

David Barsoum Perley, J.S.D.
(1901-1979)

By Fred Aprim

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David Barsoum Perley was born in Kharpoot, Turkey, in 1901, the son of the late Vartar and Barsoum and the second youngest of their six children. The family was active within the Kharpoot Assyrian community. David studied for one and a half years in the High School of the Euphrates College.

During the first World War massacres of christians (Assyrians, Armenians and Greeks) in Turkey, he was forced to flee from his home accompanied by other male Assyrians fearing for their lives as David's father and other prominent Assyrians had been seized, marched away, never to be seen or heard from. The flight of David and his companions led them through the Dersin Mountains into Russia, thence eastward taking two years before they reached the United States where his sisters, brothers and other relatives resided, chiefly in Massachusetts.

Dr. Perley's foremost ambition was the continuance of his education. His educational achievements have been:

- a. Academy of the American International College, 1922
- b. College of Liberal Arts, Boston University, 1926
- c. School of Law, Boston University, 1928
- d. New York University, Postgraduate Law, 1933

Admissions to the Bar:

- a. Massachusetts, 1933
- b. New Jersey, 1935 & 1940
- c. Illinois, 1947
- d. New York, 1967

He married Miss Rose Kazanchy of Paterson, New Jersey and established his office in the Law Building, 64 Hamilton Street, Paterson. Their only child was named Penna who married Richard Redvanly, M.D. They had three children and resided in Patchogue, New York, where Dr. Perley was living too.

The Congress of the Assyrian Universal Alliance held in Yonkers, New York, April 1973, awarded Dr. Perley the highest Assyrian national honor, "The Star of Ashur." For decades Dr. Perley answered the call when the Assyrians were in need for a defender. He has argued the Assyrian cause from the inception of the League of Nations.

After the tragic massacres of Assyrians in Simel, Iraq, in August 1933, the need for an Assyrian national organization became a necessity. Dr. Perley was one among the founding fathers of the new Assyrian National Federation needed to organize the force to protest legally the inhumane, unjust massacres of the Assyrians and submit demands to protect the Assyrians' rights to live in peace, freedom and safety within the countries of their residence and homelands.

Dr. Perley has served as Vice President, President, Secretary and legal advisor in the Executive Councils of the Assyrian National Federation (now known as the Assyrian American National Federation). He has been the most prominent expressive exponent in defense on behalf of the Assyrians and their cause. His timely articles, journalistic masterpieces, book reviews, subjects concerning the Assyrian question whether in the Assyrian or American press on various national subjects have been his innumerable contributions.

Among the wealth of his classic addresses and literary achievements were:

1. "Whither Christian Missions," 1943.
2. "Lest We Perish," 1947.
3. Petition -- "In Behalf of the Assyrians of Iran" -- in behalf of His Holiness Mar Eshai Shimun, to the United Nations.
4. "Kurdistan, Reflections of the Assyro-Kurdish Relations".
5. Editor-in-chief of the "New Beth Nahreen," during the 1940s.
6. Collaboration, formulation, completion, printing of the Constitution and By-laws of the Assyrian National Federation, 1934.

7. On June 5-6, 1947, the School of Education, New York University, invited Dr. Perley to participate in a Symposium on the "Problems of the Middle East." He was assigned the text, "National and Religious Minorities." He spoke on the topic, "The Assyrians," which later was published by UYU under the title of "Problems of the Middle East," where the Assyrian problem covered pages 60-66.
8. Collaboration and completion of the first Assyrian National Directory in America (1960).
9. Collaboration, translation, printing into English, the manuscripts and publication of the "British Betrayal of the Assyrians," 1935, by the immortal Yousef Malek.
10. Many articles in the Assyrian Star and the Assyrian American Educational Association's Christmas Sea's letters and others.

In defense of the Assyrians of Antiquity, Dr. Perley replied to Historian J. Arnold Toynbee and other western historical writers for their evils of journalism to "select the ancient Assyrians as the only prototype of unusual cruelty." He replied to Dr. Leo Oppenheim of Chicago for published comments in the November 31, 1972 copies of the Wall Street Journal, questioning the genealogy of the Assyrians, Dr. Perley challenged Dr. Oppenheim to a public debate and also suggested that no further statements be made in this connection.

Lillian S. Pera dedicated this verse during a Testimonial Dinner to Dr. David Perley for his super-human efforts, as she wrote, in behalf of the Assyrian nation

***** Assyria! My Heritage*****

**I am here!
But still the question broods within
That will not die!
Why here?
Above the noise of earthly din
There sounds this cry!**

**You were not always here;
You came from out a vast procession
Of ancient people,
Infinite influence, priceless knowledge,
Urged upon you in endless succession.**

**If there be something backward
From where we have slowly moved,
Why not something equally forward,
By which our growth be proved?**

**I am here!
But only as a starting place,
The inner voice within my heart Urges on the race
Stirring, insistent, reaching,
ASSYRIA! MY HERITAGE.**

In a review in The Assyrian Star, 9/10/1967, page 10, Dr. Perley wrote the following under the title:
"The Assyrian Nationhood," the Mystic Echoing of Ten Thousand Years:

"One's being an Assyrian is a synthesis of heritage, religion and culture, and emotional consciousness that transcends all diversities, theological, demographic, and otherwise. Those who honor truth for its own sake will have no difficulty in the comprehension of my meaning, and they will surely remember the lapsed Assyrians in a sunny Assyrian day. **The Assyrians have but one nationhood, and the distinction is very clear.** When a person is of Assyrian blood, he retains his birthright, self-esteem, and the heritage of his fathers. It is for this very reason that he may be called a Jacobite-Assyrian, Nestorian-Assyrian, Assyrian-Presbyterian, or Chaldean-Christian. Calling someone a Jacobite-Assyrian should be no more amazing than calling someone else an Irish-Catholic. It is a mere matter of hyphenated description, not a hyphenation or

division. A hyphen does not divide; it unites. The use of the term Nestorian-Assyrian is the simplest way of designating a Nestorian, who comes from, or who has, an Assyrian background. **The term Assyrian is ONE SINGLE UNITY.** The approach of this oneness of all Assyrians regardless of their religious adherence, is through the avenue of blood, and through the majesty of common memories. **Religion is a faith acquired and is changeable. Nationality is one's flesh and blood; it is his total nature. Even death cannot undo it.**"

Dr. Eden Naby Frye said in memorium of Dr. Perley's first anniversary: "We come here to do honor to a man who was above all generous in the widest sense of that word ... a man who did not hide his talents but let them shine forth. As far as his Assyrian people were concerned, his talent, born of many years of often difficult experience, led him to speak and write for his people and to carry his people's heritage and hope to the reading public. Death has not diminished him but confirmed him as an Assyrian hero. His example of persistence and buoyancy will serve all of us as a reminder to use our talents for the good of our Assyrian people, our fellow human beings and for the glory of God ..."

It is not enough to speak of the late Dr. Perley's services and sacrifices in the fields of literature and nationalism, for the more we speak about him the more there is to say. Dr. Perley had a tremendous driving compassion for his Assyrian national labors, enormous ambition, great resourcefulness, courage and the ingredients to make the whole extraordinary and interesting. His devotion to the Assyrian cause was amazing. Dr. Perley died in 1979, but his national spirit of "Freedom for Assyria" will be a beacon, a flame to follow by Assyrian Nationalists.