

BIOGRAPHY of the late Mar Eshai Shimon XXIII

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Mar Eshai shimon was born in February 26, 1908, at Qudchanis, in the mountains Assyria, located in the Turkish province of Hakkari. His father, Rab Khaila (General) David D'Mar Shimon, commanded the Assyrian armies, who fought on the side of the Allies during the First World War. His mother, Lady Esther, a woman of great esteem, was the sister of the late Mar Yousip Khanishoo, Metropolitan of Rustaqa, who, apart from holding the second highest post in the hierarchy of the Church of the East, was highly respected by every Assyrian.

From early childhood, Mar Eshai was brought up in strict traditions of the Church of the East. His liturgical training was provided by Archdeacon of Ashita and his elementary theological studies were conducted by the revered prelate, Mar Yosip Khanishoo. In 1920, by virtue of a 450 years old Church tradition, he acceded to the Patriarchal See at the age of twelve after the sudden death of his predecessor, Mar Paulos shimon, his paternal uncle.

In 1924, Mar Eshai was sent to England for further education. He first entered St. Augustine's College in Canterbury and, after the successful completion of his preparatory studies there, he was admitted to Cambridge University, with history and statecraft as his major subjects. Immediately after graduation in 1927, the late Patriarch returned to assume his responsibilities as the spiritual and temporal leader of the Assyrians. These duties, in accordance with the canon, were entrusted, in his absence, to a caretaker committee, comprising of Metropolitan Mar Yosip Khanishoo of Iraq, Mar Zaia Sargis of Baghdad, Mar Timotheus, Metropolitan of India, assisted by Lady Surma D'Mar Shimon and Rab Khaila David D'Mar Shimon in secular affairs.

In the aftermath of World War I,

as a result of which, the Assyrians lost more than two thirds of their entire population, the Assyrians were eagerly looking for a resettlement in the province of Nineveh. As a matter of fact the high ranking representative of the Allied powers had promised to find them a suitable

home in their ancestral homeland, Assyria, at present known as Iraq. At the cessation of hostilities, some one hundred thousand Assyrians were forced to march on foot from the province of Urmia to Baquba, in Iraq, a distance of about eight hundred and fifty miles through a very mountainous and rough terrain. Several thousand young and old people perished from fatigue, hunger, thirst and sickness. After a period of rest and medical care at Baquba camps provided by the international Red Cross, they were, according to the Allied plans to be settled in the province of Mosul, reuniting with their brethren, some one hundred fifty thousand of them, after a long period of separation. The Allied Powers made this promise in recognition of the tremendous help the Assyrian armies rendered to the Allied cause by engaging in bitter fighting with several divisions of the elite and well trained fighting units of the Ottoman Empire, the backbone of their Grand army.

As the fate of the Assyrian nation and the life of the late patriarch are interrelated, it is quite appropriate to have a brief glimpse in the evolution of history from the time he was born, coinciding with the tragic events of World War I and the subsequent era



the late Mar Eshai Shimon XXIII

that followed. The Assyrians fought most bravely throughout the duration of this terrible war. In spite of the great odds and lack of modern weaponry they inflicted heavy losses upon an enemy of great magnitude. At the time the armistice was declared in 1918, the Assyrian combat troops turned over to the Allied Command a large number of

prisoners of war together with a large supply in arms and ammunitions. Several books have been written by Western authors praising the fighting and indomitable spirit of the mountaineer people, glorifying the victories won by this "SMALLEST ALLY" against an enemy with unlimited military and man power, and backed by boundless resources of a mighty empire. The Assyrians helped the Western Allies tremendously by engaging the bulk of the enemy forces on the Eastern front thus leaving its southwestern front vaguely protected, being an easy target for invasion from the mechanized units of the Allies. When hostilities ended in Allied victory, it is an irony of fate, that the "Smallest Ally," who had contributed the most in ratio to its numbers instead of a gain, lost all they had and saw the greatest transmigration and exodus in its very long history.

Contrary to the legitimate expectations of the Assyrian people, for which tremendous sacrifices were made, their friends and allies went back on the promises made in earnest to resettle the Assyrians in the province of Mosul in the northern part of the territory liberated by the Allies. The Assyrians were not asking for more than a peaceful settlement

BIOGRAPHY

... CON. from page 3

host, the President, to return to his temporary headquarters in San Francisco, U.S.A., but promised to return to assume his rightful position as the captain of his people, who had been deprived of his leadership for too long, as soon as the administrative matters in hand in his diocese of U.S.A. and the rest of the world were resolved and entrusted to a capable prelate.

It is said that history repeats itself. Just when Mar Eshai Shimon was about to steer the ship of his nation and Church in the right direction, clear away from the political storms that were engulfing the Middle East, he was crowned with Martyrdom ironically after holding the exalted office for more than fifty five years. Thus he follows in the foot-steps of his heroic uncle, the late Mar Benyamin Shimon, the 117th Catholicos Patriarch, whose life was sacrificed on the treshold of national salvation from further unjust persecutions. The name of the departed spiritual head of our Church, Mar Eashai Shimon, has been added to the ever growing list of countless martyrs given to safeguard our national interests. In memory of all our sanctified martyrs we beseech all Assyrians to reunite in love to preserve our entity as a nation and gain our challenged God given human and religious rights to live in peace with all our brothers as equal partners with all other nationalities and work with dedication country.

people like the late Mar Eshai Shimon, who are born leaders, with intuition, wisdom, insight, integrity, dedication and innumerable talents are very hard to come by and more difficult to replace, especially among our Assyrian nation whose numbers are very few in comparison to those of other nations. May God rest his soul in peace. May his memory remind us of our glorious Assyrian heritage lest we forget ever that we are Assyrians, and shall die as true Christian Assyrians, and will pass this noble spirit to our present and future generations.