

MUSA DAGH

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BY GEOFFREY DUNLOP



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First Modern Library Edition, 1937

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Manufactured in the United States of America
Printed by Parkway Printing Company Paper by Richard Bauer & Co.
Bound by H. Wolff

FRANZ WERFEL

(1890—)

A NOTE ON THE AUTHOR OF "THE FORTY DAYS OF MUSA DAGH"

To the American reader and theatregoer, Franz Werfel is known principally for his heroic novel, *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*, and his two plays, *Goat Song* and *Juarez and Maximilian*, both produced by the Theatre Guild in New York. In Europe his poetry first brought him recognition and established him as a youthful leader of a growing spiritual movement. Subsequently his novels added to his stature as a man of letters all over the world. The son of wealthy Jewish parents, Werfel was born in Prague, Czechoslovakia. Every advantage of education and travel was lavished on him. As a student at a Prague gymnasium and later at the University of Leipzig, he devoted himself to the study of philosophy, and at the age of twenty-two, he became a lecturer in philosophy at his own university. The World War interrupted and terminated his academic career; he served from 1915 to 1917 in the German army on the Russian front. The impact of this experience has been evident in all his post-war writings. Abandoning scholastic work for the career of a writer, Werfel moved to Vienna, where he has lived since. Today he is an illustrious exile from the country which he served during the War. *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh* was written in 1932-33 and reflects the admiration and compassion he felt for the plight of the Armenian people when they faced and resisted extermination.

Note

THIS book was conceived in March of 1929, in the course of a stay in Damascus. The miserable sight of some maimed and famished-looking refugee children, working in a carpet factory, gave me the final impulse to snatch from the Hades of all that was, this incomprehensible destiny of the Armenian nation. The writing of the book followed between July 1932 and March 1933. Meanwhile, in November, on a lecture tour through German cities, the author selected Chapter V of Book I for public readings. It was read in its present form, based on the historic records of a conversation between Enver Pasha and Pastor Johannes Lepsius.

Breitenstein, Spring 1933.

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BOOK ONE

COMING EVENTS

“How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and
avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?”

REVELATION vi, 10

Teskeré

"How did I get here?"

Gabriel Bagradian really spoke these solitary words without knowing it. Nor did they frame a question, but something indefinite, a kind of ceremonious amazement, which filled every inch of him. The clear glitter of this Sunday in March may have inspired it, in this Syrian spring, which shepherded flocks of giant anemones down along the flanks of Musa Dagħ and far out across the irregular plain of Antioch. Everywhere their bright blood sprang from the meadow slopes, stifling the more reticent white of big narcissi, whose time had also come. A golden, invisible humming seemed to have encased the mountain. Were these the vagrant swarms of the hives of Kebussiye, or was it the surge of the Mediterranean, audible in the bright transparency of the hour, eroding the naked back of Musa Dagħ? The uneven road wound upwards, in and out among fallen walls. Then, where it suddenly ended in heaps of stone, it narrowed out into a sheep-track. He had come to the top of the outer slope.

Gabriel Bagradian turned. His shape, in rough European homespun, straightened itself, listening. He thrust the fez a little back off his damp forehead. His eyes were set wide apart. They were a shade lighter, but not in the least smaller than Armenian eyes usually are.

Now Gabriel saw what he had come from. The house gleamed out, with its dazzling walls, its flat roof, between the eucalyptus trees of the park. The stables, too, and the out-

houses, glittered in this early morning sunshine. Although between Bagradian and his property there was now more than half an hour's walk, it still looked so close to him that it might have been following at his heels. And further along the valley the church of Yoghonoluk, with its big cupolas and pointed, gabled minarets at the sides, greeted him clearly. This solemn, massive church and Bagradian's villa formed an entity. Bagradian's grandfather, the fabled founder and benefactor, had built them both fifty years ago. It was the custom of Armenian peasants and craftsmen, after their journeys abroad—to America even—in search of profit, to return home, into the nest. But bourgeois grown rich had other notions. They built their luxury villas along the Riviera from Cannes, among the gardens of Heliopolis, or at least on the slopes of Lebanon, in the neighbourhood of Beirut. Old Avetis Bagradian had drawn a definite line of demarcation between himself and such new-rich. He, the founder of that world-famous Istanbul business, which had offices in Paris, New York, and London, resided, in so far as his time and affairs allowed him to do so, year after year in his villa above the hamlet of Yoghonoluk, under Musa Dagħ. But not only Yoghonoluk; the other six Armenian villages of the district of Suedia had basked in the rich blessing of his kingly presence in their midst. Quite apart from the schools and churches built by him—from his summoning of American mission teachers—let it suffice to indicate the gift which in spite of every other event remained, even today, fresh in the memory of his people: that shipload of Singer sewing-machines which after a more than usually prosperous business year Avetis had distributed among fifty needy families in the villages.

Gabriel—he had still not turned his listening gaze away from the villa—had known his grandfather. He had been born in the house down there and spent many long months of his childhood in it. Till his twelfth year. And yet this early life, which was, after all, his own life, seemed so unreal that

it almost hurt to think of it. It seemed like a kind of life in the womb, the vague memories of which stir the soul to unwelcome shudderings. Had he really ever known his grandfather, or only read of him and seen his pictures in a story book? A little man with a white goatee, in a long black-and-yellow-striped silk gown. His gold eyeglass dangling from a chain upon his chest. In red shoes he had walked over the grass of the garden. Everyone bowed deeply. Tapered old man's fingers stroked the boy's cheeks. Had it all happened, or was it no more than empty dreaming? To Gabriel Bagradian his grandfather and Musa Dagħ connoted the same. When a few weeks ago he had first beheld again that mount of his childhood, that darkening ridge against the sunset, he had been invaded by indescribable, terrifying, and yet delightful sensations. Their depths had refused to reveal themselves. He had at once given up the attempt. Had it been the first breath of a presentiment? Or only these twenty-three years?

Twenty-three years of Europe, Paris! Years of complete assimilation. They were as good as twice, or three times, that. They extinguished everything. After the old man's death his family, absolved at last from the local patriotism of its founder, had escaped this Oriental nook. The firm's head office was, and remained, Istanbul. But Gabriel's parents had lived with their two sons in Paris. Yet Gabriel's brother—he, too, had been called Avetis—about fifteen years Gabriel's senior, had soon disappeared. He went back to Turkey, as active partner in the importing-house. Not unfittingly had he been given his grandfather's name. With him, after some years of neglect, the villa in Yoghonoluk reassumed its seigniorial status. His one amusement had been hunting, and with Yoghonoluk as his base he set forth into the Taurus mountains and to the Harun. Gabriel, who scarcely had known his brother, had been sent to a Paris lycée and then to study at the Sorbonne. No one insisted on putting him into the business, to which he, a miraculous exception in his family, would not have been

suiting in the least. He had been allowed to live as a scholar, a *bel esprit*, an archæologist, a historian of art, a philosopher, and in addition had been allotted a yearly income which made him a free, even a very well-to-do, man. Still quite young, he had married Juliette. This marriage had worked a profound change in him. The Frenchwoman had drawn him her way. At present he was more French than ever. Armenian still, but only in a sense—academically. Still, he did not forget it altogether, and at times published a scientific article in an Armenian paper. And, at ten years old, Stephan, his son, had been given an Armenian tutor, so that he might be taught the speech of his fathers. At first all this had seemed entirely useless, harmful even, to Juliette. But, since she happened to like young Samuel Avakian, she had surrendered, after a few retreating skirmishes. Their tiffs had always the same origin. Yet, no matter how hard Gabriel might try to concern himself with the politics of foreigners, he was still sometimes drawn back into those of his people. Since he bore a respected name, Armenian leaders, whenever they were in Paris, would come to call on him. He had even been offered the leadership of the Dashnakzagan party. Though he retreated in terror from this suggestion, he at least had taken part in that famous congress which, in 1907, united the Young Turks with Armenian nationalists. An empire was to be grounded in which the two races should live at peace side by side and not dishonour each other. Such an object excited even an alienated enthusiasm. In those days Turks had paid Armenians the most charming compliments, declaring their love. Gabriel, as his habit was, took these compliments more seriously than other people. That was why, when the Balkan war broke out, he had volunteered. He had been hastily trained in the school for reservist officers in Istanbul and had just had time to fight, as the officer of a howitzer battery, at the battle of Bulair. This one long separation from his family had lasted over six months. He had missed them greatly. He may have feared

that Juliette would slip away from him. Something seemed imperilled in their relationship though he could not have given a reason for any such feeling. He was a thinker, an abstract man, an individual. What did the Turks matter, what the Armenians? He had thoughts of taking French citizenship. That, above all, would have made Juliette happy. But always, in the end, the same vague uneasiness had prevented it. He had volunteered for the war. Even if he did not live in his country, he could at least always re-evoke it. His fathers' country.

These fathers had suffered in it monstrously and still not given it up. Gabriel had never suffered. Massacre and torture he only knew through books and stories. It is not, he thought, a matter of indifference which country even an abstract man belongs to. So he remained an Ottoman subject. Two happy years in a charming flat in the Avenue Kléber. It really looked as though all problems had been solved and his life taken on its final definite shape. Gabriel was thirty-five; Juliette, thirty-four; Stephan, thirteen. Their lives were untroubled, their work intellectual, they had some very pleasant friends. Juliette was the decisive factor in choosing them. This was chiefly evident in the fact that Gabriel's former Armenian acquaintances—his parents had been dead some time—came less and less frequently to the flat. Juliette, so to speak, insisted relentlessly on her blood-stream. But she could not manage to change her son's eyes. Yet Gabriel seemed to notice none of all this. An express letter from Avetis Bagradian gave a new direction to fate. His elder brother urgently begged Gabriel to come to Istanbul. He was a very sick man, he wrote, and no longer able to manage the business. So that for some weeks he had been making all preliminary arrangements to transform it into a limited company. Gabriel must be there to defend his interests. Juliette, whose habit it was to emphasize her knowledge of the world, had announced at once that she would like to accompany Gabriel and back him up

throughout the negotiations. Matters of great importance would be involved. But he was so simple by nature and certainly not up to the Armenian *ruses* of all the others. June 1914. An incredible world. Gabriel decided to take not only Juliette, but Stephan and Avakian, his tutor. The school year was nearly over. This business might prove long drawn out, and the ways of the world are unpredictable. In the second week of July they had all arrived in Constantinople.

But, even so, Avetis Bagradian had not been able to await them. He had sailed in a small Italian boat for Beirut. The state of his lungs had been going from bad to worse in the last weeks, with cruel celerity, and he could no longer stand the air of Istanbul. (Remarkable that this brother of Gabriel, the European, should have chosen Syria, not Switzerland, to die in.) So that Gabriel now, instead of dealing with Avetis, had to deal with directors and solicitors. Still, he soon perceived that this unknown brother had watched over his interests with the greatest tenderness and foresight. For the first time he grew intensely conscious of the fact that his ailing, elderly Avetis had been a worker on his behalf, the brother to whom he owed his well-being. What an anomaly that brothers should have been such strangers. Gabriel was appalled at the pride in himself which he had never managed to stifle, his scorn of "the Oriental," the "business man." Now he was seized with the wish—a kind of longing even—to repair an injustice while there was time. The heat in Istanbul was really unbearable. It did not seem wise at present to turn back westwards. "Let us wait till the storm has blown over." On the other hand the very thought of a short sea voyage was a tonic. One of the newest boats of the Khedival Mail would touch Beirut on its way to Alexandria. Modern villas were to let on the western slopes of Lebanon, of a kind to fulfil the most exacting requirements. Connoisseurs know that no landscape on earth has greater charms. But Gabriel had need of no such persuasions since Juliette agreed at once. In her,

for a long time now, some vague impatience had been accumulating. The prospect of something new enticed her. While they were still at sea, declarations of war had come rattling down between state and state. When they stood on the quay at Beirut, the fighting had already begun in Belgium, in the Balkans, in Galicia. Impossible now to think of going back to France. They stayed where they were. The newspapers announced that the Sublime Porte would enter into alliance with the Central Powers. Paris had become enemy country.

The real purpose of the journey proved unfulfillable. Avetis Bagradian had missed his younger brother a second time. He had left Beirut a few days before and undertaken the difficult journey, via Aleppo and Antioch, to Yoghonoluk. Even Lebanon did not suffice him to die in. It had to be Musa Dagh. But the letter in which his brother foretold his own death did not reach Gabriel until the autumn. Meanwhile the Bagradians had moved into a pleasant villa only a little way above the town. Juliette found life in Beirut possible. There were crowds of French people. The various consuls also came to call. Here, as everywhere else, she knew how to gather many acquaintances. Gabriel rejoiced, since exile did not seem to weigh too heavily on her. There was nothing to be done against it. Beirut, in any case, was safer than European cities. For the moment at least. But still Gabriel kept thinking of the house at Yoghonoluk. Avetis, in his letter, had implored him not to neglect it. Five days after the letter came Dr. Altouni's telegram, announcing his death. And now Gabriel not only thought, but constantly spoke of, the house of his childhood. Yet, when Juliette suddenly declared that she wanted to move as soon as possible into the house in which he had been a little boy and had now inherited, the thought scared him. Stubbornly she dismissed his objections. Country solitude? Nothing could be more welcome. Out of the world? Uncomfortable? She herself would see to all that. It was just what so attracted her.

Her parents had owned a country house, in which she had grown up. One of her pet dreams had always been to arrange a country house of her own, to manage it all *en châteline*—it made not the least difference where, in what country, it happened to be. In spite of all this vivacious eagerness Gabriel still opposed her till after the rainy season. Wouldn't it be far more prudent to get his family back to Switzerland? But Juliette held to her caprice. She became almost challenging. Nor could he repress a strange uneasiness mingled with longing. It was already December by the time they began to make arrangements to return to the house of his fathers. The train journey, in spite of the moving troops, was quite bearable as far as Aleppo. In Aleppo they hired two indescribable cars. Through the thick mud of district roads they arrived, as by a miracle, in Antioch. There, at the Orontes bridge, Kristaphor, the steward, was awaiting them with the hunting-trap of the house and two ox-carts for the luggage. Less than two hours on, to Yoghonoluk. They passed hilariously. It hadn't been half bad, declared Juliette. . . .

"How did I get here?" These surface combinations of events only seemed to answer the question very imperfectly. Gabriel's solemn amazement still remained. A vague restlessness vibrated through it. Antediluvian things, buried under twenty-three years in Paris, must be re-established in his mind. Only now did Gabriel turn his half-seeing eyes away from his house. Juliette and Stephan must certainly still be asleep. Nor had church bells in Yoghonoluk as yet proclaimed Sunday morning. His eyes followed this valley of Armenian villages a certain way northwards. From where he stood he could still see the village of the silkworms, Azir, but Kebussiye, the last village in that direction, had disappeared. Azir lay asleep in a dark bed of mulberry trees. Over there, on the little hill which nestles against the flank of Musa Dagħ, stood the ruins of a cloister. Thomas the Apostle, in person, had founded that hermitage. The scattered stones bore strange inscriptions.

Once Antioch, the regent of the world of those days, had extended as far as to the sea. Everywhere the ground was strewn with antiques, or they rewarded the first turn of the excavator's spade. Gabriel had already in these few weeks gathered a whole collection of valuable trophies inside his house. The search for them was his chief occupation here. Yet, till now, some reverence had protected him from climbing the hill of St. Thomas's ruin. (It was guarded by great copper-coloured snakes, with crowns on their heads. Those who came sacrilegiously pilfering holy stones to build their houses found, as they carried them away, that the stones had grown into their backs, and so had to carry the load to the grave with them.) Who had told him that story? Once, in his mother's room (now Juliette's) old women had sat with curiously painted faces. Or was that only an illusion? Was it possible—had his mother in Yoghonoluk and his mother in Paris been the same?

Gabriel had long since entered the dark wood. A steep, wide gully, which led on up to the summit, had been cut into the mountain slope. They called it the ilex ravine. While Bagradian was climbing this sheep-track, which forced itself painfully upwards, through thick undergrowth, he knew suddenly: I have reached the end of the provisional. Something decisive is going to happen.

PROVISIONAL? Gabriel Bagradian was an Ottoman officer in the reserve of an artillery regiment. The Turkish armies were fighting for dear life on four fronts. Against the Russians in the Caucasus. Against the English and Indians in Mesopotamia. Australian divisions had been landed in Gallipoli, to force the gates of the Bosphorus in conjunction with the Allied fleets. The fourth army, in Syria and Palestine, was preparing a fresh onslaught on the Suez Canal. It needed super-human efforts to keep all these four fronts unbroken. Enver Pasha, that deified war-lord, had sacrificed two whole army