



SUMMARY OF THE SPEECH DELIVERED BY HIS HOLINESS AT THE BANQUET

His Holiness Mar Eshai Shimun XXIII after responding to the gracious expressions of respect and good will towards His Holiness and the Holy Church by the various speakers, spoke at some length about the glorious history of the Church of the East; its apostolic foundation, its unparalleled missionary enterprise, its martyrdoms, and its contributions to mankind in science and learning especially through its famous university of N'siwin *Nisibis* which has been recognized by scholars as the first university in the history of the world.

His Holiness related the events which culminated in the untold suffering and betrayal of the Assyrians during the First World War; the assassination of his Uncle Mar Benyamin Shimun; the untimely death of his Second Uncle, Paulus Shimun, resulting from the great hardships suffered by all the Assyrians and, therefore, his own election and consecration at the tender age of twelve years, to the awesome position of the Patriarch of the Church of the East.

He stressed especially the fact that in a conference held in Tiflis, Russia, at the outbreak of the war, between the representatives of the four great allied

powers, viz, Great Britain, Russia, the United States, and France, it was decided that the small Assyrian Christian Nation was to be drawn into that world conflict.

"Drawn it was!", said His Holiness. Then he related the services rendered by the Assyrians, to the British cause in Iraq, during the years of their dominating influence on that country culminating with events of the Second World War when the unfortunate Assyrian levies were used as parachutists by the British and European theatre of conflict also.

His Holiness concluded his recounting of these tragic events in which the Assyrian people not only lost forever their ancestral homeland where they had lived from the dawn of history, but also more than half their numbers, with these words: "we wish to say with the strongest emphasis and without the slightest hesitation, that the allies in general, and the British in particular, betrayed our people!"

A dead silence gripped the whole audience when His Holiness recounted these events. For the hundreds of Assyrians present it was a reminder of the terrible

agony which was vivid to the memory of most of them.

Then His Holiness spoke of his recent visit to Iraq at the invitation of the President, His Excellency, Ahmad Hassan Bakr, after an absence of 37 years.

The Patriarch related briefly the events leading to his denationalization and deportation without trial from Iraq during those grim and tragic days in July of the year 1930

He stated how he was called by Mr. Ogilvie Forbes, then acting British Ambassador (Sir Francis Humphry's being at the time absent on a fishing trip to Norway) to the Embassy and informed by him that "His Britannic Majesty's Government had decided to take him to the Island of Cyprus". The Patriarch then asked Mr. Forbes as to the duration of this mandatory deportation. He answered "that it would be until the present crisis in Iraq has passed; adding between two to three months". Two to three months, remarked His Holiness, were to last 37 years!

It should here be noted that Mr. Ogilvie Forbes was later knighted and appointed as First Secretary of the British Embassy in Berlin, and his name is frequently mentioned in relation with the diplomatic activities leading to the outbreak of world War 11.

As to the rest of the story the Patriarch related in brief his historic reception in

Iraq; the great kindness shown to His Holiness by the President, the Ministers of the State, and all the government officials whom he had met; along with heads of religion, both Shiaa and Sunni.

This has been related in detail in the article 'Historic visit to Iraq'

However, in relating the details of his consecration in a tent church, in the Baquba camps; His Holiness spoke of his pilgrimage to the very site during his recent visit to Baghdad and how His Excellency the Vice President, Saleh Mehdi Ammash who on hearing of the fact, had graciously offered His Holiness the celebration of the 50th. Anniversary of his consecration at the same site, namely, Baquba; where the Vice President said the government would pitch tents for the thousands of Assyrians who would attend and that government officials would also attend the event.

This most gracious gesture on the part of His Excellency, said His Holiness, was deeply appreciated by him and that he had no doubt it will be equally appreciated by members of the Church of the East throughout the world.

Finally, the Patriarch closed his speech with prayer for all the world, including the much disturbed countries of the Middle East, and beseeched the Almighty God to grant to Assyrians in all the countries in which they now live the peace and freedom which the American Assyrians enjoy in this the greatest country in the world.

