

A TURKISH PROVERB AND ITS TRADITION

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"To kill with words is also murder."

German proverb

We have often been told that the gift to use words in meaningful and logical language structure sets us apart from the rest of creation. But language can mean many different things to different people. Language helps us to express what is best in our nature—unfortunately also what is worst. Through language we communicate with each other: there is the language of the market place that tries to take advantage of us; of the law that, it seems, no honest person can understand; the jargon of the learned; the incitement of the religious zealot, the ardent nationalist, the ethnic purist; the lies of the warmonger and the political and historical apologist—just to mention a few. The language of the lover, the language of logic and truth and the inspired language of the poet are often drowned out in this chaos and confusion. The best of us can easily be lost.

There is thus the language that expresses genuine interest in the well-being of the other person, in truth and in peace—and that of hatred, deceit, war and xenophobia. And the border between the two poles is often blurred. Also, it is human nature when at crossroads to choose the easier way. To carry on logical and meaningful discourse founded on truth and integrity is very demanding on the human intellect. It is much more comfortable to be led astray by the wrong voice and to succumb to the lazy way out of a challenging situation or to find the seeming truth in a catchy cliché, a fetching analogy, a generalization, a half-truth or a proverb that must express the "truth" since generations have believed in it and have passed it on as an heirloom to us.

This murky and insidious world of fallacies, unfortunately, has always provided a more congenial home to the human intellect and integrity than the world of logic, reason, truth and honesty. It is in this realm of abused language where we find many of the roots of hatred, war, xenophobia and genocide. Language thus abused, especially in the form of a proverb, can make the most heinous crimes possible and acceptable, and the great gift to mankind can easily become its great curse.

From my childhood reading I vividly recall one particularly nasty bit of folk wisdom, a common Turkish saying: "A Jew outwits ten Christians, a Yankee cheats fifty Jews, but an Armenian is a match for at least one hundred Yankees." I thought myself at first well qualified to handle this cosmopolitan insight since my background was international as well. Reading the proverb gave me the feeling that I was let into grown-up secrets about groups of people I knew about or could identify with and could now, with the help of the proverb, judge. No doubt, the lesson the saying taught had to be correct, especially since I had learnt from my teachers that proverbs could be implicitly trusted. About Turks I knew as well; I was born in a town in Rumania of which the population was mainly Turkish, and the grownups in post-war Germany, where I went to school, used to whisper about Jews and Auschwitz. One of my aunts was married to a successful Armenian businessman; Yankees I saw every day on my way to school, and the graffiti on the walls of the railroad station urged them "to go home". Since I used to go to Sunday school, I knew that I somehow belonged to those cheated Christians. I had gained new knowledge and through it a sense of power, but through this new window opened by the proverb, my familiar world had suddenly become distorted, even evil. I was a fourth-grader and very confused.

During the years that followed my encounter with the proverb, the newly written Constitution of the Federal Republic, the press, our teachers and preachers reminded us very often about our shared guilt and what came to be called the "Holocaust" and "anti-Semitism". Yet outside my family I never heard—neither from magazines, nor schoolbooks, nor preachers and teachers—one word about the Armenians who had several decades earlier than the Jews been decimated by pogroms and genocide as well.

I had come across the Turkish proverb, this little horror, back in grade school in the short story "Der Haendler von Serscht" ("The Merchant of Sersht"), published in 1897 and written by Karl May whose books even the lazy ones of my class mates devoured. He entranced us in several thousand pages, as he had our parents and grandparents before us—and he has been fascinating our children and grandchildren as well—with his view of an extremely evil Levantine-Armenian world.

Eventually I was to meet many more Armenians, both in books and in the actual world of the Armenian community in Beirut. What I found out about them in the library was usually not confirmed by my own experience. Let me generalise: The Armenian as such has not had a good

press, neither in Turkey nor in the West. Thus in my reading I had encountered many variants of May's proverb, sometimes in the pithy form of the proverb, at others elaborated on in great detail. Earlier travellers had often found fault with the Armenians they met; however, the pages of the travel books—actual as well as fictitious—and the learned books on geography and ethnography published in the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries literally teem with the progeny of the image of the “ugly” Armenian. This is precisely the span of time in which life under Ottoman rule, as far as its Christian minorities—especially the Armenians and Greeks—were concerned, became progressively worse. The Berlin Congress of 1878, which was supposed to “solve”, at least in part, the “Armenian Question”, failed to do so; then came the bloody events of the last decade of the century in which scores upon scores of Armenians were murdered; the massacres of 1909; the genocide of 1915; atrocity upon atrocity. Of course there were many voices from the West that cried out against the evil they saw, but the propagators of the proverb that I encountered were usually not bothered by these bloody events. They at times even used the proverb to explain and condone the pogroms and genocide they themselves had witnessed.

At first I did not want to call attention to the proverb and its tradition; I felt I would be belabouring a particularly nasty aspect of the image of the Armenians in the West. I hoped that it had been forgotten, and perhaps it should best be consigned to the dust heaps of history. I knew that this was definitely not the case in Turkey. And for the German-reading countries there always was the legacy of Karl May. The most recent instance, to my knowledge, in the West that it had been recalled and used to pass judgement on the whole “tribe” of the Armenians was in the 1930s by George Orwell, the novelist of *1984*-fame, when he was “down and out” in Paris. Yet I changed my mind when not too long ago an incident happened that showed me that this little horror, this proverb, was still very much with us. As I told a new neighbour, an educated German professional gentleman who has lived for many years in “foreign parts”, that I had taught for a number of years at an Armenian university, he succeeded in “placing” the Armenians in his mind and recalled a Turkish proverb. In his version “Europeans, Turks, as well as Jews are easily gulled by Armenians.” So, at least, says his brother-in-law! Both gentlemen, as far as they knew, had never met an Armenian, but both knew this proverb and trusted its wise insight and readily used it as a frame of reference.

Before cataloguing the versions of the proverb that I found, it is necessary to examine the tradition of the "genre" of the proverb, and the "truth" hidden in the vast web of our particular Turkish proverb, for there is always a grain of truth that shines through even the most bigoted and perverted piece of folk wisdom. This seeming "whole truth and nothing but the truth" that gives the illusion to its users that they are now morally empowered to pass judgement makes our type of proverb so dangerous.

But how can one refute a proverb? The proverb: The trusted helper of language teachers that supposedly helps the student gain insight into the psyche of all the people who speak the target language; the saying that reduces the knowledge and experience of ages into just one pithy sentence; the guide in good and bad times! There is an aura of hallowedness about the venerable tradition of the proverb since it is associated with the wise King Salomon and has entered as part of Wisdom Literature the tradition of the Old Testament. Undoubtedly there are proverbs that deal with universal truths about the human condition that will pass the strictest requirements of any canon of wisdom literature. These are not our problem. With the proverbs, accepted jokes and sayings that attack the "other" individual or whole ethnic groups or entire nations, we enter an altogether different realm of truth.

The renowned Muslim Moroccan-French writer Tahar Ben Jelloun warns his daughter Meriem, and through her all children as well as the rest of mankind, about the dangers of racism and xenophobia. You shall not use idioms, proverbs and generalisations about other human beings, sayings that are based on half-truths, words and expressions that judge and brand people. This is the first and foremost commandment he sets down for Meriem, for language can do much damage since it shapes, expresses and conditions our thoughts and guides our behaviour. Language abused in the form of clichés and catch-all proverbs provides easy answers to complex questions and thus hoodwinks our intellect. It can easily distort the truth and justify prejudice and hatred when it assumes the stance of implicit moral superiority of the user who presumes to sit in judgement on the collective other. The fight against bigotry, even xenophobia, has to begin with a thorough examination of our use of language.

The long tradition of the proverb unfortunately abounds with what German calls *Feindbilder*, images of the enemy, stereotypes of those we fear or envy. Stereotypes and clichés are defence mechanisms with which mankind from times immemorial has justified rape, murder and massacre.

Through this abusive way of using language, conquest, subjugation and what we now term "colonialism" have been condoned. May's Turkish proverb occupies a rather prominent position in this sad linguistic tradition. It has greatly helped to make the death of millions of people acceptable to guilty and innocent parties alike.

The study of clichés, prejudices and stereotypes—and that includes the proverb of the Turkish variety—is not a simple matter of chasing a scapegoat. Stereotypes, H. K. Bhabha maintains, "do not merely represent false images; they are ambivalent and complex in their "projection and introjection"; they are "metaphoric and metonymic strategies, displacement, overdetermination, guilt, aggressivity; the masking and splitting of 'official' and phantasmatic knowledges to construct the positionalities and oppositionalities of racist discourse." Furthermore, stereotypes are tricky and deceptive since there always seems a grain of truth hidden in their texture. It is difficult to refute the "truth" of that universal proverb: "When there is smoke there must also be a fire". May, our authority on the Turkish proverb, does not even allow time for such reflection since immediately upon quoting his version as evidence, he elucidates the saying, stating that though it may be an exaggeration, his experience has shown him that it is based on truth. "Just visit the Orient with open eyes, and you will agree with me. You can be certain that wherever malice and treachery are hatched, a hawk-nosed Armenian is involved. Should even the unscrupulous Greek refuse to carry out a villainy, there will be an Armenian who is ready to earn the wages of sin. Generally speaking, the Levantines do not enjoy a good reputation, but the Armenian is the worst of them."

May "knew" all this even though by the time he wrote these lines he had neither visited the Orient nor met an Armenian in the flesh. In his reading the "authorities" of his day, however, he had this truth verified. They provide a rich collection of the variations of this particular Turkish prejudice.

The term "anti-Semitism" has become a household word. According to Wolfgang Benz, a German authority on comparative genocide studies, anti-Semitism "certainly is the oldest social and political prejudice which in the twentieth century was translated into action; its reverberations will be felt for a long time." The process of its growth and the subsequent translation into action serves Benz as a "paradigm of prejudices with which minorities are viewed and their exclusion from established society as such." Benz, of

course, is correct, and his observations apply also to the case of the Armenians, but the sad distinction of being the first victim of genocide in the blood-drenched twentieth century really belongs to the Armenians. In Benz's paradigm, the abuse of language through slogans plays an important part, and the creation of euphemisms like *Judenfrage* (Jewish Question) and *Endloesung* (Final Solution) provided a foundation that made genocide comprehensible for the perpetrators and able to be appreciated by the general public both at home and abroad. Some of the Armenian equivalents of these expressions had been bandied back and forth already at the time of the Berlin Congress, while other clichés were the favourite catch phrases of the Turkish leadership before and during WWII. In both cases there was the same type of prejudice in the shape of the cliché and proverb, many times with overlapping ethnic boundaries.

The proverb and cliché tradition provided a vehicle for Ottoman and Young Turks and Turkophiles as well as Nazi Germans to express an accepted truth, a vehicle that was flexible enough to encompass every minority and "other" without changing the meaning of the saying at all. The blanks could be filled with the name of any needed ethnic group. All these minorities were objectionable, fit to be destroyed and exterminated. And in both cases language prepared the way, helped and justified them to do so.

The reverberations of the Armenian genocide, too, were to be felt. Let us recall that almost legendary scene: Hitler addressing his military elite on the eve of the invasion of Poland. He addressed his generals to allay any possible scruples and fears they might have: *Wer redet heute noch von der Vernichtung der Armenier?*—"Who today remembers the annihilation of the Armenians?"

A footnote to history: Karl May was Hitler's favourite author.

May's authorities on questions pertaining to ethnic identities were respectable Frenchmen, Germans, Swiss, Scandinavians, and Anglo-Saxons from both sides of the Atlantic. All of them would feel very much at home on the pages of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, though the author does not seem to be aware of most of them. For Said "Orientalism" relates to the production and reproduction of myths and imagined geographies constructing the inferiority of other peoples and places, i.e., basically the Ottoman Near and Middle East. The stance of such Westerners, in turn, reinforced and legitimated perceptions of Western superiority. This superior self became thus defined through its construction of an "other".

The fact that the Armenian minority often was considered to be the most objectionable "other" in these imagined geographies and the xenophobic excesses that this process of myth creation can lead to are not Said's concerns.

The "other" most offensive to both native and Westerner alike was the Armenian man of business. "Artin", the supposedly sly and successful Armenian merchant, became the scapegoat.

The image of the Armenian as a very rich man of business had become by the early nineteenth century an internationally accepted commonplace. Such a figure easily arouses jealousy in the less fortunate "other". Let it not be forgotten that the Armenians proudly claimed to be the first Christian nation, but this clumsy Anatolian could not have gotten his riches in honest business transactions carried out in an ethical Christian way. This was the wholesale verdict we meet repeated in almost every characterisation of the Armenians as an ethnic group. The majority of Armenians were neither merchants nor bankers, and not all Armenian businessmen were rich. But such sociological facts do not matter to the user of a cliché. The successful Armenian merchant or banker or craftsman, for that matter, represented competition and a threat, and that was not acceptable to many Turks, and definitely not to the merchant from Britain or German who was looking for new markets for his merchandise and who, with his superior know-how, wanted to open up Ottoman or reformed Turkish lands with the help, for instance, of a new railroad. The glorious days of the Old Silk Road enchanted the dreamers among them, while the realists planned to exploit the oilfields of Mosul and Baku. An Armenian entrepreneur who might prove to be better than his Western counterpart definitely was not needed.

The Armenians, like the Greeks, are Christian, but this was no plus point in the eyes of the traveller from the West. Despite the fabled generosity of Muslim rulers and society, the life of the Christian minorities in the East was hard indeed; it was demeaning. When the Christians from the West came and saw their Orthodox "brothers", they were often ashamed of this poor and debased lot. To be associated with these co-religionists would not make them, Protestants and Catholics alike, respectable in Muslim eyes. Moreover, the Armenians, like the Greeks, were mainly Orthodox, and, as we know only too well from history, there has never been much love lost between Rome and the Eastern churches. The Protestants, for their part, shared many Catholic prejudices. It is thus a vast web of political, economic, religious, traditional and personal

complexities and ambiguities that lies behind the popularity of our Turkish proverb. To explore and deconstruct this web fully would take many learned books.

Nevertheless, it is not enough to generalise about "colonial representation", i.e., our Western authorities on Armenian iniquity, but we must understand and engage with—certainly *not* accept—the colonial regime of "truth" that made the stereotypes and proverbs so effective. This can only be done by deconstructing colonial discourse as the apparatus of power aiming to legitimate conquest over people constructed as racially inferior. To represent colonial subjects in these terms, according to Bhabha, "requires an end to the collusion of historicism and realism by unseating the Transcendental subject."

The process Bhabha describes is also evident in Turkey through the centuries; there it proved to be for both religious and political authorities, as well as for the general public, a convenient apparatus of power aiming to legitimatise the conquest of peoples constructed as racially and religiously inferior as in the case of the Turks and Armenians, and naturally the Greeks and Jews and all the other minorities as well. Again, this is a vast and difficult subject. Modern Turkey, though it claims to be a free and open democracy, has not yet become mature enough to deal honestly with its history of persecution and genocide of its own minorities. Turkey is not a place where Tahar Ben Jelloun's advice to Meriem will soon be heard and heeded. Turkish parlance is rife with references to the "ugly" Armenian.

The grain of truth that shines through every proverb, then, in our case is the image of the Armenian as successful businessman. It seems that all those successful Armenian merchants and money brokers—be they few or many—have always enjoyed a rather high profile. In his study *Merchants from Ararat* K. S. Papazian writes that throughout history the Armenians have played a number of roles. "One of their most vital and ambivalent ones, thrust upon them in part by their geographic position, has been that of intermediary between the civilizations of the east and those of the west, between Asia and Europe. And one of the areas in which this connection has been most readily maintained has been the field of commerce." The markets and money exchanges of all the major cities of Europe, Africa, the Near and Middle East, of India were teeming with Armenian entrepreneurs. By the nineteenth century they had also branched out to the Americas. Many of them were successful, but this fact did not endear them to their

non-Armenian competition. The image of the sly businessman of the proverb became thus the scapegoat to be loaded with all the ill will and jealousy of those who thought themselves to be less fortunate.

The figure of the Armenian has deserved a better and fairer treatment, but as emblematic representation of what Thomas Sowell in his study *Migration and Cultures: A World View* calls "middlemen minorities" such a distorted picture of the truth is merely symptomatic. What "provokes such venomous hostility" towards these middlemen communities? Sowell asks since they themselves are usually not violent, and he lists the Ibos, the Jews and Armenians among others as examples. Basically because they are successful, "even modest prosperity among middlemen minorities may be resented far more than real opulence among some other groups such as nobility or entertainers, and those relatively few members of middlemen minorities who achieve genuine wealth tend to be regarded as representative rather than exceptional." Sowell further speculates that the feelings against them can intensify because "they perform economic functions which have been much misunderstood and condemned throughout history, regardless of who has performed" them. We recall that for a good part of history good Christians as well as good Muslims have been warned by their spiritual leaders against having their "money breed money". Sowell also points to the social isolation of middlemen minorities, their "clannishness", which makes "it easy for others to imagine the worst about them and for the skilled demagogues to play on that imagination to arouse the public to a frenzy of hatred against them." A cliché like the Turkish proverb in the mouth of such rabble rousers can be very persuasive indeed.

A great number of the German reading public as well, for instance, was to be persuaded by learned handbooks about the truth of the proverb tradition. Let one example suffice. Friedrich von Hellwald, a highly respected nineteenth-century German authority on geography and ethnography, writes in his *Die Erde und ihre Voelker: Ein geographisches Handbuch* in 1878 that the Armenians are disliked by their neighbours. Some of the accusations directed against them may be exaggerations, yet it cannot be denied that they are morally debased. Their greed and corruptness have become proverbial.

We are often assured that the "shrewdness and aptitude for business" of the Armenians are proverbial. The Rev. Henry Farnshawe Tozer, a British clergyman, assesses the situation of the Armenian community in

Ottoman Turkey in this way. The truth of such an assertion is then frequently corroborated by the version of the popular proverb about the typical Armenian who is supposedly "as wily as the serpent." The Irish physician R.R. Madden had this bit of wisdom confirmed during the latter part of the 1820s especially at the court of Muhammad Ali. Boghos Bey, the trusted Armenian advisor of the viceroy of Egypt, had not found favour in the eyes of the good doctor when the latter visited Cairo. The comparison does not always carry moral and religious overtones, and the Armenian is merely linked to the Jew, that other proverbial businessman. We might hear that "an Armenian cheats seven Jews" very much as my neighbour had been told, and therefore "no Jew can flourish within ten miles of an Armenian". This is the conclusion Richard Davey reached in 1907. This long-time resident in the "Sultan's capital" and expert on Istanbul nightlife had also realised that should he look closer, it became obvious that the Armenians' "proverbial sense of business" and their servility could "usually be read in their faces".

Other Levantines, especially the Greeks, do not fare much better in the tradition of our proverb. We read in H.G. Dwight's *Stambul Nights*, published in 1920, that "it takes three Jews to cheat a Greek, and three Greeks to cheat an Armenian". The author definitely was the walking proof of this aspect of Levantine cunning, so he says. Sir Oliver Wardrop records in his *The Kingdom of Georgia*, published in 1888, a Georgian proverb which points out that "a Greek will cheat three Jews, but an Armenian will cheat three Greeks". Frederick Davis Greene had found this type of saying confirmed by his own experience. He wrote in 1895, at the height of the Sultan Abdul Hamid massacres, that "one Greek is equal to two Jews, but one Armenian is equal to two Greeks". Such is the conclusion the veteran American missionary to the Armenians had reached; he does not profess great liking for the people among whom he had worked. The geographer Lynch, on the other hand, was a professed Armenophile; yet he, too, succumbed to the easy arithmetic of the proverb when he recorded in 1903 that "in cleverness a Jew is equal to two Greeks, a single Armenian to two Jews." That professed Turkophile, the novelist Knut Hamsun, found out when he visited Istanbul that all the Sultan's important men were cheating Armenians. The proverb that "one Jew can cheat two Greeks, but an Armenian cheats Greeks as well as Jews," in his opinion, was correct and confirmed the consensus everywhere: "Armenians are a people of cheats". It is thus not surprising, he continues his reflections concerning the scant

sympathy which is shown them in the East during times of persecution; everybody at one time or another has been cheated by them.

The arithmetic of varying proportions at times can soar to astronomical heights. This happened when the philanthropically-minded American George Hepworth rode on a fact-finding journey in the late 1890s through a devastated Armenia. As he looked down from the lofty back of his faithful horse, he realised the truth of folk wisdom: "A Jew can cheat the world...a Greek is sharper than two Jews, and...an Armenian is more than a match for two Greeks".

Other versions of the proverb include still more representatives of mankind, but the proportions of wickedness allotted to each group can vary according to the religious perspective or nationality of the so-called authority who wants to prove a point. According to the Rev. E.L. Cutts—the American clergyman travelled in the 1870s through Asia Minor—"the three degrees of comparison in commercial astuteness are: positive Jew, comparative Greek, superlative Armenian". In the opinion of Madden, the prejudiced Irish doctor whom we already met and who was not fond of Oriental Christians altogether, "it requires one Copt, two Greeks, and three Jews to defraud an Armenian." No wonder the poor travellers and the poor Turks alike felt they were at the mercy of all those "Christian-Orthodox" and Jewish Shylocks!

Viscount Pollington in the early 1860s had definitely run the gauntlet of an Oriental bazaar; it made him realise the "truth" of the saying: "It takes five Christians over a Turk, and five Turks to cheat a Greek, five of these latter are required to swindle a Jew, but it requires five Jews to 'do' one Armenian." The Honourable Robert Curzon in the 1830s took time off from hunting down dusty manuscripts in all kinds of heathen and Christian languages to ponder on the characteristics of the native population of the East. For him it was a proven fact: "It takes the wits of four Turks to overreach one Frank, two Franks to cheat one Greek, two Greeks to cheat one Jew, six Jews to cheat one Armenian." He came to this conclusion when he himself exercised his own wits to swindle guileless Oriental monks out of their precious books and cultural heritage. They, the poor gullible ones, should thank him, for he was really doing them a favour by saving and preserving their heritage for them back in England on the shelves of his personal library or in collections like the Bodleian in Oxford; of this he was convinced. Other culture-conscious travellers held similar views.

Samuel Cox, for many years American diplomat in Turkey, recorded in 1887 the same proportions of commercial astuteness as Curzon had done. Upon further reflection he feels that this piece of folk tradition "likely...has some basis of fact" and continues: "Whether it is from lack of conscience, or because he has more enterprise, or because he has been thrown, like the Hebrews, on his own resources in his wanderings from his native land...the shrewdness of his race gives them grace, humour, eloquence, genius, and above all, intrepidity in self-seeking, or...smartness." And Cox concludes: since "the Armenians have never been intimidated by threats...therefore they are successful". A diplomat definitely has recorded such an insight; other critics of Armenian character traits are hardly ever this understanding and positive. George Orwell, too, comes to mind. After he had known a very unpleasant Armenian during his Paris days, he "saw the force of the proverb, "Trust a snake before a Jew and a Jew before a Greek, but don't trust an Armenian."

Even the Yankee, no mean businessman himself, in this tradition cannot cope with the Armenian. Karl May, as we have seen, was convinced that "a Jew outwits ten Christians; a Yankee cheats fifty Jews, but an Armenian is a match for a hundred Yankees". An American friend was familiar with the following proverb: "Twist a Yankee and you make a Jew, twist a Jew and you make an Armenian."

In some versions of the proverb, the Armenian is the little brother of the "ugly" Persian or Greek. An Armenian friend remembered a "common proverb in the East" which demonstrates the iniquity of the Persians who are also reputed to be sharp businessmen: "It takes ten Jews to cheat an Armenian, and ten Armenians to cheat one Persian." Perhaps this was merely an Armenian version of the "truth"! for everything is relative on this earth. Alexandre Dumas, the French novelist who is admired for championing the three Musketeers, appreciated the recipes and cooking of Armenian women; as far as Armenian merchants were concerned, he was not so sure since he had been told by experts on ethnic character traits that he could be certain if a business transaction would be carried out faithfully as soon as the Tatar nodded with his head or the Persian shook hands, despite the latter's bad reputation. Should one, however, enter any business deal with an Armenian, it was necessary to have a written document with an official signature verified by two witnesses. In the Orient also one could find honour among thieves—unfortunately not among all of them.

Even an idealist and dreamer like the Bavarian poet and Shakespeare specialist Friedrich Bodenstedt was aware of the goings on of Oriental market places. In the early 1860s he once took time off from gazing at pretty Armenian girls or studying Azery poetry or collecting the local folklore or Orthodox chants only to reduce a great part of nineteenth-century business activity, as he understood it, into one neat equation: "Two Jews against one Russian, two Russians against one Persian, two Persians against one Armenian, two Armenians against one Greek: this makes everything equal." Let him be excused: the proverb and not Pegasus inspired him when he wrote this epigram. A bit earlier, in the late 1820s to be precise, Daniel Schlatter came to Ottoman lands. As he was seeking adventure and a sense of satisfaction that he had done a few good Christian deeds, he "had" it from a reliable European source that he should be careful in his quest, for the innocent Swiss had come to the outskirts of a commercial hell in which "two Jews equal one Armenian, two Armenians are like one Greek, and two Greeks constitute one devil". Edmund Spencer in 1838, like Dumas, appreciated Armenian women and their skills in the kitchen very much, but he was not at all sure about the integrity of their menfolk. To give credence to his understanding of the transactions in the bazaar he quotes a version of the proverb that enters the realm of absolute evil: "A Greek can cheat a Turk; a Jew will cozen a Greek; but an Armenian will trick not only a Jew but *Shaitan* (Satan) himself."

After seeing their innocence threatened by so much devilry, one feels that the travellers could often appreciate the pious wish expressed by yet another version of the Turkish proverb: "From the Greeks of Athens, from the Jews of Saloniki, and from the Armenians everywhere, good Lord, deliver us!" And the message that reaches us from between these lines easily conveys the conviction that should the good Lord be a bit tardy in obliging, it would be quite alright to lend Him a helping hand.

This last horror we find in a book published in 1895, a year in which the streets of Istanbul were drenched with the blood of murdered Armenians. The author of the book *Armenian Massacres* is Frederick Davis Greene, American missionary to the Armenians and long-term resident of Armenia. We have already met this gentleman of the cloth who did not profess great liking for the Armenian people as a group.

From Greene it is one short step to Karl May and his outrageous "apology" for the massacres of 1895 published in 1897 in his travel story *Im Reiche des silbernen Loewen* (In the Kingdom of the Silver Lion):

"There is no need for me to repeat my opinion, but I will quote a short newspaper article....It was written by a gentleman of the clergy who was in Constantinople during the Emperor's visit there: '...we were sitting in the clubhouse of the local master guilds men discussing the Armenian Question. Seated across from me was a German master potter who has lived in Constantinople for nineteen years; he knows also what life in Anatolia is like. I am recording a paraphrase of his words: I am a Christian and I think that charity is the first and foremost commandment, but I tell you, the Turks did the right thing when they killed the Armenians. This is the only way in which the Turk can protect himself from the Armenian....The Armenian is the basest fellow in the whole world. He will sell his wife and his young daughter; he will steal from his own brother. The whole of Constantinople is polluted by Armenians....Nothing happened to the Catholic Armenians, only to the Orthodox, because they are much worse. That the Armenians of Asia Minor are of superior moral quality is an English lie....There too the Armenians are the only people who practice usury. It is of no use that good German Christian missionaries educate Armenian children. When these grow up they will become just as base as the rest of them....I tell you again, the Turk acted in self defence."

This then is May's *truth*: A complex system of yet simplistic Chinese boxes that are filled with his irrefutable support of his *apology*. Very few good German citizens would have doubted the truth as found on the pages acceptable to the imperial censors of the press who often labelled the Armenians as a "degenerate race", as the "Jews of the Orient" whose seditious activities undermined the viability of the poor and endangered Ottoman Empire. Definitely very few proper German Protestants would have doubted the trustworthiness of the member of the clergy who interpreted and reported the truth. May's "man of clergy" existed in the real world; he was the popular Protestant preacher-journalist-politician Friedrich Naumann. His reports from Turkey had appeared in several publications. And who would question the experience of an honest German workman who had lived in foreign parts and therefore was entitled to sit in judgement over a mere bunch of foreigners, of inferior *others*? Who would distrust him, the voice of the people—the *vox populi*? The truth of established folk wisdom—the proverb?

They all, from Bodenstedt to Madden, from the Honourable Robert Curzon to the missionary Greene to Karl May, they had all participated in the witch hunt that led to murder and genocide. True, they did not actually

join the Turkish police and soldiers and the Kurdish and Turkish rabble that did the actual killing—they had joined them only through their trust in the proverb as accepted truth. That, however, makes them guilty still. For there is much insight in the saying that “to kill with words is murder still”.

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(Ամփոփում)

ԻՆԿՐԻՏ ՍԸՄԱԱՆ

Հեղինակուհին կ'անդրադառնայ ընդհանրապէս ասացուածքի ծնունդին եւ անոր բնոյթին՝ իբր ժամանակի հաւաքական փորձառութեան խոացում, ապա կը ծանրանայ զայն ընկալող մարդոց մտասեւեռումներուն եւ ըմբռնումներուն, անոնց մտայնութեան եւ հոգեբանութեան վրայ առակին գործած ազդեցութեան վրայ:

Ան կ'առարկէ որ առակը կարծրատիպերու եւ ընդհանրացումներու կ'առաջնորդէ, որոնք ոչ անպայման ճիշդ ընդհանրացումներ են եւ յաճախ խոտոր կը համեմատին մտածող մարդու բանականութեան, բայց միաժամանակ գործնական են քանի որ կը փոխարինեն անձնապէս չշահուած փորձառութիւն մը՝ ենթակային շնորհելով ձեռք բերուած ընդհանրացած «ճշմարտութիւն» մը կամ արժէչափ մը:

Այս յենքին վրայ, Սրման կը դեգերի արեւմտաեւրոպական գրականութեան մէջ, ու ի յայտ կը բերէ «Հրեայ մը կը գերազանցէ տաս քրիստոնեայ, եանքի մը կը խարէ յիսուն հրեայ, իսկ մէկ հայը կը համապատասխանէ հարիւր եանքի» առակին բազմաթիւ եւ բազմաբնոյթ տարբերակաները:

Սրման կը վիճարկէ որ նման ընկալման հետեւանքով յառաջացած է այն ըմբռնումը, որով կ'արդարացուէին հայկական ջարդերը, քանի որ անոնցմով կը վերանային խարերայ հայերն ու անոնց խարերայութիւնը, ջարդերը կը դիտուէին իբրեւ ինքնապաշտպանութեան եւ պատիժի միջոց հայոց խարերայութիւններուն դէմ:

Հեղինակուհին աւելի հանգամանայից կ'անդրադառնայ գերմանացի գրող Քարլ Մէյի երկերուն, որոնք գերման ընթերցասէր մանուկներու բարեկամներն են եղած եւ որոնք որոշ մտայնութիւն մը յառաջացուցած են այդ մանուկներուն մէջ:

Հուսկ, յօդուածագիրը մանաւանդ Մէյը կը մեղադրէ «սեւացրէքեան» աշխատանքի մէջ, իբրեւ ստոր ու խարերայ ներկայացնելով հայերը: Ան նման հեղինակներ մեղսակից կը նկատէ հայկական ջարդերը ուղղակիօրէն իրականացնող թուրքերուն եւ քիւրտերուն, որովհետեւ անոնք «վատահեցան ասացուածքին՝ իբրեւ ընդունուած ճշմարտութիւն: Ասիկա գիրենք մեղաւոր կը դարձնէ, որովհետեւ բառերով սպաննելը դեռեւս ոճիր է»: