



Հրատարակվում է Արևիկա Թեմայի Առաքելական Եկեղեցու կողմից
A Publication of the Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America

Volume XV, Number 8 — February 1993

An Incredible Journey

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HOW DOES IT FEEL to trace the steps of our parents and other survivors of the genocide? Incredible and unbelievable are only two of the words that come to mind.

We began this extraordinary adventure on a grueling 23-hour trip to the World Assembly of the Catholicosate of Cilicia in Aleppo, Syria. Previous World Assemblies had been convened in Antelias, Lebanon, but because of the instability of that region, the November 1992 Assembly was scheduled for Aleppo. This was to be the first meeting of the World Assembly since 1983 and the first time it had met in a locale other than Antelias.

We flew from New York on Lufthansa Airlines to Frankfurt, Germany, together with our Surpazan, Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian, and other delegates and their wives from the Eastern Prelacy. In Frankfurt, we were pleasantly surprised to join with the delegates from the Western Prelacy who had arrived there from California. After a two-hour layover we embarked on our aircraft again and flew to Damascus, Syria. There we were met by an entourage of Syrian-Armenians who escorted us through the VIP Lounge to clear customs and then to a waiting bus that would take us to Aleppo—some four hours away.

The weather was dismal. A deep fog had set in and our bus ride seemed interminable. Our first real exposure to the Arab world came, however, when the bus stopped midway at a typical Middle Eastern roadside restaurant where we caught our first glimpse of huge trays of pastries, cheeses of all kinds, olives, cakes, sandwiches, and other goodies. Because of the late hour, we opted only for hot tea and light sandwiches.

We reboarded the bus after this brief respite and arrived at our home away from home, the Amir Place Hotel in Aleppo at nearly 2 a.m.

As we disembarked from the bus, a group of six young men in their early twenties rushed to greet us. Their warm brown eyes revealed that they were fellow Armenians. They had been waiting patiently for our arrival and were concerned because of our lateness. They welcomed us warmly and said, "Give us your passports. Identify your luggage. Make yourselves comfortable and have a snack." Our guides arranged to have our luggage delivered to our rooms and then joined us in the lobby to socialize. Each of them had a pleasant smile. They were jewelers, mechanics, students, and others. They had taken time off from their own schedules to help us get settled. They explained that they or others would be there to help us with local transportation, money conversion, interpretation, sightseeing or any other matter which we desired. And that is exactly the type of

care which they extended to us throughout our week's stay in Syria.

Bright and early the following morning our young guides joined us for breakfast at the hotel. We chatted with them and they explained that it was their duty to see that we enjoyed ourselves in Aleppo and to help in anyway that they could.

One of our young friends then accompanied us on a short walking tour of "downtown" Aleppo so that we could get a general idea of the city. We visited several jewelry stores and clothing stores—all owned by Armenians—the Prelacy office and the Armenian Youth Center.

Returning to the hotel we were greeted by other youth who then escorted us in automobiles to the community center, *agoomp*, for lunch. The community center is a wonderful multi-story building with restaurant facilities on the first and third floors.

After a sumptuous lunch we were able to visit the environs of the community center where many newer buildings have been constructed. This is where many of the Armenians have relocated and is where the fairly new St. Asdvadzadzin Church is located. That Church was the situs of the meetings of the World Assembly.

Before the first session of the World Assembly, which was to convene that evening, we had the opportunity to visit the Forty Martyrs' Church. The Forty Martyrs' Church, built in three different sections, is a very ancient church. The first section was built about one thousand years ago, and the second section was added 400 years later. The walls were covered with magnificent murals, and the altar, made of marble, is of the typical arched configuration and houses a beautiful painting of Mary and Jesus. We thought of the solace this church brought to so many of our ancestors through their most trying times, and imagined the happiness that was shared within these church walls during the sacraments of marriage and baptism. We thought about the elation which separated family members felt when they were fortuitously reunited at this site. There is an extensive tripartite wall carving in the courtyard of this church as a monument to the Martyrs of April 24. A portion of the carving is a symbol of survival and rebirth of Armenia.

The next day, the delegates were taken by school buses to the assembly hall at St. Asdvadzadzin. The school buses are normally used to transport students to the various Armenian schools in the area. We smiled as we saw our Eastern Prelacy delegates board the Karen Jeppe Jemaran school bus. While the delegates were busy with their deliberations, our guides took us shopping, then to the *agoomp* for lunch and later to a fashionable beauty

Prelacy and A.R.S. Join Forces For Operation Winter Rescue

More than twenty containers have already been completed and it is expected that forty containers will be filled in time for the 2nd shipment of Operation Winter Rescue, according to a statement released by the Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America.

In all communities where it is feasible, Prelacy Parishes have joined forces with local chapters of the Armenian Relief Society in order to secure optimum quantities of food, clothing and medicine.

Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian, Prelate, also announced that donations of containers have been secured from individuals in the United States, Europe and South America.

The contents of the forty containers are as follows: six containers of Pulgur wheat; three containers of sugar; two containers of flour; five containers of rice; four containers of winter clothing; and 20 containers holding miscellaneous items of food, clothing, medicine, first-aid supplies, etc.

Archbishop Ashjian noted that Operation Winter Rescue has galvanized the community and people have come forth in large numbers to volunteer in whatever capacity necessary. The Prelate

made special mention of the small Armenian communities in Louisiana and Mississippi which joined and are doing an extraordinary job. Vartkis Bahian, chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Armenian Apostolic Church of Louisiana, secured the help of Mr. Jon Khachatryan, a civil engineer and successful businessman. Mr. Khachatryan, who was a candidate for the Senate last year, was instrumental in helping the community fill three containers. Mr. Khachatryan also personally contributed money for one-half container of rice as well as substantial amount of winter clothing.

The communities of Providence, Rhode Island, and Chicago have been working non-stop and have already filled several containers each. The communities in Philadelphia, North Andover, Watertown, New Jersey, Chicago, Detroit, Worcester, Washington, DC, Montreal, and Toronto are all in the midst of filling containers for the second shipment to Armenia.

Aside from what the local parish communities are doing, individuals—and in one instance an organization—are spontaneously contributing. (Continued on page 4)

Charles Aznavour Issues Appeal to Armenians



With Archbishop Ashjian and Charles Aznavour are, left to right, Armen Prouhian, Ambassador Arzooonian, and Mr. and Mrs. Nerses and Lena Vartanian.

Charles Aznavour, the international star of stage and film, issued an appeal to all Armenians on February 3 following a meeting with Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian and Alexander Arzooonian, Permanent Representative to the United States, at Prelacy headquarters in New York.

Ambassador Arzooonian and Archbishop Ashjian provided details to Mr. Aznavour about the "Operation Winter Rescue" campaign which is currently underway. Realizing the importance of the success of this program, Mr. Aznavour released the following statement:

"This morning while visiting with Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian and Ambassador Arzooonian, I was heartened to hear about "Operation Winter Rescue" which the United States government has initiated in response to an appeal by the Armenian Republic and Embassy in

order to transport much-needed aid to Armenia.

"As you know, since the earthquake I have devoted a great deal of my time and effort to helping Armenia. It saddens me to tell you that the current situation is as critical as it has ever been since the dark days of 1915. International relief agencies in Armenia are describing it as a 'pre-famine situation.'

"I ask my fellow Armenians to direct all of their efforts to securing food, medicine, and clothing in order to fill the three ships which the U.S. government is providing.

"Now is the time for all Armenians to work hand-in-hand for this humanitarian effort. My friends, it is a matter of life and death. Let us not miss this opportunity to transport, free-of-charge, large quantities of desperately needed goods."

Mr. Aznavour, who has become a

Musical Armenia Presents N.Y. Debut of Suren Bagratouni

Musical Armenia is delighted to present its 12th annual concert, the New York recital debut of cellist Suren Bagratouni. The concert will take place on Saturday, March 13, 8:30 p.m. at the Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall. Mr. Bagratouni will be accompanied by pianist Rina Dokshitsky for an exciting program including a collection of works by Brahms, Stravinsky, Tchaikovsky, Shostakovich, and the New York premiere of A. Khudoyan's Sonata for Cello Solo.

Musical Armenia was established in 1982 by the Ladies' Guild of the Armenian Prelacy. The concert series was developed to support the endeavors of Armenian artists as well as expose their talents to audiences in the Metropolitan area. Past artists that have been featured include Kevork Mardrossian, Nevard Shadarevan, Julian Byzantine, Elizabeth and George Pehlivanian, Maroush Panoyan, Nigon and Hrach Boghossian, and the late Mark Kyrkostas.

This years featured artist, Suren Bagratouni, leads a distinguished international career as a soloist, recitalist, and chamber musician. In addition to performing throughout the former Soviet Union, he has toured Italy, France, Switzerland, Germany, Poland, Bulgaria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Egypt, and the United States, earning enthusiastic praise in both traditional and contemporary repertoire. Richard Dyer of the *Boston Globe* has hailed him "... a cellist of uncommon attainments... Cellist Suren Bagratouni once again displayed his mastery of his instrument, which seemed an extension of his body." Critics from *Evening Yerevan* have reported "... The audiences throughout the Soviet Union attend Suren Bagratouni's concerts with great anticipation, not only for his commanding mastery of technique and musicianship, but also for his dedication in presenting new and unfamiliar works to the public."

Pianist Rina Dokshitsky began her piano studies at the age of six with Ilona Vinze in Israel. In 1982, she came to the United States to study with Russell Sherman at the New England Conservatory, where she earned both a Bachelor's and Master's degree and won the Conservatory's Concerto Competition. Ms. Dokshitsky has performed as a soloist with the Israeli Philharmonic, the Tallahassee Symphony, the Lake Charles Symphony in Louisiana, and the Plymouth Symphony in Michigan. She has given numerous recitals all over the United States and Italy, and has won international competitions in Italy, the United States, and Israel.

Tickets for Suren Bagratouni's March 13th debut recital at the Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall, 154 W. 57th Street, New York City, are currently on sale for \$15.00 each. They can be purchased through Carnegie Charge at (212) 247-7800 or through the Armenian Prelacy at (212) 689-7810½. The box office will be open one hour before the concert; however, seating is limited and it is recommended that tickets be purchased in advance.

"He who gives to me teaches me to give." —Danish Proverb

OUTREACH

A monthly publication of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America
138 East 39th Street, New York, NY 10016
Telephone: (212) 689-7810

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OUTREACH (USPS 426-490) is published monthly, with the exception of a combined June-July-August issue, by the Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America. Unsolicited manuscripts are welcome; please include a stamped, self-addressed return envelope. Signed articles do not necessarily reflect the policy of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America. Send all correspondence to the above address to the attention of the Editor. Printed in the United States of America. Second class postage paid at New York, NY 10016. Postmaster: Send address changes to OUTREACH, 138 E. 39th Street, New York, NY 10016. ISSN: 10643087

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Իրանի Խլամական Հանրապետության արտաքին գործոց նախարարության հրատարակած Մեծի Տանն Կիլիկիոյ Կաթողիկոս Կ.Ս.Օ.Տ.Տ. Գաղեգին Բ. Վեհափառ Հայրապետը, 3-13 Յունուարի, 1993-ին, պաշտոնապես այցելությունը ստաւ Իրան:

Փաստանոց

Լիբանանի Հայոց Թեմի Առաջնորդ Գիրշ. Տ. Արամ Արքեպիսկոպոս Բէշիշեանի եւ Գաւազանակի Խորէն Վրո. Տորոսեանեանի ընկերակցութեամբ, 4 Յունուարի առաւօտեան Վեհափառ Հայրապետը ժամանեց Թեհրանի Մեհրապատ օդակայանը եւ դիմարկուեցաւ Իրանի արտաքին գործոց նախարարութեան Միշին Արեւելքի եւ Հիւսիսային Ափրիկէի բաժանմունքի պետ Հրջաթօլեւան Սելի Մահմադ-մաստ Բազաբե խոնասարի, նախարարութեան փոքրգոլի պետ՝ Խարիկ Ջաւիի, նախարարի առաջին տեղակալ՝ Արիարիի, Իրանի մօտ Լիբանանի դեսպանատան գործակարին, իրանաբայ երեք թեմերու առաջնորդներուն թեմական իշխանութեանց եւ ազգային պլլ մարմիններու ներկայացուցիչներու հոլով:

Վեհափառ Հայրապետը օրակայանէն առաջնորդուեցաւ Թեհրանի Ս. Սարգիս եկեղեցին եւ դիմարկուեցաւ ժողովուրդի մէջ բազմութեան մը կողմէ: Եկեղեցոյ մէջ կատարուած կանոնական արժօքէն ետք Ազգային Առաջնորդարանի դաղիճին մէջ տեղի ունեցաւ հիղարկութիւն, որո ընթացքին Վեհափառ Հայրապետին ներկայացան ազգային թեմական մարմիններու ներկայացուցիչները:

Երկու օրը, Թեհրանի Կիսկարան շրջանին մէջ, արտաքին գործոց նախարարութեան կողմէ իրեն յատկացուած հիղարկութեան մէջ կարճ քննարկուեցաւ Իրանի միջուկային զէնքի արտադրութիւնը եւ յատուկ ծաղկեպսակ մը գետեղեց դաժմարանին վրայ

Այցելութիւն Խորհրդարանը Նախագահին

Երեքշաբթի 5, Յունուարին, ընկերակցութեամբ Արտաքին Արքեպիսկոպոս Մահուկեանի, Խրամ Արքեպիսկոպոս Բէշիշեանի եւ Իրանի խորհրդարանի հայ ազգայններուն՝ Վարդան Վարդանեանի եւ Արտաքին Բարոմետրի, Վեհափառը այցելեց խորհրդարան եւ ընդունուեցաւ խորհրդարանի նախագահ՝ Հօջաթօլիպան Նաթերի Կորիի եւ իր 15 խորհրդականներուն կողմէ: Խորհրդակցութեան ճիշդ դարձան Արցախի, Պարսկան-Հերցեգովինայի եւ պարսկալեզու ժողովուրդի տագնապները:

Վեհափառ Հայրապետը եւ Արամ Արքազան խորհրդարանը յարգող նախագահին ներկայացուցին հայ եկեղեցոյ կեցուածքը մարդկային իրաւանց եւ ժողովուրդներու արդար իրաւունքներու նկատմամբ եւ պարզեցին այդ գծով Եկեղեցիներու Համաշխարհային Խորհրդի, Միշին Արեւելքի եւ Երոպայի եկեղեցիներու խորհուրդներու ծիրէն ներս իրենց կատարած աշխատանքները: Հօջաթօլիպան Նորի յատուկ կերպով անդրադարձաւ Ազգայլեանի եւ Հայաստանի սիշել Ղապաքարի հարցին գծով գոյութիւն ունեցող տագնապին եւ անգամ մը եւս պատրաստակամութիւն յայտնեց շարունակել Իրանի խաղաղարար ճիգերը այդ տագնապի բարձր օրձեան համար: Խօսակցութեան ճիշդ դարձաւ նաեւ իրանահայ դպրոցներէն ներս կրօնքի

բալեւեւ լեզուով ուսուցման անհրաժեշտութիւնը եւ այդ գծով արդէ իսկ ընդունուած օրէնքի անմիջական գործադրութեան հնարաւորութիւնները:

Հանդիպում Հանրապետութեան Փրկ-Նախագահին Հետ

Հայկական ծնունդի օրը՝ Յունուար 6-ի կեսօրէ ետք ժամը 1-ին, Վեհափառ Հայրապետը այցելեց Իրանի Հանրապետութեան փրկ-նախագահ Տորոսեանին: Անգամ մը եւս իրօականութեան արտաքին դարձան Լիբանանի, Պարսկանի եւ Ղարաքարի հարցերը: Տորոսեանը իր համակրանքը արտայայտեց իրանահայ բանակին նկատմամբ եւ փախաք յայտնեց միացեալ ճիգերով եւ փոխարարձ հասկացողութեամբ խաղաղ լուծում մը գտնել Ղարաքարի հարցին համար:

Հանդիպում Արտաքին Գործոց Նախարարին Հետ

Երկ օրը, կեսօրէ ետք ժամը 4:30ին, Վեհափառ Հայրապետը իր շքանիւնով այցելեց իր հիղընկակին՝ Իրանի իսլամական հանրապետութեան Արտաքին Գործոց Նախարար՝ Տորոսեանի Ազգար Վիլայեթի

Վեհափառը նախ շնորհակալութիւն յայտնեց իրեն եղած այս պաշտօնապետի հրատեղին եւ ցուցաբերած բացառիկ պատիւներուն համար: Այս բացատրեց Մեծի Տանն Կիլիկիոյ Կաթողիկոսարանի դերը եւ ունեցած գործունէութիւնը, յատկապէս Միշին Արեւելքի շրջագիծին մէջ: Արամ Արքեպիսկոպոս Բէշիշեանը որպէս ատենակալ Եկեղեցիներու Համաշխարհային Խորհրդի կերպարանակալ եւ գործարար մարմիններու, իր կարգին ընդհանուր բացատրութիւն մը ներկայացուց ԵՎԽ-ի ընդհանուր գործունէութեան մասին, յատկապէս մարդկային իրաւանց եւ խաղաղութեան հետ առնչութիւն ունեցող մարզերու մէջ

Տորոսեանը իր կարգին, անհրաժեշտ Ղարաքարի հարցին, ըսաւ. «Այն ինչ որ տեղի կ'ունենայ Հայաստանի եւ Ազգայնի միշել Ղարաքարի հարցին գծով, շատ ցատակալ պարագայ մը է, որ ամեն գնով պետք է լուծուի մը գտնել: Այս պատշաճութիւն յի ծառայելու ո՛չ մէկ կողմի եւ ո՛չ ալ շրջանի եկիլներու շահերուն»:

Հանդիպում Հանրապետութեան Նախագահ Ռաֆանեանին Հետ

Շաբաթ, 9 Յունուար, կեսօրէ ետք ժամը 4:30-ին Վեհափառը իր եկեղեցական շքանիւնով այցելեց Իրանի իսլամական Հանրապետութեան նախագահ Հօջաթօլիպան Հաշիմի Ռաֆանեանին:

Վեհափառ Հայրապետը նախ շնորհակալութիւն յայտնեց իրեն եղած այս պաշտօնական հրատեղին համար, ապա ըսաւ. «Իրանը ինձի համար պարզ այցելութեան յատուկ երկիր մը չէ. ան իմ կեանքիս մէջ խառնուած երկիր մը է, Իսֆահանի մէջ իմ առաջնորդութեան օրերէն սարին: Առանկ եւս, մանաւանդ Իրանը հայութեան համար հաւազատ երկիր մը է, որ մեր ժողովուրդը դարձեալ կեանքի իր քրոնքը է խառնած եւ անոր պատմութեան մէջ շարակալուած: Ինչ որ կը պատահի Իրանի մէջ ուղղակիօրէն կը շահանգը՞տ մեզ: Իրանի ցում պլ մերը է, որպէս իսլամական պլ: Ապա Վեհափառը յայտնեց իր հաւատարմութիւններով տեղեկութիւնները եւ այսինքն Նորի Վեհափառը իր կողմէն Վեհափառը եւ հայ ժողովուրդի ներկայ կացութեան մասին թէ՛ Միշին Արեւելքի մէջ եւ թէ՛ նաեւ Հայաստանի մէջ:

Նախագահ Ռաֆանեանի իր գոհունակութիւնը յայտնեց Վեհափառ Հօր այցելութեան, հարգարարած տեղեկութիւններուն եւ արտայայտած ստանդարտներուն համար: Իր խօսքին մէջ ծանոցաւ արդի դարուն մէջ բարոյական արողջ սկզբունքներու պահպանման անհրաժեշտութեան վրայ: Շարունակելով իր խօսքը, ան ըսաւ «Ծայրայեղութիւնն ու տղեկանորութիւնը ամեն ազգի մէջ կ'ըլլայ. բայց հոգեւոր պետերը պետք է հեռու մնան անոնցմէ եւ իրենց ժողովուրդը հեռու պահեն նման փորձութիւններէ: Մեզք հայ փոքրամասնութեան եւ բոլոր փոքրամասնութեանց կը նայինք որպէս Աստուծոյ գաւազներու: Իրանի մէջ փոքրամասնութեանց գծով հայերը շատ լաւ դիրք ուղեգրեցին եւ նոյնիսկ

շատ նահատակներ տուին Իրանին կարատարութեամբ պատերազմի ընթացքին»: Անդրադարձուեալով Ղարաքարի հարցին, նախագահ Ռաֆանեանը ըսաւ. «Այդ կողմը որ ծագած է Ղարաքարի մէջ դժբախտաբար մեղուրդող բիշ մը պարտուեց: Վերջին հաշտով՝ կրիւն թշնամութիւն կ'արտաքայնէ: Պետք է օր առաջ արդար լուծում մը գտնուի, որպէսզի մարդիկ իրար չսպաննեն: Դուք եւ մենք կարող ենք խրատել, թելարդել որ կրիւն եւ թշնամութիւնը վերջ գտնեն»:

Երեւելեան Պատգամ եւ Ծնողատրութիւններ

Յունուար 6-ի առաւօտուն Վեհափառ Հայրապետը ներկայ եղաւ Գրիստոսի Աստուածայայտմութեան տօնի եւ քրօններէ արարողութեան: Արամ Արք. Բէշիշեանը պատարագեց, իսկ Վեհափառը իր հայրապետական պատգամը ուղղեց ժողովուրդին: Գարողի ընթացքին, Վեհափառը կը ուղղեց ժողովուրդին լայն օժանդակութիւն ընծայելու մեր հայրենիքը եւ Արցախի ժողովուրդին, լայն բանարկ իրենց ձեռքերն ու սրտերը, լիստարն օժանդակութիւններով «Հայաստան» Համահայկական Հիմնարկումին եւ կամ անմիջական օգնութեան համար

Հրաժեշտը Մաշիկերը

Ի պատիւ Գաղեգին Բ. Կաթողիկոսին, Իրանի իսլամական Հանրապետութեան Արտաքին Գործոց Նախարարութեան կողմէ, Երկուշաբթի, Յունուար 11-ի գիշերը ժամը 8-ին, ընթրիք-հիղարկութիւն մը տեղի ունեցաւ նախարարութեան կերպով շքեղ սրահին մէջ:

Մաշիկերու ընթացքին Վեհափառ Հայրապետը շնորհակալութեան խօսք ընել է ետք ըսաւ. «Այս արտաքին անգամ է որ Հայոց Կաթողիկոս մը պետական այլակարի բարձրաստիճան հրատեղի մը կ'արժանանայ, ինչ որ արտայայտութիւնն է Իրանի Իսլամական Հանրապետութեան եւ հայ ժողովուրդի ու Լիբանանի բարեխամական կապերուն»:

Հոջ. Խոնասրի իր կարգին շնորհակալութեան խօսքը

Իրանի իսլամական Հանրապետութեան խօսքը ըսաւ թէ՛ Վեհափառին եւ թէ՛ իրեն ընկերակցութեան: Բարեխամական յայտնեց որ բոլորը միատեղ հաւաքուած են եւ սարքուած ընթրիքը նկատեց արդի՞ վերջնամուրդներու համար եղած տոնոթիւնը: Ապա, մեծապէս գնահատեց Իրանահայութեան կեցուածքը, դրուատեց գամքը, եւ ըսաւ. «Այն բոլոր ջերմ գոգացումները, որ արտայայտեցին երկրի բարձրաստիճան ղեկավարները՝ Վեհափառին եւ հայութեան նկատմամբ, կը բխին Իրանահայութեան հանդէպ Խլամական Հանրապետութեան ողբերգած սկզբունքներէն: Անոնք բացառիկ համակարգը կը վայելեն երկրի ղեկավարներուն եւ բոլորին մօտ, որովհետեւ Իրանահայերը անկերպաբարձեւ միշտ ներկայ եղան եւ մեր բոլոր ուղիս եւ տխուր առիթներուն եւ մասնակից դարձան եւ իսլամական փարոսշուք լերկափութեան շարժումին»:

Այցելութիւններ Պետպաճարուններու Երեքշաբթի, 12 Յունուարին

Վեհափառ Հայրապետը ընկերակցութեամբ Թեհրանի Առաջնորդ Արտաքին Անուկեանի եւ Թեմական Խորհրդի անդամներուն, կատարեց հետեւեալ երկու այցելութիւնները. ա) Լիբանանի դեսպանատուն ժամը 10-ին

Այստեղ, դեսպանատուն գործակալ Պրն. Արմատ Շապաթ, ընկերակցութեամբ խորհրդակալ Պրն. Երոսար Թեֆէլեանի, սիրով ընդունեց Վեհափառը եւ յատուկ հիղարկութեամբ պատուեց զայն:

An Incredible Journey

(Continued from page 1)

salon—of course, Armenian-owned. Incidentally, the Armenian women in Aleppo are very fashionably dressed and beautifully coiffed in the European fashion.

The following day, Wednesday, we were escorted by our guides to Forty Martyrs' Church where a brief but stirring service was held. Then everyone went in to the church courtyard to view the wall carving monuments and a small museum which is located on the premises.

In the afternoon we were taken to an ancient fort, *perit*, located in the old Arab sector of Aleppo. In ancient times this fort was the entrance to the city of Aleppo, but today the city has grown and extends miles in all directions as far as one can see. Our Arab guides explained that the fort had been constructed to protect the city from invading Christians, Crusaders and others, over a thousand years ago.

That evening we were invited to the graduation ceremonies of the Armenian students from universities in the Aleppo area. These ceremonies are held annually by the Hamazkain and provide a means to recognize the academic accomplishments of the younger members of the community. It filled our hearts with pride as the master of ceremonies proudly announced each graduate's name and field of study and presented him with a diploma. His Holiness Karekin II was the honored guest at this ceremony; Vehapar delivered a short but stirring congratulatory message to the graduates. It was unbelievably touching to see the extent of warmth and love exuded to the Vehapar by the young people. In return, his love and aura reached the graduates and the audience and touched all present in a deeply emotional manner.

On Thursday, our entire group, spouses, delegates, lay and clergy, made a trip to the Karen Jeppe Jemaran. Karen Jeppe was a young Danish woman who from 1922-27 devoted herself to the care and consolation of the survivors of the Turkish atrocities. She continued her benevolent work until her untimely death in 1935. In 1947 His Grace Bishop Zareh (who later became Catholicos) proposed to the Danish successors of Miss Karen Jeppe to establish an Armenian National College bearing her name. Ten thousand square meters of land were legated to our national authorities and with the help of the Syrian government, the Kaloust Gulbenkian Foundation, and the Armenian Bishopric of Aleppo, two buildings stand on that land today known as Karen Jeppe College where more than 1,100 pupils get preparatory and secondary education. Most of the 100-120 yearly graduates continue their studies at universities. A part of the credo of the Jemaran students is to be ever ready to serve the Armenian people in their pursuit of the just resolution of Hai Tahd and to serve our Fatherland. A keen commitment to Armenianism is instilled in the students. Many of them take active roles in teaching, organizational work, and the promotion of the arts and sciences.

That evening we attended a memorable concert which was given by the Hamazkain dance group and chorus. Traditional Armenian dances were performed by young men and women in Armenian costumes. After the dances, the chorus comprised of about 100 members commenced their portion of the program. The conductor, a very energetic and enthusiastic man who had come specifically from Yerevan to lead the chorus, drew bravos for the magnificent performance with a stirring rendition of *Mer Hairnik*—but it was not over yet, as the audience gave a resounding standing ovation and called for an encore. He obliged by having the chorus sing a reprise of the last two choruses of the national anthem. There was not a dry eye in the audience. People cheered. It instilled our hearts with pride just to be



The interior of the Martyrs' Chapel at Deir Zor

able to say, "I am Armenian, and these are my beautiful and talented people." Truly, it was a rare privilege and distinct treat to have been able to be present at this concert.

On Friday, while the Assembly meetings were going on, spouses accompanying delegates had an opportunity to tour the Armenian Relief Society's facilities in Aleppo. Our first stop was the ARS building. The building has four floors. The basement is equipped with sewing machines and young Armenian women without livelihood are paid by the ARS to sew uniforms, bedding, and other salable items. The second floor houses a free clinic for the needy with rooms set aside for a dentist and an ophthalmologist. The third floor is a nursery for children from the ages of 3 months to 3 years. Working parents can leave their children without worry during the day. The fourth floor has a display room for the creative handiwork that the ARS sells.

We were then taken by bus to the ARS Old Age Home. This facility cares for both men and women who are in need. It was an extremely sad part of our trip to see these older people. Yet, we were happy that they were in an Armenian environment where they could be cared for.

Later on in the day we were taken to the ARS shelter. This shelter is a haven for children who have no parents or who have parents who temporarily cannot care for them, due to reasons beyond their control.

The youngsters were all clean and happy children. They had a classroom and teacher on the premises, a dormitory-type set up for sleeping, and a cafeteria for eating meals.

Trip to Kessab
On Saturday, a bus excursion was organized to take us to visit the Armenian village of Kessab which is about four hours west of Aleppo.

Kessab is the birthplace of His Holiness Karekin II. It is a small and beautiful mountain village (Vehapar and all the Kessabtzis insist that it is a large city) close to the shore and Musa Dagh. Thousands of people spend their summer vacations in Kessab. There are many forests for picnicking and the ocean shore is close by. It is primarily agricultural and has countless apple trees.

The local church in Kessab had been completely renovated and included a marble altar. The renovation was a Her-

culean task for this community, and we were surprised to learn that most of the work had been done in the 3 months prior to our visit in order for the church to be completed for Vehapar's visit.

Following a touching consecration service, we walked down to the *agoomp*. The *agoomp* is called the library by most Kessabtzis. Here at the *agoomp* we were served a bountiful, delicious, multi-coursed meal prepared by the local parishioners. Platters of sliced raw carrots, radishes, whole tomatoes, and cucumbers were served at all the tables. This course was followed by plates of hommus, babaganoush, and tabouleh, and then came the lamb kebab, lamb sausages, and fried potatoes. The final course consisted of fresh fruit. The amount of food served at all the meals was overwhelming. We were impressed with the vibrancy, spirit, warmth, and perseverance of the Armenian community. His Eminence, Archbishop Davet Sarkisian's mother invited all of us to her home for a short respite and some fruit and goodies. The house was small, has two stories, and is made of stone, stucco and brick. It is perched on the side of a hill, offering a beautiful view of the valley below. A fire sparkling in the fireplace, this home was very inviting on this cool and rainy November day.

Pilgrimage to Deir Zor

One of the most memorable trips was an emotion-laden pilgrimage to Deir Zor. Three bus loads of people started out from the hotel on our last day in Aleppo. We headed east through the desert about 250 miles to the town of Deir Zor and visited a Chapel built in memory of the martyrs of the Turkish atrocities of 1915. Emotions of reverence and awe were welling up in everyone. We all have ancestors whose unmarked graves—nay, indeed, unburied and decayed remains—are scattered all over this countryside.

After proceeding for about three hours through the desert, with nothing to see except an occasional nomadic shepherd with a few sheep, we suddenly encountered a sand storm of major proportion. Most of us had never experienced anything like it before. The bus had to inch its way through this maze of sand which enveloped us and blew into the bus. We were covered from head to toe. Not knowing how long it would take to get through this storm made us feel that

we, in some small degree, experienced the hardships of our parents and families when they were escaping across the desert on foot, trying to flee from the hands of the Turks.

This emotion was just the beginning. When we arrived in Deir Zor we saw the beautiful chapel that was built in memory of the Armenian martyrs. A magnificent marble structure that was three giant stories tall, the basement had numerous sand-filled boxes for candles fastened along its outside circular wall. Each box was adorned with an arch carved in the wall, and above it were quotes from the Bible. In the center of the basement was a circular depression about twelve feet in diameter, the outer portion, about three feet wide, housed bones recovered from the desert. The bones were enclosed by a glass cover. A column extends from the center of this depression up into the first floor, where the altar is located. The top of the column was adorned with a large gilded Armenian Cross, and reaching high above this toward heaven stands a beautiful dome. An eternal flame burns in memory of the martyrs within the chapel.

The Vehapar led a memorial service in the chapel, joined in with the participation of the numerous Surpazans and clergy delegates. We parishioners, with lighted candles, filed down the steps from the first floor to the lower level where the bones of the survivors are preserved. In his sermon Vehapar maintained that this was not a period for mourning, but rather a clarion call for all Armenians to respond with affirmative action to the needs of our brethren in the newly formed Republic of Armenia, as well as the world over.

On our return trip to Aleppo, the bus stopped at the Euphrates River, just outside of Deir Zor, at the point where many young men had been sacrificed and thrown in. After a special prayer was said for these martyrs also, we reentered the buses to continue back to Aleppo, thereby ending a very poignant and profound excursion to the site where our martyred parents and relatives are eternally remembered.

We were blessed by the presence of His Holiness, Karekin II, on this enlightening trip. He amazed all of us by his encyclopedic recall of not only the names of the delegates, but also the names of each and every spouse and offspring. His masterful eloquence added to our enjoyment and spiritual fulfillment. In Kessab, Vehapar pointed out (while making a vertical gesture with his hand) that a multitude of Kessab's offspring became writers, clergymen, and physicians and indicated that the common fiber in these professions (while making a horizontal motion with his hand, which thus formed a cross) is service to mankind. It was a pleasurable experience to hear one so gifted with eloquence use that gift to contextualize religion. We pray that God grant Vehapar a long and healthy life resplendent with the fulfillment of all of his national and personal dreams.

Attendance at the World Assembly provided both the delegates and their spouses with the opportunity to experience what it means to be Armenian and to experience first hand how our people have suffered. It also emphasized the sacrifices and warmth of the Armenian people wherever they may be. The Armenians in Aleppo can be proud because they are truly giving people and have done all that is possible to keep the Armenian people and heritage alive. They do this instinctively and from the heart, because they believe this is the right way to be and to live. They know no other way.

This experience was very moving and something each Armenian should experience at least once in his lifetime so that his Armenian spirit and sense of community can be rekindled.

We deeply thank our hosts, the Armenian community of Aleppo, for all of their grace and kindnesses. Their hospitality was so pleasant and warm that we would not hesitate to return to Aleppo at any time. ■

