

Classic Poetry Series

Hovhannes Toumanian

- poems -

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Hovhannes Toumanian(19 February 1869 - 23 March 1923)

Hovhannes Tumanyan was an Armenian author, public activist who is considered by many to be the national poet of Armenia. His work was mostly written in tragic form, often centering on the harsh lives of villagers in the Lori region.

Biography

Hovhannes Tumanyan was born in February 19, 1869 in the village of Dsegh, which was part of the Tiflis Governorate of the Russian Empire, and now is located in Lori Province of Armenia. His father was an offspring of an Armenian princely family of Tumanyan (branch of the house of Mamikonian) and the village's priest and his mother an avid storyteller with a particular interest in fables, Tumanyan had incorporated many of the themes from his mother's stories and his father's preachings into his writings.

He was also a great master of quatrains:

*As You take the blessings You gave me since life began,
I look to see how many are left till my race is run
Amazed am I: You have given so freely, with generous hand;
How much must I yet return till I merge with You into one?*

Tumanyan is usually regarded in Armenian circles as "All-Armenian poet". He earned this title when the Catholicos of Armenia had ordered that Armenian refugees from the west not enter certain areas of his church and house, since he is considered to be "The Catholicos of all Armenians". Tumanyan in response decried that decision claiming that the refugees could seek relief in the Catholicos' quarters under order of "The Poet of all Armenians".

He created lyrics, fables, epic poems and translations into Armenian of [Byron](http://www.poemhunter.com/george-gordon-lord-byron/), [Goethe](http://www.poemhunter.com/johann-wolfgang-von-goethe/) and [Pushkin](http://www.poemhunter.com/alexander-sergeyevich-pushkin/).

Legacy

Tumanyan's native town of Dsegh was renamed Tumanyan in his honor from

1938-1969.

In 1951, the village of Dzagidzor of Lori Province was renamed Tumanyan. There is a statue to Tumanyan in Freedom Square, Yerevan.

In Autumn of 2011 the government of Armenia purchased the house of Tumanyan in Tbilisi from its Georgian owner. The keys of that house are currently kept at the Writers Union of Armenia. A museum will presumably be established in this house.

Akhtamar

Beside the laughing lake of Van
A little hamlet lies;
Each night into the waves a man
Leaps under darkened skies.

He cleaves the waves with mighty arm,
Needing no raft or boat,
And swims, disdaining risk and harm,
Towards the isle remote.

On the dark island burns so bright
A piercing, luring ray:
There's lit a beacon every night
To guide him on his way.

Upon the island is that fire
Lit by Tamar the fair;
Who waits, all burning with desire,
Beneath the shelter there.

The lover's heart-how doth it beat!
How beat the roaring waves!
But, bold and scorning to retreat,
The elements he braves.

And now Tamar the fair doth hear,
With trembling heart aflame,
The water splashing-oh, so near,
And fire consumes her frame.

All quiet is on the shore around,
And, black,there looms a shade:
The darkness utters not a sound,
The swimmer finds the maid.

The tide-waves ripple, lisp and splash
And murmur, soft and low;
They urge each other, mingle, clash,
As, ebbing out, they go.

Flutter and rustle the dark waves.
And with them every star
Whispers how sinfully behaves
The shameless maid Tamar;

Their whisper shakes her throbbing her
This time, as was before!
The youth into the waves doth dart,
The maiden prays on shore.

But certain villains, full of spite,
Against them did conspire,
And on a hellish, mirky night
Put out the guiding fire.

The luckless lover lost his way,
And only from afar
The wind is carrying in his sway
The moans of: 'Ah, Tamar!'

And through the night his voice is heard
Upon the craggy shores,
And, though it's muffled and blurred
By the waves' rapid roars,

The words fly forward-faint they are-
'Ah, Tamar!'
And in the morn the splashing tide
The hapless yough cast out,

Who, battling with the waters, died
In an unequal bout;
Cold lips are clenched, two words they bar:
'Ah, Tamar!'
And ever since, both near and far,
They call the island Akhtamar

Hovhannes Toumanian

Armenian Grief

Armenian grief is a sea,
A fathomless, boundless main.
In that dark expanse drifts my soul,
Mournful, in mortal pain.
Now furiously it rears
And the azure coastline seeks,
Now weary it disappears,
Seeking peace in the deeps.
But neither can it find the bottom,
Nor can it reach the shore...
In the sea of Armenian sorrows
My soul languishes evermore.

1903

Hovhannes Toumanian

Before A Painting By Ayvasovsky

Rising from ocean, billows uncontrolled,
With heavy flux and reflux, beating high,
Towered up like mountains, roaring terribly;
The wild storm blew with wind gusts manifold—
A mad, tempestuous race
Through endless, boundless space.

“Halt!” cried the aged wizard, brush in hand,
To the excited elements; and lo!
Obedient to the voice of genius, now
The dark waves, in the tempest’s fury grand,
Upon the canvas, see!
Stand still eternally!

Hovhannes Toumanian

David Of Sasun

I

Lion-Mher of fabled glory
For forty years at Sassoun reigned;
He reigned with might, and in his day
No flocks made flight o'er Sassoun's steeps.
Far and away from Sassoun highlands
His mighty name was rurnoured wide;
His name bespoke his valour, his fearsome deeds—
The single name, Lion-Mher.

II

Thus, seated like a fearful lion
In the Sassoun fastnesses, he had reigned
As lord for forty years. For forty years
He had never raised a wail of woe;
But now, fallen upon declining days,
Into that fearless heart there crept a sting.
Thus the legened-laden eld to thinking fell;
"Alack, the autumn days of my life are come,
The black earth soon will claim me for its own,
Like smoke will pass the glories of Lion-Mher,
Even my name, terror and fear;
Alas! On my unowned and orphaned realm
There rise a thousand upstart braves and fiends..
Upon my passing, Mack, no heir remains
To buckle on my sword, protector be to Sassoun.
Pondered thus the troubled childless grey-beard.

III

Thus on a day, his iron-grey eyebrows knitted,
Deep he pondered , when down from the sky,
Fronting the giant, stood a fiery angel,
His feet enwrapped in billowing clouds.
"Greetings! All-powerful giant of Sassoun,
Your voice has reached the throne of God,
Soon he shall grant to you a child.

But hearken well, O lord of the Mountains,
On that day, when God grants you an heir,
On that selfsame day will you die and your wife.'
"His will be done," spake Lion-Mher, "we are ever
Of death and death of us; but if of this world
We gain an heir, with him deathless we remain.
Here the fiery angel once more took aloft;
And onward from that happy day of joyous tidings,
When nine months did pass and nine hours more,
Lion-Mher a child did have; and David
He named his cub, and called to him his brother,
Big-Voiced Ohan: bequeathed his lands and scion
To him. That day died he and his dame, too.

IV

And in those times in Egypt there sat as king
Melik of Musr, mighty and unvanquished;
When he heard that Lion-Mher no more was,
Straight upon Sassoun he marched to fight. Ohan,
The Big-Voiced, set a-quake with fear, came before
The war-like hosts unhelmeted and bowed,
And seeking mercy, fell upon his knees.
"O Melik be you the master of our heads,"
He said, "while beneath your shadow we live;
Ever may we your servants be, our tribute pay,
Only lay not waste our tillage and our lands,
And with benignant ear hark you to us.
"Nay," roared Melik, "your people all must pass
Beneath my sword and homage pay, so that
Henceforward whatever I will to do, not one
Sassounite may raise a sword against me.
Thus Ohan went and brought all Sassounites
Together and passed them all beneath the sword
David alone, despite whatever moves
Were tried, came not near the foeman Melik's sword.
Vexed, the Sassounites came and tugged at him:
He bolted once, scattered the throng here and there,
The while his little finger grazed a rock
And drew from it a flight of fiery bolts.
To the wise men gathered all about him,
Spoke the King: "I must kill this little fool!"

"O King," they said, "beneath your sword today
All Sassoun stands; sure you are the mighty one.
What is there a mere child could do against thee,
Though he were instead altogether fire?"
"You know best," said the Egyptian king, "but if,
On a day some harm should fall upon my head,
This day be witness
From him will it come."

V

When this event occurred our husky David
A mere child was, seven or eight years old,
I say a child, but one with so much strength,
Man to him or mosquito was the same.
But, alas! for the poor orphan on this earth,
Though he come forth from the lions of a iion.
Now Big-Voiced Ohan had a waspish wife;
Once or twice she held her tongue, but one day
Thus she began fighting with her helpmeet;
"A lonely soul I, heir to a thousand ills,
Why have you brought another's orphan here,
Weighed me down with a useless trencherman...
Would that I could cast sod upon his head!
No handmaid I, dancing attendance upon others!
Find a way to lose him, put him to a task,
Pack him off that he may labour for himself."
Saying thus, she `gan to wail and weep,
To mourn her hapless days, to curse her fate,
That she luckless was to be on earth,
That nor master her did own, nor pitying spouse.
Ohan set out and brought back a pair
Of iron boots for the child's feet,
Placed an iron staff upon his shoulders,
And made him the shepherd of Sassoun-town.

VI

The mighty shepherd drove his flock of sheep
And mounted Sassoun's peerless fastnesses
"O endearing highlands,
Highlands of Sassoun. .

When he called, of such force was his voice,
That canyons and highlands sounded with it,
Wild animals sprang from their lairs, scattered
From rock to rock, and became homeless.
David went after them all, those from the valleys,
And those from the hills—fox, hare, wolf, and deer
He gathered and brought and mixed with his flock,
And at night drove them all on Sassoun-town.
The noise and the din, the sounds and the roars,
The charging of numberless beasts let loose,
The townspeople suddenly saw and heard.
“Oh! Help! Run.
Old and young,
Panic-stricken,
Away did run
From their chores,
Some ran home, some to church, some to shops,
All bolted doors fast and closed shutters tight.
Boldly David strode and stood in the town square—
“Well! How early these people are gone to sleep.
Ho there! Goat-owners, sheep-owners,
Get up, swiftly unbar your doors;
He who had one—I’ve brought him ten,
He who had ten—I’ve brought him scores.
Up, get up swiftly, come and take them,
Take your sheep to the barns and your goats.”
When David saw that no one stirred, no one
A door unbarred, he placed his head upon
A stone, lengthened out himself upon the square
And soundly slept until the break of dawn.
At dawn the nobles arose together
And went to Big-Voiced Ohan and said:
“Thou Big-Voiced Ohan, be thou taken by Death,
You it was who brought this fool, made him herdsman;
He parts nor sheep nor wolves, nor foxes,
Thus with wild beasts has he filled our town.
If lovest thou God, put him to another task,
Else he’ll burst the galls of all our townsfolk.”

VII

Ohan arose and went to see David.

“Uncle Ohan, take care, tread softly,
Else the goats will scamper off.” And hard by
An ash-coloured hare, its ears fixed rigid,
Aff righted became and bolted away.
David was up in a trice and after it:
In the hills he caught the hare and brought it back
And placed it once again among the goats.
“Oh, how hard it is, Uncle Ohan. ...
God has blessed those black-black goats, but these that be
Ash-coloured goats, are ever escaping
And ever scattering into the hills.
So much did I scurry yesterday,
Until I gathered them and brought them back.”
Ohan saw that David’s boots were not what
They were, his goatherd’s staff worn to the butt,
So much in a single day had he run.
“David, my soul, I cannot leave thee thus,
The ash-coloured goats are torturing you.
Tomorrow take the flocks to the pasture,’
Ohan said. And the next morning he went
And brought still another pair of iron boots
For David’s feet, and brought an iron staff
A hundred pounds in weight, and made David
The pasture-keep of Sassoun-town.

VIII

The mighty shepherd drove his herd of cattle
And mounted Sassoun’s peerless fastnesses.
“O endearing highlands,
Highlands of Sassoun,
How sweet the slopes rise
Against thy rock—ribbed sides...’
When David sang, of such force was his voice,
That canyons and highlands sounded with it,
Wild beasts from their lairs sprang forth and scattered
From rock to rock, became homeless. David
Fell after them all, those from the valleys,
Those from the hills—wolf, leopard, lion, bear, tiger
He caught and brought and mixed with his herd,
And at night drove them all on Sassoun-town.
The noise and the din, the sounds and the roars,

The charging of numberless beasts let loose,
The townspeople suddenly heard and saw.
"Oh! Help! Run....
Old and young,
Panic-stricken,
Away did run
From their chores,
Some ran home, some to church, and some to shops,
All bolted doors fast and closed shutters tight.
Boldly David strode and in the town square stood. ...
"Well, how early these people are gone to sleep!
Ho there, oxen-owners, cow-owners,
Get up, swiftly unbar your doors;
He who had one—I've brought him ten,
He who had ten—I've brought him scores.
Up, get up swiftly, come and take them,
Take your oxen to the barns and your cows.'
When David saw that no one stirred, no one
The doors unbarred, he placed his head upon
A stone, himself lengthened out upon the square,
And soundly slept until the break of dawn.
At dawn the nobles arose together
And went to Ohan, the Big-Voiced, and said:
"Big-Voiced brother Ohan, alas, Death take you,
You it was who brought this fool, made him herdsman;
Our cows and our oxen, unshepherded
Let them be, but rid us of this madcap lout.
He parts nor bear nor ram nor ox;
Some day he'll bring great harm upon our town,
Make it a lair for bears, a forsaken land."

IX

A nuisance David! No peace from the lad!
Put to it, and to his wit's end driven,
Ohan fashioned and to David gave
Bow and arrows. "Go you forth, hunt among the hills."
From Ohan David took the bow and arrows,
Went forth beyond the bounds of Sassoun-town,
Huntsman he became. Into a barley field
He sallied forth, killing quail, shooting sparrow.
And at dusk, he took haven in a hut

Cared for by a poor and childless beldam,
Betimes to his father known. There, alongside
The fire, like an immense dragon and long,
He would lengthen himself out and sleep.
On a day, when he was from the hunt returned,
The beldam raged at him. "Goodness, David!" she said,
"Death take you! Are you indeed your father's son?
That field alone and I remain below
The skies and God. An old lady, I, weak
Of hand and foot—Why do you trample
My field under foot, and lay it waste,
Cut off my whole year's living? If you are
Huntsman, take up your bow and arrows—bctake
You to the headlands of Zudsmaga, all
The way to Seghansar—your sire held there
Of an entire domain the tenancy;
Well-stocked are its highlands with roaming game;
There be deer there, mountain-goat and wild sheep.
If you can, begone, go seek your game there."
"What is it, you hag, that makes you curse me?
Still a stripling I, now only have I heard.
Where be then the fastness of our game preserve?"
"To your uncle go, Ohan will tell it thee."

X

Next day at sunrise David stood before
His uncle's threshold with bow in hand.
"Uncle Ohan, why have you not told me
My father owned a mountain game preserve?
There be mountain goats there, rams and deer.
Up, Uncle, bestir yourself and take me there."
"What!" cried Ohan, "These are not your words.
Whoso told them you, may his tongue be tied.
That mountain game preserve, my son, is lost
To us, as also the game of that range....
No more are there mountain goats, rams, deer.
In the days when your father was still quick,
(O what wondrous days, whence are ye fled?)
Oft have I eaten there the flesh of game...
Your father died, God forsook us, Egypt's king
Gathered soldiers, came upon us, ruined

Our country, and the game from this mountain
He took, he plundered: the deer, the hind are gone...
Hence our fate's scroll has thus been written.
All is past, my son, go back to your work,
The king of Egypt else will hear your voice."
"What can the king of Egypt do to me?
What do I ask from the king of Egypt?
Let the king of Egypt stay in Egypt.
To my father's highlands what right has he?
Up, Uncle, take up your bow and arrows,
Your quiver buckle on, to the highlands
Let us go, to the mountain game preserve!"
Ohan stood up, not knowing what to do.
They went, and what a game preserve they saw..
The high walls demolished, thick forests felled,
The high turrets made level with the earth.

XI

Night fell and there they remained fast. Big-Voiced
Ohan placed beneath his head the quiver
And the bow and peacefully snored. David
Was plunged into a sea of reckonings.
And soon he saw, in the distant darkness,
A strong and flaming fire burning bright.
Toward the fire David moved, and held by
Its spell, straightway was borne upward upon it;
Upward and upward he went, alighted on
A rock, ascended again, saw a great
Cleft marble stone, from its centre belching forth
A pure flame, rising and falling, billow
Upon billow, on the selfsame stone.
Now David came down from the place, came down
And called Big-Voiced Ohan. "Up, Uncle, up
And see that bright fire, burning brightly there.
How long wiii you sleep! A light has come down
From the steep hill, the steep hill of marble stone.
Arise, Uncle, from your sweet sleep. What light
Be that that issues forth from yon marble stone?"
Ohan stood up and made the sign of the cross
Against his face. "Alas, my son," he said,
"How I cherish that light! That be the light

From our great peak Marouta. In the place
Of that light there once did stand our Sassoun's
Patroness (what wondrous days!), Sassoun's guardian,
The blessed Madonna's monastery
Of charghopan. Always, when to war he went,
It was there your father made his prayers.
Your father died, God was wroth and forsook us,
The king of Egypt gathered up soldiers,
He marched upon our abbey on that hill,
He levelled it, but from the altar still
The sacred flames of our patroness rise.

XII

When David heard this, too, "Sweet Uncle," he said,
"Uncle sweet, orphan I be and liegeless
In this world. Lacking a father, be you
To me a father good. I'll not again
From Marouta's heights come down until
Once again our abbey stands as it used.
From you I ask five hundred artisans,
Five thousand toilers, too, with them to work
So that this very week they come and build
Our former abbey as it erewhile stood."
Now Ohan went forth and with him brought back
Five thousand toilers, five hundred artisans,
Who, mid sound and fury, builded again,
Much as before with glories overlaid,
Our Blessed Mary's abbey, Marouta.
The scattered clergy once again came back,
And once again the sound of canticle
And prayer re—echoed through the abbey's walls.
When once again his father's monastery
Full-peopled was and merry, David came down,
And only then came he, from Marouta's heights.

XIII

This news was taken to Egypt's Melik.
"Well, don't tell me! So David has rebuilt
His father's abbey and become the ruler,
While I have yet the seven years' tribute to

Collect!" Now Melik was exceeding wrath:
 "Go," he said, "Patin, Gouzpatin, Sitvin,
 Charghatin, Sassoun's earth and stones lay waste.
 To me bring back my seven years tribute rich.
 Bring forty virgin girls, nimbus-lit,
 Forty short women to turn the millstones,
 And forty tall, to load the camel trains,
 To be at beck and call my household slaves."
 Gouzpatin marshalled up his soldiers true.
 'Gladly, my Lord," he said, 'so be it.
 I go to Sassoun even now to lay
 It bare, to bring back groups of forty women,
 Forty camel-loads of yellow gold,
 And ruin the home of the Armenian race.'
 Thus he spoke. Egyptian maids and women
 Together danced and raised their voice in song:
 "Our Gouzpatin has to Sassoun gone...
 'Groups of forty women have I brought,
 Forty saddle bags of gold,
 Before my eyes in serried order
 Have I brought mitch-cows red...
 In the springtime let us butter churn,
 O Gouzpatin, brave Gouzpatin,
 Cast is David in the dust."
 Now Gouzpatin, swollen with pride, roaring said,
 "I thank you sisters all, but patient be
 Till I return—it's then that you should dance."

XIV

Thus with a song,
 With soldiers strong
 Haughty Gouzpatin entered Sassoun;
 Straight when Ohan heard this he was tongue-tied:
 With salt and bread,
 With cries and tears,
 He bowed his head
 Before the spears,
 For mercy prayed.
 "Have whatever you wish, so be it; take
 Rosy-cheeked girls, of Sassoun-town the womenfolk,
 The yellow gold that's hard come by, take these,

Take these but mercy show our hapless race.
Do not cut us down nor do us in to death,
Above is God, below are you," he said.
He brought row on row of rosy-cheeked girls
And womenfolk of Sassoun—town. Uu stood
Gouzpatin and gleaned; he lodged the likelier of them
Deep within the hayloft and locked the door.
Forty virgin girls beauteously nimbus-lit,
Forty short women to turn the millstones,
And forty tall, to load the camel-trains,
To be household slaves of Egypt's Melik.
And from its hold mound on mound of yellow gold...
A pall of mourning hung on the Armenian race.

XV

Where are you, O David, you guardian of
The Armenian race, O let the rock be rent,
Only come you out into the open!
Once David had repaired the abbey of
His sires, he dropped down from Marouta's peak,
He found a tarnished, helveless blade and stepped
Into the grandam's turnip field. The hag
Came forth with cries and curses. "Fool David,"
She said, "may you one day eat fire and pain
Instead of turnips. in this wide world
Do your eyes see only me and what are mine?
My field you've levelled to the ground, you have,
This only had remained my winter's hoard,
This too have you cut off; how shall I live?
If you be brave, take your bow, begone,
Hold sway over your father's domains,
Eat from the treasures of your father
Which you have so long unprotected left
That Egypt's king has sent to pack them off."
"Why be you so angered with me, grandam?
I know not a thing of what you say.
What is it that Egypt's king takes from us?"
"The Egyptian king, heavy-footed David,
Gouges your very eyes: already is
He here. On Sassoun-town have come Patin,
Gouzpatin, Sitvin, Charghatin; the whole

Of Sassoun-town they plunder even now.
 Forty saddle-bags of gold for tribute,
 Forty beauteous virgin girls, nimbus-lit,
 Forty short women to turn the millstones,
 Forty tall women to load the camel-trains,
 All to be slaves to the Egyptian king."
 "O grandam why do you curse me? But show
 And let me see—these demands, where are they made?"
 "Death take you David! 'Where are they made!'
 Are you really the son of that father.
 You who are come here to munch on turnips?
 In your very house Gouzpatin measures
 Out your gold, while the pretty girls
 Are together herded in your hayloft."
 David left off eating turnips. He went
 He spied Gouzpatin in his home, counting
 The gold before him spilled, and Charghatin
 And Sitvin holding back the barking dogs,
 While at a distance, his neck to one side bent,
 His arms folded across his breast, Ohan stood.
 David saw, and his eyes were gorged with blood.
 "Stop! Gouzpatin, stand apart. My father's
 Gold this be. I'm the one to count it out."
 Gouzpatin said: "Well, Big-Voiced Ohan,
 This seven years' tribute will you give or not?
 If not, may my whiskers witness be, I'll leave
 And tell Musra-Melik, and he will come,
 He will lay waste your Sassoun countryside,
 Burn it down and plant a garden over it."
 "Begone, you unfeeling Egyptian dogs.
 Have you yet to hear of Sassoun's madcap braves?
 Think you we are dead, or mere shadows all?
 Think you to place our country under tribute!"
 David's wrath was great. At once he clapped
 The weighing scales, which smashed Gouzpatin's head,
 Their fragments flew beyond the walls: till now,
 To this very day, still are they in flight.
 Now they rose up, let be the scattered gold,
 Left far behind the Armenian world and fled..
 Patin, Gouzpattn, Sitvin, Charghatin.

XVI

"Well, well, Uncle, what shall I say to you?
 We have here mound on mound of gold.
 Of me a servant of the town you've made,
 Abandoned me before an alien's door.'
 "You crazy fool," his uncle said, "I've kept
 For Melik all this gold that he might kindly
 Look upon us. Now that you gave it not,
 Who is there will front his wrath, fight with him,
 When he comes forth with soldiers and with fire
 To lay in ruins Sassoun's earth and stones?"
 "Stay, Uncle, let him come forth, I shall go,
 I shall go forth and answer make to him."
 He smote the door against the dark hayloft,
 Let out the pinioned girls and set them free.
 'Go,' he said, "in freedom live, and fail not
 To pray long days for David of Sassoun."

XVII

So, battered in this way and bathed in blood,
 Homeward bound they fled and reached their native land,
 Patin, Gouzpatin,
 Sitvin, Charghatin.
 Egyptian women saw them in the distance,
 Saw them in the distance and were right glad. ...
 From the rooftops they clapped and cheered them home.
 "They come, they come... they bear, they bear...
 Our Gouzpatin has come from Sassoun-town
 Brought back groups of forty women, red milch cows,
 In the spring we'll butter make and chortaan."
 But once they saw
 At closer range
 Gouzpatin bloodied,
 They ceased giggling
 And wagged aloud:
 "Well Gouzpatin, you loud-mouthed runaway,
 Down what dales and over what mountains have you fled,
 Your thick head cleft in half? Did you not say,
 'To Sassoun I go to fetch groups of forty women,
 To fetch forty saddle—bags of yellow gold
 To lay waste the country of the Armenian race?'

As a breathless, fleeing hound have you returned!"
Gouzpatin, now angered much, began to speak:
"Silence, you brats, you've seen only your breed
Of men and not the madcap Sassoun braves.
Sassoun's madcap braves are mountain-like,
Their arrows thick as stakes, and their country
Withal a stony fastness: canyon-walls,
Impenetrable, abound and deep hollows....
Even their blades of grass stand curved as swords.
They slaughtered three hundred men, Egypt's best."
Thus he spoke and, once he had, he tarried not,
But ran fast, head over heels, pell-mell,
Ran right up to the king. The king laughed from
His throne. "Live, O live, brave Gouzpatin
The famed medallion of Ghouzghoun richly
You deserve, and from your neck shall it hang.
A guerdon for your great triumphal stroke.
But where are they? Bring Sassoun's girls and gold."
Thus Melik spoke: but Gouzpatin had bowed
His head clear to the very ground. He said.
"Long live, O great king! Barely did I flee
Though mounted on my horse. How could I
Have borne Sassoun's yellow gold? A fool is
Born among the Armenian race who brooks nor
Lord nor fear nor mighty men. See how he's
Had at my bloodied head and smashed it through.
'I will not give,' he said, 'my father's gold.
Nor will I give the womenfolk of my
Armenian people. In Sassoun-country
There is no room for you. Your king,' he said,
'Let him come, let him come and fight with me.
If brave he be, let him come and take by force.~
The Egyptian king, enraged, boiled over and over.
"Call," he said, "call all my soldiers together:
A thousand thousand males, young greenhorns,
A thousand thousand males, beardless, without rnoustach'
A thousand thousand males, downy-lipped,
A thousand thousand males, fresh from the couch,
A thousand thousand males, black-moustachioed,
A thousand thousand males, grey-haired,
A thousand thousand males, to sound trumpets,
A thousand thousand males, to strike the war-drums,

Have them come forth, take up arms, get into mail, —
I go to wage war on David, desolate
Sassoun-town and plunder it to the ground.”

XVIII

Thus he assembled an innumerable
Host, marched on the plains of Sassoun and encamped
In full solemnity, did the Egyptian king.
So great a population did they make,
That those who came to Batman’s banks bent down
And drank their fill till the river went dry,
And Sassoun’s townspeople were parched with thirst
Big-Voiced Ohan was taken by surprise.
His fur-skin on his shoulders, he scaled the heights,
He scaled the heights, and, lo, what a sight he saw:
The white tents had so whitened all the plains
That one might say mid-winter night had come,
And with white snow had covered Sassoun-town.
His gall to water turned, his tongue stood tied,
And shouting ‘Halloo’ he rushed hack home.
'Halloo, run, it’s come.... Holla, soho, it’s come...'
“What, Uncle, what? What has come who has come?”
“(Fell fire-and-pain has come to David’s nose.)
Egypt’s king has risen and come, come and pitched
His tented armies on our plain. The stars
May be numbered but not his numberless hosts.
Alas, for our lives, alas for our world!
Come, let us take the gold, let us take the girls,
Let us fall on the ground before him, say prayers,
Perchance he may relent, forbear the sword.”
“Stay, Uncle, be not afraid; get you to
Your restful room and sleep on peacefully.
But now I’ll get up, gain the Sassoun plain
And make answer to the Egyptian king.”
Straight went David to his wonted grandam.
“Granny, my soul,” he said, “give me some scraps
Of iron, tarnished and old, a grate, a spit
Gather whatever you can and give it to me...
Also find me an ass on which I may sit...
Against the Egyptian hosts I go to war.
“My goodness, David,” she said, “Death take you!

Can you indeed be the son of that sire?
Your father had in war a fiery steed,
Fully caparisoned, with a bellyband of gold:
A club of steel, a pearled saddle, helmet
Hardy, and a ready cross on his right arm,
Mailed vest, and a sword lightning-laden.
And now here have you come, O you warped fool,
Asking from me an ass and an old spit."
"O granny, not yet have I heard such things.
Where is now the armour of my father?"
"Go now to your uncle, ask it of him,
Say, 'Where are they? Find, bring them, give to me.'
If willingly he gives them not to you,
Gouge his eyes, she said "and take them forcibly."

XIX

And David went to see his uncle Ohan.
'O Uncle, he called angered , 'for battle
My father had a fiery steed fully
Caparisoned, with a bellyband of gold:
A club of steel, a pearled saddle, helmet
Hardy, and a ready cross on his right arm,
Mailed vest, and a lightning-laden sword."
"Oh David, my soul," Ohan roared in fear,
"Since from the day of your father's death
I have not brought forth the steed from the barn,
Nor from the arms-chest the sword of lightning.
The mailed vest, the golden bellyband.
For goodness sake, let me be, plague me not,
If these you want scamper off and get them."

XX

David clapped on his armour and his mail,
Buckled on, too, the belt of his lightning-sword
And, with the cross on his all-conquering arm,
Mounted his lion-hearted father's steed,
Mounted his father's steed and lashed it forth.
Weeping, Big-Voiced Ohan sang:
"Mercy, a thousand mercies
For the steed,

Alas, the fiery steed,
Mercy, a thousand mercies
For the bellyband,
Alas, the golden bellyband,
Mercy that the rich array is lost,
Alas, the rich array is lost.”
David flew into a rage,
Turned his horse and drove it back;
Poor Ohan paled, stood sore afraid,
And changed the burden of his song:
“Alas, my infant David’s lost,
Alas, my David’s lost. .
This when David heard,
His temper cooled—
He dismounted and kissed Ohan’s hand;
And Big-Voiced Ohan, as a father should,
Blessed him and gave him paternal counsels,
And put him on the road to Sassoun plain.

XXI

Now David of Sassoun an uncle had—
Toros by name—a fearful, giant-like man.
When he, too, heard of the rumors of war
With an elm-tree on his shoulder, he strode forth.
From afar he comes; roaring aloud he cries:
“Why are you come upon this field? Who are you,
How many heads may there be among you?
Have you no knowledge of David of Sassoun,
Have you not heard he’s on his way here,
And brings his winged horse to pace him around?
Clear away, David will be coming here,
Wherever he is—I’ve come to make a clearing.
As thus he spoke, he brought the elm-tree down
From his shoulder and swept off some twenty
Pitched tents of the army, the while David stood
On a fearsome height and roared a dragon s roar.
“You who are asleep, wake up,
You who are awake, get up and stand,
You who are afoot, take up arms,
You who are armed, saddle your horses,
'You who are saddled, mount your horses—

That you may not later say that while asleep
David stole stealthily upon you and left.. .
Thus he roared, and goading his fiery steed,
Came down like a lightning-bolt as from a cloud,
Spread terror among the Egyptian armies,
On all sides brandishing his lightning-sword.
He smashed and slew and slaughtered till high noon,
At high noon the blood rose in a floodtide~
He rounded up and drove off together
Thousands among those quick, among those dead.
Among the soldiers was an ancient man,
A sage, and one well-travelled in this world;
"Men," he said, "make way for me, make way,
I must go to David and with him speak."
He went to David and stood before him;
And this is how the elder spoke to him:
"O brave one, may your fist stay ever strong,
And in your hand always the stubby sword.
"But listen to the words of an old man
And see if there be any sense to them.
Pray tell, what have these men done unto you
That drives you on pell-mell to slaughter them?
"Each one among them is a mother's son,
And each one a burning light in his home,
Far behind some have left their forlorn wives,
Wives whose eyes look on the road for their return,
"Some have left a home with many children filled,
Some have left behind parents old and poor,
And some in tears, with veils across their faces,
Are the young brides of only yesterday.
"Under sway of sword and by might, their king has
Gathered them up and marched them here together.
We are men to be pitied, with hastening days,
What harm have we brought to you, in what ways?
"Your foe's the warring king, the king himself,
If you must fight, go fight with him instead.
Pray leave off drawing your lightning—laden sword
Spare these people—helpless, unprotected."
"You speak right well and true, O ancient man.
Said David to the eld. "But where is the
Warring king? What can he now be doing?
Bring him forth that I may wreathe his days in black."

'He has sent out from the great-tent, the one
That has the smoke issuing forth from its centre;
Yonder smoke is not smoke rising to the sky,
It is vapour from the king's fuming mouth."
Thus they spoke. Now David goaded on his
Horse and rode straight to where the great-tent stood.
He rode, and rode up to the entrance-door.
Thus he roared upon the Arabs standing guard:
"Where is he?" he said. "Why has he become scarce?
Call him out, into the open call him out;
If he knows not death, I have brought him death,
If he knows not his nemesis, she am I."
'Melik,' they said, 'has fallen asleep.
For seven days must he sleep. Three days only
Have yet passed, four days more there now
Remain ere he will have had his share of sleep."
"What! Has he brought these poor and pitiful folk,
Dumped them on this field, spilled their blood in seas,
While he seeks shelter under cover of
His great-tent, and sleeps peacefully for seven days!
"I cannot abide whether he sleeps or no.
Quick! Get him up and out into the open;
In such wise I'll put him to sleep before
His entrance-door, he'll never again awake."
The men arose, crestfallen, then heated
An iron rod on the fire; they rapped upon
The open heels of the Egyptian king
Who was sunk in a deep peaceful sleep.
"How now! A body can no longer have
A peaceful sleep, the fleas are so noisome...'
So the great husky murmured to himself,
Turned around and once more fell asleep.
They went and with a great plough they returned,
In the strong and burning fire they placed its share,
And red-hot when it was, reddened and sparkling,
Straightway they clapped it on his naked back.
"How now! A body can no longer have
A peaceful sleep, mosquitoes are so unjust.
Slowly the great husky opened his eyes,
He wanted so to fall asleep again,
But David he saw. Muttering to himself,
He lifted his great head from where he slept.

A great blast of air he blew, on David,
Thinking in this way to set that giant to flight.
And when he saw that David stood stock-still,
Surprise and dread struck through his very soul.
His menacing, bloodshot eyes he cast sidelong
Gloweringly at David's unblinking eyes.
But just as soon as he had looked, he felt
From him had ebbed the strength of half-score oxen.
So on the place he slept he now sat up,
And smiling, thus began to speak with him:
"Hello, well-met, David, you are still tired...
Come, sit down a bit—let's talk as is proper,
Later we may still engage in combat,
That is, if you seek another combat.
The scheming tyrant, within his great-tent
Had caused a deep pit of forty spans to be dug,
Of which the black mouth had been covered over
With a screen and, over yet that, some bright throw-rugs.
His was ever the habit fawningly to lure
Unto him all those he failed to vanquish;
He coaxed them to sit within his great-tent,
Directly over that black and deadly well.
Dismounting from his horse, David came down,
He went in, he sat, he fell into the well.
Ha, ha, ha, ha, ho-ho, ho-ho, hee-hee,
Laughed Egypt's merciless king, the king of Egypt.
"There, now let him go and stay in that dark
Well till he rots away and then some more.
Saying this, he brought an immense millstone,
A millstone immense, and rolled it over the well.

XXII

On that selfsame night Big-Voiced Ohan slept.
He dreamt that there appeared, up in the sky
Over Egypt, a bright sun, bright with rays,
But over Sassoun's fastnesses, a black cloud.
Ohan was terror-stricken. From his bed
He sprang. "O wife," he said, "bring up a light.
Our artless David is in trouble again,
'And a black cloud hangs over Sassoun-town."
"May the sod fall on your head!" said his wife.

"Who knows how or where David's having fun...
Yet here you are asleep in your cozy home,
Seeing dreams and about others worrying."
Ohan fell asleep. Again he started up:
"O wife, David is come to narrow straits.
So brightly glimmers Egypt's brilliant star,
But sicklied over glows our star and yellow."
"What's come over you, man, in the middle of
The night?" his wife shouted in a fury.
Ohan again crossed himself upon the face,
Turned around and slept, though with a troubled heart.
He saw another dream, more fearful than
Before from heaven's high arch there now sparkled,
Full-resplendently, Egypt's star; Sassoun's
Waning little star sank slowly, toward the dark.
He woke up, afraid: "Wife, may your house be wrecked!
How could I listen to your witless brains!
Alone unto himself our young and orphaned
David now is lost. Up! Bring me my arms.

XXIII

Ohan arose and went forth to the barn
And gave his white horse a pat on the back.
'Well, white horse," he said, 'how long will it be
Ere you betake me to where David fights?"
"By dawn you shall be there," and saying this,
The white horse stooped for him to mount.
"Your back be broken! What'll I do at dawn,
View his corpse or his funeral attend?"
He gave the red horse a pat on the back.
That horse, too, stooped for Ohan to mount.
"O red horse," he said, "how long will it be
Ere you betake me to where David fights?"
"In one hour you shall be there," the red horse said,
"In one hour I'll take you where David fights."
"May you burst your gall! Pain and Death take you!
Alas for all that barley you have eaten."
And now to the black horse the turn came around;
The black horse, too, stooped for him to mount.
"O my black little one, how long will it be,"
He said, "ere you take me where David fights?"

"If on my back you can stay fast," the black Horse said, "No sooner your one foot's in the Stirrup and before the other one's thrown over, I will have brought you where David fights."

XXIV

Swiftly the black horse bore Big-Voiced Ohan:
He placed his left foot in the stirrup,
By the time he threw his right foot over,
The black horse had brought him to the highlands.
Now Ohan saw David's steed, unmounted,
A-roaming in the highlands and neighing aloud;
Below, he saw the Egyptian encampment,
Undulating endlessly like the sea.
And that he might not burst with his straining,
Ohan put on the skins of seven oxen.
And Ohan stood, like a cloud, atop the
Topmost peak in Sassoun's highlands, and roared.
"O David, O David, where can you be!
But call to mind the cross on your arm, give
The name of Our Blessed Madonna
And come you out into the hnad daylight."
His voice floated, reverberatingly,
And into David's inner ear blared strong.
"Ho-ho! That is my uncle's voice," he said,
"From Sassoun's fastnesses he calls for me.
"O blessed Madonna of Marouta,
O intrepid cross of our litany,
I call on you—succour David now...
He called, and from his place rose to his feet:
In such strength, in such wise he smote the millstone,
The stone was smashed into a thousand pieces,
The pieces upward flew to high heaven,
And still to this day are they in flight.
Melik, formidable, came out of his lair;
By fear his fiendish spirit was possessed.
"Brother David, do still come over here,
Let us sit at board together and parley...'
"Never again at board will I sit with you,
You base, you crooked, you poltroonly man;
Get up, quick, take up your arms, mount your horse,

Come out into the open and let us fight.”
“Indeed let’s fight, let us fight,” Melik said,
“But mine is the right to strike the first blow.”
“Oh very well, it’s yours, strike,” David called.
He rode and stopped in the middle of the plain.
Musra-Melik arose, came to his feet,
He took up his lance and mounted his horse,
And dashed off all the way to Diarbekir,
And from that place yet again returned.
Three thousand boulders was Melik drawing
By the handle of his gigantic lance.
He charged and struck a blow—at once the dust
Arose and the world’s globe trembled strong.
“There’s been an earthquake or the world’s destroyed,”
Said many people throughout the world;
'No,' others said 'bloodthirsty giants,
Men of might, are having at each other.’’
“From but this single blow hath David died,”
Musra-Melik told his myriad soldiers,
But David from beneath a cloud called forth,
“Musra-Melik, yet am I among the quick!”
“Well, from short distance only did I charge,
But you’ll see now from where it is I come!”
Arose the mighty one, came to his feet,
And sprang on his mount for a second time.
Clear to Aleppo he rode the second time,
On his way back from there he left free the reins.
Reins came and hail, and a strong hurricane
With its tremendous force, shook the whole world.
He came, he struck, and from the clamour of
The blow, standers-by were fully deafened.
“Lost is David to the House of Sassoun,”
Announced the haughty Egyptian monarch.
“Among the quick am I,” shouted David,
“Charge once again — ’tis still your turn.”
“Well! From short distance only did I charge,”
Melik shouted, and sprang upon his mount.
The third time now that he mounted his horse,
Out and away he rode to Egypt’s own soil,
And from that distance, the lance in his hand,
Back he rode, charging full-tilt on David.
He charged on David and struck with all his strength,

Struck with a crushing and formidable blow:
The dust went up as high as Sassoun's steeps,
So dense it was the sun's face stood beclouded.
For three nights and for three days, the dust lay
Like a cloud over all the countryside.
For three nights and for three days, the rumours
Went forth that David of Sassoun had died.
When there had passed three days, like the dust
That stood cloudlike, David too did stand;
Yea, as the peak, the peak of Mount Kur-Kur
Stood David, fog-shrouded, majestic.
"O Melik," he roared, "whose turn is it now?"
The proud soul of Melik was terror-stricken:
Death's tremors now possessed his very heart,
His haughty, puffed-up spirit was now let down.
Melik strode forth and dug himself a deep well,
He let himself down into the dark grot,
He covered its opening with forty skins,
And covered these again with forty millstones.
That lion-hearted son of the lion-hearted,
David, stood up from where he sat, grumbling,
Mounted his stormy steed, made it career,
As aloft he held his gleaming Lightning-Sword.
There now came forth, her hair loosed before her,
The mother of Melik, a mean old crone:
"O David, by my hair draw me beneath
Your heels, but deal thy very first blow on me.
The second time he lifted high his sword,
There came running Musra-Melik's sister:
"O David, if it be your wish," she called,
"Strike your second blow on my fainting heart."
Now the hour had come for the final blow;
And for the third time David raised his sword.
"Now one blow have I left. I must strike for God's sake,"
He said, "I must strike... no one else remains."
Saying thus, he mounted, careered his horse.
His fiery steed took flight and sailed high,
In the heavens careered, defiantly—
Then downward came the lightning-laden sword.
Through forty hides of oxen did it pass,
Also through forty millstones did it pass,
Clear through the loathsome monster did it cleave,

Cut into his flesh seven feet deep.
"I am among the quick! Strike once again!"
Melik roared from deep within the well.
David heard, and was much astonished
At the blow he'd struck and his Lightning-Sword.
'Melik,' he said, 'do move about a bit.'
And Melik made a stir within the well.
Right down the middle his body split,
One section falling here, another there.
The Egyptian soldiers, when they viewed that sight,
Terror-stricken, their blood to water turned.
David called: "Be none of you in fear,
But listen yet to what I have to say.
"You are but tillers of the soil, farmers,
Benighted and denied, hungry, naked,
With a thousand and one ills and pains,
With a thousand and one troubles to boot;
"Why have you taken up the bow and arrow,
Spilled over onto far and alien plains?
Know you not that we too have homes and hearths,
We too have tender babes and the aged?
"Have you tired of the quiet and peaceful life,
The quiet and peaceful life of the husbandman?
Are you tired of the threshing-floor, the field,
Tillage and sowing, your harvests and greens?
"Return you by the paths that brought you here
Return to the native soil of Egypt;
But if once again by might and in arms
You should dare to march against these freeborn men,
"Be the wells you dig forty measures deep,
Be they covered up with forty millstones,
Against you will rise, just as today,
David of Sassoun and his Lightning-Sword.
"And at that time, only God will know
Who between us shall the sorrier be...
We who rise to wage a battle great,
Or you, who've made of us your enemy.

1902

Translated by Aram Tolegian

Hovhannes Toumanian

Descent

For forty long years I follow one path,
Straight and fearless
Ascending
Towards a bright world, the Holy Unknown.
For forty long years by that dread path
I have travelled thus,
And now at last
Have reached
Tranquility.
I have left down there, at the mountain's foot
Glory and wealth,
Grudge and envy,
Everything that oppressed the soul.
And all the things
That I view again
From my mountain heights
Look so worthless and meagre.
Now, richer in wisdom, my burden light,
With carefree laughter,
Song and canticle
I descend from the mountain's other side.

1909

Hovhannes Toumanian

Farewell Of Sirius

O say, from what remoteness do you hail
Sirius, mighty traveller of the sky,
What is the haven to which you sail
With speed untold
On endless routes,
As the centuries unfold?
Most brilliant gem of the firmament,
You gleam
On the heavenly dome.
With your bounty of ardent light
You decorate
Illuminate
The canopy of our dim night.
How many eyes gazed at you before
Just as we do tonight,
And how many more
As yet unborn
Will be gazing at your light?
Who was it first wished you good speed
From our Earth
And the human race?
And in whose eyes without a trace
Will fade,
Darken, expire
Forever your farewell fire?
Good speed on your way, our ancient guest!
If you perchance
Meet mighty Death
Ask her a question on our behalf:
"How many
Generations of men
Will a stellar leave-taking outlast?"

1922

Hovhannes Toumanian

Illusion

It started up, our true Chalak,
Raced across the mountain flank,
On and on through the darkened wood
With my bold brother in hot pursuit.
Glade and thicket they wandered through
In the twilight virgin depths.
I call them ever and anew,
Their return I still expect.
But alas, among our hills
Neither of them reappears.
Only their two voices still
Echo in my ears.

1918

Hovhannes Toumanian

In The Armenian Mountains

The way was heavy and the night was dark,
And yet we survived
Both sorrow and gloom.
Through the ages we go and gaze at the stark
Steep heights of our land-
The Armenian Highlands.

We carry from old our treasure,
Vast as the sea,
Brought into life
By the great soul of our people,
In our lofty land-
The Armenian Highlands.

How many times
The savage hordes
From the blazing desert
Tore and tormented
Our caravan
In our blood-smeared land-
The Armenian Highlands.

Yet, plundered and scattered,
Our caravan
Sought its way out
From among the rocks
Counting the scars of its countless wounds
In our mournful land-
The Armenian Highlands.
And we gaze with dolorous, longing eyes
At the earth in its gloom,
At the distant stars;
Ah, when will the dawn break at last
Over our green
Armenian Highlands.

Hovhannes Toumanian

In The Cottage

The little children wept and wailed;
Heart-rending were the tears they shed.
"Mamma, mamma, we want our food!
Get up, mamma, and give us bread!"

With bitter sorrow in her heart
Groaned the sick mother from her bed:
"We have no bread, my little ones;
Papa has gone to get you bread."

"No, you are cheating, bad mamma!
You are deceiving us! You said
That when the sunlight struck the banks
Papa would come and bring us bread.

"The sun has come, the sun has gone;
Still are we hungry, still unfed.
Mamma, mamma, we want our food!
Get up, mamma, and give us bread!"

"No bread your father yet has found;
Without it he dares not come back.
Wait but a little while, my dears!
Now I will follow in his track.

"In heaven there is a great Papa;
Abundant store of bread has he.
He loves you much, so very much,
He will not let you hungry be.

"There will I go and say to him
That you are faint with hunger sore.
Plenty of bread I'll ask for you,
That you may eat, and weep no more."

So spake the mother, and she clasped
The starving children to her breast.
On her pale lips the last kiss froze
That to their faces thin she pressed.

The mother's arms unclosed no more—
She shut her eyes and went away
Bread to her little ones to send—
And lifeless in their sight she lay.

The little children wept and wailed;
Heart-rending were the tears they shed.
"Mamma, mamma, we want our food;
Get up, mamma, and give us bread!"

Hovhannes Toumanian

Parvana

I

The high-throned Abul and Metin mountains
Back-to-back in proud silence stand,
Holding high on their mighty shoulders
Parvana—a beautiful ancient land.
And people say that there in his castle
Over the steeps, next to the sky,
Lived a king, the hoary lord of the mountains
Who ruled Parvana in days gone by.
The king had a daughter, and such was her charm,
That no one ever in his life did meet,
Hunting among the lofty mountains,
A doe so beautiful and so sweet.
His gray old age and his mountain realm
With her childish gaiety she adorned
And the old but happy King of Parvana
His darling daughter simply adored.
The years to come promised still more joy;
She came of age, and, legends report,
The king despatched his ambassadors
To every castle and to every court.
“Where is, he inquired, “the courageous youth
That can win my daughter by main and might?
Let him don his armour and mount his steed
And come to take my daughter by right.”

II

Their sabres clanged and clattered,
Their horses pranced and reared
When before the castle
Those brave young knights appeared.
In front of the grand white castle
Of Parvana’s hoary king
All waited in impatience
For the contest to begin.
Folk from all the neighbourhood
Had left their hearth and home

To see who wins the maiden
For his very own.
The trumpet echoed. All the court
Assembled in the square.
Then came the gracious hoary king
And his daughter fair.
Her father came like a gloomy cloud
And like a moon came she
Arm-in-arm, they were a sight
That all eyes were glad to see.
And all who gathered were amazed
That such a maid could be.
The brave young men stood silently
In spellbound reverie.
"Now look you at these splendid knights
All come to seek your hand.
Prepared to fight in contest fair,
Upon the square they stand.
"One will display his manly strength,
Another his skill with arms,
A further one his horsemanship,
Still another his grace and charm.
"And when the contest comes to end,
And they come to claim their prize,
And when the bravest of them file
In parade before your eyes,
"Then throw an apple to your choice,
The champion of the day,
And let the whole world envy you,
So happy and so gay.
The king was about to raise his hand
That the contest may begin
When the princess set the apple by
And thus she spoke to him:
"What if a mighty-muscled knave
Beats a gentle-hearted dove?
He may be champion of the day
But never win my love.'
Then asked the rivals gathered
Around the royal stand:
"What would a champion have to do
To win your heart and hand?"

“Is it wealth you want? We’ll get you boats
With gold and silver laden.
Or is your wish a shining star?
We’ll bring it down from heaven.”
“No need have I for silver,
No need have I for gold.
And though you bring me gems and pearls,
You still may leave me cold.
“The man that is to be my lord
Must find undying fire.
Whoever brings the fire to me
Will have his heart’s desire.”
The gallant knights then took to horse
And gallop off did they.
Each chose himself a different road
And followed each his way.
They rode to fetch the princess fire
That would forever burn.
But though many years rolled by,
Not one man did return.

III

“Oh, Father dear, where are the knights,
Why do they not return?
Perhaps it can’t be found at all,
Fire that will always burn?”
“Yes, daughter dear, they sure will come
And bring undying fire.
But the roads and ways of dauntless men
Are full of dangers dire.
“They have to pass through evil ground
And in evil water swim,
And clash in deadly battle
With the spiteful Jinn.”
Year after year went by again
But no one brought the flame.
“Look from the window, Father dear;
It’s surely time they came.
“More and more often in my dreams
My faithful knight I see,
Holding the fire, he gallops up,

But I wake, and gone is he!"
"Be patient, daughter, he will come!
In seeking for the fire
He who goes after it himself
May oftentime expire."
Again the years go rolling by.
The princess waits in vain.
The horsemen never came in sight
On the mountains or the plain.
"Oh, Father dear, I fade with grief,
Sorrow burns my soul.
Can it be there is no such fire
In the world at all?"
But nothing could the mournful king
To his dear child reply.
Black doubt besieged his hoary head
And sorely did he sigh.

IV

Year after year sped past again.
His daughter watched in vain
The melancholy neighbourhood:
No horse nor rider came.
At last the princess lost all hope,
And sad tears did she weep
And soon the castle lay beneath
A lake both vast and deep.
The princess vanished in the lake
Whose source were her sweet eyes;
Since then among the mountains tall
Clear as a tear it lies.
Beneath the lake's transparent waves,
In the shadowy, green deeps,
The castle of the luckless king
Its haughty look still keeps.
And now, as soon as twilight falls
And windows come alight
A myriad moths as if possessed
Begin their nightly flight.
And people say those luckless moths
That perish in the flame

Were once Parvana' s gallant knights
Whom passion made insane.
Turned into moths upon their way,
Whenever they see fire
They fly to it from far and near
And in the flame expire.

1902

Hovhannes Toumanian

Rest In Peace

And I stood up, so that
In keeping with our ancestral laws,
I may read a last prayer
On the hapless victims of my nation,
Who in city and mart
On hill and plain,
From sea to sea,
Extinguished are,
Dead, strewn, scattered
In their thousands.
And I borrowed fire
From the red flames
Of the great conflagration,
That consumed Armenia;
There in the bosom
Of the cold serene skies,
Ignited our mountains
The Massis and the Ara,
The Sipan and the Sermantz
The Nemruth and the Tandurck.
One by one I relit
The great candles
Of the Land of Armenia.
I relit the lamp
Of the Holy Arakadz too.
Like the distant sun;
Endless and infinite.
Always refulgent and bright
Over my head.
I stood there sullen and alone,
Solid like Mount Massis;
I called upon those miserable spirits,
Strewn forever as far as Mesopotamia,
As far as Assyria, the Sea of Armenia,
As far as the Hellespont,
As far as the stormy shores of Pontus.
"Rest in peace, my orphans.
In vain are the bitter tears,
In vain and useless.

Man the man-eating beast
Shall remain thus
For a long, long time."
To my right the Euphrates,
To my left the Tigris,
With mighty torrential roars,
Singing psalmodies
Meandered through
Their deep, deep valleys.
The clouds, too,
Rose from the plain of Tsirac,
The giant censer.
They set out from the verdant hills.
From the Armenian Range.
Clumps fragrant,
Moved on and on
Sprinkling the jewels of rain,
The scent of flowers,
The scent of incense.
As far as Mesopotamia.
As far as the Hellespont.
As far as the stormy shores of Pontus.
"Rest in peace, O my orphans.
In vain are the bitter tears,
In vain and useless.
Man the man-eating beast
Shall remain thus,
For a long time to come.

1915

Hovhannes Toumanian

The Ancient Blessing

'Neath a hazel's green, gathered in a ring
Sat the men of age, who had known life's sting.
They sat them around,
Stooped on the ground,
For feasting and song,
This ven'erable throng,
Our fathers, the aged, our seniors, the sage
Honoured for their age.
With uncovered heads we three of us stood;
We were school friends good,
Just three village lads, spirited and lighthearted.
Our hands on our chests in humbleness lay
As in voices strong we enlivened the throng
With song after song.
At the songs of joy of our childhood world
The gray Tamada his moustaches twirled,
Then each filled his cup to the very brim
And stood up with him.
This blessing they spoke 'Live long, lads, live happy,
Not as we lived in our day!'
Peace to your bones, our fathers who moaned!
The ills that you bore we also have known,
And now, in moments of joy or distress,
When children we bless,
We speak in your words: 'Live long, lads, live happy,
Not as we lived in our day!'

Hovhannes Toumanian

The Armenian Grief

The Armenian grief is a shoreless sea,
An enormous abyss of water;
My soul swims mournfully
On this huge and black expanse.
It prances at times – enraged,
And looks for the shore – blue and serene,
Where sometimes, it wearily dives deeply
Looking for fathomless rest;
But it will never reach the bottom of this sea.
It will never reach the shore.

In the Armenian grief – on the black expanse
My soul lives and mourns...

Hovhannes Toumanian

The Capture Of Fort Temuk

Prologue

Come hither, poor and gentle folk,
Lend an ear and listen well.
A wandering bard from distant parts,
A wondrous tale will I tell.
We are all but guests in this mortal world
Since the day we get our birth,
We come and go, each in his turn
To and from this fleeting earth.
Both love and laughter must disappear,
As will beauty, treasure and throne
Death is for us, we are for death,
Man's work is immortal alone.
Only noble deeds will never die
Through the centuries gloried and famed.
Happy the man who through his deeds
Wins an immortal name.
Yet the evil-doer lives too without end,
Cursed be his baneful deed,
Be it your father, mother or son
Or the woman you love and need!
I sing my praise to the deed benign;
Unthroned it, whoever can!
For who, even foes, will not admire
The deeds of a kindly man?
I wish you all the best of luck!
Now listen to what I tell;
Watch my word like a bullet fly,
Shot by a hunter aiming well.
I
Nadir, the Shah, mustered his troops
Soldiers in countless hosts
And he beleaguered Temuk Fort,
Like a night full of fiends and ghosts.
"Hey, brave Tatul!" the Shah called out,
"You think you will never die?
Come! For it is your death I have brought,
While you on your soft bed lie."

"Do not swagger, boastful Nadir!"
Cried the giant in reply.
"A mountain will never bow its peak,
Though the blackest clouds sweep by."
He called his warriors, daring and bold,
He buckled his shining sword,
Then sprang and mounted his charger swift
And rode afield from the Fort.
For forty days and for forty nights
The battle raged without cease;
So many corpses remained from the fight,
They topped the Fort in their heaps.
Iran and Turan had all arrived,
Yet they couldn't conquer the giant.
Army, slingshots were all destroyed,
But the fortress still stood, defiant.
Back to the Fort at last he came
Victorious, on the morn,
The dark-eyed beauty, his youthful wife,
Awaiting his return.

II

If ever a minstrel,
I swear by my soul,
A woman like that could boast,
Without any weapon
Or army he could
March against any shah's host.
Whenever they smile,
Those lovely eyes,
Fountains of love and fire,
The night becomes bright
As broad daylight
And banished are gloom and ire.
If they wish you victory,
Rose-petal lips,
When you come the foe to meet,
Then no Shah Nadir
Nor death, nor fear,
No army your might can beat.

III

On the field of battle, before the Shah,
The woman's beauty was praised.
The loveliest houri in all Iran
Could not equal her charm and grace.
This daughter of Javakh had eyes like the sea!
Men sank and were lost in her gaze.
Her forehead was whiter than any snow
That the lofty Abul displays.
She was Prince Tatul's living breath and soul,
The hero was drunk with her love.
He drew his might from her winning smile;
The lion gained power from the dove.
If the great Shah, could win over her heart,
Tatul, powerless, would be at his feet,
Then with ease he could capture Temuk Fort,
Which so long had withstood defeat.

IV

Here is how the immortal Farsi Firdousi,
The sweet nightingale, once opined;
Who in the world a hero could crush
If not for women
And wine?
With his radiant, sun-like face he stands
Like a mountain, proud and fine.
Who could level him with the ground
If not for women
And wine?
As if he were dancing, he goes to the fray,
As on wings he seems to fly.
Who could bring him down from his soaring flight
If not for women
And wine?
If even the whole world fell upon him
He would thwart the evil design.
Rustam Zal himself could not conquer him
If not for women
And wine?

V

So the Shah despatched his beloved bard
"Go, see her and ask her health.
Sing my love," he said, "to the lady fair,
Tell her of my glory and wealth.
"Promise to her my throne of gold,
Promise all that she ever desired.
Promise whatever a shah can pledge
To his lady-love or his bride."
Where the Shah could not enter by cunning or force
They welcome the bard with his saz.
So one day a minstrel, old and poor,
Through the gates of Temuk did pass.

VI

The walls of Temuk they trembled and shook
As Tatul stood against the Shah;
As foes dealt foes the most terrible blows,
Blood flowed like a sea, wide and far.
As foes dealt foes the most terrible blows,
Blood flowed like a sea, wide and far,
The minstrel sang of the glory and wealth
And the boundless love of his Shah.
While the lady fair of Temuk did attend
With secret shame she quailed,
Torn apart by temptation dire
Which to defeat she failed.
"Do you hear me, o lady fair of this Fort,
Charming beyond compare?
Look at the Shah; of his boundless might,
Of his wealth are you aware?
"Yet like us, he too, is a frail, weak man,
Which a beauty may captive take.
A jewelled crown would befit your brow,
A majestic queen would you make. . .
The lady fair of Temuk did attend
All of a night and a day.
She grew silent, meditative and pale,
And her sleep did flee away.

Home from the battle came Prince Tatul,
Victorious, with his troop.
He wiped his sword, put it back in its sheath,
And the Fort shook with joy to its roof.
His lovely mistress put up a great feast,
Turned dark night into sunlit day.
The wines they flowed like a welling tide
As her lord whiled the night away.
The flower-like lady she moved about
And table by table did pass.
She bade them be merry and of good cheer
And left empty no goblet or glass.
'Raise your goblets, my valiant guests,
And here's to my brave Tatul.
God bless both him and his sabre sharp,
Whose triumph was fast and full!"
"O Gracious God, make sharper the sword
Of our brave Tatul! May his land
Ever be shielded from enemies
By the power of his bounteous hand."
And it echoed and shook, did Fort Temuk,
With joyous festivity,
It thundered with the triumphant songs
And resounded with manly glee.
"Is it an eagle swooping down
From the gloomy clouds like an arrow?"
"No, 'tis Tatul from Fort Temuk
Striking fear into enemy marrow.
"Is it a dark cloud or lightning dread
Rumbling in Temuk Dale?"
"No, 'tis Tatul fighting his foes,
And his sword that makes them pale."
"What mountain eagle can equal Tatul?
What shah can oppose his sword?"
And neither did wine ever cease to flow
Nor the songs in praise of their lord.
To the flower-like beauty that bloomed on their rocks
Toasts like thunder were roared.
They drank to the glory of fighting men
Shedding blood for their country's love;

To the memory of their fallen friends
Now looking at them from above.
The flower-like lady she moved about
And table by table did pass,
She bade them be merry and of good cheer,
And left empty no goblet or glass.
"O Hostess Dear, upon our word,
We can surely drink no more.
Forsooth, we have drunk and eaten our full,
'Well pleased, yet tired are we sore.
Then silence fell, and in darkness wrapped
Peace came on Temuk Fort.
Drunk and fatigued, in the darkness they lay,
Fast asleep, both army and lord.

VIII

Then sinister dreams came, flock after flock,
Hovering on black wings,
Over the people, slumbering, tired,
Motionless as dead things.
And Prince Tatul had a nightmare too;
A dragon crept up to the Fort,
And coiled around it in ugly rings
As if in some awesome sport.
The monster raised its terrible head,
Up and up, ever higher,
Till it reached the chamber of Prince Tatul,
Breathing thunder and spitting fire.
And Prince Tatul he was lying in bed,
On his breast lay his wife's sweet head.
And he said to her: "My angel, get up,
And I'll strike that monster dead."
So said Prince Tatul, and suddenly saw
It was not his wife's fair head
But the ugly head of the monster that lay
On his chest as he slept in bed.

IX

Awake, and shake off the fetters of sleep,
You brave soldiers of Prince Tatul!

Whose shadow lurks in the darkness there
As if he can't sleep his full?
Perhaps the vanquished and desperate foe
Beaten in honest fight,
Has gotten into the Fort by stealth
Plotting evil at dead of night?
Wake up, arise, for all through the night
Gaunt shapes are prowling around.
Wake, lion-like men, Tatul's brave guard,
Strike the enemy down to the ground!
Awake, get up, for the lady fair
Made you drunk and opened the gate.
The traitress has let the enemy in
And woeful is your fate...
Treason! Arise and sound the alarm!
To arms, to horse, brave men!
The gates of the castle are rolling back,
The enemy's pouring in.

X

The sun rose bright, the day was clear,
As it opened its shining eyes.
O'er the ruined Fort in a darksome cloud
Smoke and dust did rise.
The lord of the Fort and his soldiers all,
Drunk with victory and with wine,
The lord and his army, forever slept
Nor with pain and remorse did pine.
The Shah sat still and before him saw
Festive tables, abandoned and lone,
And thoughts of Man's frailty came to him
At the sight of the orphaned throne.
There is nothing secure in the universe,
Never believe in aught,
Neither luck, nor glory, nor victory,
Nor the glass by a loving wife brought....
And the awe-stricken Shah he questioned the pale
Mistress as there she stood:
"O dark-eyed traitress, come, answer me,
Was Tatul not brave and good?"
"He was far more brave and handsome than you,

He was fearless, noble and tall.
He never took castles by foul deceit,
Never so low would he fall."
The lady's answer was honest and true,
And his hangman the Shah did call!
He roared with wrath like a savage beast,
Till all rang in the spacious hail.

XI

The hangman came in, clad from head to foot
In red, at which none can look,
And led away through the castle gates
The fair lady of Fort Temuk.
She was taken away to the giant rock
That still stands in its place today
And they threw her down in a bottomless gorge
And motionless there she lay.
And wolves and foxes came in from the plains
And devoured her base heart with wild cries;
Kites and ravens flew down from the clouds
And tore out her treacherous eyes.
So the lovely lady of Fort Temuk
Passed from the world away
Like the choicest flower of last year's spring
That will never blossom again.
And so did the dread and mighty Shah
And his army pass away too,
As did Tatul the victorious Prince,
As also will I and you.
And only this true and woeful tale
Has remained until our day,
Outlasting castles, outliving forts,
Defying death and decay.

XII

Come hither, all you good people,
Sit down and listen well.
A wandering bard from distant parts
A wondrous tale will I tell.
We all are guests in this mortal world

Since the day we get our birth.
We come and go, each in his turn,
To and from this fleeting earth.
We pass away, and only our deeds
Good or bad, live on in fame,
So blessed be he who leaves the world
As pure a man as he came.

1902

Hovhannes Toumanian

The Crane

The Crane has lost his way across the heaven,
From yonder stormy cloud I hear him cry,
A traveller a'er an unknown pathway driven,
In a cold world unheeded he doth fly.

Ah, whither leads this pathway long and dark,
My God, where ends it, thus with fears obsessed?
When shall night end this day's last glimmering spark?
Where shall my weary feet to-night find rest?

Farewell, beloved bird, where'er thou roam
Spring shall return and bring thee back once more,
With thy sweet mate and young ones, to thy home
Thy last year's nest upon the sycamore.

But I am exiled from my ruined nest,
And roam with faltering steps from hill to hill,
Like to the fowls of heaven in my unrest
Envyng the boulders motionless and still.

Each boulder unassailed stands in its place,
But I from mine must wander tempest tossed
And every bird its homeward way can trace,
But I must roam in darkness, lone and lost.

Ah, whither leads this pathway long and dark,
My God, where ends it, thus with fears obsessed?
When shall night end this day's last glimmering spark?
Where shall my weary feet to-night find rest?

Hovhannes Toumanian

The Dog And The Cat

1

Once there lived a pussy cat,
Who was very sleek and fat.
As for his trade,
Warm things he made:
Hats and mittens
For cats and kittens.
One fine day the furrier-cat
Whistling in his workshop sat
When in came a dog
Out of the fog.

2

He made a low bow
And he yelped "Hullo!"
And after he'd yelped
He pulled out a pelt.
Then he said to the cat:
"Have a look at that.
I've got no hat
And the winter's near.
It's all too bad;
I'll freeze, I fear.
If it comes out nice,
I'll pay any price.
What do you say?"
'O.K.'

3

"How long will it take?"
"Oh, less than a week.
To oblige a friend,
I'll be double-quick.
Sewing a hat
Isn't sewing a coat
Oh no, mere play.

Come on Saturday!"

4

"It won't be a hat
But a very peach,
The envy, I'll warrant,
Of every and each.
As for the money,
That can wait.
We'll talk it over—
Never too late.
Sewing a hat
Isn't sewing a coat."
"Good-bye, Cat!"
And off the dog strode.

5

On Saturday morning
The dog turned up,
Shaking and shivering
Like a wretched pup.
"Is it ready, my hat?"
"Oh no," they said.
"And where's the Cat?"
"Not at home yet."

6

Before the doorstep
On a mat
Frozen Mr. Doggy sat,
When down the street
Came Mr. Cat
In a brand-new lambskin hat.
Tile saw the dog and he said:
"Waiting for me, I bet?
You'll be getting your hat, don't worry,
But don't be in such a hurry..
Though it isn't a coat but a hat,
It takes time, a job like that.

I sprinkled the pelt before tea.
Now I've got to cut it, you see?"

7

"Too bad," said the dog, "too bad,
That you haven't yet finished the hat.
But maybe you'll tell me plain
When can I see you again?
I'm coming here not to chat,
But to get my hat, Mr. Cat!"

8

"Come on Wednesday,
But please don't grumble."
The furrier-pussy mumbled.
So again the unlucky dog
Came on Wednesday at three o'clock.
"Good day! Now it's ready, I hope?"
"Good day! Lovely weather! Nope!"
But here their voices
Rose in pitch.
They told each other which is which,
And finished with a noisy tussle
Involving claw and tooth and muscle.
"You're just a thief!"
"And you're a crook!"
"She's just a bitch,
The wife you took!"
"You pig!"
"You brat!"
"You milksop, you."
"You filthy cat!"
"I spit on you!"

9

Things went from bad to worse
Till it got to court, of course,
Where the Judge and Jury sat
Who promptly ordered:

"Summon
Both the dog and cat!"
The swindler cat
And swindled dog
Both came to court
At ten o'clock.

10

Who judged the case
And where and how
I see no need to say.
But ever since that famous row
The furrier ran away.
He disappeared
And what is worse
Took with him
All his stock of furs.

11

And since the cheeky furrier
Of all our cats was sire
To get their own back on the tribe
Is what all dogs desire.
On seeing one,
An honest pup
Starts growling at the cat
As if he wants to ask again,
"Well, what about my hat?"
The cat just hisses in reply
And spits from shame or fright
Just like the cat whose story I
Made up my mind to write.

1886

Hovhannes Toumanian

When Some Day

Sweet comrade, when you come some day
To gaze upon my tomb,
And scattered all around it see
Bright flowers in freshest bloom,

Think not that those are common flowers
Which at your feet are born,
Or that the spring has brought them there
My new home to adorn.

They are my songs unsung, which used
Within my heart to hide;
They are the words of love I left
Unuttered when I died.

They are my ardent kisses, dear,
Sent from that world unknown,
The path to which before you lies
Blocked by the tomb alone!

Hovhannes Toumanian

With My Fatherland

From early days I turned my gaze towards the vast unknown.
In heart and mind I soar above the abyss, intent and lone.
Yet every time, O country of mine, my heart is torn again
When I reflect upon your past and present full of pain,
Upon the silent crowds of exiles-your devoted sons,
Upon the plight of ruined villages and burned and looted towns.
O Fatherland beloved mine,
In age-old sorrow you repine!

I see the ruthless enemy putting you to tortures,
I see your face so beautiful, your flowering, fields and orchards
Contorted with the agony of villages and towns;
I hear the shouts of those whose name I calmly can't pronounce,
Who turned our land into a vale of sorrow without bounds.
Till now in plaintive songs, my land, that sorrow still resounds.
O hillbound Fatherland of mine,
In age-old anguish you repine!

Your wounds are countless, O my land, yet still alive are you.
The cherished words we have waited for are already breaking through
Your lips compressed with sorrow; we believe that on the way
Destined to you by God and Fate-those words you'll find and say.
We wait with fervour for your call-anon, Anon we hear it;
You will become a promised land, free both, in flesh and spirit,

O lofty, sacred Fatherland,
O ever-cherished Fatherland!

We hope, we know the dawn will rise and put an end to dark,
And joy will pour like sunshine into every stricken heart.
The summits of your mountains from the clouds on us will gaze,
And for the first time Ararat will smile at dawn's first rays,
And a poet with lips undefiled by rage and condemnation,
Will glorify in glowing words your great rejuvenation.

O my reviving Fatherland,
Shine with new light, my Fatherland!

With The Stars

O shining stars!
Eyes of the night,
Glowing ardent,
You smile so bright.
Just as you smiled
When still a child
Lovely and brisk,
Bright as yourselves
I would frolic and frisk
Without sorrow.
You smile today,
When weak and gray
I weep with grief
For my lost belief.
You will smile tomorrow
Upon my grave....

1891

Hovhannes Toumanian