# OUR TOUREG

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**Category:** Opinions

By Simon Vratsian, Translated by Vahe H. Apelian, Loveland, Ohio, 1 October 2010

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Saint Nshan church probably is full to capacity now. It would be impossible to breathe there in this suffocating hot weather. However, it is Toureg's memorial, can I not attend?

Although there are other memorials, the church is mostly empty. Regular Sunday church attendants who have nowhere else to go, for that reason they attend church services and few others who truly respect Toureg. "Intimates", those who partook of his daily table are absent.
I felt very uneasy. The choir was singing "Jerusalem of the above", the choir's "do not despair small flock" was reaching my ear; however, hammers were doing the talking in my mind.

-Toureg, Toureg, Toureg, where is your small flock?

Was it this or the smell of the incense? I could not take it any more so I left the church.

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I do not remember the exact date. I had come to Tbilisi from Yerevan. In the Yerevanian Square, volunteers who had come from America surrounded me. They had one thousand and one complaints and demands.
The volunteers were being organized into troops and were being integrated with the regular forces but the volunteers were refusing to be under such command. Especially the Armenian-American volunteers who had come with high hopes and enthusiasm, but instead were disappointed and were complaining that they were deceived in being brought to Caucasus.

First and foremost there was no deception. Of course, we had alerted volunteers not to come from America. Personally, I had written letters explaining the situation in Caucasus and the change in the policies of the Tsarist government. I had urged the Armenian-Americans not to move from their

places and take advantage of the favorable employment conditions to save money for the future. However the impatience had been great with the Armenian-Americans. They were afraid that Armenia would be liberated without their participation. Many had wanted to take advantage of the opportunity and return to their ancestral homes, or to avenge their martyred family members. The party thus had been obliged to give in and send volunteers to Caucasus from America as well.

The Armenian-Americans arrived to Caucasus under most unfavorable conditions and they did not receive the welcome they had expected. From here their first disappointment and a series of other difficulties which were inherent of the volunteering movement.

Karekin Tourikian stood in front of me in the Yerevanian Square. He is from Khoups village of Keghi. He was dressed in leather jacket and next to him stood a young man who also was dressed in leather jacket as well and was also wearing a Russian Cossack fur hat from which his curly hair protruded.

-"My nephew", said Karekin, "Mehran Tourikian, he is also a volunteer from America."

I did not remember Mehran from America. I think he was from Detroit and I had never been in Detroit.

He was a likeable young man. In appearance, he was dark almost black. His expression was such that you thought he would be laughing at any moment. He treated his uncle with reverence.

- From which troops are you? I asked.

- From our troop, joked Mehran.

- With few others we are getting ready to go to Keghi, explained Karekin, therefore we decided not to join any other group.

I secured for them the necessary permits and gave them recommendations to present to Keghi regional command to explore the region. I think they were 8 to 10 persons.

They went to Garin and for a long time there was no news from them. To the extent I remember, Rostom had met them in Garin and had given them advice as to what to do when they get to Keghi.

Later on I met them in Etchmiadzin. Karekin, Mehran and the others had come to kiss the right hand of the Catholicos and brief the Catholicos of what they had seen in Keghi. The Catholicos had heard them in grief, had shed tears with them, had given them his blessings and had bid them farewell.

Karekin looked hopeless. Not the party, not the Catholicos, no one was in a position to mitigate his pain.

We should take our revenge with our own hands,

That was the conclusion of their troop.

They told what they had seen in Keghi.

There were no Armenians left in Keghi.

To this day Mehran's expression voiced in an affirmative tone rings in my ear.

-There are no Armenians, but Armenian will live.

What did he mean to say? Was it his bitterness for the Armenians who had vanished? It was his faith of course that Keghi will remain Armenian. It's worth to note here, "your faith will sustain you".

Karekin had gathered notes about the evacuation and massacres of Keghi. He thought of publishing them. In France he approached me several times to find a publisher. It was not possible. He evaded trusting his notes to others to read, which he claimed amounted to few volumes. What happened to these notes? Where they used to prepare a memorial album about Keghi?

I do not know where the troop of Keghetsis went from Etchmiadzin.

I accidentally met Mehran a few times in Caucasus. He was a solemn, reserved man who looked at life philosophically. He was the exact opposite to Karekin, who held everyone responsible for the ills that had happened.

Much like our accidental meeting, Mehran disappeared from my Caucasian horizon. I thought that he had returned to America. There was nothing left for him to do in Caucasus. Keghi was no more. And much like Vanetsi without Van, Keghetsi without his mountains cannot breathe freely.

If it were to end this way, I would have regarded it as an accidental meeting with a likeable young man and I probably would nothing to write. Don't we all meet likeable people in our lives?

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Years passed. Armenians dispersed all over the globe. The Armenian Diaspora came into existence branched in my countries. And in every place, a prominent Armenian flavored the local Armenian life.
There are names that define the country or the city they live in. For a while, it was not possible to imagine Paris without Chobanian. Chobanian died, so did Paris for many.

Beirut for a time was synonymous with Toureg for me, the Toureg of Hotel Lux. Humorous articles in newspapers…. Toureg. Presence in our national bodies….Toureg. In the life of the party……Toureg. Who was this individual? For a brief moment I could not believe that he is the Mehran I had met in Caucasus. That dark featured young man, with expressive eyes, curly hair, the solemn young man and now a married man with children.

America had not enticed him. Avenging the ills that had befallen on his people had catapulted him

from Caucasus to Cilicia. He had participated in the national upheavals and struggles there. In the end he had met a like-minded miss from Garin and gotten married and had settled in Beirut as the owner and director of the famed Hotel Lux and as the enthusiastic national and party activist.

In December 1951, when I moved from America to Beirut, Toureg and his wife Shoushan visited me for welcome at Goms' house, where I was staying. Almost 35 years had passed since I had met him last in Caucasus. His former impressive curly hair had disappeared. However, his expressive eyes and face had remained the same but he seemed to have grown even darker. There was a new man in front of me both in body and in mind, someone who had grown wise by the experiences of life into the beloved Toureg of the community.

The life of every Armenian is a novel. For some it's tragedy, for others it's adventure, and for a third it's comedy. Toureg was fated to experience these three literary genres in his life to leave this earth content and in joy.

That's what he told me during our last visit.

- I leave this earth content and in joy.

Was that true though? His eyes were telling otherwise. Who, I beg you to let me know, leaves this planet called earth content and in joy?

"Do not despair small flock", but where is the flock?

The words of the song are being justified

-You die and they bury you as if you never lived on earth……

"Housaper" Daily
December, 15 1960.

**Notes**:

**Toureg** was the pen name and Mehran Tourikian's moniker, a noted Keghetsi in his days in Beirut, Lebanon. **Simon Vratsian** was the last prime minister of the 1918-1920 short lived first Armenian Republic. **St. Nshan** is well known Armenian Apostolic Church in Beirut. **Garin** is the Armenian name for Erzeroum. **Rostom** is one of the founders of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation. **Goms**, is the pen name of Vahan Papazian who was a deputy member of the short lived Ottoman Parliament representing the Van region. He is also a noted author. **Houssaper** was an Armenian daily printed in Cairo, Egypt.

According to Jean-Louis Tourikian, who lives in Toronto, his grandfather Karekin wrote a book about Keghi. Jean-Louis entrusted his grandfather's personal papers to the Academy of Sisters in PA, USA.