many Assyrian scholars and physicians were given positions of honor and influence at the court of the Abbasid caliphs. Their educational centers flourished in Nisibis, which became the symbol of faith in the thirteenth century. Jundishapur and Merv flourished as centers of culture; Barsumas, a theologian, founded the theological school in Persia, and Rabban Sawma, the church father of Tartar origin travelled extensively in Palestine and Syria as a missionary and ambassador, spreading the Christian faith in that region. When Timur, a fanatical Muslim, came to the area, he brought with him anarchy and ruin, scattering the Christian groups to isolated regions.

The European museums not only contain our many surprising monuments, but they also contain many of our manuscripts and valuable books. Today, the descendants of those scholars, writers, theologians, and missionaries have lost the zeal of their forefathers in almost every area. We look forward to the day when this ancient people, once so renowned for missionary efforts and evangelical enthusiasm, would again awaken from the slumber of ages and become a faith-intoxicated community, bright as the sun, clear as the moon, and formidable as an army with banners going forward to achieve victory for Christ and our needy nation.

I am writing these pages in Chicago, in 1980. I am told

that there are thirty thousand Assyrians in this city, with only six churches, and with less than five hundred attendants in all of them at any regular Sunday morning service. No minority group has this meager statistical element. There are about sixty thousand Koreans in Chicago; they have fifty churches with admirable attendance every Sunday, plus centers of education and many other profitable activities. The same could be said about the Jews, the Spanish, and other groups.

The Swedish people came to this country as immigrants like us. They worked hard at different manual jobs; they built, prospered, and established schools, churches, hospitals, etc. Today, for example, in the Evangelical Covenant Church of America, a denomination with Swedish roots, there are only 76,239 members in the United States and Canada. Yet, at this time of writing they have

- 552 churches,
- 927 ministers,
- one theological seminary,
- one college
- schools overseas,
- one high school,
- two hospitals,
- eighteen retreat camps,
- thirteen old people's homes
- four retirement homes,
- two nursery homes,
- two children's homes,
- 101 missionaries in seven foreign countries,
- one print shop,
- one bookstore,
- and property worth about 500 million dollars.

All this the work of a few immigrants who came to this land and who now number 76,239 men and women.

We Assyrians do not even have one elementary school, or a recreation center, or a convention center. Every year we pour millions of dollars into hotels for these activities with which we could buy land if we wanted to, and were wise enough in organizing our national affairs and were indeed interested in our problems.

This section deals with religion, church, faith, and a new dimension therein. As a church, as a Christian group, we have not done much in modern day because we are not serious about these life-and-death issues. I have discovered a peculiar aspect in our church life that runs against common sense, and whose origin I cannot trace. We go to church on Sunday when we have nothing else to do. Anything, no matter how trivial, prevents us: party, social gathering, club meeting, business, car, television, wedding ceremony, funeral, ball games, festivals, visitations, dancing, and bowling. Any one of these activities has priority over the church. We are good in some of these areas, and excellent in others, and spend lavishly on them all as we spend destitutely on our churches. We are not cheerful givers; we are cheerful takers. This is a tragic "legacy" we have inherited from godly missionaries of past decades. We want good church buildings, but someone else has to build them and make them good for us; and when we enter these churches for worship, we proudly think that we are doing God, the minister, the priest, and the whole world a great favor. Moreover, when someone is not pleased with the church situation, he will hardly be seen in the church again. We are not only proud, but very sensitive.

There is no strong faith to bind us strongly to the church; there is no grace of humility to see ourselves short in the sight of God and man and in need of reconciliation. There is no zeal for God's house and love of neighbor. The church as a bond of unity, as a means of gathering together our ethnic minority in the bond of faith, love, hope, and charity, is dissolving before our own eyes and we are unable to do anything about it—either because we do not understand it or because we are not serious about it.

The Assyrian church has not been evangelical or missionary-minded since the seventh century of our Christian era. That was the era when our forefathers reached China and India before any other nation. That was the grandest point of our achievement, and it is the only grandest point of our boasting in church expansion. Since that moment in history, in faith, religion, evangelization, devotion, and expansion, we have not made one step toward God. The illogical line of rationalization has ever been, "Our forefathers and missionaries reached China and India thirteen hundred years ago; they did it for us, that is enough, we are Christians. Our ancestors were great fighters, valiant; we had a mighty empire; so we are great and mighty." Since the year 612 B.C. when Nineveh fell, we have not made one step toward national progress, and for the same reasons.

Let me ask a question: Where do faith and belief come from? They come from within ourselves. We are faith; we are belief. We are also doubt and unbelief. We are individuals, and as a people must make our decisions where to go in life, how far to go, how much to do or not to do. We must take our faith and belief seriously

and must think of them as wings that can take us to our destination no matter how critical and chaotic times may be. A national difficulty can be resolved, a church crisis can be remedied, a weak faith can be strengthened, provided we do the resolving, solving, and criticizing in a spirit of love and brotherhood. Many obstacles could be removed if we ourselves deal with our own problems and determine our destiny. But the first and the foremost prerequisite is that neither things nor times will ever change for better unless we change first. A change of heart and mind, a conversion from selfishness to God, will open new avenues through which many difficult issues could be decided upon and many problems solved.

We have always blamed others and lamented ourselves for our adversities, misfortunes, and for not being able to accomplish anything. We have, and perhaps with some justification, blamed the British politicians, American missionaries, French diplomats, Turkish sultans, Kurdish aghas (chiefs), and contemporary political disadvantages. There is about this excuse a pathetic air of shrinkiness, an apologetic ring of feebleness, a sickly note of timidity. We bewitch and beguile ourselves and become dependent on crutches that take us nowhere.

There is oddity in human affairs. Usually people unite *against* something rather than *for* something. Sadly enough, it takes an enemy to unify a people. But with us Assyrians, even in the face of an enemy we hardly unite, let alone unite *for* something.

Why is the course of our church or its destiny shrouded with obscurity? Why is there such an indifference in our church efforts today? Why have our children, young and old, lost interest in the church of the third

century of our Christian era? Who is to be blamed?

Let me take some measure of liberty and talk frankly to my colleagues in our spiritual struggle. And I apologize if I demonstrate a degree of forwardness. The responsibility lies on us, the clergy, the leaders of the church. First, let me candidly remark that the Assyrian church of today has poorly educated clergy. This is the primary obstacle to the church of our time. You cannot make a cobbler to run the affairs of a state, or a farmer to diagnose a disease-stricken person. Why should it be different in church offices, or perhaps in high church positions? You cannot have an uneducated, a non-theologically oriented minister to administer the affairs of the church. A poor carpenter, working with poor tools, will ultimately produce poor work. A poorly educated minister will produce a poor, if not a dead, church. A host of scriptural passages are too much for an unpolished mind in biblical subjects. Certainly, there is an exception. I know very few of the clergy who, educationally and theologically, could meet the normal standard of theological requirements. The rest here in this country and abroad, most of them have never been to a college, and hence never to a seminary. Yet these uneducated clergy (and I have met a few), without any intellectual refinement, not only reign, but rule with medieval ecclesiastical arbitrariness, rebuke the learned and the respected in the church, speak with papal infallibility, give orders, take what is God's and Caesar's as well, make people bow before them in obeisance, kiss their hands, and rest assured of their eternal salvation. This is either a misunderstanding of the essentials of the church or a magical interpretation of its ritual—perhaps both.

If we really love the church above our selfish motives and desire to save it from its imminent collapse, then let us begin from the beginning—the education of the clergy—from which logically follows the organization of the church and its education, which is meagerly organized and totally uneducated. Second, there must be a spirit of co-operation among the clergy themselves. At this point, we the clergy have sinned against God and our members. We do not gather together to know each other better; we do not want to, and therefore, we have accumulated a multitude of prejudices without understanding one another. Ethics condemns us in this attitude of isolation. Every ethnic group or denomination has its clergy meet occasionally and discuss their religious difficulties, church administration, social problems, and a host of other current crises pertaining to their status quo. Why should not the Assyrian clergy meet every once in a while and do the same? In this way many misunderstandings will be resolved, misconceptions which unjustifiably prevail will be mitigated, and maybe a great threat of fear will be eliminated. Jealousy, fear, cleverness, the love of material things, preferring the world and its pleasures to Christ, the vested interests, the timidity of compromise, and many other negative concepts and aspects will be settled. I see no rational explanation or biblical interpretation or moral justification for this attitude of personal exclusiveness. When men are separated, distant, aloof, they cannot communicate; when they cannot communicate, they fear each other; and when they fear each other they start hating each other. This is a self-evident psychological fact in human beings, and Christians are no exception.

We are brethren, but alas, we are separated brethren. This is the agony of our situation. And let it be noted carefully that as long as there is a divided clergy, there will be a divided church; and as long as there is a divided church, there will be a divided people; and as long as there is a divided people, subsequently, there will be a divided nation; and as long as there is a divided nation, there will be divided goals, powers, and perspectives. This is the end-result of a small mistake, or rather, the consequence of a small sin.

I myself am ready to take the initiative in this matter of co-operation. In fact, I have tried several times but in vain. I am persuaded that we should begin with ourselves, and demonstrate a Christian spirit of togetherness and co-operation, and be a better example to the Christians and non-Christians alike.

There is within us a schism that needs to be closed once and for all. Every minister of the Gospel has an obligation to stand courageously to the eternal verities of the Gospel of reconciliation, truth, and love on the collective level. Any religion that ends with the individual, ends.

This is not a trivial matter; in fact it is very crucial. We are dealing with the Church of Jesus Christ which he has bought with his own blood. Yet we the clergy have become the scandal and the offence; and through our arrogance and ignorance, personal prejudices, miscalculations, and craving pride have prevented God from touching our touchy souls, redeeming us, and renewing us into the likeness of his Son. Not until that process of cleansing takes place can we see a new day in our corporate churches, a new hope glowing into the hearts of our

members, a new spirit of trust sweeping us like a mighty wind, and a new kind of love that seeks not its own prevailing in our innermost beings, driving us to the highest, deepest, and most exciting experience in our Christian life. Our clergymen of today are “faint,” that is, they lack the power to feel and do the right, to battle manfully with the wrong, to side over with the right, and to rectify the prevalent moral errors.

The need calls for a deeper analysis, to penetrate beneath the surface. Conditions today appear to be most propitious for a deeper life of the Spirit. This is what makes the present moment the most exciting with all its manifold problems and sufferings. Let us declare that opportunity of the moment, the excitement of it; and not only preach it, but mean it and believe it wholeheartedly so that others may believe us and believe our message that is declared and preached. This should be the time to stop fooling ourselves and our church members. In the realm of the Spirit no swindling is tolerated, and yet how much we swindle, with no finger pointing to us and saying, “Thou art the man.” We need a purging campaign, a sifting process—if necessary, by fire! If we do not purge ourselves, we will be purged in spite of us. This was one of the outstanding facts and as well as the principal obstacle in the Medieval Church before the Reformation. The priests, the bishops, and the popes were not willing to acknowledge and abandon their ecclesiastical abuses. They were possessed with the erroneous notion that the Church will be in the hands of the eternal Roman Pontiff. When the Reformation came and the tocsin of religious freedom was sounded, it took the pope, the curia, the clergy, and the misguided people

by surprise. A fresh religious zeal, a newer and deeper faith that stood on the Word of God solely, shook all Europe, reverting it from a corrupt and false ecclesiasticism to the pristine teaching of Christ and his apostles. Nobody had thought that such an adamant system of the church would ever be undermined, the unquestioned principles, the unchallenged papal authority, and the undisputed traditions and customs would ever be questioned, challenged, and disputed. But again, we are unfamiliar with church history, and much less so with the ecclesiastical history. However, today, through the blur of distance, we must read that handwriting on the wall, lest we fall under God's judgment, if we have not already heavily fallen.

To recapitulate this item, let me add one additional remark to my colleagues, the clergy of the twentieth century, namely, "Awake!" In the Kingdom of God half measures will not prevail. "For whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7).

Let us strive to have an educated clergy so that we may have an educated church. Let the clergy get together occasionally and discuss their failures and successes and learn from one another new experiences and insights and apply these new experiences and insights to ourselves and to the building of better churches and institutions. Let us see where we have failed and others have succeeded, and learn from our failures and mistakes, minimize them, avoid them if we can, and strive to do better than we have done thus far. In our spiritual arena today, more than any other time in our recent history, we ought to reach a newer and deeper spiritual consciousness, capable of driving us closer to God,

sweep us off our feet, and carrying us on broad waves of spiritual enthusiasm toward God's love, harmony with one another, peace with ourselves, righteousness, and holiness. We may easily conclude from the experiences of the past that there is absolutely no possible panacea without a spiritual revival. Let the breath of God breathe over these dry bones, stir and move them until we become men prepared for God's service and our nation. Therein lies our destiny.

*A Futuristic Hope
‘Realizable’*

“The miserable has no medicine,
but only hope.”
Shakespeare

So we are miserable and have no medicine, but perhaps there is a glimpse of hope projected—somewhere in the future, that someday could be realized. Yet a mere hope somewhere in the future, or merely hoping without any action involved, is worse than a mirage in the desert that eludes a man's destination and aspiration. We Assyrians for centuries have been hoping against hope. For more than two millennia we have been a hopeless people hoping for a hope from somewhere that could be realized in our national structure; or looking for a haven where our national ship would harbor once and for all. Any hope must be "realizable," alive, and must set the miserable on a new direction, open new avenues, and usher them into their desired and long-awaited goals.

We all live in hope for a better future, whether on individual consideration or national calculation. One of the grandest aspirations of man is a hope for better days. Nevertheless, hope and future are certainly not passive words. Passive words take us away from reality, from ourselves, and lead us to nowhere. Thus, when we passively and indifferently hope that when future comes things will loom better by some magic formula we are

not thinking or hoping for a “realizable” future, creatively. We never see the future, and perhaps it is good that we do not, because when it comes it is today. Therefore, let us start the future with today.

To use the symbols of hope and future creatively, we must live them today. Every one of us, every day, must strive for a desired and cherished goal, and ought seriously to try to reach it even if we are occasionally sidetracked by failure. This, of course, requires courage, determination, devotion, freedom from selfishness, and self-respect in true perspective. This is active hope, true hope looking for a future to be realized, a dream to be fulfilled, and a utopia cherished by all the neglected and the oppressed.

The thesis in the following pages may be further elaborated. What are these desired, cherished, and long-awaited goals? What is our future hope that is nationally realized? Is it the restoration of the glories of ancient Nineveh and Ashur, with their princes, priests, chariots, wealth, and power? Then let me frankly and seriously remark that in these high hopes and lofty aspirations, precious as they are, there are extremely calculated risks and astronomical sacrifices. There ought to be; otherwise they will not be worth fighting for and dying for their high causes. Nationalism is a language of hope, and in most cases it takes us into a world, perhaps a *new* world, poised on the edge of a precipice. Nevertheless, this new world can and must be created, both in thought and action. These are not moments for mere casual observance; these are not days to pay sheer lip service; these are paramount moments that require life service, supreme sweat and toil, if our utopia is to be achieved.

To a people that has many reasons to despair of its capability to cope with the crises of our time, the following pages should bring a degree of reassurance and some grounds of future hope. I speak with temperance; but I also speak with candor. These pages may shed new light on certain issues and alternatives which face us all.

Having realized that there is or must be a hope and some long-awaited aims, what then is the procedure? What is the route on the chart that we should follow?

In international politics, before world forums, a people must be recognized, accepted as an existing entity. If it is not recognized, it must do so. A people must demonstrate its identity, must show itself that it is there to stay regardless of disadvantageous circumstances.

In this area, we Assyrians are far behind. Unfortunately, many people have not even heard of us. On several occasions I have surprised my American and European friends by declaring to them for the first time that I was an Assyrian. They had not the slightest notion that there was a small remnant of that ancient people still struggling in vicissitudes of time for their home and ancient glory. The reader may go back and read the "Foreword" written by my best friend and colleague, Dr. Robert Canfield, an anthropologist from Washington University in St. Louis. Few have heard of us. The reason is simple: We do not publicize ourselves; and a further reason for that is simpler: We have no writers, no publications, no educated people to write and produce; hence, there are no books about us to be put in the hands of other people to read about us and know us. We are forgotten, neglected by our own fate and mentally handicapped.

Therefore, it can be deduced from the above argument that the crisis urgently and seriously calls for upgrading, elevating, and making ourselves felt and known. And the essential medium to achieve this process is through education. Although this might seem a circular reasoning, yet it is an important one. The first and most important issues ought to be dealt with by men of first rank. If we are to achieve a future hope and a secured destiny, they ought to be thoroughly digested in minds of the educated people; they ought to be handled by those who understand the meaning of hope and future. For no international organization is haphazardly going to grant us our national and political demands when we are not ready to handle these demands and duties; when we have no right people to deal with extremely significant national issues. There are certain international prerequisites we ought to meet on an international level. But the first prerequisite is a need for men and women of international caliber. So the crisis is not a man-power but rather a power-of-man crisis, man of word, thought, and action. Here lies our shortage. Our tomorrow is waiting to see that shortage fulfilled by men in whose hands lies our destiny, and perhaps our redemption.

There is in the Bible an interesting remark by Jesus to the Jews of his day (Matthew 9:36-38). The account says, "But when he saw the multitude, he was moved with compassion on them, because they *fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd*. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few; Pray therefore the Lord

of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest’” (Italics mine).

Two thoughts capture our attention in this passage which describe a national situation.

1. These people *fainted*, that is, not because of physical fatigue, but because of moral and intellectual weakness. There was a lack of intellectual vigor, imagination, strength, and genius. There was no power, or man of power, of thought, sufficient to lift up and boost the morally broken spirits of men. There was the lack of power to do what the current circumstances demanded.

2. And more pathetic was that these men were scattered abroad *like sheep having no shepherd*. This, indeed, is a dangerous situation. It means they were liable to go astray and perish. A sheep is one of those animals that seem to have propensity to wander from their home; nor does it seem to have any instinct to stimulate and guide it back to its lost pasture and position. “Sheep having no shepherd” is a description of men in their alienation from God and man.

The words of Jesus describe our national plight adequately. So our need demands shepherds to bring us back into the fold, for men to raise us up from our fainted condition. The need calls not only for those who could use arms, but also more urgently for those who discuss ideas, confront conflicting ideologies and systems and handle diplomatic debates on international ranks. The crisis demands educated, capable, and recognized representatives whose voices and ideas could be heard and respected.

The world is transformed and recreated by a single

idea or ideas inside a man. Everything we behold today made by previous generations was, before its appearance, and idea in the mind of a man. The world revolutions that shed so much blood and directed men toward liberty were the idea of one man who lived in the midst of thousands of his fellow-men. The man-made systems, the gigantic Pyramids of Egypt, the Taj Mahal of India, the Parthenon of Greece, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, and the Skyscrapers of modern America—all these were an idea in the mind of an individual. When such men of ideas appear, who indubitably are most needed, they shall have our stamp of approval, because only then things will start to happen in their proper direction. For these are the people who could speak to heart-sick and home-sick exiles who mourn and yearn for the renaissance of days gone by, of departed glory whose nostalgia could not be fed on empty hopes and meaningless abstractions. We are looking for a new atmosphere created by men of fresh ideas, of good-will, honest, knowledgeable, and educated—in whom prevails a glowing hope and radiant assurance for a people wrapped in the robes of the spirit of the time and looking for a way out of no way, people victimized both by the forces of history and the forces of destiny, hoping that one day justice would prevail in international halls and a lost homeland would be restored.

A second factor under the rubric in question is a sense of general unity among us to be implemented without any further hesitation. We should forget our past adversities, our proud tribal “superiorities,” and start acting like men scattered and in desperate need of regathering and reinforcement.

Sufferings and unrelenting pressures, in most national misfortunes, have forged a strong sense of unity in people. Every speaker on almost any issue has the watchword of the day, *unity*. This sense, this bond of unity, must penetrate every idea of our cultural life if we desire to see fundamental national transformation. A people in a foreign land, in a country not its own, must desire and implement unity as much as, if not more than, the people dwelling on its own soil. Our responsible leaders and men of authority and influence ought necessarily to realize the importance of this morale in our people and life; the responsibility of corporate personality, that each one is his brother's keeper; that each one is bound to all in our cultural system, and that we are united wholeheartedly in the time of peace or war, and perhaps more in war than in peace. Let us learn an everlasting lesson, that no people, or minority group, or even a nation can prosper until it has adequately grasped the meaning of unity and enjoyed a personal and collective sense of dignity therein. Further, let us realize that we are our own reconstructive agents. We shape our future, hope, and destiny.

I shall try to illustrate briefly a number of steps in which unity can be accomplished, if not immediately, then at least in the future.

1. The first step toward this unity is a common acknowledgement of our guilt for the events that have separated us in the past and the present. All parties must acknowledge this flaw, and all of us must be ready and be involved for the next steps. It has often been difficult for us all to acknowledge our responsibility for the rifts that now divide us. But unless first we acknowledge our

dissatisfactions and shortcomings and do something about them, we will not be able to improve our satisfactions. The best method to solve any problem is to remove its cause first. It is both rationally sound and psychologically tenable.

This preliminary step makes us better acquainted with one another and with ourselves. This means self-exploration, both of the things we want to talk about and of the things that divide us. It is one of the signs of maturity to be able to give and receive criticism in the spirit of love and good will. If the criticism is surrounded by bonds of mutual concern and love, it need not be destructive but can actually be creative. When we have reached this point in our relationships with one another, we have taken a gigantic step to our national unity. Besides, when such acquaintance or relationship deepens, it is more and more possible to discuss differences as well as similarities, and to do so without self-consciousness or rancor. The more free and unstrained are our conversations, the more trustworthiness develops; good will prevails and awesome barriers that stand in the way can be reduced.

2. Another step toward unity, and one that is perhaps even more difficult than the first, is the attempt to engage in a purification. External influences must be terminated, paid agents and unloyal individuals and groups ought to be converted, won, and taught. This requires some wisdom and technique. Our task is not to point out the faults so obviously and glaringly present in others' lives, but rather to work to remove the faults so insidiously present in the system in which the individual or group is operating. The method is persuasion, not coer-

cion. It demands a great magnitude of redeeming power, in which every action is justified morally and legally.

3. Before we can take any active steps toward unity, we must be quite clear about the nature of the unity we are talking about—the words, phrases, intentions, and terminologies we are using. Nothing but disillusionment will come of a naïve hope that unity can be achieved by just a little more talking. The differences that remain when all the talking has been done may still be astronomical differences. However, this is one possible method that still divides the children of the same household.

4. We come to the final step. Unity will not come if either party passively waits for the other to move toward it. Unity will come only as both or more groups move out toward one another; neither will be quite the same as it was before the confrontation took place. The process involves some rules. They are:

a. Each party must wholeheartedly believe that the other is speaking in good faith, with sincere convictions and well-meant intentions.

b. Each group must have a clear understanding of its programs, plans, intentions, and goals.

c. Each party must accept responsibility in humility and good faith for what its group has done and is doing to foster and perpetuate unity.

d. Each party must forthrightly face the issues which cause separation, as well as those which create unity.

e. Each party must recognize that all that can be done with the discussions or dialogues is to offer them up to God who willingly and gladly consummates every well-intended unity.

I acknowledge with gratitude the sincere desire and firm belief of all those who strive to accomplish a unity among us. When in God's good time that great work is accomplished, it will be a gift of God and a fruit of many prayers. But at the same time it is an urgent and an essential goal toward which must be directed all our efforts and wills, cleansed of egotism, and illuminated by the discoveries of intellectual minds subject to the demands of faith. And finally, let us remember the significant words of our Lord on the subject: "If two of you agree over any request that you make on earth, it will be granted them by my Father who is in heaven."

5

Envoi

We have attempted to tell the tale of a nation. That nation is the major character; its actions, its plans, its goals, its power, dilemma, and destiny, and its relation to each one of us is our major concern.

It has been an interesting and grateful experience to glance, although in passing, at one important segment of our ancient history, to remind ourselves of its rich phases and vibrant personalities. To this day we still feel in our blood system the sap of those effervescent centuries, the lifting breath of that afflatus. The world museums in our modern day overflow with the spared surplus of that inspired and frenzied age. What frightening vitality there must have been in those ancient ancestors of ours who lived amid violence, superstition, and war, yet were eagerly alive to every form of beauty, artistry, and war! These men, their ideas, deeds, and accomplishments are indispensable to our minds and times.

The aim of this small work was to present itself to a people that stems from the dwellers of the ancient Mesopotamia, Assyrians. Nineveh, the capital of that powerful nation, fell in 612 B.C. Since then, this people has been a wandering Aramean throughout the centuries of

the Middle East. My ancestors fled from Turkey to Iran, to Iraq, to Syria, under persecution. They migrated three times in less than one century; and at this time of writing, they have no country they can call their own. The present writer was himself born in one country, raised in another, and educated in three others. And like his parents, he has no country he can call his own.

It is this sort of aimlessness, this sense of frustration, of deprivation, of injustice and oppression, that has sapped our spirit of any national home and killed our sense of hope in every human effort. Many have lost their faith in the arm of the flesh, in worldly organizations, and almost even in God. We have not only been bitten once, but many times in our tragic history by poisonous snakes of injustice, religious fanaticism, segregation, humiliation, and maltreatment in all their ugly phases. It is this sort of negligence, this indifference on the part of world communities that has broken the hope and spirit of this minority so that it has lost its faith and trust in any majority. We have seen a lot; we are tired.

We have lived in agony and terrible darkness through the centuries in many unhappy places. Many times in our national political life, as well as the social and religious, we have seen truth crucified and goodness buried, justice suppressed and injustice enthroned, rights trampled and wrongs triumphant. Yet we have kept marching on with the "little strength" that we have, with the conviction that the truth crushed to earth will rise again and that justice buried will emerge triumphant. May it be so.

That is why it became necessary to strike a note about our dilemmas. Our dilemmas perhaps are greater than

the dilemmas of any other people, in spite of our small number. I have advocated good education as a prerequisite and precipitating factor to a minority living in the sea of majority. Through good education, we can do our own thinking, planning, organizing, building, and rebuilding. Our dilemmas must be solved by ourselves, and our destiny determined by our own thinking and thinkers.

This obviously called for the necessity of a good leadership capable of directing and giving a new motivation, zeal, vigorous patriotism, fresh morality, and life to an aging people. We need heroes and rulers who can trust and be trusted in these days.

But all these above suggestions and recommendations can only be achieved and implemented as a result of a general galvanized unity. This is the first and foremost prerequisite to our dilemmas and destiny. In the name of God, in the interest of our national dignity, for the cause of our freedom, and for the sake of our children and children's children, I call upon all those of good will to gird themselves, demonstrate their moral courage, speak the truth, and *unite*.

Thank you my patient reader.

