



ՀԱՍՏԱՆԻ ԳԼԵՆԴԵԼԻ ԱՐԱՐԱՏ ՄԱՍՆԱՃԻՂԻ
ՄՇԱԿՈՒԹԱՅԻՆ ԲԱԺԱՆՍՈՒՆՔ

Homenetmen Glendale Ararat Chapter
Cultural Division

Get to Know...

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HAGOP BARONIAN

November 19, 1843 – May 27, 1891

Hagop Baronian is the foremost comedian in the Armenian language. He was born and educated in the Edirne (Adrianople), in that corner of Turkey which adjoins Greece and Bulgaria, but was active mainly in Istanbul. His family was extremely poor, his health unsteady, his education minimal. But being a brilliant child, he mastered several languages and read all the classics in Greek, French, and Italian. He began to work at an early age and held a variety of jobs in Istanbul, then one of the most important cultural centers of the Armenian Diaspora. After contributing sketches to several periodicals he became the editor of a periodical himself.

He wrote plays (among which Brother Balthazar enjoyed enormous popularity and is still widely performed today) and several novels, the most widely admired of which is "The Honorable Beggars" – a delightful and enduring little masterpiece about human greed and vanity wherein every character without exception is either an imbecile or a liar, and sometimes both at once. The plot of Honorable Beggars (which is available in English) is simplicity itself. Apissoghom Agha, a wealthy merchant from Trebizond, comes to Istanbul in search for a wife. This search, however, is obstructed by a wide and colorful assortment of charlatans (editors, journalists, poets, priests, marriage brokers, lawyers, barbers...) who approach him one by one and insist on helping him in order that in the process they may help themselves. Of particular interests is Apissoghom Agha's encounter with a young, ambitious poet who asks him to be his patron and to subsidize the publication of one of his fiery patriotic speeches. Apissoghom Agha gives him the money just to get rid of him. But immediately after, he has second thoughts. As a good merchant he can't see why he should give something and get nothing in return. He therefore asks the poet if it would be possible to list on the cover of the booklet his "cattle, sheep, donkeys, and farms in Trebizond." The poet, who seems to have dealt with this type before, replies: "Those things belong to the rural side of poetry." Baronian's dialogue is real, his satire sharp. He rarely strikes a false note and his choice of situations that will project typical behavior in bold relief is always definite. Notwithstanding his wide popularity however, Baronian was throughout his life over-worked and underpaid and died penniless on the streets of Istanbul. He was buried in an Armenian cemetery in Istanbul, but the precise location of his grave has been lost.

