LEST WE FORGET -- BAYARD DODGE (1888-1972)

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Mesrob Vartabed Ashjian, Spurk, 31 December 1972
Translated by **Vahe H. Apelian**

> *The late Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian posted this article in Simon Simonian's "Spurk" weekly (Dec. 31, 1972). It was translated and abridged by Vahe H. Apelian.--Editor.*

The Armenian media kept a strange silence at the death of a great friend of the Armenians, Bayard Dodge. Strange, because he was a towering figure in Lebanon and a great number of people have been beneficiaries of his good deeds. He contributed greatly towards the establishment of the Lebanese Armenian community.

Bayard Dodge standing far right in above photo

It was my pleasure in the last two years to meet him and relive with him the period when caravans of destitute Armenians would arrive in Lebanon and find shelter in orphanages preparing to face life and end up establishing the vibrant present Armenian community in Lebanon. I feel a debt of gratitude towards him and belatedly pen these lines in his memory. More than others, he deserved to be remembered and eulogized by Armenians.

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Bayard Dodge was born in 1888 in a family known for its humanitarian missionary zeal. His name, along with that of his father's Cleveland, great paternal uncle Steward, and father-in-law Daniel Bliss remain forever associated with the American University of Beirut (AUB).

After attending Princeton and other top American universities, Dodge headed to Lebanon. It would become his adopted country. He set foot in Lebanon in 1913 and immediately assumed a variety of responsibilities. His caring heart and generosity of spirit would reveal themselves when he was appointed director of the Near East Relief Association in 1920 where he rendered incalculable assistance to the Armenian orphans. From 1923 to 1948 he acted as president of the AUB. During his distinguished tenure he made the university a center of learning and knowledge to people in Lebanon, in Asia, Africa and Europe.

After his retirement he returned to the U.S. For the next quarter-of-century he maintained his ties with Lebanon and continued to work for the betterment of the country. Prime Minister Saeb Salam eulogized him saying: “Bayard Dodge exemplified the best in Americans. He understood the people of Lebanon as well as the Arab peoples. He identified himself with them and made their social, educational, and national struggles his own.”

Bayard Dodge was also known as a man of faith. Even though he was a devoted Christian he saw much commonality with Muslims. In a statement that appeared posthumously, he said: “A good Muslim and a good Christian are alike in many ways. It is a blessing that the American University of Beirut was founded in Lebanon, which is a unique country”.

The AUB’s modest and unpretentious president was also a scholar, and a capable administrator devoted to good causes. He was honored by many universities receiving honorary doctoral degrees. Syrian, Lebanese, Egyptian, Iranian, Polish, French, Greek and British governments decorated him with medals of distinction. In 1960 he was honored the “Woodrow Wilson" award. Suleiman Franjieh, president of Lebanon, posthumously bestowed upon him the National Order of Cedar First Class.

Bayard Dodge died on May 30, 1972. Memorial services were rendered in Princeton and in Lebanon. Alas, we Armenians could not express our gratitude on these occasions for the services he rendered to us, among them for his decisive role in the acquisition of the property for the seat of

the Catholicosate of Cilicia.

The world bestowed upon him all the accolades it could. Surely it is the God's recognition of him as a devoted servant mattered most to him, for he worked tirelessly to live up to the motto of the university he served: "That they may have life and have it more abundantly".

The Dodges displayed in their home with affection the attached photo of Bayard Dodge receiving the plaque the Armenian community presented to him in 1948 as a token of its gratitude. Also in the photo, Catholicos Karekin I Hovsepian is sitting next to Mrs. Dodge.