

ISLAM IN
MODERN
TURKEY

*An Intellectual Biography
of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*

Şükran Vahide

Edited and with an introduction by
Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi‘

State University of New York Press

Published by
State University of New York Press, Albany

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For information, address State University of New York Press,
194 Washington Avenue, Suite 305, Albany, NY 12210-2384

Production by Diane Ganeles
Marketing by Michael Campochiaro

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Şükran Vahide.

Islam in modern Turkey : an intellectual biography of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi / Şükran Vahide ; edited and with an introduction by Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-7914-6515-2 (hardcover : alk. paper) — ISBN 0-7914-6516-0 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Nursî, Said, 1873-1960. 2. Islam—Turkey. 3. Islam and politics—Turkey. 4.

Turkey—Politics and government—1980- 5. Scholars, Muslim—Turkey—Biography. I. Abu-Rabi', Ibrahim M. II. Title.

BP253.Z8N877 2005

297.8'3—dc22

2004027307

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

Author's Note on the Sources	vii
Note on Spelling and Punctuation	ix
Maps	x
Introduction by Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi'	xiii

Part I. The Old Said

1. Childhood and Youth	3
2. Istanbul	33
3. Bediuzzaman and the Thirty-first of March Incident	65
4. The Future Shall be Islam's	83
5. The Medresetü'z-Zehrâ	101
6. War and Captivity	111
7. The Armistice Years (1): Appointment to the Darü'l-Hikmeti'l-İslamiye, and Opposition to the British	131
8. The Armistice Years (2): The Birth of the New Said, and Departure for Ankara	157

Part II. The New Said

9. Van	177
10. Barla	189
11. Eskişehir	215
12. Kastamonu	227
13. Denizli	257
14. Emirdağ	271
15. Afyon	285

Part III. The Third Said

16. Consolidation of the Nur Movement and “ <i>Jihād</i> of the Word”	305
17. The Last Months	333
Conclusion	349
Notes	353
Bibliography	403
Index	415

Author's Note on the Sources

The main source for Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's life is the biography compiled in his last years by some of his students. Apart from the first section on his early life, the greater part of this substantial work consists of lengthy extracts from Nursi's own works and letters, with only short introductions to each section that give the briefest facts about Nursi himself. The reason for this unusual method of biographical writing is that Nursi wanted importance to be given not to his person, but to the *Risale-i Nur*, his magnum opus written in the second main period of his life, that of the "New Said." He therefore did not supply his students with details, and even instructed them to remove passages he considered to be extraneous.

The section on the first period of Nursi's life, that of the "Old Said," is an abridged version of the biography published by his nephew Abdurrahman in 1919, with the addition of excerpts from his works of the time. Abdurrahman's thirty-nine-page biography, prepared under his uncle's supervision, appears to be an expanded version of a nine-page summary of Nursi's life, written by his student Hamza and included as an addendum to his wartime Qur'anic commentary, *Ishārāt al-I'jāz*, published in 1918. Together with containing many interesting details, the main purpose of both these works is to describe the Young Said's remarkable scholarly career and his feats of learning during his early years.

For the above reasons there remain many lacunae and obscurities in Nursi's early life. These tantalizing gaps in his story have to a small extent been filled by documents unearthed in recent years among what remains of the Ottoman state archives, and from private sources. These finds have also corroborated what was known of his activities. Further research may well fill in more of the picture.

The considerable body of recollections, anecdotes, and memoirs collected by the biographer Necmeddin Şahiner over many years forms the other main source for his life. These he obtained through his indefatigable tracking down and interviewing of hundreds of people who met or knew Nursi; necessarily they relate mostly to the New Said period. Additional to the volumes these constitute are his biography, which has run to numerous editions, and the published results of his other research. Şahiner's invaluable work was augmented in 1990 by the publication of the three-volume biography, also in

Turkish, by Abdülkadir Badıllı, a student of Nursi, which both draws on the above sources and includes original material.

The Republican period presents different problems for the researcher, for the police, court, and state records are not open to public scrutiny. Moreover, since all opposition was suppressed during the single party era (1925–46), the press was to a large extent an instrument of government propaganda and cannot be relied on for its reporting of events that smacked of opposition. Much reporting about Nursi and his students can be described only as libelous.

Nursi's own works form another important source, close study of which has produced facts that have escaped the attention of previous biographers. Considerable space has been given to analysis of Nursi's ideas, and the attempt has been made to situate these and his related activities in their historical contexts. Thus, despite the unavailability of source material in some fields, it is hoped that the reader will gain a complete view of Nursi's life and thought.

Note on Spelling and Pronunciation

With the exception of Turkish words in common use in English, such as pasha (T. *paşa*) and shaikh (T. *şeyh*), all Turkish names, titles, and words are written according to the modern Turkish system. The following are the equivalent sounds in English or French:

c—j, as in *jot*.

ç—ch, as in *chop*.

ş—sh, as in *shop*.

ğ—unpronounced, lengthens preceding vowel.

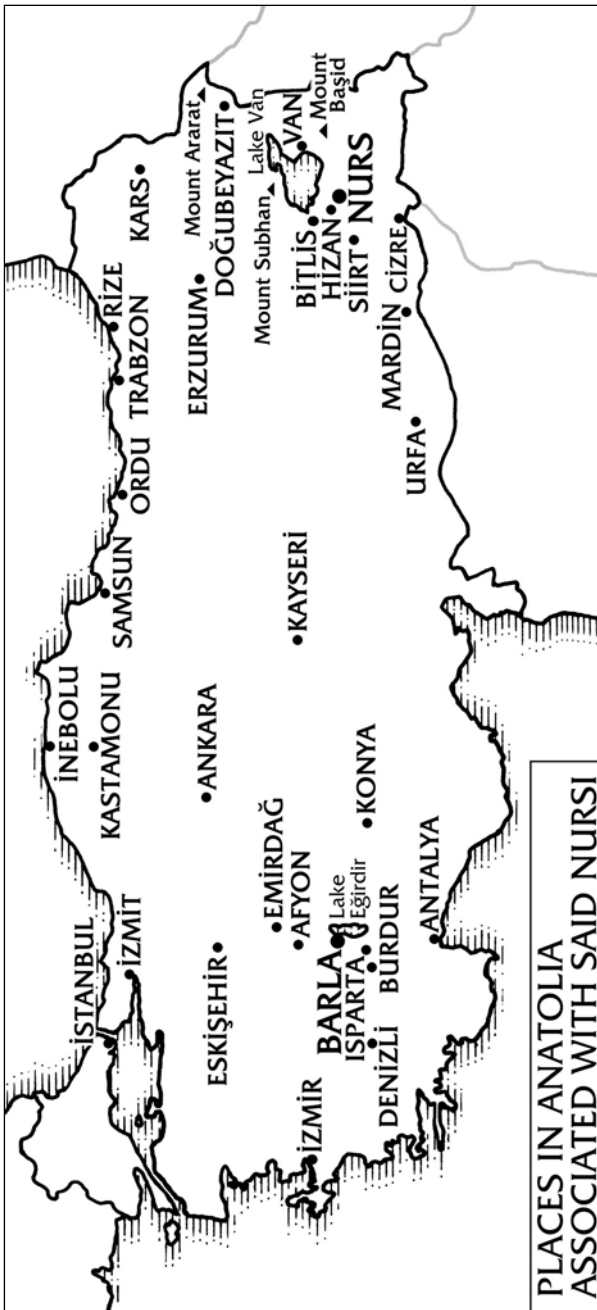
ı—no equivalent, approximately as in *io* of *nation*.

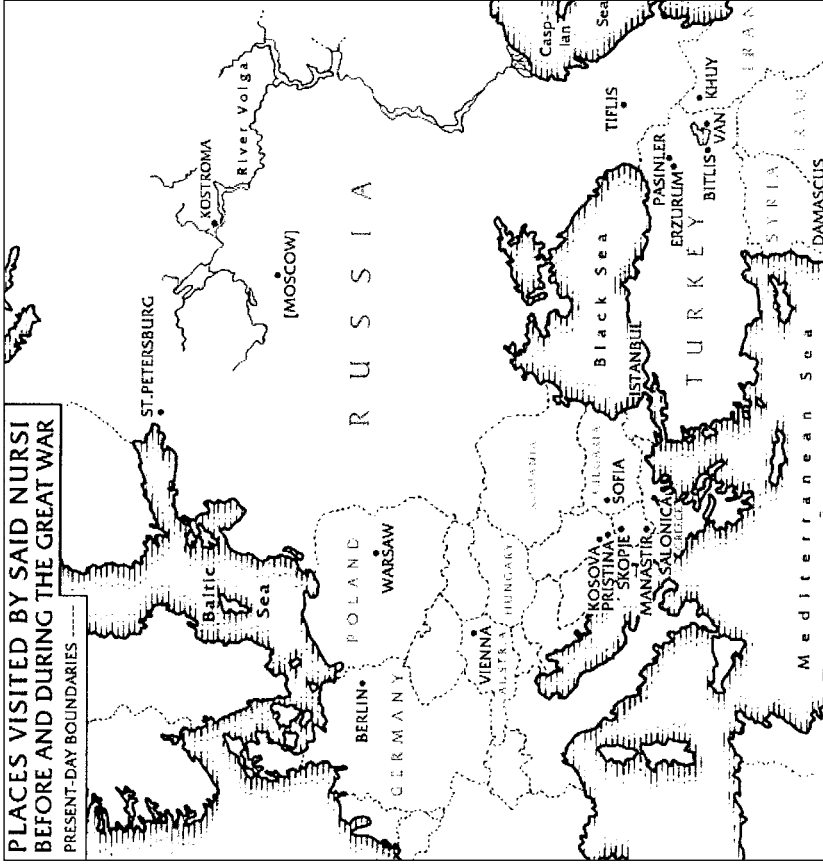
ö—as in French *peu*.

ü—as in French *rue*.

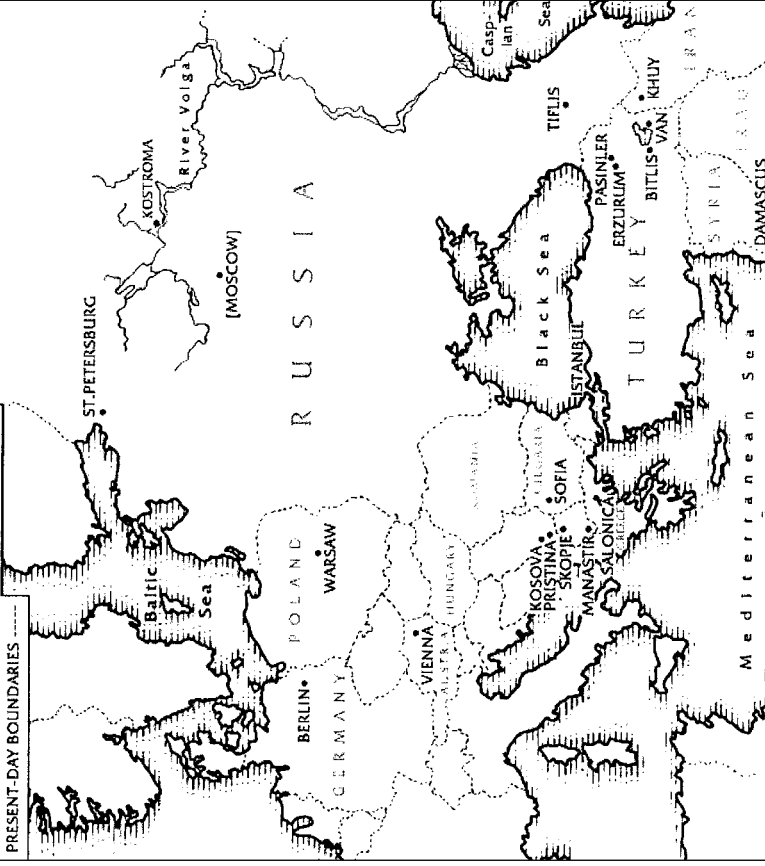
Said (Nursi)—is pronounced *Sa'eed*.

The Anglicized spelling of Bediuzzaman (T. Bediüzzaman) has been used throughout.





PLACES VISITED BY SAID NURSI BEFORE AND DURING THE GREAT WAR
 PRESENT-DAY BOUNDARIES ----



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Introduction

Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi‘

Şükran Vahide’s biography of Ustadh Bediuzzaman Said Nursi may well become a classic in the field of modern Islamic Studies and Comparative Theology. In this work, the author traces Nursi’s life and thought from his birth and childhood in the eastern part of Turkey until his death in 1960. Vahide’s command of the original sources is beyond reproach, and her understanding of the modern religious and intellectual history of modern Turkey is unrivaled. As she ably shows in this book, Nursi was one of the most brilliant Islamic thinkers in the modern era, a man who consistently fought for his ideals by keeping Islam a dynamic religion in the modern world. Although some scholars overlook Nursi in their discussions of modern Islamic intellectual history, his impact on whole generations of religious Turkish intelligentsia in the post-Republican era has in fact been considerable. Since his death in 1960, Nursi’s followers have taken up the challenge of disseminating his ideas throughout the world.

There exists a considerable amount of material in Western languages on Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, Sir Aḥmad Khān, Muḥammad ‘Abduh, Rashīd Riḍā, Muḥammad Iqbāl, and other leading intellectuals in the Muslim world. It is high time that Nursi, too, be included among these figures, and be seen as one of the most important of them. Vahide’s study aptly demonstrates why he deserves such a position in modern Islamic thought and practice.

As Vahide shows in detail in the first section of this book, we must consider Nursi’s educational and religious formation in the context of the nineteenth century Ottoman intellectual tradition, which was subject to a variety of intellectual and ideological forces and currents. Our understanding of Nursi’s formative period must be anchored in such classical Islamic sciences as Qur’anic exegesis, tradition, *kalām*, and mysticism, especially as the Ottoman intelligentsia developed them in the high age of the encounter between the Ottoman state and the West in the nineteenth century. Ustadh Nursi absorbed the different classical Islamic sciences such as *tafsīr*, Hadīth, history, and so on, and became a brilliant commentator on them by making them relevant to the demands and problems of the modern age. His theological reflections still inspire an entire generation of Muslims throughout the world.

In Vahide's biography, Nursi emerges as an active theologian with a solid vision of uniting the fractured world of Islam. His intellectual and religious activities spanned nearly six decades of productive life, despite the fact that he was imprisoned for years during Turkey's Republican phase. Nursi's life is a great historical narrative that epitomizes the life not just of the Turkish nation, but of the Muslim *ummah* in the modern period as well. In this sense, there are a great many historical lessons and insights to be derived from following Nursi's life as he evolved and moved from the countryside in the eastern part of the Ottoman Empire to the vibrant city of Istanbul.

Nursi's career and writings provide us with deep insight into the history of the post-Tanzimat period in the Ottoman Empire, the predicament of the traditional class of ulama, the failure of the Islamic reform movement of the nineteenth century to provide "an Islamic solution" to the encroachment of Westernization, the profound philosophical and political underpinnings of the rise of secular nationalism in Turkey, the abolition of the Ottoman caliphate in 1924, and the state of religion in Kemalist Turkey. Nursi's magnum opus, the *Risale-i Nur* (henceforward referred to as the *Risale*), was written over a period of six decades and exemplifies the scope of his intellectual and religious dynamism. This work also reflects Turkey's major institutional and ideological transition from a polyglot, multiethnic, and multireligious empire to a secular republic. This enormous change did not happen suddenly, but had been gradually taking place since the beginning of the nineteenth century, at least.

With this as the background, Vahide traces the two periods of Nursi's complex life, Ottoman and Turkish, and establishes the different political, social, and religious dynamics that influenced his thought in both periods. In the Ottoman period, Nursi was fully cognizant of the weakness and progressive decline of the Ottoman institutions, which he desperately tried to halt. Before World War One, Nursi considered the revival of the Ottoman Empire to be the revival of Islam itself and its ability to withstand the tremendous changes surrounding Ottoman life. Here he represented the efforts of the enlightened Muslim intelligentsia, who understood early on in the nineteenth century that the reform of Ottoman institutions was the key to the survival of the Ottoman Empire in the turbulent politics of the modern era. However, World War One and its aftermath changed everything, and we can see these changes represented in Nursi's own struggles. Whereas Nursi tried to pursue political and military means to stop the decline of the empire before the defeat of the Ottoman army in World War One, after the war he became increasingly convinced that Islam itself was at stake. Thus, he began to focus his efforts on conserving the Islamic ethos and faith in rapidly changing political and social situations.

This can clearly be seen in Nursi's religious life in the post-Ottoman or Republican phase of Turkey. During this time, Nursi was willing to sacrifice

his life for what he considered to be the preservation of Islam in an aggressively secular environment. Perhaps the most interesting part of Nursi's career, as considered retrospectively several decades after his death, was his sustained intellectual and religious challenge to the secularist and nationalist system built by Kemal Atatürk, a challenge that is at the heart of the *Risale*. However, nowhere and at no time does Nursi translate this challenge into an open rebellion against the system. After the establishment of the Turkish Republic, he seems to have contented himself with the notion that it was possible to coexist with Turkey's secular system as long as the foundations of Islamic faith were not threatened by the state.

Vahide documents Nursi's agonies and hopes during the Turkish Republic in great detail. In spite of his trials and tribulations, he never stopped advocating Muslim unity as a means of withstanding the complex challenges of the twentieth century. One can argue that, in general, Nursi was guided by the emerging problems in the Muslim world as well as by the enormous legacy of deep-rooted Muslim tradition. He was well aware of the importance of keeping Islamic tradition alive in the modern era. At the same time, he took seriously the question of modernity and how it might have impacted Muslim societies in the twentieth century. Thus, Nursi's understanding of Christianity was not so much a reflection on its theological merits as it was his consideration of Christianity's role in modernity. He advocated a kind of rapprochement between the Christian West and Islam, since he understood that Islam was not an island unto itself but existed in interaction with other worldviews and communities.

What clearly emerges in this biography are Nursi's concepts of Islamic identity in the modern era, of how traditional Islamic sciences could be revived in order to shed light on questions of power and authority, and modernity and tradition, and of how Islamic sciences relate to this life and the after-life. One of Nursi's primary concerns was to revive Muslim ethics in a highly secularized world. In one deep sense, Nursi believed that it was possible for the Islamic ethos to coexist with contemporary life and that Muslims could practice their Islam without recourse to political authority.

In this, Nursi's Islamic thought, as it crystallized in his post-Ottoman writings, was fundamentally at odds with that of many Islamic thinkers of that period. Contemporaries such as Muḥammad Iqbāl, 'Allāma Mawdūdī, Ḥassan Bannā, and Sayyid Quṭb in one way or another advocated the revival of "Islam as politics" and not just "Islam as faith." After World War One, Nursi was no longer interested in "politics" as a means of safeguarding Islam. He thought it was possible to do this without politics and the "people of this world." It can be argued therefore that Nursi did not attract much attention in the West because he did not advocate "political Islam" per se. However, there seems to be new interest in Nursi's work, especially among those Western

scholars interested in spirituality, comparative theology, and the question of religion and modernity in general.

It is always interesting to consider whether or not Islam can be preserved apart from politics. In other words, do we need an Islamic state in order to establish Islamic faith or propagate Islamic ideas? Nursi's answer after the foundation of the Turkish Republic seems to be no. That is to say, Islam can prosper without an Islamic state. As a matter of fact, he writes that Islam and the faith of the common folk in the Muslim world are better off when the powers that be leave them alone.

By bringing Nursi's life and thought to light, Vahide helps us understand the life of the contemporary Nursi community, which can be found all over Turkey and in different parts of the world, as well, most notably in Europe and Australia. The Nursi community is primarily guided by the ethics of the Qur'an as it was interpreted and practiced by Nursi himself. There is no doubt that Nursi was a charismatic figure. Since his death in 1960, a great number of readers have ascribed charisma to his text. However, as Vahide points out, the *Risale* was not intended and does not function as a substitute for the Qur'an; on the contrary, it is a commentary on the Qur'an in light of the modern sciences and the tremendous challenges affecting the modern Muslim world.

Vahide presents an engaging and enlightening picture of Nursi and modern Turkey. She uses all the appropriate sources to paint as detailed and authentic a picture as possible. In this, she has admirably succeeded. Above all, her devotion to this subject makes her the leading international authority in this field. For this, she must be congratulated.

PART I

The Old Said

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CHAPTER 1

Childhood and Youth

Birth and Early Childhood

The village of Nurs straggles along the bottom of the south-facing slopes of a range of the massive Taurus Mountains south of Lake Van in the province of Bitlis in eastern Anatolia. Its deep valley is carved through the mountains from Hizan, the nearest township some ten hours away on foot. Until the road was built in the 1980s the only path to the village followed this valley, along which flows the rushing stream that borders the south side of the village. The settlement is surprisingly rich in vegetation, and the varied greens of its trees—walnut, poplar, and oak—and its gardens and fruit trees offer a pleasant contrast to the stark slopes bearing down from above. Its houses of roughly cut stone rise in uneven tiers, huddled against the slope and shaded by the trees. It was in one of these humble dwellings with its tiny windows and sagging straw roof that Said Nursi was born in 1877,¹ the fourth of seven children. His father, called Mirza, had a smallholding of land, similar no doubt to the small terraced plots still cultivated today. His birthplace, too, stands unchanged, inhabited by distant relatives.

Mirza was also known as Sufi Mirza, to denote either his attachment to a Sufi order or his piety,² while his wife was Nuriye—or, more correctly according to one biographer, Nure or Nura.³ They were among the settled Kurdish population of the geographical region the Ottomans called Kurdistan.⁴ In Nursi's words, his family was an ordinary one and could boast no illustrious forebears.⁵ According to some reports, Mirza's generation was the fourth descended from two brothers who had been sent from Cizre on the Tigris to preach in the area.⁶ It is conceivable that they were members of the Khālidiyyah branch of the Naqshbandī order, which spread rapidly through the area in the nineteenth century,⁷ though this would have meant that Mirza was at most the second generation. Nuriye was from the village of Bilkan, some three hours' distance from Nurs.

The two eldest children of the family were girls, Dürriye and Hanım. The latter later gained a reputation for her knowledge of religion and married another *hoja* (teacher) who bore the same name as her brother, Molla Said. They went into voluntary exile in Damascus following the Bitlis Incident of 1913, and died while circumambulating the Ka'bah in 1945.⁸ The next child,

Abdullah, also a *hoja*, was the young Said's first teacher. He died in Nurs in 1914. Said was followed by Molla Mehmed, who taught in the *medrese* (religious school) in the village of Arvas,⁹ not far from Nurs. Then came Abdülme-cid, who for many years studied under his elder brother, Said. His main claim to fame was his translation into Turkish of two of Nursi's Arabic works. He died in Konya in 1967. Nothing is known of the youngest member of the family, a girl called Mercan (Ar. Marjān). The eldest girl, Dürriye, the mother of Ubeyd, also a student of Said, was drowned in the river at Nurs when Ubeyd was small.

Mirza died in the 1920s and was buried in the Nurs graveyard. Once Said left the family home to pursue his studies, he never again saw his mother. She died during the First World War and was also buried in Nurs. In later years, Said was to say: "From my mother I learnt compassion, and from my father orderliness and regularity."

Said passed his early years with his family in Nurs. Long winters were spent in the village, and short summers in the higher pastures or in the gardens along the low slopes and riverbanks in the valley bottom. The growing season was short, but sufficient to meet the villagers' needs. It was a life close to the natural world, in harmony with its rhythms and cycles, full of wonders for an aware and responsive child like Said. He was unusually intelligent, always investigating things, questioning and seeking answers. Years later when explaining how scholarly metaphors may degenerate into superstition "when they fall into the hands of the ignorant," he himself described an occasion that illustrates this.

One night, on hearing tin cans being clashed together and a rifle being fired, the family rushed out of the house to find there was an eclipse of the moon. Said asked his mother: "Why has the moon disappeared like that?"

She replied: "A snake has swallowed it."

So Said asked: "Then why can it still be seen?"

"The snakes in the sky are like glass; they show what they have inside them."¹⁰

Said was only to learn the true answer when studying astronomy a few years later.

Whenever the opportunity arose, and especially in the long winter evenings, Said would make the trek to *medreses* in the vicinity to listen to the discussions of the shaikhs, students, and teachers. These occasions and the culture they reflected clearly had a formative influence on his character and future activities. A reference to them in his later writings illustrates too the influence on the life of the region's people of the revivalist Naqshbandī/Khālīdī order, which with its emphasis on scholarly learning—specifically, the study of jurisprudence (*fiqh*)¹¹—and virtuous activity in preference to the quest for mystical knowledge had spread rapidly in the nine-

teenth century, displacing the Qādirī order and establishing many *medreses* and *tekkes* that became centers disseminating the traditional religious sciences.¹² Şerif Mardin describes the subprovince of Hizan as being “riddled” with their schools.¹³ This explains also—in part, anyway—how a tiny isolated hamlet like Nurs whose people were bound by the timeless cycles of simple husbandry could have produced in Said Nursi’s generation so many teachers and students of religion and a figure of his stature. He wrote in the mid-1940s:

In the district of Hizan, through the influence of Shaikh Abdurrahman Taġī, known as Seyda, so many students, teachers, and scholars emerged I was sure all Kurdistan took pride in them and their scholarly debates and wide knowledge and Sufi way. These were the people who would conquer the face of the earth! When I was nine or ten years old I used to listen when they talked about famous ulama, saints, learned men, and spiritual masters. I used to think to myself that those students and scholars must have made great conquests in religion to speak in that way. [Also] If one of them was a little more intelligent than the others, he was made much of. And when one won an argument or debate, he would be held in great esteem. I was amazed because I felt the same way.¹⁴

That is, to be victorious in debate also appealed strongly to the young Said. In addition, more than being merely independent-minded, it was as though from his very earliest years Said was trying to discover a way other than that which those around him followed, as the following shows:

When I was eight or nine years old, contrary to my family and everyone else in the vicinity, who were attached to the Naqshī order and used to seek assistance from a famous figure called Gawth-ı Hizan,¹⁵ I used to say: “O Gawth-ı Geylānī!”¹⁶ Since I was a child, if some insignificant thing like a walnut got lost, [I would say] “O Shaikh! I’ll say a Fātiḥah for you and you find this thing for me!” It is strange yet I swear that a thousand times the venerable shaikh came to my assistance through his prayers and saintly influence. Therefore, however many Fātiḥahs and supplications I have uttered in general in my life, after the Person of the God’s Messenger (PBUH), they have been offered for Shaikh Geylānī. . . . But preoccupation [with study of the religious sciences] prevented my becoming involved with the *tariqat*.¹⁷

Although, as is stated here, Said never joined a *tariqat* or followed the Sufi path—he was later to describe Sufism as being inappropriate for the needs of the modern age—his close relationship with Shaikh ‘Abd al-Qādir Geylānī continued throughout his life; on many occasions throughout his life Said received guidance and assistance through his saintly influence.

Said Begins His Studies

Said started his studies at the age of nine by learning the Qur'ān.¹⁸ He appears now as a pugnacious child, prone to quarreling with both his peers and elders. But this sprang from the frustration at having a spirit that as yet could find no way to express itself, and at the incomprehension that he often met with from both his teachers and his fellows.

It was the example of his elder brother, Molla Abdullah, that first prompted the young Said to start studying. With unusual perspicacity for a child of nine, he had noticed how Abdullah had benefited from his studies; he had gradually improved and progressed so that when Said saw him together with his friends from the village who had not studied, his self-evident superiority awoke in Said a strong urge to study himself. With this intention, he set off with him for Molla Mehmed Emin Efendi's *medrese* in the village of Tağ, near İsparit, some two hours from Nurs on foot. However, he fought with another student called Mehmed and did not stay there long.

For the young Said also held himself in great esteem. He could not endure even the smallest word spoken to him in a commanding tone, or to be dominated in any way. So he returned to his own village, where he told his father that he would not attend any more *medreses* until he was older because the other students were all bigger than he was. Due to its small size, Nurs had no *medrese*, so Said's lessons were then restricted to the one day a week that his elder brother, Abdullah, returned.

Here is how in later years Nursi described himself at this age:

When I was ten years old I had great pride in myself, which sometimes even took the form of boasting and self-praise; although I myself did not want to, I used to assume the air of someone undertaking some great work and mighty act of heroism. I used to say to myself: "You're not worth tuppence, what's the reason for this excessive showing-off and boasting, especially when it comes to courage?" I didn't know and used to wonder at it. Then, a month or two ago [1944] the question was answered: the *Risale-i Nur* was making itself felt before it was written: "Although you were a seed like a common chip of wood, you had a presentiment of those fruits of Paradise as though they were actually your own property, and used to boast and praise yourself!"¹⁹

About a year passed in this way, then once again Said set off to continue his studies full-time. But his needs were not to be answered by any of the teachers or *medreses* he visited. He went first to the village of Pirmis, and then to the summer pastures of the Hizan shaikh, the Naqshbandī Sayyid Nur Muhammad. There, his independent spirit and the fact that he could not endure being dominated made him fall out with four other students. They

would join forces and pick on him constantly. So one day Said went to Sayyid Nur Muhammad and said: “Shaikh Efendi! Please tell them that when they fight me to come two at a time and not all four at once.” This pluck on the part of the ten-year-old pleased the shaikh greatly, who smiled and said: “You are my student, no one shall bother you!” And from then on Said was known as “the shaikh’s student.”²⁰

Said remained a while longer, and then went together with his elder brother Abdullah to the village of Nurşin. Since it was summer, they left the village together with the villagers and other students for the high pastures of Şeyhan. Once there, Said quarreled with his elder brother, and they fell out. The principal of the Tağ *medrese*, Mehmed Emin Efendi, was angry with Said and asked him why he opposed his elder brother. But Said did not recognize the teacher’s authority either, and retorted that since the *medrese* belonged to the famous shaikh Abdurrahman Taği, he was a student like himself and did not have the right to act as a teacher. He then left immediately for Nurşin, passing through a dense forest that was difficult to penetrate even by day. From there he moved on to a village called Kuğak.

With its oral culture and social structure dominated by the shaikhs, aghas, and tribal leaders, stories about the saints and religious figures abounded among the people of the region, and not all of them were apocryphal. Many were, and are, related about Said Nursi, some of which have been recorded by researchers together with their “lines of transmission.” The account of his early studies is certainly authentic. It was written first by his nephew and then later—based on this account—by his closest students under his supervision; and it has been verified by witnesses. So, too, the gist of the tales and legends about him can be taken as true, even if some details have been changed in the telling. There are sometimes different versions of the same stories. Some are related to his future service to Islam, others illustrate his learning and other virtues, and a few link his qualities to the uprightness and piety of his parents.

One, reputedly told by Nursi himself, relates how in his first place of study, the Tağ *medrese*, the illustrious owner of the *medrese*, Shaikh Abdurrahman Taği (d. 1886–87), used to show a close interest in the students from Nurs, rising at night during the winter to make sure they were all covered and would not catch cold. Moreover, he used to say to the older students: “Look after these students from Nurs well, one of them will revivify the religion of Islam, but which of them it will be I do not know at present.”²¹ This may actually have been another shaikh, for Abdurrahman Taği had moved to the village of Nurşin many years previously.

A well-known story describing Mirza’s uprightness and Nuriye’s piety concerns one of the young Said’s teachers who was intrigued by the child’s abilities and wanted to meet his parents. So taking a number of his students,

together they made the six- or seven-hour journey to Nurs. A short time after arriving, Mirza appeared, driving before him two cows and two oxen with their mouths bound. After the introductions, Said's teacher asked him the reason for this. Mirza replied in a modest manner: "Sir, our fields are a fair way off. On the way, I pass through the fields and gardens of many other people. If these animals' mouths were not tied, it is possible they would eat their produce. I tie them up so that there's nothing unlawful in our food."

Having seen how upright Said's father was, the teacher asked his mother how she had brought up Said. Nuriye replied: "When I was pregnant with Said, I never set a foot on the ground without being purified by ablutions. And when he came into the world, there was not a day when I did not suckle him without being purified by ablutions."

Said's teacher had now discovered what he had come to learn. Of course, such parents should expect to have such a son.²²

Young Said's Independence

At that time in eastern Anatolia any scholar who had completed the course of study in a *medrese* and could demonstrate his mastery of the subjects obtained his diploma (*icâzet*) and could then open a *medrese* in a village of his choice. If he was able, he would himself meet the needs of the students, such as food, heating, and clothing, and if he was not able to, they were met by the villagers either through *zakât* or some other way. The teacher asked for no payment for his teaching.

Young Said would in no way accept *zakât* or alms. To accept assistance meant becoming obliged to others, and he felt that to be an unbearable burden on his spirit.

One day, his fellow students went to the neighbouring villages to collect *zakât*, but Said did not accompany them. The villagers, being impressed by this and appreciative of his independence, themselves collected a sum of money and tried to give it to him. Given the poverty and deprivation of the region,²³ this was indeed a meaningful gesture. But Said thanked them and refused it. Whereupon they gave it to Molla Abdullah in the hope that he would persuade him to accept it. The following exchange then ensued:

Said said: "Buy me a rifle with the money!"

Molla Abdullah: "No, that's not possible."

"Well, in that case, get me a revolver."

"No, that's not possible either."

So, smiling, Said said: "Well, get me a dagger, then."

His elder brother laughed at this and said: "No, that's impossible too. I'll just buy you some grapes; then we'll make sure the matter remains sweet!"

Said stayed a while in the *medrese* at Kuğak, then set off alone for Siirt and the *medrese* of Molla Fethullah, again showing his fierce independence and almost foolhardy courage, for travel was extremely dangerous due to the lawlessness of the times. Pursuing his studies for some two months under this well-known teacher, he then departed for Geyda, a village near Hizan where Sayyid Sibğatullah, the Gawth of Hizan, is buried. Said attended the *medrese* here but had to leave after a short time because he was involved in a fistfight in which, while trying to defend himself, he wounded another student. He returned to his father's house in Nurs, where he spent that winter.²⁴

Said Dreams of the Prophet

That winter Said spent in Nurs. Toward the spring he had a powerful dream that impelled him to return to his studies. It was like this: it was the Last Day and the resurrection of the dead was taking place. Said felt a desire to visit the Prophet Muhammad. While wondering how he could achieve this, it occurred to him to go and sit by the bridge of Sirat, for everyone has to pass over it. While the Prophet is passing, he thought, I shall meet him and kiss his hand. So he went and sat by the bridge, and there met with all the prophets and kissed their hands. Finally, the Prophet Muhammad came. Said kissed his hands and asked for knowledge from him. The Prophet said: "Knowledge of the Qur'ān will be given you on condition you ask no questions of any of my community." Upon which Said awoke in a state of great excitement. And indeed, he thereafter made it a personal rule never to ask questions of other scholars. Even when he went to Istanbul, he adhered to it; he always only answered questions put to him.

Filled with enthusiasm, Said left Nurs, going first to the village of Arvas and from there to Shaikh Emin Efendi's *medrese* in Bitlis.²⁵ Because of his tender years, the shaikh did not teach him himself, saying he would appoint one of his students to do so. This wounded Said's self-esteem. One day while Shaikh Emin was teaching in the mosque, Said rose to his feet and objected to what he was saying with the words: "Sir! You're wrong, it's not like that!" The shaikh and his students looked at the young Said in amazement. It was inconceivable that a mere student should challenge a shaikh's authority.

Again Said had to curtail his stay. This time he set off for the Mir Hasan Veli *medrese* at Müküs (Bahçeseray), whose principal was Molla Abdülkerim. When he saw that the new, lower-grade students were given no importance, he ignored the first seven books, which should have been studied in sequence, and announced he would study the eighth. He remained there only a few days, then went to Vastan (Gevaş) near Van. After a month in Gevaş, he set off with a companion called Molla Mehmed for (Doğu) Bayezit, a small town near the

foot of Mt. Ararat, and it was here that his real studies commenced. Until this time, he had studied the works on Arabic grammar and syntax taught in the *medreses* of eastern Anatolia as far as the work called *Hall al-Mu'addad*, which was of an intermediate level and the equivalent of the well-known work called *Izhār al-Asrār* that was taught in the Istanbul *medreses*.²⁶ It was now 1891–92.

Bayezit

Said's period of study in the Bayezit *medrese* under Shaikh Muhammad Celālī²⁷ lasted only three months, but it was to provide him with the foundations of or key to the religious sciences on which his later thought and works would be based. Also, it was once again to show what he had instinctively displayed from the very beginning of his studies—namely, his dissatisfaction with the existing education system and his awareness of the urgent need for its reform. Moreover, the astonishing number of works Said read, memorized, and digested in this short period of time was to demonstrate his remarkable power of memory and exceptional intelligence and understanding, both of which were developed to a degree far exceeding the average for boys of his age. He was fourteen or fifteen years old.

During his time in Bayezit, Said completed the entire course of study then current in *medreses*. The works studied were heavily annotated with commentaries, commentaries on commentaries, and even commentaries on those commentaries and further expositions, so that to complete the course under normal conditions took the average student fifteen to twenty years. The method was to completely master one book and one subject before passing onto the next.

Said began from *Molla Jami*,²⁸ and completed all the works in the course in turn. This he did by ignoring all the commentaries and expositions, and by concentrating on only a certain number of sections in each work. On being asked by a displeased Shaikh Muhammad Celālī why he was studying in this way, Said answered thus: "I am not able to read and understand this many books. But they are all caskets of jewels, treasure chests, and the key is with you. I only implore you to show me what is in them so I can understand what they are discussing, and then I shall study those that are suitable for me."

Said's aim in replying thus was to point out the need for reform in *medrese* education and to prevent time being wasted through the inclusion of so many commentaries, annotations, and expositions. And in answer to his master's question: "Which subject, which of the sciences studied, is suitable for you?" Said replied: "I can't distinguish these sciences one from the other. I either know all of them or none of them."

Whichever of the books Said studied, he would understand it without seeking anyone's assistance. He was able to study and master the most difficult works of two hundred pages or more like *Jam' al-Jawāmi'*, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, and *Ibn Ḥajar*²⁹ in twenty-four hours. He gave himself over to studying to such a degree that all his ties with the outside world were cut. On whichever subject he was questioned, he would give the answer correctly and without hesitation.

While in Beyazit, Said passed much of his time, and even the nights, in the mausoleum of the Kurdish saint and poet Shaikh Ahmad Hani,³⁰ so that the people said he was specially privileged with Ahmad Hani's spiritual radiance. One night Said's friends from the *medrese* missed him and started searching for him. Finally they looked in the mausoleum and found him there studying by the light of a candle. But he rebuked them for disturbing him. While Said was thus plunging himself into studying, he also started to follow the way of the Illuminist (*Ishrāqiyyūn*) philosophers and to practice extreme self-discipline and asceticism. The Illuminists had accustomed their bodies to such practices gradually, but Said ignored the necessary period of adjustment and suddenly undertook the most rigorous ascetic exercises. His body could not support it, and he grew progressively weaker. He would make one piece of bread last three days, trying to emulate the Illuminists in their practice of the theory "asceticism serves to expand the mind."

Not being content with this, he followed Imām Ghazālī's mystical interpretation of the Hadith, "Give up what you are doubtful about for that about which you have no doubts" from *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*,³¹ and for a time gave up eating even bread; he subsisted on grasses and plants. Furthermore, he rarely spoke.

At the end of three months, toward the springtime, Said obtained his diploma from Shaikh Celālī and was then known as Molla Said. He evidently intended to pursue the ascetic life, for he donned the dress of a dervish with a sheepskin flung over his shoulder and set out for Baghdad, intending to visit its famous religious scholars and the tomb of Shaikh 'Abd al-Qādir Geylānī. He wanted also to test his knowledge against that of other scholars. Avoiding roads and traveling at night, he came after three months to Bitlis. It was a remarkable feat of courage and endurance that should not be underestimated, for not only is it a distance of at least two hundred miles, but the country is very wild and mountainous and at that time was still heavily forested. Besides such natural foes as bears and wolves, the whole region was infested with bandits and brigands. Together with the intertribal feuding, it rendered any travel perilous, let alone for an unarmed boy of fifteen or so.

When Molla Said finally arrived in Bitlis, for two days he attended the lectures of Shaikh Mehmed Emin Efendi. The shaikh proposed that he wear the dress of a scholar. In eastern Anatolia at that time the turban and scholar's

robe were not worn by students, but only presented when the diploma (*icāzet*) was obtained. The scholar's dress was the right only of teachers (*müderris*). But Molla Said did not accept the shaikh's proposal, answering that since he was not yet mature, he did not think it was fitting for him to wear the dress of a respected teacher. How could he be a teacher while still a child? And he put the gown and turban away in a corner of the mosque. Nevertheless, it was from this time that he started to teach the Arabic sciences and have his own students.³² Moreover, with his practice of meeting other scholars in argument and debate and presenting himself to answer their questions, he was trying to establish himself as a religious scholar and teacher.

Şirvan

From Bitlis, Molla Said traveled on to Şirvan, where his elder brother, Molla Abdullah, taught in the *medrese*. The following exchange took place at their first meeting:

Molla Abdullah: "I have finished *Sharh al-Shamsī*³³ since you were here. What have you read?"

Molla Said: "I have read eighty books."

"What do you mean?"

"Yes, I have finished eighty books. And I have read a lot of works not included in the syllabus."

Molla Abdullah found it hard to believe that his brother had read so many books in such a short time and wanted to test him. Molla Said agreed, and Abdullah was left in admiration and astonishment. Then hiding it from his own students, he accepted his younger brother as his master, though only eight months before Said had been his student and started to take lessons from him. When Abdullah's students discovered their master being taught by his younger brother, Said told them that he was doing so "to avert the evil eye." The reason for his change of dress and "image" at this time, described below, suggests that he explained his action in this way as an act of self-mortification rather than out of mere modesty. For rumors had begun to spread among the people that the young Molla Said was a sort of child *veli* or saint-prodigy, and it was in response to this, to conceal the level of knowledge and spirituality he had attained, that he put aside his dervish garb and first started to wear the dress of a Kurdish chieftain, for which he was to become famous. This consisted of a suit made of patterned, finely woven woolen material, russet in color, with full trousers resembling plus fours; long leather boots; a waistcoat; a long sash wound round the waist several times; and a turban. Bediuzzaman persisted in wearing this dress even when he went to Istanbul,³⁴ and changed it for the more sober gown (*jubba*) of a religious scholar only on his transfor-

mation into the New Said after the First World War.³⁵ It may also be seen as a declaration of his intention to follow a way other than either the traditional dervish (or Sufi) way or the learned profession.

Siirt

Molla Said remained with his brother a while longer and then made his way to Siirt. It was here that he was challenged by the local ulama for the first time and was successful in debating with them and answering all their questions. His reputation now became firmly established. On his arrival in Siirt, he went to the *medrese* of the famous Molla Fethullah Efendi, who was to experience the same astonishment as Molla Abdullah at the number of books Said had read and learned. He also examined Molla Said, who again gave perfect answers. So he then decided to test his memory and handed him a copy of the work by al-Ḥarīrī (1054–1122)—also famous for his intelligence and power of memory—called *al-Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīriyyah*. Molla Said read one page once, memorized it, then repeated it by heart. Molla Fethullah expressed his amazement.

While there, Molla Said learned by heart the work on the principles of *fiqh* he had studied in Bayezid, *Jam' al-Jawāmi'*, by reading it for one or two hours every day for a week. Thereupon Molla Fethullah wrote in the book, in Arabic, “He committed to memory the whole of the *Jam' al-Jawāmi'* in a week.” Said’s own copy with the same statement written in the first person in his own (poor) handwriting on the cover is still extant. It has 362 pages.³⁶

From a letter written by Nursi in 1946 while in exile in Emirdağ, it is learned that it was at this time, as a result of these feats of learning, that he was first given the name of Bediuzzaman—Wonder of the Age—by Molla Fethullah Efendi. He wrote to one of his students: “My Curious Brother, Re’fet Bey, you want information about Bediuzzaman Ḥamadānī’s works in the 3rd century [Hijrī]. I only know about him that he had an extraordinary intelligence and power of memory. Fifty-five years ago one of my first masters, the late Molla Fethullah of Siirt, likened the Old Said to him and gave him his name.”³⁷

News of these events spread around Siirt, and upon hearing it the ulama of the area gathered together and invited Said to a debate and to answer their questions. Said accepted, and both defeated them in debate and was successful in answering all their questions. Those present were full of praise and admiration for him, and when the people of Siirt came to hear of it, they regarded Molla Said as something of a *veli*, or saint. However, all this aroused the jealousy of the lesser scholars and students in the area, who, since they were unable to defeat him in argument or in learning, tried to do so by force.

They set upon him one day, but the people intervened and prevented any harm coming to Said, who told the gendarmes who arrived on the scene, having been sent by the governor: “We are students; we fight and make it up again. It is better if no one outside our profession interferes. The fault was mine.”

Said answered in this way out of his extreme respect for the learned profession, which he felt would be slighted by the interference of the ignorant and uneducated, although it was to assist him.

After this incident, Said always carried a short dagger with him in order to deter those tempted to fight him.³⁸ He was strong and agile and now came to be known as Said-i Meşhūr, Said the Famous. He challenged all the ulama and students in Siirt to debates, letting it be known that he never asked questions, but answered anyone who chose to put questions to him. He also competed in sports and physical feats, and demonstrated his superiority in these, too. One day in Siirt, he challenged a friend, Molla Celāl, to jump a water canal. He himself cleared the broad canal successfully, then stood back to watch his friend. Molla Celāl took a running jump, but alas, not being as athletic as Said, landed in the mud at the edge of it!

Bitlis

It was probably Molla Said’s successes in the field of scholarship that made him abandon his journey to Baghdad and return to Bitlis and the *medrese* of Shaikh Emin so as to establish his reputation in the provincial center. However, as before, the shaikh dismissed Said as too young to understand anything. Molla Said was not to be deterred and requested once again that he be given the opportunity to prove himself. So Shaikh Emin prepared a series of questions on various most difficult subjects, all of which Molla Said answered correctly and without hesitation. The shaikh then set him some riddles and puzzles, which he solved in record time. He then went to the Quraish mosque and began to preach to the people.

Said became very popular, drawing a large number of the people of Bitlis to listen to him. But it resulted in two factions forming in the town: those who supported him and those who supported Shaikh Emin. So to forestall any trouble, the governor expelled Molla Said from Bitlis, and he made his way from there back to Şirvan.³⁹

A story about Said Nursi at this time, related by Badıllı together with its line of transmitters, shows both that the illustrious Shaikh Emin bowed to his superior knowledge and that Said did not hesitate to voice his opinions whatever the rank or position of those he was addressing. While he was in Bitlis, three Wahhābī (according to one source they were Shī‘ī) preachers visited the provincial governor, who called on Shaikh Emin as the town’s foremost

scholar to meet them in debate and reply to them. Perhaps the shaikh felt he was inadequately informed, but in any case he was disinclined to face them; he suggested summoning the young Molla Said instead. Once again extricating himself from attempts to prevent him—this time he was locked in his room—Said presented himself, only to be met with the governor's disparaging amazement as Shaikh Emin rose to his feet and seated him in his place. Not in the least perturbed, Molla Said turned to the governor and said: "Actually it's you who's the Wāhhābī! Those who stood up when I entered did so out of respect not for my person, for I'm younger probably than their grandchildren, but for my knowledge!"

He then proceeded to expound the beliefs of the Wāhhābī school and their origins and historical development and demolished convincingly the ideas on which they are based. The story has it that he spoke so reasonably, the Wāhhābī scholars offered their excuses and made themselves scarce, while the governor admitted that he had been secretly trying to spread Wāhhābism but was now persuaded of its errors.⁴⁰

Undoubtedly, the purpose of this anecdote is to demonstrate Molla Said's exceptional talents, but it also gives an idea of some of the religious currents that were seeking to extend their influence in the area at the end of the nineteenth century—there is another anecdote about Said silencing Shī'ī preachers so successfully they turned around in their tracks and made their way back to Iran.⁴¹ This and two other important factors—Christian missionary activity and the Armenian question⁴²—suggest that the Muslims of eastern Anatolia were in a somewhat embattled position, and though there are no references to the latter questions in Said's biography at this stage, they must have impinged strongly on his consciousness and been a powerful motivating force. The breakdown of the social order and social and political changes that were consequences of the nineteenth-century centralizing reforms and administrative reorganization known as the Tanzimat, together with the missionary and Armenian questions and their effects on the area, particularly Bitlis, have been dealt with in some detail by Şerif Mardin.⁴³ Here a few brief points will fill in some of the background to the progression of Said's activities.

The position of weakness into which the Ottomans had fallen vis-à-vis the European powers had far-reaching repercussions all over the empire but was felt especially in the eastern provinces, since it was exacerbated by the two above-mentioned interrelated factors. Of the various denominations of missionaries that had been granted the freedom to pursue their activities in the empire by the reform rescripts of 1839 and 1856, it was the American Protestants who had become most active in Bitlis. Generally, most of the missionaries' activities, which gained momentum in the 1880s and 1890s,⁴⁴ were educational, and by the end of the century they had founded some four hundred schools throughout the empire with well over thirty thousand students. These

supplied excellent education, the chief purpose of which was conversion.⁴⁵ They were directed mainly at the Christian minorities. The missionaries undermined the Ottoman state in many ways and were one of its main headaches, not least in Bitlis, where they were alleged to have assisted the Armenians' revolutionary efforts.⁴⁶ The Protestant missionaries' proselytizing had proved fruitful in Bitlis. The Armenians converts to Protestantism there had "a substantial church edifice with a congregation of about four hundred and a large boarding-school for boys and girls."⁴⁷ Quoting the same source, Mardin informs us that American missionaries had a school for girls with fifty boarders and fifty day students. Others had opened a "Girls' Seminary" that then established branches in outlying districts.⁴⁸ This was itself revolutionary in a region where girls were rarely given any education—Molla Said's sister Hanım was an exception.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, together with the Great Powers, particularly Russia and Britain, the missionaries did much to fan rising nationalist aspirations, against which background the Armenian question⁴⁹ should be seen. Initially, the great majority of Armenians living within the Ottoman domains were opposed to the nationalist struggle, which was instigated by non-Ottoman Armenians and furthered by two revolutionary societies, the Hinchaks and the Dashnakzoutiun.⁵⁰ What is particularly relevant here is that the revolutionaries incited a series of revolts in the eastern provinces, which they claimed as their homeland, and in Istanbul, one of which took place in Van in 1896.⁵¹ However, even in Bitlis and Van, where there was the greatest concentration of Armenians, they did not form more than 26 to 30 percent of the population.⁵² The violence, uprisings, and their suppression by the Hamidiye regiments⁵³ were most widespread from 1890 to 1894. Thousands of both Armenians and Muslims were killed.⁵⁴ These were the conditions prevailing over much of the country as Molla Said roamed from place to place debating with the ulama. But more important were the feelings of outrage as acts of terrorism and massacres and ensuing counter-massacres were consistently used by the revolutionary networks in a propaganda war against the Ottomans, as was indeed their aim, providing justification for the European powers to increase their pressures on the Ottomans and to threaten intervention. The frustration and sense of weakness, which reflected on Islam itself, must surely have been a constant spur, goading the ambitious young Said in his efforts to revitalize Islam.

Tillo

As Said's fame grew, so did his difficulties. From Bitlis he had gone to Siirt. There some teachers and lesser scholars whom he had previously defeated in

debate constantly sought opportunities to reduce his prestige in the eyes of the people. They had him watched and followed, and one day when he missed the time for the morning prayer and performed it late, they started rumors about him. He soon moved on, this time because in that rough-and-ready life one of his students was attacked by the local villagers. He was offended at this and went to Tillo, a village a few miles outside Siirt.

His stay here—he incarcerated himself in a small domed building of stone intended originally as a place of retreat, called the Kubbe-i Hassa—is famous for three things. Firstly, he memorized an Arabic lexicon, the *Qāmūs al-Muḥīt*, as far as the fourteenth letter of the alphabet, *Sīn*.⁵⁵

Secondly, while he was here Said's younger brother, Mehmed, used to bring him his food each day. And Said, dipping his bread in the soup, would eat it and give the crumbs to the ants around the building. When asked the reason for this, he would say: "I have observed that they have a social life, and work together diligently and conscientiously, and I want to help them as a reward for their republicanism."⁵⁶

Although it was not until later that Said was first "awakened politically," it is clear from this story of the ants that he had already at this stage acquired ideas that he would adhere to throughout his life. Since these are described below and in detail in a later chapter, suffice it to say here that his political ideas were based on Islamic practice and on the principles of freedom, justice, consultation, and the rule of law.

Thirdly, it was also while he was in Tillo that Molla Said had the dream in response to which he first started to work among the tribes as a conciliator and man of religion generally. He dreamt that Shaikh 'Abd al-Qādir Geylānī appeared to him and ordered him to go to Mustafa Pasha, the head of the Miran tribe,⁵⁷ "and summon him to the way of guidance." Mustafa Pasha was to desist from oppression, perform the obligatory prayers, and enjoin what was lawful. Otherwise Said was to kill him.

This was a surprisingly tough task for a boy who can still have been no more than sixteen years old and marks what may be seen to be another stage in his career: that of working as a man of religion among the tribes—a function usually performed by the shaikhs. It was all the more surprising, since the tribal chief in question, Mustafa Pasha, was notorious for his brigandage and general oppression, which have been well recorded. Besides his leadership of the Miran, one of the few tribes that had managed to increase its power on the destruction of the old emirates, he was appointed commander of one of the Hamidiyye regiments, founded by Sultan Abdülhamid in 1892; hence his title of pasha. This enabled him to extend his power, through the use of force, over further tribes and a wide area. A traveler through the region soon after his appointment, which must have coincided roughly with Molla Said's unusual mission, probably 1892, noted that he "had established his

own petty ‘kingdom,’” which was virtually independent of the Ottoman government and which he maintained through exacting illegal tolls and raiding.⁵⁸

Notwithstanding this formidable prospect, Said immediately gathered together his belongings and made his way south to the region of Cizre on the Tigris.⁵⁹ His relations with the tyrannical chief there illustrate one of his most striking and enduring characteristics—namely, his absolute lack of fear, especially in the face of oppressors and the powerful. Rather, it was a disdain for fear of anything other than his Maker.

Molla Said and Mustafa Pasha

On approaching Mustafa Pasha’s tent, Said learned that he was elsewhere and took the opportunity to rest. A while later Mustafa Pasha returned to the encampment and entered his tent, whereupon all those present rose to their feet, except Molla Said, who did not so much as stir. This attracted Mustafa Pasha’s attention, and he inquired who the man was from Fettah Bey, a major in the militia. He informed him that it was the Famous Molla Said. Now, Mustafa Pasha did not care at all for the ulama, but he thought it wise to suppress his anger, and asked why he had come. Molla Said replied as ordered in his dream: “I’ve come to guide you to the right path. Either you give up your oppression and start performing the obligatory prayers and enjoin what is lawful, or else I’ll kill you!”

Mustafa Pasha was doubtless taken by surprise at this reply and left the tent to consider the situation. After a while he returned and again asked why he had come. Said repeated what he had said. After further exchanges, Mustafa Pasha thought of a solution; he would set up a contest between Molla Said and “his” religious scholars in Cizre. If Molla Said was victorious, he would do as he said, otherwise he would throw him in the river. Said was quite unperturbed. He told Mustafa Pasha: “Just as it’s beyond my power to silence all the ulama, so is it beyond your power to throw me into the river. But on my answering them, I want one thing from you, and that’s a Mauser rifle. And if you don’t stick to your word, I’ll kill you with it!”

After this exchange, they mounted their horses and rode down to Cizre from the high grazing grounds. Mustafa Pasha would not speak to Molla Said on the way. When they came to the place known as Bani Han on the banks of the Tigris, Said slept, entirely confident about his forthcoming trial. When he awoke, he saw that the scholars of the area had gathered and were waiting, books in hand. After introductions, tea was served. The scholars had heard of the Famous Molla Said, and as they awaited his questions in a state of some trepidation, Said drank not only his own tea but some of theirs, as well. Mustafa Pasha noticed this and informed the scholars that he was of the opinion that they would be defeated.

Molla Said told the Cizre scholars that he had taken a vow to ask no questions of anyone but that he was ready for theirs. Whereupon they presented him with about forty questions, all of which he answered satisfactorily—except for one, which they did not realize was incorrect and accepted. As the gathering was dispersing, Molla Said recalled this and hurried back to inform them and give the correct answer. Upon which they admitted that they were well and truly defeated, and a number of them started to study under him. Mustafa Pasha also presented him with the promised rifle, and began to perform the obligatory prayers.

Molla Said was physically fit and strong, just as he was intellectually. He particularly enjoyed wrestling and used to wrestle with all the students in the *medreses*. And they were never able to beat him.

One day, he and Mustafa Pasha went out to race each other on horseback. Mustafa Pasha had ordered that an unbroken, uncontrollable horse be prepared, which he gave to Molla Said to ride. Molla Said wanted to gallop the rebellious horse after walking it around for a bit. Given some rein, the horse galloped off, away from the direction it had been pointed. Said tried to stop it with all his strength; he could not. Finally the horse careered toward a group of children. The son of one of the Cizre tribal leaders was standing right in its path. The horse reared up and struck the child between the shoulders with its forelegs. The child fell to the ground under the horse's hooves and began to struggle desperately. Quickly, those watching reached them. When they saw the child, by then motionless as though dead, they wanted to kill Molla Said. On the tribal leader's servants pulling out their daggers, Molla Said immediately drew his revolver, and said to them:

"If you look at the reality of the matter, Allah killed the child. If you look at the cause, Kel Mustafa killed him, because it was he who gave me this horse. Wait, let me come and look at the child. If he is dead, we can fight it out later." Dismounting, he picked up the child. When he saw no signs of life in him, he plunged him into cold water and immediately pulled him out. The child opened his eyes and smiled. All the people who had rushed to the spot to watch were dumbfounded.

Molla Said stayed a short time longer in Cizre after this incident, then set off with one of his students for some desert country and its nomadic Arab tribes. He had not been there long when he heard that Mustafa Pasha had reverted to his former evil ways, and he returned to advise him to give them up. But it was more than Mustafa Pasha could bear to be dictated to in this way, and it was only at the intervention of his son, Abdülkerim, that he refrained from assaulting Molla Said, who then left at the son's request and returned to the Berriyye desert, this time alone.⁶⁰

Said was attacked twice by bandit nomads in the desert, which lies between Nusaybin and Mardin. The second time he would have met his end,

but they recognized him and, regretting their attack, offered him their protection on the dangerous parts of the road. Molla Said rejected their offers of assistance, and continued on his way alone until several days later he reached Mardin.

Said Nursi's student and biographer, Abdülkadir Badıllı, records a first-hand account of a witness of Molla Said's encounter with the ulama at Cizre that throws light on his spiritual or mental powers (*kerāmet*). Though in later life he always discounted such powers, or else ascribed them to the Qur'an or *Risale-i Nur*, they were an essential attribute of the shaikhs and religious leaders of those times. The possession of such powers would also explain how this young *molla* could have imposed his will on an autocratic tyrant like Mustafa Pasha.

In 1969 Badıllı interviewed a ninety-six-year-old member of the Buhti tribe called Fakirullah Mollazade, who had been studying in Cizre at the time of Said Nursi's trial by the ulama, which he attended. On completion of his studies he settled in Nusaybin, where for sixty years he worked as a preacher and mufti. Though bedridden at the time of the interview, he was still in full possession of his mental faculties.

Fakirullah told Badıllı how he had been so drawn to Molla Said after his successful trial that he had remained with him for seven months as his student, and that he had witnessed many instances of his *keramet* or wonder-working. Molla Said evidently liked him and often used to joke with him. One day he told him: "*Sad salo!* You'll live to be a hundred! I'll die in Urfa, but they'll break open my grave and remove me elsewhere! *Nemiro! Sad salo!* Immortal hundred-year-old!"

Fakirullah went on to say that he had forgotten about this until Said Nursi came to Urfa in March 1960, two days before his death. He immediately set out to visit him, but was too late. And it is a fact that three and a half months after Said Nursi's death, his tomb was broken open by the military authorities and his remains were removed to an unknown spot, and that Fakirullah Mollazade died in 1973 at the age of a hundred.⁶¹

Mardin

Besides his continuing success in scholarly debate, which included all his contests with the Mardin ulama, Molla Said's stay in Mardin was significant in several other respects. But first an anecdote that illustrates Said's characteristic daring and courage.

As related by Haji Ahmed Ensari, one day Molla Said went out with his host's son, Kasım, and suggested they climb the minaret of the Ulu Mosque to see the view. Having climbed it, Said suddenly jumped up onto the parapet of

the gallery of the minaret, which was only about four centimeters in width. There he spread his arms wide and started to walk round it. Kasım shut his eyes out of fear. Appearing from the other side of the minaret, Said shouted out: “Kasım! Kasım! Come on, let’s walk around together!” But shaking at the knees, Kasım descended the minaret and joined the people who had gathered to watch from below, wondering at the boldness of this intrepid young *molla*.⁶²

To understand just how bold this was, one has to remember that Mardin is built on the slopes of what resembles an extinct volcano, the summit of which has been fortified and made into a large citadel. The town looks down on the Mesopotamian plain, which spreads out to infinity to the south. The decorated stone minaret of the twelfth century mosque rises to over sixty feet, standing out spectacularly as the ground falls away to the plain. If one wanted to perform an act of daring, this was the place to do it.

While in Mardin, Molla Said stayed as a guest in the house of Shaikh Eyyub Ensari, and began to teach in the Şehide Mosque, answering the questions of all who came to visit him. One of the notables of the town, Hüseyin Çelebi Pasha, was so impressed by Said’s knowledge and skill at debating that he offered him numerous gifts. But in keeping with his usual practice, Said refused them all, except for a good-quality rifle, called a *şeşhane*.

It was at this time, however, that Molla Said was in his own words “awakened” politically and made aware of the wider issues facing the Islamic world. In a work entitled *Münâzarât (The Debates)*, first published in 1913, he wrote: “Sixteen years before the [Constitutional] Revolution [of 1908], I encountered in the region of Mardin a person who guided me to the truth; he showed me the just and equitable way in politics. Also at that time, I was awakened by the Famous Kemal’s *Dream*.”⁶³

The “Famous Kemal” mentioned here is Namık Kemal, one of the leading figures of the nineteenth-century Young Ottoman Movement,⁶⁴ the main aims of which are reflected in this work of Kemal’s that Molla Said came across at that time, *The Dream (Rü’ya)*. It is written in the form of an address to the nation by a heavenly representative of freedom. This beautiful, fairy-like symbol of freedom, which has slipped through the clouds, urges liberation from despotism and struggle for the sake of the nation, progress, and the prosperity of the fatherland (*vatan*). Following this, it outlines the picture of a society and country of the future, which is free, whose people are sovereign, citizens are educated, and in which full justice and rights are established.⁶⁵

In another place in *Münâzarât*, Nursi described himself as “Someone who for twenty years has followed it [freedom—*hürriyet*—as opposed to despotism] in his dreams even, and has abandoned everything because of that passion.”⁶⁶

Thus, it was at this time in Mardin that Molla Said first became aware of the struggle for freedom and constitutional government that the Young

Ottomans had been pursuing since the 1860s. As we shall see in the following chapter, Said Nursi maintained that such freedom was both enjoined by Islam and was the key to progress and the answer to the question “How can this State be saved?” He thought despotism and absolutist government were among the major causes of the dire condition, internal and external, of the Ottoman Empire and Islamic world.

Also while in Mardin, Molla Said met two “dervishes” who were instrumental in broadening his ideas. One was a follower of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1839–97), who in the summer of 1892 was brought to Istanbul by Sultan Abdülhamid with a view, so Afghānī hoped,⁶⁷ to using him in furthering his pan-Islamic policies.⁶⁸ The second was a member of the Sanusi order, which played such an important role against the colonial expansion in North Africa.

It is conceivable that the person Molla Said encountered who gave him guidance and the follower of Afghānī were one and the same, if “the just and equitable way in politics” signifies the liberal values of constitutionalism. For the introduction of constitutional government in the Islamic world and limitation of absolutism were part of Afghānī’s ideas for mobilizing Muslims in the way of progress and for resisting the encroachments of European imperialism.⁶⁹ No further explanation is given in the original reference in Nursi’s biography to the meeting with the two dervishes. However, it was more specifically in connection with Islamic unity, or pan-Islam, that the other reference to Afghānī in Said’s works of the period is made, for which Afghānī was most famous.⁷⁰ In his defense speech in the court-martial of 1909, Said declared: “My predecessors in this matter [of Islamic unity] are Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, the late Mufti of Egypt Muhammad ‘Abduh, Ali Suavi Efendi and Hoja Tahsin Efendi, [Namık] Kemal Bey, and Sultan Selim.”⁷¹

These questions are dealt in greater detail in a later chapter, but it is worth noting here that the names quoted above are preceded by what may be taken as a definition of Islamic unity as Said understood it. This was not political unity; its aim was “to stir everyone’s consciences and urge them down the path of progress. For the most effective means of ‘upholding the Word of God’ at this time is through material progress.” This gives us a pointer as to why he included names not immediately associated with Islamic unity but with education and especially with the introduction of the modern physical sciences. Interestingly, this fits in with the mention of the Sanusi order. A nearly contemporary work on it tells us that together with the phenomenal spread of the order all over the Islamic world in the nineteenth century and its aim of Islamic unity,⁷² with its emphasis on education and the single-minded application of its members to mundane work rather than to acts of supererogatory worship, it resembled a social society or brotherhood more than a mystical order.⁷³ Thus, in the light of Nursi’s subsequent activities, it seems reason-

able to suppose that the dervishes in Mardin introduced him to Afghānī's powerful ideas for arousing and uniting Muslims and revitalizing Islamic civilization, for which constitutionalism and education were crucial, and initiated him into this struggle.

It is also recorded that it was during this stay in Mardin that Molla Said first engaged in active politics. Again, it is not clear precisely what is meant by this, but his "awakening" and encounter probably provide the clue. In any event, the governor, Mutasarrıf Nadir Bey, saw fit to intervene and expelled him from the town, sending him to Bitlis under armed guard.⁷⁴

The task was to prove an unusual one for the two gendarmes, Savurlu Mehmed Fatih and his friend İbrahim, assigned to deliver Molla Said to the governor of Bitlis. This story became well known in the region. They set out on the journey, Said riding with both his hands and feet bound with iron fetters. While they were in the vicinity of a village called Ahmadi, it was the time for the obligatory prayers. Said asked the gendarmes to unfasten his bonds so that he could pray, but they refused, frightened he would try to escape. Thereupon Said the Famous undid the fetters, dismounted from his horse, performed his ablutions at a stream, then performed the prayers under the astonished gazes of the two gendarmes. Recognizing his unusual powers, they said to him when he had finished: "Up to now we were your guards, but from now on we shall be your servants." But Molla Said merely requested them to do their duty.

When asked at a later date how this had occurred, he replied: "I myself don't know; it must have been a miracle of the prayers."⁷⁵

Molla Said was indeed famous, and news of his exploits spread throughout the region, reaching also the village of Nurs. In later years he described his parents' reactions to what they heard:

In the old days, my father and mother used to be told of my strange doings in that eventful, rough-and-ready life. When they heard news like "your son is dead," or, "he has been wounded," or, "he is in prison," my father used to laugh and enjoy it immensely. He would say: "Mashallah! My son's doing something controversial again, he's demonstrating his courage and daring; that's why everyone's talking about him." While my mother would weep unhappily in the face of his pleasure. But then time would very often prove my father to be right.⁷⁶

Bitlis

Despite having been deported from Bitlis two years earlier and then being brought back there by an armed escort, Molla Said soon established himself

in this provincial center, and as a guest in the residence of the governor, Ömer Pasha. It was his zeal in upholding the Shari‘ah that won him the governor’s respect, even though it had been directed against the governor. Molla Said had heard one day that Ömer Pasha and some officials were carousing in his office. Finding it unacceptable that representatives of the government should behave in such a way, he armed himself with a revolver and a dagger and burst in on them. Then, declaiming a Hadith about the drinking of alcohol, he rebuked them in the strongest terms. Surprisingly, the governor suppressed his anger and did nothing. When leaving, his aide-de-camp asked Molla Said why had acted like this, which normally he would have paid for with his life. Said merely replied: “Being executed didn’t occur to me, I was thinking of prison or exile. Anyway, if I die combating an unlawful deed, what harm is there in it?”

But when, a couple of hours later, two policemen sent by the governor escorted him back, the governor rose to his feet when he entered the office and treated him with great deference, saying: “Everyone has a spiritual guide; you shall be mine and you shall stay with me.”⁷⁷

So for the next two years Molla Said stayed in the governor’s residence, during which time he devoted himself to further study. There is no record of his involvement here in the political adventures that had led to his expulsion from Mardin. His stay with the governor was not, however, a sort of unofficial detainment, as is shown by an anecdote related by his nephew, Abdurrahman, in his biography. He describes how one day Molla Said was set upon by a large number of soldiers when he refused to comply with orders to keep out of the prohibited zone of the army barracks. There was a garrison of 2,500 men stationed at Bitlis at that time. He finally extricated himself from the fairly violent fracas on the intervention of an officer, and afterward explained that he had needed such a lesson in order to accustom him to complying with “the restrictions of civilization,” something he felt to be totally opposed to his nature.⁷⁸ He prized his personal freedom over virtually everything.

Abdurrahman also gives us some valuable insights into the young Said’s psychological makeup and how he had acquired his remarkable learning. He tells us that until about this time all Said’s knowledge had been of the sort called *siinuhah*. That is to say, he had understood the subjects he had studied without much thought; understanding had come to him as a sort of inspiration without his exercising his reasoning faculty unduly. Because of this, he had not found it necessary to study the subjects at great length. But whether due to his increasing maturity or because he had become involved in politics, this former ability now slowly began to disappear. So in order both to preserve his position among the ulama, and especially to answer the doubts raised about Islam, Molla Said embarked on a comprehensive study of all the Islamic sciences. These included those that can be thought of as instrumental, such as logic and Arabic grammar and syntax, as well as the main sciences of

Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr*), Hadīth, and jurisprudence (*fiqh*). He committed to memory around forty books in two years, including works on theology (*kalām*), like *Matāli'* and *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif* by Jurjānī, and the work of Ḥanafī *fiqh*, *Mirqāt al-Wuṣūl ilā 'Ilm al-Uṣūl* (by Muḥammad ibn Feramrūz, d. 1480–81). It used to take him three months to go through them all, reciting a part of each from memory each day.

During his time in Bitlis, Molla Said began to memorize the Qur'ān by reading one or two *juz'*⁷⁹ each day. He learned the greater part of it in this way, but did not complete it. There were two reasons for this. Firstly, he wanted to avoid being disrespectful to the Qur'ān, for it had occurred to him that to read the Qur'ān at great speed was lacking in respect; and secondly, that the more urgent need was to study the truths the Qur'ān taught. In the following two years, therefore, he learned by heart the forty or so works noted above on the Islamic sciences, which would be the key to those truths, and would preserve them by answering the doubts that had been raised concerning them. The governor's residence in Bitlis provided a favorable environment to pursue this program.

Ömer Pasha's wife was dead, and he had six daughters. One day, one of these girls wanted to go into Molla Said's room to clean it, or for some such innocent reason. However, Molla Said scolded her and brusquely shut the door in her face. The girl was taken aback and upset at this.

The same day while in his office, someone who was trying to make trouble for Said, no doubt from jealousy, whispered in the governor's ear: "How can you leave Molla Said in the house all day? Your daughters are not married and you have no wife, and he is a vigorous young man. How can you do such a thing?" He thus tried to sow seeds of doubt in the governor's mind about Said.

That evening when he returned to his family, Ömer Pasha was met by his disconsolate daughter, who immediately complained to her father: "That Said you have given the room to is mad. He tells us off and never lets us in there." Feeling remorse for his suspicions, Ömer Pasha went straight to Molla Said's room and treated him with great courtesy and kindness.

In a later work, Bediuzzaman explained his attitude as follows:

When I was twenty or so, I stayed for two years in the residence of the governor of Bitlis, Ömer Pasha, on his insistence and because of his respect for learning. He had six daughters. Three of them were small and three of them were older. Although I stayed in the same house as they for two years, I could not tell the three older ones apart. I paid them so little attention, how could I? Another scholar came and stayed together with me as a guest, and within two days he had got to know all of them and could tell them one from the other. They were all perplexed at my attitude and asked me: "Why don't you look at them?" I replied: "Preserving the dignity of learning doesn't allow me to look at them."⁸⁰

The last time Molla Said was taught by anyone was while he was in Bitlis. The lesson came from one of its leading Naqshī shaikhs, Shaikh Muhammad Küfrevi.⁸¹ The text of the shaikh's homily may be translated as "All praise be to God, Who has determined the proportions and measures of things through His power and has delineated their forms and shapes through His wisdom. And blessings and peace be upon Muhammad, the pivot of the sphere of prophethood, and on his Family, the Beloved of the robe of chivalry and manliness (*futūwwa* and *murūwwa*), so long as the stars revolve around the face of the heavens and the clouds make their progress over the globe." Then, one night following this, he dreamed of the shaikh, who summoned him in his dream and said he was leaving. Said immediately went to him, and when he saw that the shaikh had already left, he awoke. He looked at his watch; it was one o'clock in the morning. He went back to sleep again. When in the morning he heard the sound of mourning and weeping coming from the direction of the shaikh's house, he hurried there to find that the shaikh had died at one o'clock the night before. Uttering a prayer for him, Said returned home sadly.⁸²

Molla Said had tremendous love for the great shaikhs of eastern Anatolia. Four of these are mentioned in his biography:⁸³ Sayyid Nur Muhammad, who taught him the Naqshbandī way.⁸⁴ Shaikh Abdurrahmān Tāġī,⁸⁵ from whom he learnt "the way of love (*muhabbet*)"; Shaikh Fehim,⁸⁶ from whom "by means of an intermediary" he acquired "knowledge of reality" (*'ilm-i hakikat*); and Shaikh Muhammad Küfrevi, from whom he received his last instruction. Three leading ulama who had taught Said are also mentioned as having won his love: Shaikh Emin Efendi of Bitlis, Molla Fethullāh of Siirt, and Shaikh Fethullāh Verkānisi.⁸⁷ This brief list illustrates an important point mentioned previously; that most of the leading ulama of eastern Anatolia at the end of the nineteenth century seem to have emerged from the Naqshī/Khālidi order. It was probably due to its backwardness as well as the distance from the capital that the region had produced so few members of the learned hierarchy⁸⁸—a clear indication of why Said Nursi was to attach paramount importance to comprehensive educational reform.

Besides the rivalry and jealousy mentioned, it may have been Molla Said's holding aloof from the dominant Naqshī way, his innovative ideas, and eventually his formulation of new methods of education that were the cause of the opposition he received from time to time, generally from lower-ranking *medrese* scholars and students. He also met with opposition when he first started to teach the modern physical sciences together with the religious sciences.⁸⁹ Part of his plans for educational reform was to be the introduction of modern science by way of the *medreses* so as to allay the ulama's fears concerning it.

Finally, despite his veneration for the leading shaikhs mentioned and his appreciation for the learning he had received from them—and, reputedly, for

their recognition of his exceptional abilities—he never followed any of them exclusively. He continued to follow his own path, which finally became fully clear to him only after he entered into the second main period of his life after the First World War.

Van

After two years, at the invitation of Hasan Pasha of Van,⁹⁰ Molla Said moved on to Van, for while Bitlis was an important center with many ulama, there was none of any standing in Van. This was most probably in 1895 or 1896 when Said was nineteen or twenty years of age. With various breaks of up to five years, Van now became Said's base until he was sent into exile in 1925. A certain amount has been recorded about the twelve years he spent here before he made his first journey to Istanbul at the end of 1907; he divided his time between traveling among the tribes as a conciliator in disputes and man of religion generally and teaching in Van and mixing with government and other officials.

While in Van, Molla Said stayed first with Hasan Pasha, and then, after İškodralı Tahir Pasha was appointed governor, for a long period in the governor's residence. Tahir Pasha was a distinguished official much respected by Sultan Abdülhamid II, and served as governor in Mosul and Bitlis as well as in Van. He was a patron of learning, followed developments in science, and owned an extensive library. He was the first state official to perceive Bediüzzaman's great talent and potential, and continued to encourage and support him till his death in 1913.

Paradoxically, it was probably Said's independence that allowed him to accept the patronage of the governors of Bitlis and then Van, where he might have been expected to eschew such favors of the highest representatives of the state. That is, he was not attached to any religious order or establishment that might have hindered his pursuing his aims and career in this way. As far as the governors were concerned, they were keen to support his scholarly enterprise. How far this was a general policy is not clear, but certainly with Tahir Pasha it was also a personal preference or interest.

Tahir Pasha's residence was a favorite center for government officials, teachers of the new secular schools, and other intellectuals; there they could meet to discuss questions of interest. Tahir Pasha was eager for Molla Said to join these discussions, but the new environment soon opened Said's eyes to the effects on the thinking and attitudes of these officials of the secularizing reforms of the Tanzimat, and the chasm that had opened up between them and traditional views. He realized, moreover, that in its traditional form Islamic theology (*kalām*) was incapable of answering the doubts and criticisms that had been raised about Islam. This led him to take the momentous step of

learning the modern sciences—something unprecedented among the ulama of the eastern provinces. It was in this that he received the most encouragement from Tahir Pasha. Taking advantage of his library and the newspapers and journals supplied to his office, Molla Said embarked on the study of such subjects as history, geography, mathematics, geology, physics, chemistry, astronomy, and philosophy (probably natural science), as well as current affairs and developments in Ottoman life and the Islamic world.

Said had no teacher for this; consulting the available literature, he taught himself. He made swift progress, expedited by his applying his practice of debating to this new field. On one occasion he got into a discussion on geography with a high school teacher. The discussion became prolonged, and they decided to continue the following day. Within twenty-four hours, therefore, Molla Said memorized a geography book, and when they again met, he silenced the geography teacher in his own subject. On a second occasion, he silenced a chemistry teacher, having mastered the principles of inorganic chemistry in five days.⁹¹

Molla Said's quickness and brilliant intelligence demonstrated itself particularly in mathematics. He could solve the most difficult problems mentally and almost instantaneously. He wrote a treatise on algebraic equations, which unfortunately was subsequently lost in a fire in Van. Tahir Pasha used to organize contests of knowledge and competitions in mathematical reckoning. Whatever the calculations, Molla Said would find the solution before anyone else; he always came in first in these contests.

It was not until this time that Said learned Turkish, but he appears to have quickly overcome the handicap. Similarly, he would answer unhesitatingly the questions Tahir Pasha would cull from the books newly arrived from Europe. One time he saw such books lying around and understood that the pasha was compiling some questions; he quickly read the books and learned their contents.⁹²

Molla Said continued to memorize those works he considered essential, approximately ninety during the years he was in Van. On one occasion, while passing the door of Said's room, Tahir Pasha heard what he thought was the sound of prayers and invocations being recited softly; it was Molla Said repeating his books by heart. Years later, he told Mustafa Sungur, one of his students:

Tahir Pasha assigned me a room when I was staying in his residence, and every night before sleeping I would spend around three hours going over the books I had memorized. It would take me three months to go through the lot. Thanks be to God, all those works became steps ascending to the truths of the Qur'ān. Some time later, I ascended to those truths and I saw that each of the Qur'ān's verses encompasses the universe. No need then remained for anything else; the Qur'ān alone was sufficient for me.⁹³

It was at this time that as a result of these feats of learning and the prodigious amounts of knowledge he was acquiring, Molla Said now became widely known as Bediuzzaman or the Wonder of the Age, the name given him by Molla Fethullah of Siirt several years previously.

Although Molla Said also used this title himself, it was not out of vanity. In an article published in 1909, he was asked the question: “You sometimes sign yourself Bediuzzaman; doesn’t the name indicate self-praise?” He replied, “It’s not like that. I present my faults, excuses and apologies with the title, for Bedi’ means strange. Like my style, my manner of expression and dress are strange, they are different. Through the tongue of this title, I am requesting that the opinions and customs generally held and practiced are not made the criteria for judging mine.”⁹⁴

Then, in a later work, he stated that he used the name “in order to make known a divine bounty.” He wrote: “I now realize that the name Bediuzzaman, which was given to me many years ago although I was not worthy of it, was not mine anyway. It was rather a name of the *Risale-i Nur*. It was ascribed to the *Risale-i Nur*’s apparent translator temporarily and as a trust.”⁹⁵

Molla Said had his own *medrese*, and it was during his stay in Van that he formulated his ideas on educational reform and his own particular method of teaching. He developed this through examining the principles of all he had studied together with his experience of teaching religious and scientific subjects, then considering them in relation to the needs of the times. The basis of this method was to “combine” the religious sciences and modern sciences, with the result that the positive sciences would corroborate and strengthen the truths of religion. Said now followed this method when teaching his students.⁹⁶

Molla Said’s chief aim was to establish a university in eastern Anatolia where this method would be practiced; that is, where the physical sciences would be taught together with the religious sciences and his other ideas applied. This university he called the Medresetü’z-Zehra after the Azhar University in Cairo,⁹⁷ as it was to be its sister university in the center of the eastern Islamic world. He later extended his project to include three such institutions—in Van, Bitlis, and Diyarbakır, respectively. Having traveled throughout eastern Anatolia, he had seen that not only would they be a sure means of combating the widespread ignorance and backwardness of the region, but would also be a solution for its other social and political problems. Nursi’s ideas related to education are discussed in greater detail in a subsequent chapter.

Molla Said used to spend the summer months in the high pastures of Başid, Feraşin, and Beytüşşebab. More than anything he loved the mountains of Kurdistan, “where there is absolute freedom.” In addition to his mediation in tribal disputes and work among the tribes, he would roam the mountains and forests reading “the book of the universe” and pondering over its meaning and

messages as directed by the Qur'ān. He had a close affinity with the natural world and its creatures. They also felt an affinity with him. Of the stories illustrating this is one for which we also have the date: 1321 (that is, 1905). On this occasion Said was high up on Mount Başıd, alone. He was sitting on a rock in contemplation, having performed the evening prayers, when a great wolf appeared. But this “lion of the mountain” merely came to him “like a friend,” then passed on its way doing nothing.⁹⁸

When news of a tribal dispute reached Molla Said, he would intervene and reconcile the two parties. He was even successful where the government had failed in making peace between Şekir Ağa, the head of the Giravi branch of the Ertoshi tribe,⁹⁹ and Mustafa Pasha, the chief of the Miran tribe, by settling their dispute over pasturing rights. Because personal courage was the most highly prized quality, Said was held in awe by all the tribes of the area. Mustafa Pasha was persisting in his lawlessness and oppression, and this time tried to placate Said by giving him money and a horse as gifts. In keeping with his usual practice, Said refused them and told him that if indeed he had gone back on his word to give up his oppression, he would not reach Cizre, where he was headed. And indeed, they heard later that Mustafa Pasha had been killed on the road and had never reached Cizre.¹⁰⁰ That was in 1902.

Molla Said's distinctive dress—he now carried a large dagger and pistol at his waist and had bandoliers slung across his chest, with baggy trousers and on his head a shawl wound round a conical hat—was frequently the subject of comment. Tahir Pasha had greeted it with astonishment when he first met him.¹⁰¹ In fact, Said claimed that Tahir Pasha had offered him a thousand gold liras, a house, and one of his daughters if only he would consent to wear the dress of a religious scholar. But he had refused.¹⁰²

Said appears to have been accepted almost as one of Tahir Pasha's family. At any rate, during the First World War he worked closely with Tahir Pasha's eldest son, Cevdet Bey, who was then governor of Van and a high-ranking official of the Committee of Union and Progress, and was also married to one of Enver Pasha's sisters. This raises the question of whether Tahir Pasha was a secret supporter of the constitutional movement. It would be another reason for the firm though sometimes troubled relations between him and the prodigiously gifted yet unceremonious Molla Said.

Nursi read the newspapers regularly while in Van. One day, Tahir Pasha pointed out an item that evoked an overpowering response in him. It was the report of a speech made in the British House of Commons by the secretary for the colonies. Nursi described it as follows:

About the year 1316,¹⁰³ the author of the *Risale-i Nur* underwent a radical change in his ideas. It was as follows: up to that time, he had only been interested in, and had studied and taught, the various sciences; it was only

through theoretical knowledge that he had sought enlightenment. Then at that date, he suddenly learned through the late governor, Tahir Pasha, of Europe's dire and evil intentions toward the Qur'an. He heard that a British secretary for the colonies had even said in a newspaper: "So long as the Muslims have the Qur'an, we shall be unable to dominate them. We must either take it from them, or make them lose their love of it."

He was filled with zeal. Heeding the decree of "So turn away from them" (Qur'an, 6:68, etc.), the numerical value of which is 1316, it overturned his ideas and changed the direction of his interest. He understood that he should make all the various sciences he had learned steps by which to understand the Qur'an and prove its truths, and that the Qur'an alone should be his aim, the purpose of his learning, and the object of his life. Thus, the Qur'an's miraculousness (*i'jāz*) became his guide, teacher, and master. But unfortunately, due to many deceiving obstacles in that period of youth, he did not in fact take up the duty. It was a while later that he awoke with the clash and clamor of war. Then that constant idea sprang to life; it began to emerge and be realized.¹⁰⁴

As this passage states, the explicit threats of the British colonial secretary to the Qur'an and Islamic world caused a revolution in Nursi's ideas, clarifying them and setting him in the direction he would now follow. The threats caused him to declare: "I shall prove and demonstrate to the world that the Qur'an is an undying, inextinguishable Sun!"¹⁰⁵ Using the knowledge he had acquired to prove its truths, he would demonstrate the Qur'an to be the source of true knowledge and progress, so defending it against the deliberate efforts to discredit it and corrupt the Muslim community. In a letter he wrote in 1955, Nursi stated that he found two means of doing this: one was the *Medresetü'z-Zehrâ*, which took him to Istanbul and even to Sultan Abdülhamid's court, and the second was the *Risale-i Nur*.¹⁰⁶ But this second means only became realized with the emergence of the New Said subsequent to the First World War. Until that time, Nursi was actively involved with the compelling events of the times. For the most part he served the cause of Islam through active participation in social and political matters. But, as shall be described in a later chapter, he was also preoccupied with "human" science and philosophy, and hoped to follow his aim through them.

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CHAPTER 2

Istanbul

In November 1907 Nursi set off for Istanbul with the intention of obtaining official support and backing for his Islamic university, the *Medresetü'z-Zehrâ*. He was now around thirty years of age. From his humble beginnings in the village of Nurs, he had established his reputation among the ulama of Kurdistan and was a figure well known not only for his unbeaten record in debate, extensive learning, and extraordinary abilities, but also for his pursuit of justice and defense of right, and his absolute fearlessness before anyone save his Maker. His ambitions matched his ability. This had marked him out from his earliest years. He had never been content with the status quo; something within himself had perpetually pushed him to seek fresh, new, better paths. As his horizons expanded, his path became clearer.

As is described in the previous chapter, besides the continuing process of his study, several events were decisive in giving him direction. One was his learning of what he perceived to be the severe nature of the threats to the Qur'an and Islam and his decision to dedicate his life and learning to proving them to be the source of true knowledge and progress. Another was the acquaintances he made in Mardin in 1892 and his learning through them of the struggle for freedom and constitutionalism, and of the movement for Islamic unity and other issues concerning the Islamic world. But what had the profoundest influence on him was his mixing with the government officials in Van, which made him realize the extent to which the Westernization and secularization of the Tanzimat had affected the thinking and views of the Ottoman educated classes, giving rise to many doubts about Islam. Influenced by Europeans, some had even come to believe that Islam was responsible for the empire's backwardness. This had brought home to Nursi the urgent necessity of reforming *medrese* education and updating the Islamic sciences in the light of modern advances in knowledge. Until the beginning of the First World War, it was with these issues that he was chiefly concerned.

The Tanzimat and Constitutional Movement

The Tanzimat is the name given to the period (1839–76) during which, largely under European pressure and advice, the Ottoman sultans and their leading

ministers introduced a series of reforms by which they intended, by reordering the government, administration, and many areas of Ottoman life along Western lines, to restore the empire's fast-declining power and deliver it from subjection to Europe.¹ In fact, the Tanzimat solved none of the empire's immediate problems, but it did set the future course of Turkish history. Here it is mentioned chiefly in respect of several matters that contributed to the emergence of the Constitutional Movement, whose proponents put forward alternative solutions.

The introduction of Western-style reforms, in many cases alongside the existing system, resulted in the separation of the religious and worldly functions of the state, which had previously been symbolically fused in the person of the sultan-caliph.² Notwithstanding this step toward secularization and the attendant neglect of religious institutions and the displacement of Islam from the center of life, the upper echelons of the ulama supported the reforms.³ It was the lower ranks and *medrese* students that remained fiercely hostile to them.⁴ Another factor breeding opposition was that by both granting equality to the Christian minorities and protecting their interests as independent *millet*s (religious communities), the reforms greatly strengthened the minorities' economic and political positions at the expense of the Muslim majority of the empire. Other developments, such as the increase rather than decrease in the sultan's autocratic authority, also fueled opposition to the reforms. Also relevant was the influx of Western ideas that accompanied the reforms. The new secular schools greatly increased the teaching of European languages, particularly French, and often involved the sending of students to Europe, both of which expedited the flow of contemporary European ideas into the Ottoman Empire.

As the downward slide of the empire under the overwhelming pressures of Europe continued despite the Tanzimat reforms, a group of intellectuals and writers emerged who in the newly established press started to voice criticisms of the reforms and the statesmen who had introduced them. The ideas they strove to publicize as alternative solutions for the empire's crisis were centered on the concepts of freedom and constitutional government. The most prominent member of this not very cohesive group, which became known as the Young Ottomans, was Namık Kemal. In his writings, Kemal sought to reinstate Islam as the foundation and spirit of the state,⁵ and to find precedents in Islamic thought and practice for the liberal concepts associated with constitutionalism and representative government, which were derived from Western thought, and to unite them. He extended the meanings of traditional Islamic terms to accommodate the new concepts.⁶ Both Kemal himself and subsequent generations of Islamic thinkers appear to have found this union satisfactory, though contemporary scholars note unresolved contradictions.⁷ Many echoes of his arguments, ideas, and terminology are to be found in the early works of Said Nursi.

Namık Kemal played an important role in the drawing up of the first constitution, which was proclaimed December 23, 1876, after much political maneuvering and the deposition of two sultans, only to be prorogued by Sultan Abdülhamid II (1876–1909) just over a year later. The struggle for constitutionalism then continued underground.

The ailing empire tottered on the brink of collapse in the years before and after Abdülhamid's accession, both economically (it declared bankruptcy in 1875) and militarily and politically—following the 1877–78 war with Russia and Treaty of Berlin, the empire lost about a third of its total territory and over 20 percent of its population.⁸ Yet despite these initial losses, Abdülhamid, a master politician, succeeded in holding together the remainder of the empire for the thirty-three years of his reign by playing off against each other the Great Powers and other forces working against it.⁹ However, his successful foreign policies were paid for by internal repression of considerable severity. After the dissolving of the first parliament he ruled as a despot from Yıldız Palace, supported by networks of spies and informers that penetrated even the farthest corners of the empire. Strict press laws and rigorous censorship curtailed free thought and expression. The efficiency of this extraordinarily oppressive system was greatly increased after the introduction of the telegraph and other improvements in communications. Abdülhamid continued the process of reform and modernization started with Tanzimat so long as it strengthened the state and did not encroach on his prerogatives. The increased centralization and efficiency did indeed strengthen his regime, but at the same time contradictions emerged that eventually undermined it. One area this happened was in education.

Sultan Abdülhamid founded literally hundreds of new schools throughout the empire, together with ten or so institutes of higher learning in the capital. But while their aim was to instill the official Islamic ideology and produce loyal servants of the caliph-sultan, the predominantly secular education provided in the secondary schools ran counter to this. As for the colleges of higher education, they became hotbeds of dissent, particularly the Military School of Medicine and the War College.¹⁰ The ideas that fired most the minds of teachers and students alike were those propagated by Namık Kemal and his contemporaries. It was around this time that one of these secretly read, banned works of Kemal first awakened the young Said Nursi, far away in Mardin, to the constitutional struggle. Also popular, especially among the medical students, were works that would provoke a very different response from him: those expounding scientific materialism and positivism.¹¹

Another matter not directly connected with the reforms but one that had unforeseen consequences was the expansion of the press and publishing.¹² Prohibited by the press laws to make any mention of or even allusion to scores of subjects that could be imagined to have any connection with politics and

government,¹³ the newspapers and periodicals “began to stuff their pages” with articles on popular science, the new discoveries of Europe and America, and all manner of informative yet innocuous subjects. Literature of this kind became widely read, and increased demand induced enterprising publishers to produce ever greater amounts of diverse material. Although much of this was frivolous, it opened the eyes of the expanded reading public (still a minute proportion of the population) to the Western world and its great strides forward in material civilization.¹⁴ It seems reasonable to suppose that at least some of the newspapers and periodicals that found their way to Tahir Pasha’s residence in Van were of this sort. Any of a political nature must have entered the country by way of the post offices of the foreign embassies.¹⁵

The first moves toward political opposition to the Hamidian despotism came from discontented students in the Military School of Medicine, who founded a clandestine society in 1889. This grew slowly through the establishment of cells to include army officers, government officials, and other intellectuals, both at home and in exile. The Young Turks, as they were known in Europe, consisted of various groups representing conflicting ideas and were united only in their common opposition to Abdülhamid’s internal despotism and their desire to see fundamental social and political reforms and the restoration of the constitution. After Mizancı Murad, who led the Islamic, conservative faction, succumbed to Sultan Abdülhamid’s promises of advancement at home, Ahmed Rıza regained a leading position, despite the unpopularity of his positivist ideas. The other challenge to his leadership came from Prince Sabahaddin, a nephew of the sultan; he favored an alternative solution, centered on private initiative and decentralization. In 1907 relations were established between Ahmed Rıza’s group in Paris and the independent revolutionary underground movement within the empire and centered in Macedonia. It was this group, which assumed the name of Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) and was strong among army officers and civilian officials, that led the Constitutional Revolution of 1908.¹⁶ Here at least the CUP were firm believers in constitutionalism and representative government as the essential conditions for preserving the unity of the empire,¹⁷ particularly in the face of the nationalist aspirations of the minorities, and for securing its material progress.

To come now to Said Nursi and his relations with the CUP, it has to be said that as with other facets of the first period of his life, these have yet to be discovered in all their details. In the present account an attempt is made to throw light on this question by examining what he himself wrote about the Young Turks in his works and what is known of his activities, and by analysis of his ideas. At this point suffice it to say that although he appears to have worked closely with the CUP in the first days of the Constitutional Revolution, suggesting strongly that he was in contact with some of its members

prior to it, within a short time he became disenchanted, like a great many others, and then did not hesitate to oppose it. In a newspaper article that appeared in April 1909, in reply to the question “In Salonica you cooperated with the CUP, why did you part from it?” he wrote: “I did not part from it; it was some of its members that parted. I am still in agreement with people like Niyazi Bey and Enver Bey,¹⁸ but some of them parted from us. They strayed from the path and headed for the swamp.”¹⁹

Maintaining the unity of empire—one of the major problems facing the government—was one goal on which Nursi continued to be in agreement with the CUP, and he directed many of his activities toward it. However, as he said, “Unity cannot occur through ignorance. Unity is the fusion of ideas, and the fusion of ideas occurs through the electric rays of knowledge.”²⁰ Thus, education was an area in which Nursi expended great effort, particularly for his native Kurdistan. Quite contrary to the accusations of his enemies subsequently that he was a Kurdish nationalist, the aim of all Nursi’s endeavors for the reform and spread of education in Kurdistan, and for its material and cultural development, was the strengthening of the Ottoman Empire and Islamic world. It was with this intention that he had set out for the Ottoman capital in November 1907.

Now to return to 1907 and Nursi’s arrival in Istanbul.

Tahir Pasha’s Letter

Tahir Pasha, now governor of Bitlis, who had provided Said with so much encouragement and support, wrote him a letter of introduction to the palace, pointing out his fame and position among the ulama of eastern Anatolia and requesting the sultan’s favor and assistance in securing medical treatment for him. This treatment was for a form of mental exhaustion brought about by his extreme mental exertion over a long period of time. Said Nursi’s nephew, Abdurrahman, notes that it was the competitive solving of mathematical problems in particular that had exhausted his brain, and that for a period of some three years during his stay in Van he virtually give up debating of this kind and would only speak when necessary.²¹ The following is a translation of Tahir Pasha’s letter:

A request from His most humble servant.

Since Molla Said, who is famous among the ulama of Kurdistan for his brilliant intelligence, is in need of medical treatment, seeking refuge in the compassion and kindness of His Excellency the Shelter of the Caliphate, he has set out at this time for His Exalted Excellency.

Although the above-mentioned is a person to whom everyone in these regions has recourse for solving problems concerning knowledge and learning, since he considers himself to be a student, he has not as yet consented to change his dress.

Together with his being a faithful and sincere servant of His Excellency the Supreme Benefactor, the above-mentioned is by nature gentlemanly and satisfied with little, and in the opinion of this most humble servant, whether in regard to good moral qualities or loyalty and worshipfulness toward His Excellency the Shelter of the Caliphate, among the Kurdish ulama who up to this time have had the good fortune to go to Dersaadet [Istanbul], is a person distinguished for his devoutness and is most worthy of benevolence. It is therefore boldly submitted that if he is made the object of special favor and facility in the matter of receiving treatment, it will be considered by all the students of Kurdistan to be an eternally unforgettable gracious kindness of the dynasty of His Excellency the Sultan.

In this and in every matter the command belongs unto him to whom all commanding belongs.

3 Teşrin-i Sani 1323 (November 16, 1907)
The Governor of Bitlis, Tahir²²

The “Şekerçi Han”

There is no record of this letter having evoked the desired response. On his arrival Said stayed as the guest of Ferik (Major General) Ahmed Pasha, with whom he remained for two months.²³ It is difficult to deduce the sequence of Said’s activities in the seven to eight months till the proclamation of the constitution, July 23, 1908, and indeed thereafter. Ahmed Pasha, about whom no details are given in the above source, may have assisted him in preparing the petition seeking support for his educational projects in Kurdistan to be presented to the palace, and secured the necessary introductions. However, the actual presentation did not take place till May or June 1908.

At some point Said settled in the religious center of Istanbul, Fatih, and set about establishing himself among the Istanbul ulama. Before leaving Van, Tahir Pasha had said to him by way of spurring him on: “You can defeat in argument all the ulama of eastern Anatolia, but you cannot go to Istanbul and challenge all the big fish in that sea,” knowing that he could never let such a challenge go unanswered.²⁴ He took a room in a large building in Fatih known as the Şekerçi (Sweetmakers’) Han, which served as a hostel for many of the leading intellectual figures of the time. The poet Mehmet Âkif and Fatin Hoja, the director of the observatory, were among its inhabitants.

At that time, with the exception of the ulama, the educated classes had all adopted Western dress, retaining only the fez as the badge of their Islamic identity, so Said caused a sensation. It was met with incredulity that anyone of any standing, let alone a member of the ulama, should be concealed beneath the traditional dress of the backward Eastern Provinces, and with such assurance and eloquence describe the region's chronic problems and his suggestions for their solution. Here too he challenged the scholars of the *medreses* and secular schools to debate and to present him with their questions. On the door of his room in the Şekerci Han he even hung a large sign that read: "Here all questions are answered, all problems solved, but no questions are asked." His intention, however, was to attract attention not to himself, but to the problems of the Eastern Provinces and to publicize his ideas on educational reform.

The following are the impressions of some of his visitors to the Han and others who met him at that time. But first the description of an incident that led to his arrest. It is related by Dr. Hamid Uras, a physician from Gaziantep:

It was during the Second Constitutional period and we were students in the Medical School. Nursi was also in Istanbul at the time. Among the professors of the *medreses*, he preferred those of Fatih and admired them. He was very well known, his fame had spread everywhere. One day he was spotted by police as he was strolling through the palace grounds. They apprehended him and asked him if he didn't know that the gardens were part of the palace and belonged to the caliph. Said replied that he did know but that this did not prevent him from walking through them; as a member of the nation, he was free to be there. The incident was deemed serious, and they sent him to be examined by a government doctor, a Greek. The doctor interviewed Said and in the course of their conversation Said took a textbook on anatomy from the bookcase and read four or five pages, then asked the doctor to test him on it. The doctor did so and was left in amazement as the patient read the pages back to him from memory word for word. He apologized to Said and wrote a favorable report to be sent to the palace by means of the police chief.²⁵

Here are the impressions of Hasan Fehmi Başoğlu, later a member of the Consultative Committee of the Department of Religious Affairs:

Around the time the Second Constitution was proclaimed I was studying in the Fatih Medrese. I heard that a young man called Bediuzzaman had come to Istanbul and had settled in a hostel, and that he had even hung a notice on his door that said: "Here every problem is solved, all questions are answered, but no questions are asked." I thought that someone who made such a claim could only be mad. But hearing nothing but praise and good opinions

concerning him, and learning of the astonishment of the many groups of ulama and students who were visiting him, it awoke in me the desire to visit him myself. I decided to prepare some questions on the most difficult and abstruse matters. At that time I was considered to be one of the foremost members of the *medrese*. Finally one night I selected a number of subjects from some of the most advanced books on the theological sciences, and put them into question form. The following day I went to visit him, and I put my questions to him. The answers I received were quite astonishing and extraordinary. He answered my questions precisely, as though we had been together the previous evening and had looked at the books together. I was completely satisfied. . . .

Afterward he got out a map, and explained the necessity of opening a university in the Eastern Provinces, emphasizing its importance. At that time there were Hamidiye regiments in the Eastern Provinces. He explained to us convincingly the deficiencies of this form of administration and said that the region had to be developed through education, industry, and science. He explained that he had come to Istanbul to realize this aim, and he said: “The conscience is illuminated by the religious sciences, and the intellect is illuminated by the sciences of civilization.”²⁶

And another account, from Ali Himmət Berki, a former president of the court of appeal:

During those years I was a student in the Medresetü'l-Kuzat (the equivalent of the Law Faculty). I was ahead of the other students. Nursi's name and fame had spread throughout Istanbul; everyone was talking about him in scholarly circles. We heard reports that he was staying as a guest in a *han* in Fatih and that he answered every sort of question that anyone put to him. I decided to go with some fellow students.

One day we heard he was in a teahouse answering questions. We went there immediately. There was quite a crowd, and he was wearing unusual clothes—not the dress of a scholar, but the local dress of eastern Anatolia.

When we got close to Nursi he was answering the questions being put to him. He was surrounded by scholars who were listening to him in rapt silence and wonder. Everyone was satisfied and pleased with the answers they received. He was replying to the theories of the Sophist philosophers, demolishing them with rational proofs. . . . There was another piece of information about him that was well known: as a man of religion he did not accept gifts, money, or charity from anyone. He could have owned lots of things if he had wanted. He didn't own a stick in the world.²⁷

Abdullah Enver Efendi, known as the Walking Library, gave the following account:

Harbizade Tavaslı Hasan Efendi, a teacher in the Fatih Medrese, was a scholarly and respected figure. He lived into his nineties, teaching right up until his last days. There was never a day that he didn't go to teach. But one day he told his students: "I can't come today because someone called Bediuzzaman has arrived from eastern Anatolia and I'm going to visit him." He left the *medrese* and went to visit him in the Şekerci Han. On his return, he expressed the warmth and astonishment he felt, saying to his students: "Such a person has never been seen before, he is a rarity of creation. The like of him has yet to appear."²⁸

And finally an anecdote from Haji Hafız Efendi, who used also to attend the discussions held in the Fatih Medrese at that time of lively debate. It was related by his son, Visali Bey, from his father's memoirs.

One day, some ulama were debating a subject in the courtyard of Fatih Mosque, but they could in no way convince one another and solve the question. The debate was continuing when Bediuzzaman appeared dressed in country clothes with a shawl, and a fur cap on his head. I recognized him and knew of his knowledge of scholarly matters, so I stood back and watched.

Nursi asked the scholars: "What is it you're discussing? May I know? Would you please tell me?"

Seeing his humble dress, the scholars replied: "See here, shepherd efendi! You wouldn't understand these things. Off with you and attend to your own business!"

Nursi was not the least offended at this. He learned what the matter was and then explained it so beautifully with verses from the Qur'an and Hadiths that everyone's mouth dropped open in amazement. He completely convinced them. You'd think he'd been at the Prophet's side when the verses were revealed. The scholars turned to him and applauded him, but Nursi excused himself modestly and unobtrusively took his leave.²⁹

Some forty years later in a letter to his students, Nursi explained how his life had followed the course it had so as to produce the *Risale-i Nur*. He told them by way of illustration:

On the way to Istanbul before Freedom several important works on '*ilm al-kalām*' came into my possession. I studied them carefully. When I arrived in Istanbul, I invited both the ulama and the teachers of the secular schools to debate and announced that anyone could ask of me any question he liked. It was astonishing, but all the questions the people who came asked me were matters that I had studied on the road and had retained in my

memory. The matters the philosophers (that is, students and teachers of modern science) asked were also things that had stayed in my mind. It is understood now that my extraordinary success and self-advertisement, of which I was completely undeserving, and that meaningless exhibition of talent, were to prepare the ground so that in the future Istanbul and its ulama would accept the *Risale-i Nur* and its importance.³⁰

“Europe is pregnant with Islam”

Around this time, one of the leading members of the famous al-Azhar University in Cairo (and at one time grand mufti of Egypt), Shaikh Muhammad Bakhīt,³¹ visited Istanbul. The Istanbul ulama, who themselves had been unable to better Nursi in argument and debate, requested Shaikh Bakhīt to meet him. The shaikh accepted, and an opportunity was found one day after the prayers in Aya Sophia. Nursi was seated in a teahouse. Other ulama being present, Shaikh Bakhīt approached Nursi and put the following question to him: “What is your opinion concerning freedom and the Ottoman state, and European civilization?”

Nursi’s unhesitating reply revealed his realism and insight. “The Ottoman state is pregnant with Europe and it will give birth to a European state one day. And Europe is pregnant with Islam; one day it will give birth to an Islamic state.”

Shaikh Bakhīt applauded this answer. “One cannot argue with this young man,” he said. “I am of the same opinion. But only Bediuzzaman could express it so succinctly and eloquently.”³²

Proposals for Educational Reform

In May or June 1908,³³ Said presented to the palace his petition setting out his ideas on educational reform. The text was later printed in the *Şark ve Kürdistan Gazetesi* (*East and Kurdistan Gazette*), dated November 19, 1908. However, as the paper’s introduction to the article points out, this event was to have unhappy consequences. In the short time he had been in Istanbul, Nursi had attracted a lot of attention, both favorable and, as far as the authorities were concerned, adverse. As was inevitable during those repressive times, being such a controversial figure, he was kept under close surveillance.³⁴ He had also attracted the enmity of others in the same profession, jealous at his learning and fame. Nursi, however, had one aim: to serve the cause of Islam and the empire, and he knew no fear in doing this. The text of the petition was as follows. It is preceded by a few introductory words by the newspaper.

We are proud to include the exact text of the proposal that Bediuzzaman Molla Said Efendi presented to the palace, and as a result became the target of many misfortunes:

While, in order to be in harmony in progress with our other brothers in this world of civilization and age of progress and competition, the founding and construction of schools has been ordered as a government service in the towns and villages of Kurdistan—and this has been witnessed with thanks—only children who know Turkish can benefit from them. Since Kurdish children who have not learnt Turkish consider the only mines of perfection to be the *medreses*, and the teachers in the *mektebs* [new secular schools] do not know the local language, the children continue to be deprived of education. Their resulting uncivilized behavior and disorder invites the West to rejoice at our misfortune. Moreover, since the people remain in a primitive state, uncivilized and blindly imitating, they become prey to doubts and suspicions. It is as though these three matters are preparing a ghastly blow for the Kurds in the future, which is a source of anxiety for those with insight.

The remedy for this: three educational establishments should be set up in different areas of Kurdistan as examples to be followed, and as encouragement and stimulation. One in Beytüşşebab, which is the center of the Ertuşi tribes; another in the middle of the Mutkan, Belkan, and Sasun tribes; and one in Van itself, which is in the middle of the Haydar and Sipkan tribes. These should be known by the familiar name of *medrese* and should teach both the religious and the modern sciences. Each should have at least fifty students, and their means of subsistence should be provided by the illustrious government. Also, the revitalization of a number of other *medreses* would be an effective way of securing the future life—both material and moral and spiritual—of Kurdistan. In this way, the basis of education would be established, and by making over to the government this huge force that is now being dissipated in internal conflict, it would cause it to be expended outwardly. It would also demonstrate that they [the Kurds] are thoroughly deserving of justice and capable of being civilized, as well as displaying their natural ability.³⁵

How Said Nursi presented his petition and what passed between him and the pashas of the “Mabeyn” is not known. This was the part of the palace where historically the sultans had received visitors and under Abdülhamid had grown “into a formidable bureaucracy,”³⁶ substituting the Porte as the center of government. In their positions as high-ranking officers of the sultan’s household, the pashas doubtless considered it presumptuous and impertinent that a young *molla* with few credentials from the backwaters of the empire should have been so bold as to make proposals that implied criticism of His

Imperial Majesty's educational policies. They may well have already known of his activities from the swarms of government agents and spies who supplied the sultan's office with daily reports on everyone's movements. Perhaps Said also provoked their ire by requesting or demanding an audience with the sultan himself. But we can be sure that he spoke with a forthrightness they were not accustomed to. In any event, they had him arrested and, after examination by doctors, at least one of whom was Armenian, sent him to Toptaşı Mental Asylum. Again it was the favorable report drawn up by the bewildered doctor sent from the palace to examine Said that caused the authorities to have him removed from hospital to prison. Part of his interview with the doctor consisted of an exposition of his ideas on educational reform, so at this point before describing the interview, we shall include an outline of them in their entirety, preceded by a brief survey of the conditions of the *medreses* at the end of Sultan Abdülhamid's reign.

With their syllabi and curricula virtually unchanged since the fifteenth century,³⁷ their buildings in advanced stages of decay,³⁸ the student facilities nonexistent, and their independent sources of income (the pious foundations) having been appropriated by the central government in 1840,³⁹ the condition of the *medreses* by the end of Abdülhamid's reign can only be described as lamentable. It was the end result of a long period of decline hastened by the educational reforms of first the Tanzimat, then of Abdülhamid himself. As noted above, the *medreses* and whole learned institution had been superseded by the Western-type legal and educational systems introduced by the Tanzimat, a process, unexpectedly perhaps, continued by Abdülhamid. With his official policies of Islamization and pan-Islam, the ulama might have awaited effective support—moral, financial and otherwise—but they were sorely neglected, and the *medreses*, which should have been training the new generations of ulama, decayed even further.⁴⁰ The cause of this in both periods was probably fear of the ulama's influence and the desire to eliminate it.⁴¹ As was shown in chapter 1 above, the situation in eastern Anatolia had been redeemed to an extent only by the Naqshī/Khālīdī order and the *medreses* it had established. The learned profession would otherwise have been very poorly represented.

Medrese reform was tackled seriously when Abdülhamid's rule effectively ceased after the Constitutional Revolution. Before that, several scholars had published articles and treatises on the subject, but their ideas had not been applied. Notable among these were Ali Suavi⁴² and Hoca Muhyiddin.⁴³ Parallels are to be found between Nursi's ideas and the latter's, particularly concerning the introduction of the modern sciences into the *medreses*, the outmoded curricula, and securing equal status for reformed *medreses* and their secular equivalents. Nursi's proposals, however, were distinguished by their specifically addressing the problems of the East.

The heart of Said Nursi's proposals lay in reconciling "the three main branches" of the educational system—the *medreses* or traditional religious schools, the *mektebs* or new secular schools, and the *tekkes* or Sufi establishments—and the disciplines they represented. The embodiment of this rapprochement was to be the Medresetü'z-Zehra, which has been mentioned earlier. Nursi attached the greatest importance to establishing this university where the religious sciences and modern sciences would be taught side by side and "combined," and pursued it till the end of his days.

The second main area of Nursi's proposals lay in completely restructuring *medrese* education and were extremely modern in their approach. These consisted of what might be described as the democratization of the *medrese* system, and its diversification so that "the rule of the division of labor" could be applied.

A third area concerned the preachers, who "guided the general public."

While the role the Medresetü'z-Zehra was to play was seen by Nursi to be vital for securing the future of Kurdistan and unity of the empire, the general principles it represented were applicable to all *medreses*. Several of the conditions Nursi considered to be essential were mentioned in the petition: the Medresetü'z-Zehra and its two sister establishments should be known by the familiar name of *medrese*, and the instruction should be in a language known by potential students. In another work, *Münâzarat*, Nursi stated that they should be trilingual, with Arabic being "compulsory," Kurdish "permissible," and Turkish "necessary."⁴⁴ In the same work, he also stated that Kurdish scholars who were trusted by both Turks and Kurds should be selected as teachers, as well as those who knew the local languages, and that it was necessary to take into account the capacity and cultural level of the community they were to serve. Also, these *medreses* should be on an equal footing with the official secular schools, and like them, their examinations should be recognized. The basis of the system Nursi was proposing, however, was the combined teaching of the religious and modern sciences.

In the course of time the *medrese* syllabi had become narrow and sterile with modern developments in science being rejected altogether, so that at the beginning of the twentieth century the *medreses* were producing ulama who believed, together with the Europeans, that there was a clash and contradiction between certain "externals" of Islam and certain matters of science—matters as basic as the sphericity of the Earth. This false idea had caused feelings of hopelessness and despair, and had shut the door of progress and civilization. "Whereas," pointed out Nursi, "Islam is the master and guide of the sciences, and the chief and father of all true knowledge."⁴⁵

On a human level, Nursi saw religion as representing the heart and conscience, and science, the reason; both were necessary for true progress to be attained: "The religious sciences are the light of the conscience and the modern

sciences (lit. “the sciences of civilization”) are the light of the reason; the truth becomes manifest through the combining of the two. The students’ endeavor will take flight on these two wings. When they are separated it gives rise to bigotry in the one, and wiles and skepticism in the other.”⁴⁶

On a wider scale, the Medresetü’z-Zehra would unite the three traditions in the educational system by representing “the most superior *mekteb* by the reason, the very best *medrese* by the heart, and the most sacred *zawiye* by the conscience.”

As a result of its unique value for the Islamic world, it would in time gain financial independence by reason of the donations and pious bequests it would receive.

The benefits of such a system would be manifold. Just as it would ensure the future of the ulama in the Eastern Provinces, at the same time it would be a step toward the unification and reform of general system. So would it deliver Islam from the bigotry, superstitions, and false beliefs that had encrusted parts of it over the centuries. Importantly, it would also be a means of introducing modern learning into the *medreses* in a way that would allay the ulama’s suspicions concerning modern science. And it would “open the door to spreading the beneficial aspects of constitutionalism.”⁴⁷

Nursi wished for Islam to function like a consultative council, that is to say, through the mutual consultation (*şura*) of “the three divisions of the army of Islamic education”—those of the *medreses*, the *mektebs*, and the *tekkes*—so that “each would complete the deficiencies of the other.” His aim was for the Medresetü’z-Zehra to be an embodiment of this.⁴⁸

According to Nursi, this transforming the *medreses* from being “single-faculty” institutions into being “multifaculty” and putting into practice “the rule of division of labor” was in accordance with wisdom and the laws of creation. The failure to practice it in previous centuries had led to despotism and the exploitation of learning in the *medreses*, and the teaching being undertaken by those not qualified to do so. It had headed the *medreses* toward their destruction.⁴⁹

Other points are mentioned below in Nursi’s “Conversation with the Doctor.”

Finally, a further point that could be thought of as radical was Nursi’s view that “public opinion” should prevail among both the ulama and the students. That is to say, he believed that it was “scholastic despotism,” an offspring of political despotism, “that has opened the way to blind imitation (*taklid*), and barred the way to searching for the truth.” For the problems of the modern age to be grappled with and progress to be secured, “constitutionalism among the ulama” should be established “in the ulama state.” In the same way, among the students, “public opinion” or the prevalent ideas emerging from debate and the exchange of ideas between students of varying disciplines

should be taken as master. Nursi predicted that this would provide a strong stimulation and incentive for progress. Thus, “Just as public opinion predominates in the state, so too should the prevailing opinions of the ulama be mufti, and the prevailing opinions of the students be master and teacher.”⁵⁰

Years later, Nursi wrote: “Born in the village of Nurs in the province of Bitlis, as a student I entered into contests with all the scholars I encountered, and continuing through divine grace to defeat in scholarly debate all who challenged me, I continued the contests in this calamitous fame, and as a result of the incitements of my rivals, on orders from Sultan Hamid, was dragged as far as the mental hospital.”⁵¹

Toptaşı and the “Conversation with the Doctor”

How long Said’s tribulations in the mental hospital lasted is not known for certain, but finally he was released on the strength of the doctor’s report. The following is the text of his conversation with the doctor that contributed directly to the favorable report. In it he explains to the doctor with his usual clarity and logic his aims and intentions, and why he has aroused opposition in Istanbul.

First of all, Said points out to the doctor four points he should take into account while making his diagnosis. Firstly, his background, for “the prevalent virtues in Kurdistan are courage, self-respect, strength of religion, and the agreement of heart and tongue. Matters looked on as polite and refined in civilization are thought by them to be flattery.”

Secondly, the doctor should not make his judgment superficially according to current deviant norms, but should realize that Said takes Islam as the criterion for his actions, through which he intends to serve the nation, state, and religion. Thirdly, he points out that some of those in authority could not stomach him because he provided answers to a number of hitherto insoluble problems, and all they could do was to declare him mad. And fourthly, he has for fifteen years been pursuing Islamic freedom, that is, “the freedom that is in accordance with the Sharī‘ah,” and now that it is close to being realized he is prevented from seeing what is going on, how shouldn’t he be angry? And he adds: “It is only one in a thousand who is not afflicted by this temporary madness.”

Said then goes on to expand these points, stressing that he is not prepared to sacrifice any of his sacred aims and principles, which are for the common good, for his own personal benefit or so that he should be better accepted.

Firstly, Said’s aim was for the strengthening and progress of the Ottoman Empire through the development and progress—educational, material, and cultural—of its component parts. Through retaining the dress of his

native region and professing his love for it, he wanted to stress in the empire's capital the importance of provincial development and create demand for local industries. And by declaring that he had offered allegiance to Sultan Selim (1512–20)—that is, Selim the Grim—Said was stating that he was dedicated to the same aim, that is, unity. Reforms aimed at the development of the provinces would serve to strengthen the unity of the empire, thereby strengthening Islamic unity.

Secondly, Said had aroused opposition through his practice of debating with the *ulama*. He now explains to the doctor that by doing so he wanted to offer a practical example for a solution to the stagnation in the *medreses*. He was recommending more active participation in the process of study on the part of the students. A second reason he gives for their backwardness is that the instrumental sciences (grammar, syntax, logic) had been emphasized in place of the sacred sciences (*tafsīr*, Hadīth, theology—*kalām*). Thus, Said is stressing the need for lively debate and the role of competition in revitalizing the *medreses*, and also, the importance of the fundamental sacred sciences. He then goes on to emphasize the need for specialization. It was through taking one science as a basis and only studying further subjects insofar as they would complement the main subject, that the students could study in sufficient depth and penetrate the subject as required.

Thirdly, Said examines the reasons for the divergence and differences between the various branches of the educational system, which he states are a major cause of the backwardness of Islamic civilization, which constitutes true civilization, in relation to present-day civilization. He says: “The people of the *medreses* accuse those of the *mektebs* of weakness in belief because of their literalist interpretation of certain matters, while the latter look on the former as ignorant and unreliable because they have no knowledge of modern science. Then the scholars of the *medreses* regard the people of the *tekkes* as followers of innovations.”

While recognizing the differences in their ways, he stresses that the barriers between them should be broken down, and by way of a remedy, modern science should be taught in the *medreses* “in place of obsolete ancient philosophy,” religious sciences should be taught “fully” in the secular schools, and scholars from the *medreses*, “some of the most learned *ulama*,” should be present in the Sufi *tekkes*. He then goes on to analyze the reasons for the ineffectiveness of the preachers, who played such a vital role in educating the mass of the people. He wanted the preachers “to be both searching scholars, so that they can prove what they claim, and subtle philosophers so that they do not spoil the balance of the Sharī‘ah, and to be eloquent and convincing. It is essential that they are thus.”⁵²

It was plain to the doctor that Said was in no way deranged,⁵³ and he prepared his report accordingly; whatever the reasons were for his being sent to

the mental hospital, they were not medical, and the doctor did not concern himself with them. But now his attested sanity caused the palace even greater consternation, and they decided to get rid of him—that is, to send him back whence he came. They had him moved to a prison where they tried to buy him off. But to no avail. Just as Said Nursi did not know the meaning of fear and could not be intimidated into abandoning the path he had chosen, so too he had no desire for wealth or position. Throughout his life one of his most salient characteristics was his refusal to accept any personal benefits, material or otherwise; there was no way he could be bought; he could not be made to renounce his cause. The fact that the palace sent Şefik Pasha, the minister of public security, to inform him of the sultan's wishes and that the cabinet was discussing his proposals shows that the authorities must have taken him seriously.⁵⁴ The exchange between the pasha and Said went as follows:

The minister: "The sultan sends you greetings. He has assigned you a thousand *kuruş* as a salary. He said that later, when you have returned to the East, he will make it twenty to thirty liras. And he sent you these gold liras as a royal gift."

Said's reply: "I'm not a beggar after a salary; I couldn't accept it even if it were a thousand liras. I didn't come to Istanbul for myself. I came for my nation. Anyway, this bribe you want to give me is hush money."

The minister: "You are rejecting an imperial decree. An imperial decree cannot be rejected."

Said's reply: "I am rejecting it so that the sultan will be annoyed and will summon me, and I can tell him the truth."

The minister: "The result will be disastrous."

Said's reply: "Even if the result is the sea, it will be a spacious grave. If I am executed, I shall rest in the heart of a nation. And when I came to Istanbul, I brought my life as a bribe; do whatever you like. I say seriously that I want to give a practical warning to my fellow-countrymen that if one has relations with the government, it should be to serve it, not in order to grab a salary. And someone like me serves the nation and government through advising and admonishing. And that is through making a good impression. And that is through expecting nothing in return. And that is through being unprejudiced, which is through being without ulterior motives, which is through renouncing all personal benefits. As a consequence, I am excused from not accepting a salary."

The minister: "Your aim of spreading education in Kurdistan is being discussed by the cabinet."

The reply: "According to what rule do you delay education and speed up salaries? Why do you prefer my personal benefits to the nation's public benefits?"

The minister grew angry.

Nursi: “I was free. I grew up in the mountains of Kurdistan, the place of absolute freedom. There’s no point in getting angry; don’t tire yourself for nothing. Send me into exile; be it Fezzan or Yemen, I don’t mind. I would be saved from falling from a height.”

The minister: “What do you want to say?”

Nursi: “You have drawn a veil as thin as a cigarette paper over everyone in the face of all these seething ideas and emotions, and called it law and order. Underneath everyone is groaning at your oppression like moving corpses. I was inexperienced, I didn’t go in under the veil, I remained top of it. Then one time it was rent in the palace. I was in an Armenian’s house in Şişli; it was rent there. I was in the Sweetmakers’ Han; it was rent there, too. I was in the mental hospital. And now I am in this place of custody. In short, you do so much patching up that I’m annoyed as well. I was well acquainted with you while I was in Kurdistan, and now my experiences here have taught me your secrets. Especially the mental hospital, it gave me a clear understanding of them. So I thank you for these experiences, because I used always to think favorably instead of distrusting.”⁵⁵

The picture of Said Nursi at this juncture is further completed by part of a newspaper article by the writer Eşref Edip, who especially after the First World War was a close associate of Nursi. His magazine *Sırat-ı Müstakim*, later called *Sebilürreşad*, was one of the main organs of the Islamist press in the second constitutional period.⁵⁶

No one, and most of all the sultan, could at any time agree that there was even the smallest amount of disloyalty in him. They appreciated his excellence, his zeal.

He had come to Istanbul in order to open schools in the Eastern Provinces, to revivify education. He was a great cherisher of freedom, he had great courage and civilization. Think of the conditions of the time. What was the attitude of the palace toward the Namık Kemals, the Ziya Pashas, and other supporters of freedom? Nursi was far ahead of them as regards courage and fearlessness, patriotism, and love of freedom. The palace displayed great tolerance toward this struggle of his for freedom out of respect for his learning and virtue. But it was not possible to curtail his striving. His youth, his overflowing brilliant intelligence, his love of freedom, his combative spirit—none of these could save him from the consequences suffered by the other supporters of freedom.

He displayed such a degree of courage and boldness in the struggle for freedom at a time everyone was frightened to open their mouths and only hinted and made allusions that it was incomprehensible to them. It was only natural that for someone to arrive from the Eastern Provinces and display so much boldness when the palace and pashas were sovereign and held absolute

power would be met with astonishment and consternation. The despotic pashas, who looked on the people as their slaves, could see no other way of ridding themselves of him and regaining their comfort apart from saying: "To display this much courage is not conformable with sanity," and putting him in the mental hospital. That was why he was sent there.

What he told the doctor in the mental hospital left him in amazement; he was amazed at his intelligence and knowledge, courage and bravery. He understood why he had been sent there, and reminded Nursi of the refined manners of the age. He advised moderation, then begged his pardon.

Yes, this is the man they said was mad, this mad lion!⁵⁷

Freedom

How Nursi was delivered from his place of custody is not known. He may have been released pending his deportation back to Van, or he may have escaped on the way. Alternatively, he may still have been in captivity when the constitution was proclaimed, July 23, 1908, and been released when an amnesty was granted on July 26. However, since according to available sources the amnesty only came into effect two days later⁵⁸ and Said Nursi gave his famous impromptu speech, "Address to Freedom," on the third day of the revolution, it seems that this possibility is ruled out. It has also been claimed that Nursi was spirited out of his prison by CUP sympathizers and taken secretly to Salonica. There he is reputed to have stayed as a guest in the house of Manyasizade Refik Bey, who was minister of justice in the first cabinet following the proclamation of the constitution and was at that time chairman of the central committee of the CUP. Through him Nursi is said to have made the acquaintance of the leading figures of the CUP.⁵⁹ This is possible, and he may have returned to Istanbul on the restoration of the constitution. But for reasons that will become clear, it is preferable to treat this and other assertions of the same author with caution. Nursi must in any case have been in contact with members of the CUP in Istanbul, and it is known that he visited Salonica some time after the revolution, as is discussed below.

It should also be recalled that the situation in Salonica during the final weeks of the Hamidian despotism was extremely volatile and hardly favorable for entertaining guests and arranging introductions. Composed mainly of young officers from the Second (Edirne) and Third (Macedonia) Armies, as well as officials and professional people, the CUP was a still a clandestine revolutionary organization and suppressed, despite its strength in numbers. Sultan Abdülhamid's agents and spies must have been thick on the ground. Its leaders had emerged from all the above groups, principally Enver Bey, a major in the Third Army, and Tal'at Bey, chief secretary of posts and

telegraphs in the post office. Unrest had been mounting throughout the empire in the years preceding the Young Turk Revolution among all sections of the population due to deteriorating conditions,⁶¹ and in the army, particularly among its younger officers who had been educated in the new military schools.

The events leading to the forced restoration of the constitution began at the end of June, around the time the chief of police conveyed the sultan's orders to Said Nursi. In response to threats, Enver Bey and then a series of other officers, notably Niyazi, absconded with numbers of their men and arms, and took to the hills. The mutiny spread. Senior officers sent by the sultan to investigate were assassinated. There were uprisings in many places in Rumelia, that is, the Balkan provinces. Telegraphs were sent demanding the restoration of the constitution. Events moved swiftly. Finally the sultan relented, and ever unwilling to shed the blood of his subjects, on the night of July 23 agreed to reinstate the constitution. Thus, the Young Turk Revolution had occurred and had achieved its aim.

The new era was met with tumultuous rejoicing in Salonica and Rumelia, with the multifarious ethnic groups apparently reconciled and optimistically looking forward to being granted their demands by the new regime in return for their previous support. On every corner, speakers expatiated on the meaning of constitutional government to the thronging crowds, "spouting out the ideas of 1789."⁶²

Although in other parts of the empire Abdülhamid's censors at first prevented publication of these momentous events or presented the restoration of the constitution as a gracious act of the sultan instigated by himself,⁶³ in Istanbul, too, people thronged the streets, celebrating their deliverance from autocracy and despotism and embracing in love and brotherhood.

Wherever Said Nursi passed these days of powerful emotion and high hopes, without doubt he was affected and his enthusiasm fired.

"Address to Freedom"

On the third day of the revolution, when the rejoicing and celebrations had subsided, Said Nursi gave the first of many speeches and addresses explaining the meaning of constitutionalism and how it should be regarded. He said that if the Shari'ah was made the source of it, "This oppressed nation will progress a thousand times further than in former times."

Rather than being merely an ode in praise of freedom, the "Address to Freedom"⁶⁴ was primarily an introduction to these new ideas and an exhortation to adhere to Islam and its morality in the new era. With the advent of freedom, the Ottoman nation had been given the opportunity to progress and

establish true civilization as in former times, but this would only be achieved if the Sharī'ah was made the foundation of freedom. It pointed out the detrimental effects of despotism, on the one hand, and the possibilities for progress that freedom provided, on the other. Together with this, it constituted a program of what should be achieved and what should be avoided in order to preserve freedom and secure progress. In doing this it described some of the causes of the Ottoman decline.

Before giving some excerpts from the address, it should be noted that similarly to all the supporters of the constitution—members of the ulama⁶⁵ and other educated classes alike—Said Nursi did not hesitate to frame his ideas in the liberal concepts introduced to the Ottomans by Namık Kemal and the Young Ottomans, and perpetuated by the CUP, as has been noted above. But in addition to securing the unity and progress of the Ottoman “nation,” and arguing that the concepts on which this should be based are in essence Islamic, Said Nursi’s aims and goals were more comprehensive than those of the Ottoman intellectuals and thinkers, and, moreover, he strove for their practical application. That is to say, he believed as they did that Islam contained within itself all the requisites of progress and civilization, and he put forward many arguments supporting this, but he also an activist and initiated works that would lead eventually to its achievement. His ideas on educational reform and projects for the spread of education in the Eastern Provinces, which form a part of this, have been discussed. Other points should become clearer in the course of the following chapters. Another aspect of Nursi’s activism was his concern to involve the ordinary people in the constitutional order, an innovation. He also expressed its alien ideas in accessible language and presented them as a program that everyone could identify with and practice, at the same time as situating these in the wider Islamic context. All were departures from earlier thinkers and bear a stamp particular to himself.

Nursi prefaced the address with an apology. With his direct, lively, and picturesque style—which, he explained, like his own dress was contrary to “modern fashion,” since he did “not know *à la Turquie* tailoring that [he] might cut out a fine suit of clothes and make buttons for what [he] has to say”—he sought to engage his audience’s attention. He wanted his listeners to participate mentally in what he was going to say and impress on them that everyone would have to work now and pull their weight if the objectives of constitutionalism—progress and the rebuilding of Islamic civilization—were to be achieved.

O Freedom! . . . I convey these glad tidings to you, that if you make the Sharī'ah, which is life itself, the source of life, and if you grow in that paradise, this oppressed nation will progress a thousand times further than in former times. If, that is, it takes you as its guide in all matters and does not

besmirch you through harboring personal enmity and thoughts of revenge. . . . Freedom has exhumed us from the grave of desolation and despotism, and summoned us to the paradise of unity and love of nation.

The doors of a suffering-free paradise of progress and civilization have been opened to us. . . . The constitution, which is in accordance with the Sharī'ah, is the introduction to the sovereignty of the nation and invites us to enter like the treasury-guard of paradise. O my oppressed compatriots! Let us go and enter!

Having pointed out that sovereignty will now lie with the nation, Nursi went on to describe “five doors” that would have to be entered, or five principles to which the nation should be bound so that this paradise might be attained. The first was “the union of hearts.” This has been described as preserving the consciousness of the Ottoman Empire’s unity and integrity, especially in the face of the nationalist and separatist movements of the minorities. The second door was “love of the nation.” That is, the individuals who make up the nation being aware of their nationhood and nurturing love for one another. The third was “education,” which referred to the cultural and educational level of the nation being raised to a satisfactory point. The fourth was “human endeavor”—that is, everyone being guaranteed work and receiving fair recompense for his labor. And the fifth door was “the giving up of dissipation,” which meant giving up ostentation and extravagance, both on an individual level and as a society, since they caused discord and were a malaise afflicting state officials in particular at that time.⁶⁶

Nursi pointed out the harmful effects of the vice and immorality arising from despotism, material as well as moral, and said, “The voice of freedom and justice . . . raises to life our emotions, hopes, exalted national aspirations, and fine Islamic character and morality, all of which were dead.”

After immediately warning against killing these again “through dissipation and carelessness in religion,” Nursi predicted that unity, adherence to Islamic mores, and the successful functioning of the constitutional government, and genuine practice of the Islamic principle of consultation would result in the Ottoman nation soon “competing neck and neck with the civilized nations.” The metaphors for progress Nursi used in the passage demonstrate his own belief in science and technology.

Nursi laid great stress on the need to adhere to Islamic morality for true progress and civilization to be achieved and next voiced his constant fear that if freedom was understood as license, it would be lost and would result in a return to despotism, “for freedom flourishes and is realized through the observance of the ordinances and conduct of the Sharī'ah, and good morals.”

Nursi next warned against acquiring “the sins and evils of civilization” and abandoning its virtues. The Ottomans should imitate the Japanese in tak-

ing from Western civilization what would assist them in progress, while preserving their own national customs: “We shall take with pleasure the points of Europe—like technology and industry—that will assist us in progress and civilization. However . . . we shall forbid the sins and evils of civilization from entering the bounds of freedom and our civilization with the sword of the Sharī‘ah , so that the young people in our civilization will be protected by its pure, cold spring of life. We must imitate the Japanese in acquiring civilization, for in taking only the virtues of civilization from Europe they preserved their national customs, which are the leaven of every nation’s continuance. Since our national customs grew up within Islam, they should be clung to in two respects.”

By contrasting conditions under the old and new regimes, Nursi went on to describe five indestructible truths on which freedom would be established. They were as follows: the first truth was unity; the second, science, learning, and civilization. The third truth was a new generation of able and enlightened men to lead and govern the nation. Nursi described how with “the rain of freedom,” everyone’s abilities and potentialities, even those of common villagers, would develop so that “the vigorous field of Asia and Rumelia will produce the crops” of the brilliant and superior men so badly needed. “And the East will be to the West what dawn is to sunset. If, that is, they do not wither up by the languor of idleness and poison of malice.”

The fourth truth was the Sharī‘ah. Nursi explained: “Since the illustrious Sharī‘ah has come from the pre-eternal word of God, it will go to posterity.” For it was dynamic. The Sharī‘ah adapted and expanded in relation to man’s development. It comprised equality, justice, and true freedom with all its relations and requirements. The initial period of Islam was proof of this. Therefore, Nursi said, their unfortunate condition resulted from four causes: failure to observe the Sharī‘ah, arbitrary and erroneous interpretations of it, bigotry on the part of certain “ignorant externalist scholars,” and “abandoning through ill-fortune and bad choice, the virtues of Europe, which are difficult to acquire, and imitating like parrots or children the sins and evils of civilization, which are agreeable to man’s base appetites.”

The fifth truth was the parliament and the Islamic principle of mutual consultation (*meşveret*). In this complex modern age it was only through a constituent assembly, consultation, and freedom of thought that the state could be upheld, administered, and guided.

Nursi completed the address with three “warnings.” Firstly, state officials who were prepared to adapt to the new regime should be treated with respect and their experience benefited from. Secondly, the sickness afflicting the empire had spread from the center of the caliphate, from Istanbul, so “the three main branches of the ‘public guide’”—the scholars of the *medreses*, the scholars of secular schools, and the Sufis in the *tekkes*—should be reconciled. The third

warning concerns the preachers. Again, Nursi was urging them to renew their ideas and methods, and speak conformably with the needs of the times.

In connection with the second warning it should be noted that Nursi had pinpointed at an early date the problems arising from the introduction of the secular education system alongside the existent Islamic system, consisting of the *medreses* and the Sufi *tekkes*. He believed this bifurcation to be a major cause of the backwardness of “Islamic civilization,” and to have “shaken the foundations of Islamic morality” and “splintered the unity of the nation.” His aim with his plans for restructuring the educational system in the East was to reconcile and unite through education these separate streams, thereby reuniting the divided society within Islam and healing the breaches within the indigenous Islamic culture.

Salonica, the CUP, and Propagating Constitutionalism

Said Nursi’s first public speech, the “Address to Freedom,” marked the beginning of nine months of public life during which he energetically propagated his ideas on constitutionalism, particularly among the ulama and *medrese* students, on the one hand, and his fellow Kurds, on the other. Explaining its vital importance for the empire and Islamic world, he strove to win their support for the constitution and new government. This he did by mixing with both groups and giving lectures and talks, and by means of the press, which on the raising of censorship sprang into life and flourished. This period came to an abrupt halt with the revolt known as the Thirty-first of March Incident (April 13, 1909), following which Nursi was arrested, tried by the court-martial, acquitted, and released. A number of opposition newspapers were closed down and a new press law introduced.⁶⁷

Said Nursi published his first article, which took its title from the Qur’anic verse “Consult them in matters [of public concern],” (Qur’ān, 3:159) on August 6, 1908 in the first number of a little-known newspaper called *Rehber-i Vatan (Guide of the Fatherland)*.⁶⁸ If the paper was published in Istanbul, the likelihood is that he traveled to Salonica sometime following this. Current research shows that his next article appeared on October 2, 1908, in the second number of *Misbah*,⁶⁹ by which time he must have been back in Istanbul. During these first weeks of the revolution, he was clearly working closely with the CUP. Some of their leaders, the committee of seven, had left Salonica for Istanbul in early August. Among them were Tal’at, Jamal, Javid, and Rahmi,⁷⁰ who, remaining in the background in Istanbul, were to act as pressure group on the new government of established politicians.

At whose invitation Nursi went to Salonica to speak is not known, but doubtless for their part the CUP were keen to employ this eloquent supporter

of freedom from the ranks of the ulama,⁷¹ while Nursi would have missed no opportunity to put forward his case for adhering to the Shari‘ah to those who now held the fate of the empire in their hands. The CUP in Salonica were a “mixed bunch”; what unified them was their patriotism and desire to save the crumbling empire, and their belief that this could be achieved through reinstalling the constitution and setting up representative government. The majority of them being army officers, they had little experience of politics and political administration, and even when they forced the proclamation of the constitution they had no clearly drawn up political program;⁷² their circumstances disallowed their preoccupation with the theoretical side of reform.⁷³

For the most part they were secular in outlook, but both before and after the revolution they sought to legitimize constitutionalism by emphasizing its source in Islam and compatibility with the Shari‘ah, and they cultivated good relations with the ulama and learned establishment,⁷⁴ the great majority of whom supported it.⁷⁵ Initially, even the theorists from among the Young Turks, such as Ahmed Rıza and Abdullah Cevdet, who spent their years of opposition abroad in exile and were known for their espousal of positivism and other materialist doctrines, accepted the positive function of Islam in society.⁷⁶ As Nursi himself later wrote: “At the beginning of the constitutional period I saw that there were atheists who had infiltrated the CUP who accepted that Islam and the Shari‘ah of Muhammad contained exalted principles extremely beneficial for the life of society and particularly Ottomanist policies and who supported the Shari‘ah with all their strength.”⁷⁷

Although cracks in the CUP’s Islamic facade soon became apparent, Nursi seized the opportunity to achieve his goals, and “worked with all his strength to make freedom and constitutionalism serve the Shari‘ah.”⁷⁸ But again it must be stressed that while he continued to support members of the CUP who shared this end, he became a strenuous opponent of those of them who deviated from it.

Nursi delivered his “Address to Freedom” for the second time in Freedom Square in Salonica, “in the presence of thousands of politicians,”⁷⁹ presumably meaning members and supporters of the CUP. This may well have been part of a more extensive meeting or celebrations intended to consolidate the revolution.

One indication that Nursi did indeed fraternize with the CUP leaders in Salonica is the anecdote in his “official” biography about his meeting with Emanuel Carasso, the Jewish deputy for Salonica and founder and grand master of the Macedonia Risorta Masons’ Lodge.⁸⁰ No doubt wanting to find a way of influencing such a talent and using it for his own purposes, Carasso sought a meeting with Nursi. Nursi agreed, but the grand master left abruptly halfway through the conversation and confessed to those waiting for him outside: “If I had stayed any longer, he would have made a Muslim of me!”⁸¹

It was in these early days of the revolution that, back in Istanbul, Nursi also cooperated with the CUP in sending “fifty to sixty telegraphs” to the tribes of the Eastern Provinces from the grand vizier’s office (*Sadaret*), calling on them to recognize and support the new constitutional government. He told them: “Constitutional government and the constitution you have heard about consist of justice and mutual consultation as enjoined by the Shari‘ah. Look on them favorably and strive to defend them, for our prosperity lies in constitutionalism. And it was us who suffered most from the era of despotism.”⁸²

Given the widespread ignorance about constitutionalism in all parts of the empire other than Rumelia, one of the CUP’s first tasks, besides consolidating their power, was to enlighten as many of the population as means allowed concerning it. The telegraph system, which had been an important component of the apparatus of despotism, now came into its own for conveying happier information. Messages were sent all over the empire, together with representatives, to inform the people and drum up support .

Nursi’s close association with the CUP was not long-lived; like many people, he was soon disillusioned by the way events unfolded. It was chiefly with Enver Bey (later pasha) that he continued to have relations, for reasons we shall attempt to discover. Nevertheless, there were areas of their policies that he found acceptable and useful, or at least between which and his own ideas there were parallels. One of these was their adherence to the ideology of Ottomanism,⁸³ by which they hoped to achieve one of their two main aims, embodied in the committee’s name, Union and Progress. Ottomanism, first advanced by the Tanzimatists, was the ideal also of the Young Ottomans:⁸⁴ the union under the sultan’s sovereignty within the Ottoman “nation” (*millet*) of all the ethnic groups and religious communities comprising the Empire. With the formulation of this essentially secular ideology, the term “millet” had acquired a new meaning; the religious communities (*millets*) were now (also) called “elements” (*unsur*, pl. *anasır*) or community (*cema‘at*);⁸⁵ and their members were all citizens (*vatandaş*) of the Ottoman state with equal political rights, and members of the Ottoman “nation.” Once in power, the CUP intended to unite all the elements of the empire under a powerful central government, regardless of ethnic and religious differences. However, since Islam was the foundation of Ottomanism and the Ottoman dynasty was Turkish, the Young Turks⁸⁶ faced criticism from Europe and from the minorities themselves.⁸⁷ In the face of growing nationalism and separatist tendencies, it was thought to be impracticable, even “an impossible fantasy.”⁸⁸ Nevertheless, despite this and its final failure, Ottomanism found initial support from many quarters, including the minorities, and from activists like Said Nursi. By 1910, the CUP leadership were shifting their emphasis toward its Islamic component.⁸⁹ Then, following the Balkan Wars, currents among them embraced Turkish nationalism while retaining a commitment to Ottomanism.

Nursi Combats Disunity

The introduction of freedom of expression and of association after the thirty years of Hamidian repression and the end to censorship and repealing of the press laws led to an explosion of political activity. Hundreds of newsheets, newspapers, and journals appeared, representing views of all shades. There followed a rapid, unprecedented politicization of society as politics became the sole topic of conversation among all classes, even among artisans and porters.⁹⁰ Diverse interests found expression in the founding of a multitude of social, political, cultural, and professional clubs and associations.⁹¹ Opposition forces also soon made themselves felt through the clubs⁹² and the formation of political parties. The most prominent of these was the Liberal Union Party (Osmanlı Ahrar Fırkası), which with hasty preparations was the only party to challenge the new regime in the first elections at the end of 1908. Its leader was Sabahaddin Bey, a nephew of Sultan Abdülhamid and rival in their days of exile in Paris to Ahmed Rıza, the positivist who was one of the main ideologues of the CUP. Ahmed Rıza had arrived back in Istanbul to a hero's welcome and was appointed president of the Chamber of Deputies after the elections. While the CUP were committed to a policy of strong central government, Sabahaddin had developed what he believed would be the solution for the empire based on the totally opposite principles of "private initiative and decentralization." These ideas, which involved a devolvement of power from the government to the various religious and ethnic minorities, aroused extreme opposition.

An open letter to Sabahaddin entitled "Reply to Prince Sabahaddin Bey's Good but Misunderstood Idea,"⁹³ included in Nursi's first work, *Nutuk* (Speech), published in 1910,⁹⁴ illustrates clearly his views on this fundamental question, as well as showing his reasoned, and reasonable, approach.

In the letter Nursi points out that a federal system for the Ottoman Empire was theoretically acceptable, but because the level of development of the different religious and ethnic groups varied greatly, it was not practicable at that time. "Life lies in unity," he wrote. His use of scientific metaphors is interesting, indicating his wish to emphasize the importance of education, science, and progress.

Nursi likened "love of the nation" to the attraction between particles; just as the latter caused the formation of a mass, so did "love of the nation" result in the formation of a cohesive whole. It was by strengthening these bonds of unity and awareness and love of the nation that unified, "centralizing" (shared) principles could be applied and a harmony of progress be achieved. Nursi did not believe that ethnic differences should be erased; on the contrary, as we have seen, it was his view that the government should be working to raise all the elements of the empire to the same level through

programs geared to “the intellectual capacity, local languages, and national customs of each.” This would result in healthy competition, “the steam of the engine of civilizational progress.”

Quite correctly as it turned out, Nursi warned Sabahaddin Bey that the idea of decentralization and “its nephews,” the political clubs and organizations of the various minorities, would be transformed into a centrifugal force due to the conflict between the different “elements.” An upsurge of violence would spill over the vessel of “the extension of powers.” This would lead to autonomy and, by “rending the veil of Ottomanism and constitutionalism,” to independence and an army of small states. Then finally exacerbated by rivalry and the desire for domination, the results of inequality, this process would end in chaos. It was unthinkable in Nursi’s view, that the patriotism and nobility of so gifted and highly educated a person as Prince Sabahaddin would allow him to break up the empire, stir up discord, and destroy the future. Most members of the nation were believers in God’s unity, and as such were charged with establishing unity and cultivating love of the nation. Islam was sufficient. Solutions should be sought within the framework of Islam; he said, “If there have to be elements—*unsur*—Islam is sufficient for us as an element.”

Thus, for Nursi, unity (*ittihad*) took priority over everything; in the face of all the “centrifugal” forces, internal and external, that were working against the Ottoman Empire, intending to fracture it and split it up, its unity had to be preserved at all costs. Examination of his writings of the period shows that he emphasized unity on several levels. In his homilies and admonishments to his fellow Kurds, he urged unity, diagnosing internal conflict as one of their most serious, retrogressive ailments. That is, unity had to be established within the various groups of the multiethnic, multireligious empire; within the empire itself; and on the level of Islam. For Nursi, Islam and Islamic unity were integral parts of Ottomanism.

The basis of unity—and of progress and the whole structure of Nursi’s ideas related to freedom and constitutionalism—was the concept of “nationhood” (*milliyet*). Consciousness of nationhood gave rise to feelings of love, which in turn resulted in social cohesion, which allowed the possibility of progress. This was true on the wider levels as well. One of Nursi’s main criticisms of despotism was that it killed the sense of nationhood and bred hatred and division, thus obviating the possibilities of positive development. Thus, he uses both the term nation (*millet*) and its derivatives to refer to all three levels—that is, the component groups, the empire, and Islam—and he urges unity among all of them. The place of the non-Muslim minorities in this scheme is touched on later.

It was these ideas that Nursi strove to inculcate in the people with his writings and speeches. In his defense in the court-martial in May 1909, he described how he had toured all the teahouses and places frequented by the

twenty thousand Kurdish porters of Istanbul, and instructed them in simple language about constitutionalism and how they should benefit from it. They had three enemies: poverty, ignorance—of the “forty thousand [*sic*]” Kurds there were not forty who could read the newspapers—and internal conflict. What they needed were “three diamond swords” to combat these: national unity (that is, unity among themselves); striving and labor (*sa‘y*); and love of the nation (that is, love of the Ottoman nation). Stressing this latter, and perhaps also to spur them on, he told them that they had “courage and physical strength” to offer, while the Turks had intelligence and education: “[T]he Turks are our intelligence while we are their strength. Together we make a complete human being. . . . [W]e shall see only benefits, for the constitutional government is in truth government based on the Shari‘ah. . . . In unity lies strength; in union, life; in brotherhood, happiness; in obedience to the government, well-being. It is vital to hold fast to the strong rope of unity and bond of love.”⁹⁵

Again we note this unique concern of Nursi that the message of freedom and constitutionalism should reach the ordinary people, as well as his own exemplary practice of “love of the nation.”

The Kurdish porters also played an important role in the Austrian boycott. The first major blows to the empire under the new regime occurred soon after the constitution was proclaimed. On October 5, 1908, Austria annexed Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Bulgaria proclaimed independence, while on the sixth, Greece annexed Crete. In response to this, on October 10, the people of Istanbul declared a boycott, organized by the CUP,⁹⁶ on all Austrian goods and the places they were sold. Being “ignorant and naive,” the twenty thousand or more porters on whom the commercial life of Istanbul depended were open to provocation from various quarters, especially since the boycott continued for around five months.⁹⁷ But thanks to Nursi’s calming advice and counsels at that “time of confusion and high excitement,” the porters acted wisely and reasonably,⁹⁸ despite themselves bearing the brunt of the boycott.⁹⁹

The poverty and backwardness of the Eastern Provinces, which Said Nursi was striving to rectify through the introduction of educational reforms, the inclusion of modern science, and the spread of education, were severe enough to be frequently brought up in the Chamber of Deputies. In distinction to the other ethnic minorities, the Kurds’ problems were discussed in connection with the appalling socioeconomic conditions of the East. The illiteracy rate was also mentioned; “not even one person in ten thousand was literate,” and the deputies wanted funds to reduce the ratio to “one person in a thousand.”¹⁰⁰

Education was one reason for Nursi’s initial close cooperation with the CUP, since it was an area where their aims and objectives overlapped. The CUP attached great importance to education, more with a view to enlightenment and making “the Ottoman people more receptive to constitutional and

liberal ideas,” than merely to preparing future candidates for the bureaucracy and army, as their predecessors had done.¹⁰¹ They also instituted clubs in many places, one of the prime objects of which was to offer education to the public in religious and political matters.¹⁰²

Nursi Maintains Public Order

As the great effusion of optimism at the coming of freedom was transformed into disillusion and views and parties became more polarized, the situation generally became increasingly volatile and unstable. Nursi therefore did whatever he could to maintain public order and harmony so that constitutionalism could become established and its benefits be obtained. Some examples were given above; here are some more.

The famous owner of the *Mizan* newspaper, Mizancı Murad Bey, gave a public lecture in the Ferah Theater in Şehzadebaşı in Istanbul, the subject of which was the rise and fall of the Roman Empire. As the lecture progressed it became clear that Murad Bey, who had previously led the Islamist group of the Young Turks, was comparing the CUP and the government to the Romans. As his comparisons became more explicit, the CUP supporters in the audience started muttering in disgust. Murad Bey continued with this criticisms unperturbed, not wavering even when threatened by a man with a revolver. But when the muttering erupted into shouting and stamping, his opponents had their way and he was unable to continue. He withdrew into the wings and the curtain was lowered. But the hubbub did not abate. On the contrary, the audience, now divided into two camps, started pushing and shoving and flinging insults and abuse at each other. No one attempted to leave, and no one attempted to intervene.

Suddenly, someone sprang nimbly onto his seat and shouted above the din: “O you Muslims one and all!” It was Bediuzzaman. Having commanded the audience’s attention, he pointed out that freedom of speech had to be respected. It was shameful for members of a nation that had just proclaimed freedom and the constitution to exceed the bounds of good behavior in this way and prevent a speaker from lecturing. The religion of Islam also commanded that ideas be respected. He backed up what he said with verses from the Qur’ān and Hadīths, gave examples from Islamic history, and told them of how the Prophet Muḥammad used to consult the ideas of others and quoted some things he had said. Then he advised them all to disperse quietly and go on their way.

Nursi spoke so well and convincingly that no one objected. Even the toughs and rowdies who a few minutes earlier had been hurling invective and abuse said nothing. Everyone left the theater thoroughly subdued and contrite.¹⁰³

The writer of the above description, the journalist Münir Süleyman Çapanoğlu, had further memories from that time, which he related in an interview in 1972: “Certainly, [Nursi] was someone who knew his theories well and could defend them. He began way back at that time, in the constitutional period. He went at the same tempo, at the same speed, in the same direction, and defended the same ideas. They were frightened of him at that time the same as now, because whenever he came out onto the street he was immediately surrounded by a crowd.”

On being asked if it was his own students who flocked round him, Münir Çapanoğlu continued: “Both his students and the ordinary people. But mostly the people; they wanted to see him, they wanted to hear him speak. I myself witnessed this many times. He spoke beautifully. He spoke persuasively.”¹⁰⁴

Nursi also calmed a tense situation at a mass protest organized by the *medrese* students in Beyazid in Istanbul in February 1909. Traditionally, students of the religious schools were exempt from military service of any kind, but following the proclamation of the constitution the government had decided to introduce an examination on the pretext that the privilege was being abused. Students who passed the examination were to be exempt from military service, while for those who failed it military service would be compulsory. The students had organized the meeting ostensibly to protest at the very short time they had been given to prepare for the examination.

The meeting was becoming fairly turbulent by the time Nursi reached it. Well known to the students, he addressed them, explaining the authentic relationship between the Sharī‘ah and constitutionalism and pointing out that despotism could in no way be associated with the Sharī‘ah. In a short time he calmed the situation and prevented any serious disturbance from occurring.¹⁰⁵

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CHAPTER 3

Bediuzzaman and the Thirty-first of March Incident

Introduction

After nine months of CUP rule, increasing discontent found expression in the famous Thirty-first of March Incident.¹ Many aspects of this revolt, which started with certain sections of the army in Istanbul mutinying and continued for twelve days, have still not been brought to light. But what is certain is that for whatever reasons, the role in the revolt of the newspaper *Volkan*, of its owner Derviş Vahdeti, and of the *İttihad-ı Muhammedî Cemiyeti* or Muhammadan Union (for which the *Volkan* was the press organ) has been consistently exaggerated and possibly completely misrepresented. An attempt is made in the following account at least to draw attention to some of the main distortions, but it is not possible either to expose all the misrepresentations or to investigate the incident thoroughly.

Said Nursi played no part in the revolt; on the contrary, as far as he could he used his influence and reputation in persuading the rebelling soldiers to obey their officers and return to barracks, and to no mean degree was successful in this. Nevertheless, when order was restored on the arrival of the Operation Army from Salonica, he was arrested along with many hundreds of others and sent before one of the military courts. The reason for this was his involvement with the Muhammadan Union, which was accused of inciting the revolt. In any event, he was acquitted and released. His defense speech, with an addition that was instrumental in forty to fifty other prisoners being released, was published in 1911 under the title *The Testimonial of Two Schools of Misfortune, or The Court-Martial and Said-i Kürdi*. It had a second printing the following year.

The Muhammadan Union

Among the news carried by the *Volkan*, no. 36 (February 5, 1909) were three apparently related items. Firstly, the Freemasons had met in Müşir Fuad Pasha's house and expected to open a lodge three weeks later. Secondly, the

Muhammadan Union had been formed. Thirdly, “the sacred society,” presumably meaning the Muhammadan Union, was “displaying itself to the world” in response to the Masons going public.² Although it is generally thought that Derviş Vahdetî³ was the founder of the Muhammadan Union, in fact (as he himself explains at length in a series of articles in the *Volkan*, nos. 66–70 inclusive) he was introduced to it by a group of—to him—unknown people who wanted to use the *Volkan* as the Union’s publication. They claimed the Union had been in existence for ten years.⁴ He at first complied, but soon became suspicious and parted company with them, since their aim was “political reaction”⁵ and at least one of them was a former spy or detective.⁶ He then took on the Union single-handed. The *Volkan* bore the superscription “Publication of the *İttihad-ı Muhammedî*” with effect from no. 48, February 17, 1909, though the full versions of its manifesto and code of rules did not appear in the *Volkan* newspaper until March 16, 1909.⁷ The ceremony to mark its “official opening”⁸ took the form of a *mevlid*⁹ and was held at the later date of April 3 to coincide with the Prophet Muḥammad’s birthday (Rabi‘ al-Awwal 12, 1327). Nursi played a prominent role in the *mevlid*, which was held in Aya Sophia, delivering a sermon that lasted two hours. But first it will be useful to learn from Nursi’s address to the court-martial his reasons for joining the society, and how he viewed it.

“I heard,” said Nursi, “that a society had been formed called the Muhammadan Union. I was extremely anxious that certain people might act in error under this blessed name. Then I heard that upright people like Süheyl Pasha¹⁰ and Shaikh Sadık¹¹ had joined so as to make their actions more purely worship and follow the exalted Sunnah of the Prophet. They had transferred from that political society [CUP?] and cut their relations with it, and they were not going to interfere in politics. But again I was afraid, I told myself: ‘Everyone has a right to this name; it should not be appropriated [by anyone] or restricted.’ As for me, I belonged in some respect to seven societies because I considered their aims to be the same, and then I joined this [one (lit., “blessed name”)].”

Said Nursi’s first article for the *Volkan* appeared in no. 70 (March 11, 1909). In no. 68 (March 9), is an announcement calling its leading members to an extraordinary meeting, one of whom is Nursi, and in no. 75 he is listed as one of the twenty-six members of the Union’s governing body. It must therefore have been around this time, when Vahdetî was setting up the Union independently, that Nursi became involved with it. He continued: “However, I define the Muhammadan Union I belong to as follows: It is a circle bound with a luminous chain stretching from east to west, and from north to south. Those within it number more than three hundred million at this time. What unites this society and binds it is divine unity. Its oath and pledge is belief in God. Its members are all believers, belonging from the time of God’s

covenant with man. Its register is the Preserved Tablet. The Union's means of communication are all Islamic books, its daily newspapers, all religious newspapers whose aim is 'upholding the Word of God.' Its clubs and councils are the mosques, *medreses*, and Sufi *tekkes*. Its center is the two holy cities [Mecca and Medina], its head, the Glory of the World [the Prophet Muḥammad]. Its way is the struggle (*cihad-ı ekber*) of each person with his own soul; that is, to assume the morality of the Prophet (PBUH), to give new vigor to his practices, to cultivate love for others and, if it is not harmful, offer them advice. The regulations of this society are the Prophet's practices, and its code of laws, the injunctions and prohibitions of the Sharī'ah. Its swords are clear proofs, for the civilized are to be conquered through persuasion, not compulsion. Investigation of the truth should be [prompted] by love, while enmity should be for savagery and bigotry. Its aim is to uphold the Word of God. Ninety-nine percent of the Sharī'ah is concerned with morality, worship, the hereafter, and virtue. One percent deals with politics; let our rulers think of that."

Nursi then continued: "Our aim now is to urge everyone toward the *ka'ba* of achievement and perfections on the way of progress with an eagerness and desire of the conscience through making that luminous chain vibrate. For at this time the most powerful means of upholding the Word of God is through material progress.

"I am a member of this society. . . . I do not belong to the parties and groups that cause dissension."¹²

Nursi, then, was firstly concerned to prevent a society bearing the Prophet's name being appropriated by any group and, being exploited for political ends, becoming a source of strife and disunity. Rather, the Muhammadan Union embraced all believers and was a way of overcoming the serious differences that had developed between the various societies and political parties in the months of CUP rule—differences so bitter that it was to this—at least in part—that Nursi ascribed what he called "the great disaster," that is, the Thirty-first of March Incident.¹³

Nursi wrote: "Our Union's way is love toward love and enmity toward enmity; that is, to assist love among Muslims and defeat the forces of enmity."¹⁴ In fact he described the *İttihad-ı Muḥammedī* as *İttihad-ı İslam*, or Islamic Unity, that is, "the unity that exists either potentially or in fact among all believers."¹⁵ The unity and brotherhood of Muslims were "like hidden veins of gold in half the globe," and the Union in Turkey was "a new flame that had appeared in one corner of it and gave the good news of that mighty reality being wholly revealed." It had emerged from being potential to becoming actual and now sought to awaken other believers and urge them toward the way of progress through the drive of the conscience. Muslims had not realized that vast potential. Through neglect, the luminous chain of unity that had

bound the centers of Islam together had become inert; it had not been benefited from. Now it had to be brought to life and made to vibrate.¹⁶

The foundation of unity and progress and of the strengthening and liberation of the Islamic world was moral renewal, and Nursi saw the Union as spearheading a widespread movement for moral rearmament through putting new energy into observance of the Shari‘ah and the practices (*Sunnah*) of the Prophet. He stated: “The reason for our worldly decline was failure to observe our religion. Also, we are more in need of moral improvement than of government reform.”¹⁷

In these articles Nursi is explaining in greater detail the aims of the Muhammadan Union as they appeared in its manifesto and code of rules. In addition, the manifesto pointed out that at that time societies and parties of every shade and variety were being organized in different parts of the world, and stated that just as it was not injurious for a Muslim not to belong to the society, so also belonging to it did not form an obstacle to belonging to other societies, whether religious or political. Societies were necessary, because “the desired fruits can never be plucked from constitutionalism without parties and societies.” The Union recognized (“does not even look askance at”) the fact that under the constitution all citizens—that is, non-Muslims as well as Muslims—were equal before the law. Furthermore, the manifesto was at pains to point out that all its activities, and the activities it aimed to promote among Muslims, were to be within the law.¹⁸

The *Mevlid* in Aya Sophia

That a *mevlid* was being organized by the Union in Aya Sophia to coincide with the Prophet’s birthday was announced in the *Volkan* on March 31, 1909. It stated that the Union “had entered a new era of tranquillity and progress, having successfully surmounted all the attacks to which it had been subject and the crises arising from those attacks.” The *mevlid* was to be “a gift to Muhammad (PBUH)’s pure and unstained spirit.”¹⁹

The news of the *mevlid* evoked a tremendous response among the population of Istanbul, and something in the region of one hundred thousand people gathered on the specified day. Never before had there been such a throng in the area surrounding Aya Sophia. However, despite the numbers, no untoward incidents occurred either before or after the *mevlid*; the whole occasion was most orderly, “a display of Islamic brotherhood and decorum.” Derviş Vahdetî described Nursi’s arrival and address as follows:

Round about ten o’clock Bediüzzaman Said Kurdi Hazretleri arrived at the head of the Society for Students of the Religious Sciences (*Talebe-i*

Ulām Cemiyeti). We greeted him at the outer doors, where we were meeting all who arrived. . . . The turbans on the students' heads were white as light and enspiriting as flowers. But more than anything, it was the religious education they had received that gave the students an exceptional quality.

Since it was requested of him, "Our *Hazret*," that is, the Wonder of the World of Islam [Nursi], mounted the pulpit with that famous Kurdish dress and heroic manner of his and like always with a dagger at his waist, and standing, delivered an eloquent address.²⁰

Nursi began the address with the words: "The truth has risen naked from the grave of the heart. Let those for whom it is prohibited not gaze on it." And mentioning all the important political, social, and religious subjects of the time, he continued for two hours. In the words of one of those present: "The sermon Nursi delivered standing in the pulpit was a masterpiece."²¹

Derviş Vahdetî

Hafız Derviş Vahdetî,²² owner and founder of the *Volkan* newspaper, continues to this day to be something of an unknown quantity. While he is usually portrayed as a fiery fundamentalist firebrand²³ and radical reactionary, opposed to constitutionalism,²⁴ and even as a subversive and British agent,²⁵ from recent research these accusations appear to be false. He now appears more as a victim of circumstance who was made the symbol of the revolt and paid the consequences.²⁶ His articles in the 110²⁷ issues of the *Volkan*, the first of which appeared on December 11, 1908, belie his image as an inflammatory provocateur. Certainly his purpose was to present the problems of the day from an Islamic standpoint, to uphold the Shari'ah and draw attention to incidents associated with the new freedom of the constitutional regime that were understandably perceived as threatening to established norms, and to provide a forum for discussion; yet as a daily paper, the *Volkan* discusses current political issues and topical questions in a style and tone that can be described as generally moderate. One can perhaps detect a sharper tone in some articles, particularly as the political situation deteriorated after the forced resignation of Grand Vizier Kâmil Pasha (February 13, 1909) and the murder of Hasan Fehmi, the editor of the opposition newspaper, the *Serbesti* (April 6, 1909). As Vahdetî himself put it, the *Volkan* was "very small but active"; "moderation" was its "way." "However, when truth and right are attacked, it is not possible for the *Volkan* not to erupt."²⁸ Nevertheless, the paper was a staunch supporter of the constitution and included what can only be described as adulatory pieces about such members of the CUP as Enver and Niyazi, the "Heroes of Freedom."²⁹ However, it condemned Ahmed Rıza for reverting to

absolutism once he had secured a fine position for himself.³⁰ Moreover, it upheld the rule of law and unhesitatingly opposed the daily increasing despotism and unlawfulness of the CUP and its supporters.

The apprehension expressed by Nursi on hearing that “certain people” had founded a society called the Muhammadan Union refers to his anxiety that a society bearing the name of the Prophet Muḥammad should be involved in partisan politics or be limited to one group; the apprehension is not specifically about Derviş Vahdetî. He may also have heard about the dubious founders of the Union. Nevertheless, however much he shared the views expressed by the newspaper, he no doubt wanted to ensure it persisted in the moderation it claimed to be its way. For he was severely critical of the divisive role of the press in that period and on several occasions included in his articles advice as to how the newspapers should conduct themselves.³¹ But having said all that, it should be noted that at the end of one long article of the fifteen that appeared in the *Volkan*, Nursi wrote a brief reminder to Vahdetî advising him of his responsibility to be temperate in his writings, as Islam requires:

My Brother, Derviş Vahdetî Bey!

Writers should be mannerly, and their manners should be molded by the manners of Islam. The Press Law should be drafted by the sense of religion in the conscience, for this Islamic revolution has shown that what rules all consciences is Islamic zeal, the light of lights. Also, it has been understood that Islamic unity includes all soldiers and all believers. There is no one outside it.³²

This reminder appeared on the second day of the revolt and refers to the proposed Press Law, which had been the subject of debate in the press for over a month.³³ It is not clear precisely which of Vahdetî’s articles Nursi is referring to, but tension had risen sharply after the assassination of Hasan Fehmi, which may well have been linked with a demonstration of protest against the new law called by his newspaper, the *Serbesti*, and scheduled for the day after his death. His cold-blooded murder was thus a double blow dealt by the CUP at freedom of speech and association—for it was the CUP that was blamed for it—and caused feelings of outrage. Apparently, Nursi felt obliged in that highly volatile situation to remind Vahdetî that it was only by themselves sticking to their way of moderation that they could assist in calming the situation and establish the public order that was necessary for the “Islamic” constitutional regime to function—that is, for Islam to be an effective influence on lawmaking and other branches of the administration. Such anarchy and disorder would only work against this and serve the interests of those opposed to freedom.

Since by March 1909, along with the *Mizan* and other papers, the *Volkan* had taken up an open position against the CUP, it and the Muhammadan Union for which it spoke became the objects of much criticism. Speaking in the most moderate and reasonable tone, Nursi particularly sought in his articles to allay fears about the Union, explaining it in the terms described above. It is possible that in maintaining this even tone, Nursi was seeking to offset Vahdetî's more combative stance and to prevent the attacks being directed at the Muhammadan Union. Three of his later articles, appearing between March 31, 1909 and April 15, specifically answered criticisms, misgivings, and questions concerning it. The final two instalments of the third, "Lemeân-i Hakikat" (Dispelling Doubts in the Light of the Truth), appeared after the Thirty-first of March Incident had broken out, and this article may have been a reason for his arrest and arraignment before the court-martial. As for Derviş Vahdetî, he paid for his open opposition to the CUP: he was accused and found guilty of inciting the rebellion and was hanged along with twelve others on July 19, 1909.³⁴ Indeed, the Committee of Union and Progress well and truly took its revenge: the total numbers executed were 237.³⁵

Background to the Revolt

The CUP declared the Thirty-first of March Incident a reactionary movement³⁶ and held Sultan Abdülhamid responsible for it.³⁷ But while many factors have been suggested as contributing to the mounting anger against the CUP, the mutiny itself has not been satisfactorily explained. As has been noted above, a fair investigation of the sources suggests that contrary to what has been regrettably repeated in the majority of works mentioning the incident, the *Volkan* newspaper, and Derviş Vahdetî's writings in it, and the Muhammadan Union were not so provocative as to incite the revolt. The source of this interpretation appears to have been the CUP and its supporters, and its version of events has been the one most favored by successive writers. According to this, the revolt was reactionary in the sense of rejecting the liberal constitutional regime and seeking to return to the autocracy of Sultan Abdülhamid. However, as mentioned above, this was not the wish of members of the Muhammadan Union as expressed in the *Volkan*. Moreover, as a well-known historian has pointed out, the CUP labeled all their opponents "reactionary (*mürteci*)," and the word "reaction (*irticâ'*)" became synonymous with "opposition."³⁸

According to principal sources propounding the above view,³⁹ the revolt was fomented by the liberals (*Ahrar*) in league with the British and led by Vahdetî, who were then unable to control the course it took,⁴⁰ and was an

expression of the fierce political struggle against the CUP. Certainly the discontent was fueled by numerous sources, and it all served to strengthen the opposition. Another explanation, mentioned by Nursi himself,⁴¹ is that it was engineered by factions wanting to speed up secularization and Westernization and to eliminate the forces countering this, which would point the finger at the CUP. Other sources lay the blame at the door of the British Intelligence Service.⁴² Sources holding the CUP responsible show Vahdeti's role to have been minimal.⁴³ It is beyond the scope of this book to examine the incident in detail, but since both it and Nursi's role in it have been consistently misrepresented, we shall attempt to give a clearer perspective by including the following brief outline of its main causes and the course of events.

As has already been noted, when the high hopes and expectations engendered by the proclamation of the constitution were not realized, there was widespread disappointment and dissatisfaction. Disenchantment with the CUP increased daily as its true colors became more evident. Remaining in the background, it was not an official political party—it was only the day preceding the revolt that the CUP came into the open and announced that it had become a political party⁴⁴—nor were its members responsible to anyone, but their intervention in government affairs continuously increased. Furthermore, in contrast with Sultan Abdülhamid, they were inexperienced, and their refusal to admit to this contributed directly to the immediate loss of territory and the speedy demise of the empire. Censorship was abolished. The Unionists began a relentless attack on the sultan in the press. Claiming constitutionalism as their own, they tried to force their views on the people. Their autocratic tendencies became apparent. But the more they showed their true colors, the more mistrusted and unpopular they became, and the fiercer became the battle between the parties and societies. The press became the field of battle. In response, the Unionists resorted to covert and illegal methods in order to establish themselves more firmly, increasingly using force to eliminate opponents. They were intolerant of any opposition, believing themselves to be “the Sacred Society” (*Cemiyet-i Mukaddese*) and “the Saviours of the Nation” (*Munci-i Millet*).

The intimidation and political violence created an atmosphere of terror, and all the while those prompting it remained in the background. On December 15, 1908, one of the sultan's men, İsmail Mahir Pasha, was murdered. He was followed by others, including prominent journalists, one of whom was Hasan Fehmi Bey. He was the editor of the *Serbesti*, one of the loudest voices of opposition to the CUP. As mentioned above, the *Serbesti* had called for a mass demonstration to protest the proposed Press Law; it was to be held on April 8, the day after his death. But as fate would have it, it was his funeral that the large crowds attended.⁴⁵ An announcement for the demonstration for “freedom of the press” appeared in *Volkan*, no. 97 (April 7, 1909). His assas-

sination on the night of April 6/7, 1909 resulted in widespread, unanswered calls for justice. It was a return to despotism in a form worse than previously.⁴⁶

At the same time, the CUP started a drive to weed out government officials and replace them with its own supporters, whether experienced or not. There were substantial numbers involved, swelled by the thousands of redundant spies and secret agents of the former regime. The same policy was followed in the army. The officers were of two kinds: those risen from the ranks on their merit and experience, and those trained in the new military schools. The CUP started to replace the former with the latter, who were mostly CUP supporters. The numbers of those expelled from all sections of the army reached several thousand. Many of the new officers were inexperienced, and some of them were contemptuous of Islam and tried to prevent the ordinary soldiers carrying out their religious duties. Thus, dissatisfaction within the army grew to serious proportions—there had in fact been a mutiny in October 1908.⁴⁷ The expelled officials and officers formed a significant body ready to rebel against the government.

Then the proposed law related to the *medrese* students and military service had pushed another significant body of public opinion into the opposition camp. Also, there was a general feeling of affront and distrust among the people due to the CUP's lax attitude toward religion. Freedom had speeded up the import of Western culture, manners, and morality, and had led to a decline in moral standards. The known involvement of some of the CUP with Freemasonry⁴⁸ also added to their unpopularity.

And finally there was the extreme partisanship of the different parties and societies. The excessive and bitter war between the newspapers representing the CUP and their opponents continually exacerbated the situation.

The Revolt

The revolt broke out among one of the Light Infantry battalions that only a few weeks previously had been brought to Istanbul from Salonica as the defenders of freedom. One explanation for this unexpected turn of events is that the young, modern-educated officers had abandoned their men for "the heady political life of the capital."⁴⁹ It started in the middle of the night of April 12/13. Locking their officers in their rooms, the soldiers took control of the barracks, then poured out into the streets. As they made their way to Aya Sophia and the Chamber of Deputies nearby, the throng was joined by other soldiers, *medrese* students, and members of the public. The shout was for the Sharī'ah. It was daytime by the time they reached Aya Sophia. They surrounded the Chamber and presented their demands. These included the dismissal of the grand vizier, the war minister, and commander of the imperial

guards, the removal of Ahmed Rıza, who had acted as president of the Chamber since the proclamation of the constitution, the application in full of the Sharī'ah, the reinstatement of their expelled officers, and a guarantee that the soldiers who had taken part in the mutiny would not be punished.

In the meantime, the rebels had murdered one of the deputies, on the mistaken supposition it was the leading CUP journalist Hüseyin Cahid, and the justice minister, supposing him to be the grand vizier. The government resigned, and the sultan appointed a new grand vizier and minister of war. The rebellion continued; there was looting and some bloodshed. The offices of the CUP and their main press organs were sacked. All this may be seen as pointing to political motivation, and the Liberals as the force behind the revolt.⁵⁰ Rather than attempting to quell the disturbance—it was not supported by anyone of authority either military or civil—the CUP chose to send for forces from Salonica.

News of the uprising provoked a strong reaction in Salonica, which was still the center of the CUP. Spreading the news that the constitution itself was threatened, the CUP had no difficulty in mustering a force of volunteers consisting largely of bands of Serbs, Bulgars, Greeks, Macedonians, and Albanians. Regular units were in a small minority in this Operation Army. They were armed and entrained for Istanbul. The force gathered at Aya Stefanos, several kilometers outside the city, where Mahmud Şevket Pasha took command of it. On April 24, they took control of the city and the following day proclaimed martial law. On the twenty-seventh, Sultan Abdülhamid was deposed. With great insistence the CUP leaders managed to obtain the *fatwa* authorizing the dethronement from two religious notables—having failed to extract it from the Şeyhü'l-İslam.⁵¹ Then, having moved to Aya Stefanos in order to demonstrate their support for the Operation Army, members of the Chamber of Deputies and the upper house took the secret decision to depose the sultan, though they published a declaration saying their purpose was to save him.⁵²

When answering questions on this subject put to him by the tribes in eastern Anatolia the following year, Nursi said:

I observed a situation similar to this during the Thirty-first of March Incident. For Islam's constitution-cherishing, patriotic devotees were suggesting ways of adapting to the Sharī'ah the divine bounty of constitutionalism, which they knew to be the very essence of life, and direct those involved in government toward the *qiblah* in the prayer of justice, to uphold the sacred Sharī'ah with the strength of constitutionalism and perpetuate constitutionalism with the strength of the Sharī'ah, and to impute all the former evils to opposition to the Sharī'ah. Then supposing, God forbid, it to be conducive to despotism, those who couldn't distinguish right from left started shouting: "We want the Sharī'ah!" like parrots and in that situation

the real purpose could not be understood. In any case, the plans had been laid. So then a number of villains who had donned masks of false patriotism attacked the sacred name [the Shari‘ah].⁵³

Nursi is saying that plans had been laid to incite just such a revolt, and when the Thirty-first of March Incident broke out, it was exploited to the full in order to attack the Shari‘ah and reduce the power of Islam within the state. Indeed, the military courts set up afterwards have been described as “a cleansing operation,” and their purpose, not to carry out justice but “to eliminate a mentality and a system.”⁵⁴

Nursi Calls for Order

From his defense speech before the court-martial we learn of Nursi’s own movements during the revolt and how he did all he could to reestablish order within the army. He told the court:

I watched the fearful activity on the Thirty-first of March for two or three minutes from the distance. I heard numerous demands. . . . I understood the matter was bad; discipline had been breached; advice would have been ineffective. Otherwise, like always, I would have attempted to quench the fire. But the people were many, my fellow-countrymen heedless and naive, and I would have been conspicuous because of my undeserved fame. I left after three minutes and went to Bakırköy so that those who knew me would not join it. And I advised people who just happened to be there not to take part. If I had been involved to even the tiniest degree, my clothes would have shown me up, my unwanted fame would have attracted everyone’s attention. I would have figured very prominently. Indeed, I would have put in an appearance in Aya Stefanos and confronted the Operation Army, even if alone. I would have died manfully. Then my involvement would have been plain; it would not have been necessary to prove it.

On the second day I asked about discipline in the army, the source of our life. They told me: “The officers have put on soldiers’ uniforms and discipline has been maintained to a degree.” I asked also how many officers had been shot. They deceived me and said: “Only four, and they were despots. Anyway, procedure and punishment will be in accordance with the Shari‘ah.”

Also, I looked at the newspapers and they had made the uprising seem lawful. In one way I was pleased, for my most sacred aim is for the Shari‘ah’s rulings to be enacted in full. But I felt infinitely hopeless and saddened because army discipline had been breached. So I addressed the soldiers through all the newspapers saying:

“O Soldiers! If your officers are wronging themselves by committing some sins, through this insubordination of yours you are in one respect wronging 30 million Ottomans and 300 million Muslims and transgressing their rights. For the honour and happiness of all Islam and all Ottomans is at this time tied to your obedience. You want the Sharī‘ah, but through your disobedience you are opposing it.” I flattered their action and courage, because the newspapers—those lying interpreters of public opinion—had made us think their action was lawful. I made my advice effective to an extent by showing appreciation. And to an extent I quelled the rebellion. Otherwise it would not have been put down so easily.

On Friday [the fourth day of the revolt], together with other ulama, I went in among the soldiers who were around the War Ministry. I induced eight battalions to submit and obey orders. My exhortations showed their effect later.

Nursi then quoted his speech to them, which began similarly to the few sentences from his newspaper address to the rebelling soldiers quoted above, and pointed out that they were threatening Islamic unity and brotherhood through their insubordination.

You should know that the army corps resembles a huge, well-run factory. If one machine rebels, it throws the whole factory into turmoil. Private soldiers should not meddle in politics. The Janisseries testified to that. You say you want the Sharī‘ah, but you are opposing and besmirching it. It is laid down by the Sharī‘ah, and the Qur‘ān, and Hadīth, and wisdom and experience, that it is obligatory to obey trustworthy, religious, and just rulers. Your rulers are your instructors and officers.

Nursi then went on to say that they should obey the officers who had come from the new military academies, even if their conduct was partly unlawful. If a doctor or engineer committed a misdemeanor, it did not necessarily harm his professional activities; the same was true for these officers. The banner of divine unity was in the soldiers’ possession, and they were strong to the extent they upheld discipline and order. A thousand regular, obedient soldiers were equal to a hundred thousand undisciplined troops.⁵⁵

Arrest and Imprisonment

According to an eyewitness of the events, when news of the Operation Army’s mobilization in Salonica filtered through to Istanbul, representatives of the opposition newspapers met and issued a declaration calling on all the politi-

cal parties to unite. This was followed on Saturday, April 17, by a meeting of representatives of various parties, societies, and newspapers. Again they made calls for unity and declared their loyalty to the constitution. Some members of the opposition newspapers then left Istanbul in the face of the Operation Army's impending arrival.⁵⁶

It is possible that Said Nursi was among the latter, for it was at İzmit, at the eastern-most tip of the Sea of Marmara some 120 kilometers from Istanbul, that he was arrested on May 1, 1909. He must, however, have remained two days or so, since three of his articles (only one bears his name) appear in the final issue of *Volkan*, dated April 20.⁵⁷ His "flight" to İzmit is referred to briefly in a later work.⁵⁸ The news of his arrest was reported in the newspaper *Ceride-i Sofiye Gazetesi*, dated Nisan 18, 1325 (May 2, 1909). The announcement, at the top of the front page, states that Bediüzzaman Kürdî had been arrested in İzmit and sent by train to Dersaadet (Istanbul), and transferred to the Ministry of War.⁵⁹

Along with many hundreds of others—guilty and (mostly) innocent, high-ranking officers, civil servants, deputies, court officials, writers, soldiers, people off the streets—Said Nursi was put into the notorious Bekir Ağa Bölüğü (military) Prison, adjacent to the War Ministry in Beyazid. The numbers were so great—3,000, according to one report⁶⁰—that having packed the prison itself, the military authorities had to take over part of the barracks and other buildings and to pitch tents in the large square to accommodate the unfortunate prisoners. These were left unfed and untended and were subject to gross ill-treatment.⁶¹

An account by one of the prison's wardens-cum-executioners, called Cellad (Executioner) Hasan,⁶² gives valuable firsthand information about both conditions in the prison and its inmates. Its mention of Nursi also confirms some of his remarkable personal qualities—his composure and peace of mind, even in that grim place of torture under the shadow of the gallows; his compassion for other prisoners; and in truly generous fashion, his sharing his daily ration of a few olives with an unhappy pasha who had collapsed into incredulous abjection when faced with the reality of his execution. The end of Cellad Hasan's account supplies us with the additional information that "Bediüzzaman Shaikh Said" received on visiting days visitors who came no less than eight times to see him. They had kept him busy all day.⁶³ Among them was none other than Said's father, Sufi Mirza, who having received no news of his son for months had come all the way from Nurs to find him.⁶⁴

It was only Nursi's force of character that saved him from the torments inflicted on the other prisoners. Just for sadistic pleasure or to satisfy their desire for revenge, soon after his arrival two guards or soldiers entered his cell with the clear intention of molesting him. Filled with righteous anger, Said bore down on them, flinging invective. Unprepared for such a response, they turned tail and fled. Nor did they ever bother him again.⁶⁵

The Court-Martial

If further illustration is needed of Nursi's unwavering fidelity to the cause he believed to be the path of salvation for both the Ottomans and the Islamic world and his extraordinary boldness and courage in furthering it, his defense speech to the court-martial provides it. It is a statement of how he had served this cause since he had come to Istanbul, and at the same time forms a stinging condemnation of the CUP, the new despotism it was creating in the name of constitutionalism, and the military courts that had been set up in the name of justice following the Thirty-first of March Incident. Nursi had been held in prison for three weeks before being sent before the court-martial;⁶⁶ it was this, together with his experience of the mental hospital, which prompted him to deliver this attack on the CUP's betrayal of constitutionalism and gave the name to the speech when it appeared in book form. The basic lesson he had learnt from these "Two Schools of Misfortune" was "compassion for the weak and an intense detestation of tyranny."⁶⁷

Two military courts had been set up to try the hundreds of prisoners. The first, under the presidency of Hurşid Pasha, was, according to one commentator, staffed by honorable and fair-minded officers who would not allow the court to be made a party to injustice. The second, however, which tried Nursi, consisted of young officers who, solely to prove their loyalty to the CUP and to curry favor, dealt out death sentences to all and sundry, innocent and guilty alike, regardless of the law.⁶⁸ The day Nursi was brought before the court, the corpses of fifteen of its victims could be seen hanging in the square beyond the windows.

At the beginning of the hearing, Nursi was asked a number of questions put to all the accused, one of which was: "Did you want the Shari'ah? Those who did are hanged like those out there."

Nursi replied: "If I had a thousand lives I would be ready to sacrifice all of them for one truth of the Shari'ah, for it is the source of prosperity and happiness, pure justice, and virtue. But not like those who revolted want it."

Then he was asked: "Are you a member of the Muhammadan Union?"

To which he replied: "With pride. I am one of its most insignificant members. But in the way that I define it. Show me someone apart from the irreligious who is not a member."

Nursi told the court:

Pashas and officers! By way of introduction I say: the manly and brave do not stoop to crime. And if they are accused of it, they do not fear the punishment. If I am executed unjustly, I shall gain the reward of two martyrs. But if I remain in prison, it is probably the most comfortable place when there's a despotic government and freedom consists only of the word. To die oppressed is better than to live as oppressor.⁶⁹

The main part of Nursi's long defense consisted of a description of the eleven and a half "crimes" for which he had been imprisoned. These were his main activities in the nine months of freedom and were all in the cause of Islam and the constitution. They have mostly been described above, including his reasons for joining the Muhammadan Union and how he viewed it, and his movements during the revolt. He then declared:

I have done one good thing in place of all these bad deeds. I shall tell you: I opposed this branch of despotism here, which has destroyed everyone's enthusiasm and extinguished their joy, awakened feelings of hatred and partisanship, and given rise to the formation of racialist societies, whose name is constitutionalism and meaning is despotism, and who has besmirched the name of unity and progress. . . . Since I am pledged to true constitutionalism based on the Sharī'ah, whatever form despotism takes, even if it clothes itself in constitutionalism and calls itself that, I shall strike it wherever I encounter it. I think the enemies of constitutionalism are people who make others hostile to mutual consultation by showing constitutional government to be tyrannical, ugly, and contrary to the Sharī'ah.

O you who command! I had a good name and I would have served the nation of Islam with it; you have destroyed it. I had undeserved fame and I used it to make my words of advice acceptable to the people; I am pleased to say you have destroyed it. Now I have a frail life of which I am weary. May I be damned if I begrudge the gallows it. I wouldn't be a man if I didn't go laughing to my death. . . . You put me to the touchstone. I wonder how many of those you call the sacred party would emerge sound if you put them to the touchstone. If constitutionalism consists of one party's despotism and it acts contrary to the Sharī'ah, let all the world, men and jinn, bear witness that I am a reactionary!⁷⁰

Nursi also wanted to set the record straight concerning the Thirty-first of March Incident, discipline in the army, and the Sharī'ah and its role, which from the start had been misinterpreted and misrepresented by newspapers of both sides. The seven main reasons he put forward for the revolt were substantially the same as those given above.

Toward the end of his address, Nursi told the court that he was absolutely insistent on everything he had written in all his newspaper articles. Whether he was summoned to a court in the Era of the Prophet, or to one three hundred years hence, his case, "dressed according to the fashion of the time," would be exactly the same. "The truth does not change; the truth is the truth."⁷¹

Nursi expected to be hanged as a result of this court-martial, which for its evidence had relied chiefly on informers and denouncers. Indeed, he had asked the court: "The detectives now are worse than the ones before, how can

their word be relied on? How can justice be built on what they say?" On learning of the court's unanimous decision for his acquittal, Nursi expressed no gratitude. He turned and left the court on being released, then walked from Bayezid to Sultan Ahmed at the head of the large crowd that had gathered, shouting: "Long live hell for all tyrants! Long live hell for all tyrants!"⁷²

On Monday, May 24, 1909, the *Tanin*, no. 261, carried this announcement: "It has been verified that the denunciations of Bediüzzaman Said Kurdi were false, and that on the contrary, the above-named performed exceptional services in the setting up of the constitutional government, and has [therefore] been released."⁷³ Nursi's trial and acquittal took place the previous day, May 23.

In the published account of Nursi's defense, the section above, his eleven and a half "crimes," is followed by eleven and a half "questions." These, Nursi mentions in a note, he put to Hurşid Pasha, president of the first court-martial, the second day after his release, and subsequently many times to others.⁷⁴ The succinct questions point out that the majority of those involved were not blameworthy and suggest that injustices arising from CUP rule were the cause. These questions resulted in some forty to fifty prisoners being released.⁷⁵

The Thirty-first of March Incident was indeed as Nursi described it, "the great disaster." Whatever the CUP's role in it, it provided them with the opportunity they had been seeking. Firstly, they realized their long-held ambition to depose Sultan Abdülhamid. Immediately preceding the revolt, they had come out into the open and proclaimed themselves an official party. Then, following it, they disbanded the opposition parties, further reduced the powers of the sultan, and gained tighter control over the state. The same year they introduced a number of measures that restricted freedom to a greater degree than under Abdülhamid. The Muhammadan Union was closed down and disbanded; indeed, many of its leading members had met their end on the gallows of the military courts.

Nursi felt profound disillusion with Istanbul and its deceptively civilized exterior after what he had experienced in the short time he had been there. His gaze now returned to his native East. He wrote:

If civilization provides such a favorable ground for honor-destroying aggression and dissension-causing slander, cruel thoughts of revenge, satanic sophistry, and carelessness in matters of religion, let everyone witness that in place of this seat of malice known as the felicitous palace of civilization I prefer the wild nomad tents of the high mountains of Kurdistan, the place of absolute freedom. . . . I thought that writers' conduct should be worthy of literature, but I see some ill-mannered newspapers disseminating hatred. If that is how manners should be, and if public opinion is thus confused, bear

witness that I have renounced such literature. I shall have no part in it. In place of the newspapers, I shall study the heavenly bodies and tableaux of the world in the high mountains of my native land. . . .

Yes, I prefer the wild life to civilization that is thus mixed with despotism, depravity, and degradation. This civilization makes individuals impoverished, dissolute, and immoral, whereas true civilization serves mankind's progress and development and the realization of man's potential. In this regard, therefore, to want civilization is to want humanity.⁷⁶

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CHAPTER 4

The Future Shall Be Islam's

Nursi Heads East

By the end of May 1909 Nursi was free of prison and the court-martial. Despite his bidding farewell to Istanbul at the end of his defense and declaring that he was returning to the East, there now follows a period of nine or tenth months before he made his return journey to Van, about which to date no clues as to his movements have been found. He set out the following spring by way of the Black Sea accompanied by two of his students, stopping off, among other places, at İnebolu,¹ Of, and Rize.² In İnebolu, Nursi had a warm reception from one of its leading religious scholars, Haji Ziya, and on leaving was accompanied as far as the quay by a large crowd.³ On reaching Tiflis (Tbilisi), the capital city of Georgia, while making his way from Batumi to Van, Nursi made the following interesting observations to a policeman.

He had climbed a prominent hill known as Shaikh Sanan, which has a commanding view of the city of Tiflis and the valley of the River Kura in which it is situated, together with all the surrounding countryside. Plunged in thought, he was gazing at the view when approached by a Russian policeman. The following exchange ensued. It began with the policeman asking:

“Why are you studying the land with such attention?”

Nursi replied: “I am planning my *medrese*.”

“Where are you from?”

“I'm from Bitlis.”

“But this is Tiflis!”

“Bitlis is one of Tiflis's brothers.”

The policeman was bewildered: “What do you mean?”

Nursi explained: “Three lights are beginning to be revealed one after the other in Asia and the world of Islam. While with you three layers of darkness will start to be peeled back, one after the other. The veil of despotism shall be rent; it will shrink back and I shall come and build my *medrese* here.”⁴

This only increased the policeman's bewilderment. “I'm sorry for you,” he said. “I'm astonished that you should entertain such a hope.”

“And I'm astonished at your not understanding!” replied Nursi. “Do you think it possible for this winter to continue? Every winter is followed by spring, and every night by day.”

“But the Islamic world is all broken up and fragmented.”

“They have gone to study. It is like this: India is an able son of Islam; it is studying in the high school of the British. Egypt is a clever son of Islam; it is taking lessons in the British school for civil servants. Caucasia and Turkestan are two valiant sons of Islam; they are training in the Russian war academy. And so on. You see, after these noble sons of Islam have received their diplomas each will lead a continent, and waving the banner of Islam, their just and mighty father, on the horizons of perfection, they will proclaim the mystery of pre-eternal wisdom inherent in mankind in the view of pre-eternal divine determining and in the face of obstinate fate.”⁵

This short anecdote gives the tenor of Nursi’s main message for the tribes and ulama of eastern Anatolia, and of his celebrated sermon in Damascus early the following year—namely, encouragement and hope for the future. Despite his disillusion with developments in Istanbul, Nursi was unwavering in his conviction that constitutionalism was the way to further the cause of Islam and preserve the empire by securing progress and unity. Indeed, he predicted that according to all the signs, Islam and Islamic—or, true—civilization would prevail in the future, and that a large segment of mankind would accept and join the religion of Islam. He said: “In the future when reason, science, and technology hold sway, that will surely be the time the Qur’ān will gain ascendancy, which relies on rational proofs and makes the reason confirm its pronouncements.”⁶ While as a means of social mobilization constitutionalism and freedom constituted the remedy for the common people, Nursi had a whole set of proposals for the ulama, “the upper class” (*havass*) of Kurdish society, which aimed “to polish up Islam” and bring their thinking up to date. Moral renewal, hope, and unity were his main messages for the Arabs of Damascus, the third main group Nursi addressed on this trip.

Among the Tribes of Eastern Anatolia

On his return to Van, Nursi stayed for several months in the İskender Pasha Mosque, where he continued to teach.⁷ In the middle to late summer, he set off with a number of his students to travel among the tribes of southeastern Anatolia. “Making a *medrese* of mountain and plain,” he wrote, “I gave lessons on constitutionalism.” He found that the general understanding of the subject was “extremely odd and confused,” and therefore suggested the tribesmen ask the questions, which he then answered. He afterward made a compilation of these and published it in Turkish in 1913 under the title *Münāzarat* (*The Debates*). He also prepared an Arabic version with the title *Rachatat al-‘Awāmm* (*Prescription for the Common People*).

The questions cover a number of subjects related to freedom and the new regime, and its consequences for the tribespeople and their leaders. The answers constitute one of the main sources for Nursi's ideas on the subject, and form a substantial and fascinating work that deserves more attention than can be given it here. Some of his ideas relating to constitutionalism have been referred to in various sections above. Here a few additional points will be made, concerning its definition and relation with the Sharī'ah; then it will be explained further how, through the people "awakening" and becoming conscious as autonomous, enterprising, self-sacrificing individuals of their being members of the "the nation of Islam," the new order would secure the progress (in this instance, of the Kurds), and the unity of the Islamic world and the empire. But first it should not go unnoticed that Nursi did not spare himself in this struggle, nor did he restrict it to the pen or to the theoretical. He had pursued it as far as Istanbul, publicizing in particular the needs of the East and doing what he could to further his plans for educational reform. Now he had returned to his native country and proceeded to travel all over that wild, mountainous, backward, and impoverished region. And it was primarily the ordinary people he was seeking to address, the ordinary people who through the adoption of the constitution had been raised to the rank of "sovereign," and were the builders of the future.

In response to the people's first questions, Nursi gave contrasting definitions of despotism and constitutionalism:

Despotism is oppression. It is dealing with others in an arbitrary fashion. It is compulsion relying on force. It is the opinion of one person. It provides extremely favorable ground for exploitation. It is the basis of tyranny. It annihilates humanity. It is despotism that reduces man to the most abject valleys of abasement, has caused the Islamic world to sink into abjection and degradation, which arouses animosity and malice, has poisoned Islam—and in fact sows its poison everywhere by contagion, and has caused endless conflict within Islam by giving rise to its deviant sects like the Mu'tazilah, Jabriyyah, and Murji'ah. . . .⁸

Constitutionalism, on the other hand, was "the manifestation of the Qur'anic verses 'And consult them in affairs [of public concern]' (3:158) and 'Whose rule in consultation among themselves' (42:38). It is the consultation enjoined by the Sharī'ah. This luminous body's life is truth, instead of force. Its heart is knowledge; its tongue, love. Its mind is the law, not an individual. Indeed, constitutionalism is the sovereignty of the nation. . . ."⁹

Later, on being asked why he exalted constitutional government to the extent he did, Nursi replied:

When constitutionalism falls to the lot of a government, the idea of freedom awakens constitutionalism in every respect. It gives birth to a sort of constitutionalism in every area and walk of life, according to the calling of each. It results in a sort of constitutionalism among the ulema, in the *medreses*, and among the students. Indeed, it inspires a particular constitutionalism and renewal in all walks of life. It is flashes of consultation, then, hinting of the sun of happiness, and inspiring desire, mutual attraction, and harmony, that have caused me to love the constitutional government so much. . . .¹⁰

On being told, “Some people say [constitutionalism] is contrary to the *Sharī‘ah*?,” Nursi replied:

The spirit of constitutionalism is from the *Sharī‘ah* and its life is from it. But under force of circumstance it may be that some details temporarily fall short of it. All situations that arise during the constitutional period need not necessarily have arisen from constitutionalism. What is there that conforms to the *Sharī‘ah* in every respect? Is there anyone who follows it in every respect? Since this is the case, a government, which is a corporate body, will not be free of faults either. Only Plato’s imaginary virtuous city might be. However, with constitutionalism, the paths leading to abuses are mostly blocked up. With despotism, they are unobstructed.¹¹

Thus, Nursi’s approach can be seen to be realistic. While in essence constitutionalism did not differ from Islamic principles, the extremely difficult circumstances of the time demanded a measured and balanced approach. It was a question of “making constitutionalism conform to the *Sharī‘ah* meticulously and in a balanced manner taking into account what is required.”¹²

The tribesmen also asked questions about freedom, which had been described to them as license, dissoluteness, and laxity. Nursi offered them the following definitions:

Delicate freedom is instructed and adorned by the good manners of the *Sharī‘ah*. Freedom to be dissolute and behave scandalously is not freedom; it is animality; it is the tyranny of the devil; it is to be the slave of the evil-commanding soul. General freedom is the product of the portions of individual freedom. The characteristic of freedom is that one harms neither oneself nor others.¹³

Freedom is this: apart from the law of justice and punishment, no one can dominate anyone else. Everybody’s rights are protected. In their legitimate actions, everyone is royally free. The prohibition: “Take not one from among yourselves as Lord over you apart from God” (*Qur’ān*, 3:64) is manifested.¹⁴

That is to say, "Freedom springs from belief in God." For, "belief requires not degrading others through tyranny and oppression, and abasing them, and not abasing oneself before oppressors. Someone who is a true slave of God cannot be a slave to others." "That is to say, however perfected belief is, Freedom will shine to that degree."¹⁵

Nursi pointed out, too, that freedom was not to be absolved from all the ties of social life and civilization: "Rather, what shines like the sun, is the beloved of every soul, and is the equal of the essence of humanity is that freedom which is seated in the felicitous palace of civilization and is adorned with knowledge, virtue, and the good conduct and raiment of Islam."¹⁶

Nursi was asked by the tribesmen why they had not seen the many benefits he described. He replied that it was problems associated with the area such as ignorance, poverty, internal enmity, and lack of civilization that was preventing it. What he wanted to make plain was that the onus lay with them, but added that he only pointed out their faults "to deliver them from laziness." "If you want constitutionalism to come quickly, build a railway out of learning and virtue so that it can mount the train of attainment and achievement called civilization, and riding on the seeds of progress, surmount the obstacles in a short time and greet you. However quickly you build the railway, that is the speed it will come."¹⁷

It is appropriate here to relate the following anecdote: during his travels through the region, Nursi had arrived at Urfa from Diyarbakır. He then set out to make a tour of the surrounding area and, returning to Urfa, addressed a large gathering in the courtyard of the Yusuf Pasha Mosque. He began his address by describing how in one of the places he had visited, a villager he had questioned on the state of local agriculture had replied "Our *ağa* [feudal landlord or tribal chief] knows" to whatever he was asked. Nursi had told him: "Well, in that case, I shall talk with your intelligence, which is in your *ağa*'s pocket!" and had proceeded to explain that he should not refer everything to the *ağa* but should be enterprising and have initiative, and himself be informed about all the matters related to the village. He made this the basis of his address.¹⁸

It can be seen from these examples that Nursi wanted to impress on the people that the way forward now lay in their own hands. The sovereignty of the nation was this. When asked about the position of their chiefs and leaders—for traditionally tribal society had been dominated by the chiefs, elders, and religious figures—he replied as follows:

Every era has its own rule and ruler. According to your terminology, an *ağa* was necessary to make the machine of the former era run. Thus, the era of despotism's immaterial rule was force; whoever had a sharp sword and hard heart rose. But the era of constitutionalism's spring, spirit, force, ruler, and

ağa is truth; it is reason, knowledge, the law, and public opinion. Whoever has a sharp mind and luminous heart will rise, and only he. Since knowledge increases as it advances in years, and force decreases, medieval governments, which rely on force, are condemned to extinction. Since governments of the modern age rely on science, they shall manifest immortal life.

Nursi was not attacking the chiefs and elders as such by speaking like this, but describing the way the modern world was taking, and the way they, too, had to take if they were not to remain outside the stream of time. Under the new order, leaders were the servants of the people and the nation. He continued: "O Kurds! If through relying on force their swords are sharp, your *beys* and *ağas*, and even your shaikhs, will of necessity fall. And they will deserve it. But if, relying on reason in place of compulsion, they employ love and make the emotions subject to the mind, they will not fall; indeed, they will rise."¹⁹

In another place in the work we learn of the main criticism Nursi was leveling at the chiefs, though here he specifies that it is at the former chiefs that he is "throwing his stone," and describes it as another of "the evils of despotism." This was that "certain chiefs, and some impostors who posed as patriots sacrificing themselves for the nation, and certain unqualified, phony shaikhs who claimed exceptional spiritual powers" had drained the nation of material and moral resources, thereby extinguishing the sense of nationhood, and breaking up and destroying the collectivity of the nation.²⁰ This idea of the collectivity, or the "collective personality" or "corporate identity" (*şahs-ı mânevî*) of a nation or social body, is frequently encountered in Nursi's writings. He described the modern age as "the age of the group or social body (*cemaat*). . . . If the 'collective personality,' which is the spirit of a social body, is righteous, it is more brilliant and complete [than that of an individual]. But if it is bad, it is exceedingly bad."²¹ That is to say, Nursi is explaining to the people of eastern Anatolia that what falls to them now is to transcend their narrow traditional interests and loyalties, expand their ideas, and develop a consciousness of Islamic nationhood. He told them:

If only those who hold their lives in little account for some benefit, or minor matter of reputation, or imaginary glory, or to hear the words: 'So and so's a brave hero,' or to uphold the honour of their *ağas* were to awake, would they not hold their lives in little account, and thousands of souls too if they possessed them, for the nation of Islam, which is worth treasures; that is, the nation of Islam which gains them the brotherhood and moral assistance of three hundred million Muslims?

Nursi went on to say that the willingness to sacrifice one's life for one's nation was essentially part of the high morality of Islam and a requirement of

it, and it had been stolen from them by non-Muslims. It was the foundation of modern progress. He continued: "We must declare with our spirits, lives, consciences, minds, and all our strength: 'If we die, Islam, which is our nation, lives; it will live for ever. Let my nation be strong and well. Reward in the hereafter is enough for me. My life as part of the nation will make me live; it will make me happy in the world above.'"²²

To recapitulate: with "the destruction of the barrier of despotism," constitutionalism and the idea of freedom had spread throughout the Islamic world and had caused a thorough awakening, and had brought about progress in ideas and great changes. This was because it had "showed up the existence of the nation," and in turn, "the luminous jewel of Islam within the shell of nationhood had begun to be manifest." Islam was vibrating, stirring to life. This had made it clear to all Muslims that each was not isolated and disjoined, but connected to all the others through shared interest and fellow-feeling. The whole Islamic world was bound together like a single tribe. This vibrating was also making Muslims aware that they had at their disposal a source of great strength and support. This had given birth to hope, which had revived their morale, previously destroyed by despair.²³

It may be seen from this why Nursi was insistent on the present regime, despite the objections that could legitimately be raised concerning the CUP. He answered the uncertainties and objections put to him by the tribesmen, pointing out that it was "the lesser of two evils" and that "if consultation now deviates from the Sharī'ah by one finger, formerly it did so by one hundred yards."²⁴ Also through explaining it in this way, he allayed their fears concerning religion, which they had understood to be under threat from the revolution. On the contrary, constitutionalism was the way to protect Islam. The feeling for Islam and sense of religion that lay behind the public opinion of the nation was a much surer, more effective, and exalted way to protect religion than leaving it to "an unhappy, defeated sultan, or sycophantic officials, or a few unreasonable policemen."²⁵

Questions on Minority Rights

As is to be expected, the tribesmen asked a number of questions concerning the Armenians, and non-Muslims generally, and the conformity with the Sharī'ah of their gaining equality of rights under the constitution. Two points may be noted here. One is that again there are similarities between Nursi's approach and that of the CUP. For in their concern to keep the empire together by forging a unity of all the elements of which it consisted, the ideology of Ottomanism, the Young Turks laid great emphasis on the equality of all the different communities.²⁶ They also persisted in maintaining after the

Constitutional Revolution the dialogue and relations with the Armenian Tashnakzutyoun they had engaged in before it.²⁷ This continued till the First World War and the Armenians' large-scale collaboration with the invading Russians, as well as their inciting widespread revolts. Nursi was not involved with this cooperation with the Armenians, but from his replies to the tribesmen it is clear that he believed their rights and equality should be recognized.²⁸

The second point to note is Nursi's extraordinary humanity and compassion, which he showed for the weak and oppressed of all religions and classes and which was especially evident during the horrors of the First World War, as is described below. This too must have colored his views. It should be said, though, that he extended his compassion only to the innocent, not to aggressors. A few of his answers are as follows. He supported all his arguments with principles taken from the Sharī'ah.

To put the questions in context it should be remembered that although the Armenian *millet(s)* had been a part of the Ottoman Empire for centuries, and many of the Armenians continued to be loyal to it despite the rise of nationalist sentiments, following the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78, the Russians, supported by the British, intensified their policy of inciting them to revolutionary acts of terrorism against the Ottoman state as a way of further dismembering it.²⁹ The acts of terrorism and slaughter were carried out primarily for propaganda purposes: by provoking retaliatory attacks by the Muslims, the Armenians intended to portray themselves as innocent victims and thus to ignite European feeling against the Turks and gain support for the setting up of an Armenian state in eastern Anatolia, and even to force Russia and Britain to intervene in their support.³⁰

After listening to Nursi's definitions of freedom, the tribesmen accepted it as a good thing, but said that the Greeks' and Armenians' freedom seemed to them to be "ugly" and made them think. They wanted to learn Nursi's opinion. His reply was in two parts: "Firstly, their freedom consists of leaving them in peace and not oppressing them. And this is what the Sharī'ah enjoins. More than this is their aggression in response to your misdeeds and craziness, their benefiting from your ignorance."³¹ It may be understood from this that again Nursi was impressing on the Kurds that their real enemy was the situation into which they had fallen: "Also, our enemy and what is destroying us is Ağa Ignorance, and his son, Poverty Efendi, and grandson, Enmity Bey. Even if the Armenians have opposed us in hatred, they have done so under the commandership of these three corrupters."³²

In the second part of his answer to the question, Nursi pointed out that even if the Armenians' freedom was as bad as they thought, Muslims still do not cause harm. The Armenians and the total number of non-Muslims in the empire were relatively few compared with the whole Muslim nation of more than three hundred million. And these three hundred million had been bound

with “three dreadful fetters of despotism” and were being “crushed, captive under the Europeans’ tyranny.” “Thus,” continued Nursi, “the non-Muslims’ freedom, which is one branch of our freedom, is the bribe for [the price of] the freedom of all our nation [the Islamic world]. It is the repeller of that despotism, and the key to those fetters. It is the raiser of the dreadful tyranny the Europeans have made descend on us.” Nursi considered they could afford this price, for as we have seen, “the Ottomans’ freedom is the discloser of mighty Asia’s good fortune. It is the key to Islam’s prosperity. It is the foundation of the ramparts of Islamic unity.”⁷³³

Nursi Addresses the Generations of the Future

Nursi’s eyes were on the future. It was a time of defeat for the Islamic world, a period of regression and darkness. But he knew the spring would come, and a golden age would dawn bringing true happiness, progress, and civilization for mankind. This return to life had begun. Flashes of light, signs of life, could be seen. Nursi’s view was so clear, he became impatient with the reluctance of the tribesmen to grasp it; rather, he expressed his impatience with his contemporaries generally:

Why should the world be the world of progress for everyone else and the world of decline and retrogression only for us? Is that the case? See, I shall not speak to you, I am turning this way; I shall speak to the people of the future:

O you Saids, Hamzas, Ömers, Osmans, Tahirs, Yusufs, Ahmeds and the rest of you who are hidden behind the high age of three centuries hence, and listening silently to my words, watch us with a secret, unseen gaze! I am addressing you! Raise your heads and say: “You are right!” It is incumbent on you to say it. Let these contemporaries of mine not listen if they do not wish. I am speaking to you over the wireless telegraph that stretches from the valleys of the past called history to your elevated future. What should I do? I was hasty, I came in winter, but you will come in a paradise-like spring. The seeds of light sown now will open as flowers in your ground. And we await this from you as the recompense for our service that when you come to go to the past, pass by my grave, and place a few of those gifts of spring by the citadel of Van, which is the gravestone of my *medrese* and houses my bones, and is the custodian of the Horhor’s earth. We shall warn the custodian; call, and you will hear the cry: “Good health to you.” . . . If they wish, let the children who have sucked milk together with us at the breast of this age and whose eyes look behind them at the past, and whose imaginings are disloyal and alienated like themselves, fancy the truths of this book to be

delusions. Because I know that with you the matters in this book will prove to be true. O my listeners! I am indeed shouting, for I am standing at the top of the minaret of the thirteenth century [of the Hijra], and calling to the mosque those who in ideas are in the deepest valleys of the past.

O you miserable two-footed mobile mausoleums who have left Islam, which is like the spirit of the two lives! Do not stop at the door of the generation that is coming. The grave awaits you. Retreat into it and let the new generation come forth, which will wave the reality of Islam over the universe in earnest!³⁴

Prescription for the Ulama

As noted above, Nursi's peregrinations of "forty to fifty days" among the tribes produced two fruits. His *Münāzarat (Debates)*, addressed the common people and set out what amounted to a series of radical ideas and proposals that could effectively thrust the Kurdish tribesmen into the twentieth century and make them active participants in their own social, economic, and political development and in the modernization of the Islamic "nation." The second work, called in the original Arabic *Sayqal al-Islām (Burnisher of Islam)* or *Rachatat al-Ulama (Prescription for the Ulama)*, addressed the ulama. Its Turkish version, called *Mukākemat (Reasonings)*, was published in 1911. This is another highly original work; it consists of three main sections, which Nursi "wrote to set out the principles of Qur'anic exegesis (*tefsir mukaddemesi*)."³⁵ In it he identifies some of the matters obscuring "the reality of Islam," such as Isrā'iliyāt and ancient Greek philosophy, which had kept his contemporaries in the Middle Ages and prevented their progress. In the first part he sets out a number of principles "to polish" Islam and clean it of those accretions. The second part is an "exposition of several matters related to the spirit of rhetoric [or eloquence]," for "the key to the miraculousness (*i'jāz*)" of the Qur'an was to be found "only in the mine of Arabic rhetoric, not in the workshop of Greek philosophy."³⁶ The third part, which was unfinished, sets out proofs and evidence for the four main "aims" of the Qur'an: proof of the Maker, prophethood, bodily resurrection, and justice. Nursi's proposition is that since the future (by which he means the present) will be the age of reason and wisdom, "the reality of Islam (Islam, Islam without accretions)" will prevail and reign supreme. As the New Said, with hindsight, Nursi understood that at that time—due to his desire "to dispel the believers' despair"—he had misinterpreted this certain conviction because he had conceived of it as being realized "very extensively, in the realm of politics and Islamic society,"³⁷ whereas then (in the 1930s and 1940s) it was being achieved in respect of belief (*īmān*) with the *Risale-i*

Nur. Nevertheless, it will be useful to look briefly at the arguments he puts forward in *Muhākemat* to support his conviction.

Nursi explains that what gives him the courage to challenge the ideas of the past—which, as mentioned above, had become interlarded with various matters extraneous to Islam, which they then obscured—is his firm belief that “Truth will grow and flourish.”³⁸ This is because the present is the age of reason (*‘aql*). And “ideas, reason, truth, and wisdom produce the steam of scientific truths, which constantly pour down as rain on the plains of the present and mountains of the future.”³⁹ The main obstacle that in the past had prevented “the absolute triumph” of the Sharī‘ah was “the imagined clash and contradiction” between “some questions of science and some outward matters of Islam.” Through stimulating the desire to discover the truth and provoking love of humanity and the inclination to be fair-minded, science and education had overturned, and were overturning, that obstacle.⁴⁰ Thus, partly in the present and wholly in the future, through the positive influence of science, “truth would prevail over force, proof over sophistry, reason over instinct . . . and thought over emotion.”⁴¹ Continuing, Nursi asserts that “what has . . . cast Christians and their likes down into the valleys of misguidance is only their dismissal of reason, rejection of proof, and blind imitation of the clergy.” “[W]hat constantly makes manifest Islam and discloses its truths relatively to the development of human thought is its being founded on truth, girded with proof, its consulting with reason, being seated on reality, and its being in conformity with . . . wisdom.”⁴² As was pointed out in Nursi’s “Address to Freedom,” the Sharī‘ah, by which is meant the whole body of Islamic teachings, is therefore dynamic; it adapts and expands in relation to human progress.

Thus, underlying Nursi’s assertion that Islam would dominate the future is the concept of progress. For him, this is a universal concept not limited to the world of humanity; it is a law that is in force both in the universe and in man, since “he is a part and fruit of the world.” This is because in both there is a desire for or inclination toward being perfected (*meyl-i istikmal*) and for progress, and it is that inclination which makes beings subject to the law.⁴³

Moreover, there is a congruence and correspondence between the natural laws and the principles of the Qur’ān. This is expressed in terms of the well-known Sharī‘ah, which orders man’s voluntary actions, and the Sharī‘ah of Creation, which “consists of the theoretical laws in force in the universe.”⁴⁴ According to Nursi, the truths of the Sharī‘ah comply with the sensitive laws in force in creation to such a degree that they preserve the balance of those (natural) laws.⁴⁵ It is because of this congruence that the Qur’ān is “the absolute guarantor of mankind’s social order and balance, and its progress.”

This, then, is a brief outline of the theoretical basis of Nursi’s proposition. The “Damascus Sermon” contains further arguments.

The “Damascus Sermon”

In the autumn of 1910, Nursi moved south, and until the following spring made “a winter journey through the Arab lands,” continuing “to give lessons on constitutionalism.”⁴⁶ He passed through Diyarbakır, Urfa, and Kilis, where he is said to have stayed in the Şeyh Efendi Tekke.⁴⁷ At some point he arrived in Damascus, where he stayed as a guest in the Salhiyyah district at the foot of Jabal Qaşyūn. It is here, where there was a sizable community of Kurds and Turks, that Mawlānā Khālid Baghdādī is buried.⁴⁸ According to one report, it had originally been Nursi’s intention to travel on to Cairo to inspect Azhar University at close quarters, but he gave up the idea when he found that the Damascus ulama were all Azhar graduates and could give him the information he sought.⁴⁹ Another version says that he had intended to make the Hajj that year (‘Īd al-Aḏḥa fell on November 21, 1910), but was unable to make it.⁵⁰ If Nursi’s past record is anything to go by, he had extensive debates and discussions with the ulama of this important center of Islamic learning. At any rate, it was on the insistence of the ulama that in the spring of 1911 he gave his famous “Damascus Sermon” in the Umayyad Mosque. His fame must have been considerable, for close to ten thousand people, including one hundred ulama, packed into the historic building to listen to him.⁵¹ The text of the sermon was afterward printed twice in one week.

Although Nursi’s sermon was designed, by setting out arguments proving the imminent rise of Islam, to counter the “despair” he diagnosed as being the affliction most detrimental to its present advance, and emphasized moral regeneration as essential to achieving this, it will be useful to include a few brief facts about the political situation in this Arab province of the empire, which was marked by growing unrest.

Even by 1910 the Young Turks were admitting privately that their pivotal policy of Ottomanism was unworkable, but contrary to what is often written, this took them not to Turkish nationalism but, following the loss of Libya and the Balkan provinces, to emphasize Islamic unity.⁵² Though there were Arabs in both the CUP and the opposition parties when they were formed, dissatisfaction with the government was due mostly to its centralizing policies, to what were perceived as the privileged position of Turks in officialdom, to the CUP’s anti-Islamic attitudes, and to the impiety of some officials.⁵³ The years 1910–11 witnessed a slowly growing antipathy toward the Turks by Arabs, one reason for which was the introduction of the Turkish language in all branches of government and the judiciary, in some instances replacing Arabic. The primary purpose of this was to reinforce the empire’s unity. During the winter of 1910–11, when Nursi was in Damascus, several factors exacerbated the unrest. Among these were the increased opposition to the central government, voiced by the press “in an anti-Turkish idiom”,⁵⁴ the unusually

severe winter; and the issue of Zionist settlement in Palestine. There was considerable alarm at the sale of land to settlers.⁵⁵ It seems fair to say, therefore, that Nursi was restating in a different form his themes of progress, unity, and, to a lesser extent, constitutional government as an antidote to all these disintegrative forces.

Nursi's sermon took the form of six "Words" taken from "the pharmacy of the Qur'an," which constituted the cure or medicine for the "six dire sicknesses" that he had diagnosed as having arrested the development of the Islamic world. He described it as follows:

In the conditions of the present time in these lands, I have learnt a lesson in the school of mankind's social life and I have realized that what has allowed Europeans to fly toward the future on progress while it arrested us and kept us, in respect of material development, in the Middle Ages are six dire sicknesses. The sicknesses are these:

Firstly, the coming to life and rise of despair and hopelessness in social life. Secondly, the death of truthfulness in social and political life. Thirdly, love of enmity. Fourthly, not knowing the luminous bonds that bind the believers to one another. Fifthly, despotism, which spreads like various contagious diseases. And sixthly, restricting endeavor to what is personally beneficial.⁵⁶

Nursi had started by quoting the verse "Do not despair of God's mercy" (Qur'an, 39:53), and the Hadith: "I came to perfect good moral qualities," which provide the theme of the six "Words" of which the sermon is composed. The first Word is "Hope"; it will be worth describing it in some detail, for in it Nursi set forth further reasons for his optimism concerning the future of the Islamic world. It consists of "one and a half preliminary arguments" to support his "firm conviction" that "the future shall be Islam's and Islam's alone, and the truths of the Qur'an and belief shall be sovereign." The premise of his arguments is that "the truths of Islam possess a perfect capacity to progress both materially, and in moral and nonmaterial matters."⁵⁷ The first aspect is progress in moral and nonmaterial matters, and contains five or six main points.

Nursi begins by citing a famous remark by the Japanese commander-in-chief that in distinction to other religions, Islam has the capacity to progress and comprises everything necessary to achieve true civilization. It is significant that this acute observation was made not only by a non-Muslim, but by a Japanese. The Japanese, as mentioned, were held up by many supporters of constitutionalism as exemplary in their taking only science and technology from the West in their drive for progress and civilization while retaining their own culture and morality. Nursi continued his argument by stating that history

presents no evidence for any Muslims having embraced other religions on the strength of reason, whereas as a result of “reasoned argument and certain proofs,” the followers of other religions were “gradually drawing close to and entering Islam.” He then laid this challenge before the believers: “If we were to display through our actions the perfections of the morality of Islam and the truths of belief, without doubt the followers of other religions would enter Islam in whole communities; some entire regions and states, even, would take refuge in Islam.”

Next, Nursi described modern man’s search for true religion. He said that developments in science together with the terrible wars and events of the twentieth century had aroused in man a desire to seek the truth. Man had been awakened by these and had understood “the true nature of humanity and his own comprehensive disposition.” He had thus realized his need for religion, for “the only point of support for impotent human beings in the face of the innumerable disasters and external and internal enemies that plague them . . . is in recognizing the world’s Maker, in faith, and in believing and affirming the hereafter. There is no help for awakened mankind apart from this.” He went on to say that like a human being, countries had also now begun to realize “this intense need of humanity.”

For the next stage in his argument, Nursi pointed out that the Qur’ān repeatedly “refers man to his reason,” telling him to use his intelligence and ponder over and take lessons from his own life and the events of past ages. Having advised his listeners to heed these warnings, Nursi concluded that the Qur’ān will prevail in the future: “We Muslims, who are students of the Qur’ān, follow proof; we approach the truths of belief through reason, thought, and our hearts. We do not abandon proof in favor of blind obedience and imitation of the clergy like some adherents of other religions. Therefore, in the future when reason, science, and technology prevail, that will surely be the time that the Qur’ān will gain ascendancy, which relies on rational proofs and invites the reason to confirm its pronouncements.”

To complete this “First Aspect,” Nursi described “eight serious obstacles” that had “prevented the truths of Islam completely conquering the past,” but which were then dispersing, and followed this with quoting the testimony to the truth of Islam of two “enemies” by way of proof of his argument.

The first three obstacles were “the Europeans’ ignorance, their barbarity at that time, and their bigotry in their religion. These three obstacles have been destroyed by the virtues of knowledge and civilization, and they have begun to disperse.”

The fourth and the fifth were “the domination and arbitrary power of the clergy and religious leaders, and the fact that the Europeans obeyed and followed them blindly. These two obstacles have also started to disappear with the rise among mankind of the idea of freedom and the desire to search for the truth.”

The sixth and seventh obstacles were “the despotism that was with us, and our immorality and degeneracy that arose from opposing the Sharī‘ah.” These were disappearing due to “an upsurge of Islamic zeal” and a growing awareness of the ugliness of immorality.

The eighth obstacle was the imagined conflict between modern science and some “apparent meanings of the truths of Islam.” That is to say, scientists and philosophers opposed Islam because they did not understand its true meaning, but “after learning the truth, even the most opinionated philosopher is compelled to submit to it.”

Nursi concluded the “First Aspect” by quoting the testimony to the truth of Islam of the nineteenth-century Scottish philosopher Thomas Carlyle, and from the famous Prussian Otto von Bismarck (1815–98). On the strength of this, he repeated the prediction he had made to Shaikh Bakhīt: “Europe and America are pregnant with Islam and one day will give birth to an Islamic state. Just as the Ottomans were pregnant with Europe and gave birth to a European state.”

The “Second Aspect” of Nursi’s argument “offers strong proofs for Islam’s material progress and supremacy in the future.” These were in the form of “five extremely powerful, unbreakable strengths,” which having “blended and fused . . . are established in the heart of the Islamic world’s ‘collective personality.’” But before describing them he made the very important and interesting point that the Qur’ān instructs man in progress and urges him towards it. By mentioning the miracles of the prophets, he said, “the Qur’ān is informing mankind that events similar to those miracles will come into existence in the future through progress and is urging them to achieve them, saying: ‘Come on, work! Show examples of these miracles! Like the Prophet Solomon (PUH), cover a journey of two months in a day! Like the Prophet Jesus (PUH), work to discover the cure for the most frightful diseases!’” He cited further miracles as examples.

Of the five “Strengths,” the first was “reality of Islam”; the second was “an intense need, which is the real master of civilization and industry” together with “utter, back-breaking poverty”; the third was “the freedom that is in accordance with the Sharī‘ah”; the fourth Strength was the “courage” or “valor of belief”; and the fifth, “the pride of Islam, which proclaims and upholds the Word of God.” And, as we have seen, “in this age, proclaiming the Word of God is contingent on material progress.”

Nursi then inferred that because in the drive for modernization so far pursued in the Ottoman Empire it had not been the beneficial aspects of civilization that had been taken but its “evils and iniquities” that had been “imitated,” the empire had been reduced to the state of defeat it was then in. It was also because the iniquities of civilization had prevailed over its benefits that mankind had suffered the bloody and calamitous wars of this century. “God

willing,” said Nursi, “through the strength of Islam in the future, the virtues of civilization will predominate, the face of the earth will be cleansed of filth, and universal peace be secured.”

Nursi then asked his audience: “How is it that while there are such powerful and unshakable ways and means for the material and moral progress for the believers and people of Islam, and the road to future happiness has been opened up like a railway, you despair and fall into hopelessness in the face of the future and destroy the morale of the Islamic world? . . . Since the inclination to seek perfection has been included in man’s essential nature, . . . in the future truth and equity will show the way to a worldly happiness in the world of Islam, God willing, in which there will be atonement for the former errors of mankind. . . . Just as every winter is followed by spring and every night by morning, mankind, also, shall have a morning and a spring, God willing. You may expect from divine mercy to see true civilization within universal peace brought about through the sun of the truth of Islam.”⁵⁸

With the remaining five “Words” of the Sermon, Nursi indicated how his audience could contribute to achieving this true civilization. They are concerned mainly with morality.

The second points out some of the destructive results of despair, “a grievous sickness [that] has entered the heart of the world of Islam.” It had been despair that had destroyed the morale of Muslims so that the Europeans had been able to dominate them. Nursi called on the Arabs to give up despair and stand in “true solidarity and concord” with the Turks, and “unfurl the banner of the Qur’an in every part of the world.”⁵⁹

The third Word is “truthfulness” or honesty. This, said Nursi, is the basis and foundation of Islam, and the fundamental principle of Islamic society. Salvation, he told them, is only to be found through honesty. Sometimes in the past lying may have been permissible, but since it was abused, now there were only two ways, not three: “Either truthfulness or silence.”

The fourth Word was a call to love and brotherhood. Nursi said that “the thing most worthy of love is love, and the quality most deserving of enmity is enmity.” For it is love that guarantees the life of society and ensures happiness, while enmity and hatred destroy them.⁶⁰

In the fifth Word, Nursi urged the Arabs to take up their positions alongside the Turks as “sentries of the sacred citadel of Islamic nationhood.” We have already seen how constitutionalism would serve to develop awareness of the sense of Islamic nationhood among Muslims. Here we learn more of why this was vital for the Islamic world. Nursi explained to his listeners that in the present age man’s actions, either good or bad, very often do not remain with the doer but have widespread consequences. He therefore warned the Arabs against laziness, for good deeds “may benefit millions of believers.”

Nursi went on to remind them of their responsibility as teachers and leaders of the other, smaller Muslim groups and peoples, a responsibility they were neglecting through laziness. At the same time, their good deeds were great, and he predicted that in forty or fifty years' time, the various Arab peoples would "enter upon exalted circumstances . . . like those of the United States of America," and would be "successful in establishing Islamic rule in half the globe. . . . If some fearful calamity does not soon erupt, the coming generation shall see it, God willing."

However, Nursi immediately continued: "Beware, my brothers! Do not imagine that I am urging you with these words to busy yourselves with politics. God forbid! The truth of Islam is above all politics. All politics may serve it, but no politics can make Islam a tool for itself."

And then: "With my faulty understanding, I imagine Islamic society at this time in the form of a factory containing many wheels and machines. Should one wheel fall behind or encroach on another wheel, which is its fellow, the machine's mechanism ceases to function. Thus, the exact time for Islamic unity is beginning. It necessitates not paying attention to one another's faults." Nursi was saying that Islamic supremacy will be won through the material and technological progress achieved through the unity and cooperation of all the different components—that is, the groups and peoples—that make up the Islamic world.

The sixth Word, or sixth constituent of the cure Nursi was prescribing for the Islamic world, was mutual consultation. He described it as "the key to Muslims' happiness in the life of Islamic society," and stressed its importance as the basis of progress and scientific development, adding that one reason for Asia's backwardness was the failure to practice consultation. He then said it was "the key and discloser of the continent of Asia and its future," and that, "just as individuals should consult one another, so also must nations and continents practice consultation."

To conclude, Nursi explained that it was the sincerity and solidarity that result from consultation that make it the means of life and progress. For, "three men between whom there is true solidarity may benefit the nation as much as a hundred men. Many historical events inform us that as a result of true sincerity, solidarity, and consultation, ten men may perform the work of a thousand men."⁶¹

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CHAPTER 5

The Medresetü'z-Zehrā

Return to Istanbul

Soon after giving his sermon, Nursi left Damascus for Beirut, and from there took the boat for Izmir and Istanbul.¹ His intention in returning to Istanbul was to renew his efforts to found the Medresetü'z-Zehrā (eastern university). The last part of *Münāzarat* is devoted to this ideal of Nursi, and he many years later described it as “the spirit and foundation” of the work.² After his long travels through the region he resolved to get official support and backing for the construction of the university, reaffirmed in his conviction that it was the most comprehensive and far-reaching solution for the region’s problems. And this time he was to have success, though the tide of events finally prevented the realization of his project.

The Rumelia Journey

On June 5, 1911, Sultan Mehmed Reşad set out on his famous Rumelia journey with a large retinue including two princes, the grand vizier, Hakkı Pasha, and a number of deputies.³ It was to be the last time an Ottoman sultan visited the European provinces, for soon they were to be lost to the empire. The previous year had seen the first Albanian uprising. The purpose of the sultan’s journey was to reawaken feelings of patriotism and solidarity among the various peoples of Macedonia and Albania in the face of the upsurge of nationalism, and to secure social calm.⁴ Niyazi Bey, an Albanian and one of the “Heroes of Freedom” and prime movers of the Constitutional Revolution, figured on the trip, which had been advised by the CUP;⁵ and presumably it was at their suggestion that Nursi joined it, as the representative of the Eastern Provinces—all the ethnic minorities were represented.

Traveling by sea to Salonica, the sultan and his party stayed two days, and then continued their journey by train, arriving at Skopje on June 11. In the same compartment as Nursi on the train were two teachers from one of the new secular schools. A topical discussion started between them when they asked him: “Which is more necessary and should be stronger, religious zeal or national zeal?” The gist of Nursi’s answer was: “With us Muslims religion

and nationality are united, though there is a theoretical, apparent, and incidental difference between them. . . . Religious zeal and Islamic nationhood have completely fused in Turk and Arab and may not now be separated.” Then, by means of a comparison in which Muslims were represented by a six-year-old child and Europeans or unbelievers by the heroes Hercules and Rostam, he demonstrated the unassailable strength of belief in divine unity.⁶ On his return he included the conversation in an Arabic piece called *Tashkhīs al-‘Illa* (*Diagnosis of the Ailment*), which he added as an addendum to his *Al-Khuṭbah al-Shāmiyyah* (*The Damascus Sermon*), published in 1911.

Some elderly inhabitants of Skopje who recalled the visit was the following description of Nursi:

Bediuzzaman was wearing boots. His moustaches were short and his eyes brilliant. He was a handsome, imposing young man with a darkish complexion. He carried a Circassian whip and at his waist was an ivory-handled dagger. Within a short time he was known in Skopje as Bediuzzaman Molla Said Efendi. The Skopje ulama came group by group to visit him and put their questions to him. He was immediately next to Sultan Reşad while the sultan was greeting the people from the balcony of the high school in Skopje, which was later destroyed by an earthquake. Thousands of Skopjans gave them a truly enthusiastic reception.⁷

On June 16, the sultan and his retinue arrived in Kosova from Prishtina, and in the large open space around the tomb of Sultan Murad Hudavendigâr (d. 1451) they performed the Friday prayers together with the Albanians, who temporarily forgot their grievances. There was a congregation of a hundred thousand people. It was an unforgettable and nostalgic occasion.

While in Kosova, there was much talk of a large university they were attempting to found as part of their plans to placate the Albanians in their demands for greater autonomy and, among others things, the introduction of the Latin script in their schools.⁸ It provided Nursi with the opportunity he had been waiting for. He suggested to Sultan Reşad and the CUP leaders who were accompanying him that the East was in greater need of such a university, for it was at the center of the Islamic world. They accepted his arguments and promised that a university would be opened in the Eastern Provinces. In October of the following year the First Balkan War broke out and Kosova was lost to the empire, whereupon Nursi applied for the nineteen thousand gold liras allotted to its proposed university. His application was accepted, and he was given a thousand gold liras in advance.⁹ He then returned to Van and, on a site on the shores of Lake Van at Edremit, finally laid the foundations of the *Medresetü’z-Zehrâ*. But it was not to be. With the outbreak of the First World War shortly afterward, the construction was halted and never resumed.¹⁰

Sultan Reşad and his accompanying party completed their visit to Rumelia on returning to Salonica. There they again boarded the warship *Barbaros* and attendant vessels, and, after being greeted by a cannon salute at Çanakkale, retraced their path to Istanbul. On June 26 they were met by large welcoming crowds. The trip lasted three weeks.

The tide that was flowing against the Ottomans was running so strongly by this time, however, to be stemmed by such gestures, despite the sultan's enthusiastic reception on the trip and the large demonstrations of loyalty. The nationalists and separatists continued to receive support from the foreign powers, and CUP misrule exacerbated the already volatile situation and led finally to the end of Turkey in Europe with the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913. Also in late 1911 the Tripolitanian War broke out: Italy attacked Tripoli and Benghazi, in modern-day Libya, and they too were lost to the empire. The Italians went on to occupy the Dodacanese Islands and bombard the entrance to the Dardanelles. And with the outbreak of the First Balkan War, in November 1912 Greece seized the Aegean Islands, and Salonica was also lost. The deposed Sultan Abdülhamid was hurriedly removed from his place of exile and taken to Beylerbeyi Palace in Istanbul. The unexpected occupation of Tripoli, added to the other events, caused a political crisis in Istanbul, and the CUP were ousted from power for a period of some six months, from July 1912 until the famous raid on the Sublime Porte in January 1913 led by Enver Bey. After the liberation of Edirne in July 1913, Enver was made minister of war, and it was he who set up the alliance with Germany the following year that brought Turkey into the First World War on the side of the Central Powers.

The period following the trip to Rumelia is another one of the lacunae in Nursi's early life that is not accounted for in his biography. From the letter referred to above, written to the education minister in 1951, it appears that he returned east only after having secured the promise of funds for the Medresetü'z-Zehrâ and having received a forward payment of a thousand gold liras. Since the First Balkan War broke out on October 8, 1912 and on the swift defeat of the Ottomans the armistice was signed on December 3, it seems unlikely that the comparatively minor question of redirecting the funds allotted to the Kosova university, now lost, to the Eastern University would have been settled immediately. Moreover, the second edition of *İki Mekteb-i Musibetin Şehadetnamesi*, published in 1912–13, says in the introduction written by its publisher, Ahmed Ramiz, that Nursi had by that time returned east. It is possible, however, that since (according to the Rumi calendar still in force in the Ottoman Empire) the new year fell on March 1, he secured the advance quickly and left immediately. *The Damascus Sermon* was also published that year. It had also been Ramiz who published the second edition of *Nutuk (Speech)* in 1910–11 while Nursi was in the east. It is also possible that the 1951 letter was intended loosely and was not meant to be precise. In other

words, Nursi had returned to the East at an earlier date and communicated by telegraph or some other means, as indeed he did later, in June 1913, through the governor of Van, Tahsin Bey. In view of what is known at present, this seems the most likely.

The Special Organization

There is a third alternative, which takes us to the unsolved question of Nursi's involvement with the *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa* (Special Organization), an intelligence organization and special operational force that after the dethronement of Sultan Abdülhamid was made an official intelligence service by his successor, Mehmed Reşad. It became the empire's main security organization and played an important role in all the main actions of the Tripolitanian, Balkan, and First World Wars. Its main objectives were to maintain the integrity and unity of the empire and to further the causes of pan-Islam and pan-Turkism. Enver Pasha was appointed as its commander-in-chief when he became minister of war in 1913, but in its operations it remained independent of both the CUP and the government. Within its ranks were leading intellectual and religious figures, as well as members of the military establishment and men from all fields and walks of life. By far the most reliable study of this secret organization, scant mention of which is to be found in Turkish and other works of and about the period,¹¹ was carried out by Philip H. Stoddard for his doctoral thesis, presented to Princeton University in 1963.¹²

One of Stoddard's main sources was Eşref Kuşçubaşı (1873–1964), reputedly the founder of the organization in 1903, whom he interviewed on numerous occasions. Kuşçubaşı handed over a large part of his memoirs to the popular historian Cemal Kutay, and it was Kutay who after Kuşçubaşı's death claimed that Said Nursi had played a prominent role in the Special Organization. He published various works purportedly disclosing what Kuşçubaşı had recorded in his memoirs. Reference to these hitherto unknown exploits of Nursi has subsequently been made in works about him in other languages, principally Şerif Mardin's *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (1989) and the present author's *The Author of the Risale-i Nur, Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (1992). Further study of Nursi's life, however, has, to say the least, thrown doubt on what Kutay has written about him. But given the nature of such involvement and the fact that many records of the period were destroyed, it may not be possible to ascertain the whole truth concerning it. At any rate, research to date has not come up with anything that might serve as an independent source verifying Kutay's assertions. It should be mentioned also that Stoddard expressed both his frustration at Kutay's powers of imagination and his doubts as to the value of his contri-

butions to the study of history.¹³ This was in connection with subjects other than Nursi, who does not figure in either Stoddard's thesis or Kuşçubaşı's account (prepared for publication by Stoddard) of his own daring missions for the Special Organization in Arabia in the first years of the First World War.¹⁴ But again, this does not necessarily eliminate the possibility of Nursi's involvement. According to Stoddard, at the height of the organization's activities in 1916 it had 30,000 operatives throughout the Islamic world working for it in some capacity.¹⁵

While nothing has been found to corroborate Kutay's claims, a number of points indicate the possibility that Nursi was involved with the Special Organization in some other way. The strongest evidence for this is provided by Nursi's relations with Enver Pasha. This question is dealt with in the following chapter.

Cemal Kutay also claims that Nursi led a militia regiment from eastern Anatolia in the disastrous Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913,¹⁶ and was together with Eşref Kuşçubaşı and Süleyman Askeri when they set up the provisional Western Thrace government in August 1913 after the retaking of Edirne.¹⁷ But since to date no reference to his participation has been found in other memoirs or works, including his own, and in June 1913 the great likelihood is that he was in Van, busy with the building of his university, the Medresetü'z-Zehrâ, this does not appear to have been the case. It is especially unlikely in view of the fact that Kutay also claims that Nursi went on to assist the Special Organization in the preparation and distribution of the famous *jihād* proclamations, joining a group of its leaders who traveled by submarine to North Africa in early 1915 to persuade the Sanusis to join the *jihād*. No evidence has been found to support either of these claims; indeed, according to Nursi's own statements he joined the army as soon as war was declared and spent two years on the eastern front before he was captured in early March 1916.

Return to Van

On his return to Van, Nursi resumed his teaching. Ali Çavuş, one of his students, has described how on his return he established himself near the village of Çoravanis, perched on the lower slopes of Mount Ereğ near Van. He lived in a large tent that served as his *medrese*. By the time winter approached, the students had increased to forty or fifty, and they moved en masse to the village mosque. Here, according to the witness, he remained teaching for two years.¹⁸ This must be an exaggeration, but at least it suggests that Nursi returned east after the Rumelia trip in June 1911 and did not remain for any length of time in Istanbul.

Ali Çavuş explains that Nursi wanted to found the promised university in the village of Çoravanis, but was refused permission by the governor of Van, Tahsin Pasha, whereupon he chose a site on the shores of Lake Van at Edremit south of Van. The foundations were laid, but the building could not continue due to the onset of winter. Nursi was then given the Horhor Medrese at the foot of the citadel in Van, which belonged to the Ministry of Pious Foundations (*Evkaf*),¹⁹ presumably through the good offices of the governor. This must have been the winter of 1912–13.

The Horhor Medrese became very famous, with sometimes as many as two hundred students.²⁰ It was large and commodious, and had a wooden minaret and a pool. It took its onomatopoeic name from the spring that rose at its side. Here, besides teaching according to his own methods, Nursi inculcated his students with the qualities he deemed important. Among these were his lifelong principles of frugality and independence, which later in life he encouraged in the *Risale-i Nur* students. In Van, the savings resulting from thriftiness allowed him to meet the needs of up to sixty students from the allowance for five given by the ministry.²¹ In the summer they would betake themselves to Mount Başıd, southeast of Van, and, continuing their studies, spend one to two months among its startlingly beautiful high peaks.²²

Two works dating from this period give us a clue as to the Horhor syllabus. One is composed of Nursi's comments and expositions on a well-known work on logic called *Burhan-ı Gelenbevi*, which one of his favorite students, Molla Habib, wrote down as marginal notes on a handwritten copy of the work.²³ One feels that Gelenbevi (1730–91), a polymath and mathematical genius who taught in the newly established Naval Engineering School (*Muhendishane*) and produced works in numerous fields,²⁴ would himself have felt at home in Nursi's *medrese*. Nursi called the work *Ta'liqāt* and in later years described it as "a masterpiece in respect of logic."²⁵ He published another highly acclaimed work on logic in 1920–21, called *Qizil İjāz 'alā Sullam*.

It was also around this time (1913) that Nursi began work on his celebrated Qur'anic commentary *Ishārāt al-I'jāz fī Maẓānn al-İjāz* (*Signs of Miraculousness*). He would take up a copy of the Qur'ān, and referring to no other book expound its verses. The notes Molla Habib took as he lectured became the basis of the remarkable work he composed in the trenches on the Caucasian front after war had broken out.²⁶ Nursi explained as follows his purpose in writing the work: "So know that our aim from these indications is a commentary on a number of the symbols of the Qur'ān's word order, for [one aspect of] its miraculousness is manifested in its word order. Indeed, the embroidery of its word order is its most brilliant [form of] miraculousness."²⁷

In the preface,²⁸ which sets out the method by which Qur'anic commentaries should be written in the modern age, Nursi explains further his purpose in writing it. He first explains the nature of the Qur'ān as divine speech

addressing all men in every age, then points out that it also encompasses the sciences that disclose the structure of the physical world. Indeed, the Qur'ān's truths become manifest through the discoveries of science. Thus, in the modern age when the cosmos is being opened up and its workings are being revealed by science, commentaries on the Qur'ān must keep pace with these giant strides science is taking. Nursi points out that it is beyond the capacity of an individual or even a small group to be familiar with all the sciences, and a commentary should therefore be written by a committee of scholars who are specialists in a number of sciences, both religious and modern. It will be recalled that among Nursi's proposals for educational reform were the combining and joint teaching of the religious and modern sciences, specialization, and the application of the principle of mutual consultation.

When Nursi understood that some great catastrophe was going to occur—he gave repeated warnings of it in the years preceding the First War, as many of his students testified²⁹—he began to write *Ishārāt al-I'jāz* on his own. It was because he realized its extreme urgency and importance that he continued to write it in the unfavorable conditions of the front. In fact, he had had a dream or vision around the beginning of the war that had corroborated his premonitions and confirmed his intention to write the commentary.³⁰ He presents the work as a model or example that could be followed by a committee of scholars such as he had described at some point in the future.

The Medresetü'z-Zehrā

Work on the Medresetü'z-Zehrā had come to a standstill due to the nonpayment of the promised funds. The laying of the foundations had been celebrated with a banquet and ceremony with speeches, one of which had been given by Nursi's old patron and friend, Tahir Pasha.³¹ In June and July 1913 his successor, Tahsin Pasha, took up the matter, sending a number of telegraphs to the Grand Vizier's Office and Ministry of the Interior requesting that payment be expedited. Twenty or so documents have been unearthed among the archives of the Prime Minister's Office in Istanbul.³²

In one, dated Haziran 4, 1329 (June 17, 1913), the governor wrote to the Grand Vizier's Office that all the ulama, notables, and tribal chiefs of the area were requesting the speedy payment of sufficient money “from the imperial pocket”—only a small amount had been paid up to that time due to the financial straits of the government—to begin the construction of an Islamic university for eighty students in Van, the plans and preliminaries of which had already been completed. It was hoped the running costs would be met by the Imperial Estates. He wrote that it would effectively secure the continued existence of Islam and the Ottomans in the area in the face of daily increasing

Shī'ī propaganda and the ignorance of the Kurdish people. It would strengthen feeling for Islam, remove every sort of misunderstanding, and be most beneficial and effective.

Having received positive replies from the Grand Vizier's Office and the Ministry of the Interior, finally a telegraph arrived from the Ministry of Pious Foundations dated August 2, 1913, informing the governor that it was unable to meet the expenses for the university's construction.³³

The Bitlis Incident

In the midst of all this striving and activity Nursi was undergoing a profound change in his inner world. His finally applying himself after his exertions in the way of constitutionalism to the mysteries of the Qur'an's miraculousness led him to form "the intention to slip free of the Old Said and embark with all his strength on the 'nonmaterial' striving of the New Said."³⁴ This was as though the corollary of the slow and infinitely painful death of the old order.

The policy of Ottomanism, on which the Young Turks had pinned their hopes and which Nursi too had propagated, was by now admittedly a failure. With their expansionist aims, the Great Powers vied with each other in extending their influence over the all-but-moribund empire, and the ethnic minorities continued to be one of their most effective means of weakening it. The Russians exploited this means to the full, especially after their defeat of the Ottomans in the war of 1877–78, stepping up their pressure on the eve of the First World War. On the pretext of "protecting" the Armenians, they finally pressured the Ottoman government into accepting the implementation of a series of "reforms" designed to overwhelmingly favor the Armenians of the Eastern Provinces. This had been resolutely refused by Sultan Abdülhamid, since it would have been a certain step toward Armenian autonomy and the breaking up of the empire.³⁵ The Russians further attempted to destabilize eastern Anatolia by winning the support of Kurdish chiefs and shaikhs—many of whom were dissatisfied with the CUP government due to its strongly centralist policies and the reputed irreligion and secularism of the Young Turks—and inciting them to rebel against the government.

The well-known Bitlis Incident of March–April 1914³⁶ was the result of Russian incitement.³⁷ The revolt was led by Shaikh Selim of Hizan, who after various brushes with the authorities and attempts to gain the cooperation of both the Armenian Tashnak revolutionaries and the tribal chiefs and religious leaders of the region, including Said Nursi in Van, occupied the town of Bitlis.³⁸ The army had to deploy considerable forces to suppress the uprising, while the combined efforts of the governors of Van and Bitlis prevented it from spreading.³⁹

As on numerous other occasions, including the much larger Shaikh Said revolt in 1925, Nursi would not participate. He declined to join Shaikh Selim when approached by him, refusing to draw his sword against fellow Muslims. One pretext for the revolt was evidently the irreligious behavior of some of the military commanders in the area. He told him: "The misbehavior and irreligion of commanders like them is theirs, the army is not responsible for it. There are perhaps a hundred thousand saints in the Ottoman army; it would not be right for me to draw my sword against it. I will not join you." He continued: "Those people left me, drew their swords, and the futile Bitlis Incident occurred. A short time later the First World War broke out and the army fought in it in the name of religion, it waged the *jihād*. And from it a hundred thousand martyrs attained the rank of sainthood, and confirming what I had said, signed the diplomas of their sainthood with their blood."⁴⁰

"Arms and Books Side by Side"

As the acts of terrorism increased and conditions generally deteriorated, Nursi bought "five or six Mauser rifles," again thanks to "the fruitfulness of frugality,"⁴¹ and his education of his students now included training in guerrilla warfare. He used to take them up the mountains and set up eggs for target practice. He would give whoever hit an egg a *mecidiye* (a silver coin) as a reward. The students Nursi was thus training became so proficient and bold that when they came to the mountain for training, the Armenian revolutionaries would make themselves scarce and go elsewhere.⁴²

With his charismatic personality and ability to inspire great love and devotion in his students and followers, Nursi was able to infuse them with something of his own absolute fearlessness and powers of endurance, and move them to acts of great bravery. He described their activities as follows: "In those days of long ago, the Old Said's students' passionate attachment to their master was such they would sacrifice their very lives for him, so the Old Said was able to halt the Armenian Tashnak revolutionaries around Van and Bitlis, where they were very active, and suppressed them to an extent. He found Mauser rifles for his students, and for a while his *medrese* was like a barracks with guns and books side by side. Then an army general visited and saw them, and said: 'This isn't a *medrese*, it's a barracks.' Because of the Bitlis Incident he became suspicious and ordered that our rifles be confiscated. A month or two later, the Great War broke out and I reclaimed my rifles."⁴³

The account of a visit to Nursi's *medrese* by three potential students fills in the picture further:

At that time in the East, studying in the *medreses* was like this: the *hoja* (teacher) taught for nothing; in fact, through his mediation, the people provided the students' upkeep. There was therefore no material reason preventing study. Teachers were chosen only with a view to their learning. So if someone was known as a great scholar, he would have many students; everyone would want to be taught by him. A few friends and myself had gathered together and begun to search for a good teacher when we were told of Molla Said the Famous in Van, in a *medrese* called the Horhor.

Three of us went there. Hoja Efendi was not present when we arrived, and someone called Molla Habib met us and invited us inside. He told us to wait, saying that the *hoja* would come soon. At this point, the *medrese's* walls caught our attention, for hung up on them in rows were Mauser rifles, and various weapons, swords, daggers, and cartridge belts. Together with these were books on reading stands. In truth, we were astonished. After a while they announced his arrival. We straightened ourselves up. He entered, bade us welcome, then asked us why we had come.

The second thing that caught our attention and astonished us was the *hoja's* manner of dress, because we did not see the customary dress of a religious scholar, which we knew and had expected. With a conical hat on his head, boots on his feet, dagger at his waist, and firm step, he reminded us of a soldier or high-ranking officer rather than a *hoja*. In fact, because of his youth, we wondered if he was learned. But then Molla Habib, the most advanced student, was studying works like *Molla Jami*. He was like the students' sergeant.

We said we had come to study under him. So he told us: "Fine, but I have conditions. You can on condition you comply with them." Then he added: "There is no possibility of going back for someone who starts with me. He remains with me till the end of his life." And he then said: "Don't think you can accept and give your word today, then leave later if you get fed up or for any other reason, because the governor of Van is my close friend. I could have you brought back here through him. Tonight you are my guests. Stay here and think it over, then make your decision in the morning."

We were bewildered and did not know what to say to the proposal. We consulted Molla Habib, asking him if he stayed under those conditions. "Yes," he replied. "We gave our words once and undertook to stay. It's true it's not all that easy, but his knowledge is truly extraordinary. But you know best, do whatever seems right for you." We bowed our heads in shame and, saying we could not accept, left.⁴⁴

CHAPTER 6

War and Captivity

War Is Declared

On the declaration of war Said Nursi enlisted in the army as a voluntary regimental mufti (religious functionary) together with Molla Habib, and they were posted to the Van (Thirty-Third) Division (*firka*) and sent to the front at Erzurum.¹ Nursi performed all his military service as a volunteer, “just for the honor of it.” The agreement between the Ottoman government, represented by a small group of Young Turk leaders, and Germany was signed in the greatest secrecy on August 2, 1914. Thereby the Ottoman Empire joined the Central Powers (Austria-Hungary and Germany) against the Triple Entente (Britain, France, and Russia). Mobilization was announced the following day, and on September 7 the Eleventh Army Corps, to which the Van Division was attached² was ordered to assemble in the Hasankale area, east of Erzurum.³ The first skirmishing took place on September 21–22 when Russian reconnaissance columns crossed the border into Ottoman territory; the first casualties fell a few days later. By this time significant numbers of Armenians were already deserting from the Ottoman ranks and crossing over to the Russians.⁴ Hostilities began in earnest on October 29, 1914, when the Russians pushed forward in their offensive. The *jihad* declaration was promulgated by the Ottomans on November 14.

At some point Nursi was ordered to form a militia force; in some of the eyewitness accounts of him on the front he figures as the commander of this force, composed in part of his students, but it is not clear to which stage of the war these refer.⁵ It is possible, however, that he formed it only after his return to Van and its evacuation before the Russian invasion. A report claiming this is given below. It was reputedly Enver Pasha who appointed him to the task. Later in life, Nursi recalled the pasha’s commendation of his outstanding service.⁶ If Enver did appoint him personally, it must have been sometime during his visit to the Caucasian front between December 13, 1914, and January 9, 1915, during which time he commanded the disastrous Sarikamiş counteroffensive. Alternatively, he may have detailed Nursi to raise and lead the force through Tahsin Pasha, the former governor of Van who by this time had been transferred to the governorship of Erzurum. According to Nursi’s brother Abdülmecid, Tahsin Bey gave Nursi some sort of testimonial certifying that

“the services performed by the Van Division were entirely due to Said-i Kurdi’s material (military) and moral assistance.”⁷

Bearing in mind the discussion in the previous chapter about Nursi’s imputed membership of the *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa*, it seems likely from the facts to be gleaned from available sources that his force was connected with the organization, though relations may have been indirect, through the governor of either Erzurum or Van. Tahsin Pasha, whose appointment to Erzurum had been discussed by Ta‘lat Pasha, the prime minister, with Dr. Bahaddin Şakir,⁸ codirected with the latter *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa* operations in the region.⁹ Cevdet Bey, who was the son of Tahir Pasha, the old governor of Van, and had replaced Tahsin Pasha, was another close associate of Nursi. He was married to Enver Pasha’s sister.¹⁰ The governors of the frontier provinces of Mosul, Van, Erzurum, and Trabzon were all specially picked and worked in conjunction with the department Enver Pasha had set up as part of the Ministry of War, whose function it was to direct all matters connected with volunteer forces and the Special Organization.¹¹

The main function of the department was to organize Enver’s grand project, formulated even before the war, to free all the Islamic lands from foreign influence. In this region, in addition to repulsing the Russian threat to eastern Anatolia, his plan was “to liberate the Muslims of the Caucasus and the Turks of Azerbaijan, and Turkestan from the Russian yoke, deliver Afghanistan and Iran from foreign influence, and make them free and independent Muslim states.”¹² The realization of this ambitious scheme, or wild dream, which General Sabis regretfully diagnosed as unreasonable and impracticable, was one of the main objectives of the Special Organization. In his war memoirs, Sabis describes the successful actions of the Special Organization’s detachments in the early stages of the war in the western Caucasus on the left flank of the Ottoman forces. These detachments were led by some of its leading members: Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir, Acreli Rıza Bey, and Nail Bey. Employing guerrilla tactics they (temporarily) recaptured the towns of Ardahan, Artvin, and Ardanoç,¹³ which had been occupied by Russia during the war of 1877–78,¹⁴ exerting pressure on the Russian forces from the west. Nursi does not appear to have played any part in these; it was with another element of Enver’s project that he was involved in some way: the expeditionary force in Iran.

The First Expeditionary Force was led by Enver Pasha’s uncle, Halil Pasha, whose duty was to cross into Iran and march up to Daghistan via Tabriz, inciting insurrections against the Russians and destroying their means of communication. He was specifically instructed to communicate with the governor of Van concerning the route to be taken and provisions for his force.¹⁵ A second force, of 10,000 infantry rifles, was to be led by Kazım Karabekir to Tehran and on to Turkestan, carrying out operations similar to Halil’s. He was to pave the way for advances into Afghanistan. The aim of

these expeditions was not to conquer Iran but to liberate it from Russian domination.¹⁶ In the event, neither Tabriz nor Tehran was reached; indeed, the home provinces of Van and Erzurum were lost.¹⁷ The brief reference to Nursi's exchange of intelligence with Halil Pasha is mentioned below.

The Front

Notwithstanding the defeats suffered by the Ottoman army, which were due more to inadequate supplies and backup services, the lack of roads and communications, and the arctic conditions, with winter temperatures falling to minus 30°C, than to the superiority of the invading forces, many units put up a valiant fight. Not least of these was Nursi's militia, which he led with extraordinary bravery. If he was still a regimental mufti at this stage, he participated actively in the fighting. To boost the volunteers' morale in those arduous conditions, he rarely entered the trenches, moving around the front lines on his horse, always to the fore of the fighting. He later wrote:

On the Pasinler Front during the Great War, the late Molla Habib and I were moving forward with the intention of attacking the enemy. Their artillery fired three shells at us at one or two minute intervals. The shells passed right over us two meters above our heads, and although our soldiers were concealed in the ravine behind us and couldn't be seen, they retreated. To test Molla Habib I said: "What do you say?, I'm not going to hide myself from these infidels' shells." He replied: "I'm not going to fall back either, I'll stay behind you." A further shell fell very close to us. Certain that divine succor would preserve us, I exclaimed: "Forward! These infidels' shells can't kill us. We're not going to draw back!"¹⁸

All the accounts collected from soldiers present at Pasinler describe Nursi's moving about the trenches on horseback in this way, in complete disdain of the Russian shells. The following draws attention to the severity of the shelling:

It was snowing and everywhere was white. We were defending our beloved country against the Russians. We couldn't raise our heads above the trenches because of the bullets, which were falling like rain. We were fighting under a rain of shells, just as though shrapnel were falling from the skies. The thing we were most powerless against was this shrapnel, which exploded in the air. It was wiping us out, and our losses were heavy. It exploded in the air and scattered to the right and left in fragments.

At the height of the shelling Molla Said the Famous was touring the trenches. He was moving up and down the valley on horseback. Then a few people emerged from their trenches, and they were hit and killed. I wanted to see Molla Said and to kiss his hands, but I was frightened of being hit. I had heard the name before, but this was the first time I had seen him, there on the bloody front at Pasinler. Then I saw he had come level with me. I heard him say: "Fight for Allah! Allah is our helper!"¹⁹

Another soldier who fought under Nursi at Pasinler, Mustafa Yalçın, recalled him like this:

[A]t our head was Molla Said. Bands of Russians and Armenians were attacking us ceaselessly. He used to teach us about religion every night. At Hasankale [Pasinler] we fought a bitter fight against the Russians with Molla Said. He used to wear a turban, but when fighting he would wear what we called a "felt hat." I was wounded at Hasankale and drew back. I received this shrapnel wound on my hip, look, it's still open. I would have died long ago, but Molla Said wrote out a prayer for each of the four of us. We hung it round our necks and no bullets hit us. At that time there were a hundred infidels firing on one Muslim. In the end I was wounded, and they took me back. Molla Said continued to fight. . . . Molla Said was a heroic person. At the front, he used to lead the attacks on horseback. He was a good shot. He did not go into the trenches. Once he was told that some units were about to break up, so he immediately went and sorted out their differences, making sure they did not disperse. He explained things wonderfully well; it was as though he could cast a spell on people.

During that infernal war he was writing a book. His students used to write down what he dictated. He was an excellent horseman. They used to heave out great rocks and roll them down on the Russians. He used to say to us: "Don't be frightened of anything, a Muslim's belief is stronger than any power." Every night he used to read to us from the books he had written. I could not understand much, because I'm not educated, but whenever I saw Molla Said my courage soared. He was formidable person, but he acted very kindly toward us.²⁰

The book this soldier mentions was Nursi's Qur'anic commentary, *Ishārāt al-I'jāz (Signs of Miraculousness)*, described in the previous chapter.

The Fall of Van and Nursi's Humanity

Although the Russians had withdrawn after their unsuccessful first offensive, with various lulls they kept up their pressure on the Ottomans, gradually push-

ing them back into Anatolia at a number of points on the enormously long front, which stretched from Batum on the Black Sea, along the Araxes River south of the Caucasus, into Iran, and southward down beyond Van. At the beginning of March 1915, to the east of the front the Russians started to advance south; apparently they were intending to take Van and incite the Armenians to revolt.²¹ Cevdet Bey, the governor of Van, notified the high command and asked for the assistance of the First Expeditionary Force, led by Halil Pasha.²² Then, as predicted, on April 17 the Armenians in and around Van rose in armed revolt,²³ attacking and laying waste the Muslim quarters of the town and surrounding villages. The bloody uprising continued for nearly a month, during which time the people fled the city in droves. It was completely evacuated by the time the Russians arrived.²⁴

Said Nursi was on his way back from the front at Pasinler when the revolt erupted. His nephew writes that on his arrival, he withdrew into his *medrese* with his students and played no part in attempts to suppress it. He rather tried to prevent harm coming to the defenseless and the women and children.²⁵

Over the border in Iran, the First Expeditionary Force was by now marching north, but was soon to suffer defeat at the hands of the Russians at Dilman. This both exploded Enver's dream of liberating the Muslims of the Caucasus and opened up the way to the Russian advance. By telegraph Cevdet Bey urgently requested the First Expeditionary Force either to come to the assistance of Van or to halt the Russian advance.²⁶ The force failed to do either, and having lagged behind the Russians, had to set off southward. Cevdet Bey, who since the beginning of the revolt had been combating the Armenians with the forces at his disposal, was finally forced to abandon Van on the night of May 16/17. Said Nursi was loath to flee before the Russians, and he and his students barricaded themselves in the citadel, determined to hold out to their last breaths. It was only on Cevdet Bey's insistence that they consented to leave. They retreated south to Vastan (Gevaş), with the remaining Muslim population in full flight before the advancing Russian forces. The Russians defeated the Ottoman detachment stationed at Vastan.²⁷ By this time the Armenians were organizing their forces "to expel the Turks from the entire southern shore of the lake in preparation for a concerted Russian drive into the Bitlis *vilayet* (province)."²⁸

A student of Nursi's who was with him during these events states that it was at this point that he formed a militia regiment together with Cevdet Bey, the governor. It included gendarmes and soldiers who still remained in Vastan, together with a number of his students. They put up a fierce fight, preventing the Russian advance. Their aim was to gain sufficient time for the migrating Muslim population to move on to safety; otherwise they would have been massacred. At night Nursi and his men climbed the hill above the

Russians' encampment, and rolling great boulders down on it, deceived them into thinking a large number of reinforcements had arrived.²⁹ They held the Russians at bay till the people were all free of the area, having suffered minimum losses.³⁰

Many of Nursi's students and volunteers fell at this time. One of these was Nursi's scribe, Molla Habib, who had returned from successfully conveying a message to Halil Pasha,³¹ who by this time must have been south of Başkale. Presumably the telegraph previously used by the governor was out of commission by this time. This piece of information, which slipped into Nursi's "official" biography, provides fairly certain proof of his close involvement with Enver Pasha's special forces.

According to General Sabis's account, Cevdet Bey and his forces retreated not to Vastan, as the biography states, but southeast toward Başkale and the Iranian border, where he joined forces with Halil Pasha's Expeditionary Force.³² The latter then made a long looping detour over the forbidding mountains to avoid the Russians, and arrived exhausted and depleted in numbers at Bitlis in June 1915. The accounts of Nursi's students, however, all say that Cevdet Bey and Nursi were together at Vastan and later at Bitlis, but the sequence of events may have been confused.

At this point Nursi's biography cites more instances of his humanitarian efforts in the chaos of war to save the displaced population from slaughter. This included Armenian women and children. The controversial deportation to northern Syria of the Armenian population of the Eastern Provinces had already begun.³³

Having escaped the Russians at Vastan, the ragged lines of the migrating people plodded westward toward Bitlis along the southern shore of Lake Van. Nursi also traveled on to Bitlis together with Cevdet Bey, where he accepted responsibility for more than five hundred war orphans, undertaking to find them food and shelter.

Once the combined forces of the army and militias had halted the Russian advance around both the south and the north of Lake Van, the migration from the occupied regions continued southward toward Siirt and beyond. Another task Nursi undertook, together with other militia forces, was the guarding of the frontiers behind the army as the migration continued.³⁴

At some point Nursi received news that bands of Armenians were attacking the village of Ispart close to his native Nurs. He led a force through the mountains to his village, and for three months in the vicinity of Hizan engaged in a fierce struggle with the marauding bands, warding off their assaults and defending the villagers. His force was finally successful in suppressing them and preventing the massacre of the Muslim inhabitants.³⁵ However, in exemplary fashion he collected together all the Armenian women and children from the surrounding area to save them from retaliatory action,

which he stated was contrary to the Shari‘ah, and handed them over to Armenian forces. The Armenians were so impressed at this fine Islamic conduct that thereafter they themselves refrained from the barbaric slaughter of innocent civilians.³⁶ Winter was closing in when Nursi returned to Bitlis, and he set about reforming his militia regiment.

Nursi’s outstanding humanitarian acts are also cited in non-Turkish records, one of which is the French *Documents sur les atrocités arméno-russes*. The following is a translation of just one page:

Yusuf and Abdurrahman, sons of Mehmed, said the following under oath:

Our family comes from Nurs, Vavink, And, and Mezraa-i And, the summer pastures of the district of İsparit in the subprovince of Hizan. After the subprovince of Çatak had been occupied by the Russians, the Armenians of the neighboring villages of Livar, Yukarı Kutis, Aşağı Kutis, Çaçuan, Sikuar, and Yukarı Adr came to the village of Yukarı Kutis under the leadership of Lato, also known as Mihran, and Kazar Dilo, both of whom had infiltrated into Anatolia from Russia. They presented three written proposals to the notables there. Among the notables was Molla Said, who is well known as Bediuzzaman. Was he taken prisoner, or was he killed? I do not know. These were the proposals: either surrender, or evacuate the district, or fight.

Nine hours after the enemy had arrived, a force of six hundred attacked the village. The enemy soldiers were wearing uniforms and caps. We could not discover whether or not there were any Russian soldiers among them. Very many of the enemy looked destitute. They could have been Russians or Armenians come from Russia.

The enemy took all the people of our village to Mezraa-i And. Abdurrahman, the son of Hurşid Bey, one of the notables, was also present together with his son and wife. The following day, thirty-three men and boys and around eighty women and young girls were moved to Müküs in separate convoys. The women’s convoy was left at Çaçuan, but at night all the men were put to the sword. I was saved from the slaughter because I had been assigned a duty. When they gave it to me, they said this: “We promise to give you money. Go to Molla Said, and tell him to hand over to us the Armenians who remain there. Tell him there is no benefit in having them killed unnecessarily. The country is just about entirely occupied. The Russians have reached as far as Aleppo. Armenia has been set up. Bring us information about the numbers and strength of the Turkish army there.”

This was said to me by Dilo. I set out immediately. When I reached Çaçuan, I saw that our forces, which were formed of gendarmes and Kurds, had arrived there together with our mayor and Molla Said. Our forces under the command of Bediuzzaman Said Efendi were successful in saving the

women's convoy after five hours of fierce fighting. The state of the women was really pitiful. They did not have the strength to walk. Most of the children had been trodden underfoot, and of the thirty-three men, only two of us survived.³⁷

Another report places Nursi on Sübhan Dağı, a high mountain northeast of Lake Van, in August:

I first saw Nursi in August 1331 (1915) on Mount Sübhan. He was on a white horse. Galloping up and down, he was raising the soldiers' morale. He was commander of a militia force at the time. He had a turban on his head and epaulets on his shoulders. He was continually moving in among the volunteers on horseback to give them courage. Enver Pasha had appointed Nursi to the militia forces. They had long been friends. . . .

The continuation of this piece includes a description of the force after the onset of winter, and may refer to it on the Van front, where, according to the source mentioned above, Nursi was fighting when Erzurum fell in February 1916. Alternatively, it might have been before the fall of Bitlis.

[Nursi's] militia forces did not obtain their weapons and provisions from us, but provided everything for themselves. They always went in front of the army and fought in the front lines. They were known as the Felt Hats. The Russians didn't know where to flee when they heard: "The Felt Hats are coming!"; they didn't know what had hit them. At that time swords were only used for prodding, but they used them on horseback and would hit whatever they struck at. [In winter] they used to wear white capes so as to blend in with the snow-covered ground and not be detected by the enemy. They would throw the horse's reins over one arm, or attach them to the horse's neck and leave the animal completely free, then galloping at speed would fire their rifles uninterrupted. They were extremely accurate shots. When the officers addressed the volunteers encouraging them to fight, in their excitement the volunteers could not remain in their places squatting on the ground; as soon as the order to move was given to move, they would spring up onto their horses and gallop off against the enemy.³⁸

In mid-September the Ottomans had received intelligence that Grand Duke Nicholas, the czar's uncle, had been appointed commander-in-chief of the Caucasian front and surmised that the Russians were planning a large-scale offensive. The major offensive began on January 10, 1916. The Ottomans were outnumbered three to one and were relatively ill-equipped. They were pushed back, and the Russians captured Erzurum on February 16

after much fierce fighting. A second Russian force moved southward, and then around the south of Lake Van toward Bitlis and Muş. By now Nursi was back in Bitlis. There are several accounts of his outstanding part in the fight to save this strategic center, for which he was subsequently decorated.

The Fall of Bitlis and Capture of Nursi

The Russians prepared to attack with three divisions. The new governor of Bitlis, Memduh Bey, and Kel Ali,³⁹ one of the commanders. (Kel Ali had recently taken over command from Yakub Cemil, who had been sent after Halil Pasha to Baghdad.⁴⁰ All three were members of the *Fedâi Zabitan Grubu* of the *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa*.⁴¹) The governor and Kel Ali approached Nursi and told him that having only one regiment and around two thousand volunteers at their disposal, they had no alternative but to retreat. Nursi replied that if they were to do that, all the people fleeing from the region and from Bitlis with their property and families would fall into enemy hands; they should therefore resist the invasion for several days to let them get away. They informed him that Muş⁴² had been attacked and that their soldiers were trying to save up to thirty heavy guns. If Nursi and his volunteers could relieve the soldiers of the guns and bring them to Bitlis, it might be possible to defend the town for several days. Nursi told them: "I'll either get them here or I'll die in the attempt!" and he set off by night with three hundred or so of his men toward Nurşin.

When they came close to Muş, by means of a spy he sent false information to the Cossack regiment pursuing the guns that a huge force led by a famous bandit were on the point of seizing them. This confused the Russians, who gave up their pursuit.⁴³ The youngest of Nursi's students accompanying him, Ali Çavuş, who was only sixteen or seventeen, resumes the story: "As they were traveling by night to save the guns, they encountered civilians and soldiers fleeing down the road, who told them that the Russians had occupied Muş. Nursi divided his militia into groups of fourteen, and ordered them to each take one of the heavy guns."⁴⁴ He detailed a squad of six men to carry the ammunition, and together they dragged all of them over the snow for at least sixty kilometers till they handed them over to a regiment dug in on the Bitlis-Tatvan road.

The Russians attacked from three sides, but their advance was halted for a time by the fierce resistance they met from the Turkish and volunteer forces at the defense line at Mount Dideban. Nursi and his men were trapped in the narrow pass before Bitlis, but they managed to escape. The fighting continued for seven days and seven nights. As was his practice, to fire his men's spirits and keep up their morale Nursi did not enter the trenches and galloped his

horse up and down the front lines. When hit by four bullets, he still did not draw back. By an extraordinary coincidence, one had hit the hilt of his dagger, another his tobacco case, and the third the mouthpiece of his cigarette holder. The fourth grazed his left shoulder. He was virtually unhurt.⁴⁵ Kel Ali had observed this and remarked that bullets had no effect on him. Nursi told him: "If Allah preserves a person, not even a cannon ball will kill him, let alone a bullet!"⁴⁶

After a week of fierce clashes, the Russians were unable to break the Ottoman lines, and they were just about to withdraw when some Armenians guided them to the south of Bitlis; they cut the Bitlis-Siirt road and held the Arab Bridge. The Armenians also opened up the way for them by capturing Mount Dideban, setting up machine guns at crucial points and gunning down many people. They were therefore finally able to enter the town. By this time, the governor, Kel Ali, the greater part of the army, and the people had all fled. In the appalling February conditions of eastern Anatolia, with snow lying to a depth of three to four meters, once again the women and children, the sick and the lame, the government officials and the army retreated before the advancing enemy.⁴⁷ Only a small detachment remained, determined to fight to the last. According to one of his four students who survived, among those who remained were Nursi and twenty-five of his volunteers.

The account of Ali Çavuş, the student, continues as follows. It includes a lively description of Nursi and his Russian captors after he had been taken prisoner.

That night (March 3, 1916) after midnight they started the attack on Bitlis. We were fighting hand to hand with the Russians in the streets. There was very fierce fighting. All our friends were killed except for four of us. Ustad's [Nursi's] nephew, Ubeyd,⁴⁸ of whom he was very fond, was killed right beside me. The Russians' rifles were spouting fire at us. He said to me as he fell: "Take the gold from my belt and my clothes so they don't fall into their hands."

The Russians had encircled us. We were racing along behind Ustad. We kept loading rifles and giving them to him, and he was firing at them. He was using them so quickly, they were like automatics. One time we gave him a rifle without unfastening the safety clip. When it didn't fire, he was livid. It was the only time I'd heard him speak to us like that. He shouted: "Why do give me dud rifles?" and he smashed it on a stone. We immediately handed him another one. Just then he plunged through the four lines of soldiers surrounding us; we wanted to cross over to the Kızılmesçid side of the town. We found ourselves confronted by a wall that looked like a conduit; we jumped down from on top of it. It passed beneath a large building next to what is now Kasimpasha Primary School. Because the water was entirely

covered by snow and it was nighttime, we could not judge the terrain and Ustad hit his leg on a stone and broke it. Pointing underneath the conduit, he said: "Get me in there, then go. I give you permission. God willing, you'll get away." We got him in there and sat him down. We laid his leg on two of our rifles and made him a bit comfortable. He went on insisting that we go, but when we said we wanted to remain and die as martyrs alongside him, he was touched and said: "Fate has made us prisoners." We declared that we too had surrendered to fate.

It is interesting to note that statements taken in June 1917 from two surviving Turks who witnessed their being completely surrounded by enemy show that Nursi and his students were so engulfed by "the Armenian bandits," raining them with bullets and stabbing them with their bayonets, that they thought they had all been killed.⁴⁹

Once in hiding under the water conduit, Nursi told them to go and inform the Russians that they were there, but his four students were frightened they would kill Nursi, and tried to think of other courses of action. They remained in the freezing mud, hungry and exhausted, for around thirty-three hours.⁵⁰ Finally they sent Abdülvehhab, one of their number who knew a bit of Russian, to inform the Russians. The account—actually, this is a collation of two separate accounts by Ali Çavuş—continues:

The Russians had occupied the building over the conduit, and their voices could be heard from below. About an hour passed, and we heard a rifle shot. We thought Abdülvehhab had been shot. Then we heard footsteps. We lifted our rifles and waited. Then we saw Abdülvehhab and a squad of fifty Russian soldiers. They pulled us all out and sent for a stretcher for Ustad, then took us to a building that was a hotel beneath and in which the Russian Second Army was billeted. On the way there, the Armenians heard we'd been found and started to crowd round us. They wouldn't have left us alive if it hadn't been for the Russian soldiers.

A regimental commander met us. They put us in a room and gave us some stale pieces of bread they'd found. We hadn't eaten for three days, and it was more welcome than the finest baklava. Then they put Ustad in another room and brought him a roast chicken. Two Russian commanders started to question him. It was clear they were talking about the war. Ustad was talking to them standing on one leg. It was as though Ustad was the commander and the two Russian commanders were prisoners; he didn't bow to them at all. Then they realized that his leg was broken and called a medical orderly, who put it in plaster. After about two and a half hours a detachment of soldiers escorted us to the government buildings. A Tatar officer, whom we later learned was a Muslim, took pity on us, and taking us inside, put us in the governor's room.

It was during the first week of our stay in Government House that an adjutant arrived. He asked for Ustad, then said the general had summoned him. They took Ustad by stretcher to the place the general was staying in Mahallebaşı. Ustad went in. The general asked a number of questions. These were centered on someone well known called Abdülme-cid, who had gone to Iran and was planning to go from there to the Caucasus to organize the Muslims there to fight against the Russians.⁵¹ They wanted information about him from Ustad. Ustad answered the questions as required. The general's questioning and the coming and going continued for about two weeks. We waited in the room outside and could hear them speaking. We would hear Ustad's terse answers and sharp retorts, and from time to time the sound of a fist being thumped on the table. We would get worried and shudder at the thought of being lined up and shot, and when from time to time Ustad emerged from the room, we didn't fail to reproach him.

On the twenty-seventh day of our stay in Government House they took us to what was then the gendarme station and is now the courthouse. There were around twenty-five officers and government officials they'd captured, most of whom were high-ranking. The general's adjutant appeared and said to Ustad: "You can take one or two of your servants with you, we're sending you away now." Ustad told him: "They aren't my servants, they're my brothers," and he took one of us called Said. We did not want to part from him. To console us he said to the police chief, İrfan Bey, who was also a prisoner: "I entrust my students to you. Show them the police there." They separated us from Ustad, and sent us to Russia.⁵²

The heroism of Nursi and his volunteers in defending the East against the Russians and Armenians became legendary among the people of the area. They told also of how the Russians had tried to kill Nursi on his surrendering to them, and how this desire had been transformed into wonder at his courage, since Nursi did not so much as wince when they handled his broken leg.⁵³ One of his students who fought alongside him tells of Nursi's anger on learning, when being questioned by the Russians, that the Armenian interpreter was misinterpreting what they said, so that the Russians brought a Tatar interpreter; and his rejection of the proposals of Kurdish chiefs who had joined the Russians that in return for his freedom he should write letters to all the tribes calling on them to surrender their arms.⁵⁴

Bitlis fell to the Russians on March 3, 1916. A most interesting recently found document describes the journey to captivity as far as the Russian border. It is the journal of a reserve officer, Muhammad Feyyaz, a descendant of the famous Sufi scholar, Erzurumlu İbrahim Hakkı, and supplies many fascinating details of the journey, during which he was together with Nursi.

The Russians kept Nursi in Bitlis for two weeks,⁵⁵ for Muhammad Feyyaz first saw him in Bařhan, between Bitlis and Tatvan on Lake Van, on March 18. He wrote:

They listed all our names in Bitlis on March 18, and in the early afternoon mounted us on camels. The camel drivers were Persian and had suffered dreadfully under Russian tyranny. Believing the Turks to be solely responsible for this, they tormented and ill-treated us by way of revenge. We arrived at Bařhan in the evening, where we saw around forty corpses of slain Turks, just heaped up outside the Han. . . . Beyond that we saw that a group of Russian soldiers had gathered and were discussing something. We dismounted from our camels. We drew close and I saw that the Cossacks were arguing with our guards, wanting them to hand over Said-i Kurdi to them so that they could kill him. The latter was watching this altercation calmly. I hadn't recognized him at once.

They put us in a filthy stable, where we stayed for a couple of days. On March 20 we left, and passing through Tatvan we followed the lakeshore till we reached a ruined village, where we spent the night. One of the Russian soldiers, a Kazan Muslim, took pity on the prisoners, who were all starving, and slaughtered an ox. That day everyone ate their fill and then stuffed their bags with the remaining meat.

We set off on the morning of March 21. It was cold and sleeting. Our clothes were sodden. That evening we again stayed in a ruined village, where we lit a fire and dried ourselves out. The following day, March 22, we set out along the lakeshore. It was all boggy; then we suffered terrible difficulties getting over some passes. That night we stayed in a ruined church. There was a telephone exchange, and the Russian soldiers shared some of their bread with us.

The caravan had just set out on March 23 when the sun came out. It was a clear day, and the sun cheered us up. That evening we stopped beside the lake in an Armenian village of a few houses, where they gave us some preserved meat, bread, and sugar. A Russian unit was stationed there.

On March 24 we set out on mules. . . . We reached Vastan at noon. We dismounted at some fine huts the Russians had made. They gave us some food, tea, and sugar. There were wonderful stoves. There were some wooden houses as well. Here [as officers] they separated us from the others.

On March 25 we again set off on our mules and reached Van in the afternoon. Here they put three of us—Molla Said, myself, and his servant—together in a room. We stayed here four days, and every day the commander would come to us and see how we were. . . .

On March 29 we were taken by wagon to Erçek, which was inhabited by Armenians. They knew Molla Said. We were shown to the people, who

swarmed toward us, cursing and swearing at us. It was obvious they would try to murder us that night. One of the guards, called Seyfullah, a Muslim, was a great help in saving us from this. We spent a very anxious night. In the morning the commander came to visit us together with his wife. They had a twelve-year-old Muslim boy with them. The commander was extremely generous and hospitable. His wife was Russian and detested the Armenians. In fact, she explained to us in broken Turkish that our government had committed a serious error in not exterminating them completely when they were about it. (The child's family had all been butchered by the Armenians in Van, and the commander and his wife had finally taken him under their wing.)

We were so upset by what the boy told us that we remained plunged in thought after he had finished. Molla Said finally chatted with him. Then they said our wagons were ready. The commander and his wife came as far as the wagon to see us off. It was March 30, 1916. That evening we reached Molla Hasen. Here the Russian commander made sure we were comfortable.

On March 31 we reached Saray, then Kazımpasha; on April 1, Kotur; on April 2, Kervanseray; and on April 4 we crossed into Khuy [in Iran]. We dismounted in the quarantine station half an hour from the town. It consisted of eight or ten long huts, three tents, and a bathhouse and hospital. We stayed here twenty-one days. We could light the fire and take a bath whenever we wanted. Every morning, the Georgian doctor from the hospital and the very kind nurse would bring Molla Said and myself three eggs each and two biscuits, and chat with us very kindly. We had very good food; it was brought to us twice a day from the town.

After twenty-one days here, on April 25, we set out for Julfa in wagons. We alighted in the evening in the residential area. . . . On April 26 we crossed the Russian border at Julfa. . . . Forty-eight hours later we were taken direct to Kosturma by train via Daghistan."⁵⁶

The daily entries in the journal stop here, and there is no subsequent mention of Nursi. He remained in Tiflis (Tbilisi), the capital of Georgia, and did not continue the journey with that batch of prisoners.

Indeed, documents found in the archives of the Prime Minister's Office in Istanbul show that in September 1916, Nursi was still in Tiflis, presumably receiving treatment for his leg. The first, dated August 9, 1332 (August 22, 1916) is from Memduh, the deputy governor of Bitlis, to the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Istanbul. It states that the officials held as prisoners of war in Tiflis required their salaries to be sent to them. Also in need of money there was Bediüzzaman Said-i Kürdî, who had saved eight large guns from Muş during the fall of Bitlis and had enlisted volunteers. The second, dated Eylül 7, 1332 (September 20, 1916), is from the interior minister, Tal'at Bey, to the director of the Ottoman Red Crescent Society, Besim Ömer Pasha, requesting him to send

sixty lira to Nursi in Tiflis by special courier. And the third is Besim Ömer Pasha's reply, dated three days later, informing Tal'at Pasha that the sixty liras had been changed into 1,254 marks and dispatched as requested.⁵⁷

The Prisoner-of-War Camps

Nursi was sent to the province of Kosturma in northwestern Russia. First he was sent to the town of Kologrif, and then—according to one source, after a period in a large camp further into the northern wastes—to a camp in the town of Kosturma on the River Volga. It was here that he spent the greater part of the remainder of his captivity. There are various accounts of him and his activities in the camp from a number of his fellow prisoners. As the commanding officer of a regiment, he was in a position of authority. This he used to ensure the prisoners' freedom to practice their religion. He won the right for them to perform the five daily prayers, which he led, and secured a room for use as a mosque. Also, as a commander he received a salary, which he spent almost entirely on the mosque and things beneficial for the other prisoners. He was in a group of ninety or so officers, to whom he would give *ders* or religious instruction. Conditions were hard in the camp; the winters were long and dark and extremely cold. In this way he endeavored to maintain the prisoners' morale.

Mustafa Yalçın, whose description of Nursi at the Pasinler front is quoted above, was already at the camp when one day to his amazement he saw that Nursi had been brought there. Among his recollections, he says:

[O]n our arriving there, they said that some prisoners had arrived from the eastern front. With interest we all gathered outside in the compound. There were a lot of prisoners, but there were two they were bringing from the other side and keeping a close eye on. I looked and suddenly saw that these were Molla Said and one of his students; one we called İznikli Osman. He was carrying something like a trunk that had Ustad's books in it. He did not allow anyone other than Osman to be with him. Osman saw to his needs. He was wounded. He had been wounded in the leg. They treated it there. They put him in a dormitory.

It was terribly cold, and you could not tell day from night. [In the summer] the sun did not set. And there as well, Molla Said Efendi was not idle at night; he used to go to other camps and read to them, although it was forbidden. He himself used to lead the prayers for us during the day. First of all, they intervened and did not let us perform them. Then Ustad spoke to them and they allowed us a bit more freedom. They did not want too many of us to gather together at the same time. We used to call Nursi "Head of Religious Affairs." He used to explain religion even to the Russian guards.

The officers would reprimand any who listened. Molla Said Efendi always boosted our morale. “Don’t worry,” he used to say. “We shall be saved.” I never knew him to sleep at night there. He always used to read and take notes. He would say to us: “These people will also be Muslims in the future, but they don’t know about it yet.” We were never frightened or distressed so long as he was with us.

Mustafa Yalçın went on to describe how one night he escaped along with a group of seventeen other prisoners. Nursi declined to join them, but one of the group was a major who had been trained by him. He acted as their guide, finding the way “from everything from the stars to the moss on the trees.” He continued:

Molla Said was completely fearless. Night and day he strove for Islam. He always used to say “It is belief in God that is necessary” and “Belief in God is worth everything.”⁵⁸

Another fellow prisoner, Dr. M. Asaf Dişçi, recalled that he first saw Nursi in the town of Kologrif. They were together there for about six months, and then Nursi was sent to another large prisoner-of-war camp further into the interior. In Kologrif they were held in a cinema, and he divided off part of it and made it into a mosque. Dr. Asaf Dişçi went on to say:

Because he was the commander of a regiment, the other prisoners used to be very respectful toward him, but he used to say: “I am a *hoja* [teacher].” . . . He lived very frugally. He would make do with two eggs and a slice of bread a day. . . . His time was always full. He would read his commentary on the Qur’ān, and teach the prisoners. The officers and men were all extremely deferential toward him, he commanded respect.⁵⁹

Mustafa Bolay, a prisoner who spent six months in the Kosturma camp with Nursi, stated that Russians wanted to kill Nursi and that it was the military high command that had specified his being sent to that camp. Nursi’s nephew, Abdurrahman, who wrote a short biography of his uncle, corroborated this claim. He wrote: “They sent my uncle to Kosturma by way of Van, Julfa, Tiflis, and Kologrif. I wanted to describe in detail all the dangers he had faced at this time—the Russian officers had even wanted to kill him on several occasions, then record that he had committed suicide—but he would not permit it, so I just wrote it briefly.”⁶⁰

Both Mustafa Bolay and Mustafa Yalçın corroborate an incident in the prisoner-of-war camp that involved Nursi and doubtless contributed to the awe in which he was held by captors and captives alike.

On one occasion, Nicholas Nicholayavich, the czar's uncle and commander-in-chief of the Russian forces at the Caucasian front, came on an inspection of the camp. While on his tour of it, he passed by Nursi, who was seated. Nursi paid him no attention and did not so much as stir. The general noticed him, and finding some excuse, passed in front of him a second time. Nursi still did not rise to his feet. So he passed by him a third time, then stopped. He said to him through an interpreter:

"Don't you know who I am?"

"Yes, I do know," replied Nursi, and told him.

"So why do you insult me?" asked the general.

"Forgive me, but I haven't insulted you. I only did what was required by my beliefs."

"What do your beliefs require?"

"I am a Muslim scholar, and there is faith in my heart. A person with faith is superior to a person without. If I had risen to my feet, it would have been disrespectful to my beliefs. Therefore, I did not."

"In which case you're saying that I have no faith, and you're insulting both myself and the army of which I am a member, and my nation, and the czar. A court-martial will be set up immediately, and you will be questioned."

As the general decreed, a court-martial was set up. The Turkish, German, and Austrian officers all came to the headquarters and tried to persuade Nursi to apologize to the general, but he told them:

"I am eager to travel to the realm of the hereafter and enter the presence of God's Prophet, and I have to have a passport. I can't act contrary to my beliefs."

Finding no answer to this, they awaited the court's verdict. The interrogation was completed. Then the decision was given for Nursi's execution on the grounds of insulting the czar and the Russian army.

When the squad arrived to carry out the sentence, Nursi requested fifteen minutes "to perform his duty." This was to perform his ablutions and two *rak'ats* of prayers. The Russian general arrived on the scene while Nursi was doing this. He suddenly realized his mistake and said to Nursi when he had finished praying: "Forgive me! I thought you behaved as you did in order to insult me, and I acted accordingly. Now I realize you were merely acting as your beliefs required. Your sentence is quashed. You should be commended for your firmness of belief. Once again, I apologize."⁶¹

Nursi mentioned this incident, which demonstrates his extraordinary courage and powerful sense of the dignity of Islam, in a letter to one of his students written when being held in another prison, Afyon, in 1949. The story had appeared in the newspapers. He wrote: "The incident, which happened while I was a prisoner of war, is basically true, but I did not describe it in detail because I had no witnesses. Anyway, I did not know [at first] that the

squad had come to execute me; I understood later. And I did not know that the Russian commander had said some things in Russian by way of an apology. That is to say, the Muslim captain who was present and told the newspapers about the incident understood that the commander had said repeatedly: ‘Forgive me! Forgive me!’”⁶²

In the spring of 1918, Nursi found a way to escape amid the confusion following the Bolshevik Revolution. In later years, he wrote an evocative description of his “temporary awakening” in the winter darkness of the days preceding his escape, and the almost miraculous ease with which it was accomplished. Before quoting the long piece, it should be mentioned that in 2002 there was still alive in Kosturma a ninety-seven-year-old Tatar woman who as a small child of eight used to watch Nursi through the window or door of the mosque by the Volga. A‘isha Apa, the daughter of Mametiyeva, lived next to the mosque and always used to watch “the colonel” as he prayed there. He used to dress differently in the mosque. He would wear a turban and robe inside, and a Tatar fur cap outside.⁶³ Nursi’s description is as follows:

In the First World War, as a prisoner, I was in the distant province of Kosturma in northern Russia. There was a small mosque there belonging to the Tatars beside the famous River Volga. I used to become wearied among my friends, the other officers. I craved solitude, yet I could not wander about outside without permission. Then they took me on bail to the Tatar quarter, to that small mosque on the banks of the Volga. I used to sleep in the mosque, alone. Spring was close. I used to be very wakeful during the long, long nights of that northern land; the sad plashing of the Volga and the mirthless patter of the rain and the melancholy sighing of the wind during those dark nights in that dark exile had temporarily roused me from a deep sleep of heedlessness. I did not yet consider myself old, but everyone who had experienced the Great War had aged. For those were days that, as though manifesting the verse “A day that will turn the hair of children gray” (Qur’ān, 73:17), made even children old. And while I was forty years old, I felt myself to be eighty. In those long, dark nights and sorrowful exile and melancholic state, I despaired of life and of my homeland. I looked at my powerlessness and aloneness, and my hope failed.

Then, while in that state, succor arrived from the All-Wise Qur’ān; my tongue said: “God is enough for us; and how excellent a guardian is He!” (Qur’ān, 3:173).

Weeping, my heart cried out: “I am a stranger, I am alone, I am weak, I am powerless: I seek mercy, I seek forgiveness, I seek help from You, O my God!”

Thinking of my old friends in my homeland, and imagining myself dying in exile there, like Niyazi Mısri, my spirit poured forth these lines:

*Fleeing the world's grief,
Taking flight with ardor and longing,
Opening my wings to the void,
Crying with each breath, Friend! Friend!*

It was searching for its friends.

Anyway, my weakness and impotence became such potent intercessors at the divine court on that melancholy, pitiful, separation-afflicted, long night in exile that I still wonder at it. For several days later I escaped in the most unexpected manner, on my own, not knowing Russian, across a distance that would have taken a year on foot. I was saved in a wondrous fashion through divine favor, which was bestowed as a consequence of my weakness and impotence. Then, passing through Warsaw and Austria, I reached Istanbul, so that to be saved in this way so easily was quite extraordinary. I completed the long flight with an ease and facility that even the boldest and most cunning Russian speakers could not have accomplished.

That night in the mosque on the banks of the Volga made me decide to pass the rest of my life in caves. Enough now of mixing in social life with people. Since finally I would enter the grave alone, I said that from now on I would chose solitude so as to become accustomed to it. But, regretfully, things of no consequence like my many true friends in Istanbul and the glittering worldly life there, and in particular the fame and honor granted me, which were far greater than my due, made me temporarily forget my decision. It was as though that night in exile was a luminous blackness in my life's eye, and the glittering white daytime of Istanbul, a lightless white in it. It could not see ahead, it still slumbered. Until two years later, Gawth-i Geylānī opened my eyes once more with his book *Futūh al-Ghayb*.⁶⁴

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CHAPTER 7

The Armistice Years (1): Appointment to the Darü'l-Hikmeti'l-İslamiye, and Opposition to the British

The Escape and Return Journey

There is no detailed account of Nursi's escape and return journey to Istanbul. He did not permit his nephew, Abdurrahman, to give anything but the briefest facts: that "having escaped from Kosturma, [Nursi] was successful in reaching Petersburg, [then] Warsaw, and finally arriving at Istanbul by way of Vienna, was saved from captivity."¹ The journey, however, was neither direct nor quick. For his description of the long nights in the mosque by the Volga when spring was close shows that his escape, which was "several days later," cannot have been later than March or April, and he did not arrive back in Istanbul till after June 20, 1918. Moreover, one source states that he visited Berlin,² while his "official" biography³ and his brother Abdülmecid⁴ say he returned "by way of Germany."⁵ Since according to his own account Nursi made his escape and journey with extraordinary ease, he must have spent time somewhere on the way, but there are no clues to this in any of his works.⁶

In any event, in June 1918, Nursi returned to Istanbul by way of Vienna and Sofia, the last part of the journey by train. In Sofya he was given a passport by the military attaché. Dated June 17, 1918, it gives these details of Nursi on the front face:

Name: Said Mirza Efendi
(Lt. Colonel)
Detachment: Volunteer Kurdish Cavalry Regiment
Nationality: Ottoman
Point of Departure: Sofia
Destination: Istanbul (Dersaadet)
Reason for journey: Returning from captivity
Date: June 17, 1918

And the back of the passport bears a copy of the photograph of Nursi taken by the German authorities, and states that the train fare is to be charged to the army's account.⁷

Nursi's arrival in Istanbul was announced in several of the newspapers. The *Tanin* dated June 25, 1918, carried this short announcement: "Bediüzzaman Said-i Kürdi Efendi, one of the Kurdistan ulama, who fought in the war on the Caucasian Front together with his students and fell prisoner to the Russians, has recently arrived back in our city."⁸

Istanbul

Nursi was given a hero's welcome on his return to Istanbul. Enver Pasha introduced him to the leading military personnel in the War Ministry, saying: "Do you see this *hoja*? This was the person who withstood the Russian Cossacks in the East!" He received invitations from prominent pashas and dignitaries, or was visited by them. He was offered various positions and honors, and was awarded a war medal. Molla Süleyman, one of his students, recalled the following exchange between Enver Pasha and Nursi:

I read of Nursi's return in the *Tanin*, and visited him in Sultan Ahmet [Mosque] and kissed his hand. Later Enver Pasha, the minister of war, invited him to the War Ministry. He said to him: "How are you? What are you doing these days, *hoja*?" Nursi replied: "If you are offering me work for worldly gain, I can't accept it. But if you have something in mind to do with knowledge and learning, that would be different. However, what I need at the moment is to rest, for I was very harshly treated while a prisoner, and I suffered great hardship."⁹

Nursi was also joined by his nephew Abdurrahman, the son of his elder brother Abdullah. He may well have brought with him from the east a fair copy of *Ishārāt al-I'jāz*, Nursi's wartime commentary,¹⁰ for as soon as Nursi returned he set about having it published. Wanting to show his appreciation of the work and of Nursi's service in the war, Enver Pasha offered to publish it for him. Nursi declined the offer and suggested he might get the paper. Paper was not easy to find in wartime Turkey, so Enver provided the paper for *Ishārāt al-I'jāz*, and Nursi had it published.¹¹ Advertisements for the first fascicule appeared in *I'tisam Mecmuası*, nos. 5 and 6, dated December 26, 1918, and *Jîn Gazetesi*, January 16, 1919. The Şeyhül-İslam's office had it distributed to all the provincial muftis.¹² It was widely acclaimed.

A firsthand account of Nursi in these first weeks after his return says that every day in the late afternoon he took a stroll around the park near the

Sultan Ahmed Mosque in the heart of old Istanbul. He was observed to be thoughtful and dignified, and at that time before his transformation into the New Said he was still wearing the traditional dress of eastern Anatolia, but of a very elaborate kind. With a turban of fine material wound around a black cap, its tip hanging down over one shoulder, he looked very imposing.¹³ He stayed first in Eyüb, then in Fatih and Vezneciler, and finally in Çamlıca, the famous hill on the Asian side of the Bosphorus. Nursi always preferred places that were high up and had wide, commanding views. Here he stayed in an old mansion called the Yusuf Izzettin Pasha Köşk—probably assigned to him through Enver Pasha.

But Nursi was given no opportunity to rest and regain his strength. On August 12, 1918, the Darü'l-Hikmeti'l-İslamiye, a learned council or Islamic academy, was set up in association with the office of the Şeyhü'l-İslam, and without his knowledge, Nursi was appointed as the nominee of the army. However, before continuing, in order to understand better the problems this institution faced and Nursi's attitude toward it—and, indeed, all his thought and activities at this time—we include here a brief outline of the main events of those bitter years.

An Outline of Events from 1918 to 1922

Through bringing the Ottoman Empire into the war on the side of the Central Powers, the leaders of the Committee of Union and Progress had secured its final demise.¹⁴ For, on its defeat, the victors, and Britain in particular, were able to realize their long-cherished designs of finally breaking up the Ottoman Empire and vanquishing their ancient foe, the Turk. On hearing the terms of the Mudros Armistice, signed by Turkey and Britain on October 30, 1918, the sultan was heard to murmur: "This is not an armistice; it is an unconditional surrender."¹⁵ The day following its signature, the leading members of the CUP fled the country for Berlin. On November 13 a fleet of fifty-five ships belonging to the victors anchored off Istanbul, including four Greek warships, which was contrary to the agreement; and on December 8, a military administration was set up. While there can have been nothing more galling for the Muslim Turks than to see the Allied forces enter Istanbul as conquerors, the Ottoman Greeks, Jews, and Armenians of the city greeted them rapturously. The French general, Franchet Despérey, even rode through the streets of Istanbul to the French Embassy on a white horse, in the style of some conquering king or emperor.¹⁶

A number of secret wartime agreements had been signed by the Entente Powers concerning the partition of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁷ When Russia renounced her claims following the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, her place

was taken by Italy. And when, in a timely move, the Greek prime minister, Venizelos, brought his country into the war the same year, it was for the promise of Izmir and a portion of Aegean Turkey. The same area had, incidentally, already been promised to the Italians.

Thus, on the signing of the armistice, the French occupied parts of southern and southeastern Turkey, and in February 1919 their troops entered Istanbul, as mentioned above. On April 29, Italian troops landed at Antalya. The British held the Dardanelles and other places of strategic importance. Plans had been made to set up a Kurdish state in eastern Anatolia; the Armenians prepared to set up an Armenian state in the northeast of the country; and the Greeks of the Black Sea region aimed to resurrect the Greek state of Pontus. Indeed, the ultimate aim of Venizelos and many Greeks was to recreate a Greater Byzantine Empire based on Istanbul—the ancient capital, Constantinople. And when on May 15, 1919, the Greek army landed at Izmir with the assistance of French, British, and American warships, it provided the spark that ignited resistance to the invaders by the Muslim inhabitants of Anatolia,¹⁸ and, after more than three years of struggle and war, the ridding of their country of all aggressors.

But there was no united front in the face of the occupation. While the various groups based and fighting in Anatolia, the National Forces, had many supporters in Istanbul, among whom was Nursi, some deputies in the parliament, the sultan, and a number of prominent statesmen and ulama opposed them, believing the interests of the Ottoman state would be best served by cooperation and collaboration with the occupying powers. When the supporters of the National Forces gained strength in Istanbul, notably in the new parliament opened in January 1920, it led to a reoccupation of the city by British troops in March, and large-scale arrests and deportations.¹⁹ Under considerable pressure from the British, the sultan dissolved the parliament the following month, and a *fatwa* was extracted from a specially installed Şeyhü'l-İslam declaring the nationalists to be rebels and the killing of them a duty.²⁰ An army was then formed to fight them.

In Ankara, which became the center of the national movement, a new representative assembly was formed, and on April 23, 1920, the Turkish Grand National Assembly had its formal opening. But it was only on the Istanbul government's agreeing to sign the Treaty of Sèvres in August 1920 that the nationalist cause obtained the almost total support of the Turkish people.²¹ Enraged by the signature of this vengeful document, which purported to legitimize the carving up of Turkey itself between the powers and meant the "surrender of [its] territorial integrity and political sovereignty,"²² they determined to liberate their country from its foreign invaders.²³

It is beyond the scope of this book to describe the course of the War of Independence, but it may be noted that up to the armistice, the Turks had been engaged in various wars since 1909, and in 1920 were exhausted and improv-

erished, with the male population decimated. On their defeat, the Ottoman army had been (supposedly) disarmed²⁴ and disbanded by the victors. Against the heaviest odds, inspired and sustained by their faith in God and the religion of Islam, the Turks won a truly remarkable victory. Indeed, religion and men of religion played a role of the greatest importance in the war, which was proclaimed a *jihād*, and one of the main aims of which was considered by all, including the Ankara government, to be the saving of the caliph and sultan from enemy hands.²⁵ Their victory was recognized by the Mudanya Armistice, signed by Britain and Turkey on October 11, 1922, and received international recognition in the Treaty of Lausanne, signed July 24, 1923.

The Turkish victory in the War of Independence was not simply the thwarting of the imperialist designs of a number of European powers. As has already been suggested, the matter must be seen in a wider perspective: for a thousand years the Turks had been “the standard-bearers of the Islamic world” against the Christian West. The word “Turk” was synonymous with “Islam.” When they were victorious against the West, it was in the name of Islam, and when they suffered defeat, it was at Islam, which they represented, that the blows had very often been directed. And so, when the Ottomans failed to match the material progress of the West and as a result became progressively subject to it, this was interpreted by Christian Europe as being proof of the superiority of Western civilization. And it was also seen as a kind of justification for their greed, as they vied with one another over the disposal of “the sick man of Europe’s” estate.

The British were described by a contemporary French writer as “the most determined enemies of the Crescent,”²⁶ and it was for British imperialism that Islam came to present the greatest obstacle. Efforts to conquer, subdue, and divide the Islamic world had been countered with some success by the Ottomans’ caliphate policy and movement for Islamic unity. The revolt of the Arabs against the Ottomans during the First World War and the subsequent setting up of separate Arab states was one result of Britain’s sustained and intense espionage and propaganda campaign against the Ottomans.²⁷

Thus, the defeat of the Ottomans in 1918 was seen by the victors as the final triumph of the West over Islam, of Western civilization over Islamic civilization, of the Cross over the Crescent. It is in this light that the occupation of Istanbul should be seen,²⁸ and one must also keep in mind the extremely harsh terms of the peace treaties, which were far harsher than those imposed on the other defeated nations.²⁹

But the desire of the British and French in particular to avenge themselves on their ancient foe did not stop there. Appointing officials to oversee the various ministries, the government itself was no more than a puppet. And having for many years spurred on the Christian minorities to rebel against the Ottoman state, they now proceeded to encourage them to take over positions of authority in local government and state officialdom. This discrimination

against Muslim Turks in their own country went so far that only Christian children could attend state schools. The Armenians and Greeks also massacred thousands of Muslims, while the occupying forces turned a blind eye.³⁰

The problems associated with the occupation of foreign armies are many. But in this case the situation was exacerbated by these deep-seated attitudes of the victors. Here it was not only the gall of defeat and excesses of occupying troops relaxing in “the fleshpots of Constantinople” that had to be borne; there was an insidious policy of Christianization through attempts to discredit Islam and to sap the moral fiber of the Turks through the deliberate encouragement of immorality, the drinking of alcohol, and other “evils of civilization.” As Nursi later told the deputies in the Grand National Assembly: “Although for a long time the Western world has been attacking the Islamic world with its civilization, its philosophy, its sciences, its missionaries, and all the means at its disposal and has conquered it materially, it has not been able to conquer it in religion.”³¹ Now, it seemed, the stage was set for it to pursue this inauspicious aim.

Nursi and the Darü'l-Hikmeti'l-İslamiye

It may be seen from the above description how great the need was for a learned body with the authority of the Darü'l-Hikmeti'l-İslamiye. The bill proposing its establishment had been introduced in the parliament at the beginning of the year,³² and it was envisaged that it would perform various functions. Just as it was to find solutions for problems confronting the Islamic world, so it was to answer in learned manner the attacks made on it, and to combat attempts to discredit the religion of Islam. It was to have the power to refer the open flouting of Islamic morality to the relevant authorities. Furthermore, it was to serve the Muslim people of Turkey, answering questions, informing them concerning internal and external dangers, and generally meeting their religious needs with various publications. To this end, branches were opened in all provinces and major towns. At any one time, it was composed of nine members, a principal, and various officers. Mehmed Akif was appointed as its first secretary (*başkâtip*). The members, all of whom were prominent ulama, were divided into three committees: jurisprudence (*fikh*), ethics (*ahlak*), and theology (*kelam*).³³ Nursi remained as a member of the Darü'l-Hikmeti'l-İslamiye for the four years of its short existence. It was closed in November 1922 when the sultanate was abolished by the Ankara government. However, as we shall see, despite the need for the Darü'l-Hikmeti'l-İslamiye and the efforts of its members, the situation did not allow for the full accomplishment of its aims.

A number of Darü'l-Hikmeti'l-İslamiye documents mentioning Nursi are still extant. Below are the Şeyhü'l-İslam's memo concerning his appoint-

ment to the rank of *mahrec*,³⁴ and the caliph's edict ratifying the appointment. First is the War Ministry's request that he be appointed, signed by Enver Pasha and referred to in the Şeyhü'l-İslam's memo.

Exalted permission is requested that, on account of his patriotic efforts in mobilizing the tribes to fight and his distinguished and witnessed public-spirited services to the fatherland, Bediüzzaman Said Efendi, who took part in the fight against the Russians at Bitlis, was taken prisoner, and has recently returned, be appointed to a rank in the religious establishment conformable with the dignity of his learning.

“Ağustos 10, 1334 (August 10, 1918)
Deputy of the Commander-in-Chief
and Minister of War,
Enver³⁵

The Office of the Şeyhü'l-İslam
212

Honored Sir,

It has been made known by the Illustrious Ministry of War that Bediüzzaman Said-i Kurdi, who took part in the battle with the Russians at Bitlis, was taken prisoner, and has recently returned, has been honored with a grade in the religious establishment on account of his patriotic efforts in mobilizing the tribes to fight and his distinguished and witnessed public-spirited services to the fatherland. The Imperial Rescript deeming it suitable that the above-mentioned, who has recently been appointed to the Darü'l-Hikmeti'l-İslamiye, be honored with the rank of *mahrec*, has been set out and presented. In whatever way, therefore, the caliph's imperial decree is concerned with the matter, it is evident, sir, haste will be made to carry it out.

Zi'l-Qa'de 17, 1336/Ağustos 24, 1334 (August 24, 1918)
Şeyhü'l-İslam
MUSA KAZIM

The Office of the Şeyhü'l-İslam

Mehmed Vahiduddin

Bediüzzaman Said Efendi, a member of the Darü'l-Hikmeti'l-İslamiye, has been awarded the rank of *mahrec*.

The Office of the Şeyhü'l-İslam is charged with carrying out this imperial decree.

Zi'l-Qa'de 18, 1336/Ağustos 25, 1334
Şeyhü'l-İslam
Musa Kazım³⁶

As mentioned above, on his return to Istanbul Nursi had been joined by his nephew, Abdurrahman (1903–28). Despite his tender years—he was still only fifteen—he was a very intelligent and capable boy, and was described by Nursi as student, and assistant, and friend, and amanuensis, and spiritual son. He remained with his uncle for several years, during which time he wrote his biography. It was forty-five pages in length and forms the main source for Nursi’s early life. It was published in Istanbul in 1919.³⁷ The following is a passage from an appendix to it describing Nursi’s appointment to the Darü’l-Hikmeti’l-İslamiye, and something of his attitude toward it and his resulting activities:

I have described the life of my uncle, Said-i Kurdi, the author of the *Lemeât Collection*, briefly in an independent work. For the past two and a half years they have burdened him with the duty of the Darü’l-Hikmeti’l-İslamiye. He used to say: “I would have given it up, but I want to render an account to the nation.” And now I am writing a few words about how my uncle rendered his account through his duties in the Darü’l-Hikmeti’l-İslamiye.

It was two years ago in 1334 (1918) that without his consent my uncle was appointed a member of the Darü’l-Hikmeti’l-İslamiye. But because he was badly shaken by his captivity, he obtained leave not to take up his duty.³⁸ In fact, he tried to resign on many occasions, but his friends would not let him. So he continued, and now two and a half years have passed.

From the beginning I noticed that he did not spend anything on himself over and above what was necessary. In reply to those who asked him “Why do you live so frugally?” he would say: “I want to be like the majority of Muslims and the majority can only obtain this much. I don’t want to be like the extravagant minority.”³⁹ After putting aside the minimum amount from his salary from the Darü’l-Hikmet, he would give me the remainder, saying: “Look after this!” But relying on my uncle’s kindness toward me and his contempt for possessions, I spent all of the money that had been left over in a year without telling him. So he told me: “It wasn’t licit for us to spend that money, it belonged to the nation. Why did you spend it?”⁴⁰ But since this is how the matter stands, I dismiss you from the post of deputy for expenditure and I appoint myself!” After this, he put aside twenty liras a month for me and fifteen for himself. Other expenses were included in his fifteen. That is to say, ten or twelve liras used to remain over for him per month. He used to put aside any money that remained over and above this.

Some time passed, and he thought about having twelve of his works printed in the cause of religion. He used the money that had accumulated, about one hundred liras, to cover the expense of having the works printed. Then, with the exception of only one or two small ones, he had them distributed free. I asked him why he had not had them sold, and he said to me:

“It is permissible for me to take only just enough to live on out of the salary. Anything more than that is the property of the nation. In this way I’m reimbursing the nation.”

His service in the Darü'l-Hikmeti'l-İslamiye was all in the form of personal enterprises like that. For he saw certain obstacles in working jointly there. People who knew him were aware that he had donned his shroud and was risking his life. It was for this reason that he resisted and stood firm as a rock in the Darü'l-Hikmeti'l-İslamiye. He would not let the Darü'l-Hikmet be made a tool in the hands of the foreigners. He held out against the wrong *fatwas* and opposed them. When a current harmful to Islam appeared, he used to publish a work to destroy it.⁴¹

To fill in the background to this, it should be noted that following the signing of the armistice (October 30, 1918) and occupation of Istanbul, the prime concern of the Entente Powers was to oversee the enactment of its provisions, including the demobilizing of the Ottoman army and surrender of all armaments, and, pending the drawing up of a peace treaty, to influence the sultan and Ottoman government in such a way as to favor their continued domination and plans for the partition of Turkey.⁴² Although the CUP leaders had fled, its supporters and members still dominated the army and the parliament, and other governmental institutions. Before their flight, the former leaders had also made provision for resistance to the occupation, both in Istanbul and in Anatolia.⁴³ Sultan Reşad (d. July 1918) was succeeded by Vahideddin, who in contrast was adamantly opposed to the CUP and the national struggle, and openly supported the revived Freedom and Accord Party (FAP) (*Hürriyet ve İtilaf Fırkası*), which was led by his brother-in-law, Damad Ferid Pasha. Neither of the latter was opposed to the occupation; in fact, as events unfolded, they became increasingly pro-British, arguing that it was only under British tutelage that Turkey could survive.⁴⁴ Damad Ferid Pasha formed five cabinets between 1919 and 1922, yet the FAP was without representation in the parliament and lacked a power base. Its only *raison d'être* was its viciously anti-Unionist stand and opposition to the nationalists.⁴⁵ These cabinets were formed “by the palace and the commissioners of the occupation forces,”⁴⁶ and acted, if not under the direction of the latter, at least under their pressure.⁴⁷ The FAP was also closely allied with the Friends of England Association, founded with British money to further British interests. One of its cofounders was the head of the British Intelligence Service in Istanbul (Dr. Frew). The association tried to win support for a British mandate over Turkey and through various means to sabotage nationalist efforts.⁴⁸

In such a situation, Nursi’s main service in the Darü'l-Hikmeti'l-İslamiye—and, indeed, the greater part of his activities in this period—was countering the divisive and corrupting influence of the occupying forces and

their collaborators. Clearly it could not fulfill its functions as it should. That is to say, at a time when the British were using every means to utilize all areas of power and influence in Istanbul for their own ends, Nursi worked to neutralize their influence as far as the Darü'l-Hikmeti'l-İslamiye was concerned, even if it lessened the effectiveness of the institution itself.

An example of pressure brought to bear on it, which was opposed, was its being required to publish pamphlets condemning the National Forces in Anatolia.⁴⁹

Another example was the famous *fatwa* condemning the National Forces. Nursi published a rebuttal of this. Following their reoccupation of Istanbul in March 1920, through the palace, the British forced Şeyhü'l-İslam Dürrizade Abdullah Efendi—installed after his predecessor, Haydarizade İbrahim Efendi, had resigned rather than sign it—to issue a *fatwa* declaring the various nationalist groups in Anatolia to be rebels and the killing of them the solemn duty of Muslims (April 10, 1920).⁵⁰ A counter*fatwa* was issued in Anatolia signed by eighty-four muftis, and a further sixty-eight ulama, of whom eleven were deputies in the Ankara assembly. It stated that a *fatwa* issued under enemy duress was null and void, and declared the national struggle to be a *jihād*.⁵¹

Nursi wrote:

A *fatwa* issued by a government and Şeyhül-İslam's Office in a country under enemy occupation and under the command and constraint of the British is defective and should not be heeded. Those operating against the enemy invasion are not rebels. The *fatwa* must be rescinded.⁵²

He also argued that since it comprised a legal judgment, the claims of both parties should have been considered before judgment had been passed. He wrote:

It is not only a *fatwa* so that it might be justified. It is a *fatwa* that comprises a legal judgment, for the difference between a *fatwa* and a legal judgment is that its subject is general, not specific, neither is it binding. Whereas a legal judgment is both specific and binding. As for this *fatwa*, it is both specific—whoever looks at it will necessarily understand its purpose—and it is binding, because its ultimate cause is to impel the mass of Muslims against them [the National Forces].

This *fatwa* comprises a legal judgment, but in a legal judgement it is imperative that the enemies [both sides] hear it. Anatolia should also have been allowed to speak. The *fatwa* could have been issued after judgment had been passed on the assertions and counterclaims by a committee of politicians and ulama taking into account the interests of Islam. In fact, a number

of things are being reversed these days. Opposites are changing their names and being substituted for each other; tyranny is being called justice; *jihād*, insurrection; and captivity, freedom.⁵³

As for the Darü'l-Hikmet, Nursi stated that it was because it lacked any real power that it could not function as it should. For example, it could not put an end to what it looked on as the serious wrongs of immoral conduct, the consumption of alcohol, and gambling, whereas the government in Anatolia stopped them with a single command.⁵⁴

A further reason Nursi gave for the Darü'l-Hikmet's inability to function adequately was the lack of harmony between its members. Their personal qualities prevented "a communal spirit" emerging. The "I's" did not become a "We."⁵⁵ Serious political differences should also be mentioned.⁵⁶ In fact, Nursi had long favored the setting up of a learned body such as the Darü'l-Hikmet, made up of specialists in different fields and based on the principle of consultation, to tackle the problems facing not only the Ottoman Empire, but the Islamic world as well. In *Sünühāt*, published in 1919–20, he discussed this in connection with the caliphate, a subject of urgent debate at the time. Briefly, having stated that the sultanate and caliphate were inseparable, and that the Office of Grand Vizier represented the former and the Office of Şeyhül-İslam the latter, he pointed out that in modern, complex society and in the face of the myriad problems facing the Islamic world, it was beyond the capacity of a single individual to perform the duty of Şeyhül-İslam effectively. A voice of such strength and authority was required that it could only be supplied by a learned council such as one described above. He suggested that with the addition of further ulama, both Ottoman and from other parts of the Islamic world, an upgraded Darü'l-Hikmeti'l-İslamiye could form its basis.⁵⁷

Green Crescent Society and Medrese Teachers' Association

Nursi was involved with further organizations and societies at this time, one of which was the Green Crescent Society, founded on March 5, 1920. He was a founder member of this nonpolitical society, set up specifically to combat the spread of alcoholic liquor and other harmful addictions, which were becoming a problem. Other members were the Şeyhül-İslam, Haydarzade İbrahim Efendi, Dr. Tevfik Rüstü Aras, Eşref Edip, and Fahreddin Kerim Gökay.⁵⁸ Answering questions put to him about Nursi in 1975, Fahreddin Gökay quoted some minutes taken at a meeting of the Green Crescent Society in which "Said Efendi" suggested giving priority to the writing and free distribution of articles and pamphlets.⁵⁹

Another society in which Nursi was involved was the Medrese Teachers' Association (*Cemiyet-i Müderrisîn*), founded February 15, 1919. Its main aims were "to initiate enterprises that would assist in raising the teaching profession to the high level that is in keeping with the Islamic nation (*millet*) and civilization, . . . to produce students of the ulama profession who would be thoroughly informed of the Islamic sciences and have knowledge of the modern sciences sufficient for the needs of the times. . . . To instil the truths of religion and elevated conduct of Islam in Muslims' spirits, strengthen bonds of brotherhood, encourage personal enterprise, and to protect the rights of *medrese* teachers." The society was subsequently transformed into the Society for the Advancement of Islam (*Teâli-i İslam Cemiyeti*) (November 24, 1919), with which Nursi does not appear to have been connected, in distinction to many of the initial members.⁶⁰ A number of the leading ulama of the time belonged to the Medrese Teachers' Society, including Mustafa Safvet Efendi, Mustafa Sabri (twice Şeyhü'l-İslam), and Mehmet Atif Efendi. These last two together with Nursi undertook to reply to articles attacking Islam that appeared in the press. Nursi included some of his replies, on such subjects as polygamy, slavery, the position of women, and the representation of the human form, in some of his subsequent works.⁶¹ An example of his persuasive argumentation is the following short reply about polygamy and slavery:

The ordinances of Islam are of two sorts: the first consists of those on which the Sharī'ah is based. This sort is pure good. The other is the modified Sharī'ah; that is, it takes matters that are savage and cruel, and, as the lesser of two evils, rectifies them and makes them practicable and conformable with human nature. Making it possible to move on to pure good, it puts them in a form that is consonant with the time and place. For it would necessitate reversing human nature to suddenly do away with a matter that governs it. Thus, the Sharī'ah did not impose slavery; it modified it so it ceased being in a savage form and made it one that would lead to complete freedom; it adjusted and rectified it. Also, the Sharī'ah did not raise the number of wives from one to four—although polygamy is conformable with nature, reason, and wisdom. It rather reduced the number to four from eight or nine. And regarding polygamy, it imposed such conditions that it can cause no harm at all in being practiced. Even if there is some bad in it, it is the lesser of two evils, and the lesser of two evils is relative justice. Alas, every situation in this world cannot be pure good!⁶²

Nursi's Ill Health

As his nephew described in the piece of his biography quoted earlier, it was only with reluctance that Nursi had taken up his position in the Darü'l-Hik-

met. He had been severely shaken by the war, but because of his sense of responsibility toward “the nation,” he undertook the duties imposed on him as a way of serving it. Abdurrahman wrote that he asked his uncle what had caused him to be so severely shaken, and Nursi replied: “I can bear my own sorrows, but I have been crushed by the sorrows and grief of Islam. I feel each blow delivered at the world of Islam to be delivered first at my own heart. That is why I have been so shaken. But I see a light; it will cause all these sorrows to be forgotten, God willing.”⁶³

Among the extant documents of the Darü'l-Hikmet are two requests of Nursi for a leave of absence on grounds of ill health. We include them here together with an identity paper dated September 26, 1921, and Nursi's answers to an official questionnaire dated October 17, 1921.⁶⁴

To the Illustrious Şeyhü'l-İslam

A Petition:

The nervous debility with which I am afflicted as a result of both the searing difficulties I endured day and night for two years on the Caucasian front in the present [*sic*] war in defense of religion and country, and the intolerable hardships I suffered in two and a half years of captivity, and the regretful conditions which we witness at the present time, has turned into neurasthenia.

As required in accordance with the attached report giving the results of the doctors' examination and stating that five to six months' change of air is imperative, I request the permission of the Illustrious Şeyhü'l-İslam for leave for about six months' change of air.

And the command belongs. . . .

Nisan 19, 1335 (April 19, 1919)

Bediuzzaman Said

Member of the Darü'l-Hikmet

Member Said Efendi's request, corroborated by a doctor's report, for five months' leave of absence for a change of air on account of his having neurasthenia has been accepted. Since there is no obstacle to his leaving his post for that period, his petition has been noted accordingly . . . Receb 17, 1337/Nisan 19, 1335 (April 19, 1919)

To the Illustrious Şeyhü'l-İslam

Illustrious and Munificent Excellency,

Since, as the attached report makes clear, the illness from which I suffered earlier has returned and I am at present undergoing treatment by a

specialist doctor in Sariyer, I request that permission be granted for three months' leave of absence for treatment and a change of air, as the report requires.

Eylül 13, 1337 (September 13, 1921)

Said

Member of the Darü'l-Hikmeti'l-İslamiye

**Document Giving the Curriculum Vitae
of Officials, Clerks, and Employees
of the Ottoman State**

Price ten *kuruş*

(1) My name is Said, I am known as Bediüzzaman, my father's name was Mirza. I have no connections with any noble family. I belong to the Shafi'i school of law. I am a subject of the Ottoman State.

(2) My date of birth was 1293 (1877). My place of birth was the village of Nurs in the subdistrict of İspart, attached to the district of Hizan in the province of Bitlis.

(3) I made my preliminary studies under my brother for about two years in the above-mentioned subdistrict of İspart. Later I completed the customary course of study in the study circle of Shaikh Muhammad Celali in the town of [Doğu] Bayezit in the province of Erzurum. Later on I started to study in Van. For about fifteen years I was occupied with studying various sciences. I took part in the recent war on its declaration as a volunteer and regimental commander. I was taken prisoner by the Russians at Bitlis. I escaped from captivity and returned to Istanbul. I have been a member of the Darü'l-Hikmeti'l-İslamiye since it was first founded. I lost the diploma I received from the above-mentioned Muhammad Celali Efendi while I was a prisoner of war. I am the author of seventeen works. In Arabic are the Qur'anic commentary *Ishârât al-I'jâz*, the treatises on logic called *Taliqat* and *Qızıl İjaz*, and *al-Khutbat al-Shâmiyyah*. And I have written works in Turkish including *Nokta*, *Şuaat*, *Sünûhat*, *Münâzarat*, *Muhâkemat*, *Tulu'at*, *Lemeât*, *Rumuz*, *İşârât*, *Hutuvat-ı Sitte*, *İki [Mekteb-i] Musibetin Şehadetnamesi* and *Hakikat Çekirdekleri*. Most of my works are written as admonishments for the guidance of Muslims and to arouse the heedless. Just as I speak Turkish and Kurdish, so I read and write Arabic and Persian. No copies remain of *Rumuz*, *İşârât*, *Hutuvat-ı Sitte*, *İki [Mekteb-i] Musibetin Şehadetnamesi*, *al-Khutbat al-Shâmiyyah*, *Münâzarat*, *Muhâkemat*, and *Ta'liqat*. I have no certificate or diploma in science or other subjects.

(4) On the declaration of the Great War, I joined the army for the honor of it and as a volunteer, first as a regimental mufti and then as a regimental commander. While performing this duty, I was taken prisoner by the

Russians at Bitlis. All these duties were undertaken as a volunteer. Only, on my return to Istanbul from captivity, as a gratuity, the Ministry of War gave me fifty liras a month for three months, making a total of one hundred and fifty liras. I have one war medal. I have no other rank or decoration. I have no foreign decorations or medals. I was appointed to the Darü'l-Hikmeti'l-İslamiye on a salary of five thousand *kuruş* in accordance with the Imperial Rescript dated Şevval 26, 1336, and as required by the imperial decree dated Zi'l-Ka'de 18, 1336, I was honored with the rank of *mahrec*.

17 Teşrin-i Evvel 1337 (17 October 1921)

Bediüzzaman Said

Member of the Darü'l-Hikmeti'l-İslamiye⁶⁵

A Memorandum of the Ottoman State

Name: Bediüzzaman Said Efendi

Father's name and place of residence: The late Mirza Efendi

Mother's name: The late Nuriye Hanım

Date and place of birth: 1295 (AH) and 1293 (Rumi) (1877–78), the village of Nurs in the subdistrict of Hizan

Religion (*millet*): Muslim

Profession, title, and eligibility to vote: a member of the Darü'l-Hikmeti'l-İslamiye.

Civil status: single

Features and Place of Registration

Height: average

Eyes: hazel

Complexion: dark

Distinguishing marks: none

Vilayet: Istanbul

District: Beyoğlu, European Bosphorus

Quarter: Sarıyer

Street: Fıstıklı Bağlar

Number of residence: 18/11

Type of residence: foreigner [not local]. Originally registered in the province of Bitlis, district of Hizan, village of Nurs.

Bediüzzaman Said Efendi, whose name, state, and description are written above, is a subject of the Ottoman Empire, and this document showing that he is recorded on the register of births is duly delivered.

Eylül 26, 1337 (September 26, 1921)

Ministry of Internal Affairs

Nursi Opposes an Autonomous Kurdistan

Nursi opposed the British openly in the press, above all warning against their intrigues in the field of politics and efforts to sow discord among the ulama. Before looking at this more closely, though, another subject of importance connected with the British with which Nursi was also concerned should be mentioned, and this was the question of Kurdistan.

It will be remembered that when allotting the spoils of the Ottoman Empire, Britain—and also France—had laid claim to the geographical region of Kurdistan and the oil fields of Mesopotamia.⁶⁶ In order to further its interests in the area, British plans included the setting up of an autonomous Kurdistan, and provision for this was contained in the Treaty of Sèvres.⁶⁷ Then, following the war, the promise of autonomy was used by the British—through such agents as Said Molla of the Friends of England Association⁶⁸ and Damad Ferid Pasha⁶⁹—as a means of inciting the inhabitants of the area to rebel against Ottoman authority, and also, incidentally, to hamper the National Forces. A number of political societies with the same aim were founded at the same time, one of which was the Society for the Advancement of Kurdistan (*Kürdistan Teali Cemiyeti*),⁷⁰ with which Said Molla was also involved,⁷¹ and which was hand in glove with the British. Nursi was again approached in the hope of gaining his support and access to his considerable influence, but as before and after, he refused absolutely and condemned any action that would damage unity with the Turks. One of those who approached him was Seyyid Abdülkadir, the president of the above society. Nursi is reported to have given him this reply: “Almighty God says in the Holy Qur’ân: God shall produce a people whom He will love as they will love Him (Qur’ân, 5:54). I pondered over this divine declaration and I understood that this refers to the Turkish nation, which for a thousand years acted as the standard-bearer of the Islamic world. I can’t follow a few brainless racialists; I have to serve this heroic nation, and our four hundred and fifty million true Muslim brothers.”⁷² An anecdote taken from the same source illustrates this further. It is related by Konsolidçi Asaf Bey, a well-known writer:

One day while sitting in the printing office a man entered. He was wearing a strange outfit and had some sort of long cap on his head. On seeing him, Mevlânzâde⁷³ rose to his feet and, pointing to me, said:

“This is our leader-writer, Konsolidçi Asaf.” Then addressing me, he said:

“This is Bediüzzaman Said Efendi, one of our leading scholars.” From then on I used to meet Nursi from time to time, and truly, I benefited enormously from his knowledgeable conversation. He used to come frequently to our press and we would talk. Sometimes we would even go out together and go around the town.

I don't know how long it was after this, Said Nursi left Istanbul. I can't remember now whether he went to his home region or some other place.⁷⁴ Anyway, Germany and its allies had met with a crushing defeat. The country was divided up, and they started to create new states in every corner of it. Armenia was one of these. One day, Mevlânzâde Rifat Bey said to me:

"They are setting up an Armenian state. Since the empire is falling apart, we ought to set up a Kurdish one."

When I looked at him in astonishment, he said to me:

"I'm not a traitor. And it wasn't me who broke up the mighty Ottoman Empire. God curse those who did; they have all fled like thieves. For sure there are the National Forces, but they don't offer much hope. We're not living in the age of miracles. I'm going to write to Bediuzzaman about the matter, because he's very influential, and ask him to join us."

Mevlânzâde wrote and sent the letter. Then, about ten days or two weeks later, we were sitting in the printing office with some guests. There was Cakalı Hamdi Pasha, who was minister of the navy at the time, and also the chief of the military court. We were talking of this and that when the postman came in and left a letter. Rifat Bey's face darkened as he read it; it was clear he was angry. After reading it through, he flung it at me, saying:

"Read this and see! Bediuzzaman rejects my proposal and says he does not support my idea."

It would have been rude to read the letter to myself, so I began to read it out loud. Cakalı Hamdi Bey and Mustafa Pasha, the chief of the military court, listened. Although I do not remember exactly how the letter went, Nursi rejected Mevlânzâde's proposal to set up [an independent state of] Kurdistan, and said: "Rifat Bey, let's not set up Kurdistan, let's revive the Ottoman Empire. If you accept to do this, I am willing to sacrifice even my life for it."

After listening to this, Mustafa Pasha turned to Mevlânzâde and said:

"You are wrong, Rifat Bey, and Nursi is right. It's not Kurdistan that should be set up, but the Ottoman Empire that should be re-formed and revived."⁷⁵

This incident may have occurred around the time Şerif Pasha, an aristocratic Kurd from the Baban family who had "a luxurious villa in the south of France," reached agreement in Paris with Bogos Nubar Pasha, the Armenian representative to the Peace Conference, concerning the setting up of an autonomous state in the Eastern Provinces of what remained of the Ottoman Empire as a British mandate or protectorate. They presented a joint memorandum to the conference.⁷⁶ Seyyid Abdülkadir, the founder of the Society for the Advancement of Kurdistan, also presented a memo concerning autonomy for Kurdistan,⁷⁷ and he supported Şerif Pasha's moves in Paris. When news of

the agreement broke, there were outraged reactions in both Istanbul and the Eastern Provinces. The Ottoman parliament in Istanbul was bombarded with telegrams. The affair caused a furor, and the deputies condemned both Şerif Pasha and Seyyid Abdülkadir. A motion was put forward proposing his dismissal from the Upper House, of which he was a member.⁷⁸

Said Nursi joined in the protest at the agreement, publishing two of the very few press articles he wrote during this period. The first appeared in the daily *İkdam*, February 22, 1920, under the title “The Kurds and Ottomanism: The Kurds’ Indignation and Anger.” It emphasized the Kurds’ long history of devoted service to Islam, and pointed out that they could never harm it by concluding pacts with its enemies, which would be contrary to their “national conscience.” They would, before anything, “preserve their religious and national unity.”⁷⁹

The second article appeared in *Sebilürreşad*, no. 461, dated March 4, 1920, which was still being published in Istanbul. Nursi had fairly close relations with both its owner, the writer Eşref Edip, and its chief writer, the “national” poet Mehmed Ākif, till Ākif left Istanbul sometime before the *fatwa* mentioned above was issued and Eşref Edip left sometime after it. The periodical introduced Nursi’s article, “The Kurds and Islam,” as follows:

Bediüzzaman Said-i Kurdi, a member of the Darü’l-Hikmeti’l-İslamiye, being truly representative of the Kurds’ firmness in religion, innate nobility, and Islamic courage, has more right than anyone to speak about this matter. He has said this:

“The most eloquent, silencing reply to the agreement signed by Bogos Nubar and Şerif Pasha has been provided by the telegraphs sent by the Kurdish tribal leaders of the Eastern Provinces. The Kurds would never leave the Islamic community. Those who say the opposite are a handful of people who follow their own aims and have no authority to speak on behalf of the Kurds.

The Kurds have [recently] sacrificed five hundred thousand of their number to uphold the honor of Islam, proving once again their loyalty to the caliphate.

To come to the notorious memorandum: the Armenians have come to realize that since they form only a tiny minority in the Eastern Provinces, they can in no way claim ownership [there]. . . . They saw that it was easy and useful to use Şerif Pasha to further their aims, since he claims to represent the Kurds. For in this way the Kurdish cause and Armenian cause would cease to exist and the wish for separation would be fulfilled. It was to realize this aim that the memorandum was signed jointly and presented to the [Peace] Conference. The Armenians’ intention is to deceive the Kurds, that’s all. For even if in the future they will not be able to deny the Kurds’ numer-

ical majority, they will certainly make them a subject people, since they are inferior in respect of knowledge and education. No sensible Kurd could ever support such a thing. Anyway, the Kurds have proved, not verbally but through their actions, that they're opposed to the memorandum.

The Kurdish cause is meaningless, because before everything the Kurds are Muslims, and with their firm adherence to religion, which is so firm as to be bigotry, they are truly Muslims. So they would never bother even for an instant about whether or not they belong to the same race as the Armenians. Islam is opposed to the idea of racialism [since] it is contrary to Islamic brotherhood. . . .

There is talk of the autonomy that will be given to Kurdistan! The Kurds would rather die than accept autonomy under a foreign protectorate. If their freedom of development has to be thought of, the Sublime (Ottoman) State will think of it, not Bogos Nubar and Şerif Pasha. In short, the Kurds are in need of no one's mediation or intervention in this matter. . . ."⁸⁰

Nursi also served the cause of unity through his renewed efforts in the field of education. He was one of the fifteen founder members of the Society for the Propagation of Education among Kurds (*Kürt Neşr-ı Ma'arif Cemiyeti*), founded 1919, which was nonpolitical, independent, and concerned solely with education. It aimed initially to set up one primary school for Kurdish children in Istanbul, who, "of all the sons of the fatherland, are the ones most deprived of the bounty of education," and later, as funds permitted, to found others in areas where Kurds formed the majority of the inhabitants.⁸¹ Nursi was also going to be successful in securing the promise of funds from the Ankara government for the Medresetü'z-Zehrâ—that is to say, to revive his project for the university-level *medrese* in the east, as we shall see.

Nursi Combats the British

During this time, the Şeyhü'l-İslam's office was presented with a questionnaire on the religion of Islam by the Church of England authorities, and as a member of the Darü'l-Hikmet, Nursi was asked to prepare the answers. Feeling this to be intolerable insolence on the part of the British, Nursi wrote a few succinct words that tended to be insults rather than answers. His intention was to protect the honor of Islam. He later described the affair as follows:

One time, when the British had destroyed the guns on the Bosphorus and had invaded Istanbul, the chief cleric of the Anglican Church, which is that country's highest religious authority, asked the Şeyhü'l-İslam's office six questions about religion. I was a member of the Darü'l-Hikmeti'l-İslamiye at the

time and they said to me: “You answer them!” They wanted a six-hundred-word reply to the six questions. I said: “I shall answer not with six hundred words, nor with six words, nor even with one word, but with a mouthful of spit! For you can see, the moment they stepped ashore here, their chief cleric arrogantly started asking us questions.”⁸²

And in *Rumūz (Signs)*, a work he published at the time, Nursi included the following piece, entitled “Answer to a Scheming Cleric Who Wanted to Pour Scorn on Us”:

Someone has thrown you down into the mud and is killing you. Although he is pressing his foot on your throat, he asks mockingly what school of law you follow. The silencing answer to this is to feel the offense, be silent, and spit in his face. So not to him, but in the name of the truth:

1) Q. What does the religion of Muhammad consist of?

A. The Qur’ān.

2) Q. What has it contributed to life and thought?

A. Divine unity and moderation.

3) Q. What is the remedy for man’s troubles?

A. The prohibition of interest and usury and the obligatory payment of *zakāt*.

4) Q. What does it say concerning the present upheavals?

A. “Man has nought save that [for] which he strives” (Qur’ān, 53:39). “And those who amass gold and silver and do not spend it in the way of God; announce to them a most grievous punishment” (Qur’ān, 9:34).⁸³

Nursi’s most effective work at this time, however, was a pamphlet called *The Six Steps*, in which he pointed out six ways in which the British and the Greeks were sowing discord and dissension in the Muslim community. It has at its head the verse: “And do not follow in the footsteps of Satan” (Qur’ān, 2:168), and Nursi later described it as having “turned the Istanbul ulama’s opinions against the British and in favor of the national movement,”⁸⁴ and as having “spoilt the fearsome plan of the commander of the British forces occupying Istanbul.” This plan was “to prepare the ground for the defeat of the national forces and the victory of the Greeks through sowing strife among Muslims, and even deceiving the Şeyhü’l-İslām and some of the ulama and inciting them against each other, and through making the supporters of the two main political groupings contend with each other [that is, supporters of the Unionists and those of the FAP].”⁸⁵

It will be recalled that the latter, the sultan, and some ulama opposed the national movement in Anatolia absolutely, considering all those

involved in it to be either members of the CUP or people of a like kind, that is to say, bandits, whom they held responsible for entering Turkey into the war, and for its defeat, which had dealt the death blow to the empire. So they looked on the national movement as the chief enemy rather than the foreign aggressors.⁸⁶

In addition, many Westernized intellectuals and writers opposed the nationalists, the most prominent of whom was Abdullah Cevdet,⁸⁷ and their exaggerated acclaim of everything Western, combined with the propaganda of the British aiming to widen and play on divisions, was a cause of confusion among the people, shaking even their faith and weakening their resolve to withstand the occupying forces. In his writings, Nursi pointed out the distortions, and in *The Six Steps*, in particular, showed with his usual clarity how the British were playing on their differences and answered their insidious suggestions so summarily that his replies both illuminated its readers and heartened them.

Nursi also severely condemned those who disparaged their own nation, accepted British protection, and thought that “the interests and ambitions of the British nation were consistent with the interests and dignity of Islam.” For the British were putting themselves forward as “the protectors” of Islam, who had saved Turkey from the “godless” Freemason CUP. The Freedom and Accord Party tried to cash in on this.⁸⁸ When asked which society or grouping he belonged to and why he was severely critical of the opposition—that is, the FAP—he replied:

I belong to the society of martyrs. It is inauspicious to either deny or belittle a single saint. So it is the most inauspicious of all inauspiciousness to deny two million martyrs who are saints, and to consider their blood to have been spilt in vain. Because the opposition say that we were wrong to enter the war [World War One], and that our enemies were right; that it was not a *jihād*. Such a judgment is to deny the martyrdom of two million martyrs. In my opinion the prayer we should utter most is: O God, do not put harm among us!

There is a fact before which the most uncivilized and even the most savage bow their heads in submission and respect, and that is, when confronted by an external enemy, two hostile clans of a tribe lay aside their own enmity instinctively. It is astonishing therefore that those who are considered to be civilized and enlightened are far inferior to such savages; when confronted by external hostility, they intensify internal enmity. If civilization and science are thus, then man’s happiness lies in savagery and ignorance!⁸⁹

The Six Steps was probably printed “through the efforts of Eşref Edip” sometime around the reoccupation of Istanbul by the British in March 1920.⁹⁰

As the British came to realize Nursi's effectiveness in opposing them, they determined to get rid of him. An incident illustrating this was related by Nursi's student, Molla Süleyman:

We set off in the direction of the Divanyolu, and Mısırlı Said Molla was there. He was the second president of the Friends of England Association. He had no religion, and whether he was a Mason or what he was, I do not know. This man used to inform on Ustad to the British; he used to tell them about his appearance, features, dress, and where he lived. This was because Ustad used to make dreadful attacks on them in the press. . . .

Then one day, soldiers of the occupying forces were waiting for Ustad in the square by Aya Sophia; they were going to seize him. I was terrified, and he said to me: "You follow close behind me and don't fall behind." Then he recited the verse from *Sūra Yā Sīn*: "And We have put a bar in front of them and a bar behind them, and further, We have covered them; so that they cannot see" (Qur'ān, 36:9), and they did not see us. We passed right by them and came to the house. I knocked on the door, and when it was slow in opening, I said to my friend inside: "Come on open it quickly; Bediuzzaman is with me!" He opened it immediately, and we went in. Ustad sat down on the divan, and I pulled off his boots. Then he asked me:

"What did you understand from all that?"

"I don't know," I replied. So he said:

"They had received orders to shoot me, and I did as I did in order to save you. I pitied you because you had no gun. Otherwise I would have lined up ten of them and taken my aim. I would have killed at least ten of them before being killed myself."⁹¹

Another account of Nursi at this time has been given by Tevfik Demiroğlu, who later served as the deputy for Van for many years. He provides a number of details concerning Nursi's life, and recalls particularly his own adventures with Abdurrahman when distributing *The Six Steps* secretly under the nose of the British. He recalls that Nursi was closely associated with Eşref Edip and with Mehmet Ākif and the magazine *Sebilürreşad*,⁹² and that they used to meet for long conversations in the Yusuf Izzeddin Pasha Pavilion in Çamlıca, where Nursi was then staying. He also describes his adventures in stealing breech-blocks from the arsenals so as to make the British heavy guns unusable, while others would steal rifles and other weapons.⁹³

The stealing of weapons, ammunition, and equipment of all sorts was the chief, and highly successful, means of resistance to the foreign occupation of Istanbul. From Istanbul they were smuggled to Ankara and to the national forces in Anatolia, part of which was occupied. From Tevfik Demiroğlu's description, it is seen that he had specific tasks and was part of one of the

organized groups, of which there were many. Previously to the reoccupation of March 1920 and subsequent arrest and deportation of many prominent Unionists in Istanbul, most of whom were active in the resistance, the groups were mostly the continuation of existent organizations, such as the *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa* and the Red Crescent Association (*Hilal-i Ahmer Cemiyeti*).⁹⁴ The most active and effective was the *Karakol* organization. From 1920, new organizations emerged that were directed from Ankara. The chief of these was the *Mîm.Mîm (Millî Müdafaa)* group.⁹⁵ This group alone smuggled 38,000 tons of weapons and ammunition to Ankara,⁹⁶ which gives an idea of the scale of these highly secret underground operations. There were also smaller groups.⁹⁷ It must have been to one of these that Demiroğlu and his friends belonged. Interestingly, he mentions the *Mîm.Mîm.* group, but qualifies its members with the epithet “damned,” and says that his group was operating without their knowledge.⁹⁸ It is not known to what extent, if any, Nursi was involved in these activities; there is no hint of them in his own or other works that the present author has seen, and anyway he would have been far too striking and prominent a figure to have been actually involved in the lifting and transportation of weapons. If one weighs up the possibilities of his involvement, one could say this:

On the one hand, during this period Nursi was in poor health and his state of mind was troubled; his problems were to be solved with the emergence of the New Said, beginning sometime in the second half of 1920. According to his own account, during this painful process he withdrew into solitude. Prior to this he was occupied with writing and publishing a number of works, as mentioned by Abdurrahman. He published twelve works, some of which are of pamphlet size, before October 1921. These were: *Ishârât al-I'jâz* (1918), *Hakikat Çekirdekleri 1* (1919–20), *Nokta* (1918–19), *Hutuvat-ı Sitte* (1920?), *Qızıl İjâz* (1920–21), *Şuaât* (1920–1), *Rumûz* (1920–21), *İşârât* (1920–21), *Tuluât* (1920–21), *Sünühât* (1919–20), *Lemeât* (1921), and *Hakikat Çekirdekleri 2* (1920–21). Those he published after this he classified as works of the New Said.

In his works, Nursi always cited *The Six Steps* as the reason Mustafa Kemal and other nationalist leaders in Ankara repeatedly summoned him there,⁹⁹ saying that they knew that he had performed services with it “equal to that of a military division.”¹⁰⁰ Yet it was two and a half years later that he finally consented to go, because he preferred to remain where “it was most dangerous.” It seems scarcely plausible, therefore, that if he had completely withdrawn from the struggle for that length of time, they would have continued to insist on his coming. If one asks from where Mustafa Kemal knew Nursi, the answer is that it may have been from Istanbul before he left for Anatolia in May 1919, when Nursi still “used to go to the most brilliant places in Istanbul”;¹⁰¹ or they may have met in Salonica in the early days of the Constitutional

Revolution. Alternatively, he may only have known of Nursi, and summoned him at a time he was cultivating the support of all the religious leaders in Anatolia.¹⁰² Evidence that Nursi was involved in some sort of way with the resistance other than with *The Six Steps* comes from Eşref Edip.

In the early 1960s, Edip told one of Nursi's young students that "during the armistice period, [Nursi] used to give us *komitadji* lessons once a week in a house in Zeyrek (in the Fatih district)." By this he presumably meant gathering intelligence, planning sabotage, and other such activities—though he probably used the term *komitadji* in a lighthearted way.¹⁰³ This would explain better the determination of the British to catch or eliminate him; his insistence on remaining in Istanbul, since he preferred to be "where it was most dangerous"; and his popularity with the leaders of the national movement in Ankara. For he was summoned or invited to Ankara on numerous occasions, twice "in cipher" by Mustafa Kemal, who by then had been elected president of the Grand National Assembly (April 24, 1920), and among others by Marshal Fevzi Çakmak. Fevzi Çakmak was minister of war in the Istanbul government till April 17, 1920, when he secretly left Istanbul for Ankara,¹⁰⁴ where he was made chief of staff. He was then responsible for the resistance organizations in Istanbul and directed their operations, which were vital for the War of Independence.

This brings us to another matter that should not pass without mention and that is Nursi's correspondence with Enver Pasha. This rather unexpected development was recorded by his student, Süleyman. One day in 1921(?), perhaps when on their way to Üsküdar by one of the small boats that plied the Bosphorus, he and Nursi stopped off at Leander's Tower, which stands on a rock a few hundred yards from the quay. Here they sat down and watched the world go by, Nursi plunged in thought. Suddenly he pulled a letter out of his bag; it was from Enver Pasha in Turkestan. He was insisting that Mustafa Kemal should not be elected president. What is meant by this is not certain, or perhaps Süleyman's recollection was hazy. For Enver traveled to Bukhara from Batum in October 1921, where he was killed fighting the Bolsheviks on August 4, 1922. Neither the sultanate nor the caliphate had been abolished at that time.

Even if the details of the above anecdote are inaccurate, it is certainly within the bounds of possibility that Enver Pasha wrote to Nursi. It was seen above how he welcomed Nursi's return and personally had him appointed to the Darü'l-Hikmet; doubtless he would have employed him in other schemes of his if Nursi had not indicated that he wanted to serve through his learning. For even the Ottoman defeat did not induce Enver Pasha to give up his grandiose plans for uniting Muslims worldwide and getting them to rise up against the imperialist powers. Likewise, before leaving Turkey, though officially dissolved, he arranged for the *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa* to continue functioning under the name of *Umum Âlem-i İslam İhtilal Teşkilatı* (General Revolu-

tionary Organization of the Islamic World). It played an important role in Istanbul as part of the *Karakol* resistance movement. In Enver's view, the war had not been concluded, and he intended to reverse the Ottoman defeat with the forces he had reassembled in the Caucasus, the Army of Islam (*İslam Ordusu*), under his uncle Halil Pasha and brother Nuri Pasha.¹⁰⁵ Until Mustafa Kemal firmly established himself as leader of the National Movement after the Turkish victory at Sakarya in September 1921, Enver Pasha was a definite rival who continued to have considerable support in the army and Unionist groups among the nationalists.¹⁰⁶ His efforts to secure Bolshevik support and material backing to form an army in the Caucasus to lead into Anatolia finally came to nothing when the Bolsheviks signed a treaty of friendship with the Ankara government in Moscow on March 16, 1921.¹⁰⁷ Notwithstanding this, waiting to seize his opportunity, Enver eventually left Moscow and came to Batum, close to the Turkish border; he was banking on internal support. Halil Pasha was a key figure in "the intrigues" surrounding Enver's return to Anatolia.¹⁰⁸ However, events unfolded not in his, but in Mustafa Kemal's, favor, and finally, toward the end of September 1921, he left Batum for Central Asia with Hacı Sami, Eşref Kuşçubaşı's brother,¹⁰⁹ without stepping foot on Turkish soil.

It may have been when Enver Pasha was laying the plans for his return that he wrote to Nursi. In any event, seated on a rock in the middle of the Bosphorus, Nursi took paper and pen from his bag and wrote a reply, starting: "Ey, Champion of Freedom!"¹¹⁰ It is not recorded what his letter contained.

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CHAPTER 8

The Armistice Years (2): The Birth of the New Said, and Departure for Ankara

In September 1919, Nursi had a “true dream” or sort of vision, which he subsequently recorded and included in *Sünühât*.¹ He tells us there that he was at the time greatly distressed at the course of events and was “searching for a light in the dense darkness.” In his dream, Nursi was summoned by “a great assembly” made up of representatives of the leading figures of Islam from each century and called upon to give an account of the present state of Islam. Contrarily to what might be expected, Nursi’s reply pointed out positive aspects of the defeat, including the strengthening of Islamic brotherhood² and the Ottomans being saved from being carried away to a greater extent by “the tyrannical current” of capitalism. Then, in order to show why Islam rejects modern Western civilization, which was epitomized by the ugly and exploitative capitalism and aggressive imperialism of the time, he made a comparison of the principles on which Western civilization and Islamic civilization are based and their results. This extremely interesting and original exposition was greeted with approval by the assembly in the dream, and one of the deputies declared: “Yes, be hopeful! The loudest and strongest voice in the coming upheavals and changes will be that of Islam!”

The same comparison of Western and Islamic civilizations appears in different contexts in a number of Nursi’s works of the period. And from these and from other references to the same subject, we see in greater detail his views on the subject, and also the reasons for the optimism and hope for the future engendered by the dream.

Nursi’s arguments will be seen in greater clarity if they are put in the wider context of the current debate, that centered on the opposing ideals of “East” and “West.”³ Briefly, following the Russian Revolution, there was a change in the meanings of these concepts, and the West began to stand for “imperialism” and the East for “that part of the world that was rising up against imperialism.”⁴ Both Turkists and Islamists were drawn to the Eastern ideal. According to Berkes, it became widely accepted that the West would “be defeated by the oppressed peoples of the East.” Istanbul and the Freedom and Accord Party had adopted “the West,” and according to their way of thinking, Ankara had opted for “the East” (in 1921).⁵

As far as Nursi's analysis was concerned, it should be noted that he frequently pointed out that just as modern civilization was not the product or property of Christianity, neither were decline and retrogression in keeping with Islam: "To consider civilization to be the property of Christianity, which it is not, and to show decline, which is the enemy of Islam, to be its friend, is to suggest that the firmament is revolving in the opposite direction."⁶ As we have already seen, Islam enjoins progress and comprises all the necessities of civilization: "I declare with all my strength that there is nothing which is in reality good in civilization that is itself, or what is better than it, not guaranteed either explicitly or implicitly by Islam."⁷ And in another work he wrote: "The things known as the virtues of civilization are each a transformed matter of the Shari'ah."⁸ Further to this, Nursi pointed out that Islam had played a fundamental and significant role in the development of modern civilization:

I cannot deny that there are numerous virtues in [modern] civilization, but they are neither the property of Christianity, nor the creation of Europe, nor the work of this century. Rather, they are common property. They are the product of the combined thought of mankind, the laws of the revealed religions, innate need, and in particular of the Islamic revolution brought about by the Shari'ah of Muhammad (PBUH).⁹

In another work he put it in even stronger terms: "The good things and great industrial progress to be seen in Western civilization are entirely reflected and derived from Islamic civilization, the guidance of the Qur'an, and the [other] revealed religions."¹⁰

However, in the West, the evils of civilization had come to preponderate over its beneficial aspects. Nursi gave two reasons for this. The first was the permissive attitude of Western civilization toward "dissipation" and "the appetites of the flesh," which arose from "not making religion and virtue the principles of civilization." The second was "the appalling inequality in the means of livelihood," which also ultimately resulted from lack of religion. These would eventually lead to its destruction.¹¹

Thus, Nursi predicted that because Western civilization had become distant from true Christianity and was based not on the principles of revealed religion, but on those of Greek and, primarily, Roman philosophy, it would eventually "be dispersed" and "change its form," and make way for the emergence of Islamic civilization. His comparisons, then, are between the "positive" principles and results of revelation, and the "negative" principles and results of philosophy, or between divine guidance (*hüda*) and genius, meaning "reason" (*deha*), as he sometimes calls them. Western civilization he describes as follows:

It takes as its point of support force, which manifests itself in aggression. Its aim and purpose is benefit and self-interest, after which everyone jostles and pushes without restraint. Its principle in life is conflict, which manifests itself in contention and discord. The ties between different groups are racialism and negative nationalism, which thrive on devouring others and which are manifested in ghastly clashes. Its alluring service is encouraging lust and passion, satisfying desires, and facilitating the attainment of whims. And as for lust and passion, they make man descend from the level of the angels to that of a beast.

The principles on which Islamic civilization is based, on the other hand, are the reverse of these:

Its point of support is truth instead of force, which is manifested as justice and equity. Its aims are virtue and God's pleasure in place of benefit and self-interest, which are manifested as love and friendly competition. Its means of unity are the bonds of religion, country, and class instead of racialism and nationalism; they are manifested as sincere brotherhood and reconciliation, and cooperation in only defending against outside aggression. The principles in life are those of mutual assistance and cooperation instead of conflict, and are manifested as unity and mutual support. In place of lust is guidance, which is manifested as progress for humanity and being perfected spiritually. It restricts the passions, and instead of stimulating the base desires of the carnal soul, it gratifies the high sentiments of the spirit.¹²

Of the various aspects of civilization for which Nursi offers more detailed comparisons, two may be mentioned here. The first of these is literature.

In a piece in *Lemeāt*, a collection of writings in free verse on various subjects published in Istanbul in 1921, Nursi makes a comparison between the Qur'an as literature and European literature. This literature is represented by the novel, for which there had been a strong vogue among Europeanized Ottomans since the time of Abdülhamid. Nursi states that there are three areas of literature. These are concerned with love and beauty, heroism and valor, and the depiction of reality. Regarding European literature, he says that in regard to the first area it does not know the meaning of true love and merely excites the carnal appetites—though it purports to be high-minded and condemn such things as unfitting for man. In regard to the second, it does not favor right and justice, but exalts the concept of force.

In the depiction of reality, Nursi describes the Western view in greater detail. He points out that since European literature regards the universe not as divine art but from the point of view of nature, it prompts materialism and the worship of nature. And fiction, whether in book form or as theater or cinema,

is the only remedy it has been able to find for the distress of the spirit arising from this misguidance. He goes on to say that both produce feelings of sadness, but while the sadness produced by the Qur'ān is of a lofty and elevated nature, that caused by European literature offers no hope. This again springs from the view of existence it expresses. The world is a wild and ownerless place; what inspires the sorrow is "deaf nature" and "blind force." It is the pathetic woe of an orphan, of the lack of friends, rather than of their absence. And while both give pleasure and stir the emotions, the Qur'ān stirs the spirit and moves the higher emotions, while European literature stimulates man's animal appetites and affords pleasure to his lower nature only.¹³

The second aspect to be considered here is of a socioeconomic nature. It concerns the injustice inherent in Western civilization and the remedy for its grievous consequences provided by Islam.

Nursi summarizes the root cause of the social upheavals mankind has suffered, particularly in the twentieth century, in two phrases. One is "So long as I'm full, what is it to me if others die of hunger," and the other, "You struggle and labor so that I can live in ease and comfort." He asserts that if they are to be eradicated, it will be through applying the Qur'anic injunction of almsgiving (*vücub-u zekat*) and prohibition on usury and interest (*hurmet-i riba*). His argument is as follows.

Through urging the wealthy classes to act in a cruel, oppressive, and arrogant manner toward the poor, the first phrase has been the cause of such sedition and strife that it has come close to overturning humanity. And the second phrase, through driving the poor to harbor hatred and envy toward the rich, has for several centuries destroyed public order and security, and this century, due to the struggle between capital and labor, has given rise to disaster and disorder on a vast scale. The role of *zakāt* (prescribed almsgiving) and the prohibition on interest in rectifying this situation is this:

The most important factor in maintaining the order of society as a whole is not allowing an unbridgeable gulf to develop between the various classes. The upper classes and the rich should not become so far removed from the lower classes and the poor that the lines of communication are broken, as happened in European civilization. "Despite all its societies for good works, all its establishments for the teaching of ethics, all its severe discipline and regulations," it could neither reconcile those two classes, nor heal the wounds in human life caused by the two phrases above. However, through making the payment of *zakāt* obligatory and prohibiting interest, Islam establishes relations between rich and poor, and forges links of respect and sympathy between them. By not allowing the classes to draw far apart, it maintains the order and balance of society. It "uproots" the two phrases and heals the wounds they have caused in mankind.¹⁴

How is it then that while Islam comprises true civilization, it was materially defeated by Western civilization? In his dream, Nursi was questioned

concerning this. He was asked by one of the deputies in the assembly: “With which of your actions did you issue a *fatwa* to Divine Determining so that it ordered this disaster for you?” Nursi replied that it was their neglect of three of the “pillars of Islam”—the prescribed prayers, fasting in Ramaḍān, and payment of *zakāt*—that had brought it upon them.¹⁵ And he afterward added a note to this, including neglect of the Hajj.

The Absolute Sovereignty of the Qur’ān

Many reasons have been touched on in describing Nursi’s thought and works up to here for the decline of the Islamic world and the Ottomans in particular. Broadly speaking, they can be classed under two main headings. One is despotism and the other is religion, or rather the failure to adhere to its principles in various areas. The two are interconnected. Despotism, together with its numerous, far-reaching, and negative consequences, and the solutions for them in the form of constitutionalism, freedom, and associated concepts circumscribed by the Sharī’ah, solutions worked for with such dedication by Nursi, have been discussed in some detail. With regard to religion, many areas of decline may be included under this heading, and these, too, together with their solutions, have been described in various places. Among them are the decline in the field of learning and *medrese* education, and the solutions put forward by Nursi for this that would also heal the deep rifts that had developed between the ulama, the Sufi community, and those with a secular, Western educational background; the negligent attitude toward the “pillars of Islam” mentioned in the dream above; and the various “sicknesses” in the social life of Muslims and in the field of morality, and the “remedies” offered by Nursi in his sermon in Damascus. However, rather than attempting a comprehensive analysis of all the reasons Nursi put forward for the decline and relative backwardness of the Islamic world, we shall just make the following points.

In *Muhākemat*, the work written to establish the principles of Qur’anic exegesis (*tafsīr*), Nursi attributes the decline to the fact that the heart or true meaning of the teachings of Islam had been abandoned for its externals. He wrote:

Abandoning the essence and kernel of Islam, we fixed our gazes on its exterior and shell. And through misapprehension and ill-manners, we did not afford Islam its right nor pay it the respect it was due. So in disgust, it swathed itself in clouds of illusion and delusion, and concealed itself. And it had the right, for we mixed *Isrā’iliyāt*¹⁶ with the fundamentals of belief, and stories with the tenets of faith, and metaphors with the truths of belief, and did not appreciate its value. So to punish us in this world, it left us in abasement and penury. And what will save us, is again its mercy.¹⁷

Later in the same work, Nursi expands on this, explaining how some *Isrā'iliyāt*, and a portion of Greek philosophy, had been incorporated into Islam, and “appearing in the apparel of religion” had thrown minds into disarray. Explaining how this happened, he concludes that when commenting on the Qur’ān, some “externalist” ulama had expounded certain of its verses (*nakliyyāt*) by making them fit the *Isrā'iliyāt*. “Whereas,” he wrote, “what will explain and expound the Qur’ān is again the Qur’ān, and sound Hadīths. Not the Gospels and the Torah, whose ordinances have been superseded, just as their stories are corrupted.”

As for Greek philosophy, it had sprung from fables and superstition, and just as it had caused confusion, so also had it opened up a way to mere imitation (*taklīd*) in place of investigative and dynamic scholarship. Supposing there to be points of similarity and agreement between philosophy and matters of the Qur’ān that demand the use of reason (*akliyyat*), externalist scholars explained these verses in terms of the philosophy and adapted them to it. Nursi then said: “God forbid! . . . For the criterion of the Book of Miraculous Exposition is its miraculousness. Its expounder and commentator is its parts. Its meaning is within it. Its shell, too, is of pearl, not clods.”¹⁸

Let us return to *Sinūhāt*, published in 1919–20, and a piece dealing with the Qur’ān and the decline of Islam. Entitled “The Absolute Sovereignty of the Qur’ān,” it describes what Nursi considered to be “the most important cause of the Islamic community displaying carelessness and negligence toward the precepts of religion.”

The gist of Nursi’s argument is that while it is the sacredness (*kudsiyyet*) of the Qur’ān, rather than reasoning, that drives the mass of believers to conform to the precepts of religion, the way Qur’anic commentaries and books on the Sharī’ah have developed in the course of time is such that they have come to act as a veil to that sacredness.

Nursi first argues that although the fundamentals of belief and pillars of Islam, which are the “personal” property of the Qur’ān and the Sunnah of the Prophet, which expounds the Qur’ān, form 90 percent of the religion, and controversial matters that are open to interpretation (*icthādī*) form only 10 percent, in the course of time the former have been “placed under the patronage” of the latter, have been combined with them, and have become subordinate to them.

Although “the books of those qualified to interpret the law (*müctehidīn*) should be like means and display the Qur’ān as though they were glass; they should neither act on its behalf nor obscure it,” it is on these books that the attention of the mass of believers has become focused. They have only thought of the Qur’ān in a hazy sort of way. They have read these books in order to understand not what the Qur’ān says, but what the authors say. As a result of this, the ordinary believer’s conscience “has become accustomed to

being indifferent, and has become lifeless and unresponsive.” However, Nursi continues, “If the Qur’ān had been shown directly in the fundamentals of religion, the mind would have naturally perceived its sacredness, which urges conformity [to the precepts of religion], is the rouser of the conscience, and is [the Qur’ān’s] inherent property. In this way the heart would have become sensitive toward it, and would not have remained deaf to the admonitions of belief.”

Nursi then states that there are three ways to direct the attention of the mass of believers toward the Qur’ān. The first he describes as dangerous, the second as needing time. The third way is to remove the veils obscuring the Qur’ān and display it directly to the ordinary believers; here the believer is to seek its “pure, unmixed property” from itself alone, and only its secondary (*bilvasita*) decrees from the means.

That is to say, the fundamentals and essentials, which as we saw form 90 percent, should be sought from the Qur’ān itself and from the *Sunnah*, while matters of secondary importance, which are open to interpretation and form 10 percent, should be sought from the works of those qualified to interpret them, that is, the *müctehids*. If that had been the case, the demand shown for these truly numerous commentaries and books on the Shari‘ah and divided up between them would have been directed toward the Qur’ān itself—indeed, the demand would have been greater because of need. And in that way the Qur’ān would have been dominant and influential in its full meaning over the Muslim community.

Nursi had a significant dream shortly after writing this piece, and included it at the end of it. It was as follows:

One night, shortly after writing this matter, I dreamt of God’s Messenger (Peace and blessings be upon him). I was in a *medrese* in his blessed presence. The Prophet was going to instruct me in the Qur’ān. On their bringing the Qur’ān, the Messenger (Peace and blessings be upon him) rose to his feet out of respect. It occurred to me at that moment that he rose in order to guide his community.

Finally I related this dream to a righteous member of his community, and he interpreted it in this way: “It is a powerful sign and certain good news that the Qur’ān of Mighty Stature will acquire the exalted position of which it is worthy throughout the world.”¹⁹

Birth of the New Said

Some two years after his return to Istanbul from the prisoner-of-war camp in Russia, Nursi underwent a radical interior change, “a strange revolution of the

spirit,” and out of this inner turmoil the New Said was born. Indeed, it is clear from Abdurrahman’s biography and from his own requests for a leave of absence from the Darü’l-Hikmet that ever since his return Nursi was suffering ill health. The strains of war and harsh conditions of his captivity had taken their toll, while the atrocities and suffering he had witnessed and the deaths of most of his students, followed by the Ottoman defeat and foreign occupation, were all sources of great distress. However, as we saw at the end of the piece describing his “awakening” in the little mosque beside the River Volga, Nursi considered the first two years of his return, despite all his activities, to be a period of heedlessness, during which the acclaim he received made him temporarily forget his decision to withdraw from social life and concentrate on the inner life. In various places in his works Nursi described in some detail the major turning point that then occurred, and we shall chart its course from these. Having begun in the second half of 1920, the mental and spiritual transformation was completed by the end of 1921.

It seems that a few flashes of realization restarted the process of “spiritual awakening.” These occurred on high vantage points overlooking the city of Istanbul and took the form of realizing the stark realities of death and separation, old age and the transitoriness of things. Nursi says that then, before anything, he tried to find consolation and a ray of light in his learning and the things he had studied for so many years. But rather than providing this, he found that they had “dirtied his spirit” and been an obstacle to his spiritual progress.²⁰

Until this time, Nursi had “filled his brain with the philosophical as well as the Islamic sciences,” for he thought that “the philosophical sciences were the means to spiritual progress and enlightenment.” In addition, he was of the opinion that European science and philosophy could be used to “reinforce” and “strengthen” Islam. He described it like this:

The Old Said together with a group of thinkers accepted in part the principles of human philosophy [as opposed to revealed knowledge] and European science, and fought them with their own weapons; they admitted them to a degree. They accepted unshakeably some of their principles in the form of the positive sciences, and thus could not demonstrate the true value of Islam. Simply, they supposed philosophy’s roots to be extremely deep and grafted Islam with its branches, as though they were strengthening it. But since the victories were few and it depreciated Islam, I gave up that way. And I demonstrated [in the *Risale-i Nur*] that Islam’s principles are so profound that those of philosophy cannot reach them; indeed, they remain superficial beside them.²¹

And now, when overwhelmed by the realization of his own increasing years (he was not yet forty-five) and the fleeting nature of everything to which

he was attached, Nursi's learning afforded him no light, no hope. "The spiritual darkness arising from the sciences of philosophy plunged my spirit into the universe, suffocating it. Whichever way I looked seeking light, I could find no light in those matters, I could not breathe."²²

Nursi's spiritual crisis prompted him to withdraw from society and seek solitude in places removed from Istanbul life. He retreated to Yuşa Tepesi,²³ a high hill on the Asian side of the Bosphorus near its junction with the Black Sea. Here, he tells us, he would not permit Abdurrahman even to attend to his essential needs.²⁴ Following this he took a house in Sarıyer, on the European side, and it was here in an old wooden house that is still standing that Nursi's crisis was resolved and he found what he was searching for.

It was Gawth al-A'zam, 'Abd al-Qādir Geylānī, who came first to Nursi's aid. A copy of his *Futūḥ al-Ghayb* came into Nursi's possession "by a happy coincidence," and on opening the pages at random, his eye fell on these lines: "You are in the Darū'l-Hikmet, so search for a doctor to cure your heart."²⁵

Or, as Nursi interpreted them:

"Oh, you unfortunate! As a member of the Darū'l-Hikmeti'l-Islamiye, you are as though a doctor curing the spiritual sicknesses of the people of Islam, whereas you are sicker than anyone. You first of all find a doctor for yourself, then try to cure others!" (. . .)

So I said to the shaikh "You be my doctor!" and I took him as my doctor and read the book as though it were addressing me. But it was terribly severe, it smashed my pride in the most fearsome manner. It carried out drastic surgery on my soul. I could not stand it. I read half of it as though it were addressing me, but did not have the strength and endurance to finish it. I put the book back on the shelf. Then a week later the pain of that curative operation subsided, and pleasure came in its place. I reopened the book and read it right through; I benefited a lot from that work of my first master. I listened to his prayers and supplications, and profited abundantly.²⁶

The second work that was instrumental in transforming the Old Said into the New Said was the *Maktūbāt (Letters)* of Shaikh Aḥmad Sirhindī, known as Imām-ı Rabbānī.²⁷ Some time after his "cure" through the mediation of Gawth al-A'zam, Nursi opened Sirhindī's *Maktūbāt* to see what it had to offer. He wrote:

It is strange, but in the whole of *Maktūbāt* the word Bediuzzaman appears only twice, and those two letters fell open for me at once. I saw that written at the head of them was: *Letter to Mirza Bediuzzaman*, and my father's name was Mirza. "Glory be to God!" I exclaimed, these letters are

addressing me. At that time the Old Said was also known as Bediuzzaman. Apart from Bediuzzaman Hamadani, I knew of no famous person in the last three hundred years with that name. But in the *imam*'s time there was such a person, and he wrote him these two letters. His state of mind must have been similar to mine, for I found that these letters were the cure for my ills. Only, the *imam* persistently recommended in many of his letters what he wrote in these two, which was: "Take only one *qiblah!*" That is, take one person as your master and follow him; do not concern yourself with anyone else.²⁸

Nursi wrote that this most important piece of advice seemed inappropriate for his state of mind, and he was bewildered as to whom he should follow. In the introduction to the Turkish edition of *al-Mathnawī al-'Arabī al-Nūrī*, translated in the 1950s, he explained this in greater detail: "Since the Old Said proceeded more in the rational and philosophical sciences, he started to look for a way to the essence of reality like that of the Sufis (*ehl-i tarikat*) and the mystics (*ehl-i hakikat*). But he was not content to proceed with the heart alone like the Sufis, for his intellect and thought were wounded by philosophy; a cure was needed. Then he wanted to follow some of the great mystics who approached reality with both the heart and the mind. He looked, and each had different points that attracted him. He was bewildered as to which of them to follow."²⁹ None of the great figures, such as Imām Ghazālī, Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, or Shaikh Aḥmad Sirhindī, answered all of his needs.

While in this state, "it was imparted to the Old Said's much wounded heart" that the one true master was the Holy Qur'ān. It occurred to him "through divine mercy" that "the head of these various ways and the source of these streams and the sun of these planets is the All-Wise Qur'ān; the true single *qiblah* is to be found in it. In which case, it is also the most elevated guide and most holy master. So I clasped it with both hands and clung on to it."³⁰

Thus, we can say that Nursi's enlightenment occurred in three stages. In the first, he realized the deficiency of the "human philosophy" he had studied and how it had been an obstacle to his enlightenment and progress. In the second, as he himself confessed, through the "bitter medicine" of Shaikh 'Abd al-Qādir Geylānī's *Futūh al-Ghayb* "I understood my faults, perceived my wounds, and my pride was to a degree destroyed."³¹ Then to complete the process of his transformation into the New Said, he understood through the *Maktūbāt* of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindī that he should take the Qur'ān as his sole master. The instruction in divine unity he then received from the Qur'ān through the phrase "There is no god but God" was "a most brilliant light" scattering the darkness in which he had been plunged and allowing him to breathe easily. Nursi describes how the devil and his "evil-commanding soul" would not brook this, and "relying on what they had learnt from philosophers

and the people of misguidance, attacked his mind and his heart,” but that the ensuing debate resulted in “the heart’s victory.”³²

Nursi notes that he now proceeded “through an alliance of mind and heart.” That is, through the guidance of the Qur’ān he found a way to the essence of reality through employing both the heart and the mind. And since it employed both heart and mind, he found that before anything it cured his wounded spirit and heart, and silencing Satan and his evil-commanding soul, rescued him from doubts and skepticism. This, then, was the way of the New Said. It was also to be the way of the *Risale-i Nur*. In fact, the first work the New Said wrote was a collection of eleven or so treatises in Arabic that he later put together with the title *al-Mathnawī al-‘Arabī al-Nūrī*, which he described as “a kind of seed of the *Risale-i Nur*”; it was “the seedbed” and the *Risale-i Nur* was “its garden.”³³

Thus, at the age of forty-three or forty-four, through what was clearly an overwhelming mental and spiritual upheaval, Nursi found what he had been searching for. Near the end of his life, he described this search in the presence of his student, Mustafa Sungur:

Sixty years ago, I was searching for a way to reach reality that was appropriate for the present age. That is, I was searching for a short way to obtain firm faith and a complete understanding of Islam that would not be shaken by the attacks of the numerous damaging currents. First I had recourse to the way of the philosophers; I wanted to reach the truth with just the reason. But I reached it only twice with extreme difficulty. Then I looked and saw that even the greatest geniuses of mankind had gone only half the way, and that only one or two had been able to reach the truth by means of the reason alone. So I told myself that a way that even they had been unable to take could not be made general, and I gave it up. . . . Then I had recourse to the way of Sufism and studied it. I saw that it was truly luminous and effulgent, but that it needed the greatest caution. Only the highest of the elite could take that way. So, saying that this cannot be the way for everyone at this time, either, I sought help from the Qur’ān. And thanks be to God, the *Risale-i Nur* was bestowed on me, which is a safe, short way inspired by the Qur’ān for the believers of the present time.³⁴

Ankara

On receiving repeated demands from Ankara, Nursi sent three of his students—Tevfik Demiroğlu, Molla Süleyman, and Bitlisli Binbaşı (Major) Refik Bey—to offer their support to the national government. These insistent invitations have been corroborated by the “national defense *imam*” and regimental

mufti, Osman Nuri Efendi, whom he consulted in Istanbul as to whether or not he should accept. The *imam* evidently advised him that it would of great benefit to go to Ankara and mix with the deputies there.³⁵ Nursi finally went on being invited by his old friend, the former governor of Van and Erzurum, Tahsin Bey, who was now a deputy in the Grand National Assembly.³⁶

The War of Independence had by now been won. On August 22 there began what became known as the Great Offensive, which by September 29 had resulted in the Turkish victory and liberation of Anatolia. In October, the Mudanya Armistice was signed.³⁷ These were also the last days of the Ottoman Empire. The armistice had been signed with the Ankara government, but the sultan's government was still nominally functioning in Istanbul. So to solve the problem, on November 1, 1922, at the prompting of Mustafa Kemal, the Grand National Assembly voted to abolish the sultanate and retain only the caliphate. The right to choose the caliph would rest with the assembly. The deposed Sultan Vahiddedin left the country on a British warship on November 16, and his cousin Abdülmecid was appointed as caliph by the assembly.³⁸ The caliphate was finally abolished on March 3, 1924, after being held for 407 years by the Ottoman house.³⁹

With all these momentous events behind them, on November 9, 1922, Nursi was given an official "welcoming" in the assembly. The ceremony was recorded as follows in the minutes of that day:

Welcome for the religious scholar Bediuzzaman Said Efendi Hazretleri.

Speaker: "The deputy for Bitlis, Arif Bey, and his friends have a motion:

[*Arif Bey:*] "We propose to the Illustrious Presidency that a welcome be given to Bediuzzaman Molla Said Efendi Hazretleri, one of the well-known ulama of the Eastern Provinces, who has come here from Istanbul in order to visit the ghazis of Anatolia and this illustrious assembly and is at present in the visitors' gallery."

Bitlis	Bitlis	Muş	Muş	Siirt	Bitlis	Ergani
—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Arif	Derviş	Kasım	(İlyas Sami)	Salih	Resul	Hakkı

(*Applause*)

Rasih Efendi (Antalya): We request him to honor the platform and offer prayers.⁷⁴⁰

Whereupon Nursi mounted the platform, congratulated the veterans of the War of Independence, and offered prayers.

Despite the warm reception he was given and the rejoicing at the triumph of Islam and the Turks over their enemies, Nursi was dismayed to find a lax and indifferent attitude toward Islam and their religious duties among many of the deputies in the assembly. His “official” biography informs us that his intention in coming to Ankara had been to encourage those in power to set up a form of government based on the Qur’ān and the Shari’ah. Through divine assistance, the Turks had defeated those who had wanted to destroy Islam. It was the beginning of a new era and exactly the time to marshal their forces to make the new republic the means for bringing about a renaissance of Islam and Islamic civilization, and make it a center and source of support for the Islamic world.⁴¹ Furthermore, he found that atheistic ideas were being propagated. He described it like this: “When I went to Ankara in 1922, the morale of the people of belief was extremely high as a result of the victory of the army of Islam over the Greeks. But I saw that an abominable current of atheism was treacherously trying to subvert, poison, and destroy their minds. ‘Oh God!’ I said. ‘This monster is going to harm the pillars of belief.’”⁴²

That is to say, once the victory had been won, the old differences came to the fore once again. Up to the final victory it would have been considered traitorous for any deputy in the assembly to assume a position opposed to Islam, but once it was secured, those who favored Westernization and the abandoning of religion began to show their true colors. Since its inception there had been various opposing groups in the Grand National Assembly. In the summer of 1922 a group was formed that opposed the autocracy of Mustafa Kemal.⁴³ But with the victory, he was to increase his dictatorial powers, and with the aim of gaining total control of the assembly the position of the conservative Second Group was now progressively weakened, until in the elections of June 1923, before which Nursi had left Ankara, he was able to have elected a docile assembly that would present him with no serious opposition.

In the face of the laxity and “current of atheism” that he found, Nursi wrote a work in Arabic disproving atheism called *Zeylū’l-Zeyl*, and another called *Hubab*. He noted however, “Alas, those who knew Arabic were few, and those who considered it seriously were rare; also, its argument was in an extremely concise and abbreviated form. As a result, the treatise did not have the effect it should have, and sadly, the current of atheism swelled and gained strength.”⁴⁴ Nursi’s main concern in Ankara, however, was urging the deputies to adhere to Islam and perform their religious duties at this crucial time. In connection with this he published a ten-point circular that he then distributed to all the deputies. It was read to Mustafa Kemal by Kazim Karabekir Pasha.⁴⁵

The circular,⁴⁶ dated January 19, 1923, stresses in particular the necessity of performing the prescribed prayers and is of some length. Included here

is a translation of the last part. Nursi first points out here the harm to the nation if its leaders and representatives do not perform their religious duties, and says that in truth such people are not fit to govern:

What excuse can there be for neglecting or giving up the religious obligations? For to do so causes harm to matters of both religion and the world. Is it consonant with patriotism? Especially these *mujahidīn* commanders and this Grand Assembly, for they are held as examples. The nation will either imitate their faults or criticize them, and both are harmful. That is to say, their religious duties look to the rights of all the people. True and serious work cannot be expected from those who—although they represent consensus—do not heed innumerable warnings and signs, and are deluded by the sophistry of the soul and the whisperings of Satan. The foundation stones of this mighty revolution have to be firm.

Nursi then states that due to the power invested in it by the nation, the assembly now represents the sultanate. It has also to represent the caliphate, but to do this it has to fulfill its religious obligations and see that they are fulfilled by the nation, and answer the nation's religious needs. If it does not do these things, out of need the nation will compel it to "give meaning" to the "name" of the caliphate, which in effect it had undertaken as mentioned above, and will also invest the assembly with the power to carry out the caliphate's functions. However, Nursi says, if due to its members' negligence and laxity in performing their religious obligations the assembly does not have the ability to do this, it will give rise to discord and disunion, which is contrary to the verse, "And hold fast all together to the Rope of God" (Qur'ān, 3:103).

Nursi goes on to make a point that is fundamental to his ideas and that has been mentioned in several places in the present work so far. This is that the modern age is the "mass" age or age of the community or social group. Communities give rise to "collective personalities" or "spirits." In the case of government or authority, in this complex modern age, they can only function adequately by means of "collective personalities" of this sort. He mentions this here in regard to the caliphate.

The present is the time of community. The collective personality of a community, which is its spirit, is firmer and more capable of executing the ordinances of the Sharī'ah. The person of the caliph can only undertake his duties through relying on [such a collective personality]. If a collective personality, the spirit of a community, is righteous, it is more brilliant and perfect [than that of an individual]. But if it is bad, it is exceedingly bad. Both the goodness and badness of an individual are limited, but those of a com-

munity are unlimited. Do not spoil the goodness you have gained in the face of external [enemies] through internal badness. You know that your perpetual enemies and opposites and foes are destroying the practices and marks of Islam. Your solemn duty, therefore, is to revive and preserve them. Otherwise, unconsciously you will be helping the conscious enemy. Contempt for the practices and marks of Islam shows weakness of nationhood, and as for weakness, it does not arrest the enemy, it encourages him.

This exhortation—which shows that Nursi accepted the principle of the nation’s sovereignty and was not opposed to the abolition of the sultanate, and that on condition the representative body was governed by and reflected Islamic precepts, it should also in some capacity represent the caliphate⁴⁷ (he believed the two to be inseparable)—had a considerable effect; around sixty more deputies began to perform the prayers regularly and the room used as a mosque had to be changed for a larger one. However, it drew an unfavorable reaction from the president of the assembly, Mustafa Kemal Pasha. One day, in the presence of a large number of deputies, he shouted angrily at Nursi: “We are in need of heroic *hojas* like you. We called you here in order to benefit from your elevated ideas, but you came here and immediately started writing things about the prayers and have caused differences among us.” Nursi countered this with a few words, then in anger he jabbed his fingers at him, saying: “Pasha! Pasha! After belief, the most elevated truth in Islam is the obligatory prayers. Those who do not perform the prayers are traitors, and the opinions of traitors are to be rejected.”⁴⁸

There were many witnesses to this,⁴⁹ and they feared for him, certain that he would be made to suffer for his words. But Mustafa Kemal suppressed his anger and in effect apologized, for two days later he had a two-hour meeting with Nursi in his office.

Just as with the pashas in the court-martial and with Grand Duke Nicholas in Kosturma, Nursi did not bow before Mustafa Kemal. He took the opportunity to admonish him on the great harm to the nation, country, and Islamic world in attacking Islam and trying to eradicate its practices in the hope of gaining a reputation among their enemies. If a revolution had to be brought about, it had to be achieved through making the Qur’ān the basis of it. He dwelled particularly on the great error of trying to find favor with the enemies of Islam and the Turks by attacking Islam. Mustafa Kemal apparently took no offense at Nursi for these words, which “wounded all his sensibilities and principles”;⁵⁰ on the contrary, he tried to placate him and win him over so as to take advantage of his influence. He offered Nursi Shaikh Sanusi’s post as “general preacher” in the Eastern Provinces with a salary of 300 liras, a deputyship in the assembly, and a post equivalent to that he had held in the Darü’l-Hikmeti’l-Islamiye, together with various perks, such as a residence.⁵¹

Nursi did not accept, and before examining the reasons, it may also be mentioned that Mustafa Kemal was also one of the 167 deputies who signed the bill for the building of Nursi's Medresetü'z-Zehrâ.⁵²

Throughout the time Nursi was in Ankara he pursued the matter of founding this university in the East. There were three points in particular that he impressed on the deputies, many of whom were of the belief that the time had come to dispense with the religious sciences and for education to be Westernized and concentrate on the modern sciences. First was the geographical location of the Eastern Provinces; since they were a center of the eastern Islamic world, it was essential to teach the religious sciences together with modern science. Second, the fact that most of the prophets had appeared in the East and most of the great philosophers in the West showed that the East would only be aroused by religion; progress was dependent on religion. And third was the important point that religion was the only way to maintain unity. If religion was not taken as the basis, the non-Turkish Muslims of the region "would not feel true brotherhood for the Turks," and the need for cooperation and solidarity at that time was great.⁵³

On February 2, 1923, a bill proposing the founding of the school in Van known as the Medresetü'z-Zehrâ, signed by 167 deputies, was presented to the president of the assembly. On February 17, it was sent before the relevant committee. It proposed that 150,000 liras be assigned to the project in that year's budget. On September 12, 1923, having passed through the necessary procedures, it was sent to the education and Shari'ah committees, and there it remained. Once again the building of the Medresetü'z-Zehrâ was overtaken by events. Finally, two years later, on November 29, 1925, it was rejected by the committee and sent back to the assembly. It was put to the vote and rejected.⁵⁴ By then the law for the unification of education and closing of the *medreses* had been passed (March 1924), and Nursi had been sent into exile in western Anatolia.

One reason Nursi gave for declining Mustafa Kemal's offers of various posts was the change that had come about in himself. As he wrote: "Their conduct and the way they were going did not accord with my own feelings of old age." And he quoted himself as telling them: "The New Said wants to work for the next world and cannot work with you, but he will not interfere with you, either."⁵⁵ However, the main reason was that Nursi had perceived the course that would be taken and understood that he could not work alongside the new leaders. Indeed, time proved him to be right in this matter. In a later work, he wrote: "So I was compelled to leave those most important posts. Saying that nothing can be gained from working with or responding to those people, I abandoned the world and politics and social life, and spent all of my time on the way of saving belief."⁵⁶

Nursi had also understood that it would be followers of the Qur'ân that would combat them, and that they would be defeated not in the realm of pol-

itics but with the “immaterial sword” of the Qur’ān’s miraculousness. So he refused to work together with the new leaders and left Ankara for Van, where he withdrew into a life of solitude.⁵⁷

When leaving, Nursi was escorted to the station by a number of deputies and friends. Mustafa Kemal Pasha, who at the time was living by the station, joined the group. It is recorded that they had a conversation about statues, and that on the pasha asking Nursi his opinion on them, Nursi replied sharply: “The Qur’ān’s attacks are all at statues and idols. The statues of Muslims are monuments like hospitals, schools, orphanages, mosques, and roads.”⁵⁸ This is corroborated by Nursi’s student Tefvik Demiroğlu, who was still with him and then remained in Ankara.⁵⁹ The date on Nursi’s ticket—the ticket that took Nursi from the life of the Old Said to that of the New Said—shows that it was issued on 4/17/39; that is, April 17, 1923, which was the first day of Ramaḍān, 1341.

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PART II

The New Said

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CHAPTER 9

Van

On arriving in Van, Nursi stayed with his younger brother, Abdülmecid, a teacher of Arabic, in the Toprakkale district of the town. But we learn from Abdülmecid's wife, Rabia, that his well-wishers and visitors were so numerous that he was obliged to move to Nurşin Mosque. This then became Nursi's base in Van in place of his *medrese*, the Horhor, which had been razed in the general destruction of the city wrought by the Armenians and occupying Russians during the war.¹ Nurşin Mosque became a center of learning, with large numbers of religious scholars and shaikhs coming to visit Nursi to pay him their respects and seek his advice. Nursi again attracted many students and began to teach, in addition to speaking with his many visitors. He remained here for the rest of that year. Eventually, however, this busy life weighed on Nursi and impinged on his inner life, so as soon as the weather grew sufficiently warm, he took a small number of his students with him, and withdrew from Van to Mount Ereğ, a mountain among the jagged peaks to the east of the town. Here he was able to devote himself entirely to prayer and contemplation.

That he was the New Said was clear to everyone in Van. Most of those who have recorded their memories of him at this time have mentioned some aspect of the changes that had come about in him. The most apparent of these was that he had abandoned the colorful local dress of the area for clothes of a more sober nature.² Indeed, on first seeing his destroyed *medrese* and the sacked and burnt city of Van, he was to relive the harrowing events of war and the deaths of so many of his students that had been instrumental in bringing about the New Said. Then, too, they saw that he had altogether turned his back on politics and the world, and those who heard him speak learned of the way of the New Said: that of saving and strengthening religious belief, which would form the basis of renewal and reconstruction.

Nursi stayed on the mountain throughout the summer and autumn of 1924, inhabiting a ruined Armenian monastery and then a cave near the source of the River Zernabad, and returning to Van only for the coldest months of the winter. It was his practice to go down to the town on Fridays to give the sermon in Nurşin Mosque. From what has been recorded of these sermons and what he taught his students, they, too, were entirely in accordance with the way of the New Said. That is to say, Nursi concentrated on explaining and teaching the fundamentals of belief, the basic tenets of faith: divine unity and

the resurrection of the dead and life of the hereafter. On this being questioned, for his treatment of these subjects was new and his congregations were unaccustomed to hearing these basic matters, he told one of his students: "My aim is to build the foundations of belief firmly. If the foundations are sound, belief cannot be shaken by any upheavals."³

The same student, Molla Hamid, also quoted Nursi as saying in this connection: "Gentlemen, the Old Said is dead! But you still think of me as the Old Said. This is the New Said you see before you. Almighty God has granted him limitless blessings; ten months of the New Said's teaching is the equivalent of what the Old Said taught in ten years, and should be sufficient."⁴

The New Said's outlook was to become fully enunciated with the *Risale-i Nur* and the three years till the spring of 1926 when he wrote its first parts may be seen as a time of preparation and seeking divine guidance. Also, just as the first writings of the New Said, collected together in the *Math-nawā'ial-'Arabī al-Nūrī*, were the "seedbed" of the *Risale-i Nur*, so too at this time in Van, some of the "lessons (*ders*)" Nursi gave or subjects he taught were later included in the *Risale-i Nur*. Another student, İsmail Perihanoğlu, has recorded two instances of this:

Another day, Molla Resul, Kopanisli Molla Yusuf, and I went together with Ustad to Zeve, the people of which had been entirely wiped out in the Armenian massacres. Ustad paused standing, and said: "This is the resting-place of martyrs. My brother Molla Ahmed-i Cano lies here too." And unable to hold back his tears, he wept sorrowfully.

Molla Ahmed-i Cano had studied with Ustad.

Later Ustad taught us concerning the levels of life as described in the First Letter,⁵ and we later wrote it out and duplicated it.⁶

On another occasion they climbed to the top of the citadel in Van, and as was Nursi's practice, he climbed to the very highest point and spread out his prayer rug. Looking down on the ruins of his *medrese* at the foot of the citadel, he spoke of the signs of the end of the world. Then, shifting his gaze to Lake Van, he explained the story of Jonah and the whale. He made a comparison of Jonah's situation and that of modern man, and explained how his moral and spiritual state resembles that of Jonah in the belly of the whale. Nursi later incorporated this into the *Risale-i Nur* as the First Flash.⁷

Many people commented on Nursi's absorption in worship.⁸ His sister-in-law, Rabia, notes that he never slept at night while staying with them; from his room came the continuous sound of prayer and supplication.⁹ İsmail Perihanoğlu notes how Nursi preferred to perform his worship, an important element of which was contemplation (*tefekkiir*), in high places and elevated spots. He describes another occasion when he found Nursi, plunged in thought, on the

roof of the mosque.¹⁰ Molla Hamid, who spent the most time with him on Mount Ereğ, states that Nursi was never for a moment idle, but was always occupied, mostly in prayer and supplication. He spent hours on his knees, so that his toes became raw. When one of his students suggested that he sit in a more comfortable position, like themselves, he replied: “We have to win eternal life in this brief life and fleeting world. Both sit comfortably and claim Paradise—that’s not possible! I’m not so bold as to sit comfortably!”¹¹

Nursi and his students transformed a ruined monastery on the mountain into a mosque, and in a thicket of trees by the source of the Zernabad they built a small platform on the interwoven branches, which he found conducive to study, prayer, and contemplation. Tree houses were a mark of the New Said, and after he had been exiled to western Anatolia he had a number made in spots favorable for “reading the book of the universe.”

Molla Hamid also relates a number of anecdotes illustrating Nursi’s kindness toward animals, his respect for them as creatures, his affinity with them, and power over them. The following is an example showing this last—that is, Nursi’s *keramet*, or spiritual powers.

One day a number of people arrived on the mountain to visit Nursi, and when it became apparent they were to stay overnight, Molla Hamid was sent down to a neighboring village to get some quilts. He was frightened of meeting wolves, dogs, or other wild animals, of which there were many, and cut himself a stout stick. But Nursi would not allow this. “The dogs won’t harm you,” he told him.

Molla Hamid set off, and on approaching the village he encountered a flock of sheep or goats guarded by dogs. He saw that a great brute of a dog lay across the path, blocking it. Remembering Nursi’s words, he approached the animal; it rose to its feet and moved off, making way for him. On reaching the village, the villagers expressed their astonishment, saying that they could not approach the herd even as a group armed with clubs, for the dogs were fed on sheep’s milk to make them sufficiently ferocious to ward off the wolves. Whereupon Molla Hamid told them he had been sent by Nursi. “Ah,” they said. “We can accept it then!”

Molla Hamid took the quilts and retraced his steps. He was met by Nursi when he arrived, who asked him if he had been attacked by dogs on the way. On hearing that he had not, he told him: “Have courage! Don’t be scared!”

It had been a lesson in courage for Molla Hamid.¹²

Molla Hamid also recalled the following “lesson.” In answer to an unasked question about looking at “what is forbidden,” Nursi struck himself angrily on the knee, and said:

I am not satisfied with the Old Said; I only like three things about him.
At a glittering time in Istanbul, I used to change my dress once a week,

splendid clothes! I used to go to the most brilliant places in Istanbul. Then my *hoja* friends appointed one of themselves to follow me, to see where I went and what I did. Three days later they said to me: "Said, whatever you do is right. You're heading in the right direction, and you'll be successful." When I asked them what they meant, they told me: "We have had you followed for three days to see if you did anything contrary to Islam, and we saw that you are not concerned with anything apart from your own business. So you will achieve what you set out to do." In the same way that a small flame will slowly consume a whole forest, a believer who lowers himself to look at what is forbidden will day by day destroy his good works. I'm sorry to say that such people may come to a bad end. . . . The Old Said stayed in Istanbul for ten years during his youth, and he did not look at a woman once.¹³

The Shaikh Said Revolt

Although it was known by everyone that Nursi had given up all political concerns and gone into retreat, the tribal chiefs and other leaders still wished to benefit from his considerable influence in the Eastern Provinces. Thus, among his visitors were chiefs and tribal leaders, besides those who came to him purely as a man of religion. For the problems of the area had found no solution. Among the Kurds were many who favored independence or autonomy, especially since the abolition of the sultanate and caliphate and the establishment of what many of them saw as the godless republic.¹⁴ A series of laws passed in March and April 1924 had abolished the surviving religious superstructure, completely secularizing the state. The founding of the Turkish nation-state had also led to an emphasis on Turkishness to the detriment of other identities.¹⁵ By early 1925 unrest was widespread, and the tribal chiefs tried to gain Nursi's support for a full-scale uprising against the government. As before, Nursi did all he could to persuade them against such a move. A number complied with his wishes. Thus, many thousands of lives were saved when what was to be known as the Shaikh Said Revolt¹⁶ finally broke out on February 13, 1925, named after its leader, a Naqshbandi shaikh called Shaikh Said of Palu. He too had tried to gain Nursi's support in a letter (Nursi's reply to it is given below). The revolt, which was only put down after two months, was to have far-reaching consequences, for Nursi (who was sent into exile, entirely unjustly, along with many hundreds of others), for the area, and not least for the future of the country as a whole. It set the course for the new regime. The government in Ankara used the revolt as a pretext for rushing through the Law for the Maintenance of Order, passed March 4, 1925, which empowered them to set up the notorious Independence Tribunals and gave them dictatorial powers to pursue their policies without opposition.¹⁷

Among the tribal leaders who visited Nursi—on several occasions, it would seem—was Kör Hüseyin Pasha. He was the powerful chief of the Haydaran tribe, and a commander of one of the tribal regiments that had replaced the Hamidiye forces. On one occasion he was accompanied by Abdülbaki, the son of the mufti of Van, Shaikh Masum, who was a close friend of Nursi. This visit Abdülbaki described in some detail, telling of the extremely ascetic conditions under which Nursi lived on Mount Ereğ. He also recorded that during the visit Nursi foretold the difficulties they would undergo, but that they should not be unduly dismayed, for Allah would send someone to protect and revive the religion of Islam.¹⁸ Interestingly, there is another record of his foretelling the difficulties of the future. On this occasion he told his students to “seek refuge with Almighty God . . . dire things are going to happen.” When they asked for an explanation of this, he merely told them that he was not permitted to say anything further at present.¹⁹

During the same visit, Kör Hüseyin Pasha tried to give Nursi money, something he never accepted under any circumstances. Molla Hamid describes a similar occasion, noting Nursi’s anger at the offer and his refusal. Their exchange continued with Hüseyin Pasha saying:

“I want to consult you. My soldiers, horses, weapons and ammunition are all ready. We only await your command.”

“What do you mean? Whom do you want to fight?”

“Mustafa Kemal”

“And who are Mustafa Kemal’s soldiers?”

“I don’t know . . . soldiers.”

So Nursi told him: “Those soldiers are the sons of this land. They are my kith and kin and your kith and kin. Whom will you kill? And whom will they kill? Think! Use your head! Are you going to make Ahmed kill Mehmed, and Hasan kill Hüseyin?”²⁰

Kör Hüseyin Pasha also approached Nursi on another occasion, this time in the Nurşin Mosque after the Friday Prayers and in the company of several other tribal leaders and notables. Ali Çavuş describes how together with the deputy for Çaldıran, Hasan Bey, and three others he again tried to obtain Nursi’s support. The governor of Van was alarmed by the visit of these chiefs, and on the pretext of a burial service also attended the prayers at the mosque. But his alarm turned out to be needless, for on their admitting to their intention of joining the revolt, Nursi told them: “Where has the idea of serving this cause come from, I wonder? I ask you. Is it the Sharī‘ah you want? But such an action is absolutely opposed to the Sharī‘ah. There is a strong likelihood of its being exploited by the foreigners and their provocations. The Sharī‘ah can’t be contravened by exploiting it and shouting for it. The key to the Sharī‘ah is with me. Now all of you return to your homes and places!”

When he had finished speaking, Nursi rose to his feet and returned to Mount Ereğ. As for K r H seyin Pasha and the tribal leaders, they heeded his warnings and did not join the revolt, which meant that Van and its people were not forced to join it, and thousands of lives were saved.²¹ Many people have testified to this fact.²²

As was mentioned above, Shaikh Said wrote in person to Nursi requesting him to join the movement, saying that if he did so they would be “victorious.” Nursi replied as follows: “The struggle you are embarking on will cause brother to kill brother and will be fruitless. For the Kurds and Turks are brothers. The Turkish nation has acted as the standard-bearer of Islam for centuries. It has produced millions of saints and given millions of martyrs. The sword may not be drawn against the sons of Islam’s heroic defenders, and I shall not draw mine!”²³

The Journey to Exile

Toward the end of the revolt, the authorities started to round up all the influential religious and tribal leaders in the province of Van and all over eastern Anatolia, although they had not taken part in the revolt, and send them into exile in western Anatolia. Rumors began to circulate that Nursi also was going to be exiled. There were moves to persuade him to leave the area for Iran or Arabia, but he declined, saying that should he go to Anatolia, it would be of his own consent.

Nursi was taken into custody from his cave on Mount Ereğ, then held together with other detainees in a secondary school in Van. These included Shaikh Masum, the mufti of Van; K r H seyin Pasha; the mufti of Gevaş, Hasan Efendi; K fecizade Shaikh Abd lbaki; Abdullah Efendi, the son of Shaikh Hami Pasha; and hundreds of others, including the elderly, women, and children. It was the month of Ramadan when they started their long trek, just as it had been in Ramađan that Nursi had returned to Van almost two years previously. That year, 1925, it began on March 25. It was still bitterly cold, and the whole land was covered in snow. They set off from Van; there were some seventy to eighty sledges drawn by oxen or horses, with many on foot or on horseback. The whole caravan stretched for about a kilometer. To start with, Nursi was handcuffed to Shaikh Masum. According to Haydar S phandađlı, K r H seyin Pasha’s son, Nursi—unlike all the others being exiled, who were leaving their homes and native land amid tears and in trepidation like a retreating army—was entirely calm and resigned at the turn of events. He also stated that the caravan stopped for three to four days in Patnos, one night in Ađrı, and a week in Erzurum, from which they continued in horse-drawn wagons. At Trabzon, where they stayed some twenty days, they

boarded a ship for the week-long journey to Istanbul. Nursi stayed in Istanbul some twenty to twenty-five days before traveling on with other exiles to Izmir and Antalya in the same boat. From there he was sent on to Burdur in southwestern Anatolia, his destination.²⁴

Kinyas Kartal, who as a young man of twenty-five or so was sent into exile in the same group,²⁵ recalled that when they were leaving Van, people from the surrounding area, who had collected a considerable sum of money and gold, tried to give it to Nursi, but he would not even look at it. He would accept presents, charity, or money from no one.²⁶ Kartal tells also how “Seyda” did not sleep at night in their first stopping-place, spending it in prayer. After this he requested a room to himself so as not to disturb the others.²⁷ That Nursi received special treatment on the journey is attested to by the gendarme assigned to guard him, Mustafa Ağralı. He gives a detailed description of Nursi, the caravan, and some of the villages in which they stayed: “Despite the other sledges all being loaded up with people and belongings, there was nothing on Nursi’s at all. He was all alone. He was being given special treatment. Wound round his head was a long, twisted turban of white printed muslin material. He had thick black moustaches, and no beard.”

Mustafa Ağralı describes also the hospitality they received from the Kurdish villagers in the places where they stopped for the night. He notes, however, that in the first place Nursi refused all offers of food, pleading illness. And after spending the night in prayer and performing the morning prayers together with Ağralı, he got out a kettle from the small basket that contained his belongings, then proceeded to boil himself an egg on the stove. It was the first food he had eaten since leaving Van.²⁸

Münir Bakan reports that when the caravan stayed two or three days in his village of Koruçuk near Erzurum, there were officers assigned to write down whatever Nursi said. As he told Necmeddin Şahiner, “Of course, they weren’t writing down these notes out of ‘sincerity,’ but for ‘capital.’” One of the things Nursi told Münir Bakan was “Don’t be afraid, my brother, these disasters that are being visited on us are temporary. Only there is one thing you should pay careful attention to: make your children study, otherwise this religion will be lost to you in no time at all.”²⁹

By the time the exiles boarded the ship for Istanbul in Trabzon, the spring had arrived in the warmer western climate. Two independent witnesses have told of how Nursi insisted on remaining on deck in the ship, defying the captain when he tried to force him to go below to join the other exiles.³⁰

In Istanbul, Nursi stayed in the Arpacılar (Barley Sellers) Mosque in Sirkeci, in the Hidayet Mosque, and with his student Tevfik Demiroğlu. His fears about Mustafa Kemal’s intentions had been justified, for the attempts to uproot Islam and expunge Turkey’s Islamic past and identity had already begun, and he saw here some of the results. He described one of these as follows:

When I was brought to Istanbul on my way to exile, I asked what had happened to the Şeyhü'l-İslam's Office, for I was connected with it, having worked and served the Qur'an in the Darü'l-Hikmeti'l-İslamiye, which was attached to it. Alas! I received such an answer that my spirit, heart, and mind trembled and wept. The man I asked said: "That Office, which for hundreds of years shone with the lights of the Sharī'ah, is now an older girls' lycée and playground." I was seized by such a mental state it was as though the world had collapsed on my head. I had no power, no strength. Uttering sighs of anguish in sheer despair, I turned toward the divine court. The feverish sighs of many others whose hearts were burning like mine combined with my sighs. I cannot remember whether or not I sought the assistance of Shaikh Geylānī's prayers and saintly power for our supplications; I do not know. But in any event it was his prayers and influence that set fire to the sighs of those like me in order to save from darkness a place that for so long had been a place of light. For that night the Şeyhü'l-İslam's Office was in part burnt down. Everyone said, "What a pity." But I, and those who were burning like me, said, "All praise and thanks be to God!"³¹

According to Tahsin Tandoğan, who was a chief superintendent of police in Istanbul in 1925, Nursi also stayed in Süleymaniye near the old Şeyhü'l-İslam's Office. His recollections provide both added proof of Nursi's innocence and further interesting details of his stay in Istanbul. Tahsin Bey himself arrested those ringleaders of the Shaikh Said Revolt who were in Istanbul and took their statements—namely, Palulu Sadi, Seyyid Abdülkadir, his son Muhammad, and Nazif Bey. He was also ordered by his chief, Ziya Bey, to go to Süleymaniye to the Şeyhü'l-İslam's Office,³² in order to fetch Nursi to the police headquarters and take his statement. The police chief told Chief Superintendent Tahsin Bey: "It is the famous Said-i Kürdi, but he is not in touch with these here involved in the revolt. We could not establish any connection between them at all." Tahsin Bey continued:

They had recently brought him [Nursi] from the East. He was staying in Süleymaniye. He had one of his students with him called Bitlisli Kürt Hakkı, who attended to his needs. I myself went there to get him and bring him to the Special Branch. I had his file. It was me who took the file to the police chief and to the governor [of Istanbul] to have it signed. I myself took his statements. Said Nursi said:

"I have no connection with this revolt whatsoever. I would have nothing to do with a destructive movement such as that and know nothing of it. I would not have my brothers' blood on my hands. Movements such as that are the cause of the blood of brothers being spilt."

Tahsin Bey went on to describe how he took the other four to Diyarbakır to the Independence Tribunal, where three were condemned to death and executed, and one, Nazif Bey, was acquitted. He then went on to say that the inquiries continued for fifteen days, after which they let Nursi go. Both Seyyid Abdülkadir and Palulu Sadi testified that Said Nursi had no connection with them at all. Tahsin Bey described his impressions of Nursi like this:

Nursi was an extremely intelligent person. I have never seen such an intelligent person. Thousands of guilty people have passed through my hands, and I understand what they are from their faces. What eyes he had! Like a motor, sparking, turning. I have never in my life seen such eyes. They sent him to Isparta as a precautionary measure; he was ordered to reside there. I am of the opinion that he was not the sort of man to be involved in simple revolts such as that; he was a most intelligent person.³³

After some three weeks, the greater part of which thus passed in “helping the police with their inquiries,” Nursi again boarded the ship, which set sail for Antalya, having called at Izmir to disembark a number of the other exiles. A considerable crowd of friends and well-wishers gathered on the Galata Bridge to make known their sorrow at his leaving them and bid him farewell. From Antalya he was taken inland to the small town of Burdur.

Burdur

Thus unjustly began twenty-five years of exile for Nursi. And the injustice was to continue. For rather than merely “compulsory residence,” he was to be held under very oppressive conditions, constantly under supervision and subject to arbitrary and unlawful treatment by government officials. He arrived in Burdur in the mulberry season, that is, June, and stayed at first together with two others of the four hundred exiles sent to Burdur³⁴ in an old army barracks,³⁵ then on the top floor of a house belonging to a local family, the Seyhans. Finally, he stayed in the Delibaba Hacı Abdullah Mosque in the Değirmenler district of the town. We learn from another neighbor that he used to hold “lessons” (*ders*) every day in the mosque after the afternoon prayers, and that this attracted many people.³⁶ It is probable that as material for these *derses* he used what was later entitled *Nur’un İlk Kapısı* (The First Door of the *Risale-i Nur*). This was a collection of thirteen short sections, called *derses*, which he wrote while in Burdur and had put together secretly into book form. This was then duplicated by hand by people who felt the need for the basic truths of belief that it teaches. Nursi described it as “an index, list, and seed of the *Risale-i Nur*” and as “the Qur’ân’s first lesson to the New Said.”³⁷

One of those who came to visit Nursi in Burdur was A. Hamdi Kasaboğlu, a member of the Consultative Council of the Department of Religious Affairs. He recalled: “One day, I went to visit Nursi in Burdur. I took a page of Arabic with me wondering if he knew Arabic. During the visit, I asked him to read it and I handed it to him. He took it, cast an eye over it, and handed it back to me. And saying, ‘Now let’s see if I can remember it,’ he read by heart the whole page.”³⁸

Field Marshal Fevzi Çakmak, the head of the general staff, came to Burdur while Nursi was there. He knew Nursi of old, and when the governor complained to him about Nursi, saying that he and some of his students declined to report to the police station every evening as was required, and that he was giving religious instruction, Fevzi Pasha told him: “No harm will come from Nursi. Treat him with respect and don’t bother him.”³⁹

Isparta

However, Nursi’s activities were contrary to what the government had intended in exiling the religious leaders of the East to western Anatolia, and anxieties were voiced among the authorities concerning him. So in January 1926 Nursi was taken from Burdur and sent to the center of Isparta. There he stayed in the Müftü Tahsin Efendi Medrese and at once again began to teach and attract many students. The governor of the town felt consternation at this. According to one eyewitness who visited the *medrese*, it was full to overflowing and he was only able to sit in the doorway.⁴⁰ The authorities then determined to send Nursi away to some tiny and remote place where he would attract no attention, and where deprived of all company and civilization he would just fade away and be forgotten. The place they chose was the village of Barla, a tiny hamlet in the mountains near the northwestern shore of Lake Eğirdir. After some twenty days in Isparta, Nursi was taken there.

Always severely self-critical and interpreting events according to their inner or true meaning, Nursi gave the following reasons for his being exiled to the three places we have described:

This concerns this unfortunate Said: whenever I have flagged in my duties, and saying “what is it to me,” have become preoccupied with own private affairs, I have received a slap. . . . For example, so long as I was busy teaching the truths of the Qur’ān in Van at the time of the Shaikh Said events, the suspicious government did not and could not interfere with me. Then when I said “What is it to me?” and thinking of myself withdrew into a ruined cave on Mount Ereğ in order to save my life in the hereafter, they took me without cause and exiled me. And I was brought to Burdur.

There, again, so long as I was serving the Qur'ân—at that time all the exiles were watched very closely, and although I was supposed to report to the police in person every evening, my sincere students and myself did not comply. The governor there complained to Fevzi Pasha when he visited, but the pasha said: “Don't interfere with him; treat him with respect.” What made him say that was the sacred nature of service to the Qur'ân. But whenever I have been overcome by the idea of saving myself and thought only of my life in the hereafter, and there has been a temporary slackening in my serving the Qur'ân, I have received a slap contrary to my intentions. That is to say, I was sent from one place of exile to another. I was sent to Isparta.

In Isparta I took up my duties once again. After twenty days, a number of cowardly people said by way of a warning: “Perhaps the government won't look favorably on this; it would be better if you go a bit cautiously.” Again I began to think only of myself, and I said: “Don't let the people come!” Then again I was taken from that place of exile and sent to a third, to Barla.

And in Barla whenever a slackness has come over me and the idea of thinking of myself has taken a hold on me, one of these serpents and two-faced hypocrites from among those concerned only with this world has been set to pester me.⁴¹

Nursi thus clearly felt that he had been charged with a mission. He was not free to choose to devote himself to a life of worship, which doubtless would have suited him, and to sink into obscurity. Outside his own volition, he was obliged to serve the Qur'ân.

So after a brief stay in his second place of exile, Isparta, Nursi was sent to the village of Barla. At that time the easiest way to travel there through the mountainous country was by way of Lake Eğirdir. The gendarme who accompanied him, Şevket Demiray, described their journey as follows:

The morning after market day in Eğirdir, they called me to the town hall. I went and found the head official of the district, the gendarme commander, members of the town council, and an imposing-looking man of around forty years⁴² of age wearing turban and gown. The gendarme commander said to me: “Look here, son, you've got to take this Hoja Efendi to Barla. He is the famous Bediuzzaman Said Efendi. It is a very important task for you. When you hand him over to the police station there, get these papers signed then report back here.” I said: “Right away, sir!” and accepted the duty. I went out with the *hoja* and said to him on the way: “You are my superior, forgive me, but what can I do, it's my duty.” We arrived at the jetty and agreed on a price with a boatman. He accepted to take us for fifty *kuruş*. Bediuzzaman Efendi got out the money for the boat and paid him. Then he gave a further ten

kuruş and got them to buy a kilo of seedless raisins. When boarding the boat he had in his hand a basket containing his belongings: a teapot and kettle, a few glasses, and a prayer rug. In his other hand was a Qur'an. With the two boatmen, a friend of the boatmen, and the two of us, we were five in the boat. It was afternoon. The weather was cold. It was round about the time when the first signs of spring were appearing. The lake was iced over in places. The front boatman broke the ice with a long pole, opening up a way for the boat to sail. Nursi offered us all raisins and pieces of dried pressed fruit from the East on the way. I was watching him carefully; he was completely calm and steady. He was looking at the lake and surrounding mountains. His fingers were long and thin. He was shining as though electricity was burning inside him. He was wearing a silver ring set with a stone, and on his back was a garment of high-quality cloth.

It was immediately the time for the afternoon prayers, since the days were short. He wanted to perform them in the boat. We turned the boat toward the *qibla*, then I heard the sound of "Allāhu Akbar." I had never before heard the words uttered in this awe-inspiring and solemn way. He declared "Allāhu Akhar," "God is Most Great," in such a way we all shivered. He did not resemble any other *hoja*. We were trying not to let the boat veer away from the direction of the *qiblah*. He offered the words of peace and completed the prayers, then turned to us and said: "Yes, brother, that was a bother for you." He was very polite and gentlemanly. We arrived at the Barla jetty after a voyage of some two hours. Burhan, the forester, was wandering up and down. I called out to him, and he came immediately. We took the *hoja's* basket and sheepskin from him and put them on the donkey.

At this point, the boatman Mehmed took the forester's rifle intending to shoot partridges with it, but Bediuzzaman prevented him, saying: "The spring is close now and their mating season. It's a shame, you should give up the idea." He stopped him shooting them. Then the partridges flew up into the air over our heads and started to follow us.

I slung my rifle over my left shoulder and took Hoja Efendi's left arm. We climbed the hill slowly and after walking for about an hour came to Barla. The partridges remained above us as far as Barla. They kept flying round above us.

Evening had drawn close. We stopped at the police station beside the Ak Mescid in Barla. The head official of the district, Bahri Baba, and the chief of the police station were there. I handed Bediuzzaman Efendi over to them and got them to sign the papers. I spent the night there and returned to Eğirdir the next morning.⁴³

CHAPTER 10

Barla

Isolation in Barla

Barla—Ankara had indeed found a remote spot removed from easy contact with the outside world. With its low, red-roofed houses nestling on a hillside among the green-sprinkled mountains to the west of Lake Eğirdir, this small village could only be reached on foot, or by horse or donkey; there was no motor road. The road was to come to Barla in later years, as was the telephone and electricity. The authorities in Ankara were not to know, however, that in unjustly exiling Nursi to this distant spot that they were serving the very cause they were intending to extirpate—that their injustice in not only exiling him but in imposing these conditions of isolation on him would be “transformed into a divine mercy.” They allowed him only the occasional visitor, and by spreading rumors and slander about him in the area of Barla they frightened off the local people and tried to prevent them approaching him; they had him watched, followed, and harassed continuously; and when in 1928 the government granted an amnesty to the other deportees, they denied him this right, too. But these repressive measures were, in Nursi’s words, merely serving the purposes of divine wisdom, for in this way he was isolated from all distraction and his mind was kept clear so that he could “freely receive the effulgence of the Qur’ān” and be employed to a greater degree in its service.¹ Nursi was to remain nearly eight and a half years in the gardens and mountains of Barla, and during this time he wrote the greater part of the one hundred and thirty parts of the *Risale-i Nur*. Barla became the center from which irradiated “the lights of belief” at a time it seemed they were destined to be extinguished.

The Attempt to Uproot Islam

By the early spring of 1926, the course Turkey was to follow had been set: that is, due west. For in the view of Mustafa Kemal, who by now had consolidated his power, Turkey could only be rebuilt and take its place in the “civilized” world through rapid modernization, and modernization meant Westernization.² And this in turn meant complete secularization. In his view, and in that of the Westernized elite that had come into existence as a result of the

Tanzimat reforms, Islam stood for backwardness and was responsible for the Ottoman decline and final defeat. The first goal, therefore, was the disestablishment of Islam and the removal of its visible presence from public life, and its replacement by Western civilization together with all its trappings. However, this should not have constituted the radical break that indeed it was perceived to constitute, for the secularization of the state had started with the Tanzimat. It had continued in the second constitutional period, though the voice of the Westernists had still been relatively feeble beside that of the Islamists, who proposed taking only science and technology from the West. Then, after the CUP gained complete control of the government in 1913, a string of secularizing measures proposed by the Turkist Ziya Gökalp were introduced, which greatly reduced the competence of the Şeyhül-İslam, handing over his “administrative, financial, judicial, and pedagogical functions” to the relevant departments of government,³ so that by 1923 the field of Islamic jurisdiction had been narrowed to include only family law. Yet this belied the immense power that remained to Islam as the basis and binding force of society. Its displacement or extirpation by the secularizing reforms could be achieved only through measures of the most draconian kind.

Before listing the reforms, it will assist in envisaging the popular reaction to them, as well as understanding Nursi’s response and that of the students he attracted in Barla, to recall that those implemented during the Tanzimat and subsequently had had little effect on the mass of people and their way of life, which was inextricably bound up with Islam. They still identified with Islam. Moreover, against all the odds the people of Turkey had just emerged victorious from the War of Independence, in which as Muslims their very land and existence had been threatened by what they saw as the powers of Christendom. In short, the purpose of the intended radical transformation, which was no less than a cultural revolution, was to eliminate the old Islamic identity and create one based on the Western concept of nationalism.⁴

The transformation⁵ was already in process—the joint pillars of the Islamic state, the sultanate and caliphate, had been abolished, together the office of Şeyhül-İslam, and the last strongholds of the ulama, the Shari‘ah courts and the *medreses*, had been consigned to the past. A law was passed unifying all education under a department of government. This all occurred before Nursi visited Istanbul on his way to exile. In 1926 the Swiss Civil Code was adopted. The Italian model was taken for criminal law.

Following the Shaikh Said Revolt in 1925, with the new dictatorial powers afforded the government by the Law for the Maintenance of Order mentioned above, a law was passed closing down all dervish lodges and Sufi meeting places. The orders were disbanded. The tombs of saints were also closed.⁶

Later the same year Mustafa Kemal announced his decision that the people of Anatolia should dress in a “civilized” manner, that is, according to Western

fashion. Traditional dress—notably the fez—was banned, and the famous Hat Act of November 1925 stated that all men should wear European-style hats, making the wearing of all other headgear a criminal offense. These decrees provoked outraged reactions⁷ and were imposed only by means of the Independence Tribunals and not a few executions.⁸ Many hundreds of people were arrested in efforts to enforce the law, men of religion being the main targets and victims. Characteristically, Nursi resolutely refused to discard his turban and gown, and persisted in defying attempts to make him do so till the end of his days, even making his court appearances in them. “This turban comes off with this head!” he told Nevzat Tandoğan, the governor of Ankara, in 1943 after a very sharp exchange. He was taken from the governor’s office and transported to prison in Denizli.⁹

The traditional calendars and forms of timekeeping were the next to go. The Western Gregorian calendar and twenty-four-hour clock were introduced with effect from January 1, 1926. The metric system was adopted in 1931.

These changes were not without opponents, even at the highest level; a plot against Mustafa Kemal was discovered in June 1926 that provided him with the pretext to do away with many of them. The Independence Tribunals went into action, and sixteen men were condemned to death, whether implicated or not.¹⁰ In 1928, article 2 of the 1924 constitution was abrogated, which had stated that Islam was the religion of the state.

Mustafa Kemal now felt sufficiently secure to adopt first Western numerals, then the Latin alphabet. The new “Turkish” letters were officially adopted in accordance with a law passed on November 3, 1928, and the Arabic alphabet was declared banned after the end of that year. A more effective way of cutting off an entire nation from its religion, its roots, and its past could not have been devised. The *Risale-i Nur* was to play an important role in keeping the Qur’anic script alive in Turkey.

With the alphabet Turkified, the next logical step was to Turkify Islam itself. The Arabic letters were done away with, then the language itself was replaced by Turkish. To retain the Arabic language was considered incompatible with the principle of nationalism, one of the six principles of Kemalism.¹¹ So after January 1932 the glorious Arabic words of the call to prayer, the great mark and symbol of Islam, were banned, and a Turkish version was provided to replace them. This, which according to one historian “caused more widespread popular resentment than any of the other secularist measures,”¹² remained in use till the Democrat government repealed the law in June 1950, as one of its first pieces of legislation.¹³

Another measure was the so-called purification of the Turkish language by eliminating loan words of Arabic and Persian origin and the introduction or invention of Turkish words. In 1934 surnames were introduced, and in 1935, the weekly holiday was moved from Friday to Sunday, severing one of the last links with the Islamic world.

In 1931 the Republican People's Party (RPP), the party Mustafa Kemal had founded, merged with the state, thereby gaining absolute control over it. Turkey was declared a single-party state; by this time, all opposition had been silenced anyway. In 1937 the six principles of the RPP were written into the Turkish constitution. Having obtained a monopoly of power, the RPP embarked on a program of mass education in the Kemalist principles. Thousands of People's Houses, People's Rooms, and later Village Institutes were opened in every corner of the country, through which the six principles, particularly secularism, nationalism, and Western culture¹⁴ were instilled into the Turkish people at grassroots level. The authoritarian, even totalitarian, regime of the RPP, which was seen by the Kemalists as "primarily a mechanism for social control from above,"¹⁵ was extremely unpopular, and resentment and discontent were rife.¹⁶

Of the six principles of Kemalism, secularism and nationalism thus played cardinal roles in the cultural transformation it hoped to achieve. As with other Young Turks before him, Mustafa Kemal's understanding of secularism was derived from French thought, but basic differences, particularly between Islam and the Catholic Church, meant it was largely inapplicable in the Turkish situation. This has given rise to an unresolved debate on the nature of secularism in Turkey. Mustafa Kemal's outlook and worldview were shaped by positivism, according to which science was the only valid source of truth and religion formed an obstacle to progress. In the scramble for civilization therefore, Islam had to be suppressed or eliminated, and made subject to the power of the state. It was certainly severely repressed in the 1930s and 1940s,¹⁷ while the latter was effected by the establishment of the Directorates of Religious Affairs and Pious Foundations in 1924¹⁸ and the abolition of what remained of the former system. Thus, secularization led neither to the true separation of state and religion, nor to the equal treatment by the state of adherents of all denominations and beliefs, religious and irreligious alike, whose rights and liberties it was supposed to protect. This problem crops up again in subsequent chapters, since it was the alleged infringement of this principle that was the pretext for Nursi's arrest and imprisonment on a number of occasions.

The Risale-i Nur

Said Nursi did not retreat into a world of prayer and worship in Barla; indeed, under the watchful eye of the state he succeeded in writing and disseminating a body of writing that would eventually be the inspiration of a movement for the revitalization of belief. Of all the Islamists of the previous era, Nursi stands out as unique in carrying forward into the Republican period the great

debate between Westernism and Islam, and presenting the case of Islam and the Qur'ān in a way that was to be enthusiastically taken up by large numbers of people. This was not a political struggle but one of ideas and beliefs, of conflicting visions of the world and existence. What Nursi set out to do was to prove the superiority of the Qur'ān and its civilization and that it was only through the Qur'ān that human beings individually and collectively could find fulfillment, satisfaction, and happiness; at the same time he replied to the positivist view and demonstrated that materialist philosophy was essentially irrational and untenable, and destructive of both humanity and society. By the 1950s and the easing of conditions brought about by the Democrat Party, Nursi's followers, the Nur students, had coalesced into a movement and become an appreciable force in Turkey.¹⁹

It will be recalled that in his early youth in the far eastern marches of the Ottoman Empire, Nursi had understood the significance of the age of science together with the dangers posed by the influx of European ideas, and had seen the necessity of updating the Islamic sciences, particularly Qur'anic exegesis. In *Muhākemat*, his first major work (1911), he assigned a section (unfinished at that time) to the Qur'ān's main "aims"—that is, the principal truths it teaches, which form the basis of the religion of Islam. Though often obscured in the early period of his life, this continued to be his main goal. Under the pressure of events, Nursi's desire to find "a new way to reality" became so intense it was instrumental, along with other factors, in bringing about his transformation into the New Said.

Once Nursi perceived the intended course of Turkey's new leaders, and that to further the Islamic cause through political struggle would be counterproductive, he devoted himself entirely to finding a new way to serve it. This led him to conclude that henceforth he should concentrate all his resources on the question of faith or belief (*īmān*) as taught by the Qur'ān, and its revitalization and strengthening through new methods. By the time he arrived in Barla he had developed such a method, by expanding the "inner way" he had found during the birth of the New Said into a general way of proving and elucidating the Qur'anic teachings on the "truths of belief." This new method²⁰ was also derived from the Qur'ān, and brings together its truths and scientific facts, as well as satisfactorily refuting such bases of materialist philosophy as nature and causality. It is a method of reflective thought (*tefekür*) on or observation of the phenomenal world by which beings are considered for the meanings they express, rather than for themselves. It makes wide use of allegorical comparisons, which "like telescopes" bring distant truths into sharp relief, making them easily comprehensible, and also makes extensive use of logic and reasoned argument. These and other features of Nursi's writings made them readily accessible to all sorts of people, whatever their level of understanding. This last point is important: the *Risale-i Nur* is "populist."

That is to say, just as the Old Said had striven to make his message heard by ordinary people and to involve them in the great movements of the time, so the New Said in his new struggle sought to address the ordinary people so to renew their belief and raise their religious consciousness while combating efforts to deprive them of their own religion and culture and turn them into pale imitations of Westerners. Many further points about the *Risale-i Nur* and the movement it inspired are discussed in later chapters.

Resurrection and the Hereafter

The first piece Nursi wrote, soon after his arrival in Barla, which he later designated the Tenth Word, was about the resurrection of the dead and life of the hereafter. In 1954 when revisiting Barla with some of his students, he described how it had been written. They were walking through the fields and orchards on the slopes to the east of Barla down toward Lake Eğirdir when Nursi told them:

It was about thirty years ago and just this season. I was walking through these orchards with the almond trees all in blossom when suddenly the verse “So think on the signs of God’s mercy, how He gives life to the earth after its death; indeed, He it is who will give life to the dead, and He is powerful over all things” (Qur’ān, 30:50) came to mind. Its meaning became clear to me that day. I was both walking and repeating it over and over again at the top of my voice. I recited it forty times. In the evening I returned and together with Şamlı Hafız Tefvik wrote the Tenth Word. That is, I dictated and Hafız Tefvik wrote it down.²¹

Unlike most subsequent parts of the *Risale-i Nur*, Nursi was able to have the Tenth Word printed when it was first written. This first printing (1926),²² of a thousand copies, was probably done in Istanbul through the efforts of one of Nursi’s old students from the east, Müküslü Hamza. It had a second printing in 1928. This time a local merchant, Bekir Dikmen, took the manuscript to Istanbul, and brought back the sixty-three-page books. Nursi corrected each copy and had them distributed.²³ A number of these he sent to Ankara to be distributed among government officials and deputies in the Grand National Assembly. According to Nursi, this coincided with an official decision by the Council of Education to inculcate ideas denying bodily resurrection.²⁴ After a meeting at which this was discussed, one of the members of the council encountered a deputy who had with him a copy of Nursi’s treatise. He spotted the book and told the deputy: “Said Nursi is receiving information about our work and writing works to counteract it.” Kazım Karabekir Pasha

informed Nursi of this, who offered this explanation: “I had received no such information concerning the council’s decision. Almighty God bestowed the treatise on resurrection on me because of their decision. I did not write it out of my own desire; it was written due to need.”²⁵

How Kazım Karabekir got word to Nursi is not recorded, but it is well known that the education policy of the new republic was geared to accomplishing the primary aim of the Kemalist revolutions, raising Turkey to the level of modern (Western) civilization, and was based on secular, positivist principles.²⁶ And “education” was not limited to schools. Media of all kinds, such as they were at that time, were used to attack religious beliefs and institutions, and hold them up to ridicule. For instance, the April 1927 edition of the monthly magazine *Resimli Ay Mecmuası* carried interviews with a number of well-known figures, including Abdülhak Hamid and Abdullah Cevdet—the famous proponent of biological materialism whose Westernizing ideas were influential in the early republic. They were replying to a questionnaire entitled: “Do you believe in the hereafter?” Provocative indeed in a country the great majority of whose people were still devout Muslims. While most of those asked avoided answering directly, Abdullah Cevdet openly denied the life of the hereafter, stating his opinion that belief in God was only for simpletons and “irremediably illogical.”²⁷

Nursi attached the greatest importance to his treatise about the resurrection of the dead, which, as he said, “explains to ordinary people, and even to children,” truths of belief before which even a genius of philosophy like Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) had confessed his impotence. Ibn Sīnā had declared that “resurrection cannot be understood by rational criteria.”²⁸ Nursi wrote also in a letter in the early 1930s that its “value had not been fully appreciated,” and that he himself had “studied it perhaps fifty times, and each time I have received pleasure from it and felt the need to reread it.”²⁹

What form then does the treatise take that it is able to prove such difficult matters so simply and clearly? Nursi’s own explanation provides an example of one of the types of reflective thought he uses in the *Risale-i Nur*:

Each [of the twelve “Truths” of which the main part of the work is composed] proves three things at the same time. Each proves both the existence of the Necessarily Existent One, and His names and attributes, and then it constructs the resurrection of the dead on these and proves it. Everyone from the most obdurate unbeliever to the most sincere believer can take his share from the Truths, because in each, the gaze is turned toward beings, works. It says: “There are well-ordered acts in these, and a well-ordered act cannot be without an author. In which case it has an author. And since the act has been carried out with order and balance, its author must be wise and just. Since he is wise, he does nothing in vain. And since he acts with justice, he

does not permit rights to be violated. There will therefore be a great gathering, a supreme tribunal." The Truths have been tackled in this way. They are succinct, and thus prove the three things at once.³⁰

At the end of the conclusion of the Tenth Word itself, this is enlarged upon. Nursi explains that the proofs for resurrection rest on divine works in the universe that proceed from the manifestation of the greatest divine name (*ism-i a'zam*) and the greatest degree of manifestation of the other names, and are therefore vast and immense. He writes: "Since the resurrection and Great Gathering (Last Judgment) occur through the manifestation of the greatest name, they are to be proved as easily as the spring, and submitted to with certainty, and believed in firmly, through seeing and demonstrating the immense acts that are apparent through the manifestation of God Almighty's greatest name and the greatest degree of all His names."³¹

Nursi explains that it is because of this great breadth and profundity that the resurrection is difficult to comprehend rationally. But he adds that thanks should be given, for the way had been shown by the Qur'an, while on its own man's reason had remained impotent.

Life in Barla

Thinking and writing, Nursi lived the life of a recluse in Barla. The first week he spent as a guest of one of the villagers, Muhacir Hafız Ahmed, who together with his family was later to perform great services for Nursi and the *Risale-i Nur*.³² But he needed somewhere quieter and less frequented, and a small, two-roomed house was found that had formerly served as the village meeting house. This humble dwelling was to be Nursi's home for the next eight years. In his words it became his "first Nur *medrese*," that is, "*Risale-i Nur* school." Beneath it ran a stream, summer and winter, and in front stood a truly majestic plane tree. Nursi had a platform or small tree house made among its great boughs, which in spring and summer he used as a place for contemplation and prayer. His students and the people of Barla used to say that he would remain there all night, neither rising nor sleeping, and at dawn the birds would flutter all around the tree as though drawn by the sound of his supplications, joining their songs to his prayers.³³

Barla's setting is one of great beauty. Mountains rise up behind it, and before it the land falls away to Lake Eğirdir, with orchards and fields following the curve of its valley. Nursi spent much of his time walking through this country and down along the lake. High above the lake some four hours to the north of Barla is Çam Dağı, the Pine Mountain. Here Nursi spent much time, particularly after 1930, staying weeks on end in complete solitude. Here too he

had tree houses made, two of them, one in a pine tree and the other in a cedar, where he would write and also correct the handwritten copies of *The Words* and other parts of the *Risale-i Nur*, which by that time were becoming increasingly numerous as his writings became better known and more widely spread.

The way the *Risale-i Nur* was written and disseminated was another of its unique features. Together with his extraordinary learning and abilities, Nursi himself had very poor handwriting, so that he described himself as “semiliterate.” He interpreted this as a divine bounty, however, for because of this need, Almighty God sent him students who were “heroes of the pen.”³⁴ He would dictate at speed to these scribes, who would write down what he dictated with equal speed. The actual act of writing, therefore, was very fast, so that some of the parts of the *Risale-i Nur* were written in an incredibly short space of time—for example, one or two hours. This shall be discussed at greater length later. And Nursi himself was busy with the actual writing for only an hour or two each day. Copies of the original were written out by hand and distributed. These were then copied and passed on to others who would write out further copies. In this way *The Words* passed from village to village, and in the course of time, from town to town, and throughout Turkey, as we shall see.

Barla’s spring and summer rains are famous. The sunny skies suddenly cloud over, the thunder crashes, the lightning flashes, and the heavens open. Then the air is filled with the sweet smell of the soaked earth.

On one of the early days of the first summer he was in Barla, Nursi was walking alone in the surrounding country when the skies darkened and just such a rain began to fall. Finding nowhere to shelter in the mountains, he made his way back to Barla drenched to the skin. He slowly climbed the narrow streets to the common water tap with his by now ripped black rubber shoes in his hand and white woolen stockings soaked in mud. A group of the villagers were passing the time of day. One of them, seeing the *hoja* in this sorry and dejected state, parted from the group and came up behind him. Sensing someone behind him, Nursi turned and, seeing Süleyman (as he was called), beckoned to him. Süleyman took the torn and muddy shoes and washed them in the trough; then, together they climbed up the hill to Nursi’s house. Süleyman attended to Nursi’s needs with complete willingness for the next eight years. Nursi called him Faithful Süleyman. The Twenty-Eighth Word, about paradise, was written in his garden. To this day it is known as the Paradise Garden.³⁵

Nursi continued to suffer from bad health all the time he was in Barla. It was also his habit to eat only just sufficient to keep body and soul together. This had always been his practice and was often noted by those who knew him; his meal was generally a small bowl of soup and a piece of bread. The first four years he was in Barla, his soup came from Muhacir Hafiz Ahmed’s

house, brought by his seven- and eight-year-old children, who were *hafızs* of the Qur'ān like himself. Nursi would always give them the payment for the soup in return, ten *kuruş* in those days. The four years following this it was provided by another of the villagers, Abdullah Çavuş.³⁶

Particularly the first years Nursi was in Barla, he was very much alone, and he described this isolation in several letters, one of which is given below. However, he also raised a lot of interest in the area and on occasion received visits from local people from all walks of life. One of these was a local district officer called İhsan Üstündağ, who visited Nursi together with the district doctor, the finance officer, and a chemist, sometime between 1926 and 1930. His account is as follows:

While on the way to Barla in the boat, a conversation started up about religion. The chemist had little religious belief, and he said: "You say God exists, so why did He create evil?" We could in no way convince him. So we told him about Nursi, and said: "Don't say anything else or we'll throw you in the lake! We're going to Barla, you can ask the Hoja Efendi there; he'll give you a good answer." On arrival we went straight to the district chief's house and, before even drinking our coffee, sent word that we wanted to visit Nursi. He received us gladly, greeting us standing. "It should have been me that visited you, but you've come to me," he said, and before we could ask any questions, started to talk about good and evil. He continued: "Now I'll explain to you how evil can be good." We gasped in amazement. He gave this example: "Cutting off an arm infected with gangrene is not evil, it's good, because if it isn't cut off, the whole body would be infected. That means Allah created that evil for good." Then he turned to the doctor and the chemist, and said: "You're a doctor and a chemist, you know this better than I do." The chemist turned as white as chalk. He was completely tongue-tied. [They had not said who they were.] Hoja Efendi gave another example: "If you put some eggs under a turkey and some hatch and some don't, could you say that this is evil? For each chick that does hatch is worth five hundred eggs." Finally he gave a detailed description of the heart. Several days later, Dr. Kemal Bey told me that he had never heard such a fine scientific exposition of the heart before, even from professors!³⁷

The following is an extract from one of Nursi's letters describing his solitude. All his letters begin with the words, "In His Name, be He glorified," and are followed by the verse: "And there is nothing but glorifies Him with praise (Qur'ān, 17:44)."³⁸ It is his famous *gurbet* letter. There is no direct equivalent for the word *gurbet*³⁹ in English; it denotes the idea of being away from home, exile, and strangeness, and has long been a theme in the literatures of the East. After starting in his customary way, Nursi writes:

My hardworking brothers, zealous friends, and means of consolation in these lands of exile known as the world! . . . These last two or three months I have been very much alone. Sometimes once every two or three weeks I have a guest with me; the rest of the time I am alone. And for nearly three weeks now there has been no one working in the mountains near me; everyone has dispersed. . . .

One night in these strange mountains, silent and alone amid the mournful sighing of the trees, I saw myself to be in five exiles of varying hues. The first: due to old age, I was alone and a stranger, far from most of my friends, relatives, and close ones; I felt a sad exile at their having left me and departed for the Intermediate Realm [the grave]. Then another sphere of exile opened up within this one: I felt a sad sense of separation and exile at having been left by most of the beings to which I am attached; like last spring, they have departed. And a further sphere of exile opened up within this, which was that I was away from my native land and relatives, and alone. I felt a sense of separation and exile arising from this, too. Then, too, the lonesomeness of the night and the mountains made me feel another pitiable exile. And finally I saw my spirit in an overwhelming exile, which had been prepared to journey to eternity both from this exile and from the transitory guesthouse of this world. I exclaimed to myself, My God! how can these exiles and layers of darkness be borne? My heart cried out:

*My Lord! I am a stranger; I have no one, I am weak,
I am powerless, I am impotent, I am old;
I am without will; I seek recourse, I seek forgiveness,
I seek help from Your Court, O God!*

Suddenly the light of belief, the effulgence of the Qur'ān, and the grace of the Most Merciful came to my aid. They transformed those five dark exiles into five luminous, familiar spheres. . . .⁴⁰

In another letter Nursi wrote: "I have understood and believe firmly that this world is a guesthouse undergoing rapid change. It is not the true homeland, and everywhere is the same. Since everywhere is a guesthouse, if one is befriended by the mercy of the guesthouse's Owner, everyone is a friend and everywhere is friendly. But if it does not befriend one, everywhere weighs on the heart and everyone is hostile."⁴¹

Abdurrahman's Death and Nursi's Students

These letters were written to Hulūsi Yahyagil,⁴² "the first student of the *Risale-i Nur*." Then serving as a captain in the army stationed at Eğirdir, he

first visited Nursi in the spring of 1929. He was from Elazığ in eastern Turkey and was to perform considerable services for the *Risale-i Nur* when he returned there eighteen months later. He formed a very close bond with Nursi, identifying completely with *The Words*, and “his zeal and seriousness was the most important cause of the last of *The Words* (*Sözler*), most of the *Letters* (*Mektubat*), and some of the *Flashes* (*Lem‘alar*) being written.”⁴³ More than this, Nursi considered him to be successor to his nephew, Abdurrahman.⁴⁴

Yes, together with all the other hardships he suffered at this time, Nursi was struck by this heavy blow: the death of his spiritual son, companion, and helper, Abdurrahman. Let us hear it from Nursi’s own pen:

At one time I was being held in Barla in the province of Isparta in distressing captivity that was supposed to be exile, in a truly wretched state suffering both illness, and old age, and absence from home, in a village all alone and with no one, barred from all social intercourse and communication—when in His perfect mercy Almighty God bestowed a light on me that illuminated the subtle mysteries of the All-Wise Qur’ân. It was a consolation for me, and through it I tried to forget my pitiful state. I was able to forget my native land, my friends, and relations, but alas, there was one person I could not forget and that was Abdurrahman. He was my nephew, and my spiritual son, and my most devoted student, and my bravest friend, and had parted from me six or seven years previously. . . . Then, out of the blue someone gave me a letter. I opened it, and saw that it was from Abdurrahman, written in a way showing his true self. . . . It made me weep, and it still makes me weep. The late Abdurrahman wrote in the letter seriously and sincerely that he was disgusted with the pleasures of this world and that his greatest desire was to reach me and look to my needs in my old age, just as I had looked to his when he was young. He also wanted to help me with his capable pen in spreading the mysteries of the Qur’ân, my true duty in this world. He even wrote in his letter: “Send me twenty or thirty treatises and I’ll write twenty or thirty copies of each and get other people to write them.” . . .

Before writing the letter he had obtained a copy of the Tenth Word, about belief in the hereafter, and it had been a remedy for him, curing all the spiritual wounds he had received during those six or seven years. He then wrote to me as though he was awaiting his death with a truly strong and shining faith. One or two months later I was thinking of once again passing a happy worldly life with Abdurrahman; then, alas, I suddenly received news of his death. I was so shaken that five years later I am still under the effect of it. . . . Half of my private world had died with the death of my mother, and now, with Abdurrahman’s death, the other half died. My ties with the world were completely cut.⁴⁵

Once again Nursi found consolation through the Qur'ân, this time through the verse: "Everything shall perish save His countenance; His is the command, and to Him shall you return" (Qur'ân, 28:88), and the phrase, "The Eternal One, He is the Eternal One." Nursi completes this piece, taken from his *Treatise for the Elderly*, by saying that Almighty God gave him thirty Abdurrahmans in place of the one he had taken.

The most important of these new students was Hulûsi Yahyagil, who first visited Nursi a year or so after Abdurrahman's death. Another was Kuleönlü Mustafa, whom Nursi found waiting for him when he returned home to Barla after hearing the news.⁴⁶ There were other army officers besides Hulûsi Bey, one of whom was Re'fet Bey,⁴⁷ a retired captain; another was Binbaşı Asım Bey,⁴⁸ who died under interrogation in Isparta in 1935 when Nursi and over a hundred of his students were rounded up and arrested. There was also Santral Sabri,⁴⁹ the jetty keeper at the village of Bedre on Lake Eğirdir, who played a central role in distributing the parts of the *Risale-i Nur* to the surrounding villages. He was the prayer leader in the village mosque, and shared with Nursi a "seal of brotherhood" in the form of the second and third toes of one foot being webbed. And there was Hüsrev⁵⁰ from Isparta, who had very fine handwriting and entirely devoted himself to writing out copies of the *Risale-i Nur* and to its service.

Nursi's relations with his students were quite unlike the usual formal, distant relations between teacher and students or shaikh and followers. He considered himself to be a student of the *Risale-i Nur* the same as them, and besides having close personal relations with them, true to his belief in consultation, consulted them concerning the writing and dissemination of the *Risale-i Nur*. Just as he was most awe-inspiring and utterly uncompromising in the face of unbelief and the enemies of religion, toward those who served the truth, he was most kind and compassionate. Nursi was also extremely modest with his students, and courteous, and personally would accept no superior position, or praise or adulation. "I don't like myself," he used to say, "and I don't like those who like me!" He would only accept praise insofar as it belonged to the *Risale-i Nur* or the Qur'ân. Nursi also kept in constant touch with his students, and an unceasing flow of letters passed between them. These thousands of letters were gathered together and form a substantial part of the *Risale-i Nur*. The following is part of a letter, from the collection written while Nursi was in Barla, *Barla Lahikası*:

My brothers Hüsrev, Lütfi, and Rüşti,

In one respect—beyond my due—you are my students, and in one respect you are my fellow students, and in one respect you are my assistants and consultants. My dear brothers! Your Master is not infallible, it is an error

to suppose him to be free of error. One rotten apple in an orchard does not harm the orchard, and one worn coin in a treasury does not negate the treasury's value. If good points are reckoned as ten and bad points as one, it is fair in the face of the good points not to upset the heart and object because of the one bad point and error. . . .

Understand this, my brothers and fellow students! I shall be happy if you tell me freely when you see a fault in me. If you hit me over the head with it even, I shall say, "May God be pleased with you!" Other sakes should not be considered in preserving the sake of the truth. I will accept it immediately. . . . Know that at the present time this duty of serving belief is of the greatest importance. It should not be loaded on a weak wretch whose thought is scattered in several directions; assistance should be given him as far as is possible. Yes, the absolute, succinct truths emerge and I am the apparent means, but the ordering, clarification, and arrangement of them are up to my valuable and capable fellow-students.⁵¹

It is important to bear in mind when reading these pages the extremely difficult conditions under which Nursi and his students were working. These arose from both the economic and the political situations. As regards the former, life in the countryside was hard; the long years of war, the ravages of the independence struggle, and the exodus of the sizable Greek population—the Greeks were the main entrepreneurs of the region and controlled trade and commerce—all contributed to a deterioration in living conditions in this isolated though potentially rich agricultural region. Further setbacks were suffered when the effects of the world depression were felt in the early 1930s.⁵² The secularizing reforms must also have been met with particular resentment, since Isparta Province was famous for the number of its *medreses* and the ulama it had produced.⁵³ Despite this, literacy rates were not high among the ordinary people; the figure given for the general population in 1927 was less than 9 percent.⁵⁴ The extent of the Nur movement's service in improving this deplorable situation will become clear. With the closure of the *medreses* and Sufi *tekkes*, and the banning of the Arabic alphabet, an effective stop was put to all religious education. Following this, those caught teaching or reading books in the old alphabet were treated as criminals, and very often suffered imprisonment, exile, or even death as a consequence. The same went for the Qur'ân; the teaching and learning of it were carried on in secrecy. Imprisonment and torture were the lot of the persecuted *hojas* caught teaching it. It was a nightmare time for people of Anatolia, so bound to the religion of their fathers. This official terror and persecution increased in severity throughout the 1930s and 1940s.

It is clear from the letters of people who were introduced to the *Risale-i Nur* at this time how greatly they benefited from it. Their belief became firm as they read its treatises, and they acquired considerable strength and courage.

They also had the example of Nursi and his proverbial courage and persistence, so that they bore all the hardships, attached no importance to the persecution, and, like Nursi, devoted themselves entirely to writing out copies of the treatises of the *Risale-i Nur* and passing them on to others. The following are two examples of letters to Nursi from his students. The first is from Hüseyin of the “graceful pen,” who for years wrote out innumerable copies of the *Risale-i Nur*:

My Dear and Respected Master!

Each of your *Words*, that is, your treatises, is a powerful cure. I receive great blessings from your *Words*. So much so that the more I read them the more I want to read them; I can't describe the sublime delight I feel each time I do this. I am certain that anyone who reads even one of your *Words* fairly will be obliged to submit to the truth; if he is a denier, he will be obliged to give up the way he has taken; and if he is a sinner, he will be obliged to repent.⁵⁵

The second is from Kuleönlü Mustafa, who as mentioned above visited Nursi after he had received news of Abdurrahman's death, and was a forerunner of the many hardworking students who were to devote themselves to the *Risale-i Nur* in place of Abdurrahman. Included here are some extracts from his long letter, which is interesting in that it describes how he himself found his “guide” in the *Risale-i Nur*, how others like him responded to it in the same way and found that it “cured their wounds,” and how the *hojas*, not known for their readiness to accept anything new, recognized its unique value. The letter also makes the important point that now the people were deprived of any opportunity of learning Arabic, the language in which all teaching of religion had been carried out, the *Risale-i Nur* took the place of the *medreses*, teaching “the truths of belief” and the Qur'ān both in Turkish and in a way suitable for their needs:

My Revered Master!

I was searching for a perfect guide when it occurred to me that I was seeking a guide far away, while nearby there was Bediuzzaman. So I approached the revered Master, and he told me to write out the treatises. I wrote out fifteen or so of the *Words* and I am reading them. . . . I began to benefit from them immensely. . . . Eventually young people gathered around me. . . . My Esteemed Master! Your writings cure the wounds of these hundred friends of mine. On occasion one who is floundering amid doubts comes, and when this impotent student of yours reads him a part of the *Risale-i Nur*, his doubts evaporate and disappear. . . .

This impotent student of yours never studied Arabic nor saw the inside of a *medrese*. He used to read books in Turkish written long ago and could find no cure for his material and spiritual wounds. . . . [But] as Almighty God creates solutions appropriate for every era and bestows remedies suitable for every wound, so at this time of ours which lacks *medreses* He is causing the *Risale-i Nur* to be written by our Esteemed Master, in Turkish, for those wounded like us. . . . Endless thanks be to Almighty God! May He give our Esteemed Master success in the service of the Qur'an and exalt him in this world and the next. Amen! Although I received no education in Arabic nor studied for ten to fifteen years in a *medrese*, and have only written out the treatises of the *Risale-i Nur* and studied them seriously, I feel that I have studied in a *medrese* for twenty years. The reason is this: many Arabic teachers come to this impotent, lowly wretch and are amazed at what he has studied. People who have been trained by perfect guides also come and are captivated by the words they hear from me. Many *hojas* come in all humility and get me to read the *Risale-i Nur*. If my voice were sufficiently powerful I would shout with all my strength to all the young people on the earth: "Writing out the *Risale-i Nur* and studying it seriously is far superior to studying in a *medrese* for twenty years and far more beneficial!"⁵⁶

The *Risale-i Nur* Spreads

By degrees the *Risale-i Nur* spread as the writing of it became more extensive. Particularly in the area of Isparta, there were eventually thousands of Nur students, men and women, young and old, who devoted themselves to writing out copies of it. Of these, some did not emerge from their houses for seven or eight years. Even in the village of Sav, which came to be known as the Nur School, the treatises of the *Risale-i Nur* were duplicated by literally a thousand pens. This continued for a number of years. A duplicating machine was first used continuously in İnebolu in 1946 or 1947, and it was not till 1956 that it was possible to print the whole *Risale-i Nur* collection on modern presses, and in the new script.⁵⁷ The number given for handwritten copies of the various parts of the *Risale-i Nur* is six hundred thousand.

Radiating out from Nursi himself through these Nur students was a courage and hope that countered the pervading air of defeat and despair engendered by the pressure, propaganda, and terror directed against Islam and those who practiced it. This was contagious and generated a positive movement that eventually spread through the whole country. So, too, all these students were undaunted by the intimidation and official efforts to prevent them. They suffered every sort of persecution. They lived under the constant threat of having their houses raided and searched for copies of the *Risale-i Nur*.

Many were taken time and again from their houses to police stations, where they suffered imprisonment, torture, the bastinado.

The women too played a vital and heroic role in this extraordinary movement. Some took on their husband's work to leave them free to either write or serve the *Risale-i Nur* in some other way. Some assisted their husbands in writing. Many wrote out copies by simply tracing the letters. Many others now learned to read and write for the first time and wrote out copies of the treatises themselves. Others read the *Risale-i Nur* themselves and then read it to other women in the vicinity. Undaunted like their husbands at the intimidation, they found their strength from the firm belief they obtained through reading and listening to the "lessons" of the *Risale-i Nur*. The children, too, played an important part in writing out the treatises.⁵⁸

It may be seen from this how the *Risale-i Nur* contributed to preserving the Qur'anic script in Turkey when the attempt was being made to exterminate it completely. And more than this, in the face of the so-called language reforms that followed in the 1930s and aimed at removing all words of Arabic and Persian origin from the Turkish language, it played an important role in maintaining and even reinvigorating traditional Islamic culture. It may even be said that the Nur movement contributed significantly to increasing the literacy rate and raising the cultural level of thousands of people, quite apart from its function of preserving and renewing the Islamic faith. In connection with this, Nursi wrote: "Just as the *Risale-i Nur* strives to protect the truths of belief against atheism, so one of its duties is to preserve the letters and script of the Qur'ān against innovations."⁵⁹

What was it about the *Risale-i Nur* that attracted these people to it, causing them to undertake so many risks and hardships and very often leave aside their own concerns so as to devote themselves to its service? What was the source of its power to strengthen their belief in this way? Was it in fact Nursi that attracted them and infused them with this zeal? Or did the *Risale-i Nur* itself possess some attractive power that drew them and held them? First, we can say that Nursi always directed attention away from his own personality and toward the *Risale-i Nur*, shunning any sort of adulation that would damage the absolute sincerity he considered necessary for the task to which he felt he had been appointed. Also, he considered that all of himself had gone into the *Risale-i Nur*. And as was mentioned before, he considered himself to be not the source of the *Risale-i Nur* but merely its "translator" and the means of its being written. He said of himself: "Just as an ordinary private can announce the commands of a field marshal, and a bankrupt can shout out the wares of a shop full of priceless jewels and diamonds, so too I announce the wares of the sacred shop of the Qur'ān."⁶⁰ He also wrote: "I do not say about *The Words* out of modesty, but to state a fact, that the truths and perfections in *The Words* are not mine, they are the Qur'ān's, and have issued from the

Qur'ān."⁶¹ Thus, it may be said that in the view of Nursi and his students it was the lights of the Qur'ān shining through the *Risale-i Nur* that was attracting and illuminating ever-increasing numbers of people.

“Divine Favors” Associated with the Writing of the *Risale-i Nur*

As a form of thanks and also in order to encourage his students in their work in the difficult conditions of the time, Nursi dedicated a long section of one of his letters to describing a number of “divine favors” associated with the writing of the *Risale-i Nur* that strengthen this claim. He told them that without their knowledge and beyond their will, someone was employing them in these important matters. His evidence for this was these favors and the fact that things were made easy for them. He then enumerated some of them, calling them “Indications.”⁶²

The first indication was the question of the “coincidences” (*tevfukat*), which first became apparent in connection with the Tenth Word. Here Nursi takes the Nineteenth Letter as an example, which in some handwritten copies displayed some truly extraordinary examples of these “agreements” or “coinciding.” He also used it as an example for others of the points, including the great ease and speed with which most of the *Risale-i Nur* was written, for the most part when Nursi was suffering most from illness and harassment. Briefly, the Nineteenth Letter, entitled *The Miracles of Muhammad*, describes more than three hundred of the Prophet’s miracles, very often citing the narrators of the Hadiths quoted. Despite being over a hundred pages long, it was written entirely from memory without recourse to any books for reference, outside in the countryside, and within the space of three or four days working only for two or three hours each day, thus making a total of about twelve hours. When the first copies were made, it was before they knew about these “coinciding,” and in copies written by eight different, inexperienced scribes, who were in different places and did not communicate with each other, the alignments and positioning of the phrase “the Most Noble Messenger, Upon whom be blessings and peace,” turned out to be so clear and well ordered that it was impossible to attribute them to chance. As though positioned by an unseen hand, this arrangement of the phrase was itself a sort of miracle or wonder of the *Miracles of Muhammad*.⁶³

The second indication was “the brothers, each of whose pens were like diamond swords,” whom Almighty God had bestowed on Nursi as helpers. They themselves formed a sort of “coincidence,” and the fact that they dedicated themselves to serving the cause of the Qur'ān through the *Risale-i Nur*, “never flagging and with total enthusiasm and enterprise, at that time when the alphabet had been changed and there were no printing presses and everyone

was in need of the lights of belief, and there were many things to destroy their enthusiasm, was itself a sort of miracle of the Qur'ān and a clear divine favor."

A further indication was that the *Risale-i Nur* proved all the most important truths of belief and the Qur'ān with the greatest clarity, and Nursi cited a number by way of example. For instance, the Tenth Word was about the resurrection of the dead and the hereafter, before which, as we have seen, even Ibn Sīnā had confessed his impotence. The Twenty-sixth Word solved the problem of Divine Determining, sometimes called fate or destiny, and human will, in a manner that everyone may understand. The Twenty-ninth Word provided convincing proofs of the angels, the immortality of man's spirit, and the resurrection of the dead. The Thirtieth Word spoke about the human "I" or ego, and the transformations of minute particles. Together they "uncover and explain the talisman of the astonishing activity in the universe, the riddle of the creation or the world and its end, and the mystery of the wisdom in the motion of minute particles."

The fourth indication of the divine favors associated with the writing of the *Risale-i Nur*, Nursi writes modestly, was that the various parts of it explain, by means of comparisons, the most profound and inaccessible truths of belief to even the common people, in a way beyond his own abilities and outside the normal possibilities of present circumstances. These comparisons, which are an important feature of the *Risale-i Nur* and are "reflections" and "similitudes" of the comparisons in the Qur'ān, "bring the most distant truths near and teach them to the most ordinary person." So also, although the *Risale-i Nur* had by then become widespread, its treatises had not been subject to criticism by anyone, and everyone from religious scholars and followers of the Sufi paths (*tarikats*) to atheistically minded philosophers and the ordinary people had benefited from it according to their degree; it addressed everyone according to their level.

The sixth indication is very significant and will be mentioned again later; it was that Nursi's whole life had been a sort of preparation for the *Risale-i Nur*. He wrote: "I am now certain that my life has passed in such a way, beyond my will and power, consciousness and planning and has been given so strange a course, that it might yield the result of these treatises to serve the All-Wise Qur'ān. It is quite simply as though all my scholarly life has been an introduction to them and in preparation of them. It has passed in such a way that the exposition of the Qur'ān's miraculousness through *The Words* [the *Risale-i Nur*] would be its result." And now his isolation in Barla and the persecution he suffered from the authorities, not even being allowed his books for study, had concentrated all his attention on the Qur'ān and the writing of the *Risale-i Nur*.

Furthermore, "almost all the treatises had been bestowed on the spur of the moment and instantaneously due to some need arising out of [Nursi's]

spirit, without any external cause.” After they had been read by others, Nursi learned from them that the treatises met the needs of the times and were a cure for its ailments.

A final indication of the divine favor directed toward them was the easiness and assistance they experienced in all the matters concerned with the writing, copying, and disseminating of the *Risale-i Nur*. Nursi described this as being “extraordinary,” and said that he had no doubt it emanated from the Qur’ān. So also they found that they received an ease and plenty in their livelihoods as a result of serving the *Risale-i Nur*.

The Authorities Increase Their Pressure on Nursi

As the *Risale-i Nur* became more widely disseminated and it became clear to the authorities that they had failed to stifle Nursi’s endeavors in the cause of Islam, they stepped up their pressure on him. The aim was by constantly needling him, unlawfully, to provoke a reaction that would provide them with the excuse to further curtail his freedom. With this aim, two officials were posted to Barla in 1931; one was a new chief district officer, and the other was a teacher. Although these two were a constant thorn in the flesh for Nursi, they failed in their attempts to provoke him. Even when they arranged for his small mosque to be raided while he and a few others were worshipping, and then closed it, Nursi contained his righteous wrath. They had previously barred him from it on occasion in their efforts to make his isolation total, as well as prevented him from holding his *ders* or readings with one or two of his students even in his own room.⁶⁴

When Nursi had first come to Barla, he had repaired a small mosque that had fallen into disuse, and thereafter, on the strength of his certificate, which dated from before his exile, acted as imam or prayer leader to a small congregation of three or four people. The two officials had staged the raids on it, making a pretext of the new law imposing the Turkish call to prayer.

According to Cemal Can, the district chief, when Nursi refused to have the call to prayer and the *ikāmet* given in anything other than Arabic in his mosque, Cemal Can received repeated directives from Ankara on the subject and finally arranged the raid.⁶⁵ On July 18, 1932, gendarmes were concealed in various dark corners and on the Arabic words being uttered, sprang into view with bayonets fixed, surrounding Nursi and his small congregation of innocent villagers. Four of these were then arrested and marched off to Eğirdir. They were, however, later released after questioning.

Tevfik Tıǧlı, the teacher, said that Cemal Can made every effort to have Nursi moved from Barla. He, too, took it on himself to pester and harass him. In fact, both shared the pettiness and desire to domineer characteristic of

minor officials, and they often combined their efforts to that end. However, as very often happened with those whose intention was to harm Nursi, the chief district officer received a blow: totally unexpectedly, he was arrested in connection with some quite different matter and was sent to prison for two and half years.⁶⁶

In regard to the changes to the call to prayer, Nursi supported his adamant opposition to Turkifying the practices of Islam with various reasoned arguments. Particularly in regard to the Qur'ān, when the authorities announced it was to be translated in the early 1930s, he wrote various letters and treatises arguing the impossibility of translating it, and pointing out the evil intentions of those who were urging it.

For example, some people said that the words of the Qur'ān and those used by the Prophet in various prayers and supplications illuminate man's inner faculties and are spiritual sustenance for him. But the words are not enough if their meanings aren't known. The words are like clothes; wouldn't it be more beneficial if they were changed? To which Nursi replied: "The words of the Qur'ān and those of the glorifications of the Prophet are not lifeless clothes; they are like the living skin of a body. Indeed, with the passage of time, they have become the very skin. Clothes can be changed, but were the skin to be changed it would be harmful to the body. The blessed words of the prescribed prayers and the call to prayer, for example, have become the signs and marks of their accepted meanings, and as for signs and names, they cannot be changed." Nursi then goes on to say that whenever they are repeated, each of man's subtle inner senses takes its share from these phrases, whereas if they are in a language other than the revealed Arabic of the Qur'ān, his spirit remains in darkness and he becomes heedless of the divine presence. Nursi also argues that it is contrary to the Shari'ah to change these "marks of Islam."⁶⁷

In another letter he points out that "as with all bad things" it was blind imitation of Europe that was the source of these attempts to change the marks of Islam, and emphasizes the importance of an environment that constantly reminds Muslims of the meanings of these sacred phrases and instructs them in them⁶⁸—these phrases which are "each a seed of the pillars of belief."⁶⁹

Nursi said that when the proposal was first made to translate the Qur'ān, it was part of the conspiracy against it and was made with the clear intention of discrediting it. "But," he wrote, "the irrefutable arguments of the *Risale-i Nur* have proved that a true translation of the Qur'ān is not possible. No other language can preserve the subtle points and fine qualities of the Qur'ān in place of the grammatical language of Arabic. The trite and partial translations of man cannot take the place of the miraculous, comprehensive expressions of the Qur'ān's words, each letter of which yields from ten to a thousand merits; [such translations] may not be read in mosques."⁷⁰ While many places in the *Risale-i Nur* address this issue, it is chiefly the Twenty-fifth Word, called *The*

Miraculousness of the Qur'ān, that in demonstrating forty aspects of the Qur'ān's miraculousness or inimitability proves this to be the case. This remarkable treatise, which demonstrates Nursi's extensive knowledge of the Qur'ān, expounds its inimitability in respect of the eloquence of its word order, meanings, styles, and manner of exposition; the comprehensiveness of its words, meanings, subjects, styles, and conciseness; its giving news of the Unseen, preserving its youth, and addressing all classes and levels of men; and in various other respects.

The more they increased the pressure on Nursi, the greater was his endeavor and the more the *Risale-i Nur* spread. Just as by unjustly exiling him, unlawfully isolating him, and preventing him from mixing with people, the authorities in Ankara had unwittingly served the cause of the Qur'ān, now in Barla their persecution of him served only to "make the lights of the Qur'ān shine brighter." The same would be true for the next twenty years; the spread and successes of the *Risale-i Nur* were in direct proportion to the increase in the severity of the treatment meted out to Nursi and his students. Nursi wrote:

All this oppression and tyranny of theirs are like pieces of wood for the fire of ardor and endeavor that illuminates the lights of the Qur'ān; it makes them flare up and shine. And those lights of the Qur'ān, which have suffered that persecution of theirs and have spread through the heat of endeavor, have made this province—indeed, most of the country—like a *medrese* in place of Barla. They supposed me to be a prisoner in a village, but in spite of the atheists Barla has become the teaching desk, and many places, like Isparta, have become the *medrese*.⁷¹

Nursi's Relations with the World and the Worldly

The New Said had withdrawn from the world and politics. The Ankara government had intended to isolate him from all contacts with the world beyond the village of Barla, and within it too, but this was just what the New Said had chosen. It was, after all, from the cave in Mount Ereğ near Van that he had been taken to exile. But now the authorities would not leave him in peace. They would not leave him alone. They could not pin anything on him, he did not break any of their laws, yet the religious treatises he was writing were being duplicated in hundreds of homes in the province of Isparta and beyond at a time when the production of books and writings on Islam had been suppressed virtually entirely. They were extremely agitated by Nursi and the *Risale-i Nur*, interpreting his writings only in political terms. According to the way of thinking of these people—Nursi calls them *ehl-i dünya*, the worldly whose view is restricted solely to the life of this world—the *Risale-i Nur* was

being written as a means to political ends. Hence their constant provocation and harassment of him and his students. If they could have shown him to be politically motivated, they could have shown him to be breaking one of the new laws.⁷² Nursi answered these accusations in several letters, stating clearly that he was compelled to explain the matter to them “in the tongue of the Old Said, not that of the New Said,” in order to save not himself, but his friends and the *Risale-i Nur*, from “the unfounded suspicions of the worldly and their torments.”⁷³ In the Sixteenth Letter, Nursi made clear his attitude toward politics like this:

The New Said avoids [politics] so vehemently in order to serve belief and the Qur’ān, which is of the greatest importance and is the greatest necessity and most pure and most right, and so as not to sacrifice unnecessarily for one or two doubtful years of worldly life his working for and winning more than millions of years of eternal life. For he says: I am getting old and I do not know how much longer I shall live, so the most important question for me must be to work for eternal life. The prime means of gaining eternal life and the key to everlasting happiness is belief, so one has to work for that. But since I am obliged by the Shari’ah to serve people in respect of learning so that they may profit also, I want to perform such a duty. However, such service will either concern social and worldly life, which I cannot do, and in stormy times it is not possible to perform such service soundly. Therefore, I left aside that aspect and chose the aspect of service to belief, which is the most important, the most necessary, and the soundest. . . .

But if you ask why service to the Qur’ān and belief prohibits me, I would say: since the truths of belief and the Qur’ān are all like diamonds, if I was polluted by politics, the ordinary people who are easily deceived would wonder about those diamonds I was holding, [asking]: “Aren’t they for political propaganda to attract more supporters?” They might regard the diamonds as bits of common glass. Then by being involved with politics, I would be wronging the diamonds and depreciating them.⁷⁴

A passage in the Thirteenth Letter⁷⁵ enlarges on this, pointing out that politics was not the way to bring the guidance of the Qur’ān to the majority of people at that time; in fact, it formed an obstacle. It shows Nursi’s acute awareness of the state of Turkish society and its needs. Most people were not opposed to the truth, they were confused and uncertain; what they needed was to be drawn to the truth through the lights of the Qur’ān, whereas politics frightened them off. Only a minority embraced “misguidance,” but all the attention was focused on them, while the “bewildered majority” remained deprived of the guidance of which they were in need. Nursi’s concern was for this majority. He also pointed out that there were supporters of the truth in all the political currents; one offering the truths of

the Qur'ān therefore had to remain outside all partisanship, so that the Qur'ān would not be left open to attack by his political opponents. There is further discussion of this in later chapters.

Isparta

In the summer of 1934 Nursi wrote to one of his students in Isparta, a calligrapher called Tenekeci Mehmed, saying that things had become intolerable in Barla. He wrote: "My brother, the torments of the teacher and chief district officer here have made my situation unbearable. They discomfort me incredibly. I can't even go out into the countryside. I live in my damp room as though living in the grave. . . ."

The student immediately took the letter to the governor, Mehmed Fevzi Daldal, and the next day, July 25, Nursi was collected and taken to Isparta. He was to remain there till the following April, staying first in the *medrese* he had used before being sent to Barla. He moved then to a two-story house set amid gardens where his student Re'fet Barutçu was staying, and afterward rented a wooden house belonging to another student, Şükrü İçhan.⁷⁶

During these months in Isparta Nursi was kept under very close surveillance. There were police permanently posted at his door and in the vicinity. One particularly obnoxious police officer named Dündar, has found his place in history. He used to make whatever trouble he could for Nursi and his students, so that Nursi called him Murdar, "Foul." Often his students could not approach Nursi, he was kept under such strict surveillance. For a time just one, named Mehmed Gülirmak, was permitted to remain with him to attend to his needs. He also acted as "Nur postman," collecting or distributing the *Risale-i Nur* as required. In Isparta, Nursi wrote several more parts of *The Flashes (Lem'alar)*, the third collection of the *Risale-i Nur*. When completed, *The Flashes* numbered thirty treatises, and the complete *Risale-i Nur*, one hundred and thirty. Nursi loved the province of Isparta as the center from which the *Risale-i Nur* irradiated by means of his numerous students. He explained this to some of them sometime later: "Because of you, I love Isparta and the surrounding country together with its very stones and soil. I can even say that if the Isparta authorities were to impose a prison sentence on me and another province were to acquit me, I would still choose Isparta."⁷⁷

In the town of Isparta were some of Nursi's closest students, such as Hüsrev and Re'fet Bey. They remained with him as far as they were able now that he had been moved there, principally acting as his scribes and writing out copies of the *Risale-i Nur*. Among Re'fet Bey's reminiscences of this time were these:

Hüsrev and I were writing out copies of the *Risale*. Ustad was in the upstairs room. Suddenly the door clicked open, and what did we see but Ustad entering with a tray and two glasses of tea. We were overcome with confusion and sprang to our feet, wanting to take the tray from him. But he lifted his hand and said, “No, no. It’s me that has to serve you.” My goodness, and he added “has to.” What modesty! What courtesy! I never saw such courtesy and modesty anywhere. . . .

We were studying the truths of the Qur’ân and writing them out, and were benefiting enormously. To tell him this one day, we said to him: “What would we have done, Ustad, if we had not found you?” And again with that tremendous modesty he replied: “What would I have done if I had not found you? If you are happy once over that you found me, I should be happy a thousand times that I found you.”⁷⁸

Among the three parts of the *Risale-i Nur* written here were the Nineteenth, Twenty-fifth, and Twenty-sixth Flashes, called respectively *On Frugality*, *For the Sick*, and *For the Elderly*. Re’fet Bey recalled the following about the writing of the *Treatise for the Elderly*. Only the first thirteen “Hopes” had been written due to Nursi and his students being taken into custody by the authorities:

One day Ustad called us, and saying, “The Twenty-Sixth Flash is about the elderly. It consists of twenty-six Hopes. The First Hope . . .,” he began to dictate.

He dictated five or six Hopes, and it stopped at that. Some time passed and parts of other treatises were written in the interval. Then one day he called us, and without asking, without saying something like, “Where did we stop? Just read out a bit,” he continued to dictate from where we had left off.

I used to go to him early, to assist him. One day I was a bit late. When I arrived, he said to me, “Brother! If only you had come a bit earlier, what I have just told this person (indicating the Kadı Zeynel Efendi beside him) would have made an excellent addendum to the treatise on Divine Determining.” He had answered the *kadı*’s questions about Divine Determining and taught him on the subject of predestination. We understood from all this that his works were born in his heart through divine inspiration, and he would write at that time only.⁷⁹

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CHAPTER 11

Eskişehir

The Arrests Start

On April 25, 1935, a number of Nursi's students were taken from their homes and places of work and held in custody. Two days later, Nursi himself and another group were arrested. It was the start of an event that very often bordered on the ridiculous, despite its seriousness, and was another example of the lengths the government went to reduce the standing of influential religious figures and to scare the population away from religion.

According to Süleyman Rüştü, the affair began when Nursi went to attend the Friday prayers and thousands of people poured into the streets to see him. The town's governor and administrators took fright at this, and when a copy of the Tenth Word, Nursi's treatise on resurrection and the hereafter, was found on the governor's desk, they panicked and sent urgent wires to Ankara saying, "Nursi and his students have taken to the streets. They are storming the Government Building."¹ In fact, this was part of the "plan" of the authorities to provoke "an incident," as we shall see. The houses of anyone known to have had any connection with Nursi were then searched, and the arrests began.

Tenekeci Mehmed tells how someone sent word to him that this was happening, and he took all the parts of the *Risale-i Nur* he had in his house, together with any other books having to do with Islam or religion, and buried them in the garden. At that point no less than eighteen police came and searched the house. Despite their thoroughness, they found nothing, and he was one of the few not arrested.² Besides Isparta and its province, suspects were arrested in Milas, Antalya, Bolvadin, Aydın, Van, and other places. They had been denounced to the authorities as "reactionaries" (*mürteci*), and were charged under article 163 of the Criminal Code,³ which among other things prohibited the exploitation of religion and religious sentiments in any way damaging to the security of the state, and the formation of political associations on the basis of religion. There was questioning and statements were taken, and it was while this was in progress that Binbaşı Asım Bey died. He had to make the choice between saying something that could be harmful to Nursi, and telling a lie, which his honor would not allow. So he uttered a prayer: "Lord! Take my spirit!" And, indeed, the Almighty did take his spirit, and he attained the rank of what Nursi called "an integrity martyr."⁴

Meanwhile, a furor was started in the press, startling the country with stories of the “network of reactionaries” that had been uncovered. And as though to quell some major unrest that threatened the foundations of the state, the interior minister, Şükrü Kaya, and the commander-in-chief of the gendarmerie, Kazım Orbay, traveled together to Isparta at the head of a detachment of gendarmes. Isparta and the surrounding country were put under the control of military units, and cavalry was posted along the road all the way from Isparta to Afyon. Rumors were spread throughout the region that Nursi and his students were going to be executed, and a general atmosphere of terror was generated. At the same time, in order to forestall any uprising in eastern Turkey that Nursi’s imprisonment might provoke, İnönü, the head of the government, set off on a tour of the Eastern Provinces.⁵

On around May 12, Nursi and thirty-one of his students were handcuffed in pairs and bundled into motortrucks at the point of bayonets. Unknown to them, they were to be taken to the prison at Eskişehir, some 330 kilometers to the north. Crowds of local people gathered when they were leaving, including the families of those arrested, and all the people were weeping to see Nursi being taken from them in this pitiable state.⁶ One of the gendarmes sent from Ankara to escort them described this and the journey, first telling how they had been fitted out with new equipment and how Nursi had been described to them in the most exaggeratedly unfavorable terms, Şükrü Kaya, the interior minister, calling him in derogatory fashion, “the Kurdish *hoja*.”⁷ In fact, the order was to deposit Nursi and his students in some isolated spot on the road and to shoot them. However, the officer in charge, Ruhi Bey, was sympathetic and did not carry out the order. Moreover, he ordered their handcuffs to be unfastened at the appropriate time, so they could perform the prayers. One student claims that he was expelled from the army as a consequence.⁸ They traveled as far as Afyon in the motortrucks, in which they had been permitted neither to speak nor to open any window for air and, still handcuffed in pairs and under the bayonets of gendarmes, were transferred to a train. The following morning they arrived at Eskişehir.⁹

Eskişehir Prison

Conditions in the prison were appalling. Nursi was put in solitary confinement, the others together in a ward. Their number grew from thirty-two to one hundred and twenty as they were joined by more Nur students arrested elsewhere. Once they entered the prison they were not allowed to visit the lavatories. After hours some warders came and dug a hole near the door and inserted a pipe. This is what they would have to use, they were not to be allowed out. With the filth, the bedbugs, and the cockroaches, it was impossi-

ble to sleep at night. For twelve days they were kept without food. The fact was they were considered to be condemned prisoners doomed for the gallows.¹⁰ Notwithstanding the conditions, Nursi continued to write, completing five more treatises in the months he was here. These were the Twenty-eighth, Twenty-ninth, and Thirtieth Flashes, and the First and Second Rays. He wrote them very much with his students in mind, who were suffering so unjustly this first imprisonment. He named the prison the School of Joseph (*Medrese-i Yusufiye*), after the Prophet Joseph, the patron of prisoners.

Among those arrested were some that had only the very slightest connection with Nursi. It was another example of how the government had blown up the case out of all proportion. These were members of the “network of reactionaries” that was threatening the state! A businessman from Bolvadin named Şükrü Şahinler related his own case and two others:

I had got to know Halil İbrahim Çöllüoğlu in connection with some business, and he wrote me a letter and requested a reply. The reply I sent was enough to send me to Eskişehir Prison and include me among the students of the *Risale-i Nur*. But in that way I was able to see Nursi in Eskişehir and visit him.

There was an optician in Aydın called Şevket Gözaçan. Because he had treated the eyes of one of Nursi’s students, Nursi wrote him a short note of thanks three or four lines long. They sent Şevket Bey to Eskişehir Prison because of this.

And again, one of Nursi students called Ahmed Feyzi Kul had written Nursi a letter in Barla and signed it “The Müftü of Aydın” [by way of a joke: *aydın* means “enlightened,” as well as being a place-name]. When the affair erupted, they sent the real Müftü of Aydın to Eskişehir, although he was not connected in any way at all. Müftü Mustafa Efendi stayed in prison for months together with me. Eskişehir was a mass of crazy mix-ups like these.¹¹

Perhaps the most crazy involved Nursi’s treatise on the wisdom of fasting in the month of Ramađân. When searching the houses of Nursi and his students for copies of the *Risale-i Nur*, the police had come across this treatise, called in Turkish *Ramazân’a Ait*, which can mean either “Belonging to Ramazan,” or “Concerning Ramazan.” Besides meaning the holy month of fasting, in Turkey it is a man’s name. So the police started searching the villages of Isparta for someone of that name. During the operation it was learned that the neighbor of someone whose house was searched in some remote village was called Ramazan. So they came and clapped handcuffs on the unfortunate villager, who knew neither how to read nor write, and sent him to Eskişehir Prison, despite his bewildered protestations of innocence. And there he remained for two months until the authorities admitted their mistake and released him.¹²

The Prison Became Like a Mosque

The prison authorities did not neglect to plant an informer in the ward where Nursi's students were. "Postman Kāmil," as he was called, was doing his military service as a gendarme in Eskişehir when he was assigned to the job. One day Nursi sent his students a note stuck to the bottom of the teapot; it warned them not to speak against the government, as there was an informer among them. In the event, "Postman Kāmil" was so impressed by Nursi and these completely innocent people that he himself began to perform the obligatory prayers, and in his reports wrote that they were innocent. When describing these days in 1985, he said: "I was serving in the prison when I was startled by some sudden news: some condemned prisoners were coming, and they were *hojas*. . . . Several days later Hoja Efendi [Nursi] arrived, and after him, the other *hojas*, his students."

Kāmil was instructed to act as informer on the new arrivals, and he joined them inside, ostensibly serving the sentence for some crime. He continued:

Everyone got on well with each other in Eskişehir Prison. . . . They used to perform the obligatory prayers all together, recite the Qur'ān, and offer prayers.

They emptied the juveniles' ward for Nursi and put him in it. His students were somewhere else. The juveniles' ward was large, and Nursi stayed in it all alone. They [the authorities] were always speaking ill of Nursi to us, so that unavoidably I was influenced by what they said. Then one day I went and kissed his hand. He was a saintly old man, frail, and his hair quite long. His beard had grown a bit, since it had not been shaved. On my being cordial, he embraced me. I was very touched and started to weep. He began to tell me about his life. He said: "I only want the *Risale-i Nur*. I won't give up these works of mine." I was very moved and affected by his terse words, and was sorry at the injustice done to such a great person. I wondered to myself: "Why do they bother this elderly man so much?" Without letting it be known to anyone, I kept on visiting him. One time Hoja Efendi drew two fingers over my forehead, and said to me: "Repent and seek forgiveness; provide food for sixty people and pay the blood money." This was extraordinary. I hadn't said I had killed someone, but with his saintly powers, he knew what I'd done. He was a great saint. . . .

I stayed in the Hoja's students' ward, so of course I was in close contact with them. It was not possible to think of anything else in those cramped quarters. They held good talks there, the prayers were performed, and the Qur'ān recited. That dark prison ward shone with the lights of the Qur'ān. Everyone would rise early for the prayers and take their sections [a thirtieth part] of the Qur'ān, then the recitations would begin. After the

morning prayer, the prayer for a complete recitation of the Qur'an would be said. From time to time one of the *hojas* with a fine voice [Mehmed Gülirmak] would sing a *kaside*. He used to send us into raptures. Then they would start reciting the Qur'an again. The whole Qur'an was recited several times each day. Those innocent people were saved by the readings of the Qur'an and the prayers. Those were good days. . . . *The prison became like a mosque*. If only I had been able to be like them. There's another thing I witnessed in Eskişehir Prison that has stayed in my mind these fifty years; I always pray for Hoja Efendi's soul. I had plenty to eat, but he made do with tea and a few olives each day. God's grace was with him; just how great he was, I didn't know.¹³

Eskişehir Court

It is apparent from the overreaction of the interior minister, Şükrü Kaya, and the government, the furor started in the press, and the rumors put out both in Isparta and Eskişehir that the intention was to do away with Nursi.¹⁴ After all, countless people accused of lesser "crimes," and especially men of religion, had fallen prey to the secularizing reforms. The charges were several, and involved the infringement of the principle of secularism and of article 163 of the Criminal Code through, among other things, exploiting religion for political ends "with the idea of political reaction" and organizing a group that might disturb public order.¹⁵ The court was under pressure from the interior minister to condemn Nursi. It was thus a matter of life and death for him, and his students, but it was not himself he set about to defend in the court; his defense speeches are for the most part defenses of the *Risale-i Nur*. They are masterpieces that demolish with his usual straightforward reasoning the government's baseless suspicions concerning him and the trumped-up charges of the court. The fact was that due to his percipience and foresight, Nursi had succeeded in counteracting the deprivations into the Islamic faith of the people of Turkey. And more than this: with his writings, he had started a positive movement of renewal without apparently breaking the new laws. And he was able to prove this to the court.

Thus, despite the pressure brought to bear on it, the court cleared him of all the charges, save one, which concerned a short treatise expounding some Qur'anic verses about Islamic dress,¹⁶ and some mentioning women's inheritance. It made this the excuse, and arbitrarily sentenced Nursi to eleven months' imprisonment, and fifteen of his students to six months.¹⁷ The remaining one hundred and two were acquitted; three had already been released. Nursi objected to this, for if they had been found guilty of the crimes of which they had been accused, it would have resulted in his own execution and at

least imprisonment with hard labor for his students. He described it as “the sentence for a horse thief or [mockingly] an abductor of girls,” and demanded that they show in accordance with the law that his guilt necessitated either his execution or one hundred and one years’ imprisonment, or else give him and his friends and his writings their complete freedom and recover their losses from those who caused them.¹⁸

Quite apart from the trumped-up charges and arbitrary sentence, Nursi was denied his basic rights when it came to preparing his defense, which he himself wrote and delivered. While it had taken the court three to four months to prepare the case, he was allowed only a few days in which to prepare his whole defense; and for some parts of it, only a few hours.¹⁹ And although he found writing by hand so laborious, he was denied a scribe. And he was not permitted to speak with anyone for two months.²⁰ However, Nursi was not intimidated by these injustices; he was prepared to do all he could so that the *Risale-i Nur* should be cleared and justice upheld. For he recognized the law and the process of the law, and was absolutely opposed to any activities that usurped it, disturbed public order, and infringed the rights of the majority. Thus, in addition to answering the charges according to the existing laws, Nursi told the court that copies of his defense were to be sent to the interior minister and the governing body of the Grand National Assembly.²¹ And when, despite proving quite clearly that article 163 was not applicable to him and his activities, he was found guilty of one charge by the court, he applied for the case to be sent to the court of appeals.²² In the event of the appeals court upholding the court’s decision, he was prepared to send a petition to the highest level of government, the cabinet.²³

Nursi’s Defense

One by one Nursi answered the charges made against him, supporting all his replies with evidence. He told the court that since the best wile was to be without wiles, he had taken truth and honesty as the basis of his defense. Thus, he openly admitted his service to belief and the Qur’ān, which being in no way concerned with politics was not contrary to the law, and exposed to the court the plot that had been laid against him because of this service. To involve the legal system in this conspiracy and attempt to realize its aims in the name of the law was a grave error and brought the law and legal system into disrepute. He was quite undaunted by the manifest purpose of the court, his execution. He was, after all, the Bediuzzaman who had faced the court-martial set up after the Thirty-first March Incident in 1909, and won his acquittal. He was also the practiced preacher and fine orator who had addressed thousands in Aya Sophia the same year, and thousands in the Umayyad Mosque in Damas-

cus in 1911. Thus, Nursi started off his defense with a skilful move that turned the tables on those judging him. He was answering the main charge of “making a tool of religion with the idea of political reaction, with the intention of undertaking an enterprise that might disturb public order”:

God forbid a hundred thousand times that the sciences of belief with which we are occupied should be a tool for anything apart from divine pleasure! For sure, just as the sun cannot be a satellite of the moon and follow it, so belief in God, which is the luminous, sacred key to eternal happiness and a sun of the life of the hereafter, cannot be the tool of social life. There is no matter in the universe more important than the mystery of belief, the greatest question and greatest riddle of the world’s creation, so that belief may be made the tool of it.

Judges of the Court! If this torturous imprisonment of mine concerned only myself and my life in this world, you can be sure that I would remain silent like I have these last ten years. But since it concerns the eternal life of many others, and the *Risale-i Nur*, which reveals and explains the mighty talisman of creation, if I had a hundred heads and each day one were to be cut off, I would not give up this mighty mystery. Even if I am delivered from your hands, I cannot be saved from the clutches of the appointed hour. I am old and at the door of the grave. So consider only this mystery of belief concerning the appointed hour and the grave, which will come to everyone, one of the hundreds of matters the *Risale-i Nur* discloses. . . .

Can all the most weighty political questions of the world loom larger than death for someone who is certain of death, so that he can make it the tool of those questions? For the time of its coming is not known. The appointed hour may come at any time to cut off your head. . . . The ever-open grave is either the door to a pit of nonbeing and eternal darkness, or the gate to a world more permanent and light-filled than this world.

Respected sirs, is it at all fair, is it at all reasonable, to consider the *Risale-i Nur*, which discloses and explains hundreds of questions related to belief like this one, to be a biased and harmful work that exploits politics? What law requires this? . . . Also, since the secular republic remains impartial according to the principle of secularism and does not interfere with those without religion, of course it also should not interfere with religious people on whatever pretext.²⁴

Thus, Nursi established that it was the cause of religious belief and the *Risale-i Nur* that he was going to defend, and then went on to rebut the charges concerning his exploiting religion for political ends. The important questions of political reaction and secularism are discussed below.

After pointing out that he had refused Mustafa Kemal’s offers to work alongside the new regime in 1923 because he had already withdrawn from the

world and politics, Nursi described to the court five “pointers” showing that he had not “interfered in the state’s business.”

Firstly, for thirteen years Nursi had not so much as opened a newspaper, newspapers being “the tongue of politics,” as everyone he knew could testify to. Then, for the ten years he had been in the province of Isparta there was not the slightest hint to suggest he had made any attempt “to be involved in politics,” despite the social upheavals that were occurring during that time. His house had been raided and searched thoroughly, and all his private papers and books taken. These had been studied by both the police and the governor’s office, yet nothing of any political content had been found. In all the works they had found a few points they were able to raise objections about, but these were mostly scholarly expositions of Qur’anic verses to do with women’s dress and inheritance. However, he told the court, these short pieces had been written years earlier while he was a member of the Darü’l-Hikmeti’l-İslamiye, and he had suppressed them when the new laws were passed since they might be construed as opposing them. But then one copy had been sent to someone by mistake. Furthermore, the fact that Nursi had chosen to remain for nine years in a remote village proved his desire to avoid all involvement in social and political matters. In fact, he said, it was his failure to apply to the Isparta authorities to be released or transferred elsewhere that had “wounded their pride,” so that they had instigated the affair by alarming Ankara. He told the court: “All my friends who are in touch with me know that even to think about politics is opposed to my goal, my state of mind, and my sacred duties related to belief, let alone being involved in them or attempting anything political. Light has been given me; the club of politics has not been given me.”²⁵

Similarly, there was absolutely no evidence to support the charge of disturbing public order by exciting religious emotions. On the contrary, as Nursi pointed out, the *Risale-i Nur* preserved order: “The *Risale-i Nur*, which consists of the sciences of belief, establishes and ensures public order and security. Yes, belief, the source of good character and fine qualities, certainly doesn’t disturb public order; it ensures it. It is unbelief that disturbs it, because of its bad character.”²⁶

Also, not one of Nursi’s students, or anyone who read the *Risale-i Nur*, had been involved in any of the disturbances that had been given a religious coloring and had occurred since the reforms had been first enacted.²⁷ In another part of his defense, Nursi said: “People who receive instruction from the *Risale-i Nur* certainly do not get involved in any public disturbances, which are the cause of the blood of innocents being spilt and their rights being violated.”²⁸ Furthermore, Nursi pointed out that if article 163 was applicable to them, it was applicable also to the Directorate of Religious Affairs and all the imams and preachers whom they employed, since they encouraged religious feelings in the same way.²⁹

A further charge, and one that was to be frequently made, was that Nursi had given instruction in Sufism. As was mentioned earlier, Sufism had been outlawed in 1925, and the orders disbanded and their *tekkes* closed. This was another baseless charge; as could be seen from the *Risale-i Nur*, Nursi's concern was with the truths of belief. He told the court: "As I have written in numerous treatises, this is not the time of Sufism; it is the time to save belief. Many people enter paradise without following the Sufi path, but none enter it without belief. It is therefore the time to work for belief." There was no one who could come forward and claim that he had taught him Sufism. What he had taught to a small number of his special students was "not training in the Sufi way (*tarikât*), but instruction in the direct way to reality (*hakikat*)."³⁰ In connection with this, the court wanted to know what Nursi lived on. However, his extreme frugality was well known and easily established, as was his lifelong habit of not accepting presents or charity in any form.

Another of the main charges, which was also clearly trumped up, was that Nursi had set up an organization for political purposes. He was persistently questioned by the court concerning this, and asked where he had secured the funds for it. Nursi's reply was in four parts. He began:

Firstly, I ask those who ask this: What document, what is there, to suggest the existence of such a political organization? What evidence, what proof have they found, that we have set up an organization with the money they so persistently ask about? For the last ten years I was in the province of Isparta under strict surveillance. I used to see only one or two assistants and in ten days one or two travelers. I was alone, a stranger, tired of the world, felt extreme disgust with politics, and had repeatedly witnessed how powerful political movements had been harmful and come to nothing through their reactions. I rejected and took no part in political movements when among my own people and thousands of friends at the crucial opportunity, and fled from politics as though fleeing from the devil, considering it to be the greatest crime to damage through political partisanship service to true belief, which is most sacred and which it is not permissible to harm by anything. . . . It is not only me, but the province of Isparta and all who know me, and indeed anyone who possesses reason and conscience, who will meet with disgust the slanders of those who say, "There is such an organization, and you are hatching political plots," and will say to them, "You are accusing him due to your own malicious plans."

Our business is belief. Through the brotherhood of belief, we are brothers with 99 percent of the people of Isparta and this country, whereas a society or organization is the alliance of a minority within the majority. Ninety-nine people do not form a society in the face of one man.³¹

He concluded answering the charge by pointing out how unrealistic it was to wonder where someone who had managed to live on a hundred liras in ten years and had worn the same patched cloak for seven years had obtained the money for the organization he was supposed to have formed.

The main point on which the trial rested, however, was the vexed question of secularism, in the cause of which all the radical changes since the establishment of the republic had been brought about. What lay at the base of the accusations against Nursi was that he had opposed the government and its program of secularization. While, for his part, Nursi denied that he had opposed it, arguing that “the secular republic means the separation of religion from [the matters of] this world,”³² and that “since, according to the principle [of secularism] the secular republic remains impartial and does not interfere with those without religion, so too of course it should not interfere with those with religion on whatever pretext.”³³ That is to say, secularism should ensure freedom of conscience, and of expression, and other liberties. This conflict of interpretations over the meaning of secularism and how it should be applied remains unresolved to this day. Thus, Nursi argued that the *Risale-i Nur* was a scholarly work—and as such should be unrestricted under the secular republic—which silenced materialism and naturalism and the philosophers of Europe and their attacks on the Qur’ān; for more than thirty years his attention had been directed toward their attacks. He saw the internal problems of the country as resulting from their corrupting influence.³⁴ The *Risale-i Nur* dealt “powerful blows” at them and at the atheists who furthered their interests and plots in the country³⁵ under the cover of secularization. It was these “intriguers” and “their irreligious committees” that Nursi opposed, not the government. Nursi differentiated between the government and these committees or secret societies working for the cause of irreligion, and warned about their infiltrating the government and deceiving it. It was they who raised the outcries of “political reaction” and “exploiting religion for political ends.”³⁶

Such accusations leveled at people who supported religion were not new. Much use had been made of them after the Constitutional Revolution of 1908, when the debate between those who favored secularization and Westernization and those who did not was often quite virulent, as was described in an earlier chapter. At that time, Nursi told the court-martial set up after the Thirty-first of March Incident: “Certain people who make politics the tool of irreligion accuse others of political reaction and exploiting religion for the sake of politics in order to conceal their own misdeeds.”³⁷ Under the republic, the same slogans were used for the same ends: to blacken the names of Muslims and reduce their standing in the eyes of the population, and so, by frightening the people away from Islam, to pave the way for the spreading of opposing ideas. The Menemen Incident was a classic example, and part of the charge against Nursi was that he had attempted “to imitate” that revolt. It had

been a minor incident that occurred in response to provocation, and amid great storms in the press had been suppressed brutally as a “reactionary movement.” Thirty-three people had been executed in the wake of it, and in numerous places repressive measures taken against people known to work for the cause of religion. Reprisals had also been taken against Nursi, although he had absolutely no connection with it.³⁸ Nursi explained to the court how forces representing the same interests had attempted to provoke a similar incident in Isparta, and having failed were now trying to deceive the judiciary. He said also that the matter had to be seen in the light of the perpetual struggle between belief and unbelief, religion and irreligion, and that “everyone who is aware of the heart of this matter knows that these attacks on us are an assault on religion directly on behalf of irreligion.”³⁹

Thus, Nursi demanded a fair trial from the court. He told it: “Among the branches of government, it is the court that is charged more than any other with preserving its independence, and, remaining free of outside influences, with considering matters impartially and without emotion.” Nevertheless, irregularities had taken place. For example, while his name was Said Nursi, in his questioning Nursi was always referred to as “Said-i Kurdi” and “the Kurd” in a way that would inevitably produce biased opinions.⁴⁰ Indeed, the intention was to link Nursi with the constant opposition to the government and rebellions in eastern Turkey, as is shown clearly from the slanderous campaigns orchestrated against him in the press at the same time. So also, despite his correcting them in all his statements, the dates his works were written were deliberately confused with the dates they were copied out, and pieces written over a period of twenty years were shown as having been written in one year.⁴¹

It was due to his “scholarly defense” of a few Qur’anic verses concerning women’s dress and inheritance, written before the foundation of the republic and adoption of the new Civil Code and “against the objections and attacks of European philosophers,”⁴² that the court finally convicted Nursi and sentenced him in entirely arbitrary fashion to one year’s imprisonment, to be followed by one year’s compulsory residence in Kastamonu under house arrest; and as mentioned, fifteen of his students were sentenced to six months. Sentence was passed on August 19, 1935, decision number 121, and confirmed by the Supreme Court on October 12, 1935, decision number 2,111. Nursi served eleven months—he was probably granted a month’s remission of sentence—and was released the following March.⁴³

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CHAPTER 12

Kastamonu

Life in Kastamonu

Nursi was released from Eskişehir Prison in March 1936 and was sent to Kastamonu in the Ilgaz Mountains to the south of the Black Sea. He was now fifty-nine years of age. His enforced residence in this the major town of the province of Kastamonu was to last seven and a half years. Under constant surveillance, his movements were more restricted than in Barla, and the harassment and persecution continued. Nursi wrote further additions to the *Risale-i Nur* while here, including *The Supreme Sign*, which was a sort of culmination of it and a part most illustrative of its method. He attracted new students, and Kastamonu, and particularly the town of İnebolu on the Black Sea, earned the name of “the second Isparta” as a center from which the *Risale-i Nur* spread. Nursi kept up a continual correspondence with his students in Isparta and elsewhere, and his letters were gathered together to form the *Kastamonu Lahikası*, or Kastamonu Letters. They tell us much about the matters with which he was concerned at this time, and most of the subjects they discuss will be touched on in the course of this chapter. They were a source of great enlightenment, instruction, and encouragement for his students, now parted from him, and were conveyed secretly from town to town and village to village by “Nur postmen” with copies being made on the way, since it was inadvisable to send them by post.

His first three months in Kastamonu, Nursi stayed “as a guest” in the police station. He describes how trying this was for him as someone who preferred a life of solitude; he also could not abide the compulsory changes in dress.¹ Nursi’s refusal to abandon his Islamic gown (*cübbe*; Arabic, *jubba*) and turban were doubtless made the pretext for the harassment he received. Following this, he was moved to a rented house immediately opposite the police station. It was a traditional wooden house on two floors, with the ground floor used as a storage area for logs and an outside staircase leading to the two upstairs rooms. Nursi remained here for the seven years he was in Kastamonu.

It was during his first weeks in Kastamonu that Nursi attracted the first of his closest students here, Çaycı Emin. He was an exile the same as Nursi. A tribal chief from eastern Anatolia, he had been exiled to Kastamonu ten years previously and now made his livelihood by running a tea stall in the

courtyard of the Nasrullah Mosque. It was here that he first saw Nursi. Nursi won his heart when he warned him against approaching him, but Çaycı Emin was not one to be deterred by any possible harm from officialdom and thereafter did all he could to assist Nursi.² Among Nursi's other close students in the town of Kastamonu was Mehmed Feyzi,³ who had a scholarly background. These two constantly attended Nursi, securing his daily needs; Mehmed Feyzi mostly acted as his scribe and assistant with the *Risale-i Nur*.

Nursi was virtually confined to his house, going out only once or twice a week either up into the surrounding mountains or climbing up to the citadel that dominates the town. He spent his time either writing the *Risale-i Nur* or correcting the handwritten copies of existing parts, or in worship, prayer and supplication, or in contemplation. The nights he spent in prayer. He was busy with the same activities when he went out into the mountains, and even on the way there; he never passed an idle moment. Mehmed Feyzi tells how, Nursi on horseback would correct copies of the *Risale-i Nur* or listen to himself reading them out, or else teach him and Çaycı Emin and any other of his students who were present. Although Nursi corrected the copies with the greatest care, he never consulted the originals; they were all in his head.

The high altitude of Kastamonu makes the winters very cold. In several letters, Nursi mentions the bitter cold together with the illnesses he suffered. He was afflicted with chronic lumbago and rheumatism, and was also poisoned on several occasions. He writes that despite suffering these tribulations in addition to all his other hardships, "I offer endless thanks to my Creator that He has sent me belief, the sacred remedy for every ill, and the medicine of resignation to the divine decree, the result of belief in Divine Determining; these have afforded me complete patience and caused me to offer thanks."⁴

Nursi's indefatigable endurance is illustrated by the following anecdote, told by Çaycı Emin:

I used to go to Nursi's house early to light his stove. One day when I went it was extremely cold, and without realizing it I had gone two hours before the call to prayer. He was rapt in worship on his prayer rug. In candlelight in the predawn cold, he was praying in a sad and touching voice, he was pleading, beseeching. Agitated, I waited on my feet for a full one and a half hours. Shivering and trembling, I watched this elevated sight. Finally the sound of the call to prayer began to come from afar, but the Turkish call to prayer of that time. He turned to me and said: "Emin, you made a great mistake! I swear that I have certain times when even should the angels come, I would not receive them."⁵

Çaycı Emin apologized, saying he had been misled by the light of the bright moon and that he would not come again before the call to prayer.

Nursi was subject to constant harassment. Ankara appointed governors to the province who they knew would keep up the pressure on him. These were the most oppressive days of the Republican People's Party's rule, when it was pursuing its Westernization program with all its resources. Governor Avni Doğan was appointed in September of the year Nursi was sent to Kastamonu. He was the epitome of the new breed of officials grown up under RPP rule. A hardline secularist, he did all he could to inflict torment on Nursi and his students. He remained in this post for nearly four years and was succeeded in 1940 by Mithat Altıok, whose attitude toward Nursi was somewhat more conciliatory. Nursi, however, endured all that was inflicted on him by these officials, even on one occasion preventing harm coming to Avni Doğan, and incidentally winning for himself a new student in the process.

Briefly, in response to the destruction of the mosques and Sufi *tekkes* and tombs of saints that was carried out with greater ferocity and efficiency in Kastamonu after Avni Doğan was appointed governor, one of the town's shaikhs, Hilmi Bey, known as the Little Shaikh, vowed to kill the governor in order to try to put a stop to the destruction. He obtained a rifle and laid the plans. Then, when all was ready, he was walking plunged in thought in front of Nursi's house when there was a tap at the window. Nursi beckoned to him. Wondering what the elderly *hoja* wanted, he climbed the stairs to the house. But Nursi merely gave him a copy of a prayer called *Tahmidiye* and asked him to write out copies of it. Hilmi Bey agreed, and on returning home, immediately sat down and started to write it out. He continued far into the night. When he had finished, his mind had been changed completely, and he had given up all idea of his projected crime. Thereafter, he became a devoted student of Nursi, dedicating himself to writing out the *Risale-i Nur* and serving its author.⁶

At Avni Doğan's instigation, Nursi's house was frequently searched by the police for copies of the *Risale-i Nur*, and his students had to hide them in whatever unlikely places they could find. However, some of the police officers charged with plaguing him paid for it. One, named Hafız Nuri, would come every few days and go through Nursi's house with a fine-tooth comb; he was finally struck down by a mysterious illness and died. Another, named Safvet, also came to a sorry end. Nursi wished them no ill; as he told Hafız Nuri's family who came to plead for him, they received these blows from the Qur'an.⁷

Another of Nursi's students was Taşköprülü Sadık Bey,⁸ the local *ağa* or lord. He was the grandson of Sadık Pasha, one of the heroes of Plevne, and had been educated in the Military Academy in Istanbul. He put aside his rank and position and devoted himself to serving Nursi and the *Risale-i Nur*, while his village of Taşköprü became a center for writing it out, as did the town of İnebolu. The *Risale-i Nur* was introduced into İnebolu by two other leading

students of Nursi, Nazif and Selahaddin Çelebi, who were father and son. Selahaddin described as follows his first visit to Nursi, when to be corrected he took a copy of the Fourth Ray that his father had written:

I climbed the mountain . . . under a tree a person dressed in white was performing the prayers. “This must be him,” I said to myself. After finishing them, he motioned with his head for me to sit. I knelt down and said “Amen” to his supplications; in a touching voice he was beseeching Almighty God for the peace and happiness in this world and the next of humanity and the Islamic world. Finally I gave him the book I had brought. “Welcome, my brother,” he said. “Let’s correct it.” It took half an hour. I studied the Hoja Efendi carefully, whom I was seeing for the first time. He was correcting it with great attention, even correcting wrong points and letters in the words. He asked me: “Do you know this [Ottoman] writing?” and got me to write a sentence.

“*Ma’shallah!* You write very well,” he said. “Will you write out a treatise if I give you one?” When I said I would with pleasure, he gave me around nine of the Short Words. And he gave me the Eleventh and Twelfth Words for my father. “They must be written out exactly,” he said. I asked his permission, and left him.

This was how the *Risale-i Nur* was introduced into İnebolu. Later on, hundreds of people started to write it out . . . for five years their pens worked like printing presses. The Nur postmen were organized between Kastamonu and İnebolu, and the parts of the *Risale-i Nur* were sent to Anatolia [by sea] from the port of İnebolu. . . . This work was continuing unceasingly when I saw a duplicating machine in a shop in Istanbul. On learning that it duplicated at the rate of a hundred pages a minute, I bought it immediately and took it to İnebolu. First of all we duplicated the Seventh Ray, *The Supreme Sign*, which consists of “the observations of a traveler questioning the universe concerning his Creator.” When I took the first copy to Ustad, he was tremendously pleased. He expressed his feelings at the end of the work with these words:

“Oh God, grant happiness in paradise to Nazif Çelebi and his blessed helpers, who have written five hundred copies with one pen!”

In the villages of Isparta the treatises of the *Risale-i Nur* were being written out by hand continuously. Bedre, İlema, Kuleönü, İslamköy, Sav, and Atabey—hundreds of people in these villages devoted themselves entirely to writing out the *Risale-i Nur*. “Nur Exchange” Sabri, the jetty keeper in the village of Bedre, took the parts of the *Risale* and Nursi’s letters, made copies immediately, and sent them by means of Nur postmen to Eğirdir, and from there they would be taken to Hafız Ali in İslamköy. All were aware of the

urgency of the task. In the village of Sav, and elsewhere, the women in particular dedicated themselves with great devotion to writing, while the shepherds carried the pieces in their bags, delivering them from place to place to be written out.¹⁰ We learn from one of Nursi's letters that his student Hüsrev, "one of the heroes of the *Risale-i Nur*," wrote out in his exceptionally fine handwriting four hundred copies of various parts of the *Risale-i Nur* over a period of nine to ten years, as well as three copies of the Qur'an that contained clear examples of the coinciding of the word Allah (*tevafulkat*).¹¹

Nursi's letters to his students, which, like the *Risale-i Nur*, have a warmth and directness that engage all who read them, concern mostly the aims, purpose, and way of the *Risale-i Nur* and the position its students should take in the face of the political and social conditions of the time. They stress the caution they should practice in the face of their numerous enemies, and emphasize the importance of developing sincerity and selflessness in their task of serving the Qur'an so as to form strong bonds of brotherhood with their fellows and develop the "collective personality" necessary to combat the joint attacks of those who were inimical to Islam. Many of the letters describe the importance of the role the *Risale-i Nur* and its students had to play, and also the great blessings and benefits associated with it. Nursi often expresses his gratitude for the students who had been drawn to the *Risale-i Nur* and their self-sacrificing service; it was a major source of consolation for him in the oppressive conditions under which he had to live and work. Before examining some of the letters about the *Risale-i Nur*, included here are one or two examples illustrating this:

My Dear, Loyal, and Blessed Brothers and Sincere, Vigorous, and Renowned Comrades in the Service of the Qur'an and Belief!

I offer endless thanks and praise to Almighty God that He has affirmed the hopes expressed in the *Treatise for the Elderly* and proved true the claims in my defense speeches. Yes, through you He has bestowed on the *Risale-i Nur* thirty Abdurrahmans who are the equivalent of thirty thousand; indeed, He has bestowed one hundred and thirty or one thousand one hundred and thirty Abdurrahmans. . . .¹²

And another example:

My Dear and Absolutely Loyal Brothers!

You are my consolation and means of joy in this world. If it hadn't been for you, I wouldn't have been able to endure these past four years of torment. Your persistence and fortitude have afforded me a powerful patience and endurance.¹³

And again:

My Dear and Loyal Brothers!

I was happier at your letters than I can describe. Especially Husrev's two most valuable letters saying that the *Risale-i Nur* is spreading in extraordinary fashion in Hacı Hafız's village—they have been kept like copies of the *Risale-i Nur* and clear proofs, and are being shown to the Nur students in this area as a spur and encouragement.¹⁴

The Way of the *Risale-i Nur* and Its Function

Nursi wrote to his students that the *Risale-i Nur*'s function was to save and strengthen belief in the face of the concerted attacks against it that were taking place.¹⁵ According to Nursi, these attacks were not new, and failure to withstand them arose from a long process of corruption caused by the infiltration of alien ideas, which probably refers to Western philosophical currents. Belief had therefore to be raised from the level of "imitative" to that of "certain."¹⁶ He described the *Risale-i Nur*'s mission like this:

The *Risale-i Nur* is not only repairing some minor damage or some small house; it is repairing vast damage and the all-embracing citadel that contains Islam, the stones of which are the size of mountains. And it is not striving to reform only a private heart and an individual conscience; it is striving to cure with the medicines of the Qur'ān and belief and the Qur'ān's miraculousness the collective heart and generally held ideas, that have been breached in awesome fashion by the tools of corruption prepared and stored up over a thousand years, and the general conscience, which is facing corruption through the destruction of the foundations, currents, and marks of Islam, which are the refuge of all and particularly the mass of believers.

Certainly, for such universal breaches and awesome wounds, proofs and equipment of the utmost certitude and the strength of mountains, and well-proven medicines and numberless drugs of the effectiveness of a thousand remedies, are necessary. Emerging at this time from the miraculousness of the Qur'ān of Miraculous Exposition, the *Risale-i Nur* performs this function, and is also the means of advancing and progressing through the infinite degrees of belief.¹⁷

Thus, in the course of time the belief of the mass of believers in the fundamentals of Islam had lost its vitality, and now this process had received a powerful impetus with the policy of Westernization. It was the *Risale-i Nur* with its concentration on developing belief from being merely imitative into

certain, verified belief that had the ability to reverse the decline and help rebuild the structure of Islam. While in Kastamonu Nursi wrote *The Supreme Sign*, to which he attached great importance as one of the parts of the *Risale-i Nur* most effective at developing this kind of faith or belief. We can look at it briefly in order to learn both what Nursi meant by belief of this kind and the new method he had developed by which it could be attained.

The Supreme Sign

The Supreme Sign is a key to understanding Nursi's own view of existence and his way of worshipping, for he said that he wrote it for himself according to his own understanding.¹⁸ The treatise comprises "the observations of a traveler questioning the universe about his Maker," and describes a journey in the mind through the universe made by a traveler curious to learn about and become acquainted with "the Owner of this fine guesthouse, the Author of this vast book, the Monarch of this mighty realm." He questions first the heavens with their suns and stars and heavenly bodies, then the atmosphere with its thunder and lightning, winds, clouds and rain, then the earth, and so on, each of which proves the necessary existence and unity of its Maker. With the "thirty-three degrees in the necessary existence and unity of the Creator" proclaimed by these "thirty-three universal tongues," it constitutes thirty-three degrees in belief or faith. That is to say, as the traveler travels through the universe questioning all of its realms and learning of their testimony to the divine existence and unity, his belief gains universality and strength with each degree, and passes from being "imitative belief" to the degree of "certain, verified belief," and beyond.

One of the central features in this new way of renewing and strengthening belief in God is its employing and addressing the heart and the mind. That is, both the reasoning faculty and the intuitive inner senses are utilized in ascertaining the truth, and in the process are illuminated with the knowledge obtained. Let us look at the role of the mind or reason.

It will be recalled that on learning of both the external threats to the Qur'an and Islam back at the beginning of the century, and the outdated content and methods of many of the Islamic sciences, Nursi set himself the task of learning modern science, for he understood that it was an essential element of updating the Islamic sciences. If the Qur'an and Islam were to be defended, the Islamic sciences, including Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*), had to be reformulated in the light of modern knowledge. So Nursi mastered the physical sciences, and they became for him "the steps by which to understand the Qur'an and prove its truths."¹⁹ This was in distinction to the approach of some of his contemporaries, the Young Turks, for whom scientific materialism was the

key to progress and who were hostile toward religion.²⁰ While grappling with these problems, the Old Said directed much of his energy toward founding the Medresetü'z-Zehrâ, where science and religion would be taught in combined form. However, it was as the New Said and with the *Risale-i Nur* that his aim of blending the two was realized.

Nursi's involvement with science in his youth gained for him a view of the universe that, in the sense of its being a perfectly functioning "machine" or "factory" made up of component parts, is Newtonian, even mechanistic. This is reflected in some of the imagery he uses. However, though Newtonian in scheme, his interpretation of the physical world is Qur'anic. As was explained in an earlier chapter, Nursi's main achievement on his transformation into the New Said was his discovery and subsequent development of the Qur'anic vision or method of regarding things, beings, for the meanings they express. This he called *manâ-yı harfî*, as opposed to the view of "philosophy and science," which regard beings as *manâ-yı ismî*, signifying only themselves. Thus, on the one hand, Nursi's presentation of the universe is modern and scientific, but on the other, all his writings are designed to teach how it should be approached and regarded, and to expound by use of the Qur'anic method "the truths of belief" that the Qur'an teaches. This original method and approach made his writings relevant and useful to people of many different backgrounds and casts of mind. A short section from *The Supreme Sign* will help to illustrate this:

Then [the traveler] looks at the rain and sees that within it are contained benefits as numerous as the raindrops, and manifestations of the Most Merciful One as multiple as the particles of rain, and instances of wisdom as plentiful as its atoms. Those sweet, delicate, and blessed drops are, moreover, created in so beautiful and ordered a fashion, that particularly the rain sent in the summertime, is dispatched and caused to fall with such balance and regularity that not even stormy winds that cause large objects to collide can destroy its equilibrium and order; the drops do not collide with each other or merge in such fashion as to become harmful masses of water. Water, composed of two simple elements like hydrogen and oxygen, is employed in hundreds of thousands of other wise, purposeful tasks and arts, particularly in animate beings, although it is itself inanimate and unconscious. Rain, which is then the very embodiment of divine mercy, can only be manufactured in the unseen treasury of mercy of One Most Compassionate and Merciful, and on its descent expounds in physical form the verse: "And He it is Who sends down rain after men have despaired, and thus spreads out His mercy" (Qur'an, 42:28).²¹

As is seen from this, another element of the *Risale-i Nur*'s method related to the mind is reflection or reflective thought (*tefekkiir*). In one of his

letters to his students, Nursi writes that because he took the path of reflection at the time the Old Said was transformed into the New Said, he sought the true meaning of the Hadith “An hour’s reflection is better than a year’s [voluntary] worship.”²² After twenty years his interpretation of its meaning had found, after *The Supreme Sign*, its final form in a collection of Arabic pieces that included the well-known *Jawshan al-Kabir*, and a summarized extract of *The Supreme Sign*, called *Khulāṣat al-Khulāṣah*.²³ This reflection entails pondering over the beings in the universe in the manner of the traveler in *The Supreme Sign* and “reading their tongues,” which proclaim their Maker’s unity and point to the divine names and attributes. Nursi described how this form of reflection illuminates the whole universe, on the one hand demonstrating the illogicality of such concepts as nature, on which materialist philosophy is based, and, on the other, resulting in a level of belief that leads to an awareness of the universal divine presence and universal worship:

In the *Hizb al-Nuri* there is both the meaning of “An hour’s reflection,” and universal worship . . . I saw that *Jawshan al-Kabir*, the *Risale-i Nur*, and the *Hizb al-Nuri* all illuminate the universe from top to bottom; they disperse the darknesses; they destroy heedlessness and nature; and they rend the veils under which the people of heedlessness and misguidance want to hide. I observed that they card the universe and all its beings like cotton, and comb them out. They show the lights of divine unity behind the farthest and broadest veils of the universe in which the people of misguidance have become submerged. . . . [T]hey show that from top to bottom the universe reflects the manifestations of the divine names like mirrors, leaving no possibility for heedlessness. Nothing becomes an obstacle to the divine presence. I saw that rather than banishing or forgetting or not recalling the universe like the Sufis and mystics (*ehl-i tarikat ve hakikat*) in order to gain permanent access to the divine presence, the universe gains a sense of the divine presence as broad as the universe, and that a sphere of worship opens up as broad and universal and permanent as the universe.²⁴

Very often when explaining “the way” of the *Risale-i Nur*, Nursi compares it with Sufism, as in the above piece. Founding a new *tarikat* was something he had been accused of in Eskişehir Court. Also, it was a method many of his students were familiar with. His comparisons show clearly the differences between them. The *Risale*’s way is based on observation of and reflection on the beings of the phenomenal world; knowledge of God the Creator is thus gained through “reading the book of the universe.” According to Nursi, the main Sufi schools, in contrast, either denied the universe’s true existence or entirely disregarded it; that is, they “cast it into oblivion.” This is because the Sufis’ ascent or journeying to God is an inner journey, through the activation

and unfolding of the human inner faculties, and chiefly “the heart.”²²⁵ This type of knowledge is intuitive and illuminative. The *Risale* addresses both the reason and the heart. It uses logic, reasoned argument, and proofs, together with its incorporation of scientific facts and view of the physical world mentioned above, and it does not neglect to address the modern rational mentality and its skepticism, persuading it of the necessity of the Qur’anic truths. However, Nursi writes, the *Risale-i Nur* does not only teach “with the feet of the reason” like the works of the ulama, the religious scholars; “rather, proceeding with the feet of the blending and combining of the reason and the heart, and the mutual assistance of the spirit and other subtle faculties, it flies to the highest peaks; it ascends to where the feet and even the eyes of the philosophy that attacks [religion] cannot reach; and it shows the truths of belief even to eyes that are blind.”²²⁶

Nursi found that *The Supreme Sign* with its thirty-three degrees proving the divine existence and unity and *Hizb al-Nuriye*, in particular, illuminated the heart and other inner faculties. He wrote that when he read them, his “spirit, imagination, and heart expanded and unfolded to such a degree that when I uttered the testimony ‘There is no god but God’ that each degree declares, I was aware of divine unity on a vast scale as though that universal tongue was mine. Thus, *The Supreme Sign* can impart lights of belief to the spirit as brilliant as the sun. I formed this unshakable conviction, and I saw it.”²²⁷

Regenerator of Religion

In connection with its success in strengthening and revitalizing belief in the twentieth century, when religion was apparently losing its relevance and was subject to unprecedented attacks, Nursi and the *Risale-i Nur* came to be recognized by many as fulfilling the requirements of the Regenerator of Religion (*mujaddid*; Turk. *müceddid*)²⁸ promised by the Prophet Muhammad in the well-known Hadith: “At the start of each century Almighty God will send someone to this community (*umma*) who will renew its religion.”²⁹ Recognition of this was not limited to Nursi’s students; established ulama and religious scholars also did not hesitate to speak out in Nursi’s defense, strongly recommending the *Risale-i Nur*. Three may be mentioned. The first was a prominent Istanbul scholar and former head of the office for issuing *fatwas*, Fetva Emini Ali Rıza Efendi. He is reputed to have said after studying *The Supreme Sign*, the Twenty-Fifth Word about the miraculousness of the Qur’ān, and other parts of the *Risale-i Nur*: “Nursi has performed the greatest service to the religion of Islam at this time. His works are absolutely correct, and no one else has sacrificed himself at this time to the extent he has, that is, given up the world and produced such a work. He is altogether worthy of con-

gratulation. The *Risale-i Nur* is the Regenerator of Religion; may Almighty God grant him every success and blessing!"³⁰

Another was Hasan Sarıkaya, who was known as the Golden-Voiced Hafız since he had led the morning prayers for Sultan Abdulhamid II in Yıldız Palace before the sultan's dethronement. He had known Nursi at that time. After the founding of the republic and closure of the *medreses*, he had persisted in teaching religion and the Qur'an, and had taught many hundreds of students. He told his son: "Bediuzzaman is the Imam and Renewer of this century; he is not a mere scholar. Every century has its Renewer, and he is the Renewer of this century."³¹

The third was the mufti of Kahraman Maraş, Hafız Ali Efendi. He told Mustafa Ramazanoğlu, one of Nursi's students, in the 1950s: "Such a work has not appeared for two hundred years; and it is not clear whether one will appear again in the future [that is, another will not appear], I have no doubt that he is the Regenerator of Religion."³²

It is also recorded that Nursi's mission as Renewer was foretold in the year of his birth, and this was not by someone in his native east, but by a leading Naqshbandi shaikh in the region of Isparta, Beşkızalızade Osman Khalidi.³³ The shaikh gave certain news in the year of his death, 1293 (that is, 1876 or 1877), or possibly the previous year, that "A Renewer will appear who will save belief in God, and he was born this year." He added that one of his four sons would have the honor of seeing him. And indeed, some fifty years later when Nursi was exiled to the province of Isparta, his youngest son, Ahmed Efendi, met him. And it was there that Nursi wrote the greater part of the *Risale-i Nur*, and from that center that it was spread.³⁴

Mawlānā Khālīd Baghdādī's *Jubba*

Probably in 1940, Asiye Hanım, the wife of the governor of Kastamonu Prison, brought a hundred-year-old *jubba* (a gown worn by religious scholars) to give to Nursi. Knowing that he would not accept it as a gift, she consulted Mehmed Feyzi, and they decided to present it to him as a "trust." Nursi, however, accepted it readily, as though receiving his own property.

Asiye Hanım had inherited the gown from her father, who in turn had received it from his father, Shaikh Muhammad ibn 'Abdullāh al-Khālīdī, well known by the name Küçük Aşık. He was from Afyonkarahisar and had made his way to Baghdad when still of tender years to study under the famous founder of the Naqshbandi Khālīdī order, Mawlānā Khālīd Baghdādī.³⁵ On completing his studies, he was sent by the master, who gave him the gown as a token, as a *khalīfah* to Anatolia. Küçük Aşık later went on to Egypt, where he died in 1884. His family preserved the gown, and even when they were

forced to abandon their home in Afyon in the face of the Greek invasion during the War of Independence, it was first thing they took with them. Finally, Asiye Hanım married an official called Tahir Bey. On his being posted to Kastamonu as the prison governor, Asiye Hanım came to know of Nursi, and understood that the gown they had so carefully guarded all these years as a trust had found its true owner, and she handed it over to him.³⁶ Nursi recalled in a letter that when he had received his diploma on completing his studies, he had been too young to don the scholar's gown and turban. Now, fifty-six years later, Mawlānā Khālid had dressed him in his own *jubba* over a hundred-year distance.³⁷

Mawlānā Khālid³⁸ was the most influential figure in Naqshbandī Sufism after Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, known as Imam-ı Rabbani, Nursi's spiritual link with whom has been mentioned in several contexts. Born a hundred or so years later than Sirhindi, who was known the Regenerator of the Second Millennium, Mawlānā Khālid was recognized by many as the Regenerator or Renewer of the following century.³⁹ The movement he started was one of renewal and became very influential in the eastern Ottoman Empire, as has been mentioned.⁴⁰ In a short piece, one of Nursi's students, Şamlı Hafız, pointed out some of the parallels, and differences, between Nursi and Mawlānā Khālid, which show that indeed the gown had found its true owner. The main ones are as follows (the dates are according to the Rumi calendar):

Mawlānā Khālid was born in 1193. In 1224 he went to the capital of India, Cihanabad, where he entered the Naqshī Order and its revivalist (*mujaddidi*) branch in particular. In 1238 "he attracted the attention of the politicians" and had to migrate to Damascus. He was descended from 'Uthman, the third caliph. He was brilliant, and before reaching the age of twenty became the foremost scholar of his time. These points coincide with corresponding dates in Nursi's life in a way that cannot be attributed to chance. Nursi was born in 1293;⁴¹ in 1324 he went to Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman Empire, where he prepared for his struggle in the way of Islam. In 1338 he went to Ankara, saw that he could not work alongside the new leaders, and withdrew to Van, from where as a result of the baseless suspicions of the politicians, he was sent into exile. So, too, at the extraordinarily early age of fourteen Nursi received his diploma and started to teach. When it comes to the differences, the most important are that while Mawlānā Khālid's person was the "pole" and guide, Nursi "dismissed his own person and directed all attention to the *Risale-i Nur*." While both emphasized adherence to the Prophet's Sunnah, Mawlānā Khālid's way was that of Sufism (*ilm-i tarikat*); Nursi, "due to the requirements of this fearsome age, favored the science of reality (*ilm-i hakikat*) and the way of the truths of belief, and looked on Sufism as being third in importance."⁴²

More on the *Risale-i Nur*'s Function and Nursi's Advice to His Students Concerning This

While explaining the *Risale-i Nur*'s functions and duties in his letters to his students, Nursi frequently stresses that these are concerned with belief and the strengthening and saving of it, and he advises them, in the particular conditions of the times, to concentrate all their attention on matters related to these and not to become involved in political, social, and worldly matters.

This included the Second World War, which, although Turkey did not take part in it, was the cause of dissension in the country. Various reasons for this emerge from the letters, like the preservation of absolute sincerity and the harm to service to religion of political bias. Such an attitude was probably demanded by the political conditions of the times and the regime's persecution of those who worked openly for the cause of Islam. However, in mentioning some of these points, a further underlying reason emerges for Nursi's insistence on his students remaining aloof from politics and working solely for belief, and this was in connection with the *Risale-i Nur*'s function as Renewer of Religion, which he saw in the long view of the future. It can be understood from Nursi's letters that during these years he was concerned with the end of time, and related the war and dreadful events of this century to those foretold to occur at those last times. He placed the *Risale-i Nur* and its mission within this perspective. This becomes clear particularly from his replies to questions put to him concerning the Mahdi, who according to popular belief will appear at that time. The following letter makes this clearer. It was written by a number of Nursi's students to a *hoja* who had written to him on the subject:

Our Master says: Yes, at this time belief and religion, and social life and the Sharī'ah, and public law and Islamic politics are all in need of a renewal of great stature. But the duty of renewal with respect to saving the truths of belief is the most important, the most sacred, and the greatest. The spheres of the Sharī'ah, social life, and politics take second, third, and fourth places in relation to it. Also, most emphasis in the narrations of Hadīth about the renewal of religion is on renewal in [the question of; lit., "truths of"] belief. But since in the view of public opinion and those caught up in this life, Islamic social life and the politics of religion, which are attractive in that they are apparently far-reaching and predominant, appear to be of greater importance; they look from that point of view, through that lens; they give it that meaning.

Furthermore, it does not appear to be possible for these three duties to be performed all together perfectly by one person or community at this time and for them not to impede one another. They can only be brought together

at the end of time by the Mahdi and the collective personality of his community, which represents the luminous community of the Prophet's Family. Endless thanks be to Almighty God that in this century He has given the duty of renewal and preservation of the truths of belief to the *Risale-i Nur* and to the collective personality of its students.⁴³

In emphasizing the paramount importance of belief and its strengthening, Nursi writes in another letter that it is not possible to initiate change in all these matters at once at the present time, so that even if the Mahdi were to come now, he would concentrate on the question of belief:

At this time there are currents so overwhelming they draw everything to their own account. So even if the true awaited person, who will come next century, were to come now, my conjecture is that he would forgo the political world and change his goal and not let his movement be carried away on those currents. . . . [H]e would surely take the greatest matter as the basis and not the others, so that the service of belief would not be tainted in the popular view; he would not let it appear to ordinary people, who are easily deceived, that it was being exploited for other ends.⁴⁴

It is in this perspective, then, that Nursi establishes the *Risale-i Nur*'s primary function of renewing and strengthening belief, and it is with this view in mind that he guides his students in its service. For the sake of completeness, included now are examples of letters illustrating some of the main points Nursi made in advising his students about this service. First came examples of his advising them to disregard political and worldly matters. Then came examples warning the students above all to be cautious and circumspect in the face of the plots and intrigues hatched against them by their many enemies. And finally came examples of letters guiding them toward developing complete sincerity (*ihlas*) in their service and selflessness before their fellow *Risale-i Nur* students, so that the "collective personality" necessary to fulfill the *Risale-i Nur*'s unique functions could emerge. This consciousness of a joint or corporate personality is one of the distinguishing marks of the *Risale-i Nur* and its students, and Nursi himself offered the finest example in his total sincerity and selflessness, always putting this collective personality before himself.

Aloofness from Political Life

Nursi saw the modern world as having captured man's soul and plunged him into the life of this world, and pointed out that the way to be saved from this

was through following the teachings of the *Risale-i Nur*. One aspect of this was life and the living of it. Nursi wrote that inessential needs, wastefulness, and greed had attracted and held all the attention of “the misguided,” so that any little worldly need took preference over the greatest matter of religion. As “the dispenser of the healing remedies of the Qur’ān,” the *Risale-i Nur* “was able to withstand this strange sickness of this strange age,” and “its resolute, unshakable, constant, sincere, loyal, and self-sacrificing students were able to resist it.”⁴⁵ Also, the modern world had infected people with a senseless curiosity about “the chess games” of politics and diplomacy, the most harmful result of which was division in society along political lines.

Although at this time, the truths of belief should come first and other things remain in second, third, and fourth place, and serving them through the *Risale-i Nur* should be the prime duty and point of curiosity and main aim, the state of the world has stimulated to a high degree the veins of worldly life, and especially of social life and political life, and more than anything of partisanship in regard to the [Second] World War, which is a manifestation of divine wrath in punishment for the vice and misguidance of civilization; this inauspicious age has injected those harmful, passing desires into the very center of the heart, even as the diamonds of the truths of belief. . . .

Nursi continues that the present age has implanted these to such a degree that they are the cause of difference and disunity even among religious people. Some religious scholars, for example, give only secondary, or less, importance to matters of belief because of political and social matters and love an enemy of religion who shares the same view, while nurturing enmity for followers of the Sufi path who oppose them. Thus, Nursi himself completely disregarded current events “in the face of this awesome danger of the present age,” and he urged his students not to allow the chess games of tyrants to distract them from their sacred duty, nor let them corrupt their minds.⁴⁶

The prevailing note in many of these letters is one of encouragement, even cajoling. Nursi frequently points out the great benefits that the *Risale-i Nur* had brought with the new and direct way it had opened up in attaining certain belief, and urges his students to be steadfast and unwavering in their service of it. For the Nur movement was still hardly established, and the students met with considerable opposition from both the *hojas* and religious scholars, and from the Sufis and followers of the *tarikats*, who saw the movement in terms of rivalry, as well as from the enemies of religion. It is in this light that Nursi’s frequent pointing out of what he saw as the special instances of divine favor associated with the *Risale-i Nur* should be seen. Hostility of this kind was on occasion fanned and exploited by the enemies of religion. Thus, Nursi always urged his students to act tolerantly and peaceably toward

followers of other paths and to return any criticism or aggression with good will, and above all to not allow political differences to cause disunity and so aid irreligion. Religion should be adhered to as the point of unity: “Beware! Don’t let worldly currents, and particularly political currents, and currents that look outside the country, sow discord among you. Don’t let the parties of misguidance unified before you throw you into confusion. Don’t let the satanic principle of ‘love for the sake of politics, enmity for the sake of politics’ take the place of the divine principle, ‘love for God’s sake; enmity for God’s sake.’ Don’t agree to the tyranny of displaying hatred for your brother and love and support for a satanic political colleague, and so in effect share in his crime.”⁷⁴⁷

Nursi often also insists that politics should be avoided, since the truths of belief and the Qur’ān can be made a tool of nothing: “The three supreme matters in the worlds of humanity and Islam are belief, the Shari‘ah, and life. Since the truths of belief are the greatest of these, the *Risale-i Nur*’s select and loyal students avoid politics with abhorrence so that they should not be made the tool of other currents and subject to other forces, and those diamond-like Qur’anic truths not be reduced to fragments of glass in the view of those who sell or exploit religion for the world, and so that they can carry out to the letter the duty of saving belief, the highest duty.”⁷⁴⁸

In regard to the Second World War, Nursi wrote that because of the feelings of partisanship it had given rise to, his students should not concern themselves with it, for “just as consent to unbelief is unbelief, so too consent to tyranny is tyranny. In this duel, tyranny and destruction are occurring that are so ghastly they make the heavens weep . . . it has given rise to such fearsome wrongdoing that in its barbarism it is unprecedented.” It was inappropriate for people occupied with the truths of the Qur’ān to follow those events unnecessarily as though applauding the destruction of tyrants.⁴⁹

The war years in Turkey saw a worsening of economic conditions, which already had been severe throughout the 1930s, and there were serious shortages in many basic essentials.⁵⁰ Moreover, there had been a decline in moral standards during the years of the republic as the regime chipped away at the Islamic cement bonding society. These severe conditions are reflected in various contexts in Nursi’s letters. Economic hardship was exploited by the authorities to try, on the one hand, to distance from religion those who were not well-off, like the majority of the Nur students, through their struggles to secure a livelihood, and, on the other, to sow discord among the students in order to break their solidarity. He continually warned them to be vigilant, and not allow themselves to be shaken in the face of this often extreme hardship and their unity harmed. He urged them to respond with the principles of “frugality and contentment.”⁷⁵¹

In regard to the decline in moral standards, Nursi urged his students to adopt the Qur’ānic concept of *taqwa*, fear of God or piety, as the basis of their actions in the face of the corruption and destruction of that time. In a letter

marked “extremely important,” he defined it as “avoiding sins and what is forbidden” and stated that “good works” consisted of “complying with the injunctions [of religion] and performing pious actions.” In those trying conditions a few good deeds became like many, he said, and those people who fulfilled their obligations and did not commit serious sins would be saved. The *Risale-i Nur* was a “repairer” resisting the destruction. “With the shaking of the ramparts of the Qur’ān, . . . a dark anarchy and irreligion more fearsome than Gog and Magog have begun to corrupt morality and life.” Righteous action even to a small degree on the part of the Nur students would have extremely positive results. Nursi concluded this letter by telling them that their greatest strength lay in strengthening each other’s *taqwa*: “After sincerity (*ihlas*), our greatest strength at such a time in the face of these fearsome events is, in accordance with the principle of ‘sharing the works of the hereafter,’ for each of us to write good deeds into ‘the righteous-act books’ of the others with our pens, and with our tongues to send reinforcements and assistance to the ‘forts’ of the others’ *taqwa*.”⁵²

Sincerity and the Collective Personality of the Students of the *Risale-i Nur*

As mentioned in the above letter, Nursi considered their greatest strength to be sincerity. In another letter he described the way of the *Risale-i Nur* as being “based on the mystery of sincerity.”⁵³ While still in Barla and Isparta, Nursi had explained this principle in detail in two treatises, the Twentieth and Twenty-first Flashes, and the points he makes in the Kastamonu letters are by way of reminders. Just as the acquisition of sincerity was essential so that they could form a “collective personality,” so was it necessary in order to prevent opponents taking advantage of differences among the followers of different paths and ways. “Since our way is based on the mystery of sincerity and is the truths of belief, we are compelled by our way not to get involved in worldly and social life unless forced to, and to avoid situations which lead to rivalry, partisanship, and dispute. It is to be regretted a thousand times over that now while subject to the assaults of terrible serpents, unfortunate religious scholars and the people of religion make an excuse of minor faults like mosquito bites, and assist in the destruction of serpents and atheistic dissemblers, and kill themselves with their own hands.”⁵⁴

The secret of the *Risale-i Nur*’s success in combating the destruction of atheism lay in this sincerity:

The *Risale-i Nur*’s victorious resistance against so many fearsome, obdurate deniers arises from the mystery of sincerity, and being a tool for nothing, and looking directly to eternal happiness, and following no aim apart from the

service of belief, and attaching no importance to the personal illuminations and wonder-working that some followers of the *tariqats* consider important, and in accordance with the mystery of the legacy of prophethood, only disseminating the lights of belief and saving the faith of the believers, like the Companions of the Prophet, who possessed supreme sainthood. . . . And they do not interfere in anything outside their own duties, such as being successful, which is God's business, or making the people accept or demand [their service], or making it to prevail or receiving the fame, illuminations, or divine favors they deserve. They work with pure, total sincerity, saying: "Our duty is to serve. That is sufficient."⁵⁵ "

The true students of the *Risale-i Nur* see the service of belief as superior to everything; should they be accorded even the rank of spiritual pole, out of sincerity they would prefer that of service.⁵⁶

It was in order to develop a "collective personality," a characteristic of the modern age, that the students of the *Risale-i Nur* had to renounce all the demands of the ego; it was to "transform the 'I' into 'We,' that is, give up egotism, and work on account of the collective personality of the *Risale-i Nur*."⁵⁷ "The present is not the time for egotism and the personality for those who follow the path of reality (*ehl-i hakikat*); it is the time of the community (*cema'at*). A collective personality emerging from the community rules, and may survive. To have a large pool, the ice blocks of the ego and personality have to be cast into the pool and dissolved."⁵⁸

While in the past, the age of individuality, persons of great stature like 'Abd al-Qādir Geylānī, Imām Ghazālī, and Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindī had been sent to guide the Muslim community in accordance with divine wisdom, the unprecedented difficulties and conditions of modern times demanded that a collective personality undertake such duties.⁵⁹

More Glimpses of Nursi's Life in Kastamonu

Despite the harassment Nursi received at the hands of officials and his being under constant surveillance, he was held in great respect by the majority of the inhabitants of the town, and a number used to visit him as far as they were permitted. We learn from one of his students, Tahsin Aydın, that among these was the chairman of the town council. He also tells of an occasion when Nursi refused the offer of money for his students, even though sent by one of the heroes of the War of Independence.⁶⁰ Nursi never broke this fundamental rule of his life, that of never accepting money under any circumstance, even though his situation was so difficult at one point in Kastamonu that he was forced to sell his quilt to pay the rent.⁶¹

Nursi also concerned himself with others in difficulties. And there were many drunkards and people who had fallen foul of the law that he saved. For example, there was a family who had been deported from eastern Anatolia after one of the disturbances. One member of it was a thirteen-year-old boy who used to run errands for Nursi. Since he was a child, he could come and go unquestioned, and he relates in his account of those days how besides performing such vital jobs as sending Nursi's letters, he would also "prepare the ground" for people wanting to visit him by conducting them on roundabout routes to avoid being spotted from the police station opposite Nursi's house. He also mentions that on Nursi's recommendation his family was able to move to a house that Nursi himself had originally been going to live in, but had been deemed unsuitable because it was in a quiet and secluded spot. The house was still empty, and they lived there for nine years without paying any rent. Nursi helped this family in numerous ways. On one occasion an unjust complaint was lodged against them by a neighbor, a retired police superintendent named Süleyman. Being complete strangers in the town, they were understandably very perturbed. The boy, Nadir, ran to Nursi to explain, and he sorted out the matter in no time. Since it illustrates the authority Nursi wielded, despite his position, as well as his concern for the downtrodden, a few lines are quoted in full:

When I got there, Ustad met me at the door. On my explaining the situation to him, he said to me: "I understood that you were upset. Go and tell the headman of the quarter, Çarıkçı İhsan Efendi, to come here." I went and told him, and he said he would go immediately with pleasure. He went at once. Ustad told him: "Go and tell Süleyman not to bother these people!" So İhsan Efendi went to Süleyman and repeated this. From there he came to us and consoled us, saying: "Relax! No one's going to bother you. If you have any difficulties, I'm here!" And so the problem was solved.⁶²

Well known in Kastamonu was the story of how Nursi saved Araçlı Deli Mu'min. Deli Mu'min had not been aptly named and was one of the roughs and rowdies of the district notorious for his acts of banditry. Drink and gambling were his normal pursuits. He had even killed a few people. Then one day, Çaycı Emin went in the darkness just before dawn to Nursi's house to light his stove. Going to open the door, Emin made out a figure slumped on the doorstep. He drew closer and peered at it; it was Araçlı Deli Mu'min. He said to him: "What do you want here? You're drunk again. Do you know whose doorstep you're on?" Deli Mu'min knew where he was. He started pleading: "I've repented! Pray for me! Accept me as your student!" Çaycı Emin went up and told Nursi. And Nursi did not turn him away. He said: "Yes, my brother," and received the drunk bandit. But from

then on Araçlı Deli Mu'min was saved from drink, from banditry, from crime. Now he lived up to his name, he was a believer. And this is just one example of many.⁶³

The *Risale-i Nur* Becomes Established

During these years the *Risale-i Nur* became firmly rooted in Turkish society, and Nursi wrote that now it was certain to continue into the future. He felt certain of this, as women and children responded so enthusiastically to it, both in the region of Isparta and in Kastamonu, and it also began to have readers among schoolboys in Kastamonu. He mentions this in a number of letters, expressing his extreme pleasure at the large numbers of parts of the *Risale-i Nur* written out by children, women, and the elderly. In one letter he writes:

My Dear and Loyal Brothers!

Copies written out by fifty to sixty of the *Risale-i Nur*'s young and innocent students have been sent to us, and we have collected them into three volumes. We have noted down some of their names: Ömer, fifteen years old; Bekir, nine years old; Hüseyin, eleven years old. . . . Their serious efforts at this time show that . . . the *Risale-i Nur* gives a greater pleasure, joy, and eagerness than the various amusements and incentives with which they try to entice children to attend the new schools. It also shows that the *Risale-i Nur* is taking root. God willing, nothing will be able to eradicate it, and it will continue down the generations.

In the same letter he writes that they had compiled the forty or fifty pieces written by the illiterate elderly, who had learned to write after the age of fifty. So, too, "harvesters, farmers, shepherds, and nomads" were all putting aside their own pursuits and working for the *Risale-i Nur*. He goes on to mention that the difficulties in correcting all these copies were compensated for by the fact that he was compelled to read them slowly and carefully, and by the pleasure he received from hearing the *Risale-i Nur*'s lessons from "their sincere and innocent tongues."⁶⁴

In other letters, which encourage these Nur students so tactfully and kindly, Nursi mentions that they had made up seven volumes of these pieces, one of which included pieces written out by children that illustrated examples of the coincidence of letters (*tevafukat*).⁶⁵ Women too, he said, had a close affinity with the *Risale-i Nur*, and he had long expected them to respond warmly to it. He wrote: "In fact, since the chief foundation of the *Risale*'s way is compassion, and women are mines of compassion, I had long expected the

Risale-i Nur to be well understood in the world of women. Thanks be to God, the women are more active and work with greater enthusiasm than the men hereabouts. . . . These two manifestations are an auspicious sign that [in the future] the *Risale-i Nur* will shine and make many conquests in those mines of compassion.⁶⁶

Although it was while in the Darü'l-Hikmeti'l-İslamiye that Nursi had written the treatise on the wisdom in Islamic dress for women, which he renamed the Twenty-fourth Flash while still in Barla, it was only during these years that he consented to receive women from time to time for the purpose of teaching them from the *Risale-i Nur*. It was also at this time that some of the pieces were written that were later compiled as *A Guide for Women*.⁶⁷ They most probably formed the basis of his “lessons” to these visitors.

Nursi was also concerned with the youth, as those most susceptible to the materialist ideologies being propagated with such fury. In 1940 or 1941, some high school boys started to visit Nursi, one of whom was Abdullah Yeğın, who from that time on was a devoted student of Nursi and the *Risale-i Nur*, and in future years was one of his most active students. Some of the replies to the questions they asked became the basis of various parts of the *Risale-i Nur*, and it was thanks to them that Nursi compiled the pieces finally published as *A Guide for Youth*. It was also due to them that Nursi first gave permission for the *Risale-i Nur* to be written in the Latin alphabet, thus becoming immediately accessible to the younger generation. Some of the young schoolboy’s impressions of Nursi are as follows:

In 1940–41 I was in the second class of the middle section of Kastamonu High School. On hearing Ustad’s landlord and some others who visited us speak in praise of him, it awoke in me the desire to go and see him. What I heard about him was that he was an important person, he did not accept presents, and he did not receive everyone.

One day during the break in school I broached the subject with my bench-mate, Rifat. When I told him there was a famous *hoja* here worth visiting, he replied: “Yes, I know, his house is opposite ours. He’s a very good person, let’s go together. I sometimes visit him.”

We went together at a convenient time. We knocked at the door, and it was opened. We went upstairs and entered his room by the door on the right. First Rifat and then I kissed his hand, and we sat down. He was seated on a high platform like a bed, with a quilt drawn up over his knees and leaning against the back. He was holding a book. His hair came down to his ears. Looking at us over his fine spectacles, he said to us: “Welcome!” He asked my friend about me, and he introduced me as his school friend. He asked my name and was very kind. He spoke to us about Islam, the beauty of belief in God, death, and the hereafter. We sat for a while, then we left.

One day when I went to visit him, the Ustad struck me as very humble and modest. It was because of this humbleness that I wondered if he knew anything. For he always came down to our level and spoke of things that we knew. I even asked Mehmet Feyzi Efendi one day if he knew Arabic. Of course, Feyzi Efendi just laughed.

Ustad's modesty and humility, and affection and interest in us, bound us to him. From time to time I would take other friends to him. He always gave excellent answers to the questions we asked him. I only lost the negative ideas about religion I had acquired from some of the teachers at school when I visited Ustad.

Another time when I visited him, I said: "Our teachers don't speak about God. Tell us about our Creator." Ustad explained at great length about this subject. I can't exactly remember when the answer to our question was written down. When we visited him, Mehmed Feyzi Pamukçu used to read from *The Supreme Sign* or *The Short Words*, and we would write them down in our notebooks in the new letters.

One day at school during the geography lesson the teacher asked the class: "Who's been to that reactionary *hoja* they call Bediuzzaman?" Six people raised their hands. He asked why we'd gone, and said that Ustad was an enemy of the reforms and didn't like Atatürk. He sent us before the Disciplinary Council. They asked various questions. As a result, a friend named Suat and myself were banned from school for six days, and the others were given warnings. We said in the statements we gave that we had gone because we wanted to learn about our religion, no one had said anything against anyone, and that we were religious and liked performing our worship. A few days later the police raided the house where I was staying and went through it with a fine-tooth comb. My statement was taken by the police. I described what had happened to me. The prosecutor asked: "There's the mufti and lots of *hojas*. Why don't you go to them?" I said I didn't know the mufti.

The reason I had first visited Ustad was this: he did not accept presents from anyone! I saw the way he lived; he was really and truly poor! In one of his rooms was a woven rug and a few cloth prayer mats, and the other was completely bare. If the well-to-do people in the town brought him anything, he would most kindly and graciously refuse it. He did not want to offend anyone. He absolutely would not take anything or eat anything without giving something in return. He really lived what he wrote. The only thing he spoke about was the *Risale-i Nur*. The way he acted was like a repetition of what it teaches.⁶⁸

Abdullah Yeğin notes also another side of Nursi's character: his refusal to compromise his beliefs in any way in the face of threat or tyranny, which was a powerful source of strength and inspiration for others in those dark days:

Like his speech, Ustad's manner was unique, and everyone used to look at him in amazement. For his dress, his manner, and his actions resembled no one else's. . . . I'll never forget the way, in that time of repression when the police and gendarmes were so feared, Ustad walked with firm and resolute steps toward the governor's office escorted by the police in exactly the same dress he had always worn and the way the onlookers stared at him in wonder, a shiver passing over the crowd.⁶⁹

Parts of the *Risale-i Nur* Written in Kastamonu

Between his arrival in Kastamonu in March 1936 and about 1940, Nursi wrote from the Third to the Ninth Rays inclusive.⁷⁰ Of these, the Seventh Ray, *The Supreme Sign*, was written in Ramadan of 1938 or 1939.⁷¹ It was followed immediately by the Eighth Ray,⁷² and the summary of the Arabic Twenty-ninth Flash, *Hizb al-Akbar al-Nuri*.⁷³ Nursi sent numerous letters to his students in Isparta, and also while in Kastamonu, he prepared the final drafts of the First and Second Rays, which had been written in Eskişehir Prison. The second part of the index, which included the parts of *Lem'alar* (*The Flashes*) subsequent to the Fifteenth Flash—the Fifteenth Flash forms the index for all the Words, Letters, and the First to the Fourteenth Flashes—was also written at this time by some of Nursi's students in Isparta.⁷⁴ There followed after 1940 a period of cessation as far as writing new works was concerned.⁷⁵

As the *Risale-i Nur* spread and became established, Nursi had some of its parts put together in the form of collections, and some of these he had typed out in the new letters. This was in 1942 and 1943. One was a collection of four pieces for the schoolboys.⁷⁶ Abdullah Yeğin mentions above their writing out pieces in the new Latin script. There were other collections for which he suggested various titles, including what was later published as *Gençlik Rehberi* (*A Guide for Youth*), and another called *Sikke-i Tasdik-i Gaybî* (*The Ratifying Stamp of the Unseen*).⁷⁷ Nursi also put together other pieces on the resurrection of the dead to be included as addenda to the Tenth Word.⁷⁸ In 1943 Tahiri Mutlu, from the village of Atabey near Isparta, had *The Supreme Sign* published in Istanbul. Although it was only during Nursi's Kastamonu years that he had come to know the *Risale-i Nur*, Tahiri Mutlu was to be one of its leading students. It was also through his enterprise that handwritten copies of the *Hizb al-Qur'ân* and *Hizb al-Nürî* were printed photographically at this time. Also in 1943, the Fifth Ray about Hadiths alluding to the signs of the end of the world and resurrection and the Antichrists who are to appear at the end of time began to be sought after. The final draft of this treatise had been made in 1938 from a first draft made while Nursi was a member of the

Darü'l-Hikmet from various pieces, some of which were written in 1908. This Fifth Ray was to be the main cause of his arrest and that of a number of his students in August 1943 and their second sojourn in prison.

Increased Harassment and Arrest

Nursi, his students in Kastamonu, and the Nur students in the region of Isparta and other places were under constant pressure from the authorities. This increased as time passed, culminating in widespread arrests and the Denizli trials and imprisonment in 1943–44. On several occasions previous to this, copies of the *Risale-i Nur* had been seized after searches; students had been arrested and then subsequently acquitted, and the copies of the *Risale-i Nur* had been returned. It was the Fifth Ray in particular that was being searched for. In 1940, thirty to forty students were arrested and then released. Toward the end of 1941, there was another incident in Isparta involving a *Risale-i Nur* student called Mehmet Zühtü, and this was followed by a third incident.⁷⁹ The closeness of the surveillance under which Nursi was held, and the pressure on him, also increased. These incidents are reflected in Nursi's letters, together with repeated warnings to his students to observe the utmost caution and discretion and to guard against the plans and plots that were being hatched against them. These have been mentioned in part above; their principle aim was to break the solidarity of the Nur students by sowing conflict among them and to distract, tempt, or scare them away from their service to the *Risale-i Nur*. It was a serious, planned attempt to stop the spread of the *Risale-i Nur*.

The series of arrests occurred in Isparta, and Nursi was not himself actually taken into custody. However, the authorities attempted to solve their problem by more dastardly means: they had him poisoned on several occasions. Çaycı Emin stated that from time to time Nursi suffered severe bouts of illness as a result of being poisoned.⁸⁰ He also described an occasion when Nursi was poisoned by some "doctored" fruit he bought when on his way to the mountains alone. Mehmed Feyzi also describes it, for it was he who received word from some unknown source and went up into the mountains and found Nursi in a semiconscious state. Nursi had known the grocer he had bought the fruit from, since he very often got something from him on his way. The wretch had evidently been persuaded by the agents who followed Nursi wherever he went to give him pieces they had injected with poison. The horse Nursi had been riding had made its own way back to the town when Nursi was overcome by the effect of the poison. Feyri rode the horse up the mountain and brought Nursi back on it. Nursi was ill for some time following this.⁸¹

In early August 1943, a Nur student who was active in the Denizli region was arrested along with several others. He had been informed on by the

local mufti, and as a result extensive searches were carried out in the area and handwritten copies of the *Risale-i Nur* were seized.⁸¹ As with the Eskişehir affair, the matter was taken up by Ankara and blown up out of all proportion. President İsmet İnönü, Prime Minister Şükrü Saraçoğlu, and Education Minister Hasan Âli Yücel were directly concerned. Instructions were sent to Isparta and Kastamonu in particular, and the houses of numerous Nur students searched. Then the arrests began in Isparta.

Nursi is Arrested

Nursi's house in Kastamonu was searched three times in succession. They were unable to find what they were searching for, the Fifth Ray, and they determined to do away with Nursi. They succeeded in poisoning him a further time. This was verified by a doctor⁸² and when seriously ill with the effects of it and running a temperature of over 40°C., his house was searched a second time. This coincided with the start of Ramađān, which in 1943 began on September 2. This was followed by a third and very rigorous search directed by a number of high-ranking police and officials.⁸³ On this occasion they found some parts of the *Risale-i Nur* hidden in a strongbox under the coal and firewood. They included the Fifth Ray, the collection called *The Ratifying Stamp of the Unseen*,⁸⁴ the treatise on Islamic dress for women, which had been the pretext for Nursi's conviction by Eskişehir Court, and another called *Hücumat-ı Sitte*.⁸⁵ Nursi was then arrested and held in Kastamonu police station for some two to three weeks.

In the spring of that year Nursi had had a premonition that he would not remain much longer in Kastamonu. He had told this to the schoolboy Abdullah Yeğın before he went away for the long summer holiday. When Abdullah Yeğın returned, it was to see Nursi being driven away by the police. He described it like this:

It was in the spring of 1943. It was going to be the school holidays, and we went to visit him again. I'll never forget what he said to us after giving us lengthy instruction on the subjects of belief and morality: "My brothers! For a long time I've never stayed more than eight years in one place. It's now eight years since I came here, so this year I'll either die or go somewhere else. Perhaps we won't meet again. A time will come when there will be *Risale-i Nur* students everywhere. Don't part from one another or from the *Risale-i Nur*."

I was very upset at his speaking in this way. When he saw this, he said: "Don't worry. We'll meet again, God willing."

Three months later the holidays came to an end and we returned to Kastamonu from Araç. I wanted to go and visit him, but he warned Çaycı

Emin Bey: “They’re following me. Don’t let anyone come.” For this reason we could not visit him.

Then one day we were in the playground of Kastamonu High School for the break. They were taking him in a light open carriage along the street. He had a wickerwork basket, a teapot, ewer, and a few possessions with him. Then the carriage stopped and they got out. With him were a gendarme sergeant and a few policemen. A crowd gathered. He was wearing a black turban and a long gown, also black. It was impossible to go out dressed in such clothes at that time, above all with the police.

In the school the others saw me watching him and called me “Bedi-uzzaman follower.” Then the bell rang and we went into class.

How many days passed after this I don’t know; then, one night around midnight, our house started shaking. The earthquakes had started. The tremors continued in this way for about two weeks. The people said: “Hoja Efendi was a good man. They treated him badly and slandered him, so now there are earthquakes.”⁸⁶

Nadir Baysal, some of whose reminiscences were given above, described the air of terror that descended on the town after Nursi was arrested. He says also that Nursi was not held in the prison but in his house:

It was Ramađān in 1943. I was going toward Ustad’s house when in the Shoemakers’ Market I saw them taking him, still with a turban on his head, in a phaeton to the law courts. Çaycı Emin, Mehmet Feyzi, and altogether twenty-two people were held for about two weeks in the prison. Ustad did not stay inside, but was sent back to his house under police supervision. Two weeks later they transferred all of them to Denizli. Such an air of terror then descended on the town it was as though anyone who had had anything to do with Ustad had committed a crime. Some people did not dare to go out of their houses. . . .

While Ustad was leaving Kastamonu, the leaves of the calendar showed 1943. A short while later the earthquakes started. A great stone rolled down from the citadel, and seven people were killed in the house on which it fell. In the region of Tosya between six and seven hundred people were killed.⁸⁷

Kastamonu-Ankara-Isparta

On the Night of Power, which in Turkey is generally considered to be Ramađān 25–26, and was thus probably September 27, Nursi was taken from the police station opposite his house in Kastamonu and put on the bus for

Ankara, some 271 kilometers to the south. He is reported to have told the police there: “Tell Midhat [the governor of Kastamonu] to send my defense speeches in both the new and old letters on after me!”⁸⁸

This, reported by Selahaddin Çelebi, referred to Nursi’s defense from Eskişehir Court that Nursi had given to the officials and police when they were searching his house.⁸⁹

Also present in the bus was an official from İnebolu named Ziya Dilek, who was also later arrested and sent to Denizli. His account of the journey has been recorded:

I had got on the bus to go to my job at Ilgaz. It was stopped by police and gendarmes at Olukbaşı (where the police station was) and space for three people cleared at the back. They put Bediuzzaman Hoja Efendi there. When the bus moved off he felt unwell; he was seventy years old and ill. He said: “Since they count me as a political prisoner, I should be sent by a private taxi.” Whereupon the soldier sitting next to me got up and offered him his seat, and they changed places. I was very scared and could not do anything to help him. When he sat down beside me he asked me my name. On my saying Ziya Dilek, he said, “Are you our Ziya? Did you come to see me off on behalf of the people of Kastamonu?” Turning to the policeman Safvet behind him, who had brought him, he said; “Safvet! Where was I reading in the Qur’ân when you raided my house?” And asking for a piece of paper, he got me to write down the verse, “So bear in patience the command of your Lord for you are in Our sight, and offer praise and glory” (Qur’ân, 52:48). Then saying “Wasn’t I reading this verse?” he showed it to Safvet and the others. He said to me:

“Ziya, tell your friends not to worry. We won’t be convicted. They’ll either make a truce or be reconciled.” Through me, he was sending greetings and this good news to his friends who had been arrested. But I was not going there and I had not been arrested!

Later he said: “Would you tell the driver to please stop the bus. There’s no compulsion in religion, but I have a few words of advice for the passengers.” So the driver stopped the bus and Hoja Efendi immediately started to address the passengers:

“Tonight is most likely the Night of Power. When recited on other days, each letter of the Qur’ân yields ten rewards; in Ramađân each yields a thousand rewards, and on the Night of Power, thirty thousand. If you were told you would be given five gold liras in return for doing something, wouldn’t you want to earn them?” The passengers replied that they would, so the Hoja continued: “You spend all your strength and energy to earn five gold liras for this transitory life; don’t you want to prepare some victuals for your provisions-bag for eternal life?” Again the passengers replied in

the affirmative. So Nursi said: "In that case, if a Muslim recites *Sūrat al-Ikhlās* three times, *Sūrat al-Fātihah* once, and *Āyat al-Kursī* once, he will have prepared some provisions for his bag for eternal life."

The driver, Rizeli Lütü, and the passengers thanked Nursi, and soon afterward it was time to break the fast. He stopped the bus at a famous spring in the pine forests in the Ilgaz mountains for a break. There, Hoja Efendi gave me the food given to him by the town council and I gave him mine, and we broke the fast in that way. We performed the evening prayers together. In Ilgaz I left Hoja Efendi and went to work. But a while later they arrested me and sent me to Denizli. They still had not brought Hoja Efendi there when I arrived. When friends in the prison asked me anxiously if I had seen Ustad, I remembered the verse he had got me to write in the bus on the way to Ilgaz. I got it out and read it to them and related what had happened on the journey. It was a powerful consolation for them, and they were very pleased.⁹⁰

Assigned to accompany Nursi from Kastamonu to Isparta was a non-commissioned gendarme officer named İsmail Tuñçoğan. He noted that on reaching Ankara, he and Nursi put up at a hotel in the Samanpazarı district.⁹¹ Soon after arriving, in a manner entirely outside the normal course of events, Nursi was summoned by the governor of Ankara, Nevzat Tandoğan. There followed an incident that, if it had not been for the appalling disrespect shown to Nursi, would have been quite simply ludicrous. This unhappy man, who was one of the notables of the Republican People's Party and for seventeen years was governor of Ankara, had summoned Nursi in order to force him to take off his turban and put on the "official" peaked cap. Needless to say, he was not successful. Nursi told him: "This turban only comes off with this head!"⁹² In addition to the gendarme officer, who noted that the office boy came out of the governor's office carrying a peaked cap, the incident was witnessed by Nursi's student from İnebolu, Selahaddin Çelebi, who had been arrested in Ankara some days previously and was taken after Nursi to the government offices. He described it like this:

It was a hot day towards the end of Ramađān. I was at the door of Nevzat Bey's office. The officials brought Nursi, and they went into the office together. Then the officials came out, and the door was closed. The sound of angry voices came from inside. Then a bell rang, and a servant went in and then came out again. At that point, Nursi said angrily to Tandoğan: "I represent your forefathers. I live in seclusion. The dress laws cannot be enforced on people living in isolation. I don't go out. You brought me out by force. I hope you pay for it!" The servant then returned carrying a twenty-five-*kurush* peaked cap and went into the governor's office.⁹³

According to one account, the governor himself actually physically put this cap on Nursi's head; according to another, he tried to, but could not.⁹⁴ Nursi was then taken to the station and put on the train for Isparta. Governor Tandoğan however, did not give up at this point and went also to the station together with some police with the intention of catching Nursi red-handed. But the moment they were going to seize him, Nursi whipped off his turban and climbed into the train. They stopped in amazement; how had he known they were there and what they intended to do? Nursi later said they they had been defeated by a flea. For just as he was about to board the train, a flea alighted on his head, and he had taken off his turban to scratch it! So they could do nothing. Nursi said it had been an instance not of his own but of the *Risale-i Nur's kerāmet*.⁹⁵

According to the gendarme İsmail Tunçdoğan, a large crowd gathered to greet Nursi at Isparta. Also on the train was one of his students from his days in Barla, Çaprazzade Abdullah. He had come and spoken with Nursi on the journey, and as a result was held for questioning for two days in Isparta on arrival.⁹⁶ Nursi was taken from the station to the prison, where Nur students from a number of regions had already been brought. As in all his stays in prison, Nursi was put into solitary confinement. Then he and the other students were subject to intense questioning and interrogation. They were to remain less than a month in Isparta before being transferred to Denizli Prison for the trials. The Ministry of Justice in Ankara specified Denizli, since it was where the first arrests had taken place.

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CHAPTER 13

Denizli

Nursi was still ill from the effects of the poison, and weak. It was now the end of Ramađān. He was deeply grieved at this blow to the *Risale-i Nur*; besides himself, virtually all its leading students had been arrested. The students had been rounded up and taken from their homes and villages in the province of Isparta and elsewhere and their families left without support or protection. What the outcome would be was anything but certain. If conditions had been bad in Eskişehir Prison, in Denizli they were worse. Nursi said he suffered in one day in Denizli the distress he suffered in a month in Eskişehir. But again it resulted in victory: while at first it seemed as though a crippling blow had been dealt to the *Risale-i Nur* and its dissemination, in the event the Denizli trials and imprisonment, like Eskişehir before and Afyon afterward, served the cause of the *Risale-i Nur* in ways no one expected.

First came the positive report by the committee of experts in Ankara and the acquittal. This led many officials and others to read *The Supreme Sign* and other parts of the *Risale-i Nur* with favorable results. The court case and imprisonment publicized the *Risale-i Nur* and aroused a lot of sympathy toward Nursi and his students and interest in the *Risale-i Nur*, which counteracted the propaganda campaign against them orchestrated by members of the government.

A factor that contributed to their acquittal was the extraordinary change that came about in many of the other prisoners through the influence of Nursi and his students. The same had been true to an extent in Eskişehir, but in Denizli Prison even hardened criminals learned how to perform the prayers and recite the Qur'ān, and some to assist Nursi's students in writing out copies of the *Risale-i Nur*. Nursi was kept in solitary confinement in a minute, damp, dark cell. He was again poisoned on several occasions. Undoubtedly, the intention was to do away with him and some of his leading students. Two, in fact, died during the nine months they were held. One of them was Hafız Ali, from the village of İslamköy near Isparta. It was widely believed he had been poisoned. Nevertheless, Nursi relentlessly continued his struggle. His students were forbidden to visit or speak with him, so he wrote them numerous notes and letters encouraging and consoling them, guiding them, and directing the writing out and copying of these and the *Risale-i Nur*. Then he wrote the Eleventh Ray, *The Fruits of Belief*. He also wrote his petitions and defense

speeches. Since he and his students were charged with virtually the same “crimes” as in Eskişehir and he offered the same defense in Afyon Court some four years later in 1948–49, his trial will be described only briefly in this chapter.

Life in Denizli Prison

The Nur students who had been gathered together in Isparta were transported to Denizli by train. Handcuffed in pairs, they were packed into windowless coal and straw wagons. Nursi was handcuffed to a ninety-year-old villager named Hasan Dayı from the village of Sav near Isparta who was so weak Nursi virtually had to carry him.¹ Their handcuffs were not unfastened during the journey. Of the one hundred and twenty-six Nur students who were taken to Denizli² from all over Turkey, in all seventy-three entered the prison and the remainder were released.³ The students from Kastamonu, İnebolu, and Istanbul were brought some two months later. They were then put in with the long-term and condemned prisoners.

The prison was new and outside the town, yet despite this was more cramped and insalubrious than older buildings. It was built of concrete, and was dank and airless. With tiny windows that were heavily barred and high up, the cells and dormitories were in perpetual gloom. The electricity was of a very low voltage, and was on only a few hours out of the twenty-four. It was also infested with lice and mosquitoes. At night bedbugs and mosquitoes descended “like a fine rain” on the prisoners from the ceilings. Nursi was put in a cell so small a bed could scarcely fit in it. According to Selahaddin Çelebi, who was sent by the prison governor on one occasion to write out Nursi’s defense speech for him, it was airless and claustrophobic like a cave, and so damp the human body could scarcely withstand it. They had to work by the light of a candle. After one hour of writing down what Nursi dictated, he was completely exhausted.⁴ The cell had one small window that overlooked the long-term prisoners’ exercise yard. Since Nursi was in total isolation and his students and all the prisoners were forbidden to speak or communicate with him on pain of being beaten, he used to throw the notes, letters, and pieces he wrote out of this window to them. They were most often written on scraps of paper folded up inside matchboxes. When this was discovered by the prison authorities, they boarded up the window for a time. Nursi also sent them by means of a go-between named Arnavut Adem Ağa. When they received them, the students would start writing out copies. The cell was also next to the juveniles’ ward, and the delinquents were encouraged by the prison authorities to disturb Nursi, who was extremely sensitive to noise, and to strike up a din, particularly while he was praying or performing his worship.

When Selahaddin Çelebi, Mehmet Feyzi, and the other students from Kastamonu arrived, they were put in with the long-term and condemned prisoners. Among these was the prisoners' spokesman and leader, Süleyman Hünkâr, a person of considerable power and influence in the day-to-day affairs of the prison. Süleyman Efe, as he was known, was "reformed" and gave up his former bad ways. He became a loyal student of Nursi, and he struck up a close friendship with Taşköprülü Sadık Bey. Sadık Bey also had followed the fast life of a *derebey* till Nursi came to Kastamonu, and he had become his student. Although all Nursi's students and some of the prisoners worked continuously in those appalling conditions for the cause of religion and the *Risale-i Nur*, it was really through these two that it was possible for Nursi to organize it.

İbrahim Fakazlı from İnebolu described how the prisoners started to reform and perform the prayers. When Nursi had gone to make his ablutions, the prisoners had crowded at a window wanting him to speak to them. This happened three times, and Nursi ignored them. Then, the third time, he told them: "Go and wash!" So Süleyman Efe gathered together seventy to eighty of the prisoners; after asking them, "Which of you is dirty?" he harangued them and ordered them to take baths. Then the prisoners again asked Nursi to speak to them, so this time he told them to perform the prayers. When they said they did not know how to, he said he would send his students to teach them.⁵ In this way the greater part of the prisoners began to give up their former ways and to perform the five daily prayers. Nursi's students also taught them the basic rules of religion and how to read and recite the Qur'an. Together with the Kastamonu prisoners were a number of well-known *hojas* from Istanbul, among whom was Gönenli Mehmed Efendi, one of Turkey's best known Qur'an teachers. He also taught the prisoners the Qur'an. One named Mehmed, who had murdered four people, learned to read the whole Qur'an and memorized the last twenty-two suras, thus earning the right to lead the others in prayer.⁶ Others were taken away to be hanged while reading the Qur'an or performing the prayers, having been saved from every kind of vice and evil living. What a lesson for secular and humanist sociologists and reformers!

When the students from Kastamonu and İnebolu arrived at the prison, Sadık Bey immediately established good relations with the other prisoners, who according to Süleyman Efe were all "his men." Bold and generous, he won their respect and soon formed a team to carry out the necessary jobs for continuing the work of the *Risale-i Nur*. Through them it was possible for Nursi's writings to be distributed throughout the prison, and to be smuggled in and out of it. Süleyman Efe also secured a typewriter, and Sadık Bey and his team used to write out Nursi's defense speeches and other writings in the new letters and then have copies sent to various government departments in

Ankara or wherever Nursi required. He won Nursi's admiration and gratitude with this unparalleled service, which was reflected in the notes and letters he wrote him,⁷ and in his accepting Sadık Bey's soup. Nursi, who would accept nothing from anyone without giving something in return, was happy to live on the soups Sadık Bey cooked for him.⁸ It has also been recorded that the *Risale-i Nur* was smuggled in and out of the prison by a gendarme stationed there who came from the village of Kuleönü near Isparta. He would take the pieces copied out in the village of Sav for Nursi to correct and the presents his students sent him, such as the area's famous rose oil.⁹

Besides Nursi's letters and defense speeches, and indeed the students' own defenses, which had to be composed and written out, it was mostly *The Fruits of Belief* that was copied out in the prison. This, the Eleventh Ray, which Nursi described as "a fruit and memento of Denizli Prison and the product of two Fridays," consists of eleven pieces or "Topics," the last two of which were written in Emirdağ after Nursi was released. Addressing in particular the prisoners, each Topic explains some matter of belief such as knowledge of God, resurrection and the hereafter, and—particularly relevant to that situation—the question of death. It also forms a summary of the truths of the *Risale-i Nur*. The concluding part of the Eighth Topic was written during the Kurban Bayramı¹⁰ or 'İd al-Ađħa, the Feast of the Sacrifices, which in 1943 began on December 8. Numerous copies of this important part of the *Risale-i Nur* were made by Nursi's students and the other prisoners in Denizli, and it was the effect of this more than anything that led to the extraordinary reform of the prisoners. At first it had been written out and smuggled around the prison in the greatest secrecy, but when this improvement in conduct was noted by the prison authorities, they permitted copies to be made without restriction. It was also sent to the appeals court and relevant departments in Ankara as a defense of the *Risale-i Nur* and was instrumental in securing their acquittal.¹¹

Denizli Court

The same charges were made against Nursi and his students in Denizli Court as in Eskişehir. They included creating a new Sufi *tarikāt*, founding a political society, opposing the reforms, and exploiting religious feelings in a way that might breach public security. The Fifth Ray on Hadiths about the end of time, the treatise that had led to the arrests, was the prosecution's main evidence for their alleged exploitation of religion. Thus, on Nursi and his students being transferred from Isparta to Denizli, they were again questioned, and the Denizli prosecutor set up a committee to study the *Risale-i Nur* and produce a report for the court. Composed of two local schoolteachers com-

pletely unqualified to undertake such a job, they produced the report the prosecutor wished of them in a few days and the case was sent before the criminal court. Their report was superficial to a degree and contained the most shameful misrepresentations. Nursi objected to it vigorously, and setting out the errors and his corrections, presented them to the court together with a request for a committee of qualified scholars to be set up to examine the *Risale-i Nur*. After some delay, his request was accepted, and on March 9, 1944, all the material of the case was sent to the First Ankara Criminal Court. A committee of three established scholars was then appointed under the chief judge of the court, Emin Böke, and it set about studying in detail the entire *Risale-i Nur* and all Nursi's letters and those of his students.

In the meantime, the court hearings continued in Denizli. Nursi offered his defense and answered all the charges. His students also presented their defenses. Mehmet Feyzi noted that Nursi sent a petition to the court seeking permission not to attend on the grounds of illness, but when he saw the positive attitude of the chief judge, Ali Rıza Balaban, who had the courtroom arranged like an amphitheater, he took it back. And the judge did prove to be fair, both in the final outcome of the case and in allowing Nursi to sit while the court was in session, despite the objections of the prosecutor.¹² They walked from the prison to the court, a line of seventy handcuffed in pairs. It was the only time the students from the various parts of the prison could meet. Nursi was handcuffed to a different person each time. They were accompanied by more than thirty gendarmes with bayonets fixed, while the people of Denizli lined their route and expressed their sorrow and sympathy.¹³

Extracts from Nursi's Defense

Sirs!

I tell you with certainty that apart from those here who have no connection or little connection with us and the *Risale-i Nur*, I have as many true brothers and loyal friends on the way of truth as you could wish. Through the certain discoveries of the *Risale-i Nur*, we know with the unshakable certainty of twice two equaling four that through the mystery of the Qur'ān for us death has been transformed from eternal extinction into a discharge from duties, and that for those who oppose us and follow misguidance, certain death is either eternal extinction (if they do not have certain belief in the hereafter), or everlasting, dark, solitary confinement (if they believe in the hereafter and take the way of vice and misguidance). Is there any question more crucial for man in this world? I ask you! Since there is not and cannot be, why do you strive against us? In the face of your severest penalty we

receive our discharge papers to go to the world of light, and we await this steadfastly and resolutely. But we know as clearly as seeing it, like we see you in this court, that those who reject us and condemn us on behalf of misguidance will in a very short time be condemned to eternal extinction and solitary confinement and will suffer that awesome punishment, and out of our humanity we earnestly pity them. I am ready to prove this definite fact and to silence even the most stubborn of them. If I were incapable of proving it as clearly as daylight, not to that unscholarly, prejudiced committee that knew nothing of spiritual and moral matters, but to the greatest scholars and philosophers, I would be content with any punishment!

As an example, I offer *The Fruits of Belief*, which was written for the prisoners on two Fridays. It explains the principles and bases of the *Risale-i Nur*, and is like a defense of it. We are working secretly under great difficulties to have this written out in the new letters so as to give it to the departments of government in Ankara. So read it and study it carefully! If your heart (I cannot speak for your soul) does not affirm me, I shall remain silent in the face of whatever insults and torment you inflict on me in my present solitary confinement!

In short: either allow the *Risale-i Nur* complete freedom, or smash this powerful and irrefutable truth if you can! Up to now I have not thought of you and your world, and I was not going to think of it. But you forced me. Perhaps Divine Determining sent us here in order to warn you. As for us, we are resolved to take as our guide the sacred rule, "Whoever believes in Divine Determining is safe from grief," and to meet all our difficulties with patience.

Prisoner
Said Nursi¹⁴

Sirs!

I have formed the certain opinion due to numerous indications that we have been attacked on behalf of the government not for "disturbing public order by exploiting religious feelings" but behind a tissue of lies, on behalf of atheism, because of our belief and our services to belief and public order. One proof of this out of many is that despite twenty thousand people reading and accepting the twenty thousand copies of the parts of the *Risale-i Nur* over twenty years, public order has not been disturbed by Nur students on any occasion whatsoever, and no such incident has been recorded by the government, and neither the former nor the present courts have discovered such an incident. Had there been, such widespread, powerful propaganda would have brought it to light within twenty days. That is to say, contrary to the principle of freedom of conscience, article 163 of this ambiguous law, which embraces all who give religious counsel, is a bogus mask. Atheists

deceive certain members of the government, confuse the judiciary, and want to crush us whatever happens.

Since the reality of the matter is this, we declare with all our strength: O wretches who sell religion for the world and have fallen into absolute unbelief! Do whatever you can! Your world will be the end of you! Let our heads be sacrificed for a truth for which hundreds of millions of heads have been sacrificed! We are ready for any penalty and for our execution! In this situation, being outside prison is a hundred times worse than being inside it. Since there is no freedom at all—neither religious freedom, nor freedom of conscience, nor scholarly freedom—under the absolute despotism that besets us, for those with honor, for the people of religion, and for supporters of freedom there is no solution apart from death or imprisonment. We say, “We belong to God and our return is to Him,” and we trust in God!

Prisoner
Said Nursi¹⁵

Sirs!

[T]he Ankara committee of experts has confirmed our decisive reply to the charge of organizing a political society, so insistently made a pretext by you for our conviction, which you have decided upon, as may be deduced from the course followed by the prosecution. While feeling amazed and astonished at your insisting on this point to this degree, the following occurred to me: friendship, fraternal communities, gatherings, sincere associations that look to the hereafter, and brotherhood are all foundation stones of social life, an essential need of human nature, and the ties binding together all life from family life to the life of tribe, nation, Islam, and humanity; and they are means of support and consolation in the face of the assaults of the things material and immaterial that cause harm and alarm, which each person encounters in the universe and cannot combat on his own, and prevent him carrying out his human and Islamic duties. Now some people attach the name of “political society,” although there is nothing political about it, to the gathering together of the *Risale-i Nur* students around the teachings of belief, which is most praiseworthy and is a sincere friendship centered on the teachings of belief and the Qur’ān; is a certain means to happiness in this world, in religion, and in the hereafter; is companionship on the way of truth; and is cooperation and solidarity in the face of things harmful to the country and the nation. Most certainly and without any doubt, therefore, they have been deceived in some appalling manner, or they are extremely vicious anarchists who are both barbarously inimical to humanity and tyrannically hostile to Islam, and harbor enmity toward social life in the utterly corrupt and depraved manner of anarchy, and strive obdurately and intractably as apostates against this country and

nation, the sovereignty of Islam and sacred things of religion. Or they are satanic atheists who, working on behalf of foreigners to cut and destroy the life-giving arteries of this nation, are deceiving the government and confusing the judiciary in order to destroy or turn against our brothers and our country the immaterial weapons that up to now we have used against them—those Satans, pharaohs, and anarchists!

Prisoner
Said Nursi¹⁶

The “Fifth Ray”

The Fifth Ray played a prominent part in the Afyon trials in 1948–49, so a detailed discussion of it will be left to then, and here only one or two points will be mentioned briefly. As noted above and as Nursi told the court, the original of this treatise, in which they alleged Hadiths were used to prove Mustafa Kemal was the Sufyan or Islamic Dajjal—that is, the Antichrist who is to appear at the end of time¹⁷—had been written when Nursi first came to Istanbul in 1907, long before Mustafa Kemal rose to prominence. And its rough draft had been made some twenty-five years earlier, while Nursi was a member of the Darü'l-Hikmeti'l-İslamiye, in order to “save allegorical Hadiths from denial and strengthen the belief of those whose belief was weak.”¹⁸ Furthermore, Nursi had not allowed it to be published, and in the eight years he had been in Kastamonu only two copies had come into his hands, and these he had disposed of. The affair had started when some “rivals”—that is, the mufti and preacher who had informed on Atif Egemen in the province of Denizli in July 1943—had obtained a copy of it. At the same time, without Nursi’s consent, *The Supreme Sign* had been printed in Istanbul. The authorities, who had been informed of this, then confused this, the Seventh Ray, with the Fifth Ray. The matter was then blown up out of all proportion by Nursi’s enemies and resulted in the mass arrests and Denizli trials.¹⁹ In any event, it was cleared by the court at Denizli along the rest of the *Risale-i Nur*; and when the committee of scholars set up in Ankara raised a number of objections concerning it, Nursi pointed out why they were in error.²⁰ In fact, Nursi had wanted *The Key to Belief Collection* to be printed rather than *The Supreme Sign*,²¹ but he wrote in a letter that he “expected from divine mercy” that the attention drawn to *The Supreme Sign* in this way would in the future result in the victories it deserved.²²

The True Nature of the Case

These months of the trial in Denizli Prison were truly a testing for Nursi and his students. In addition to the physical distress and hardship it involved, it

was clear forces within the government were working for Nursi's execution and that of a number of his leading students. Their situation was one of extreme uncertainty. Besides the severe criticism of the first committee set up to examine the *Risale-i Nur*, Nursi mentions the attacks made on him and his followers by the education minister, Hasan Ali Yücel, and his publishing a manifesto against them.²³ The prime minister, Şükrü Saraçoğlu, was also directly concerned with the case. Furthermore, since it was really the *Risale-i Nur* that was on trial, both Nursi's defense and those of his students were defenses of the *Risale-i Nur*. And so, while for the most part Nursi's tone in his defense was mild and reasoning, when it came to exposing the plots against the *Risale-i Nur*, which were the cause of the trial, his words were anything but mild, despite the precariousness of his position.

It was this external pressure brought to bear on the case and the fact that the law was clearly being used as a shield and a means of suppressing religion that led Nursi to inform his students in a letter that "the real cause of the widespread, significant assault and aggression" against them was not the Fifth Ray, but *The Key to Belief, Hüccetü'l-Balğa (The Decisive Proof)*, and *Hizb al-Nürî*. These works with their convincing proofs of the truths of belief had defeated irreligion. Thus, "because the atheists had been unable to defend their way of absolute unbelief against the blows of these two keen diamond swords," they had presented the Fifth Ray as an apparent reason and deceived the government into moving against them.²⁴

Nursi's response to these covert moves to subvert the course of justice show what a brilliant tactician he was, and also his extraordinary grasp of the situation, although he had been for several months in total isolation in the prison. He took them by storm. He had sent to seven departments of government copies in the new letters of *The Fruits of Belief* and the defense speeches, and he had sent all the parts of the *Risale-i Nur* to the Ministry of Justice.²⁵ And then, when the education minister launched his attack at them, Nursi sensed that this was out of fear, and he sent to that ministry four boxes of various parts of the *Risale-i Nur*.²⁶ In another letter, urging his students to keep patience during these long-drawn-out proceedings, he pointed out what an event it was to have the *Risale-i Nur* being read by those who most fervently supported the regime. At the very least, the *Risale-i Nur* would moderate their absolute unbelief and so lessen the attacks on them.²⁷

The Acquittal

Then, when the situation of Nursi and his students seemed most grim and they were expecting Ankara to act most severely toward them, Nursi's move proved successful, and a relatively soft and even conciliatory position was

taken.²⁸ On April 22, 1944, the committee set up to examine the *Risale-i Nur* presented their unanimous report to the First Ankara Criminal Court. Their findings were positive to a degree far exceeding all expectations. They were forwarded to Denizli and a copy of the report reached Nursi.

The report stated that 90 percent of the *Risale-i Nur* was formed of scholarly explanations of the truths of belief and that these parts “did not part at all from the way of scholarship and principles of religion.” There was nothing in these to suggest the exploitation of religion, the founding of a society, or that there was a movement that would disturb the peace.²⁹ Nursi wrote in a letter to his students: “It is a manifestation of divine favor and instance of divine succor and preservation that, as I have heard, the committee of experts in Ankara has been defeated in the face of the truths of the *Risale-i Nur*, and that while there were numerous reasons for their putting forward rigorous criticisms and objections, they have quite simply given the decision for its acquittal.”³⁰

Almost as though to placate those in high places opposing the *Risale-i Nur*, the committee stated that the treatises marked as confidential, which they described as being “unscholarly,” had in part been written when Nursi was in a state of “mental excitement, ecstasy, or spiritual turmoil,” and that he should not therefore be held responsible for them. They wrote also that “there was a possibility he suffered from hallucinations in regard to hearing and sight.” As Nursi pointed out in the letter to his students, the rest of the *Risale-i Nur* was sufficient to refute such allegations. They showed as evidence for this titles like *The Thirty-three Windows* (The Thirty-Third Letter), the fact that Nursi heard his cat reciting the divine name of “Most Compassionate One!” and that in another treatise he saw himself as a gravestone!³¹

In addition, the committee put forward fifteen objections on scholarly grounds. These Nursi answered and showed to be errors on the part of the committee.³² The final and longest answers and corrections he presented to the court on May 31, 1944, the day the prosecutor made his final observations and summing up, and his requests for the sentences.

On June 16, 1944, the court reached its decision, Number 199–136. Largely on the strength of the committee’s report, it announced its unanimous decision for the acquittal of all the prisoners and their immediate release. The prosecutor insisted on the sentences he was demanding, and so the case was sent to the appeals court in Ankara. The request was denied, and on December 30, 1944, it confirmed the verdict of the Denizli court.³³

The Şehir Hotel

When Nursi and his students emerged from the court, the people of Denizli greeted them with cheers and cries of “Long live justice!” and accompanied

them to the prison, where they collected their belongings. The area outside the prison was like a festival. A string of phaetons came from the town to collect them. They were the guests of Denizli. The people took them into their houses in small groups and offered them the best of whatever they had. A merchant called Haji Mustafa Kocayaka, chosen by the people, had a large sum of money to distribute among Nursi's students, but none was accepted. And when they went to the station, he and many of the town's notables came to assist them and see them off onto their trains. Nursi and the *Risale-i Nur* had conquered the town.³⁴

On leaving the prison, Nursi moved to a room with fine views on the top floor of the Şehir Hotel, where he was to remain for one and a half months. Within one or two days, all his students had dispersed, returning to their hometowns and villages. As soon as he was settled, vast numbers of people came to visit him, five hundred or so daily to start with. Some of them continued their visits, one of whom was the writer and teacher Nureddin Topçu.³⁵ He had drawn the wrath of the education minister, Hasan Âli Yücel, by some writings and had been sent to Denizli by way of a punishment. Part of his interesting account of his visits to Nursi in the Şehir Hotel is as follows:

His name was to be heard everywhere in the town; everyone was talking about him. . . . After the acquittal, he settled in a room on the top floor of the Şehir Hotel. He was under very close surveillance. Everyone who visited him was followed in the same way and all their names were taken. They could only visit him for a very short time and had to leave immediately.

Nureddin Topçu used to visit him during the time of the evening meal when there was no one about and he could stay half an hour or so. He also knew the two teachers who had been appointed to produce the first 'experts' report for the Denizli court. Evidently they were very undesirable characters. He was impressed by Nursi's forgiving them, and offering to call them to religion:

Nursi was a truly great person; he said that he forgave them. It was a great virtue to be able to forgive people who had worked against him in a way that could have led to his execution.

He was a man of action, enterprising. He used to talk to everybody. He would explain his cause. He wasn't one for diffidence or hanging back. . . .

They brought the evening meal; it was a lavish spread. He returned it to the waiter who brought it and told him to give it to the poor. He had

some olives with him, and ate them and some bread. He told me that one loaf lasted him two weeks. He had a samovar he used to make tea with, and he would offer me some. He had just been released from prison. There was nothing in his room by way of belongings, only his works, both handwritten and in the form of proofs. Thousands of his handwritten books were being passed around from hand to hand. They were being written everywhere, in the villages and towns; everywhere copies of the *Risale-i Nur* were being written out. That was a heartening time; like the time the sun rises.

Around that time I went to the village of Güveçli near Denizli. His works were being written out in every house, in all the villages around, tens of thousands of pages, such was the eagerness and zeal.

He had a very manly and bold manner. His courage and excellence were immense. Then the things his brilliant mind discovered were extraordinary. He met disasters with patience and resignation. He had given himself to Allah. As a matter of fact, those works of his were the product of all these things. All Denizli was filled with an eagerness and enthusiasm. Friend and foe alike were struck with admiration for him. Denizli's night had turned into day. He had conquered it.³⁶

Nevertheless Nursi felt keenly his being parted from his students and brothers. Above all, Hafız Ali's death in prison had caused him great sorrow. The first thing he did on being released was to visit his grave. Selahaddin Çelebi was present, and he recalled how after the Qur'an was recited and Nursi offered a sad prayer, Nursi raised his hand and said: "This martyr was a star." Involuntarily all those present raised their heads, and in the sky a single star was shining.³⁷

Nursi described his state of mind as follows in the Tenth Topic of *The Fruits of Belief*:

After our release from Denizli Prison, I was staying on the top floor of the famous Şehir Hotel. The subtle, graceful dancing of the leaves, branches, and trunks of the many poplar trees in the fine gardens opposite me, each with a rapturous and ecstatic motion like a circle of dervishes, pained my heart, sorrowful and melancholy at being parted from my brothers and remaining alone. Suddenly the seasons of autumn and winter came to mind, and a heedlessness overcame me. I so pitied those graceful poplars and living creatures swaying with perfect joyousness that my eyes filled with tears. With this reminder of the separations and nonbeing beneath the ornamented veil of the universe, the grief at a world full of deaths and separations pressed down on me. Then, suddenly, the light Muḥammad had brought came to my assistance and transformed my grief and sorrow

into joy . . . [it] raised the veil; it showed in place of extinction, nonbeing, nothingness, purposeless, futility, and separations, meanings and instances of wisdom to the number of the leaves of the poplars, and as is proved in the *Risale-i Nur*, results and duties that may be divided into three sorts. . . .³⁸

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CHAPTER 14

Emirdağ

Nursi had been a month and a half in the Şehir Hotel in Denizli when the order came from Ankara that he was to reside in the province of Afyon, still in western Anatolia, to the northeast of Denizli. A letter dated July 31, 1944, written by the Denizli businessman Hafız Mustafa Kocayaka to Sadık Demirelli, who had sent Nursi some Kastamonu rice, states that Nursi had left that day in the company of a police inspector. He was in good health and content at the prospect of the move. The government had ordered that he be given the generous traveling allowance of four hundred liras.¹ Nursi was put up in the Ankara Hotel in Afyon for two to three weeks and then ordered to settle in Emirdağ. Thus, he arrived at this small provincial town set in high rolling hills in the second half of August 1944. It was to be his place of residence for the next seven years, till October 1951, except for the twenty months he spent in Afyon Prison from January 1948 to September 1949. Since it was in the month of Sha'bān that he arrived in Emirdağ, it was before the date of August 21, on which the month of Ramaḍān began that year.

Introduction

The first three and a half years of Nursi's stay in Emirdağ saw an intensification of his struggle with the forces that equated secularism with irreligion. Up to this time these forces had felt themselves to be in an unassailable position in Turkey. The acquittal in Denizli had taken them entirely by surprise; in the words of one writer, it came like a bombshell, and they did not know what had hit them.² It was a clear victory for the *Risale-i Nur* and religion, and a forerunner of its future victories. The fruits of Nursi's twenty years of silent struggle were starting to show.

Quite contrary to the intentions of those who had instigated the case, the widespread publicity of the Denizli trials and imprisonment of Nursi and the *Risale-i Nur* students led directly to a considerable expansion in activities connected with the *Risale-i Nur*. While up to this time activity had been mainly concentrated in two or three areas, now many thousands of people in different areas of Turkey became its students and began to serve it and the cause of the Qur'ān in various ways. The basic aim of Nursi's enemies was to

make both the local government and Ankara feel sufficiently apprehensive about Nursi and the Nur movement to act against them once again. One result of this was that all the attention was focused on Nursi himself, and constraints on him increased. Thus, despite the fact that he had been acquitted by Denizli Court and the *Risale-i Nur* had been cleared, the surveillance under which he was held was even stricter than previously, and the illegal harassment and ill-treatment more severe. However, Nursi wrote to his students that he accepted this “with pride,” as it meant it was his person that was concentrated on and harassed rather than the *Risale-i Nur* or its other students; it allowed them to continue their service of it relatively unmolested.³

A further reason for this increase in pressure, culminating in Nursi’s arrest and detention in Afyon Prison, was related to the changing conditions in Turkey, and may be attributed to the fact that, with increased American influence after the end of the Second World War and moves toward democracy and more religious freedom, the hard-line secularists increased their attacks somewhat in desperation as they felt the ground slipping away, that up to then had felt so firm.

Nursi followed up the advantage he had gained by the Denizli acquittals and the favorable impression made in official circles by the copies of the *Risale-i Nur* sent from Denizli. He did so by sending petitions to various high officials and members of the government informing them of the real nature of this struggle and the vital role the *Risale-i Nur* had to play in saving the country from the anarchy into which it was being pushed by forces working for the causes of communism and other supporters of irreligion, as well as informing them of the illegal treatment he was suffering at the hands of some officials.

Arrival in Emirdağ

Nursi arrived in Emirdağ on a hot August evening, shortly before sunset. A small group of people were sitting drinking tea in front of the government offices when a bus arrived in a cloud of dust from the direction of Afyon. Among them was the government doctor, Dr. Tahir Barçın, who also acted as district settlement officer. He saw the unusual sight of someone wearing turban and gown alight, escorted by two gendarmes. And even stranger, this elderly person in his seventies set about looking for a suitable spot, and on learning the direction of the *qibla*, spread out the prayer mat he was carrying and performed the afternoon prayers, an unusual sight at that time of religious persecution. It was a happy moment for the doctor, who as a young *medrese* student in Istanbul in 1922 had seen Nursi in Fatih Mosque. He now became a close student of his in Emirdağ and, when posted to Bitlis in eastern Turkey

for a year in 1945, was instrumental in introducing the *Risale-i Nur* to Nursi's native region, where many people thought he had not survived his exile.⁴

As in each place he was sent, Nursi attracted students who served him loyally, unhesitatingly sacrificing themselves and their property and position for him and the *Risale-i Nur*. In Emirdağ it was the Çalıskan family who took it on themselves to see to his needs and assist him. One of its six brothers, Hasan, was Nursi's first visitor in Emirdağ. Thereafter, the brothers and their families attended to all his personal needs, such as sending his food, for which he always paid, as well as doing everything necessary for the work of the *Risale-i Nur* to continue. In 1945, Nursi adopted as his spiritual son Ceylan, the exceptionally intelligent twelve-year-old son of Mehmed Çalıskan. He remained with Nursi, and in future years became one of the leading students of the *Risale-i Nur*.⁵

The house that was found for Nursi was in the center of the town, on a busy street near the police station and municipal buildings. With guards posted permanently at his door and windows, it was extremely difficult to visit him. At one point, when even the boy Ceylan was forbidden to assist him, the Çalıskan's made a hole into Nursi's house from the neighbouring shop in order to reach him. One of the immediate reasons for the renewed vigor of the repressive measures taken against him was that he refused the offers of a pension that the government now made him. On the acquittals, initially they had planned to follow a new line in order to silence Nursi; they planned to buy him off by offering him a regular pension and by building him a house according to his own specifications. They also sent him the traveling allowance mentioned above.⁶ After due consideration, Nursi wrote that in order to consult with his students, to not break his lifelong rule, and to preserve sincerity, he had refused these offers. The authorities were annoyed at his, and stepped up their harassment as a result.⁷ Life became so hard for him that, as he said, he suffered in one day in Emirdağ what he had suffered in a month in Denizli Prison.

As far as he was able, Ceylan attended to Nursi's needs in the house, such as making his tea and writing out his letters. As ever, Nursi liked to spend as much time as possible in the countryside, particularly in the spring and summer, and would walk out into the open stone-wall country around Emirdağ taking copies of the *Risale-i Nur* with him to correct. He was always followed and watched by a number of gendarmes. Later, when the burden of work became too heavy, the Çalıskans eventually found a phaeton, which Nursi then traveled in, usually taking just one student with him as driver. It became a familiar sight in the area. Despite his preoccupation and the efforts to isolate him, Nursi always concerned himself with the people he encountered. The children of Emirdağ and surrounding villages would flock round him and run after the phaeton whenever they saw it, shouting: "Hoja Dede

(Grandpa Hoja)!⁸ Nursi always acted very kindly toward them, saying that they were the *Risale-i Nur* students of the future. And just as he captivated them, so too he drew the people from every class that he met while driving round the country. He would tell the shepherds, workers, farmers, or whomever he met: “This work you do is of service to others; so long as you perform the prescribed prayers five times a day, all of it will become worship and benefit you in the hereafter.”⁹

The guidance and close concern Nursi offered these people had a considerable effect, for large numbers of those children did become Nur students in the future and serve the cause of religion and the Qur’ān. Similarly, in Emirdağ itself the honesty and uprightness of the shopkeepers, traders, and craftsmen became well known. Even a plainclothes policeman sent to spy on Nursi in 1947 remarked on this, when, while buying some butter, he saw the shopkeeper weigh the paper separately. He admitted, “It was Nursi that made Emirdağ like this!”¹⁰

The *Risale-i Nur*

Though Hafız Mustafa had written to Sadık Bey from Denizli that Nursi had left in good health, Nursi described himself as being extremely ill, weak, and wretched when a short time later he was settled in his house in Emirdağ in the month of Ramaḍān. In his first letter from Emirdağ he wrote to his students in Isparta, which he so loved that it was only their prayers that had saved him from “the severe illness” he had suffered as an effect of poison.¹¹ Notwithstanding his wretched state—indeed, perhaps because of it, since many parts of the *Risale-i Nur* were written when Nursi was suffering severe illness or distress—Nursi wrote the Tenth Matter of *The Fruits of Belief*, the first nine of which had been written in Denizli Prison. It was called “An extremely powerful reply to objections raised about repetition in the Qur’ān.” He said that he reckoned he had been inspired to write it because of “dissemblers, who, like silly children trying to extinguish the sun of the Qur’ān by blowing at it,” were attempting to have the Qur’ān translated in order to discredit it.¹² Nursi wrote also in the above-mentioned letter that he was sending them this Tenth Matter.

When writing to his students in Isparta at the end of March the following year, Nursi told them that he was sending them “a further part of ‘The Fruit’ concerning the Angels.” This was the eleventh and final part of the Eleventh Ray, *The Fruits of Belief*.¹³ The *Risale-i Nur* was approaching its completion at this time. With the exception of *Elhüccetü’z-Zehrā* (*The Shining Proof*), written in Afyon Prison, *The Fruits of Belief* was the last main piece to be written, and subsequently the *Risale-i Nur* was largely published in the form of collections.

At this time, the cause of belief was for the main part furthered by two collections, *The Staff of Moses (Asā-yı Mūsa)* and *Zülfikar*. The first part of *The Staff of Moses* consisted of the eleven parts of *The Fruits of Belief*. The second part consisted of eleven pieces from various parts of the *Risale-i Nur*, including the First Station of *The Supreme Sign* and the *Treatise on Nature*. *Zülfikar* consisted of the Nineteenth Letter, *The Miracles of Muḥammad*, and the Twenty-fifth Word, *The Miraculousness of the Qur'ān*. Printed in 1947 in Eskişehir was *A Guide for Youth*, the collection mentioned in a previous chapter; it was made up largely of pieces written originally for the schoolboys who became Nursi's students in Kastamonu.

The case of Nursi and his students at Denizli had been sent to the appeals court in Ankara on the prosecutor's demanding that the acquittals be quashed. The appeals court, however, had upheld the decision of the Denizli judges, reaching its (unanimous) decision on December 30, 1944. This was announced on February 15, 1945. With all these legal delays, it was not till June 29, 1945, that the Denizli lawyer acting for Nursi, Ziya Sönmez, was able to collect Nursi's books and copies of the *Risale-i Nur*. Hafız Mustafa then brought them to Emirdağ to hand over to Nursi.¹⁴

Legally there was no obstacle now for the publication and free distribution of the *Risale-i Nur*. In addition, since the Denizli trials the demand for it had greatly increased. All over Turkey people were seeking the *Risale-i Nur*. While in 1946 or 1947 Nur students in the Isparta and Kastamonu areas, Denizli, and other places were working furiously writing out by hand copies of *The Staff of Moses*, *Zülfikar*, and other parts of the *Risale-i Nur*, the Çelebis and other *Risale-i Nur* students in İnebolu bought one of the first duplicating machines to come to Turkey. When it was seen that this was successful, Tahiri Mutlu came from Isparta to see it and then returned via Istanbul, where he bought a second one. These two machines greatly facilitated the spread of the *Risale-i Nur*. They were bought and run by the students, who with considerable sacrifice pooled their resources, and were later financed from the sale of the books produced. They were used for the one and a half to two years till the arrests preceding the Afyon trials and imprisonment at the start of 1948.

The main parts of the *Risale-i Nur* to be duplicated on these machines by the Nur students were *The Staff of Moses*, *Zülfikar*, *The Illuminating Lamp (Siracünnur)*, *The Ratifying Stamp of the Unseen*, *A Guide for Youth*, and *The Short Words*. In addition to these collections were thousands of copies of other parts of the *Risale-i Nur* and the numerous letters Nursi wrote his students at this time directing these activities and on various other subjects.¹⁵ At the same time, the writing out by hand of all of these continued at full pace. Certain collections, mainly *A Guide for Youth* and *The Staff of Moses*, were now reproduced for the first time in the new Latin alphabet in order to make them immediately available to the younger generation. However, "Since an important

function of the *Risale-i Nur*” was “the preservation of the Arabic script, the script of the vast majority of the Islamic world,”¹⁶ for the most part it continued to be reproduced in that alphabet.

This much-expanded activity was to have far-reaching results, for now the *Risale-i Nur* found new students among the younger generation who were to be important figures in the Nur movement in later years. That the *Risale-i Nur* answers in particular the needs of people whose thinking had been molded by Western ideas and philosophy was proved by the fact that it now began to draw university students and teachers and others who had been through the educational system of the republic. Among these was the teacher in a village institute, Mustafa Sungur, who became one of Nursi’s closest and most influential students, and his “spiritual son.” Another was Mustafa Ramazanoğlu, a university student, and Zübeyir Gündüzalp, who worked in the post office and first visited Nursi in 1946. Although Nursi appointed no successor, since, as he said, the true *üstad* of the *Risale-i Nur* movement was its collective personality, Zübeyir Gündüzalp was to emerge as one of its leaders after 1960.

Moreover, at this time the *Risale-i Nur* began slowly to spread to the Islamic world. This was assisted when after 1947 it became possible to go on the Hajj. Copies of some of the collections were sent to al-Azhar in Egypt, to Damascus, and to Medina,¹⁷ and some were given to a Kashmiri religious scholar who agreed to convey them to the Indian ulama.¹⁸

So also Salahaddin Çelebi in İnebolu—Nursi called him Abdurrahman Salahaddin—struck up relations with some American missionaries. Over a period of months he read them *The Staff of Moses* and *Zülfikar* collections, and gave them copies.¹⁹

In the face of the growing threat of communism, in accordance with certain Hadith, Nursi advocated cooperation with truly religious Christians against this threat.²⁰ This is discussed in a later chapter.

Conditions

The writing of the *Risale-i Nur*, then, was virtually complete within a few months of Nursi’s coming to Emirdağ, and a large part of his time there was spent in correcting the copies of it sent to him, both handwritten and duplicated. This work sometimes even took up some of the time he set apart each day for worship and contemplation. In many of his letters directing his students’ activities, together with encouraging them and insisting on the continued importance of the handwritten copies, he urged them to pay attention to writing out the pieces accurately, so as to assist him in this laborious and time-consuming task. He constantly urged caution on them, and to act circumspectly, aware that their enemies were always seeking ways of halting their work.

Nursi's three and a half years in Emirdağ were truly torturous for him. This is clear from his letters. The people of Emirdağ and his students testified to the entirely unlawful and vindictive treatment he received. He was approaching seventy years of age when he arrived and suffered perpetual ill health, largely due to his periods in prison, the frequent times he had been poisoned, and his long years of exile and deprivation.

The aim of his enemies was to keep him under a cloud of suspicion and guilt so as to destroy his influence over the people. The isolation in which he was held and constant and oppressive surveillance were to this end, in addition to numerous incidents intended to belittle him in the eyes of the public. And when after Nursi had been in Emirdağ a short time, he started to draw people like in Denizli—in his words: “With the same situation starting here as in Denizli where on account of the *Risale-i Nur*, the people showed me regard far greater than was my due”²¹—his enemies increased the pressure on him and used official influence to conduct a propaganda campaign against him, so as to frighten the people off and keep them away from him.

“The dissemblers” also employed various plans and stratagems in order to provoke “an incident,” so that Nursi could be accused of “causing a disturbance and upsetting the peace” and the authorities could be made to come down on him with excessive force. The constant pressure under which he was held, the assaults on his person, especially on the pretext of his dress, and the raids on his house were to this end. In essence, these methods were no different than previously, and just as then they failed; what was different in Emirdağ were their frequency and severity.

The underlying reasons for the intensification of Nursi's efforts to publish the *Risale-i Nur* and the increase in the attempts to silence him and halt its spread may be found again in Nursi's letters, and from looking at his life.

In 1945, probably after the acquittals had been ratified and the confiscated copies of the *Risale-i Nur* returned, and before the duplicating machines were obtained, efforts had been made to have further parts of the *Risale-i Nur* printed, one of which was *The Supreme Sign*. The debate was now over the alphabet to be used, the old or the new. In consultation with his students in Isparta, Nursi decided to send Tahiri Mutlu to Istanbul to have *The Staff of Moses* printed in the new letters, and *Zülfikar* in the old.²² However, their enemies got wind of this and prompted various authorities to move against them and seize copies of the *Risale-i Nur*. For this reason, these two collections were not printed at that time.²³ In a further letter, Nursi explained “an important reason” for their decision to print part of the *Risale-i Nur* in the new letters.

He wrote that the time had come or would shortly come to print the *Risale-i Nur*, that is, publish it on a large scale, “in order to repulse two fearsome calamities that were threatening the country, of which it was “a sort of savior.”

One of these calamities was communism, against the racing tide of which the *Risale-i Nur* “could perform the function of a Qur’anic barrier,” while the second was “the severe objections” leveled at the Turkish people by the Islamic world, from which, since the founding of the republic, it had drawn away; The *Risale-i Nur* was “a miracle of the Qur’ān” that could be the means of restoring former love and brotherhood.²⁴

Nursi believed the threat to the Turkish nation of these “calamities” to be so real that rather than trying to suppress the *Risale-i Nur*, “patriotic politicians,” he thought, should have it published officially in order to counter the threat. But unlike during the previous twenty years of his exile and captivity, he wrote letters and petitions to high government officials describing the nature and severity of the threats, and urging them to counter them by returning to Islam and publishing the *Risale-i Nur*.

In essence, this was a continuation of the same struggle he had been pursuing since his youth, to have Islam and the Qur’ān be accepted by the country’s rulers as the source of progress and civilization, rather than the West and its philosophy. After the War of Independence, the path of Westernization was adopted, which had already been followed to some degree for over a century. Its aim was total Westernization, and it demanded that Islam be rendered ineffective, as we have seen. What emerged was what Nursi perceived as a battle between belief and unbelief. Up to this time during his years of exile, his role in this battle had been “defensive”; he had written numbers of treatises explaining and proving the basic truths of belief, which were then subject to fierce attacks in the name of science, philosophy, and atheism. He had sought to defend Islam and belief against these orchestrated onslaughts which had been conducted on many fronts: by publications of all sorts, by education in schools, by adult education programs, and so on. In a very low key and unobtrusive manner, the *Risale-i Nur* had been passed from hand to hand among the ordinary people, had been copied out by hand, and by degrees had spread till by 1945 he and the *Risale-i Nur* had many thousands of followers all over Turkey.

Now, in 1945, as a consequence of the path that had been taken, Nursi saw that the Turkish nation was in great danger: having been broken off from its natural support of the Islamic world in addition to being divorced and alienated from its own true identity of Islam, it would be unable to withstand and counter what he saw as the devious plans of the forces of unbelief, which step by step were being put into practice and would finally destroy it. The Turkish nation could only withstand these designs on it through the strength of the Qur’ān. Nursi, therefore, tried to take the offensive by having the *Risale-i Nur* published in the new alphabet and on a large scale.

At the same time, Nursi was not working against the government and established order. On the contrary, it was stability and social order that he was

aiming to preserve in the face of the two outside currents or “calamities” that were seeking to destroy public order, destabilize the country, and create anarchy. And he wrote a number of open letters and petitions to members of the government and government departments in order to alert them to the dangers.

One such letter was to Hilmi Uran, the interior minister until October 1946 and then general secretary of the Republican People’s Party. In it Nursi described the two currents, pointing out the inseparable nature of Islam and the Turkish nation and the grave error of trying to replace Islam by “civilization”—that is, of uprooting religion and imposing philosophy in the form of positivism and nationalism. The second of these currents was composed of the forces seeking to split up and divide the Islamic world, and “in order to bind its colonies in the Islamic world to itself,” was “working to corrupt the powerful Islamic center of this country by accusing it of being irreligious.” It was following a plan of severing Turkey’s relations with the Islamic world and turning its brotherhood into enmity. Through what in other places Nursi described as “atheistic committees (*zındıka komitesi*),” “secret organizations,” and “the forces of corruption,” it was seeking to establish “absolute unbelief” in order to create enmity toward the Turkish nation, “the heroic brother and commander of the Islamic world,” and for relations to be cut between them.

Communism, the other current, formed a real threat at that time. Having overrun all eastern Europe, its overwhelming presence to the north and aggressive stance toward Turkey pushed Turkey to join the West. Within Turkey, since the establishment of the republic, Moscow and its agents and sympathizers had been working for its spread. Nursi told Hilmi Uran that “if in place of the propaganda of civilization to the detriment of religion you do not work to spread directly the truths of belief and the Qur’ān,” the Turkish nation would fall prey to the anarchy underlying absolute unbelief; it would fall apart and disintegrate, and would be “overwhelmed by the fearsome monster that has appeared in the north.” Nursi pointed out in the above letter that it would be halted only by the Qur’ān and the Turkish nation, which was “fused with Islam and was one with it.”²⁵

It was with these covert forces working on behalf of the first current above, “the secret committees” and “atheistic organization whose roots are abroad,” that Nursi had been struggling since before the setting up of the republic, even since the days of the Constitutional Revolution. Seeing Nursi as an obstacle to spreading irreligion in Turkey, they had employed every device and stratagem to have him silenced. Some of these had resulted in the trials and imprisonment. Others were the attempts to poison him. Now in Emirdağ, their plans included mobilizing government influence against Nursi by means of certain officials.²⁶

Communism had gained considerable strength within the country since İnönü came to power in 1938. The policies he followed favored its spread, and

the setting up in 1940 of “village institutes” for the training of teachers were widely thought to be “nests of communist subversion.”²⁷ He was also thought to have appointed communist sympathizers to high office, though it is difficult to substantiate such allegations. When forced by the threat of Soviet aggression to turn to the West, İnönü was obliged to take the path of democracy and liberalization, leading to greater religious freedom; this also drove those secretly working for the communist cause to increase their efforts to silence Nursi and halt the spread of the *Risale-i Nur*.

Together with the problems and moral decline these two currents had already caused in Turkey, Nursi saw the real dangers for the future. He described them in a letter to “the minister of justice and judges of the courts concerned with the *Risale-i Nur*,” urging them “to protect the *Risale-i Nur* and its students” instead of striving against them, as the solution lay there. He pointed out to them that “the libertarians” thirty years before had advocated a loosening of the constraints of religion and its morality. The results of that were now apparent. In the same way, current developments would result in fifty years’ time in a fearful moral degeneration and dissolution of society. For, “Muslims do not resemble other people; a Muslim who abandons religion and departs from the high moral character of Islam falls into absolute unbelief, becomes an anarchist and can no longer be governed.”²⁸

Nursi argued that the “moral and spiritual” (*mānevī*) destruction of these forces could only be halted and countered by the truths of the Qur’ān and belief. Issuing from the Qur’ān, the *Risale-i Nur* was “a repairer of the strength of an atom bomb” and “a Qur’anic barrier” before those forces. With their “material” penalties the law and processes of justice could not arrest the dangerous currents.²⁹ Neither could politics or diplomacy. Thus, in his letters both to his students and departments of government, Nursi stressed the importance of “politicians and patriots embracing the *Risale-i Nur*.” Similarly, he frequently pointed out that it was these forces, which were themselves attempting to destroy order and create anarchy and thus were conspiring against the country, that continuously endeavored to create incidents and have Nursi and his students accused of the same thing. As had been established by courts of law, the *Risale-i Nur* and its students protected the bases of public order, preserved security, and prevented subversion and sedition.³⁰ And he wrote to the Afyon police headquarters: “In the near future, this country and its government will have intense need of works like the *Risale-i Nur*.”³¹

Increased Harassment and Prelude to Afyon

The swift spread of the *Risale-i Nur* over the three and a half years from 1944 to the beginning of 1948 and Nursi’s intensifying of his efforts to support his

cause by putting the case of the *Risale-i Nur* directly to the authorities and urging them to consider the seriousness of the situation drove the hard-line secularists to increase their pressure on him and the other *Risale-i Nur* students as part of a wider plan to halt their activities. This culminated in the third and worst large-scale imprisonment of Nursi and his students.

Sometime toward the end of 1947, the president, İsmet İnönü, visited Afyon and gave a speech, following which the pressures on Nursi were stepped up.³² He was reported to have said during his visit that “it is reckoned a disturbance connected with religion will break out in this province.” Nursi wrote in a letter that this pointed to the large scale of the conspiracy against them, and that—as previously—the aim of the harassment inflicted on him was “to provoke an incident and disturbance.”³³

Following this, the police moved against Nur students in the provinces of Isparta, Kastamonu, Konya, and many other places. Houses were searched, and investigations were started.³⁴

At the same time, Nursi was subjected to a series of entirely unlawful raids, assaults, and harassment. It is clear by this “making numerous mountains out of one molehill” that it was leading up to further arrests. On the orders of the interior minister, the governor of Afyon and chief of police came to Emirdağ at night with the intention of searching Nursi’s house. On the public prosecutor not endorsing this, they waited till the morning, then appointed two men to break the lock on the door and made a forcible entrance.³⁵ These two officials—that is, the governor and police chief—came five times over a period of ten days. On searching Nursi’s house they found nothing, but took his Qur’ān and some sheets written in the Arabic script. Two gendarmes were ordered to take Nursi to the police station. Having failed to anger him by raiding his house, they now tried again to provoke an incident by attempting to make a spectacle of him by trying to remove his turban by force and make him wear a hat in public when taking him to give his statement. They again failed. Nursi wrote: “Endless thanks be to Almighty God, for He bestowed on me a state of mind whereby I would have sacrificed my self-respect and dignity a thousand times for the unfortunate people of this country and repulsed calamities from them; I decided to endure what they did and the insults and abuse they intended. I am ready to sacrifice my life and dignity a thousand times over for the security of this nation, and the worldly tranquility and happiness in the next life of innocent children, the venerable elderly, and the unfortunate ill and poor.”

That day and the following day when Nursi went out in his phaeton into the country surrounding Emirdağ, he was followed by five aircraft.³⁶ It may be imagined how all this intimidated the people of the town.

At the beginning of 1948, Nursi was repeatedly summoned to the police station and government offices to give statements, and it was done in such a

way as to insult and degrade him. On one occasion, although ill and over seventy years old, he was kept standing for four hours while being asked facile and meaningless questions. As during the Denizli episode, that night were four severe earth tremors, the epicenter of which was Emirdağ.³⁷

As part of the buildup of this plan to halt the spread of the *Risale-i Nur*, three plainclothes policemen were sent to Emirdağ from Afyon to watch Nursi, establish who his students were, and learn their activities.³⁸ The senior policeman of the group, Abdurrahman Akgül, later related his experiences in some detail. A summary is as follows:

The three were briefed carefully, given false identities, and were to go entirely incognito, with not even their families knowing where they were. Abdurrahman was warned by the police chief not to annoy Nursi, for if he did, he would meet with trouble. The three arrived in Emirdağ on December 13, 1947. Only the gendarme chief there and Kaymakam³⁹ knew who they were.

Having been shown where Nursi's house was, the three sat down in a café opposite and started to watch it. A short while later Nursi appeared at the door, and some of his students came out. Abdurrahman commented on their youth. The students then came towards the café, spoke with the proprietor, and approached them. They told the three:

“Ustad sends you his greetings and wants to meet you.”

The three police were dumbfounded, and trying to cover it up, pretended ignorance. Eventually Abdurrahman sent one of the other two, Hasan, with them. A while later, he returned and told them what had happened.

Nursi first asked him his name. Hasan replied:

“Ahmed.”

To which Nursi said: “Look here, Ahmed. Promise me you'll tell the truth.”

“I promise.” Nursi continued:

“I received news that three police are being sent to investigate me. I have many students and friends. If you are those three police, say so, and I'll warn them so no harm comes to you.”

Hasan remonstrated, insisting that they were not police.

The following day, the same thing happened. Only this time, Abdurrahman sent both the others. Nursi spoke to them concerning belief and the Qur'an, then he offered them some *lokum*, turkish delight, and gave them handwritten copies of *The Staff of Moses* and *A Guide for Youth*.

Abdurrahman related how the third policeman, Salih, had written out a memo stating that “Said Nursi got one of his students to buy some liquor from the grocer,” but could get no one to sign it.⁴⁰ Salih received his just deserts for this: that night he himself drank too much, got into a fight, and was beaten up. He was found unconscious lying in the gutter, with his revolver stolen. As a

punishment, his superiors fined him three times the cost of the revolver, demoted him, and sent him elsewhere.

When it came to Nursi and his students being arrested, Abdurrahman described it like this:

Whenever Nursi went out in Emirdağ, all the people used to wait for him along his way and he would greet them smiling. While we were there, the governor and public prosecutor came to Emirdağ five or six times and carried out searches. Finally, one evening they rounded up ten people from their homes, and the [five] others from their places of work. They collected Nursi the following morning, then took them altogether in the police bus to Afyon. We returned to Afyon the same day, that is, on January 17, 1948. They stayed three days in the Emniyet Hotel in Afyon, and their statements were taken. Large crowds gathered in the vicinity during these three days. Then all the police surrounded the hotel and lined the route to the prison. The chief of police said that I was to take Nursi from the hotel. I put on my uniform, then said to him:

“How can I? He knows me. It will be terribly impolite.”

“So be it. Everything’s out in the open now,” he replied.

I went to the hotel with a number of police. They went inside and I waited at the door. When Nursi came out, he saw me at the top of the steps, and smiling, exclaimed: “Abdurrahman!” Then he patted my back, and said: “I still like you, because you do your duty.”

We took Nursi by way of empty streets to the prison, and his students by the route where the people were waiting. The court hearings continued for a long time. I, too, gave my statement, and said I had seen Nursi do nothing at all that was harmful.⁴¹

Although Abdurrahman Akgül states above that Nursi and his students remained three days in the hotel, it was the January 23 when they were officially arrested and put into Afyon Prison, so it must have been a week that the fifteen or so of them stayed there. During this time Nur students were rounded up in Isparta, Denizli, Afyon, Kastamonu, and other places and brought to Afyon, making a total of fifty-four who underwent the preliminary questioning. This coincided with a spell of cold weather rarely experienced even in Afyon,⁴² which has its own microclimate and where the temperature frequently drops lower than in other places.

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CHAPTER 15

Afyon

Afyon Prison

Thus, Nursi and the *Risale-i Nur* students entered their third School of Joseph (*Medrese-i Yusufiye*). And, as previously, they did transform it into a “school” through persisting in writing out copies of the *Risale-i Nur* and the long piece Nursi wrote, *Elhüccetü’z-Zehra* (The Shining Proof), and studying and instructing other prisoners, despite the conditions, which, in their harshness, far exceeded what they had experienced in Eskişehir and Denizli.

The years of Republican People’s Party rule were drawing to an end; in 1946 the Democrat Party had already been founded. As though to have a final strike at religion and Islam, to which they were now having to make concessions, they inflicted on Nursi, who virtually alone of all the leading religious figures in Turkey had persistently defied them, twenty months of the most terrible imprisonment. But he survived the inhuman conditions and lived to see the virtually free printing of the *Risale-i Nur* under the Democrat Party and the consolidation of his students into a powerful movement.

It is clear that Nursi and his students’ imprisonment and conviction were a foregone conclusion. After the acquittals of Denizli court, their enemies determined to have them convicted come what may, although this meant “being disrespectful to three major courts, slighting their honor and justice, and even insulting them.”¹ For the charges were the same. There are a number of things that suggest this. Firstly, as is pointed out in one description of life in Afyon Prison, it was stated “by a prime minister” in the Grand National Assembly during the debates on changes to the “elastic” article 163 of the Criminal Code with a view to making it more comprehensive and carrying heavier penalties² that this would be applied directly against Said Nursi and his students.³

Secondly, the account of the governor of Afyon Prison, Mehmet Kayıhan, shows that it was a foregone conclusion that Nursi would be imprisoned: “Since it had been established by the government that Said Nursi was making ‘religious propaganda,’ a policeman called Sabri Banazlı and some others were sent to Emirdağ in civil clothes. One day Banazlı came to the prison and said to me: ‘We’ll be bringing you someone called Nursi soon.’ Then sometime after this they brought Said Nursi to the prison.”⁴ That is, he

was informing the governor that Nursi was going to be sent to the prison before there had been any court proceedings or other formalities.

Then, once inside the prison, Nursi was kept in strict isolation. Rules benefiting prisoners were not applied to him. He was allowed no visitors. He was denied assistance with and information about the court proceedings, and to hinder his defense, the public prosecutor held up giving him the Ankara experts' report for six or seven months, though his own forty-six-page indictment was in part based on it.⁵

In addition, the prosecutor abused his office in various ways in efforts to indict Nursi and his students and drag out the proceedings. For instance, it is said he was involved in the creation of disturbances inside the prison. There was a revolt while they were there, but none of the students was involved.⁶ And he repeatedly delayed the proceedings; for example, he held up for three months the sending of all the documents of the case to the Appeals Court.

After the preliminary proceedings, the hearings of the case began some four months after their arrest and continued for six and a half months. Thirty of the Nur students were tried without being arrested, and a fluctuating number—nineteen at one point, including Nursi—were inside the prison. The decision reached by the court finding Nursi guilty on some of the charges, despite all the evidence, showed clearly its purpose. Although the previous committee of experts had exonerated the *Risale-i Nur* of anything legally reprehensible, this time the committee set up by the Directorate of Religious Affairs contained a number of negative points, also probably due to external pressure, and the prosecution in Afyon was able to utilize their findings against Nursi and his students.

Life in Afyon Prison

Nursi was in Afyon Prison for twenty months, and his students for periods varying from a few days to eighteen months; the majority were there six months, one group before the court passed sentence, and others after it. Although the summer months were passing during this time, many of the accounts speak of the intense cold.

As in Emirdağ, it was Nursi's person that was focused on and made the object of attack. And again Nursi's enemies unwittingly engineered their own defeat. For Nursi's sincerity and qualities were such that he willingly endured the extreme conditions and appalling distress he suffered for the sake of the *Risale-i Nur* and its students. He not only survived the conditions, he conquered them. Over seventy years of age, numbed by the cold, weakened from lack of food, on several occasions on the point of death from poison, alone, untended, suffering distress it is difficult to imagine, Nursi continued to write

for the guidance of his students and the other prisoners, spend his nights in prayer and contemplation, and not only compose his own defense but direct “a publicity campaign” of his and his students’ defenses, in order to make known the reality of the case and defend the *Risale-i Nur* against this latest attack. With his indomitable spirit, he defeated his enemies utterly.

The prison consisted of six wards or dormitories. On arrival Nursi was put in solitary confinement in a seventy-person ward on an upper floor that was in an advanced state of decay. It had forty small windows of which only fifteen had intact glass. Ill with fever, he was left entirely alone in this huge, draughty room in subzero temperatures with no stove or heating.⁷ Later, he was given a stove, but we learn from one of his defense speeches that after three and a half months in total isolation the public prosecutor had still not permitted his books to be given to him.⁸

It was the prosecutor and the governor of the prison, whom Selahaddin Çelebi described as a Gestapo chief, that prohibited Nursi’s students visiting him,⁹ even penalizing warders who were slack. Nevertheless, his students found ways of circumventing them and would go and assist Nursi. If caught, they were beaten or bastinadoed mercilessly.

Nursi’s students also willingly endured the appalling, primitive conditions in the crowded wards to serve the cause of the Qur’an and belief through the *Risale-i Nur*; they also faced with equanimity the abuse and ill-treatment they frequently received. Their *ustad* (master) was a perpetual source of strength and consolation for them. Some tell of how the sound of his supplications at night would console them.¹⁰ They all tell of his kindness, and even tenderness, toward them in prison. They would see him watching them from his ward on the upper floor when out for their exercise in the yard. He would drop down notes to them to cheer them up and inquire if anything appeared to be wrong.¹¹

During these twenty months, Nursi also wrote numerous letters, mostly short ones, to his students in the prison, in addition to his notes. These are about various matters concerning their life in the prison, like his letters in Denizli Prison. Most importantly, they urge the students to look on their imprisonment in positive terms in the light of divine wisdom, as a trial and test, which presented new possibilities for service to the Qur’an through the *Risale-i Nur*. When the trial dragged on and they were held for months in those conditions, Nursi frequently pointed out the benefits in this, since it “expanded the field of the *Risale-i Nur*,” and urged patience on them. Some of the letters concern the trial and direct the writing out of copies of the defense speeches and their being sent to various government offices and departments, and other aspects of the students’ “service.” Others warn them of informers and spies, and efforts to sow discord between them in order to break their solidarity. Also Nursi considered an important aspect of their “service” in prison to be the reform of the

other prisoners, and a number of his letters address them. Again, these showed their effect, for many of the prisoners did reform. They included hardened murderers like the famous Butcher Tahir.¹²

As for the students, they constantly sought ways of visiting Nursi, and they found various means of exchanging letters. They were dispersed through a number of wards. Each group formed its own *medrese* to study together the *Risale-i Nur* and give instruction to any of the other prisoners who wished. The students continuously wrote out various parts of the *Risale-i Nur*. A student named Mustafa Acet is typical of those who benefited from this *Medrese-i Yusufiye*. He was a relative of the Çalıskans from Emirdağ and his arrest had been a case of mistaken identity. He was arrested in place of someone called Terzi Mustafa. But during the eleven months this entirely innocent person spent in Afyon Prison, he learned from the *Risale-i Nur* students not only how to write the Qur'anic script, so that in subsequent years he was employed as a calligrapher by the Department of Religious Affairs, but also how to recite it, so that for ten years following his release from the prison he acted as imam in a mosque in Emirdağ!¹³

On the ground floor, the stone-floored wards measured twenty to twenty-five meters by eight to ten meters, with three lavatories opening onto the ward. If anyone wanted a bath, they had to find a can of water and take it in these latrines. There were usually seventy to eighty prisoners in any one of these wards. Some food was distributed by the prison, but this had to be paid for. Since the great majority of prisoners were local, they had their food sent and laundry done by relatives outside. But since the Nur students were from other areas and mostly had little money, they subsisted on the very meagerest of rations. İbrahim Fakazlı describes the *tarhana* (dried yogurt) soup that he subsisted on. The prisoners used to cook this soup on little braziers made of old tin cans. It was made with oil of such low quality that it was inedible if not first scalded. The *tarhana* was then added to this. He described how the stench of the scalded oil together with that of the latrines was so powerful it almost knocked him unconscious when he first arrived. He grew accustomed to it after two or three days.¹⁴ Part of the time, Nursi's food was prepared by his students and sent from the sixth ward, where Mehmet Feyzi, Hüsrev, Ceylan, and others were. Nursi would not eat the bread provided by the prison. Nevertheless he was poisoned on at least three occasions in the prison. There are heartrending descriptions of him on these occasions. In his account of Afyon, İbrahim Fakazlı mentions Nursi's pitiful condition and goes on to describe the extreme cold, and how the prison authorities finally moved Nursi temporarily to a crowded ward:

If we didn't see Ustad at the window, we would be very worried and wonder the reason. Whatever the price, we would find an opportunity to go

up to him and see. One bitterly cold winter's day, I slipped up to him [secretly] without being seen. Ustad was very ill. He stretched out his hand to me and told me to take it. I took it and kissed it. It was burning, and he could not stand the heat of my hand. He said: "İbrahim, I am extremely ill. I'm about to die. But I feel comforted that you're here." At that point Ceylan came. He repeated the same things to him. We wept in bewilderment. Ustad was weeping as well. We were completely at a loss as to what to do. He embraced both of us and bade us farewell, then he recited a lot of prayers for us and sent us away. On returning to the ward, we explained the situation to the brothers, and we recited a lot of prayers and read *Jawshan*.¹⁵ Later we realized that Ustad had been poisoned.

It was winter. Everywhere in Afyon was frozen, and communications were cut with its surroundings. The railway was closed. For fifteen to twenty days no food or fuel could reach the town, and there was no running water. It was not possible to heat Nursi's ward with its broken windows and gaping floorboards. That day, I saw Ustad under two blankets folded double with an oil can in front of him in which was a little bit of charcoal; there was also a kettle and a teapot.

While the innocent, elderly, and ill Nursi was freezing to death in his empty ward virtually open to the elements, the ward opposite was in a good state of repair, with cast-iron stove and hot water. Its inmates were a young man serving a life sentence for communism, a doctor convicted of rape, and a political prisoner. They received every sort of privilege; the communist was even allowed out into the town in the company of a guard.

The Nur students sent petitions to the prison authorities for coal and a proper stove for Nursi, but as a consequence they forcibly moved him to the fifth ward, the ward for pickpockets, thieves, and vagrants. It was as though they had taken pity on him, but alas, more in keeping with their usual ways, they knew he could not abide the crowded, filthy conditions and the noise, and that it would be even greater torment for him. However, the prisoners turned out to be more sympathetic: they divided off a portion of the ward with blankets, set up a stove in it, placed Nursi in it, and themselves did not make a sound outside. It became the warmest place in the prison, and it was here that Nursi wrote *Elhüccetü'z-Zehra*.¹⁶

The seriously ill and extremely weak Nursi wrote that it occurred to him there that since there were *Risale-i Nur* students in all the other wards, it was only in this fifth ward that the inmates were deprived of the lessons of the *Risale-i Nur*; so, saying "Bismillah," he began to teach the youths there in particular, explaining eleven brief proofs of divine existence and unity.¹⁷ As for the prisoners, they began to compete with each other as to who could do the most to assist Nursi, and many of them began to perform the five daily prayers.

Nursi was at first distressed at being moved to the fifth ward, although “it later turned into a mercy”; and he said by way of a warning to the prison authorities that they would suffer for it and that the cold would become even more intense. One of the prisoners who did much to assist him in the prison, a bookseller by profession, described how following this the temperature plummeted even further, so that all the drains also became completely frozen. The people in the town said that “they must have done something to the Hoja again.” At that point the prisoner and some others set up a stove in Nursi’s old ward and made it more inhabitable, and Nursi moved back there. A while later, a warm wind began to blow and the temperature rose and the ice began to thaw, whereupon the drain pipes began to split and burst, and the whole town, including the prison, was flooded by filth and water from the drains. It took days to clean everywhere and rid it of the stench. In this way, Nursi’s prediction was fulfilled.

Nursi then wrote the Second Station of *Elhüccetü’z-Zehra*, and this same prisoner, Kemal Bayraklı, describes how he would convey the parts of it as they were written to Husrev. He and the other Nur students would then immediately write out copies. When complete, these would be returned to Kemal Bayraklı, who being allowed his professional tools in the prison, would bind them into book form.¹⁸ This was all carried out in the greatest secrecy. Thus, the work of the *Risale-i Nur* was continued even in the conditions of Afyon Prison.

Nursi Is Seen Outside the Prison

While in Eskişehir¹⁹ and Denizli Prisons, and on several occasions while in Afyon, Nursi was seen outside the prison in a number of mosques. As was usual with his extraordinary powers and miracles, for want of a better word,²⁰ Nursi always virtually discounted them in regard to himself, concealing his own powers, and rather attributed them to the Qur’an or the *Risale-i Nur*. There are two accounts of his being seen in mosques in the town, one by a prison warder, Hasan Değirmenci, and one by a local inhabitant. The warder said: “Although Nursi was inside the prison, rumors started up that he was being seen in the mosques and in the marketplace. I did an ignorant thing at that time: I thoroughly cleaned and polished his shoes to see if they would get dirty or dusty. If they had got dusty, it would have proved that he had really gone. That’s youth and ignorance for you!”²¹

Hilmi Pancaroğlu, who lived in Afyon and visited Nursi when he was staying in the town after his release, gave this account: “While in the prison, Nursi asked permission to attend the Friday Prayers, but he was refused it. Then, when the warders looked into his ward, they could not see him. In a

panic, they started to search the mosques. Police went to various mosques, and different groups of them saw him performing the prayers simultaneously in the İmarat, Otpazarı, and Mısırlı Mosques. Only, when everyone came out after the prayers, they could in no way find him. Then, on returning to the prison, what did they see but Ustad in his ward. Most of the people of Afyon know of this event.”²²

Evidently in reply to a question on this matter, Nursi confirmed that it had occurred, but, as was mentioned above, considered it unimportant and wanted attention to be directed away from himself and toward the *Risale-i Nur*. He wrote:

One time a famous scholar was seen on numerous fronts in the war by those who had gone to the *jihad*. They said to him. . . . And he replied: “Certain saints are doing this in my place in order to gain reward for me and allow the believers to benefit from my teaching.” In exactly the same way, in Denizli it was even made known officially that I had been seen in mosques there, and the governor and warders were informed. Some of them were alarmed and asked: “Who opened the prison gates for him?” Then exactly the same thing happened here, but rather than attributing a very minor wonder to my own very faulty and unimportant self, *The Ratifying Stamp of the Unseen Collection*, which proves and demonstrates the *Risale-i Nur*’s wonders, wins confidence in the *Risale* a hundred or rather a thousand times more, and ratifies its acceptance. And the heroic students of the *Risale-i Nur* in particular ratify it with their pens and conduct, which are truly wonders.²³

The Flag Incident

One Republic Day, that is, October 29, while Nursi was in Afyon Prison, the prison governor, perhaps hoping to provoke an incident, had the national flag, the famous star and crescent, hung on Nursi’s ward, obviously believing that Nursi would be displeased or discomforted by this, and maybe try to have it removed. How little these officials understood Nursi! Nursi, who had been “a religious republican” since an early age, had spent his entire life striving for the good and salvation of the Turkish nation and country, both on the battlefield and with his pen. So Nursi wrote the governor a letter. It went like this:

Sir!

I thank you for having the flag of the Independence Holiday hung on my ward. During the National Action in Istanbul, Ankara knew that I had

performed the service of maybe a military division through publishing and distributing my work *The Six Steps* against the British and Greeks, for twice Mustafa Kemal notified me in cipher wanting me to go to Ankara. He even said: "We have to have this heroic *hoja* here!" That is to say, it is my right to hang this flag this holiday!

Said Nursi²⁴

Afyon Court

Just as in the prison Nursi and his students were abused and ill-treated in ways that were entirely unlawful, so too in the trial the law was subverted and exploited in the clear purpose of the court to convict Nursi whatever the reality of the case. As the tide was turning against them, the trial and imprisonment were a last, futile attempt to silence Nursi and stem the flood turning to the Qur'an and Islam due to the teachings of the *Risale-i Nur*. A certain desperation was evident in the fact that the same charges on which Nursi and his students had been declared innocent were again put forward (Nursi described them as "collecting water from a thousand streams"): "exploiting religious feelings in a way that might disturb public order," "founding a secret society for political ends," "forming a new Sufi *tarik*," "criticizing Mustafa Kemal and his reforms," and "spreading ideas opposed to the regime." And again Nursi was accused of being "a Kurdish nationalist," a charge so far from the truth that more than anything it shows the lengths the authorities were prepared to go to in order to discredit him.

Two points the prosecution made much of in regard to "inciting the people in ways that might disturb the peace" concerned the Fifth Ray, which explains a number of Hadiths alluding to the Sufyan and Dajjal and events at the end of time, and which the authorities again interpreted as referring to Mustafa Kemal. It unfortunately received support for this from the experts' report. Related to this was the "hat" question. The brief passages in the Twenty-Fifth Word explaining Qur'anic verses about Islamic dress and inheritance were alleged to be inflammatory, as in Eskişehir Court. But if there was some sort of conspiracy, it backfired, for rather than arousing hostility toward Nursi, the *Risale-i Nur*, and religion, the widely publicized trial and imprisonment aroused sympathy. In fact, public indignation was such at the heartless, inhuman, and unlawful treatment suffered by the entirely innocent Nursi and his students that it has been suggested that it contributed to the defeat of RPP in the 1950 elections.²⁵

Since the charges were the same as in Eskişehir and Denizli Courts, Nursi was able to reuse a part of his former defense merely changing some of the wording. Once again he clearly disproved the charges and demonstrated

that neither the *Risale-i Nur* nor the activities of himself and his students had contravened the law. The following are some extracts from his defense speeches. The first reply to charges related to the political society and public order:

The 130 parts of the *Risale-i Nur* are there for all to see. Understanding that they seek no worldly goal and follow no aim other than the truths of belief, Eskişehir Court did not object to them with the exception of one or two of the parts, and Denizli Court objected to none at all, and despite being under constant surveillance for eight years the large Kastamonu police force could find no one to accuse apart from my two assistants and three others on pretexts. This is a decisive proof that the *Risale-i Nur* students are in no way a political society.

If what is intended by “society” in the indictment is a community concerned with belief and the hereafter, we say this in reply: If the name community is given to university students and tradesmen, it may also be applied to us.

But if you call us a community that is going to disturb public order by exploiting religious feelings, in response we say: The fact that in no place over a period of twenty years in these stormy times *Risale-i Nur* students have infringed or disturbed public order, and the fact that no such incident has been recorded by either the government or any court, refutes this accusation.

If the name community is given meaning it might harm public security in the future through strengthening religious feelings, we say this: Firstly, the Directorate of Religious Affairs and all preachers perform the same service. Secondly, the *Risale-i Nur* students protect the nation from anarchy with all their strength and conviction, and secure public order and security; they do not disturb them.

Yes, we are a community, and our aim and program is to save ourselves and then our nation from eternal extinction and everlasting solitary confinement in the intermediate realm, and to protect our compatriots from anarchy and lawlessness, and to protect ourselves with the firm truths of the *Risale-i Nur* against atheism, which is a means of destroying our lives in this world and in the next.²⁶

Nursi frequently stressed in his defense speeches that the nature of their service to the Qur’an prohibited them from participating in politics; it was those opposed to the positive and constructive social results of this service who repeatedly accused them of political involvement:

We students of the *Risale-i Nur* do not make the *Risale* a tool for worldly [political] currents, not even for the whole universe. Furthermore,

the Qur'an severely prohibits us from politics. For the *Risale-i Nur*'s function is to serve the Qur'an through the truths of belief and through extremely powerful and decisive proofs, which in the face of absolute unbelief that destroys eternal life and also transforms the life of this world into a ghastly poison will bring even the most obdurate atheist philosophers to belief. Therefore we may not make the *Risale-i Nur* a tool for anything.

Firstly: We are prohibited from politics lest we give the false idea of political propaganda and so reduce to pieces of glass in the view of the heedless the diamond-like truths of the Qur'an.

Secondly: Compassion, truth and right, and conscience, which are fundamental to the *Risale-i Nur*'s way, prohibit us sternly from engaging in politics and interfering in government. For, dependent on one or two irreligious people fallen into absolute unbelief and deserving of slaps and calamities are seven or eight innocents—children, the sick, and the elderly. If slaps and calamities are visited on the one or two, those unfortunates suffer also. The result being thus doubtful, we have been prohibited from interfering by way of politics in social life, which would be detrimental to government and public order.

Thirdly: Five principles are necessary at this strange time in order to preserve the social life of this country and nation from anarchy: respect, compassion, refraining from what is prohibited (*haram*), security, and the giving up of lawlessness and obedience [to authority]. Evidence that when the *Risale-i Nur* looks to social life it establishes and strengthens these five principles in powerful and sacred fashion and preserves the foundation stone of public order is that over the last twenty years it has made one hundred thousand people into harmless, useful members of this nation and country. The provinces of Isparta and Kastamonu bear witness to this. This means that knowingly or unknowingly the great majority of those who object to the *Risale-i Nur* are betraying the country and nation and dominance of Islam on account of anarchy.²⁷

In response to the repeated charge of forming a *tarikât*, Nursi said:

The basis and aim of the *Risale-i Nur* is certain belief and the essential reality of the Qur'an. For this reason, three courts of law have acquitted it in regard to being a *tarikât*. Furthermore, not one person has said during these twenty years: "Said has given me *tarikât* [instruction]." Also, a way to which for a thousand years most of this nation's forefathers have been bound may not be made something for which [the members of the nation] are indictable. Also, those who combat successfully those secret dissemblers who call the reality of Islam a *tarikât* and attack this nation's religion may not themselves be accused of being a *tarikât*.²⁸

Of all the trumped-up charges, the most obviously false was that of Kurdish nationalism. Nursi as the Old Said had striven to maintain and strengthen the unity of the Ottomans, and as the New Said in his years of exile had again sacrificed himself for the salvation of the Turkish nation. In spite of this, the court found Nursi guilty on this charge—"the blood of Kurdish nationalism is still boiling in his veins." It was clear contempt of justice in the name of the law.

Can any court in the world accuse me of such a thing? . . . [A]lthough Said left his native country and relatives and sacrificed his spirit and life for the religious Turks and this Muslim nation . . . [can such a thing be said] of someone who, in the face of twenty-eight years of torment and torture has not been shaken one iota in his sincere brotherhood with the Turks; and whom no court in the world can accuse of this; and who, since racialism has no true reality and is harmful to Islamic brotherhood, has for fifty years said: "Islamic nationhood is equal to everything," and has supported that nationhood; and who has said: "Give up racialism and take up Islamic nationhood, which gains for you four hundred million brothers!" and who has always taught this?²⁹

A further matter the court found Nursi guilty of was related to his explanations of a number of Islamic laws concerning women. In his defense to the appeals court, he wrote defending this:

One reason they gave for punishing me was my commentary on the Qur'an's explicit verses about veiling, inheritance, recitation of the divine names, and polygamy, written to silence those who object to them [in the name of] civilization. . . .

I say this: if there is any justice on the face of the earth, [the Appeals Court] will quash this decision which convicts someone who expounded [Qur'anic verses] that every century for 1,350 years have been held to be sacred, true divine principles in the social life of 350 million Muslims, and expounded them relying on the consensus and affirmation of 350,000 Qur'anic commentaries and following [what have been] the beliefs of our forefathers for 1,300 years. Is it not denial of Islam and betrayal of our millions of religious, heroic forefathers to convict, because he expounded those verses, someone who according to reason and learning does not accept certain European laws applied temporarily due to certain requirements of the times and who has given up politics and withdrawn from social life, and is it not to insult millions of Qur'anic commentaries?³⁰

The Experts' Report

While the preliminary questioning was being carried out by the public prosecutor and examining magistrate after the arrests of Nursi and his students, the collections of the *Risale-i Nur*, such as *Zülfikar*, *The Staff of Moses*, *The Illuminating Lamp (Sirac-ün-Nur)*, and *A Guide for Youth*, as well as letters and other documents were all sent to the Directorate of Religious Affairs in Ankara to be scrutinized by another committee of experts. Although it produced its report in a short time, presenting it to Afyon Court on March 16, 1948, due to the prosecutor's interference it was not for several months that Nursi was able to obtain a copy of it. This time the committee bowed to pressure from the government and included two main points that the prosecution was able to use against Nursi,³¹ although only three years before the previous "experts" had cleared the *Risale-i Nur*. Nevertheless, importantly, they rejected the charges of forming a *tarikât*, organizing a political society, and disturbing public order, and concentrated their objections, which Nursi described as, "unfair, incorrect, and unjustifiable," on the Fifth Ray.³² The second point they raised, also entirely unfair and mistaken but one that, out of fear, Nursi's enemies frequently leveled at him, was being "conceited and vainglorious," by which was meant building up, by means of his students' good will toward him, a position of personal prestige and power.

Nursi answered these objections the committee raised in the "Thank-you Letter," in which he firstly expressed his gratitude to them for exonerating him of the main charges. He then pointed out in scholarly and reasoned fashion the errors in their objections to the Hadiths in the Fifth Ray and his interpretation of them. Since together with the few lines on inheritance and Islamic dress this was the one part of the *Risale-i Nur* that was made the pretext for this court case and numerous subsequent cases—since the authorities interpreted it as attacking Atatürk, it is worth mentioning here the history of this extraordinary treatise, which illustrates one reason why Nursi earned his name Bediuzzaman (Wonder of the Age) and also how this frequently resulted in rivalry and jealousy on the part of other religious scholars.

The Fifth Ray had its origins over forty years previously. Nursi had come to Istanbul in 1907 before the Constitutional Revolution; and at that time, when the "prodigy from the East" had put a notice on his door saying "Here all questions are answered, but none are asked," the Istanbul ulama put some questions to him about some allegorical Hadiths referring to the end of time, which had been asked them by the visiting Japanese commander-in-chief. Then, when a member of the Darü'l-Hikmeti'l-İslamiye after the First World War, in reply to some further questions on the same subject, Nursi arranged these replies roughly in the form of a treatise, the purpose of which was to save believers from doubts about the allegorical Hadiths, which super-

ficially appeared to be unconformable with reason.³³ Then, in 1922 he was invited to Ankara by Mustafa Kemal, and he saw part of what these Hadiths foretold “in someone there,” and for that reason felt compelled to refuse the offers made to him by Mustafa Kemal of various posts, and withdrew from politics and the world to eastern Anatolia in order to work “solely on the way of saving belief.” And again on being asked questions about these allegorical Hadiths foretelling events at the end of time when in exile in Kastamonu in 1938, Nursi arranged this treatise in its final form, and it was incorporated into the *Risale-i Nur* as the Fifth Ray.³⁴ That is to say, as time unfolded, the interpretations of some of these Hadiths that Nursi had given as far back as 1907 were realized; what they prophesied was fulfilled.

For example, one of these Hadiths says: “A fearsome individual at the end of time will rise in the morning and on his forehead will be written: ‘This is a *kafir*.’” In 1907, Nursi had interpreted this as: “This extraordinary individual will come to lead this nation. He will rise in the morning and put on a hat, and he will make others wear hats.”³⁵ “The Sufyan will put on a European hat, and make others wear [similar hats]. But because this will be by compulsion and force of law, the hat will made to prostrate [before God] and, God willing, will be rightly guided, and by wearing it—unwillingly—everyone will not become *kafirs*.”³⁶

It was for this reason—because of its topicality—that Nursi had suppressed the treatise and not permitted it to be circulated. It was only after the entire *Risale-i Nur*, including the Fifth Ray, had been declared legally innocuous by the previous committee of experts and Denizli Court that he had allowed it to be duplicated.

Now, the present committee of experts leveled criticisms at the Fifth Ray that Nursi described as “unfair, mistaken, and unjustifiable.”³⁷ These centered on the nature of the Hadiths, which they said were either “unsound” or “weak,” and on his interpretation of them. In his “Thank-you Letter,” Nursi answered these criticisms with little difficulty.³⁸ Besides this, Nursi described these criticisms as arising from jealousy and “a vein of Wahhabism,” which points to the reasons for their second point of objection, which was equally mistaken. They criticized the eulogies written to Nursi and the *Risale-i Nur* by some of his students.

Concerning the eulogies, Nursi pointed out that it was a long-standing custom among scholars and literary people to write such pieces about one another’s work, and for these to be included at the ends of the works when they first appeared. If they had been directed toward himself, Nursi had changed them to refer to the *Risale-i Nur*. In any event, time was proving what was written about the *Risale-i Nur* to be true. And even if what they wrote had been excessively exaggerated or even wrong, it would still only have been a scholarly error, and everyone was entitled to his own opinion. Nursi went on

to gently put three questions to the experts from the Directorate of Religious Affairs, suggesting that they were busying themselves with trifles while religion and the Qur'an were suffering the awesome attacks of the present, or were even assisting those attacks.³⁹

Nevertheless, despite the unfair criticisms in the report and their consequences, Nursi maintained a positive attitude toward the Directorate of Religious Affairs, marked by the "Thank-you Letter" above and the fact that in addition to other government departments, he arranged for copies of the defense speeches to be sent to it.⁴⁰ In fact, previous to their arrests, and subsequently, he sent students to them to seek their cooperation.⁴¹

The Trial Continues

Another fact supporting the claim that the trial was an officially backed conspiracy against Nursi and the *Risale-i Nur* movement was that he was denied all sorts of legal rights in the trial. In addition to being denied access to such important documents as the report, he was even frequently denied the right to speak in the court itself. His being totally isolated for the first eleven months of his imprisonment, during the trial, was clearly both to prevent him from receiving information and helping his students. Thus, he was also often not allowed anyone to assist him with the writing out of his defense. Of course, Nursi never used the Latin alphabet, so he was dependent on his students or others for the reading of all official documents, and also the writing of any document or letter that had to be presented to the court or authorities. As with his dress, he refused to compromise. Since the Ottoman script was now illegal and invalid, when his signature was necessary on official papers, they used either his fingerprint or a rubber stamp with his name on it in the new letters.

Nevertheless, Nursi and his students were not in any way intimidated by the wrongs and injustices they suffered. A gendarme who served both in the Emirdağ and Afyon courts, İbrahim Mengüverli, described how on one occasion Nursi rose to speak in court and continued for two hours. Then, when the judge told him that was enough, "Nursi grew exceedingly angry, traced a circle in the air with his hand and jabbed his forefinger at the judge, saying: "I have the right to speak for eight hours. I'll speak for as long as I want."⁴²

There were three lawyers who acted as defense lawyers for Nursi and his students at Afyon. One of these, Ahmet Hikmet Gönen, also a student of Nursi, described the defense speeches of the *Risale-i Nur* students. They all gave their own defenses in the court, as well as writing petitions. Two were particularly noteworthy: Zübeyir Gündüzalp's and Ahmet Feyzi Kul's. The latter's, which continued for a full eight and a half hours, earned him the name of "the *Risale-i Nur* Lawyer" from Nursi.⁴³

Nursi also insisted on his right to perform the prayers at the appropriate times when the court was in session. Several witnesses have described such occasions in their accounts. One was the above lawyer. Another was Mustafa Acet from Emirdağ. He described how, during one hearing, the time for the prayers was passing, so presumably not having been allowed to leave the court earlier for five minutes, Nursi said angrily to the prosecutor: "We're here in order to protect the rights of the prayers. We are not guilty of anything else!" And he immediately got up and walked out. The usher hurried out after him, and he performed the prayers in the secretary's office.⁴⁴

The trials aroused great interest countrywide, and numbers of people flocked to Afyon from all over.⁴⁵ One of Nursi's students tells how, on one occasion, Nursi emerged from the court and a great mass of people moved forward to kiss his hand. "[T]hen in turn they started to kiss it. At that point the public prosecutor came out and unable to stomach such a situation, roared at the police and gendarmes: 'Why are you permitting this?' Nursi was exceedingly angry at this, and said in a loud voice: "What's this? What's this? I'll meet with my brothers if I want!' And he grew so excited his turban fell off. We picked it up off the ground and put it back on his head. Scared out of his wits, the prosecutor made off without looking behind him. But in order to provoke an incident, he kicked somebody's leg. This brother felt no pain. But we looked at his leg later, and it was all purple and bruised."⁴⁶

At the same time, Nursi was not content to allow the injustices of the trial to pass unnoticed. As in Denizli, he arranged through his students for copies of his defense speeches, and also those of his students and copies of his table of the ninety errors in the indictment and his answers, to departments of government in Ankara, in order to make known the reality of the case. But in Afyon he endeavored to organize the response on a larger scale, sending copies also to Isparta for his students there to duplicate and to be shown to the public prosecutor, and also to Denizli and Istanbul. These were also made into book form and distributed. He instructed them to send copies to the Directorate of Religious Affairs in Ankara.⁴⁷

This operation had to be organized in secrecy and under the difficult conditions of the prison. The copies that Nursi wanted produced in the new letters had to be typed out on typewriters, but here, unlike Denizli, they were not permitted. Their lawyer, Ahmed Bey, assisted them with this, Nursi stressing in his letters the need for accuracy. A soldier stationed in Afyon named Nihad Bozkurt, who used to visit a friend in the prison twice a week, also typed out the defense speeches for them.⁴⁸

At one point, the court had reproduced parts of the indictment "that they imagined were against" Nursi and his students. In response to this propaganda campaign, which was undoubtedly an abuse of the court's powers and was aimed at turning public opinion against Nursi, Nursi had duplicated copies of

his table of the errors in the indictment that were little more than slander, in order to have them distributed, and also further copies of their defenses so as to inform people of the truth of the matter.⁴⁹

The Court's Verdict

With all the delays and holdups, the court finally announced its verdict on December 6, 1948. Disregarding all the evidence, it found Nursi guilty under article 163 of the Criminal Code of, "exploiting religious feelings and inciting the people against the government." That a court of law should have allowed itself to be used in this blatant miscarriage of justice was a denigration of the law itself and a disgraceful episode in Turkish legal history.⁵⁰ It sentenced Nursi to two years' "penal servitude," which was reduced to twenty months due to his age. Ahmed Feyzi Kul, who had made the long defense, was sentenced to eighteen months, and twenty of Nursi's other students to six months each. Some of these had already been inside the prison for eleven months, others for less. Those who had served their terms were released, while others who had been tried without being arrested were now arrested and put inside.

Then began a long-drawn-out legal wrangle that did not reach a final conclusion until 1956. On the court's passing sentence, the case was immediately sent to the appeals court in Ankara, but as mentioned earlier, the prosecutor delayed the sending of the documents, only sending them on the intervention of the three lawyers.⁵¹ In the prison the injustices against Nursi continued, or were even increased, for it was at this time that the weather became so cold and he was forcibly moved to another ward.⁵² Both he and his students wrote further defenses and pieces to be sent to the appeals court. The lawyers gave the defense in the appeals court, which gave its decision on June 4, 1949: since Said Nursi had been acquitted on the same charges by Denizli Court, and this decision had been confirmed by the appeals court, it quashed the decision of Afyon Court.

Although Nursi and his students should have been released at this point, Afyon Court reassembled on the case being referred back to it. They were asked what they wanted. On their replying that they wanted the appeals court's decision to be applied, the court withdrew for prolonged consideration. Finally, it had no choice but to agree. But then, on August 31, 1949, the decision was taken to retry the case, and hearings began once again. In this way, with continual postponements and delays, and in an entirely unlawful manner, Nursi was made to serve the full twenty months the court had originally sentenced him to. Only when he had completed this term did they release him. His students also were released on completing their sentences. In

this way, the tyrannical and obdurate prosecutor perpetrated what was no less than a crime on these innocent people right up to the very last moment he was able. And when it came to releasing Nursi, they did not permit him to leave the prison at the normal hour, but just before dawn.

The story of Afyon Court does not finish here; the hearings continued with the accused *in absentia*, until the general amnesty announced after the victory of the Democrat Party in the 1950 general elections. But even then the prosecutor would not let the matter rest; he insisted on the works in question—the *Risale-i Nur*—being separated from the criminal proceedings and the continuation of the case. Thus, the trial of the *Risale-i Nur* continued.

The court finally reached a decision that copies of the *Risale-i Nur* should be confiscated. The case was sent to the appeals court. The appeals court again quashed Afyon Court's decision. Afyon Court had no choice now but to comply with the appeals court's judgment and acquit the *Risale-i Nur*. But the prosecutor would not accept this, and he sent this decision before the appeals court. This time, the appeals court quashed Afyon Court's latest decision due to some technicalities. The case continued. Then Afyon Court ruled that the *Risale-i Nur* should be acquitted and copies returned to their owners. Whereupon the prosecutor again sent the case to the appeals court.

This time the appeals court decided that the entire *Risale-i Nur* should be rescrutinized by a committee of experts, and the Directorate of Religious Affairs was directed to set one up. A new committee produced a report. And finally, relying on this report, in June 1956, Afyon Court cleared the *Risale-i Nur* and ruled that all the confiscated copies should be returned to their owners. This time the prosecutor admitted his defeat, and the decision was made final.⁵³

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PART III

The Third Said

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CHAPTER 16

Consolidation of the Nur Movement and “*Jihād* of the Word”

We come now to the last ten years of Nursi’s life and the last of its three main stages—in Nursi’s own words, that of the Third Said. The Third Said is generally defined in terms of changes Nursi made in the way he had patterned his life over many years, the expansion of his work with the *Risale-i Nur*, and also in his involving himself more closely with social and political developments.

The emergence of the Third Said roughly coincided with the defeat of the Republican People’s Party in the general elections of May 1950 and the coming to power of the Democrat Party under Adnan Menderes, although while still in Afyon Prison Nursi wrote that he “surmised” that “a Third Said” would emerge.¹ Here he is referring to an inner development or “unfolding” whereby there arose in him the desire to withdraw entirely from the world and leave the running of all the affairs of the *Risale-i Nur* to his leading students. In the event, he was unable to do this, and with what must have been considerable self-sacrifice continued to direct its activities. With the end of repressive RPP rule, the restrictions on Nursi’s movements were lifted and he spent these years mostly in Emirdağ and Isparta, with visits to Istanbul, Ankara, and other places as was required by either the ever-expanding activities connected with the *Risale-i Nur* or to make court appearances. For despite the new government, the bureaucracy and governing structure of the country were still largely in the hands of supporters of the former regime. Thus, copies of the *Risale-i Nur* continued to be seized, Nursi and his students continued to suffer repression, and the court cases continued.

In the early 1950s, in numerous villages and towns in many regions of Turkey, Nur students continued to write out copies by hand and distribute and read them, while in Isparta and İnebolu it was reproduced on the duplicating machines and distributed in the form of collections. Then, in 1956, on Afyon Court reaching a final decision and lifting all legal restrictions on the *Risale-i Nur*, a new generation of young Nur students set about printing and publishing the entire *Risale-i Nur Collection* on modern presses in the new letters. This took place in four places, but primarily in Istanbul and Ankara. This further expanded the number of its readers and students, so that they now ran into many hundreds of thousands.

Together with these developments, the Nur movement itself became established as a cohesive movement during these years, and some of the changes in Nursi's life can be seen to be directed toward training the new generation of students who would lead it after he himself would be no longer there to do so. Of these, a number had visited Nursi and become involved with the work of the *Risale-i Nur* in the 1940s and as a consequence had served terms in Afyon Prison along with him. Following this, which served as a crucible refining this new generation for their work in the cause of the Qur'an, such students as Zübeyir Gündüzalp, Mustafa Sungur, and Ceylan Çalışkan devoted themselves entirely to the *Risale-i Nur*, and it was for them, among others, that Nursi changed a number of his habitual practices.

Afyon served the cause of the *Risale-i Nur* in other ways, too, as had Eskişehir and Denizli before it. For one thing, it was a means of unifying the Nur movement. On the days of the court hearings, its students from all over Turkey flocked to Afyon to observe the proceedings and give moral support to their fellows being tried, and in this way they both got to know each other and establish firm relations, and become better informed about Nursi and the *Risale-i Nur* and its method of service. Afyon thus formed an important step in consolidating the movement.²

The main apparent change in Nursi, due to which this period of his life is known as that of the Third Said, was a closer involvement with social and political life. This aspect of the Third Said was directly connected with the coming to power of the Democrat Party in 1950. However, his involvement took the form of support and guidance for the Democrats, which he described as "the lesser of two evils." He supported it in order to prevent the RPP from returning to power; as throughout his life, it was in no way active involvement. He also did not permit his students to engage in active or power politics in the name of the Nur movement. If any wished, they did so in their own names.

With the coming to power of the Democrat Party, Turkey had a government that was to take a firm stand against communism, and although it was bound to the principles of Kemalism, notably secularism,³ it was sympathetic toward Islam and religion; it intended to reflect the will of the nation and redress the wrongs of the twenty-five years of RPP rule. Nursi therefore concerned himself to a greater degree with political developments; he offered the new government guidance primarily by means of letters, his students, and some personal relations with Democrat deputies. He indicated where the dangers lay and how, by adopting policies that were congruent with Islamic ethical principles,⁴ they could overcome them, and he encouraged them in any moves in this direction. He gave them his moral support and urged his students to support them, openly giving them his vote in the elections of 1957. The support of the Nur movement was of no mean importance for the Democ-

rats, especially as their popularity waned. Nursi saw them as “assisting” the Nur students in their struggle against communism and irreligion, in forming a barrier against these threats and righting the “moral and spiritual damage” they had caused, and so in saving the country from the “immaterial” destruction that they had brought about.

Thus, when Nursi considered political matters, he did so with the eye of making them serve religion. He wrote to the new president, Celâl Bayar: “In the face of those who have ill-treated us, making politics the tool of irreligion in fanatical manner, we work for this country and nation’s well-being by making politics the tool and friend of religion.”⁵

To introduce policies favoring Islam and the strengthening of religion would also heal the breach between Turkey and the Islamic world. Nursi impressed on the government the need to reestablish relations, for this “would gain [for the country] a reserve force within the sphere of Islamic unity of 350 million through the brotherhood of Islam.”⁶

Nursi’s attitude toward the West also changed following the Second World War, for such countries as Britain, France, and America no longer appeared to be opposed to Islamic unity; in the face of the anarchy arising from communism and atheism, they were in need of it.⁷ Particularly postwar America, which he saw as working for religion in a serious manner, he regarded in friendly terms.⁸ With a number of Islamic countries gaining their independence from the colonial powers in the late 1940s and the 1950s, and new Islamic states being formed, together with other indications, Nursi once again started to speak of the forthcoming ascendancy of the Qur’ân and Islam, which he had foretold in the early years of the century. He even foresaw the Islamic countries as a federation, “the United Islamic States.”⁹

On occasion Nursi called the Democrats “Ahrarlar,” sometimes translated as liberals, but by which he meant supporters of *hürriyet-i şeri’ye*, freedom in accordance with religious norms, the establishment of which he had worked for during the Constitutional Period in the early decades of the century, and which path he hoped they would take. That is to say, in his relations with the Democrats, Nursi was encouraging them to create a social and political environment that would allow for the strengthening of religion and containment of anti-religious forces, and, by implication, for the peaceful and natural evolution of a more “Islamic” society. He therefore attached the greatest importance to the maintenance of public order and security. As he frequently pointed out, despite all the provocation and attempts to implicate and involve Nur students in disturbances by those who made it their business to disrupt order, none had been recorded. The way of the *Risale-i Nur* and its students was service to belief and the Qur’ân by peaceful means and “positive action.” It was peaceful struggle, a “moral *jihād*” or “*jihād* of the word” (*cihād-i mânevî*), in the face of the moral and spiritual deprivations of atheism and

unbelief, to instill certain belief in hearts and minds.¹⁰ While in many Muslim countries violent change had been brought about by revolution in which thousands of innocents were killed, the *Risale-i Nur* method was “the positive service of belief that results in the preservation of public order and stability.”

Emirdağ

On being released from Afyon Prison in the early morning of September 20, 1949, Nursi was escorted by two police officers to a house in the town which had been rented by some of his students, released earlier than himself. Among these were Hüsrev and Zübeyir Gündüzalp. Again under close surveillance, with two or three policemen permanently posted at the house who took down the names of all visitors, Nursi remained here around two months before moving back to his former house in Emirdağ.¹¹

Back in Emirdağ among his many students, Nursi took up where he had left off two years earlier when he had been arrested and sent to Afyon. In one of his first letters to his students in Isparta, he asks for one of them to go to Ankara to the Directorate of Religious Affairs to inform the director, Ahmed Hamdi Akseki, that despite illness from poisoning, Nursi was struggling to correct the entire set of the *Risale-i Nur* they had requested two years before and would present it when completed. In return he requested the director to do all he could for the *Risale-i Nur*'s free circulation, and also to print photographically the Qur'ân Hüsrev had written, showing the “coincidings” (*teva-fukat*) of the word Allah and other divine names.¹² Thus, Nursi overlooked the harm caused to himself and the *Risale-i Nur* by the negative report of the experts' committee set up by the directorate for Afyon Court, and the first thing he did on being released was to continue to try to persuade them—and through them the muftis and *hojas*—of the great value of the *Risale-i Nur* as a commentary on the Qur'ân, to use their influence to get the legal restrictions lifted, and even to publish it officially themselves. Although Ahmed Hamdi agreed in principle to publish the *Risale-i Nur*, it did not prove possible. In 1956, after the *Risale-i Nur* had been cleared by Afyon Court, the new director, Eyüp Sabri Hayırlıoğlu, was approached, this time on the recommendation of the prime minister, Menderes, but the attempt again came to nothing.¹³

In Emirdağ Nursi continued his life as before, but some of his students noted certain changes. For instance, Mehmet Çalışkan remarked how, following Afyon, Nursi's food was prepared by his students who accompanied him, rather than by the Çalışkan family, and that he now had read to him two or three newspapers daily. Mehmet Çalışkan describes how they would collect the papers from the newsagent, slip them into an inner pocket to take them to Nursi, read him the appropriate parts, and later return them to the newspaper

seller.¹⁴ With the coming to power of the Democrat Party some six months after Nursi returned to Emirdağ, and the consequent announcement of a general amnesty (July 14, 1950), the restrictions on his movements were theoretically lifted, and that year, in addition to sharing the joy of the whole country on the lifting of the ban on the Arabic call to prayer, he was able to join the congregation in the Çarşı Mosque for the *teravih* prayers each of the thirty nights of Ramađan.¹⁵

On the Democrats winning the elections on May 14, 1950, Nursi sent the following telegram to the new president, Celâl Bayar:

To: Celâl Bayar, President of the Republic.

We offer our congratulations. May Almighty God afford you every success in the service of Islam, and the country and nation.

In the name of the students of the *Risale-i Nur*, and one of them,

Said Nursi

To which he received this reply:

To: Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, Emirdağ.

“I was exceedingly touched at your cordial congratulations and offer my thanks.

Celâl Bayar¹⁶

Since his days in Kastamonu Nursi had attached the greatest importance to guiding the young, and the numbers of Nur students in their youth and early youth had steadily grown. In the early 1950s there was a striking increase in their numbers—and in the importance of the role they played in the work of the *Risale-i Nur*. In fact, in many respects these last ten years of Nursi’s life may be seen as directing and training these young students and preparing some of them to lead the Nur movement in later years. It may also be seen as symbolic that while Nursi had written to his leading students of the older generation in Isparta wanting one of them to go to Ankara to the Directorate of Religious Affairs, as described above, in the event it was the young Mustafa Sungur who acted as deputy for Nursi, both on this and many subsequent occasions.

In Istanbul and Ankara in particular, young and enterprising Nur students, many of whom were university students, devoted themselves to working for the *Risale-i Nur* and the cause of religion. In Ankara they were active among the deputies in the Grand National Assembly, writing letters and circulars publicizing Nursi’s views and the case of the *Risale-i Nur*, and explaining

them to the deputies, particularly ones known to be sympathetic toward Islam. They also alerted them to various stratagems of the Republican People's Party (RPP) supporters who had infiltrated the Democrat Party.

One case concerned the destruction of 170 copies of the large collections, *The Staff of Moses* and *Zülfikar*, seized by the authorities in Isparta. This was despite their having been cleared by the Democrat justice minister and was evidently part of a plan of RPP supporters to arouse antagonism among the Nur students toward the Democrats, for whom they formed an important body of support.¹⁷

This partisanship, which Nursi alluded to in a letter he wrote to the new president and also warned against on other occasions, was an additional element in the harassment that Nursi and his students continued to receive from certain sections of officialdom. Such officials were supporters of the RPP, and they continuously hatched plots by which to divide the forces working for religion and prevent them uniting. Thus, since the governing structure of the country was still largely in the hands of supporters of the RPP, the repression of Nursi and the Nur students continued throughout this ten years, as did the court cases.

Eskişehir and Isparta

After years of being confined to the place he had been exiled, very often not even being allowed to attend the mosque or walk out to take exercise, Nursi was now free to move about as he wished. In October 1951 he went to Eskişehir, where he stayed in the Yıldız Hotel. He met there with many of his students, of all classes, and the young in particular. Members of the armed forces also visited him, with airmen being in the majority. After a month or so, Nursi moved on to Isparta, where he stayed for some two months, until summoned to Istanbul to stand trial together with one of his students at Istanbul University, Muhsin Alev, who had printed *A Guide for Youth*.

While in Isparta and Istanbul Nursi wrote a number of letters that he subsequently put together in a booklet and published under the title, *Nur Alemin Bir Anahtarı* (A Key to the World of the *Risale-i Nur*).¹⁸ Before describing the *Guide for Youth* trial in Istanbul, it is worth mentioning these letters briefly, since the small collection they form was the last piece to be added to the *Risale-i Nur*, and illustrate an important feature of the *Risale-i Nur*: its relating science to the truths of belief and showing that rather than their conflicting in any way, if considered in the light of the Qur'an science may broaden and strengthen belief. One of the pieces was inspired by the radio. The radio, which Nursi listened to from time to time, inspired him to write an interesting exposition of the element air and its "duties." It proves

divine unity so decisively while disproving that nature or chance could have had any hand in its creation that he reckoned that the objections to *A Guide for Youth*, in which it was first included, stemmed from this piece. Indeed, it was to the young and his students among university and school students that Nursi was most concerned to convey explanations of divine unity and the other truths of belief related to science and technology in this way. To mention these letters here also redresses the balance somewhat, for while Nursi during the last ten years of his life Nursi concerned himself to a greater degree with social and political matters, his main purpose and aim was still to serve the Qur'ān and belief through the publication and spreading of the *Risale-i Nur*.

The *Guide for Youth* Trial—1952

In January 1952 Nursi went to Istanbul, his first visit since he had stayed there on his way to exile twenty-seven years earlier. The previous year a number of his students at Istanbul University had printed 2,000 copies of *A Guide for Youth* in the new letters, as a result of which the public prosecutor had opened court proceedings against Nursi. The summons came for him to attend Istanbul First Criminal Court in January 1952. The charges, under the “elastic” article 163 of the Criminal Code, were that *A Guide for Youth* was “religious propaganda, which, contrary to the principle of secularism, had been written for the purpose of adapting the state system to religious principles.”¹⁹

Coming from Isparta, Nursi was in court for the first hearing on 22 January 1952. It took place on an upper floor of the court house, which now serves as the main post office. For the two months or so he was in Istanbul, Nursi stayed first in the Akşehir Palas Hotel, close to the court in Sirkeci, then he moved to the Reşadiye Hotel in the Fatih district. During his stay he was visited by a constant flood of visitors; they included hundreds of old friends and acquaintances, Nur students, some well-known figures, and many others, including large numbers of young people. The three court hearings—and particularly the second and third—attracted literally thousands. Once again, the trial served to publicize Nursi and the Nur movement in a way those who had instigated it can scarcely have wished.

The courtroom and corridors were filled to overflowing for the first hearing. The indictment and the experts' report were read, then Nursi was questioned. Besides exploiting religion for political purposes, he was accused of “supporting religious education,” “encouraging Islamic dress and conduct for women,” and “attempting to acquire personal prestige and influence.”²⁰ A prison sentence of five years was being sought. Three Istanbul lawyers undertook Nursi's defense. Following his reply, the court was adjourned till February 19 at 2 o'clock.

In addition to this trial, Nursi was further questioned about a part of *A Guide for Youth* that appeared in the magazine *Volkan*, but since the work had been acquitted by Denizli Court in 1943, in this case it was ruled that retrial was not permissible.²¹

The news had got around by February 19 and from an early hour hundreds of well-wishers and Nursi's students started to fill the courthouse in order to see Nursi and follow the proceedings. By the time Nursi and the lawyers and judges arrived, the crowd was so dense inside the court that in the courtroom itself, the spectators had occupied even the space round the judges' bench, while outside the building the buses could not pass for the throng and were rerouted.²² In the court the police seemed incapable of doing anything, neither was any attention paid to the judge when he ordered the crowd out. It was not till, at the judge's request, Nursi turned and made a sign that the crowd moved back out of the room and the trial could begin.²³

The statements of the printer who had printed *A Guide for Youth* and the police were heard, then Nursi's objections to the experts' report. The defense lawyers criticized it severely and at length. Then, on Nursi requesting permission to perform the afternoon prayers as the time was growing short, the court was adjourned till March 5. Nursi left amid cheers and applause and was driven to the Sultan Ahmed Mosque.

When it came to March 5 the police were out in force to prevent crowds forming in the courthouse. Nevertheless, the courtroom was packed to hear first Muhsin Alev, the student who had had the work printed, then the defense speeches of Nursi and his three lawyers.

Once again Nursi pointed out that what he was, and had been, accused of principally was "opposing the regime," but, he maintained, since public order was not disturbed in any way, to do so could not be considered a crime. On the contrary, to oppose wrong, oppression, and unlawfulness was licit and a genuine element of justice. Secondly was the charge of breaching the peace and disturbing public order, but the failure of six courts and six provinces to produce any evidence for this proved that Nursi—Nur students—were preservers of the peace. As for exploiting religion for political ends, again the courts had cleared him of this, and to accuse someone of over eighty who was "at the door of the grave" and owned nothing in the world was entirely unjust and wrong. Nursi concluded his speech by saying:

Respected judges, for twenty-eight years they have oppressed and wronged me and my students in this way. The prosecutors in the courts did not hold back from insulting us. We met it all with patience and continued on the way of serving belief and the Qur'an. We forgave the officials of the former regime for their tyranny and oppression, for they met the end they

deserved, while we gained our rights and our freedom. We thank Almighty God for giving us this opportunity to speak these words before just and believing judges like yourselves.²⁴

Nursi's three lawyers then presented their defenses,²⁵ and the judges withdrew to deliberate. Their unanimous decision was announced; once again, acquittal. The announcement met with resounding applause from Nursi's students and the spectators.²⁶ In later years the chief judge of the case said of that day: "He was an intelligent person; he foresaw the result of the trial from the way it was going. He did not display the slightest trace of anxiety or excitement, and was relaxed and at ease as though speaking with his friends in his own house. He spoke with an eastern accent."²⁷

Akşehir Palas and Reşadiye Hotels

There are numerous accounts of Nursi in the Akşehir Palas and Reşadiye Hotels by the many different people who visited him during his brief stay of two to three months. There are also descriptions by those of his close students who remained with him and attended to his needs. One of these was Muhsin Alev, Nursi's fellow-accused in the trial. He wrote that "when Ustad came to Istanbul, it was as though its entire populace poured into the Akşehir Palas Hotel. Every day hundreds of people visited him. Among them were many well-known people." Muhsin Alev goes on to describe visits by first the famous poet and writer and producer of *Büyük Doğu* magazine, Necip Fazıl Kısakürek,²⁸ and then, in the Reşadiye Hotel, by Osman Yüksel Serdengeçti, who wrote for and published *Serdengeçti* magazine.²⁹ In fact, it was articles appearing in these and other publications of the Islamist press, such as Eşref Edip's *Sebilürreşad*, that had contributed to informing particularly the young educated classes about Nursi and the *Risale-i Nur*, and continued to do so. Muhsin Alev himself had been active in this field. One of the most descriptive of these accounts is by one of three youths, then students at Galatasaray Lycée, who had benefited from these publications. The student in question, Mehmet Şevket Eygi, himself went on to bring out various newspapers and publications in later years. These three friends, who secretly read handwritten duplicated copies of the *Risale-i Nur* in school, decided to visit him. His description shows the modest conditions Nursi chose, even when staying in a hotel, together with the interest he showed these boys.

We entered the small room where Nursi was staying on the top floor of the hotel. It had a low ceiling and small windows. Ustad was sitting cross-legged on the bed, and was wearing something like a scarf of colored

material as a turban. There was a small radio made of Bakelite on a shelf on the wall. There wasn't anything else. We sat on the floor.

Ustad spoke Turkish with an eastern accent. He was pleased we were Galatasaray students, and spoke to us, giving us advice. He dwelt particularly on the dangers of bolshevism. Communism was not all that widespread in Turkey at that time, and it was very far-sighted of him to perceive that it would be such a problem for Turkey in the future.³⁰

In his account, Muhsin Alev describes Nursi's trips around the city of Istanbul visiting places he had frequented in earlier days, such as the old War Ministry (which now houses Istanbul University), where he faced the wrathful pashas in the court-martial set up after the Thirty-first of March Incident in 1909.³¹ Another student who went to visit Nursi in the Reşadiye Hotel describes the sprightly way he walked, stepping lightly up onto the pavement opposite the hotel "like a youth of twenty," and how, when he emerged from the Fatih Mosque after attending the prayers, he was mobbed by such a large and enthusiastic crowd, all wanting to kiss his hand, that he could only be saved by jumping into a taxi.³²

Nevertheless, as ever, Nursi's enemies were not idle, and there was another attempt to poison him during his stay at the Akşehir Palas Hotel in Sirkeci. The incident was described by İbrahim Fakazlı, one of Nursi's students from İnebolu, who had taken over the night in question from Muhsin, Zübeyir, and Ziya Arun. Poison was thrown into Nursi's food, which he had left outside the window to cool. When he understood what had happened, he summoned the hotel staff, and it was learned that among the occupants of the adjacent room was an Armenian militant. He was caught and confessed to Nursi that he had come that day from Edirne with the intention of carrying out the cowardly crime. İbrahim Fakazlı witnessed this.³³

Emirdağ

Nursi returned to Emirdağ soon after the acquittals in March 1952, writing in a letter that much as he wanted to meet with his many friends who wished to visit him, due to his age, ill health and weakness from poison, so long as it was not essential, he no longer had the strength and could not speak much. "However," he wrote, "I tell you certainly that each part of the *Risale-i Nur* is a Said. Whichever part you look at you will benefit ten times more than meeting me in the flesh, and also you will have met with me in reality."³⁴

Again on his return to Emirdağ Nursi was subject to unlawful harassment, which led to a further court case. This time it was at the hands of some gendarmes and concerned his dress. One day in the month of Ramađan, which

in 1952 began toward the end of May, Nursi went out of the town into the surrounding country to take some exercise. Though alone, he was followed by three gendarmes and a sergeant, who, when he was sitting alone in the hills, approached him and told him to remove his turban and put on a European-style hat. They then escorted him back to Emirdağ to the police station.³⁵

Nursi wrote a petition to the Justice and Interior Ministries in Ankara to lodge a complaint about this entirely arbitrary assault on his liberty, and requested his students in Ankara to give copies to sympathetic deputies. One of his students sent a copy to a newspaper in Samsun entitled *Büyük Cihād*. When the petition appeared in the paper, the Samsun public prosecutor opened proceedings against Nursi, and a summons arrived in Emirdağ ordering him to appear in Samsun Criminal Court. Nursi wrote a reply referring them to his lengthy, unrefuted defenses of five previous cases, since they were repeating the same old charges.³⁶ He also obtained medical reports stating he was unfit to travel. In the meantime, on November 22, 1952, the Malatya Incident occurred, in which an attempt was made on the life of a well-known journalist, Ahmet Emin Yalman. It was blown out of all proportion by the press, and finally the government bowed to pressure and closed down newspapers that openly supported Islam, and arrested many people connected with them. Among these were the *Büyük Cihād* and its owner, and also Nursi's student Mustafa Sungur, who was in Samsun and also had published an article in the paper. Mustafa Sungur was held in Samsun Prison and sentenced to one and a half years, much to Nursi's wrath,³⁷ but the appeals court subsequently reversed the decision, and on the court reconvening, he was acquitted.³⁸

The Samsun public prosecutor insisted on Nursi's attending the court to answer the charges against him, so finally the seventy-five-year-old Nursi decided to make the journey. He reached Istanbul but was taken ill, and obtaining further medical reports requested permission to present his defense in Istanbul Criminal Court. Once again the case resulted in acquittal. However, it served to bring Nursi to Istanbul a second time, and on this occasion he stayed three months.

The Pakistan Deputy Education Minister's Visit

Before describing Nursi's stay in Istanbul, there are one or two previous events that should not go unmentioned. One of these was the unofficial visit to Nursi of Pakistan's deputy education minister, Sayyid Ali Akbar Shah, who was on an official visit to Turkey. He visited Nursi at the suggestion of the Turkish education minister, Tevfik İleri, and was accompanied by a university Nur student, Salih Özcan. It took place on January 15, 1951.³⁹

Salih Özcan says in his description of the visit that Nursi requested him to act as interpreter, since their common language was Arabic. He then explained the *Risale-i Nur* and its method of service to his visitor, but when the discussion became more complex, Özcan had difficulty in interpreting. "Thereupon," he writes, "Ustad raised himself up onto his knees [on the bed on which he sat] and began to speak in truly eloquent Arabic. I had never heard such eloquent Arabic before."

The deputy minister was exceedingly pleased at the visit and expressed his appreciation on returning to the hotel, wanting to visit Nursi again in the morning before leaving. Nursi did not consent to the second visit. However, as the bus to Ankara was about to leave, he appeared to see the minister off, and traveled together with them for some seven or eight kilometers, sitting next to the minister before alighting. Ali Akbar Shah was very gratified by this. In Ankara, he gave a lecture to university students about Nursi and the *Risale-i Nur*, and on returning to Pakistan actively publicized them. He invited Nursi to Pakistan and offered him access to all the media, but Nursi replied that "the front" was in Turkey, since the basic sickness had started there.⁴⁰ Sayyid Ali Akbar Shah was subsequently appointed rector of Sind University; he kept up a correspondence with the Nur students in Turkey, and did what he could to spread the *Risale-i Nur*.⁴¹

During the 1950s the *Risale-i Nur* found numerous new students and readers in different parts of the world, including Pakistan. The last section of Nursi's "official" biography, first published during his lifetime in 1958, is devoted to these developments and includes letters from Nur students from as far afield as Finland and Washington, DC, as well as a number of Islamic countries. Articles began to appear in such countries as Iraq⁴² and Pakistan.⁴³ Also, some of Nursi's students traveled abroad in order to introduce the *Risale-i Nur* and establish relations; they went, for example, to the Hijaz, Syria, and Iran.⁴⁴ In 1954 Nursi sent his student Muhsin Alev to Germany⁴⁵ to have "Husrev's Qur'an" printed there, since repeated attempts to have it printed in Turkey had come to nothing. He remained in Berlin as the representative of the Nur movement. Previous to this, Nursi had had *Zülfikar* and other parts of the *Risale-i Nur* sent to Germany, where it had met with a good reception.⁴⁶ Nursi also received visits from religious scholars and figures from the Islamic world.⁴⁷ Links were reformed as one of his ultimate aims began to be realized: the renewal and strengthening of relations between Muslims in Turkey and in other parts of the world by means of the *Risale-i Nur*. In fact, it was Selahaddin Çelebi from İnebolu who, with Nursi's permission, in 1950 sent *Zülfikar* to the imam of Berlin Mosque. He also sent copies to al-Azhar University in Egypt, to the Pakistani ambassador, and to the pope in Rome. In response to this last, Nursi received a letter of thanks from the Vatican dated February 22, 1951.⁴⁸ As has been pointed out previously, although Nursi

always upheld and struggled for the independence of the Islamic world against the West and the maintenance of its cultural integrity, he foresaw—by virtue of their shared acceptance of divine revelation—the cooperation of Muslims and sincere Christians in the face of aggressive atheism.⁴⁹ It is in this light also that Nursi's visit to the Greek Orthodox patriarch of Istanbul, Athenagoras, should be seen. The visit took place during his stay in Istanbul in the spring and summer of 1953.⁵⁰

Istanbul

Nursi came to Istanbul from Emirdağ, probably between April 20–25, 1953,⁵¹ on his way to Samsun. He stayed first in the Marmara Palas Hotel in Beyazıt, then stayed one night in Çamlıca on the Asian side of the Bosphorus, after which he moved to Üsküdar, where he stayed three nights. Finally, on the invitation of one of his young students in Istanbul, Mehmet Fırıncı, Nursi moved to his house in the Draman district, close to Fatih. The family moved to another house next to their bakery, and being unable to complete his journey, Nursi stayed three months in their modest but pleasant old wooden house. It was exactly what he had been looking for.⁵²

Beside obtaining medical reports⁵³ and then making his defense in Istanbul Criminal Court,⁵⁴ Nursi received many visitors, and was able to make excursions by bus around Istanbul. One of the important letters he wrote during his stay, described as a fruit of his trips in and around Istanbul, reflects his attitude toward modern life with its wastefulness, extravagance, and idleness. Before quoting part of it, however, its real significance should be indicated:

Nursi's purpose in writing letters like this was to expound what he calls "fundamental laws" of the Qur'ān—that is, fundamental revelational principles, the application and practice of which would remedy social, economic, and political ills and problems that arose ultimately from Westernization and the adoption of principles originating in "philosophy." They are illustrative of Nursi's approach in that they are principles that everyone can adopt and practice in their daily lives, and they reflect his anxiety to effect social change and reform through personal effort and training—that is, from the bottom upwards in distinction to social reform from the top down by means of legislation. The name Nursi uses infers, too, the congruence and conformity of these principles with the laws inherent in man and the world, showing their "naturalness" and necessity. There is further discussion of them below, in connection with some of Nursi's letters to Menderes and the Democrats, urging their adoption.

Since modern Western civilization acts contrary to the fundamental laws of the revealed religions, its evils have come to outweigh its good aspects, its errors

and harmful aspects to preponderate over its benefits; and general tranquility and a happy worldly life, the true aims of civilization, have been destroyed. And since wastefulness and extravagance have taken the place of frugality and contentment, and laziness and the desire for ease have overcome endeavor and the sense of service, it has made unfortunate humanity both extremely poor and extremely lazy. In explaining the fundamental law of the revealed Qur'an—"Eat and drink, but waste not in excess" (Qur'an, 7:31) and "Man possesses naught save that which he strives" (Qur'an, 53:39)—the *Risale-i Nur* says: Mankind's happiness in this life lies in frugality and endeavor, and it is through them that the rich and poor will be reconciled. I shall here make one or two brief points to explain this:

The First: In the nomadic stage, man needed only three or four things, and it was only two out of ten people who could not obtain them. But now, through wastefulness, abuse, stimulating the appetites, and such things as custom and addiction, present-day civilization has made inessential needs seem essential, and in place of the four things of which he used to be in need, modern civilized man is in need of twenty. And it is only two out of twenty who can satisfy those needs in a totally licit way; eighteen remain in need in some way. . . . It perpetually encourages the wretched lower classes to challenge the upper classes. It has abandoned the Qur'an's sacred fundamental law enjoining the payment of *zakāt* and prohibiting usury and interest, which ensured that the lower classes were obedient toward the upper classes and the upper classes were sympathetic toward the lower classes, and encouraged the bourgeoisie to tyranny and the poor to revolt. It has destroyed the tranquility of mankind.

Second Point: Since the wonders of modern civilization are each a divine bounty, they require real thanks and to be utilized for the benefit of mankind. But now we see that they have encouraged many people to be lazy and indulge in vice, and have . . . destroyed their eagerness for work and effort. . . .

"For example, . . . although the radio is a great bounty and demands thanks in the form of being used for the good of mankind, since four-fifths of it are used on stimulating desires and unnecessary, meaningless trivia, it has encouraged idleness and depravity, and destroyed the eagerness for work. . . .

In Short: Since modern Western civilization has not truly heeded the revealed religions, it has both impoverished man and increased his needs. It has destroyed the principle of frugality and contentment, and increased wastefulness, greed, and covetousness. . . .⁵⁵

During Nursi's stay in Istanbul, from May 11 to May 17, the famous orientalist Alfred Guillaume came to Istanbul University to give a series of five lectures. The controversial ideas he propounded aroused hostile reactions from local scholars.⁵⁶ Muhsin Alev, who was about to graduate from the philosophy department, and Ziya Arun attended the first of them. The visiting

orientalist proceeded to deny the Qur'anic verses about the "seven heavens" (2:29; 67:3; 71:15), saying that today astronomy had made great advances and no seven "layers" have been found in the skies or in space; the verse was therefore contrary to science. The two students informed Nursi about the lecture, and he compiled a letter made up of pieces taken from the *Risale-i Nur*. The following day they went to the university and distributed copies of it before the lecture. It was read to the orientalist, who is reputed to have cut short his lecture as a result.⁵⁷

That year there were tremendous celebrations for the five-hundredth anniversary of the conquest of Istanbul. These reached their climax on May 29, with the *mehter* bands, the traditional military bands of the Ottoman armies, marching in traditional dress and playing original instruments from Topkapı at the city walls to Fatih. The population of Istanbul turned out to watch and follow them. The culmination was a ceremony at the great mosque in Fatih where Fatih Sultan Mehmet's tomb is situated. Here a platform had been erected outside the mosque and tiers of benches for the spectators. When Nursi arrived he was given a seat of honor on the platform next to the governor of Istanbul,⁵⁸ and from it he followed the proceedings with real pleasure, particularly the *mehter* bands.⁵⁹

Although Nursi was now theoretically free to go where he pleased, he was still constantly watched and followed by the police. Mehmet Fırncı describes how they were alarmed at losing his trace when he first arrived in Istanbul. After Nursi moved to the house in Draman, there was a policeman permanently posted in front of the house. They told Mehmet Fırncı, who was questioned at length about Nursi's staying in his house, "We are responsible for him and have to protect him."⁶⁰ One of Nursi's visitors there, the chairman of the local branch of the Millet Party, Hüseyin Cahid Payazağa, relates how a chief inspector had been assigned the job of watching the house and noting down all who visited it. Nursi was followed by police even when going to the mosque, or when making his excursions.⁶¹ He recalls, too, how in Draman there was a non-Muslim Greek grocer and it was with him Nursi used to do his shopping. Dimitrios, as he was named, used to show Nursi great respect. He told Payazağa: "You don't know who this person is. If he were in Greece, they would make him a house out of gold."⁶² Muhsin Alev also relates how one day they went to Bakırköy to what was then open countryside to take some air, and there a Christian from Beirut named Suleyman hurried up to Nursi. Nursi did not turn the man away, but talked with him for a while, even accepting the coffee he gave him.⁶³

It was the month of Ramađan while Nursi was in Istanbul, and Mehmet Fırncı notes that Nursi hardly slept for the whole month, spending the nights in worship and prayer while continuing his usual daily activities of reading the *Risale-i Nur* and teaching his students, correcting proofs, receiving visitors,

and so on. At night the local people would gather in the house opposite to watch Nursi, as he continued his worship in bright electric light till the morning. On their finally closing the windows, the people objected, saying, “Why have you closed them? We were reciting our prayers and supplications along with the Hocaefendi.”⁶⁴

Isparta

Nursi returned to Emirdağ toward the end of July, and after a week moved to the Yıldız Hotel in Eskişehir. Then, in August, again toward the end of the month, he traveled to Isparta. There, after staying a week in the hotel of one of his students, Nuri Benli, he moved to the rented house that, although he continued to return to Emirdağ and Eskişehir for visits, now became his base. Indeed, he loved Isparta more than anywhere else and wanted to spend his last years there among his numerous students. The house he took had a garden on two sides and was spacious, with sufficient rooms for both himself and those of his students who now stayed permanently with him.

Nursi’s having four or five of his closest students living with him was a significant change in the way he had ordered his life over many years. It had also been his unchanging rule to admit no one into his room from sunset, the time of the evening prayers, till the following morning, and he had had his door locked on both the outside and the inside. Now his students—most usually Zübeyir Gündüzalp, Tahiri Mutlu, Mustafa Sungur, Bayram Yüksel, and Ceylan Çalışkan—saw to his personal needs, and were allowed to enter his room if the need arose. Nevertheless, it was still Nursi’s practice to be constantly occupied, and their room and activities remained separate. Thus, on the one hand, they saw to all his needs, for Nursi was now approaching eighty years of age, and, on the other, he was training these students for their future roles in the Nur movement.

It was at this time that Nursi started holding readings and study (*ders*) of the *Risale-i Nur* as a group. This practice was followed by Nur students all over the country and became the hallmark and central feature of the Nur movement. Nursi and his students held these readings after the morning prayers, and very often they would continue for as much as five or six hours. All present would read out loud in turn from one of the books of the *Risale-i Nur*, and Nursi would explain and illustrate it. Bayram Yüksel, who has provided the most details of these years, writes that Nursi “had the energy and youth of someone of twenty, growing younger the more he read,” while his young students lacked the endurance to keep going for that length of time and would start to wilt.⁶⁵

In his account,⁶⁶ Bayram Yüksel gives many personal details about Nursi, about his food, his dress, and his cleanliness, the awe-inspiring manner

in which he performed the five daily prayers—always just as the time for each had come, how he was never idle, the importance he attached to the prompt and efficient carrying out of any matter in hand, and to the correction of proofs and handwritten copies of the *Risale-i Nur*. He describes his extreme frugality, and also his kindness to animals. In connection with the latter he describes how when going for excursions in the countryside, Nursi would study “the great book of the universe,” and urge them to study it. He had affection for all creatures and extraordinary compassion for them. His interest and compassion extended to all the creatures they encountered, from dogs to ants. He also tells of how in the house in Isparta, which was a traditional wooden house, the mice used to eat all the books and papers they put in the loft for safekeeping—with the exception of copies of the *Risale-i Nur*. Nursi used to say that the mice would not harm them, and indeed they did not. Bayram Yüksel goes on to say that he witnessed many things of this sort, but that he did not record them, as Nursi did not wish attention to be drawn to *kerametler*, or his powers of this sort.

In 1954, Nursi returned to Barla, his first visit since he had left there twenty years earlier, and wept with emotion as he entered his first *Risale-i Nur medrese*, where he had lived for eight years, and saw the mighty plane tree that stands outside it, for it was there and in the gardens and mountains of Barla that the greater part of the *Risale-i Nur* had been written.⁶⁷

With Nursi’s increasing years such trips became difficult for him, but every day he felt the need to go out into the countryside to take the fresh air. So finally in 1955 his leading students from Isparta, İnebolu, and Emirdağ clubbed together and bought a jeep; and then, when it was seen this was too uncomfortable on the rough roads of that time, they exchanged it for a 1953 Chevrolet. This he then used for his remaining years.⁶⁸

The Publishing of the *Risale-i Nur* and Other Activities

Prior to the final Afyon court decision in 1956 to return all the confiscated copies of the *Risale-i Nur*, handwritten copies continued to be reproduced on duplicating machines in Isparta and İnebolu. These were still for the most part in the Ottoman script. In Ankara and other places young Nur students also reproduced copies, some of which were in the new letters, but this was on a small scale. An important part of the work now was also the reproduction of the Nursi’s letters—the *Lahika* or additional letters. Up to 1953 these were copied out onto waxed paper by Hüseyin in Isparta, and then taken to the village of Sav, where they were duplicated and then distributed country-wide. The large collections, also duplicated there, were sent to Istanbul to be bound, then returned in book form. The Nur students, and particularly

Hüsrev, were constantly watched by the police. They still had to act with extreme circumspection, and always be on the alert for possible raids and harassment of other sorts.⁶⁹

Following Nursi's visit to Istanbul in 1953, young Nur students, including Mehmet Fırıncı, in whose house Nursi had stayed, formed themselves into a group and by degrees undertook similar activities for the publishing and distribution of the *Risale-i Nur* as far as their limited means allowed. Finally, they were given the use of a house near the Süleymaniye Mosque where they were able to install duplicating machines, all in the greatest secrecy. This house became the first *Risale-i Nur* study center (*dershane*) in Istanbul, and these students also formed the nucleus of Nur students in Istanbul, holding the communal readings of the *Risale-i Nur* in many places throughout the city and with groups of people from all walks of life.⁷⁰

Nursi attached the greatest importance to these activities, particularly to the publication; and he himself corrected copies, and, after they were printed, the proofs. Those in the new letters, he would correct together with one of his students. It often happened that when out in the country he would suddenly decide to return, and he and his students would find one of the Istanbul or Ankara students awaiting him with proofs to be corrected. Nursi would immediately correct them and do nothing else till they were completed. Nursi also concerned himself with these young students, most of whom were well educated, reading to them and teaching them from the *Risale-i Nur* and encouraging them to study it.

Nursi was seeing now the fruition of the labors of thirty years of exile and imprisonment. Especially after the *Risale-i Nur* began to be printed on modern presses in the new letters in 1957 in Ankara and Istanbul, he declared: "This is the *Risale-i Nur*'s festival! My duty is finished. This is the time I have long awaited. Now I can go." He was so filled with joy, he could not stop in one place, and wanted all the time to make excursions to Eğirdir and its lake, to Barla, and to all the many places of beauty around Isparta, whether by horse, donkey, or car.⁷¹

Nursi had wanted the prime minister, Menderes, to print the *Risale-i Nur* officially, and one of the Isparta deputies, Dr. Tahsin Tola, had approached him on the matter. Menderes had great respect for Nursi and had met the suggestion favorably, telling Dr. Tola to organize it through the Directorate of Religious Affairs. The attempt did not get further than that, however, and it was at that point that Nursi instructed his students to have it printed.⁷² Dr. Tola was able to secure the paper through the Democrat government, at a time of shortage, and first of all they printed *The Words (Sözler)*. Taking advantage of his parliamentary immunity, Tahsin Tola supervised its dispatch to Istanbul to be bound. The Nur students still worked under constant fear of police intervention. Following this, the other main collections, *The Flashes*

(*Lem'alar*) and *Letters (Mektūbat)*, were printed.⁷³ At the same time, the students in Istanbul started printing, ten thousand copies of *The Short Words*, twenty-five hundred of which they immediately posted to various places in Anatolia. They also printed five thousand copies of *A Letter to Women*.⁷⁴

In 1958 some of Nursi's close students, primarily Mustafa Sungur and Zübeyir, prepared Nursi's "official" biography. Wanting attention to be focused on the *Risale-i Nur*, Nursi cut out most of the sections describing his personal life and exploits. There was dispute as to whether or not photographs should be included, and on Nursi's decision a number were added.⁷⁵

Nursi gave importance to translations during these years, both from Turkish into Arabic—to further spread the *Risale-i Nur* in the Islamic world—and of the Arabic parts into Turkish. While he himself translated *The Damascus Sermon* into Turkish in 1951, his younger brother Abdülmecid, who was then muftī of Ürgüp near Kayseri, translated *The Staff of Moses* into Arabic at Nursi's suggestion. Nursi wanted to interest many quarters in this work.⁷⁶ Later, in 1955, Abdülmecid translated Nursi's wartime Qur'anic commentary, *Signs of Miraculousness (Ishārāt al-I'jāz)*, and his *Mathnawī al-'Arabī al-Nūrī* from Arabic into Turkish.⁷⁷ The Turkish translation of *İşārātü'l-İ'cāz* was then printed in Ankara in the new letters, that is, the Latin alphabet.

The *Risale-i Nur*'s "Positive" Method of Service

Even if still under threat of police action, the legal and open printing of the *Risale-i Nur* was a tremendous victory for Nursi and his students over those who for thirty years had employed every means to eliminate and silence them, and vindicated the method of service they had adhered to. The *Risale-i Nur* and its method of "positive action," the patient and silent struggle to save and strengthen belief in God and the other truths of religion by peaceful means—primarily the written word—and noninvolvement in politics had prevailed over those who behind the screen of secularization were seeking to eradicate Islam and extinguish belief. The unique function of the *Risale-i Nur* in the renewal of belief and revitalization of Islam demanded this method, which had few counterparts in the Islamic world, where attempts to serve Islam were often by direct, violent, or political methods, which Nursi categorized as material (*maddī*).

As described in the introduction to the present chapter, the method of the Nur movement and the *Risale-i Nur* was what Nursi called nonmaterial *jihad*—that is, moral *jihād* or *jihād* of the word (*mānevī cihād*) in the struggle against aggressive atheism and irreligion. By working solely for the spread and strengthening of belief, it was to work also for the preservation of internal order and peace and stability in society in the face of the moral and

spiritual destruction of the forces of irreligion, which aimed to destabilize society and create anarchy. Since the Democrat Party also understood the dangers these posed and took a positive stand against them, and furthermore took steps to strengthen Islam, Nursi described the Democrats as “assisting” the Nur students in their struggle and offered them their support. And he himself gave them advice and guidance on these matters from time to time.

Thus, since, unlike many groups and individuals who mistakenly aimed to further the cause of Islam by “negative” means, the Nur students followed this “positive” method, the Democrat government took a lenient attitude toward them, permitting the open publication of the *Risale-i Nur* after it had been cleared by Afyon Court in 1956 and not attempting to repress the movement. In view of these facts, Nursi continued to support the Democrats, and in particular the prime minister, Menderes, throughout the ten years they were in power, and in the face of the opposition Menderes faced from all quarters, including that of some Islamist groups.⁷⁸ He also urged his students to support them. Indeed, Menderes and the government had to sustain opposition of the most vengeful and, toward the end of their rule, ruthless kind from the ousted RPP and particularly its leader, İsmet İnönü. This support came despite Nursi and the Nur students continuing to be subject to various sorts of harassment at the hands of officials—mostly supporters of the RPP—and to be called up before the law, and also despite the fact that the Democrats were, in Nursi’s words, “the lesser of two evils” and that among them were individuals who could not be considered sympathetic toward religion. In his view, Menderes performed significant services for the cause of Islam and did much to reverse the harm of the quarter century of RPP rule, so that despite the army coup that overthrew him two months after Nursi’s death in 1960, and subsequent coups, the religious freedoms he returned to the Turkish people were not subsequently lost and made possible the future blossoming of Islam, in which the *Risale-i Nur* played such an important part. In fact, Nursi told Giyaseddin Emre, an elected independent deputy for Muş in 1954, who visited Nursi on numerous occasions: “Adnan Menderes is a champion of religion; he has performed great services for religion and will perform [more]. But he won’t see the fruits of this that he wishes. I too have performed services for religion, I can’t conceal it, but like him, I won’t see the results. The fruits of both will be seen in the future.”⁷⁹

Nursi’s Support for the Baghdad Pact

It is in the light of this “positive” attitude toward the Democrats on the part of Nursi and the *Risale-i Nur* movement, and in those often difficult and hostile conditions their always aiming to draw them with advice and guidance

toward further, more far-reaching measures favoring Islam and religion that Nursi's letter of support for the Baghdad Pact should be seen. Indeed, this method of service enabled the movement to emerge as a significant force within the country,⁸⁰ although the Nur students themselves did not participate in politics. Also, Nursi's support for the pact shows his advocacy of Turkey and some Islamic countries joining the Western alliance against the threat of communism.

The Baghdad Pact was firstly signed in February 1955 between Turkey and Iraq, and was subsequently joined by Pakistan, Iran, and Britain.⁸¹ In connection with this agreement Nursi wrote a letter of congratulation⁸² to Menderes and the president, Celâl Bayar, applauding the move as a necessary first step toward securing peace in the area, and as someone who had studied its problems for some fifty-five years, he pointed out the two solutions he had found.

Nursi supported Turkey's agreement with Iraq and the other Muslim countries in the Baghdad Pact primarily because it realigned her with the Islamic world and was a step toward reestablishing relations between Turkey and the Arab world, which had been virtually nonexistent since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War. This was despite the fact that Iraq was the only Arab country to join the pact, and was looked on as a traitor to the Arab cause, and the fact that Menderes's overtures to Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan were rebuffed.⁸³ It should be recalled that the movement for Arab nationalism was gaining momentum at this time. Notwithstanding these developments, Nursi emphasized that Islamic unity of a nonpolitical nature would be a source of strength for Turkey, particularly against communism and irreligion, and in a number of letters he encouraged Menderes and the Democrats to work for it and benefit from it.⁸⁴

In his letter about the pact, Nursi explained that the greatest danger for the area lay in racialism. It had caused harm to the Muslim peoples in the past, and at that time there were again signs it was being exploited by "covert atheists" with the aim of destroying Islamic brotherhood and preventing the Muslim nations uniting. The true nationality or nationhood of both Turks and Arabs, he felt, was Islam; their Arabness and Arab nationality and Turkishness had fused with Islam. The new alliance would repulse the danger of racialism, and besides gaining for the Turkish nation "four hundred million brothers," it would also gain for them the "friendship of eight hundred million Christians." That is to say, Nursi saw it as an important step toward general peace and reconciliation, of which all were in such need.

The two solutions Nursi had found on learning of the explicit threats to the Qur'an, Islam, and the Islamic world some sixty years previously had been the *Risale-i Nur* and his Eastern University, the Medresetü'z-Zehra. Both were effective means of establishing Islamic unity. The *Risale-i Nur* served to

develop “the brotherhood of belief,” as it was already demonstrating in the Islamic world and beyond. It had also defeated atheistic philosophy and other means of corruption. Thus, Nursi called on the president and prime minister to use the means at their disposal to make the *Risale-i Nur*, “this manifestation of the Qur’ān’s miraculousness,” better known to the Islamic world.

As for the Medresetü’z-Zehrâ, Nursi intended for it to play the central and unifying role in Asia that al-Azhar performs in Africa. Besides combating racialism and nationalism by acting as a center of learning and attracting students from “Arabia, India, Iran, Caucasia, Turkestan, and Kurdistan” and thus contributing to the development of a sense of “Islamic nationhood,” this large Islamic university would also “reconcile the sciences of philosophy and those of religion, and make peace between European civilization and the truths of Islam.”

Doubtless the main reason Nursi mentioned the Medresetü’z-Zehra was that the new president, Celâl Bayar, had announced in a speech in Van in August 1951 that the Democrat government planned to build a university there in eastern Turkey. Nursi had met the announcement with gratification, equating it with his Medresetü’z-Zehrâ, and writing to inform his students of it under the heading “Some Important Good News for Nur Students.”⁸⁵ Again in the present letter, he applauded the president’s move, both for Turkey as a whole and for the east of the country, and as “a foundation stone of general peace in the Middle East.” Nursi stressed that for it to perform this vital function, the sciences of religion should be taken as the basis of the university. For “the destruction” was caused by external forces and was not of a physical nature, but was “moral and spiritual (*mānevî*).” What would counter and reverse the destruction also had to be of a moral and spiritual nature. As a specialist on these matters of some fifty-five years’ standing, Nursi had the right to speak concerning them.

It may be added that although the government completed the project and the Eastern University was opened in November 1958, it was built in Erzurum, not Van, and given the name Atatürk University. The campaign the RPP and some newspapers, including *Zafer* and *Yeni Ulus*, conducted against the government, protesting that it was “building Said Nursi’s *medrese*,” may have had some bearing on this.⁸⁶

In connection with the Baghdad Pact, it might also be mentioned that Nursi’s students who were with him at the time of the revolution in Iraq, July 14, 1958, have recorded his extreme distress at the events there. This was not only at the brutal killings, but also because the revolution had “wrecked the auspicious developments” of the pact and the moves toward Islamic unity and cooperation.⁸⁷

While it may have been partly the importance Nursi attached to continuing support for Menderes—who also was “gravely upset” at this blow to the

pact⁸⁸—that had prompted him to support the pact in the first place, this last, rather surprising, statement demonstrates the seriousness with which he viewed the rise of “aggressive atheism.” The criterion for political alliance was now adherence to religion and its principles.⁸⁹

Other Matters on Which the Third Said Addressed the Democrats

An underlying reason for Nursi writing this and other letters to Menderes and the Democrats was to point out some “fundamental laws” of the Qur’ān, as he called them, which he believed were an effective means of establishing social justice and peace. With these, he was not calling for the outright implementation of the Qur’ān and the Sharī‘ah, but suggesting that these principles be taken as guidelines and underlying moral precepts in the drawing up of new laws and policies and enactment of existing ones. He argued that by virtue of their source in divine revelation, it was through such principles that social division, hatred, and criminality could be eliminated and true reconciliation, peace, and progress be achieved. This was applicable also on the international level, both between the Muslim peoples and followers of different faiths as shown in the above letter, where in reference to the former he quotes one of the “fundamental law[s] of the Qur’ān,” “The believers are indeed brothers” (Qur’ān, 49:10). Principles of this sort offered a positive, constructive approach to the social, economic, and political problems facing the Democrat government. The “fundamental law” he most often put forward, however, was the Qur’anic verse: “No bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another” (Qur’ān, 6:164, 17:15, and *passim*), which he used in its meaning of “No one is answerable for another’s faults or errors.”⁹⁰ He frequently put forward this principle in different contexts as the solution for various ills in society resulting from the adoption of Western principles.

In one letter, Nursi wrote that the reason he had altogether given up politics for nearly forty years was that contrary to the basic principle enunciated in the above-mentioned verse, one of the most basic principles of “human politics,” that is, politics and diplomacy based on principles taken from “philosophy” of some sort rather than divinely revealed religion, was “Individuals may be sacrificed for the good of the nation and society. Everything may be sacrificed for the sake of the country.” This “fundamental human law” had resulted in appalling crimes throughout history, including the two world wars this century, which had “overturned a thousand years of human progress,” and had given the license for the annihilation of ninety innocents on account of ten criminals. The verse taught the principle that no one was responsible for another’s crimes, and no innocent person could be sacrificed without his consent, even for the whole of humanity. It establishes true justice.⁹¹

The main context in which Nursi advises the adoption of the fundamental law “No bearer of burdens can bear the burdens of another” is in connection with the extreme partisanship among supporters of the various political parties that was then being “implanted” in Turkish life. He describes the dire social consequences of this partisanship as completely destroying love and brotherhood, the foundations of unity and consensus. Moreover, through clashing, the three or four opposing forces or parties lose their power, so that the power that remains is insufficient to secure what is beneficial to the country and maintain internal order and security. This partisanship could even therefore allow the seeds of revolution to become established. The resulting weakness also would prepare the ground for foreign intervention. The Qur’anic principle was, “No one is responsible for the mistakes of another. No one can be considered guilty because of another’s crime, even if [the one responsible] is his brother or tribe or group or party. If he offers even his moral support, he will only be answerable in the hereafter, not in this world.” Hence the Qur’anic principle prevents extreme partisanship. It should be taken as the rule of conduct along with other “basic principles,” such as “Indeed, the believers are brothers” (Qur’ān, 49:10) and “Hold firm to God’s rope, all together, and be not divided among yourselves” (Qur’ān, 3:103).

Nursi also examined this same question in connection with “the accusation of [political] reaction (*irticā’*),” which ever since the Thirty-first of March Incident in 1909 had been a favorite means of attacking religion by “those who make politics the tool of irreligion.” It was continually used against Menderes and the Democrats throughout their ten years in power by the RPP and İnönü in particular. It will be recalled how an outcry of “reaction” was raised against Nursi and his students by the RPP in 1934 before the Eskişehir trials. The newspapers were the usual vehicles of these campaigns. And the imaginary bogeyman of political reaction was even given as the reason for Menderes’ shameful and inexcusable execution in 1961. In connection with the matter in question, Nursi points out that the truth had been turned on its head, for those who attack religion in the name of civilization by making accusations of political reaction are in reality the reactionaries. The reason is that the “human” principle that allows individuals to be sacrificed for the good of society permits minor wrongs when it comes to the good of the state, and has led to whole villages being wiped out on account of one criminal. And in the First World War, thirty million unfortunates perished on account of the criminal political mistakes of three thousand. Those who supported a barbaric principle that thus destroys the well-being, justice, and peace of mankind are retrogressing to a barbarism of former times. Yet, these true reactionaries pose as patriots and accuse of political reaction those who work to secure unity and brotherhood through Qur’anic principles such as those mentioned above, which are the means to true justice and progress.⁹²

Another “fundamental Islamic law” that Nursi advised Menderes and the Democrats to adopt was taken from the Hadith “A nation’s ruler is its servant,”⁹³ because, Nursi wrote, “At this time, due to the lack of Islamic training and weakness in worship, egotism has been strengthened and tin-pot dictators have multiplied.” That is to say, under the former regime, which aimed to substitute Western civilization for Islam, as a bribe to its supporters positions in government and the administration ceased being service and became a means of domination and despotism. Everyone’s rights were trampled on, and justice was completely destroyed.⁹⁴ As early as 1952, Nursi warned Menderes that these discountenanced officials, many of whom remained in their positions after 1950 but were compelled by the Democrats to serve the nation rather than oppressing and exploiting it, formed a current of opposition ready to attack the Democrats. A second current was the racialist nationalists.⁹⁵ In fact, both played an important role in the Democrats’ overthrow.

Others of these apparently simple but in truth “fundamental” principles look more to the establishment of economic and social justice. Brief mention has been made of them in connection with the letter Nursi wrote while in Istanbul in 1953.

Further Victories, and the Struggle Continues

The struggle between these various forces grew fiercer and more intense. The opposition of İnönü and the RPP to Menderes grew greater the longer the Democrat Party remained in power. He was blamed for the economic recession that occurred after the boom of the early 1950s, and they accused Menderes of exploiting religious sentiments in order to retain mass support. Religion was the cause of a bitter dispute of serious proportions.⁹⁶ The accusation that Menderes had betrayed the principle of secularism was entirely unjustified: he had repealed the law banning the Arabic call to prayer and made other concessions to the people’s religiosity, but in his view neither these popular measures, nor his acknowledgment of a nonpolitical religious movement like the Nur movement and acceptance of its support, contravened or threatened the secularist principle.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, faced with the spread and successes of the *Risale-i Nur*, supporters of the former regime, still powerful in the police, judiciary, and administrative structure, used their positions to increase pressure on the Nur students. There were further court cases and a campaign of vilification in the press against Nursi and his students, and Nursi himself was held under closer surveillance.

Following the general elections of October 1957, which the Democrats again won though with a decreased majority, the opposition increased their campaign against the government. By 1959 it had degenerated into the open

incitement of disturbances throughout the country.⁹⁸ In order to prevent the RPP from returning to power in the face of the difficulties the Democrats were facing, Nursi openly gave the Democrats his vote in the elections,⁹⁹ and urged all the Nur students to do likewise. As a result, the RPP, who had expected to win the elections, held Nursi responsible for their defeat. İnönü is even reported to have declared that it was the Nurcus (Nur students) who defeated him.¹⁰⁰ This was an added element in the pressure RPP supporters now endeavored to bring to bear on the Nur students.

At the same time, with the free publication of the *Risale-i Nur*, as well as the freedoms that had been gained with the Democrat government, the Nur movement had been greatly strengthened and expanded. “*Risale-i Nur* study centers” (*dershane*) were opened in every part of the country. It was the custom when one was opened to bring the key to Nursi, who would offer prayers for its success. In eastern Turkey also, the Nur movement grew rapidly through the endeavors of long-standing Nur students like Hulüsi Bey and Çaycı Emin, so that from one letter we learn that there were around two hundred *dershanes* in Diyarbakır and the east, including four or five specifically for women in Diyarbakır itself.¹⁰¹ On occasion, in Diyarbakır as many as a thousand people would attend the *derses*, the readings of the *Risale-i Nur*. In Ankara, Istanbul, Eskişehir, and all the main centers in Anatolia, the *Risale-i Nur* and its associated activities flourished.

The corollary of these successes was increased pressure and harassment. Nursi told Hulüsi Bey when he visited him in Emirdağ in 1957 that in the face of the threats to his person he now had to take further precautions. For another attempt had been made on his life, when an unknown person had entered his house by way of the roof and thrown poison into his water jug.¹⁰² Then, in April 1958, RPP supporters in Nazilli in western Anatolia hatched a plot against the local Nur students, two of whom were arrested. In concert with them, the newspapers started a furor describing the Nurcus as “enemies of the reforms.”¹⁰³ In response, the Nur students in Ankara published a letter answering their falsehoods and misrepresentations, whereupon eleven of them were arrested and held in Ankara Prison. This was the first case the lawyer Bekir Berk undertook for the Nur students, who were all acquitted.¹⁰⁴ Bekir Berk, subsequently famous as “the Muslims’ lawyer,” was also appointed by Nursi as his attorney.¹⁰⁵ In Konya, too, where the Nur students were active, there were arrests and court cases,¹⁰⁶ and in many other centers. At the same time, the countrywide press campaign against Nursi and the Nur movement continued unabated, with blatant misreporting and misrepresentations. Nursi and his students did not let these attacks remain unanswered and published replies, a number of which are included in the second volume of *Emirdağ Lahikası*.¹⁰⁷ This wide press coverage of all Nursi’s movements and activities continued right up to the time of his death, and particularly during December

1959 and January 1960, when Nursi made a number of journeys to Konya, Ankara, and Istanbul. The criminal charges against the Nur students were mostly under article 163 and involved the infringement of the principle of secularism and exploitation of religion for political ends. The supporters of the RPP, the press, and Nursi's enemies still persisted in accusing him of pursuing political ends. That is to say, although Nursi and his students had been acquitted by courts of law on such charges on numerous occasions, in this continuing and bitter struggle their enemies could find no other weapon with which to attack them.

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CHAPTER 17

The Last Months

Sincerity and Nursi's Health and State of Mind

As we approach the end of Nursi's life, just how baseless and far from the truth were the accusations made against him may be further illustrated by descriptions of his health and state of mind during these last years, both by himself and by the students who were constantly with him. As has been mentioned in other contexts, the basis of the *Risale-i Nur*'s way is sincerity (*ihlas*), which was, according to Nursi, the secret of its successes and victories. Sincerity was to follow no aim other than God's pleasure in the service of belief and the Qur'ān, and to make such service the tool of nothing. The preservation of this sincerity precluded participation in politics or the following of personal benefits of any kind. Nursi embodied sincerity in all its aspects to the highest degree. Just as throughout his life he had inclined toward and chosen solitude and especially for the last thirty or so years, and had avoided inessential social intercourse and conversation, so it had been a rule of his to never accept unreciprocated gifts, alms, or charity; he always practiced absolute self-sufficiency. The letters and statements describing Nursi's health at this time point out how, now that he was over eighty years of age and in need of the assistance of others, two illnesses had been visited on him so that he could preserve his total sincerity.

The first of these illnesses was that he was very often unable to speak; after speaking for two or three minutes, he would be overcome by a terrific thirst. He wrote in a letter that at a time when even enemies were being transformed into friends, by preventing unnecessary conversation, this helped maintain maximum sincerity.¹ And the second illness was that now gifts, both material and immaterial, caused him to become ill. So much as a mouthful of food, if it was an unreciprocated gift, even from one of his closest students, would make him ill.² Nursi defined the visits paid to him by the thousands wanting to see and speak with him as "immaterial gifts" that he was unable to repay. At that time when the *Risale-i Nur* was spreading so rapidly and finding so many new readers, he had been given a state of mind, like an illness, whereby he was severely discomforted by the often excessive respect and veneration shown him and by conversing and shaking hands with his visitors—again, so that he could preserve the maximum sincerity.³

Thus, Nursi was able to receive only a very few of those who came from all over Turkey and beyond to visit him. He published letters explaining this: due to these illnesses, it was his wish to meet only those concerned with the publication of the *Risale-i Nur*; anyway, he generally did not speak of other matters even with the students who accompanied him and attended to his needs.⁴ In a letter written by these students explaining this state of mind to visitors who had to return without seeing him, they wrote:

On numerous occasions we have understood that to shake hands and have his hand kissed is as distressing for Ustad's spirit as receiving a blow. Also, he is severely distressed at being looked at and being studied. Even we may not look at him, although we attend to his needs, unless it is essential. We have understood the meaning and wisdom of this to be as follows:

Since the fundamental way of the *Risale-i Nur* is true sincerity, the occurrences of the present time—speaking with people and being shown excessive respect—affect him adversely and severely, because in this age of egotism they are signs of self-worship, hypocrisy, and artificiality. He says that if those who want to meet with him want to do so for the *Risale-i Nur* and for the hereafter, the *Risale-i Nur* leaves no need for him; each of its millions of copies is as beneficial as ten Sais. If they want to meet with him in connection with this world and worldly matters, then, since he has earnestly given up the world, he suffers serious discomfort, because things concerning it are trivial and a waste of time. And if it is concerning the service and publication of the *Risale-i Nur*, they may meet with his devoted students who serve him, his spiritual sons and brothers, in his place. He says that no need remains for him.⁵

In a letter Nursi himself wrote, he even interprets his thirty years or so of exile and imprisonment as continual divine warnings not to make his service to religion the means to personal benefits of any kind, and so to preserve this absolute sincerity. The oppression he suffered due to the entirely false and unjust accusations of “exploiting religion for political ends” acted as a sort of “obstacle” preventing him from succumbing to “the great danger in the service of belief in this egotistical age,” which was to make that service the means to his own (spiritual) progress and advancement, and to salvation from hell and earning paradise. Nursi had been aware that something had prevented him, and it was only now that he understood the real cause. Although to work for these things was perfectly licit, at the present time in the face of the collective personality of misguidance and irreligion, the truths of the Qur'ān and belief had to be taught in an effective and convincing way in order to refute and smash unbelief. And that was through such teaching being the tool of nothing, “[s]o that those needy for belief would understand

that it is only truth and reality which speaks, and the doubts of the soul and wiles of Satan would be silenced.”

Nursi wrote that the secret of the *Risale-i Nur*'s success in halting and defeating absolute unbelief in those difficult conditions in Turkey lay in this fact. He himself was perfectly resigned at all the torments and oppression he had suffered, forgiving those who had perpetrated them. If he had not sacrificed everything, this extraordinary power of the *Risale-i Nur* would have been lost, whereas the belief of some people had been saved by only a single one of its pages.⁶

It was through this sincerity that the collective personality of the *Risale-i Nur* was formed, which Nursi described as a sort of Renewer or Regenerator of Religion (*müceddid*). For just as a Renewer was sent each century who would serve religion and belief in the required way, so in the present age of the assaults of secret organizations and the collective personality of misguidance, the Renewer of Religion has to be in the form of a collective personality. Just such a collective personality was that of the *Risale-i Nur*, formed through the self-sacrificing sincerity of Nursi and its students. Indeed, Nursi described himself as a seed out of which, in His mercy, Almighty God had created the valuable, fruit-bearing tree of the *Risale-i Nur*. “I was a seed; I rotted away and disappeared. All the value pertains to the *Risale-i Nur*, which is a true and faithful commentary on the Qur'an, and is its meaning.”⁷

Nursi's Will and His Wish for an Unknown Grave

It was for the same reason—to preserve this “maximum sincerity” wherein lay the *Risale-i Nur*'s power and the secret of its success—that on numerous occasions Nursi stated that he wanted the location of his grave to remain secret, known only by one or two of his closest students. He also had this written in his will.

Nursi made his will on a number of occasions, the first being in Emirdağ before being sent to Afyon in January 1948. Pointing out that it was a Sunnah of the Prophet to make a will, since the appointed hour was unknown, he named a committee of his students to which he wished his personal effects and finest volumes of the *Risale-i Nur* to be left.⁸ In his later wills, he stipulates two points; one is the matter of his grave being secret, and the other, the payment of allowances to those of the Nur students who worked solely for the *Risale-i Nur* and had no other means of subsistence.

Nursi stated that those who wished to visit his grave should do so only in the spirit and recite the *Fātiḥah* for his soul from afar. For, “Like in olden times, out of the desire for fame and renown, the Pharaohs drew the attention of people to themselves by means of statues, pictures, and mummies, so too

in this fearsome age, through the heedlessness it produces, egotism draws all attention to this world by means of statues, portraits, and newspapers, and the worldly attach more importance to the worldly fame and renown of the deceased through the worldly future they imagine has thus been obtained for them. They visit the deceased in this way, rather than visiting them for God's pleasure alone and their future in the hereafter. In order not to spoil the maximum sincerity of the *Risale-i Nur* and through the mystery of that sincerity, I enjoin that my grave be not made known."⁹ Just as he had not wanted to receive visitors in this world, so he did not wish his grave to be visited.

Although at various times Nursi stated where he wished to be buried—for instance, in one letter he says that he would prefer the graveyard in the village of Sav near Isparta to Barla,¹⁰ and he says in one of his wills that if he died in Emirdağ, his students should bury him in the “upper graveyard,” and if in Isparta, in the “middle graveyard.”¹¹ He also said he would like to die in Urfa in southeastern Turkey, where the Patriarch Abraham lies, and which is where in fact he did die. He told this to Salih Özcan, who recounted it like this:

It was in 1954, in Emirdağ. Mustafa Acet, Sadık, and myself went up into the hills with Ustad. When we came to a tree, Ustad stopped at it for half an hour, deep in contemplation. Then he called us to him and said: “Keçeli! Keçeli! No one will know my grave. You won't know it either. I want to die in your home region [Urfa]. I want to die near the Friend of the Most Merciful [Abraham].”¹²

In 1950 Nursi had sent some of his personal belongings to Urfa with one of his students and said that he himself would be going there. These included Mawlānā Khālid Baghdādī's gown, given to him in Kastamonu. The student later handed them over to Abdullah Yeğın,¹³ Nursi's student since his school-days, who stayed some eight years in Urfa. He opened a *dershane* there that became an important center of *Risale-i Nur* activities. Nursi was unable to visit it until the time of his death.

Nursi wrote three additional wills directing his closest students to continue his practice of paying an allowance to those Nur students who had dedicated themselves to its service and who could not otherwise provide for themselves. These were probably written in 1959. It had been the Old Said's practice to provide for his students. He describes how through “the abundance resulting from frugality and contentment” he had been able to provide for the needs of twenty, thirty, and sometimes sixty students without breaking his principle of self-sufficiency. Now the *Risale-i Nur* had begun to produce sufficient profit to do likewise. One-fifth of the money obtained from selling copies of it was sufficient to pay an allowance to fifty to sixty students.

Nursi wrote that he was making plain these wishes in a will because “personally I no longer have the strength to carry out the duties connected with the *Risale-i Nur*. And perhaps no need remains for me to do so. It is as though, due to being poisoned many times and because of extreme old age and illness, I do not have the endurance to continue living. Even if death, which I so long for, does not come to me, it is as though I have died outwardly.” “Since I am no longer needed at all in regard to the *Risale-i Nur*, to go to the Intermediate Realm [beyond the grave] is a source of joy for me. As for you, do not be sad, but congratulate me, for I am going from hardship and difficulties to mercy.”¹⁴

Nursi’s Trips to Ankara, Istanbul, and Konya

In December 1959 and January 1960, Nursi embarked on a series of trips to Ankara, Konya, and Istanbul, which in the light of the above descriptions of his health and state of mind show more than anything his extraordinary perseverance and self-sacrifice in continuing to further the cause of the *Risale-i Nur* in the midst of all the difficulties it was facing. To visit his students and their *dershanes*, which was his immediate reason for the trips, when not only meeting with people and being held in esteem was such torment for him, but also his health was so poor, was truly a feat of endurance that only someone of the will and determination of Nursi could have achieved.

Nursi was now receiving repeated and insistent invitations from his students all over Turkey to visit them, and his trips were in response to them. At the same time, they had the character of farewell visits. Ankara and Istanbul were the main centers of publication, and Konya was both an important center of activity and where Nursi’s brother, Abdülmecid, now lived. He had seen his brother only once in forty years. Nursi visited Istanbul once during this two months; Konya, three times; and Ankara, four times. His trips to Ankara had a further important purpose: he wanted to warn Menderes and the Democrats of the dangers looming before them and to suggest ways of averting them.

The clouds of disaster and revolution were gathering in Turkey. A coup attempt had already been uncovered and forestalled in 1958.¹⁵ Unable to abide the liberalism, religious freedoms, and resurgence of Islam that were the fruits of Democrat rule, supporters of the former regime, now represented by İnönü and the RPP, were preparing to regain power by force. For they could not do so by the vote or legal means. Mentioned above was Nursi’s warning to Menderes in 1952 of “the possible attack” of the two currents within the opposition whose interests were most harmed by Democrat policies. Now the danger was imminent, and he was eager above everything to warn them of this. For it was not only a question of saving the Democrats, it was a question of

saving the country from the consequences of once again coming under the rule of forces hostile to Islam and favorable to irreligion. However, this was only one reason for the journeys, which as a citizen Nursi had a perfect right to make, just as he had the right to offer advice to politicians. Nevertheless, İnönü and the RPP seized on them as a means of further attacking and weakening the government; besides İnönü making a series of inflammatory statements, they prompted the press to raise an outcry over the journeys, which resulted in overreaction by the police and their taking extraordinary measures against Nursi wherever he visited.

Nursi's urgent advice to Menderes and the Democrat deputies who visited him in Ankara was to reopen Aya Sophia as a place of worship¹⁶ and to make an official announcement stating that the *Risale-i Nur* was not subject to any restrictions.¹⁷ That is to say, Nursi saw that the only way the Democrats could now save themselves, having fallen into a position of weakness and disadvantage before İnönü and the RPP, was to stand up and make bold statements concerning the principles in which they believed, and in the service of which their former successes and popularity lay. However, for whatever reasons, Menderes did not have the will or courage to respond to these urgent suggestions of Nursi, and within less than six months was overthrown by the coup Nursi had foreseen. The country fell into the hands of the military and eventually of its former rulers. As for Nursi, when he saw that his advice evoked no response from Menderes, he complied with the wish of the authorities and remained in Emirdağ, then Isparta, making his final journey to Urfa some two months later in March.

All Nursi's journeys were in the Chevrolet his students had bought for his use. His first trip was to Ankara on December 2, 1959. Accompanied by Zübeyir, he stayed one night in the Beyrut Palas Hotel, then returned to Emirdağ the following day.¹⁸ He continued to Isparta, where he remained two weeks, then returned to Emirdağ. On December 19 he went to Konya on the invitation of his brother, Abdülmecid. It should also be mentioned that due to his various indispositions, Nursi could not remain in one place, but felt the continual need for a change of air and scene.¹⁹

On this occasion, in addition to Zübeyir, Nursi was accompanied by two of his most active Ankara students, Atıf Ural and Said Özdemir. The latter described the visit. On Nursi's car stopping in the middle of Konya, it was surrounded by a large crowd. Abdülmecid arrived and spoke with this elder brother through the open window of the car. Then the police arrived on the scene and started to break up the growing crowd by force, upon which Nursi stated his wish to perform the prayers and visit the tomb of Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi. The director of the museum opened the tomb specially for Nursi, since it was closed that day. Taking off his shoes, he entered the tomb and offered some prayers; he was weeping. He was sur-

rounded by people and police even in the tomb. Nursi then returned to Emirdağ,²⁰ or, more likely, Isparta.

That night Nursi set out again for Konya, and arriving at four o'clock in the morning was able to visit his brother's house. After speaking with Abdülmecid for a while, who was then a teacher at Konya Imam Hatip School, they performed the morning prayers together; then Nursi left for Emirdağ.

On the morning of December 30 Nursi arrived in Ankara for a second time, and again stayed in the Beyrut Palas Hotel. His visit was greeted with sensational headlines in the newspapers: "The Said Nursi Event Is Growing" (*Cumhuriyet*); "Said Nursi Has Again Come to Ankara . . ." (*Milliyet*); "Said Nursi's Eventful Visit to Konya. . . . Thousands of Nurcus poured onto the streets to greet him: the police were compelled to break up the crowd. . . ." Nursi received numerous visitors in the hotel: politicians and officials, including three Democrat deputies; Nur students; and ordinary people. The police again overreacted, and the hotel cordoned off by police and gendarmes, and the inside was filled with them. That evening, Nursi gave a farewell *ders* that impressed once again on the Nur students that the way of the *Risale-i Nur* was that of "positive action" and the maintenance of public order and security.²¹

Previous to Nursi's arrival in Ankara, the police had seized copies of *The Ratifying Stamp of the Unseen Collection* in the press as Said Özdemir was having it printed. In connection with this, Nursi received a request from Bekir Berk in Istanbul for a signature. At the same time he was receiving invitations from his students there. The following day he set off in his car for Istanbul.

It was the first day of January 1960. The newspapers had got wind of his visit, and by the time he and his students reached the Piyer Loti Hotel where he was to stay, there was such a thronging crowd, that it was only with the greatest difficulty that they could mount the steps to enter it. Nursi had to be shielded with an umbrella against the glare of all the flashbulbs going off. Police had taken over the inside of the hotel, and the press had set up a headquarters there. Nevertheless, that evening, with astonishing energy, Nursi gave a long *ders* to his students gathered in Istanbul.²² He was to have stayed several days but the following day, January 2, a newspaper reporter climbed onto the back balcony of his room and photographed him performing the mid-day prayers. Nursi was exceedingly angry at this and decided to cut short his visit and return to Ankara. On this occasion he stayed three days, and not in the hotel but in a rented house in Bahçelievler. However, the police still did not leave him in peace.²³

Nursi again received visitors during this stay. Three Democrat deputies have given accounts of visits, although it is not absolutely clear during which of Nursi's stays they occurred. Said Köker, the deputy for Bingöl, says he paid

Nursi three visits, and that Nursi told him and the deputies with him explicitly of the May 27 military coup, which he said would occur shortly. Nursi said also he had no connection with political parties and that “he only liked Menderes.”²⁴ Other accounts are by Gıyaseddin Emre, the deputy for Muş,²⁵ and Dr. Tahsin Tola, former Isparta deputy. Dr. Tola, who had contributed so much to the publication of the *Risale-i Nur*, was in constant touch with Nursi in Ankara. He describes Nursi’s anxiety at the forthcoming calamity, and how he related Nursi’s urgent message to the government concerning Aya Sophia and the *Risale-i Nur*.²⁶ Nursi himself also stated in a letter that “an important reason” for his going to Ankara was to urge Menderes and the government to clean up Aya Sophia and make it once more into a place of worship.²⁷ It may also have been during this visit that Nursi gave his last *ders* to his students in Ankara.

Nursi left Ankara on January 6 and went once again to Konya. On January 5 he had given a long statement to the correspondent of *Time Magazine*, who had wanted to accompany Nursi on the journey, but Nursi had not consented, since his trip to Konya was “a personal trip.”²⁸ Yet despite this—Nursi went to his brother’s house, then again visited the tomb of Mawlānā Jalālud-dīn Rūmī—he was met by a huge police presence and followed by police cars wherever he went. He stayed only two hours, then returned to Emirdağ.

On January 11, Nursi set out once again for Ankara. But now the government had bowed to opposition pressure, and he was not permitted to enter the city. His car was stopped by police outside it, and he was told of the cabinet decision “advising” him “to rest” in Emirdağ. Henceforth Emirdağ was his place of compulsory residence. Nursi had already heard the decision, which had been broadcast over the radio, and complied with the request up on the car being stopped at the police barricades. He returned to Emirdağ.²⁹

Nursi’s Last Days

On returning to Emirdağ, Nursi apparently no longer concerned himself with the plight of Menderes and the government. He had done whatever he could to warn them, and now, through their own fault, he was able to do no more. In fact, his student Said Özdemir reported Nursi as saying at this this point: “Menderes did not understand me. I shall depart soon and they too will go—overturned, head over heels.”³⁰ The government had indeed lost its credibility by then in the face of İnönü’s attacks and the continual incidents provoked throughout the country, and its grip on the country’s affairs continued to decline from this time onward. İnönü was visited in his house by leading members of the military. The plans were laid for the coup. Menderes survived only two months after Nursi’s death. The increased surveillance under which Nursi was now held continued right up to the time of his death.

Nursi remained in Emirdağ for some eight days; then, in accordance with the wish he had stated to the press, on January 20 he went to Isparta. Here he stayed in his rented house till March 17, when he returned to Emirdağ for two days. The month of Ramađān began that year on February 26. Thus, it was Ramađān 19, 1379 when Nursi set off for Emirdağ in his car together with Zübeyir, Mustafa Sungur, and Hüsni Bayram, who acted as driver. His health had deteriorated considerably. Until Ramađān 15, he had even been able to perform the *teravih* prayers; after that he had started to fail. The following day in Emirdağ, Nursi's students called the doctor, Tahir Barçın, himself long a student of Nursi, for Nursi was now seriously ill.

According to Dr. Barçın, who answered their call immediately, Nursi's temperature was 38°C., and his condition was serious: he had caught double pneumonia. He gave him an injection of penicillin, and Nursi dozed off. A short while later, he smiled and opened his eyes.

In the morning his condition was easier, and he announced that they were returning to Isparta. The preparations were made, and unlike previous occasions when Nursi had left for somewhere else, this time he bade a sorrowful farewell to the faithful Çalışkans and all his students in Emirdağ. Still, the doctor wrote, it did not occur to them that Nursi was going to die. It was only when they later heard the news from Urfa that they realized that he had been bidding them farewell for the last time.³¹

Later in the afternoon of March 19, Nursi arrived back in Isparta. His students Tahiri Mutlu and Bayram Yüksel were waiting for him. An hour previously the police had come searching for him, saying that they had left Emirdağ. The account is now Bayram Yüksel's.³² He states that it was with great difficulty that they got Nursi out of the backseat of the car, where he lay, and up the stairs to the house. He was running a high temperature and could not be left. That night at around two o'clock, Bayram and Zübeyir were with him when Nursi suddenly said: "We're going!" On their asking where, he replied: "Urfa . . . Diyarbakır." They thought he was feverish. Nursi kept on repeating, "Urfa. We're going to Urfa." The car tires needed repairing. But Nursi insisted that even if it meant hiring another car, they would go. Finally, the repairs were done, the back of the car was made up as a bed for Nursi, and at exactly nine o'clock on March 20, they were ready for the road. Two police were watching the house. Tahiri Ağabey was to remain to watch the house, and not to open the door to the police. Nursi said good-bye to the landlady, Fitnat Hanım, who also would say nothing to the police of their destination; and they set off.

It was raining. The rain grew harder, and they were not seen as they passed through Eğirdir. Before they reached Şarkıkaraağaç they daubed the license plate in mud. After passing through the town, Nursi recovered a little, got out of the car, renewed his ablutions at a spring by the side of the road,

and performed the prayers on a flat rock. Later his condition again worsened, and he could not speak. On entering Konya they stopped and bought cheese and olives with which to break the Ramadan fast. Since leaving Isparta they had all been reciting *Ayat al-Kursi* against the evil intentions of the governor of Konya, whose vow that he would “rip up the Nurcus by the roots” had made the headlines in all the newspapers. Through divine grace, they passed unspotted through Konya, skirting the mosque of Mawlana Jalaluddin.

They continued. Karapınar. Ereğli. Now Nursi could not get out of the car to pray. At sunset they were at Ulukışla. It grew very cold. Nursi could eat nothing. They passed through Adana in the dark and reached Ceyhan, where they performed the evening prayers and Hüsnü, the driver, slept for an hour. At the time to eat *sahūr*, they were at Osmaniye. Here they filled up the tank with gasoline. Nursi again ate nothing. At around 7:30 on the morning of March 21, they reached Gaziantep. They continued. The road was now very rough, churned up with a mixture of snow and mud, but they passed along it without mishap. Finally they reached Urfa at exactly eleven o'clock that morning, which was a Monday.

Urfa

On arriving in Urfa,³³ the first place they went was the Kadioğlu Mosque, where Abdullah Yeğın stayed. They learned that the best hotel was the İpek Palas, and together took Nursi there. He was now in a very poor state. His students had to virtually carry him up to the room they took, number 27 on the third floor. There then followed a most extraordinary tussle. On the one side were the police and government representatives, who on the orders of the interior minister in Ankara tried to compel Nursi to return to Isparta. On the other side were Nursi's students, the people of Urfa, and some officials, who categorically refused to allow the extremely ill and weak Nursi to be moved anywhere.

Nursi had a joyous reception from the people of Urfa, who began to gather outside the hotel and visit him in an unending stream. Bayram Yüksel writes that he had to hold Nursi's hands for the people to kiss. Yet despite his extreme weakness and contrary to his previous practice, Nursi received all who came. And all did come: tradesmen, army officers, soldiers, police, officials, ordinary people; they came in their hundreds. Nursi explained to Abdullah Yeğın the importance of Urfa, speaking of the service to Islam of its people, who, being Turkish, Arab, and Kurdish, would be a means to unity and Islamic brotherhood. Nursi managed to keep going and receive all the people who kept coming.

Suddenly two plainclothes police arrived and told Nursi's students that they had to get ready to leave and return to Isparta. These were joined by

eleven or so others. They informed Nursi, who declared: "How strange! I came here to die, and perhaps I will die. You can see my condition, you defend me!"

They replied that they had their orders and brought Hüsnü, together with the car, around to the front of the hotel. The hotel manager began protesting at his guest being treated in this way. The crowd grew excited and started shouting and protesting. The situation became very tense. The police could no longer enter the hotel. Then the car disappeared and the crowd calmed down a little. The people continued to visit Nursi.

The police insisted, saying the order came directly from the interior minister in Ankara, Namık Gedik, and was final. Nursi would be sent by ambulance if they did not take him by car. Nursi's students said it simply was not possible, and, in any event, it was not up to them to relay police orders to him. The heated exchanges continued in this vein. Telegrams were sent to Menderes. Hundreds of telegrams passed between Ankara and Urfa that day. The people declared they would not let Nursi go.

The news spread that Nursi was going to be expelled from Urfa. The chairman of the Urfa branch of the Democrat Party heard, and going straight to the police headquarters, told the police chief in the strongest terms that Nursi was their honored guest and that there was no question of his being treated in this way. The argument continued, and the Democrat Party chairman banged his revolver down on the police chief's desk, making it plain that if they were to resort to force, the police would have to dispose of him first.

Meanwhile a crowd of five or six thousand people gathered outside the hotel. The Democrat Party chairman brought the government doctor, who examined Nursi. He had a temperature of 40°C. The doctor pronounced him unfit to travel, and said a general report would be made out the following day.

It was now Tuesday evening. Nursi's students were taking turns in keeping vigil over him. They were all exhausted. Bayram slept for two hours, then Zübeyir woke him up; he could not keep going any longer. Then Hüsnü went and joined Zübeyir and Abdullah Yeğin. Only Bayram was left. He stayed with Nursi. The door was locked against any possible intrusion. Nursi was running a high temperature and was feverish. He could no longer speak. He had wanted some ice during the day, but they had been unable to find any. Later they found some, but then he did not want it. His lips were parched. Bayram wiped them with a damp handkerchief. This degree of fever was new. At 2:30 in the morning Bayram pulled up the covers, which Nursi had kept throwing off. He draped a cloth over the light to reduce its brightness. Then suddenly Nursi reached up with his hand and touched Bayram's neck; he was massaging Nursi's arms. Nursi put his hands on his chest and slept. Or so Bayram thought. But Nursi had not fallen asleep; he had departed this life, and his spirit had flown to the eternal realm. It was three o'clock in the morning of Wednesday, March 23, 1960; Ramadan 25, 1379.

Nursi Is Buried in the Halilürrahman Dergah

Bayram lit the stove so that Nursi would not get cold, for he thought Nursi was sleeping. A while later Zübeyir and the others came. Nursi's body was hot, but no sound came from him. They could not accept that Nursi had died till they sent for Vaiz Ömer Efendi, a well-known religious figure who was visiting Urfa. As soon as he entered the room, he uttered the words, "To God do we belong, and to Him we shall return" (*Innā liLāhī wa innā ilayhī rāji'un*).

The news spread instantly around Urfa. Zübeyir, Hüsni, and Abdullah went to telephone and telegraph Nur students in Emirdağ, Isparta, Istanbul, and all over Turkey. The hotel owner came to the door, and started wailing when he saw what had happened. He met the police chief on the stairs and told him the news. The police chief had come to the hotel together with a troop of gendarmes to take Nursi by force back to Isparta; they returned to the police headquarters. The police sent a doctor to make out a report. But the doctor felt doubtful and only later wrote his report, for the body was so hot; it did not resemble the normal state of death. He did not want Nursi to be buried immediately.

Then the estate lawyer came; he noted down Nursi's personal effects and fixed their value. According to the report in the newspaper *Akşam*, this was 551 liras 50 kuruş. That is to say, apart from his watch, gown, prayer mat, teapot and glasses, and a few odds and ends, Nursi owned nothing in the world. On the request of his students, Nursi's only surviving brother, Abdülmeçid, was made the sole heir to these.

As the news spread, thousands of people started to pour into Urfa. It was decided that Nursi's body would be washed and buried in the *Dergah*, where the Prophet Abraham lies. He was taken there after the midday prayers. The people of Urfa closed all the shops and filled the streets. While the body was washed and wrapped in its shroud on that Wednesday afternoon, thousands of white-winged pigeons and birds of other sorts flocked and flew in the air above the *Dergah*. It was raining gently. Nursi's body was washed by Molla Abdulhamid Efendi. Also present were Zübeyir, Bayram, Hüsni, and Abdullah, and also the *Risale-i Nur*'s "first student," Hulüsi Bey. Nursi's body was then taken to the Ulu Mosque, where it was to rest till it was buried. The Qur'an was read continuously and prayers were recited. The mosque was filled.

The burial was to have taken place on Friday, but the numbers of people crowding into Urfa from all over Turkey and beyond became so great, the governor called Nursi's students and said that he would have to be buried on the Thursday following the afternoon prayers. They had no option but to agree. It was announced over loudspeakers.

The funeral prayers were performed in the courtyard of the Ulu Mosque, then the bier holding the body was raised up and carried on the hands of the crowd. The governor of Urfa, the mayor, the local garrison commander, the people of Urfa, those of the Nur students who had been able to reach Urfa in time for the burial—thousands of people crowded in and around the mosque and then moved in a thronging mass to carry the body the short distance to the *Dergah*. Everyone wanted to touch the bier, and it was passed from hand to hand as is the custom; after close on two hours it was only with the assistance of soldiers and police, who opened up the way, that it was brought finally to the *Dergah* and buried.

It was still raining. That night the recitations of the Qur'ān continued unceasingly over the grave. Nursi was now resting near the Patriarch Abraham, the Friend of the Most Merciful. The tomb in which he had been laid had been built in 1954 by a local shaykh called Shaykh Muslim, while repairs were being made to the *Dergah*. He three times had a dream in which he was told that the tomb belonged to another, as a result of which he ordered that on his death he be buried in the public graveyard. And so they buried Nursi in the tomb, but it was to be only a temporary resting place for him.

The Military Junta Orders the Removal of Nursi's Remains to an Unknown Spot

The military coup Nursi had foretold occurred on May 27, 1960. Menderes, leading members of his government, and Democrat deputies, officials, and sympathizers were all rounded up and sent to various camps and prisons. A campaign was started against the Nur students and movement. Once again the searches, confiscations, arrests, imprisonments, and court cases began. Hundreds of Nur students were subject to this new wave of vengeful repression. The country was now governed by the so-called National Unity Committee, and the decision was taken to move Nursi's remains to an unknown spot. They could not even leave him in peace in his grave, just as they had hounded and harassed him up to his last moments in this world. Nursi's brother writes:

It was in early July and three and a half months since my elder brother's death. I had performed the midday prayers on time in the house I rented near Mevlana's tomb in Konya when the Special Branch chief, whose name I learned was İbrahim Yüksel, came. He told me that the governor wanted me. Together we went to the governor's office. There were three generals there. One was Cemal Tural, another was Refik Tulga. Refik Tulga was commander of the Second Army and temporary governor of Konya.

Cemal Tural said to me: “The people in the east and from beyond our southern borders are coming and visiting your brother’s grave illegally. The times are sensitive. With your cooperation, we’re going to move his grave to inner Anatolia. Please sign this paper.”

He handed me a petition written as though by myself. I read it and said: “I have no such wish. At least leave him in peace in his grave.” But they told me:

“You have to sign it. Don’t put us in a difficult position.”

We climbed into the vehicle that was to take us to the airfield after signing the petition. . . . Finally we boarded the aeroplane. My family and children knew nothing of this. Of course, they were all anxious and frightened.

We reached Diyarbakır. After a brief rest we boarded a different plane and took off for Urfa. They took me in a military vehicle to an army building. They offered me some food, but I didn’t want it; I was exhausted. We had landed at Urfa in the afternoon. After nightfall they took me in a jeep together with a captain and some soldiers to the Halilürrahman Dergah. There were two coffins in the courtyard of the mosque. There were a number of soldiers wandering about.³⁴

From other accounts we learn that this was the night of July 12, 1960. The town had been taken over by the army. There was a strict curfew, and no one was allowed on the streets. Tanks and armored vehicles had been positioned at all key points in the town. The *Dergah* was surrounded by a tight cordon of soldiers. Acting on the orders they had received, soldiers entered the twin-domed building containing Nursi’s tomb, not by the door, but by breaking the iron grill on the windows. They then began to smash the marble slabs of the tomb with hammers.³⁵

Abdülmeceid continues:

A doctor came up to me and said: “Don’t be too anxious and upset. We’re moving Ustad to Anatolia. That’s why they have brought you here.” I completely broke down on hearing these words, and I started to weep.

The doctor told the soldiers: “Open the coffin and take Ustad out of it and put him in this one.” But the soldiers held back and were frightened, “We can’t do it. We’ll be struck down,” they said. But the doctor told them: “My brothers, we have our orders. We have to do it.” We opened the coffin together. I was saying to myself, “Seyda’s bones will be all mixed up together.” But on touching the shroud with my hand, it felt as though he had only just died. Only, the shroud had discolored slightly around its opening, and on the outside was a stain like from a drop of water. The doctor opened the shroud. I looked at his face; he was smiling. Again, all together we embraced the great and wronged Ustad and placed him in the

large, extremely heavy coffin the soldiers had brought.³⁶ They filled the empty space in the coffin with grasses and herbs. When everything was completed, we climbed into an army truck and went straight to the airfield. The streets were all being patrolled by soldiers with bayonets fixed.

The coffin would not fit in the first plane. [Hours later] a second plane arrived. We put the coffin in it, and I sat beside it. I was utterly sorrowful and my eyes full of tears.³⁷

And to continue from another account by Abdülmecid that is more detailed:

I reckon the journey was six to seven hours. We landed at Afyon near mid-afternoon. Of course, it was they who said it was Afyon. After landing, they unloaded the coffin and placed it in an army truck. I again sat in the driver's cab. Behind us were two jeeps and small trucks. We set off. It was a mountainous region. I don't know where we went and in what direction, and I didn't ask. I was as though dazed by the situation.

We traveled slowly for I reckon about seven hours; in the late hours of the night we arrived somewhere and stopped. There were several soldiers and noncommissioned officers. They had dug a grave and were awaiting us. They immediately and hastily unloaded the coffin, put it in the waiting grave, and covered it with earth. While they were doing this, I looked around, and although I could not see very well, the place resembled a mountainside. There was a wall about a meter in height. I climbed onto it and looked around; there was not a light to be seen. Everywhere was in complete darkness.

They buried the coffin. The work was finished. An N.C.O. said to me: "Do you want to stay here tonight, Hoja, or do you want to return home?" I thought, what shall I do if I stay here? A short time later, a black car arrived. The driver was a soldier. I got in and it set off. After traveling for about one and a half hours we approached a town with lights. I asked the driver where the lights were, what town. He replied, "Eğirdir." We continued on our way, and I arrived at my house in Konya at eight or nine o'clock.³⁸

In this way Nursi found his final resting place in his beloved Isparta in accordance with his wishes, and so too, except for two or three of his closest students, and a small number of officials bound to secrecy by oath, the location of his grave remains unknown.

Finally, in some couplets entitled *Eddāi* (The Supplicant), included in the introduction to *Leme'āt*, a sizable collection of pieces written in "semi-verse" and first published in 1921, Nursi foretold both the year of his death and that his grave would be demolished. A literal translation is as follows:

*My demolished grave in which are heaped up**
*Seventy-nine dead Saids** with his sins and sorrows.*
The eightieth is a gravestone to a grave;
*Altogether they weep*** at Islam's decline.*
Together with my gravestone and moaning grave of dead Saids
I go forward to the field of tomorrow's future.
I am certain that the skies of the future and Asia
Will together surrender to Islam's clean, shining hand.
For it promises the prosperity of belief;
It affords peace and security to mankind.

Nursi's footnotes are as follows; the second and third he added in the 1950s:

* This line is his signature.

** Since the body is renewed twice every year, it means that [each year] two Saids have died. Also, this year Said is in his seventy-ninth year. It means one Said has died every year, so that he will live to this date. [Nursi died in 1379 according to the Hicri calendar, and his grave was demolished and moved in 1380.]

*** With a premonition of the future, he perceived its present state, twenty years later.³⁹

Conclusion

The story of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi is the story of a Muslim scholar and teacher who at a time when the fortunes of the Islamic world had declined in the face of rising Western imperialism dedicated his life and learning to demonstrating that the revitalization of the Islamic world, and even the prosperity and happiness of humanity, were to be found in the Qur'an as divine revelation, rather than in dominant present-day civilization, since the latter took its inspiration from principles of human origin. This was a constant goal from his youth, and the pursuit of it led the young Said to write several original works and to become actively involved in the constitutional movement, which he believed was the sole means of securing the unity and progress of the Ottoman Empire and Islamic world. For Nursi and many thinkers of the day, such values of constitutionalism as representative government, consultation, and the rule of law were proper to Islam and essential for the rebuilding of Islamic civilization. Nursi, in particular, emphasized their basis in Islam.

Despite his involvement in the struggle for the acceptance of what are now known as democratic values, Nursi's cause was not a political one, but for the greater part educative, both in the broad sense of illuminating different classes of people about the manifold benefits of constitutionalism, and in the founding of innovative educational establishments, and updating curricula and the disciplines taught. He also attached the greatest importance to moral renewal.

After the Turkish victory in the War of Independence, Nursi found himself at odds with the leaders of the new regime in Ankara, and withdrew entirely from public life. This was quite in keeping with the character of the New Said, who in the bitter years of the Ottoman defeat and foreign occupation, had emerged from the Old. The Qur'an now had primacy in Nursi's life, and he was successful in developing a new observational method of expounding its teachings on the fundamental tenets of faith, derived from the Qur'an itself and based on reflective thought on the phenomenal world. When sent into exile, his new writings found a ready response among the people of Anatolia, whose beliefs and identities they felt to be threatened by the secularizing and Westernizing measures. With their proofs of the teachings of the Qur'anic revelation and accommodation with science, and rebuttal of "philosophy," Nursi's writings, the *Risale-i Nur*, articulated the

people's problems and offered them a restatement of their beliefs relevant to their situation. In essence, Nursi was carrying over into the new era the great debate between Islam and Western civilization, and presenting it on the level of basic principles.

Nursi, however, avoided confrontation of all sorts and entirely dissociated himself from political life; his concern now was with the human individual as a moral being, and the building of the human person through understanding his relation with his Maker, and his relations with his fellow-beings contingent on this. It was through the attainment of such faith or belief (*īmān*) that what Nursi believed to be the destructive aspects of philosophy hostile to religion could be counteracted and society be renewed along constructive lines. Despite the persecution suffered by Nursi and his students, they never abandoned this positive stance. In fact, terms of imprisonment only strengthened their resolve and served to spread the movement that grew up around Nursi's writings, the Nur movement.

With the rise of aggressive atheism and communism, Nursi's view of revelation and philosophy led him to acknowledge a side of the West that he had always recognized, one that took its inspiration from Christianity as a revealed religion rather than from philosophy. He encouraged cooperation with believing Christians in meeting the threat of atheism, and he personally initiated relations with Christian leaders. This was in tandem with his efforts to reforge links with the Islamic world and strengthen unity between Muslims through the *Risale-i Nur*.

Together with being centered on the *Risale-i Nur*, to no small extent the character and success of the Nur movement spring from the example of Nursi himself and his remarkable personal qualities and virtuous life.

In his early years, in a tough tribal society where factionalism was rife and group loyalties were strong, Nursi's independent spirit led him to set his own course and carve out a place for himself as a man of religion. His independence stood him in good stead throughout his hard life, as did his enterprise and zeal. Other lifelong characteristics were his proverbial courage and boldness, no less evident in his mature years than in his youth; to so uncompromisingly uphold and further the cause of Islam through long years of suppression and persecution was a feat of courage indeed. He was a rare combination of an activist who with steely determination struggled to revivify and strengthen religious belief, and a holy, otherworldly ascetic whose inner being, especially in the second period of his life, was turned wholly to his Maker. His living faith and closeness to God made him selfless in his struggle and completely forgo all the demands of the self and ego; he was as modest and courteous before his friends as he was formidable and unbending before his enemies—that is, those hostile to the Qur'an and Islam.

Most striking, perhaps, was Nursi's humanity and compassion and his profound concern for all humankind; it was this that drove him to conduct his intelligent, farsighted struggle that repaired and built rather than destroyed, so that all men might find peace and salvation in revealed religion and the practice of its principles.

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Notes

Chapter 1

1. There is some uncertainty concerning the date of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's birth, but the majority of available sources give it as 1877.

2. Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 247. He specifies that in Kurdistan it is an honorific that denotes followers of the Naqshbandī order.

3. Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:71–72.

4. See Bruinessen, *Mullahs, Sufis, and Heretics*.

5. In his later years, Nursi claimed in private conversation that he was a Sayyid, that is, a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. See Salih Özcan in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 3:129; Muhiddin Yürüten, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 3:74; and Hüseyin Aksu, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.) 1:242–43. The first two men record that Nursi said both of his parents were from a line of Sayyids. Bediuzzaman told Salih Özcan that his mother was “Husaynî,” and his father, “Hasanî.” His family was not known as a Sayyid family.

6. Şahiner, *Nurs Yolu*, 68; Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:43.

7. See Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 224ff.

8. Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (13th ed.), 312; Nursi, *Rays*, 280.

9. Şahiner, *Nurs Yolu* 2, 153.

10. Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 46; Nursi, *Flashes*, 128; Nursî, *Muhâkemat*, 22–23.

11. See Algar, “Political Aspects of Naqshbandi History,” 131; and Mardin, “Nakşibendî Order in Turkish History.”

12. See the special issue on the Qādirî order, *Journal of the History of Sufism* 1–2 (2000). Published in Istanbul by Simurg Press.

13. Mardin, “Nursi,” 75. See also Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 223ff.

14. Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 1:53.

15. The Ghawth of Hizan was the title of Shaikh Sayyid Sibgatullah Arvasi, a *khalifa* of Khālid Jazarī, who in turn was a *khalifa* of Mawlana Khalid. See Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 324, 337. He was reputed to be the most holy of contemporary shaikhs and is buried in the village of Geyda near Hizan. See also Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1993 ed.), 1:22–24.

16. For a brief biography of ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Gilānī (1077–1166), see Tringham, *Sufi Orders of Islam*, 40–44. According to this, he was not himself a Sufi preceptor but rather a preacher and religious instructor, and did not found the Qadiriyya order, which grew up sometime after his death.

17. Nursi, *Sikke-i Tasdik-i Gaybi*, 116.

18. *Ibid.*, 71.

19. Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 1:52.

20. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 31–32.

21. For another prophecy by the same shaikh, see Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:84 n. 23.

22. For a similar story corroborating this, see Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:78.

23. Clay, “Labour Migration and Economic Conditions,” 3–4.

24. Abdurrahman, *Tarihçe-i Hayatı*, 6–7; Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:86–87.

25. Shaykh Emin Efendi was a famous scholar whose *medrese* was in the Kızılımscit quarter of Bitlis. He was the teacher of many notable people, and went to Istanbul 1900. There he was greeted with a formal ceremony and had private conversation with Sultan Abdülhamid II. He returned to Bitlis in 1903 and died there in 1908 at the age of seventy. See, Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 53.

26. Hamza, “Bediüzzaman,” 668; *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 33.

27. Abdurrahman, *Tarihçe-i Hayatı*, 8–10; *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 33–35.

28. The famous Sufi scholar Nūr al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (1414–92), lived in Herat. Of his numerous works, the one known as *Molla Jami* was a commentary on a work on Arabic syntax called *Al-Kāfiya* by Ibn Ḥājib, and formed part of the *medrese* syllabus until recent times. Around one hundred commentaries were written on this work, each of which had glosses and further annotations. See *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi* (henceforth TDVIA), S. V. “İbnü’l-Hacib” by Hulûsi Kılıç.

29. *Jam’ al-Jawāmi’* is a work on the principles of *fiqh* by Taj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 1370); *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif* is on ‘ilm al-kalām (theology) and ‘aqā’id (doctrine), and is by Sayyid Sharīf al-Jurjānī (d. 1413); and *Ibn Ḥajar* is a work on the principles of *fiqh* by Ibn Ḥajar al-Haythamī (d. 1567). They are all standard works. For a list of books taught in the *medreses* of Kurdistan, see, Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:97–98.

30. For a brief biography of Ahmed Hani (d. 1707?), see TDVIA, S. V. “Şeyh Ahmed Hânî,” by M. Sait Özervarlı.

31. Gazali, *İhyā’u Ulūmi’d-Dīn*, 2:247. Nasā’ī and Tirmidhī state that the Hadīth is sound.

32. Nursi, *Sikke-i Tasdik-i Gaybi*, 65.

33. A work on logic by Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī.

34. As is mentioned in a subsequent chapter, one reason Nursi gave for wearing this distinctive attire was to advertise and encourage local industries, which were

threatened with extinction by the flood of cheap European imports. By the 1880s the production of the local mohair cloth, which was probably the material of Nursi's outfit, was declining. See İnalçık and Quataert, *Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire*, 2:924. See also Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 18–19, who points out that the material was, and still is, produced exclusively by Armenians. See also Mardin, *Religion and Social Change*, 46.

35. Abdülmecid (Nursi), *Hatıra Defteri*, 16, quoted in, Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:93.

36. Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:100–1; Şahiner, *Nurs Yolu* 2, 100.

37. Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (handwritten ed.), 383, quoted in Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:100.

38. Nursi, *Lem'alar*, 649.

39. Abdurrahman, *Tarihçe-i Hayatı*, 15; *Risale-i Nur Külliyatı Müellifi*, 38.

40. Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:109–10.

41. *Ibid.*, 1:109.

42. On missionary activities in the late Ottoman Empire and the Armenians, see Salt, *Imperialism, Evangelism, and the Ottoman Armenians*; and idem, "Trouble Wherever They Went," 287–314.

43. Mardin, *Religion and Social Change*, 42ff., 60–65; Mardin, "Nursi," 76–77.

44. Deringil, *Well-Protected Domains*, 114.

45. Shaw and Shaw, *History*, 2:250.

46. Mardin, *Religion and Social Change*, 62; Deringil, *Well-Protected Domains*, 127, 128.

47. Bishop, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, 354, quoted in Mardin, *Religion and Social Change*, 61. See also Brant, "Journey," 6:187–223.

48. Bishop, *Journeys*, 121, 122, quoted in Mardin, *Religion and Social Change*, 61.

49. See, Shaw and Shaw, *History*, 200–205; Danişmend, *İzahlı Osmanlı Tarihi Kronolojisi*, 4:331–35.

50. Zürcher, *Turkey*, 87–88.

51. Öke, *Yüzyılın Kan Davası*, 101.

52. *Ibid.*, 89.

53. For the Hamidiye regiments, see Shaw and Shaw, *History*, 2:246; Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 185–86; Kodaman, *Sultan II. Abdülhamid'in Doğu Anadolu Politikası*.

54. Danişmend, 4:334.

55. The *Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*, formerly a very widely used dictionary, was written by Abū Ṭāhīr Firūzabādī (d. 1415). It is not known which of its numerous printings Nursi used. Since it was in four volumes, he must have memorized several hundred

pages. See Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:111; Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (13th ed.), 68; TDVİA, S. V., “Fîrûzâbâdî,” by Hulûsi Kılıç.

56. While being tried for opposition to the Turkish Republic in Eskişehir Criminal Court in 1935, Nursi was asked his opinion of republicanism. He replied: “As my biography, which you have in your possession, proves, I was a religious republican before any of you, with the exception of the chairman of the court, was born,” and related the above story of the ants. He went on to say that each of the four Rightly-Guided caliphs had been both caliph (that is, successor to the Prophet) and president of the republic, and that this had not been some meaningless title, since they had been presidents of a religious republic in which true justice and freedom prevailed. See *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 39.

57. For Mustafa Pasha, see Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 181, 186–87; Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (new ed.), 1:31–34.

58. The traveler, Lehmann-Haupt, is cited by Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 186–87.

59. This account is taken from Abdurrahman, *Tarihçe-i Hayatı* 18–21; *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 39–42.

60. Said Nursi evidently had a better opinion of the son than of the father (who was killed in a skirmish in 1902), for he gave him a copy of the earliest extant photograph of himself. It was later given to Nursi’s biographer Necmeddin Şahiner by Abdülkerim’s daughter, Meryem. See Şahiner, *Resimlerle Bedüzzaman Said Nursi*, 18. He commanded the Hamidiye regiment made up of members of the Miran tribe in the Balkan Wars of 1912–13. See Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1993 ed.), 33–34.

61. Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:116–7.

62. Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 63–64.

63. Nursi, “Münâzarat” (Ott. ed.), 462.

64. On this, see Mardin, *Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*.

65. Kocatürk, *Büyük Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi*, 662.

66. Nursi, *Münâzarat* (1977 ed.), 15.

67. Keddie, *Islamic Response*, 29–30.

68. Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 115–16.

69. Keddie, *Islamic Response*, 35.

70. Enayet, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, 41–42; Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 115–19.

71. Nursi, *Divan-ı Harb-i Örfî*, 19.

72. Ahmed Hilmi, *Senûsiler* (reprint ed.), 32, 37, 43.

73. *Ibid.*, 29–30.

74. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 42.

75. Abdurrahman, *Tarihçe-i Hayatı*, 23–24; Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:123–24.

76. Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 1:135.

77. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 42–43.

78. Abdurrahman, *Tarihçe-i Hayatı*, 25–26.

79. A *juz'* is one-thirtieth of the Qur'an.

80. Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 1:257.

81. Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (new ed.), 1:344–45.

82. This event gives us a certain date for Said's stay in Bitlis: Shaikh Muhammed Küfrevi died in 1313H/1895–96. See Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:128 n. 56. In *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, it is placed at the end of his stay. See, *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 44.

83. Abdurrahman, *Tarihçe-i Hayatı*, 28–29; *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 44.

84. Sayyid Nūr Muḥammad was the grandson of Sayyid Sibgatullāh, mentioned above, n. 15. See also Nursi, *Barla Lahikası*, 276; Nursi, *Rays*, 434.

85. Shaikh Abdurrahmān Tāḡī was also known as Seyda. He died in 1886–87.

86. Shaikh Fehim Arvāsī was a *khalīfa* of Sayyid Ṭāhā, one of Mawlana Khālid's *khalīfas*.

87. Shaikh Fethullāh Verkānisī (d. 1899–1900) was a *khalīfa* of Shaikh Abdurrahmān Tāḡī. See Badıllı, *Nursi*, 129.

88. In Sadık Albayrak's five-volume *Son Devir Osmanlı Uleması*, culled from the official records, the numbers of the learned profession from eastern Anatolia are negligible compared with those from other regions of the Ottoman Empire.

89. Abdülmecid (Nursi), *Hatıra Defteri*, 11, quoted in Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:144.

90. Abdurrahman, *Tarihçe-i Hayatı*, 29, and the "official" biography calls him simply "Hasan Pasha." Abdülmecid (see Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:144) and following him Şahiner (*Bilinmeyen*, 13th ed., 77), state that he was the governor of Van.

91. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 44–45. In fact, many years later while describing his years of study in Van to one of his students, Muhsin Alev, Nursi said that he had studied and mastered all the sciences with the exception of organic chemistry; that was the only one he had not been able to master completely. See Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed), 1:227.

92. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 46.

93. Mustafa Sungur, in Şahiner, *Aydınlar Konuşuyor*, 395.

94. Nursi, *Damascus Sermon*, 88–89.

95. Nursi, *Şualar*, 748.

96. Abdurrahman, *Tarihçe-i Hayatı*, 30.

97. On the Azhar, see Hatina, "Historical Legacy," 51–68.

98. Nursi, *Lem'alar*, 648.

99. For the Giravi, a powerful tribe, see Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 55, 106, 120. Badilli says that its members were renowned for their courage and bravery, and of all the tribes of the Van area it was the most attached to Nursi. See Badilli, *Nursi*, 1:151.

100. Abdurrahman, *Tarihçe-i Hayatı*, 31–32; *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 46.

101. Erdem, *Davam*, 192.

102. Badilli, *Nursi*, 1:163.

103. That is, about the turn of the century. The quoted source and *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi* do not name the minister, whereas Şahiner (*Bilinmeyen*, 13th ed., 84) says it was Gladstone, who was famous for his “abhorrence” of “the Turk.” If this was the case, it must have been an old report, since Gladstone had died in 1898.

104. Nursi, *Sikke-i Tasdik-i Gaybî*, 76.

105. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 47.

106. Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 2:195.

Chapter 2

1. Consult the following sources: Ahmad, *Making of Modern Turkey*; Findley, *Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire*; and Goffman, *Ottoman Empire and Early Modern Europe*.

2. On the meaning of these terms, see Lewis, *Political Language of Islam*.

3. Heyd, “The Ottoman ‘Ulema and Westernization,” 29–33; 39–53.

4. *Ibid.*, 33–35.

5. Mardin, *Genesis*, 117; Mardin, *Religion and Social Change*, 122.

6. Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, 261; Zürcher, *Turkey*, 72.

7. Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, 482; Mardin, *Genesis*, 289, 402.

8. Zürcher, *Turkey*, 85.

9. On the life of Sultan Abdulhamid, see Dorys, *Private Life of the Sultan of Turkey*.

10. Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, 275–6.

11. Hanioğlu, *Abdullah Cevdet*, 9–14; Hanioğlu, *Young Turks in Opposition*, 20–21; Mardin, *Religion and Social Change*, 354.

12. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 187ff.

13. For some banned writers and words, see Shaw and Shaw, *History*, 2:251.

14. Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, 276–82.

15. For example, the *Osmanlı*, published in Geneva from 1897 by Abdullah Cevdet and İshak Sükûti, two original founders of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), was smuggled into the empire through the French and Austrian post offices. See Zürcher, *Unionist Factor*, 16; Hanioglu, *Abdullah Cevdet*, 34ff.

16. On the CUP, consult Ahmad, *Young Turks*; Arai, *Turkish Nationalism*; and Heyd, *Foundations of Turkish Nationalism*.

17. See, Zürcher, *Unionist Factor*, 22.

18. Resneli Niyazi (1873–1912), known, as Enver (1881–1922) was, as a “Hero of Freedom.” See, *ibid.*, 20 n. 9, 22 n. 20. They are mentioned together no less than twenty-five times in the 110 numbers of the *Volkan* newspaper, and held up as exemplary—mostly, it seems, for their upholding the principles of constitutionalism in the midst of the general decline that followed the revolution.

19. Nursi, “Lemeân-ı Hakikat,” *Volkan* nos. 103 (Mart 31, 1325/Nisan 13, 1909), 105 (Nisan 2, 1325/Nisan 15, 1909), quoted in Düzdağ, *Volkan Gazetesi*, 504, 511.

20. Nursi, *Münâzarat* (1977 ed.), 61.

21. Abdurrahman, *Tarihçe-i Hayatı*, 33–34.

22. Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 3:17–19. The original is in the archives of the Prime Minister’s Office, Istanbul (Istanbul Başvekalet Arşivi), among the Yıldız papers of Sultan Abdülhamid II. Şahiner gives both a transcription and photo of the original, but not the document number.

23. Abdülmecid (Nursi), *Hatıra Defteri*, 4, in Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:171.

24. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 48–49.

25. Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (13th ed.), 107.

26. Başoğlu, “Bir Hatıra,” *Uhuvvet Gazetesi* (Istanbul), 11 December 1964), quoted in Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 82–83.

27. Ali Himmət Berki, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 2:12.

28. Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 84.

29. H. Hasan Sarıkaya, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 4:356.

30. Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 1:54–55.

31. For biographical details of Shaikh Bakhit (d. 1935), see Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 4:363–64. *TDVİA*, S. V. “Bahit, Muhammed,” by Cengiz Kallek.

32. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 49–50; Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 1:108.

33. In an article entitled “İfade-i Meram” (Statement of Purpose), written in November 1908, Nursi describes what he is writing—the fourth of four answers to questions about Islam asked by Japanese visitors to Istanbul—as being “two months older than [the advent of] Freedom,” and having been asked them six months previously. (See Nursi, *İçtimâi Reçeteler*, 2:300.) It is understood from this that the

“answers” date from May 1908; that Nursi’s altercation with the Mabeyn pashas and incarceration must have been in May/June 1908; and that the article was written in November.

34. Ali Rıza Sağman, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 4:294–95.

35. Nursi, “Nutuklar,” 366–67.

36. Zürcher, *Turkey*, 83.

37. Sarıkaya, *Medreseler ve Modernleşme*, 82.

38. *Ibid.*, 79.

39. *Ibid.*, 191–92.

40. In a newspaper article published in March 1909, Nursi described to the sultan in an imaginary conversation how he should act as caliph in the new age of constitutionalism: “Since despotism has left no blood in Istanbul, the heart of the Muslim countries, show that your intention is good and make Yıldız Palace, which is now abhorred, beloved of hearts in the way you compassionately accepted constitutionalism with no bloodshed: raise Yıldız Palace to the Pleiades by filling it with leading ulama like angels of mercy in place of the former demons of hell, and by making it like a university and reviving the Islamic sciences, and by promoting the offices of Şeyhü’l-İslam and the caliphate to their rightful positions, and by curing with your wealth and power the weakness in religion that is the nation’s heart disease and the ignorance that is the disease of its head. Then the Ottoman dynasty may scatter the rays of justice in the constellation of the caliphate. . . .” “Bediüzzaman Kürdi’nin Fihriste-i Makasıdı,” *Volkan*, no. 84 (Mart 12, 1325/March 24, 1909), Düzdag, *Volkan Gazetesi*, 407.

41. Sarıkaya, *Medreseler ve Modernleşme*, 76, 77.

42. *Ibid.*, 95–96; Çelik, *Ali Suavi ve Dönemi*, 650–56.

43. Sarıkaya, *Medreseler ve Modernleşme*, 96–100.

44. Nursi, *Münâzarat* (1977 ed.), 71.

45. Nursi, *Muhâkemat*, 8.

46. Nursi, *Münâzarat* (1977 ed.), 72.

47. *Ibid.*, 74–76.

48. *Ibid.*, 76.

49. Nursi, *Muhâkemat*, 46–47.

50. Nursi, “Bediüzzaman Kürdi’nin Fihriste-i Makasıdı” (Mart 11, 1325/Mart 24, 1909), Düzdag, *Volkan Gazetesi*, 403.

51. Nursi, *Rays*, 493.

52. Nursi, “Devr-i İstibdad ve Said-i Kürdi’nin Pençeleşmesi,” in *Asar-ı Bedi’iyye*, 324–29.

53. Two other accounts may be referred to, showing that other doctors reached similar conclusions. See Şahiner, *Türk ve Dünya Aydınlarının Gözüyle Nurculuk Nedir?* 142–43; Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (13th ed.), 106–7.

54. The interview has been verified recently with the discovery of the relevant documents among the Yıldız Palace archives. One, dated June 26, 1908, instructs that “Vanlı Said Efendi” be paid a salary of 1,000 *kuruş*, another, dated June 27, instructs that he be paid 2,000 *kuruş* to meet his travel expenses on his return journey to Van. See Şahiner, *Bediüzzaman Üniversitesi, Medresetü’z-Zehrâ*, 46–50.

55. Nursi, “Devr-i İstibdadde Timarhaneden Sonra Tevkifhanede iken Zabtiye Nazırı Şefik Paşa ile Muhaveremdir,” in *Asar-ı Bedi’iyye*, 330–31.

56. On the Ottoman press in this era, see Brummet, *Image and Imperialism in the Ottoman Revolutionary Press*.

57. Eşref Edip, “İslam Düşmanlarının Tertiplerini Ortaya Çıkarmak Vazifemizdir,” *Yeni İstiklal Gazetesi*, no. 241, March 23, 1966, quoted in Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 97–98.

58. Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:197. See also Macfie, *End of the Ottoman Empire*, 41.

59. Kutay, *Bediüzzaman Said Nursî*, 186, 310.

61. Macfie, *End of the Ottoman Empire*, 25–26.

62. Tunaya, *Türkiye’de Siyasal Partiler*, 3:22.

63. Zürcher, *Turkey*, 97.

64. Nursi, *Divan-ı Harb-i Örfî*, 56–70.

65. Kara, *İslamcıların Siyasî Görüşleri*, 24, 39–45.

66. Mürsel, *Bediüzzaman Said Nursi*, 249–52.

67. On this “Incident,” see Fahri, “Şeriat as a Political Slogan.”

68. Kara, *İslamcıların Siyasî Görüşleri*, 131.

69. Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:286.

70. Macfie, *End of the Ottoman Empire*, 44.

71. This is meant loosely. At this stage, Nursi had no official position in the learned profession.

72. Shaw and Shaw, *History*, 2:274.

73. Zürcher, *Unionist Factor*, 21.

74. Tunaya, *Türkiye’de Siyasal Partiler*, 3:308–9.

75. Kara, *İslamcıların Siyasî Görüşleri*, 50, 97ff.

76. Mardin, *Continuity and Change*, 23; Hanioglu, *Abdullah Cevdet*, 129ff., 139–40.

77. Nursi, *Barla Lahikası*, 191.

78. Nursi, *Divan-ı Harb-i Örfî*, 70.

79. Ibid., 70.
80. Letter from Sir Gerard Lowther to Sir Charles Hardinge, quoted in Macfie, *End of the Ottoman Empire*, 31.
81. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 57.
82. Nursi, *Divan-ı Harb-i Örfî*, 12–13.
83. Zürcher, *Turkey*, 133.
84. See Mardin, *Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, 330.
85. Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, 331.
86. The name is misleading: it had first been used by Europeans for all opponents of Abdülhamid in exile, and had no nationalist overtones. The Young Turks themselves looked on themselves first and foremost as Ottomans. See Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, 305.
87. See Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks*, 82–83.
88. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 233.
89. Ibid., 218; Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks*, 114.
90. Birinci, *Hürriyet ve İtilaf Fırkası*, 28–29.
91. Ibid., 25–27.
92. Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks*, 75.
93. Nursi, “Nutuklar,” 356–57.
94. There is reference to an earlier edition of the work, 1324/1908, in Hanioglu, *Abdullah Cevdet*, 315 n. 2, but I have not been able to authenticate this.
95. Nursi, “Nutuklar,” 358–59.
96. Ahmad, “War and Society under the Young Turks,” 127–28.
97. Brummett, *Image and Imperialism*, 175.
98. Nursi, *Divan-ı Harb-i Örfî*, 14–15.
99. See Brummett, *Image and Imperialism*, 183.
100. Tunaya, *Türkiye’de Siyasal Partiler*, 1:407.
101. Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks*, 76.
102. Kara, *İslamcıların Siyasî Görüşleri*, 63, 88.
103. Münir Süleyman Çapanoğlu, *Türkiye’de Sosyalizm Hareketleri ve Sosyalist Hilmi*, quoted by Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 110–11.
104. Şahiner, *Nurs Yolu*, 131.
105. Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 115–16; Nursi, *Divan-ı Harb-i Örfî*, 17.

Chapter 3

1. The revolt is named according to the Rumi (Julian) calendar, then in use in the Ottoman Empire. March 31, 1325, and corresponded to April 13, 1909, on the Gregorian calendar.

2. *Volkan*, no. 36, in Düzdağ, *Volkan Gazetesi*, 168. *Volkan*, no. 70, in Düzdağ, *Volkan Gazetesi*, 335, announced that the Union had been in existence since February 6, 1909.

3. For Derviş Vahdeti, see note 22 and corresponding section in the text.

4. See, *Volkan*, no. 69, in Düzdağ, *Volkan Gazetesi*, 331.

5. *Volkan*, no. 68, in Düzdağ, *Volkan Gazetesi*, 328–29; no. 98, in Düzdağ, *Volkan Gazetesi*, 476.

6. *Volkan*, no. 69, in Düzdağ, *Volkan Gazetesi*, 331. See also Düzdağ, *Yakın Tarih Yazıları*, 155, 158.

7. *Volkan*, no. 75, in Düzdağ, *Volkan Gazetesi*, 362–64; Tunaya, *Türkiye’de Siyasal Partiler*, 1:199–203.

8. A number of historians, principally Tunaya in the above work, present this official opening (which, as noted had been delayed so as to coincide with the Prophet’s birthday), as the founding of the Union. This has linked the society—if only by inference—with the Thirty-first of March Revolt, which broke out “only” ten days later. A recent example of the many works in which this has been repeated is Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks*, 72–73. Having noted this, I would like to draw attention to one or two further points in Tunaya’s treatment of the Union, and suggest that his conclusions are misleading. These are related to the nature of the Muhammadan Union. Also, regarding its role in the revolt, closer, unbiased investigation through study of extensive original source material might well show that it did not play the leading role Tunaya and many others assert. This, however, is beyond the scope of the present work. While examining these matters, the first thing to bear in mind is the extremely partisan nature of political life in the period, which makes it essential to know a person’s affiliations in order to assess the truth of his statements about an opponent, even if (or particularly if) he is a member of the parliament or government. To come to the other points:

Firstly, throughout the relevant section of his classic work, Tunaya calls the Muhammadan Union a *fırka*, which in this context means a political party (see *Redhouse Yeni Türkçe-İngilizce Sözlük* [Istanbul, Redhouse Yayınevi: 1979], 371). Whereas in its “*nizamname* (code of rules)” and elsewhere, the Union defines itself as a “society (*cemiyet*)” (see *Volkan*, no. 70, in Düzdağ, *Volkan Gazetesi*, 362) and never uses the term *fırka*.

Secondly, Tunaya characterizes the Union as “clerical, clandestine, and revolutionary” (*Türkiye’de Siyasal Partiler*, 1:183, 192–93) The first adjective is correct, though the use of term “clerical” (Turk. *klerikal*) with its specifically Christian connotations could be questioned. It should also be remembered that the society was open to “all believers.” The second and third adjectives, however, do not appear to be cor-

rect. As regards its being a secret society, the information about it and its aims and activities in the *Volkan*, together with members' articles and statements, and announcements of new members and so on, all belie this, and as far as I can ascertain from the material at my disposal, there is nothing to suggest it. To support his assertion, Tunaya misquotes a short section from the manifesto (*Volkan*, no. 75, in Düzdağ, *Volkan Gazetesi*, 361–62), which explains that throughout the world there were societies of a religious nature, “the *İttihad-ı İslam* in India and the Jesuits and missionaries and Zionist societies in Europe and America and innumerable others”; so, too, there were political parties and groups, such as “the Freemasons, Carbonari, Young Europe, Socialists, Communists, Positivists, Karl Marx’s Internationalist Society, anarchist parties and governmental parties, and bodies of every sort and kind.” In this environment the Muhammadan Union was “spreading the lights of divine unity.” That is to say, in such a world it was incumbent on them to spread the message of Muhammad; they were not emulating the secret societies just mentioned. The Union’s aims and objectives are described below; they were neither clandestine, nor revolutionary, nor even primarily political, but to promote adherence to the Shari’ah and moral improvement (*tezhîb-i ahlak*), and arouse the Muslim “nation’s” political and social ideas and work for its progress. The Islamic unity it proposed looked to these questions. The fact that the Union was not a political party made it possible for its members to belong to any of the political parties. As for the question of being a revolutionary party and seizing power (Tunaya, *Türkiye’de Siyasal Partiler*, 1:192–93), Tunaya provides no substantial evidence to support such a claim. I have been unable to check his statements about Prince Sabahaddin, but it is difficult to see the relevance of his quotes from the *Volkan* (*ibid.*, 1:192–93 n. 39).

In short, in view of the importance of Tunaya’s work as a widely used source, it should be noted that he is attempting to construct an erroneous image of the *İttihad-ı Muhammedî Cemiyeti* on extremely flimsy foundations. The subject is in need of further unbiased investigation.

9. A *mevlid* is a recitation by special singers of the long poem depicting the birth of the Prophet Muhammad written by Süleyman Çelebi (d. 1378).

10. In the *Volkan* collection recently republished in the Latin alphabet, a Sehl Fazl Pasha heads the list of members of the Union’s Central Committee; Süheyl is probably a mistranscription, though it appears in all editions of *Divan-ı Harb-i Örfî* in recent decades. See, *Volkan*, no. 75, 364.

11. Shaikh Feyzullah Efendizade Mehmed Sadık Efendi. See *Volkan*, no. 75, in Düzdağ, *Volkan Gazetesi*.

12. Nursi, *Divan-ı Harb-i Örfî*, 17–19.

13. *Ibid.*, 20.

14. Nursi, “Yaşasın Şeriat-i Ahmedî,” *Volkan*, no. 77 (Mart 5, 1325/March 18, 1909), in Düzdağ, *Volkan Gazetesi*, 371. For translation, see Nursi, *Damascus Sermon*, 76.

15. Nursi, “Reddü’l-Evham,” *Volkan*, no. 90 (Mart 18, 1325/March 31, 1909), in Düzdağ, *Volkan Gazetesi*, 438; Nursi, *Damascus Sermon*, 84.

16. Nursi, "Lemean-ı Hakikat," *Volkan*, no. 102 (March 30, 1325/April 12, 1909), in *Düzdağ, Volkan Gazetesi*, 498.
17. Nursi, "Lemean-ı Hakikat," *Volkan*, no. 101 (March 29, 1325/April 11, 1909), in *Düzdağ, Volkan Gazetesi*, 494.
18. "Beyanname," *Volkan*, no. 75, in *Düzdağ, Volkan Gazetesi*, 361–62.
19. *Volkan*, no. 90, in *Düzdağ, Volkan Gazetesi*, 435.
20. *Volkan*, no. 95, in *Düzdağ, Volkan Gazetesi*, 461.
21. Hafız Ali Sağman, *Mevlid Nasıl Okunur ve Mevlithanlar*, quoted in Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 116–17.
22. For a short biography of Vahdetî, see *Düzdağ, Volkan Gazetesi*, facing title page; *Düzdağ, Yakın Tarih Yazıları*, 153–56.
23. See Macfie, *End of the Ottoman Empire*, 46.
24. *Ibid.*, 50; Shaw and Shaw, *History*, 2:280.
25. Yalman, *Yakın Tarihte Gördüklerim ve Geçirdiklerim*, 1:205, 208; *Düzdağ, Yakın Tarih Yazıları*, 161.
26. *Düzdağ, Yakın Tarih Yazıları*, 157–65.
27. The numbers run to 110, but two, nos. 10 and 13, did not appear due to lack of funds.
28. *Volkan*, no. 1, in *Düzdağ, Volkan Gazetesi*, 1; no. 4, 20.
29. See, for example, *Volkan*, no. 2, in *Düzdağ, Volkan Gazetesi*, 8–9.
30. *Volkan*, no. 103, in *Düzdağ, Volkan Gazetesi*, 502.
31. See Nursi, *Divan-ı Harb-i Örfî*, 16, 38–40; Nursi, "Nutuklar," 359–60.
32. Nursi, "Lemean-ı Hakikat," *Volkan*, no. 105 (Nisan 2, 1325/April 15, 1909), in *Düzdağ, Volkan Gazetesi*, 512.
33. See, for example, *Volkan*, nos. 59, 64, 71, and 84, in *Düzdağ, Volkan Gazetesi*.
34. Albayrak, *31 Mart Vak'ası Gerici Bir Hareket Mi?*, 118.
35. Kutay, *31 Mart İhtilalinde Sultan Hamit*, 59.
36. Özçelik, *Sahibini Arayan Meşrutiyet*, 271; Tunaya, *Türkiye'de Siyasal Partiler*, 1:185.
37. Zürcher, *Turkey*, 103.
38. Danişmend, *İzahlı Osmanlı Tarihi Kronolojisi*, 4:364; Birinci, *Hürriyet ve İtilaf Fırkası*, 33.
39. Tunaya, *Türkiye'de Siyasal Partiler*, 1:148.
40. Zürcher, *Turkey*, 103, 104.
41. See Nursi, *Münâzarat*, 35–36; it is quoted below.

42. See Öke, *Siyonizm ve Filistin Sorunu*, 123.
43. *TDVİA*, S. V., “Derviş Vahdetî,” by Zekeriya Kurşun and Kemal Kahraman.
44. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 215.
45. The newspaper *İkdam* reported that thirty thousand to forty thousand people attended. See Özçelik, *Sahibini Arayan Meşrutiyet*, 169.
46. Danişmend, *İzahlı Osmanlı Tarihi Kronolojisi*, 4:371.
47. *Ibid.*, 371.
48. See Macfie, *End of the Ottoman Empire*, 30–4.
49. *Ibid.*, 49.
50. Zürcher, *Turkey*, 104.
51. Müftüoğlu, *Her Yönüyle Sultan İkinci Abdülhamid*, 340–41, 350–51.
52. Bahadıroğlu, *Osmanlı Padişahlar Ansiklopedisi*, 3:747.
53. Nursi, *Münâzarat*, 35–36.
54. Cemal Kutay, in Şahiner, *Aydınlar Konuşuyor*, 345.
55. Nursi, *Divan-ı Harb-i Örfî*, 21–25.
56. See Yalman, *Gördüklerim ve Geçirdiklerim*, 1:114.
57. Derviş Vahdeti left Istanbul on April 18, hid in and around Gebze, Sapanca, and Hereke, and was finally captured in İzmir on May 25, on being denounced by a fellow Cypriot. See Düzdağ, *Yakın Tarih Yazıları*, 156.
58. Nursi, *Lem’alar* (Ott. edn.), 647.
59. Quoted in Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:304; photo, 306.
60. Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:309.
61. Mehmed Selahaddin, *İttihad ve Terakki’nin Kuruluşu*, 32.
62. Cellad Hasan’s memoirs were serialized in the weekly *Resimli Perşembe Dergisi* from March 3, 1927, to April 21, 1927, under the title “What I Witnessed in Bekir Ağa Prison.” For relevant passages plus photo, see Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:309–10.
63. See, Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (new ed.), 1:179–85, quoted from Cellad Hasan’s notes.
64. Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1993 ed.), 1:186.
65. *Ibid.*; Nursi, *Sikke-i Tasdik-i Gaybî*, 24.
66. On May 23, 1909, the *Tanin* announced that Nursi’s case had been passed to the court-martial by the investigating committee. See, Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:304.
67. Nursi, *Divan-ı Harb-i Örfî*, 39.
68. Mehmed Selahaddin, *İttihad ve Terakki’nin Kuruluşu*, 32–33.
69. Nursi, *Divan-ı Harb-i Örfî*, 11–12.

70. Ibid., 28–30.
71. Ibid., 37–38.
72. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 57.
73. Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:304; photo, 307.
74. Nursi, “Divan-ı Harb-i Örfi,” in *Asar-ı Bedi’iyye*, 302.
75. Nursi, *Divan-ı Harb-i Örfi*, 35n.
76. Ibid., 39–40.

Chapter 4

1. Nursi, *Kastamonu Lahikası*, 40.
2. Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:328.
3. Nursi, *Kastamonu Lahikası*, 121.
4. Thus, in 1910 Nursi foretold the lifting of “the three darkneses” that would descend on the peoples of Caucasia and Turkestan, the last of which were witnessed in 1991–92. They may be seen as the collapse of czarist Russia, the collapse of communism, and the Muslim states of the area gaining their independence with the falling apart of the Soviet Union. In Abdurrahman’s biography of Nursi, he quotes the Russian policeman as saying, “Freedom will cause you [the Ottoman Empire] to break up.” To which Nursi replied: “It is you it will cause to break up, and I’ll come and build my *medrese* here.” See Abdurrahman, *Tarihçe-i Hayatı*, 34–35. Also, in 1990, Bitlis and Tiflis were proclaimed “twin towns.”
5. Nursi, *Sünūhat*, 63–64.
6. Nursi, *Damascus Sermon*, 32.
7. Erdem, *Davam*, 193. Nursi’s student Ali Çavuş says “around six months,” but it was probably not as long as that.
8. Nursi, “Münāzarat,” in *Asar-ı Bedi’iyye*, 406.
9. Ibid., 407.
10. Ibid., 411.
11. Ibid., 416.
12. Ibid., 417.
13. Nursi, *Münāzarat*, 15–16.
14. Ibid., 17.
15. Ibid., 19.
16. Ibid., 18.
17. Nursi, “Münāzarat,” in *Asar-ı Bedi’iyye*, 410–11.

18. Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 134.

19. Nursi, "Münâzarat," in *Asar-ı Bedi'îyye*, 412.

20. Nursi, *Münâzarat*, 46–47.

21. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 127. The concept of *şahs-ı mânevî* entered Ottoman thinking from European thought through the writings of Namık Kemal (see Mardin, *Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, 333–34, 399–400); Nursi adapted the idea to suit his own thought.

22. Nursi, *Münâzarat*, in *Asar-ı Bedi'îyye*, 50–51.

23. *Ibid.*, 22–23, 55.

24. Nursi, "Münâzarat," 416.

25. Nursi, *Münâzarat*, 7–8.

26. For example, in the speech he gave at the funeral service of the fifty soldiers of the Operation Army killed during its taking of Istanbul after the revolt of March 31, 1909, "Enver Bey (Pasha) emphasized that Moslems [*sic*] and Christians were lying side by side . . . [they] were henceforward fellow-patriots who would know no distinction of race or creed." Pears, *Forty Years in Constantinople*, 282.

27. Öke, *Yüzyılın Kan Davası*, 141.

28. Nursi, *Münâzarat*, 25.

29. See J. McCarthy, *Muslims and Minorities*, ch. one.

30. Shaw and Shaw, *History*, 2:202.

31. Nursi, *Münâzarat*, 20.

32. Nursi, "Münâzarat," in *Asar-ı Bedi'îyye*, 433.

33. Nursi, *Münâzarat*, 20–21.

34. *Ibid.*, 39–41.

35. Nursi, *Rays*, 202.

36. Nursi, *Muhâkemat*, 73.

37. Nursi, *Sikke-i Tasdik-i Gaybî*, 153; Nursi, *Kastamonu Lahikası*, 78–79.

38. Nursi, *Muhâkemat*, 7.

39. *Ibid.*, 31.

40. *Ibid.*, 8.

41. *Ibid.*, 32.

42. *Ibid.*, 34.

43. *Ibid.*, 13–14.

44. *Ibid.*, 112–13.

45. *Ibid.*, 136.

46. Nursi, "Münāzarat," in *Asar-ı Bedi'iyye*, 404.
47. Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1993 ed.), 1:56–57.
48. On Mawlānā Khālīd Baghdādī, see Algar, "A Brief History," 34ff.; Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 223–24; Hourani, "Shaikh Khalid and the Naqshbandi Order," 89–103.
49. Erdem, *Davam*, 193.
50. Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:338.
51. Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 136–37; *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 81.
52. Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks*, 141–43.
53. *Ibid.*, 94–95.
54. *Ibid.*, 102–3.
55. *Ibid.*, 103ff.
56. Nursi, *Damascus Sermon*, 26–27.
57. *Ibid.*, 28.
58. *Ibid.*, 39.
59. *Ibid.*, 43–45.
60. *Ibid.*, 49–51.
61. *Ibid.*, 56–58.

Chapter 5

1. Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (13th ed.), 154.
2. Nursi, *Kastamonu Lahikası*, 46.
3. Danişmend, *İzahlı Osmanlı Tarihi Kronolojisi*, 4:383.
4. See McCarthy, *Ottoman Peoples and the End of the Empire*.
5. Zürcher, *Turkey*, 109.
6. Nursi, *Damascus Sermon*, 59–66.
7. Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (13th ed.), 155; Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:354.
8. Zürcher, *Turkey*, 109.
9. Letter to Minister of Education Tevfik İleri dated August 19, 1951, quoted in Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:352–53.
10. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 95.
11. There are now exceptions to this; see Zürcher, *Unionist Factor*; idem, *Turkey*; Macfie, *End of the Ottoman Empire*.

12. Stoddard, "The Ottoman Government and the Arabs." A Turkish translation of this has been published under the title *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa*. References in the present work are to the latter translation.

13. Stoddard, *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa*, 182–83.

14. Kuşçubaşı, *Hayber'de Türk Cengî*. English translation: *The Turkish Battle of Khaybar*.

15. Stoddard, *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa*, 52.

16. Kutay, *Çağımızda*, 116.

17. *Ibid.*, 138–40.

18. Erdem, *Davam*, 193.

19. *Ibid.*, 193.

20. Uslu, *Bediüzzaman'ın Kardeşi*, 29, 31.

21. Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 2:187.

22. Uslu, *Bediüzzaman'ın Kardeşi*, 37.

23. This copy has been preserved and published as a facsimile edition: Nursi, *Ta'liqât 'alâ Burhân al-Galanbawî fi'l-Mantiq*.

24. *TDVİA*, S. V. "Gelenbevi," by Şerafettin Gölcük and Metin Yurdağür.

25. Nursi, *Kastamonu Lahikası*, 140.

26. See Hamza, "Tarihçe," in *Asar-ı Bedi'yye*, 674.

27. Nursi, *Opening Sûra*, 9; *idem*, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 19.

28. Lit. "Statement of Purpose." Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 14–15.

29. See Erdem, *Davam*, 193; Abdurrahman, *Tarihçe-i Hayatı*, 35; Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 15.

30. Nursi, *Letters*, 433.

31. Tahir Pasha, who was ill, returned to Istanbul around the beginning of 1913, where he died in November of that year. See Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 3:16–20. He was succeeded by Tahsin (Üzer) Bey, also a close associate of Nursi.

32. For some of the documents, see Şahiner, *Bediüzzaman Üniversitesi*, 118–33.

33. *Ibid.*, 132.

34. Nursi, *Lem'alar*, 71.

35. Öke, *Yüzyılın Kan Davası*, 75; Macfie, *End of the Ottoman Empire*, 109; Danişmend, *İzahlı Osmanlı Tarihi Kronolojisi*, 4:409.

36. For a detailed account, see Balcıoğlu, *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa'dan Cumhuriyete*, 169–73. Bruinessen gives 1912 or 1913 as the date, but comments that "reports on this revolt are all contradictory." See Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 337 n. 4. Both Nursi (*Rays*, 383) and his brother Abdülmecid (Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:367) state it occurred on the eve of the First World War.

37. Öke, *Binbaşı E. W. C. Noel*, 14.
38. On Armenian activities, see Nalbandian, *Armenian Revolutionary Movement*.
39. Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:367.
40. Nursi, *Rays*, 383.
41. Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 2:187.
42. Nursi, *Rays*, 518.
43. *Ibid.*, 518.
44. Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 165–66.

Chapter 6

1. Nursi, *Ta'liqāt*, 92.
2. Sabis, *Harp Hatıralarım*, 1:157, 158.
3. *Ibid.*, 2:32.
4. *Ibid.*, 41.
5. For example, Bitlisli Abdülmecid, in Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:380; Molla Münevver, in Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:382; Hulûsi Bitlisi, in Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:382.
6. Nursi, *Letters*, 98; Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 1:272.
7. Abdülmecid (Nursi), *Hatıra Defteri*, 17; quoted in Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:375.
8. Arif Cemil, *Birinci Dünya Savaşında Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa*, 73.
9. *Ibid.*, 27–28. This was one section; the second operated from Trabzon. The Special Organization set up the *Kafkasya İhtilal Cemiyeti* (Caucasus Revolutionary Society), the purpose of which was to foment revolution in Caucasia and do whatever was necessary to precipitate Russian defeat.
10. Leverkuehn, *Sonsuz Nöbette Görev*, 29, 56.
11. Sabis, *Harp Hatıralarım*, 2:213. For 'Umur-u Şarkiye Dairesi,' see, Balcıoğlu, *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa*, 1–8.
12. Sabis, *Harp Hatıralarım*, 2:168.
13. Sabis, *Harp Hatıralarım*, 2:137–38, 148, 154, and passim; Arif Cemil, *Birinci Dünya Savaşında Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa*, 13–269.
14. Zürcher, *Turkey*, 144; Macfie, *End of the Ottoman Empire*, 154–5.
15. Sabis, *Harp Hatıralarım*, 2:255–56.
16. *Ibid.*, 257–58.
17. *Ibid.*, 259.
18. Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 2:13.

19. Ahlatlı İsmail Hakkı Arslan, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 5:236–37.
20. Mustafa Yalçın, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 2:21–22.
21. Sabis, *Harp Hatıralarım*, 2:366.
22. *Ibid.*, 427, 429.
23. Shaw and Shaw, *History*, 2:316; Sabis, *Harp Hatıralarım*, 2:40; Danişmend, *İzahlı Osmanlı Tarihi Kr'nolojisi*, 4:428. The latter says it was April 13.
24. Öke, *Yüzyılın Kan Davası*, 132; Uslu, *Bediüzzaman'ın Kardeşi*, 35; Erdem, *Davam*, 194.
25. Abdurrahman, *Tarihçe-i Hayatı*, 36.
26. Sabis, *Harp Hatıralarım*, 2:435.
27. *Ibid.*, 437.
28. Shaw and Shaw, *History*, 2:316.
29. *Risale-i Nur Külliyatı Müellifi*, 98.
30. Erdem, *Davam*, 194–95.
31. *Risale-i Nur Külliyatı Müellifi*, 101; Abdurrahman, *Tarihçe-i Hayatı*, 36.
32. Sabis, *Harp Hatıralarım*, 2:437.
33. The law ordering the relocation of the Armenians was passed May 27, 1915, but the deportations had in fact begun soon after the Armenian revolt in Van. See Danişmend, *İzahlı Osmanlı Tarihi Kronolojisi*, 4:428 (April 24); Shaw and Shaw, *History*, 2:315–16.
34. Hulûsi Bitlisi, quoted in Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:382–83.
35. Erdem, *Davam*, 195.
36. Abdurrahman, *Tarihçe-i Hayatı*, 36. In Abdurrahman's account, Nursi returned to Van with some of his students and succeeded in entering the city despite its occupation by the Russians and Armenians, and it was now that they barricaded themselves in the citadel, only leaving when ordered to do so by Cevdet Bey. See *ibid.*, 36–37.
37. *Documents sur les atrocités arméno-russes*, 22–23, quoted in Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 162–64. Among documents discovered recently among the archives of the Ottoman Ministry of the Interior, Directorate of Public Security, is one dated 18 Haziran [1]338 (1 July 1916) that is evidently the original of the one quoted here from the French collection. That is, the compilers of the French work used, anyway in this case, the statements taken by the Ottoman authorities.
38. Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 158–59.
39. For Kel Ali (later Ali Çetinkaya, chairman of one of the notorious Independence Tribunals in 1925), see Zürcher, *Unionist Factor*, 81, 146.
40. See Sabis, *Harp Hatıralarım*, 3:77–79.
41. See Stoddard, *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa*, 143–45.

42. Nursi's brother Abdülmecid says in his *Hatıra Defteri*, p. 16, that the eleven guns had been abandoned in the village of Liz by fleeing soldiers. See Badıllı, *Nursi*, 2:402.

43. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 101.

44. There are fourteen heavy guns in this account.

45. Abdurrahman, *Tarihçe-i Hayatı*, 37.

46. Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:388; *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 102.

47. Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 164–65, 170.

48. Ubeyd was the son of Nursi's eldest sister, Dürriye.

49. Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:394.

50. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 102.

51. Clearly a member of the *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa*. The name was probably a pseudonym.

52. Ali Çavuş, quoted in Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 169–74.

53. Sıddık Alp, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 4:347.

54. Molla Münevver, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:80–81; Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:393.

55. This appears to be correct, rather than the twenty-seven days given in the previous account, though the difference of thirteen days between the Rumi and Gregorian calendars might be a reason for the discrepancy.

56. Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:395–99.

57. Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1993 ed.), 1:65–68.

58. Mustafa Yalçın, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 2:23–24.

59. M. Asaf Dişçi, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:189–90.

60. Abdurrahman, *Tarihçe-i Hayatı*, 38.

61. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 103–4; Nursi, *Rays*, 520–21.

62. Nursi, *Rays*, 520.

63. Necmeddin Şahiner, "Kosturma," *Nur—The Light*, n.s., April 2002, 58–60.

64. Nursi, *Flashes*, 299–301. See Chap. 8 n. 25 for *Futūhal-Ghayb*.

Chapter 7

1. Abdurrahman, *Tarihçe-i Hayatı*, 38.

2. Erdem, *Davam*, 198.

3. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 105.

4. Abdülmecid (Nursi), *Hatıra Defteri*, 17, quoted in, Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:419.

5. Cemal Kutay claims he stayed in Berlin in the Adlon Hotel for two months, having sought asylum with the Germans at the Polish border (see Kutay, *Çağımızda*, 84), but he neglects to give any sources.

6. There is circumstantial evidence that Nursi was involved in intelligence work for the *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa* during his captivity, even if tenuous. Citing *Talât Paşa'nın Sürgün Hatıraları* (Tal'at Pasha's Memoirs from Exile), which he himself prepared for publication, Cemal Kutay claims that while a prisoner, Nursi—"who was within the structure of the *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa*"—sent information to the Ottoman government concerning conditions in Russia and predicted the Russian Revolution (see *Zaman Gazetesi* [Istanbul], Ocak 29, 1992, quoted in Vahide, *The Author of the Risale-i Nur*, 134–35). Citing Eşref Kuşçubaşı, he says Nursi sent similar information to Enver Pasha by means of a letter carried by a Kazan fur trader (Kutay, *Çağımızda*, 84). Even if these claims are unwarranted, given the facts we have managed to extract from available sources to date, it certainly seems possible that Nursi would have supplied the Ottoman government, or at any rate Enver Pasha, with the firsthand information he had gained. Berlin was visited constantly by leading members of both the CUP and the *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa* during the war, including Mehmed Akif and Abdülaziz Çaviş. Moreover, having been very active among the Muslims of Caucasia and Georgia since the beginning of the war (Balcıoğlu, *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa'dan Cumhuriyete*, 157–64), following the Russian Revolution the *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa* expanded its activities to include all Russia. These highly secret operations were organized through the Ottoman Embassy in Stockholm in cooperation with the German secret service. The famous Russian Islamic writer and activist Abdürreşid İbrahim was sent to Stockholm as director. Balcıoğlu, *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa'dan Cumhuriyete*, 166–68; for his activities, see in *TDVİA*, S. V. "Abdürreşid İbrahim."

7. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 105–6.

8. Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 179–80.

9. *Ibid.*, 182–83.

10. At the very time Nursi had been taken prisoner during the fall of Bitlis in March 1916, his brother Abdülmecid had been writing out a fair copy in the house of the governor of Van, Cevdet Bey, in Diyarbakır. See Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 195.

11. Nursi, *Rays*, 453.

12. Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:443–4.

13. Tepedelenlioğlu, "76 Yıl Evvelki Bir Hatıra," 243–49.

14. See D. Fromkin, *A Peace to End all Peace*, chap. one.

15. Bahadıroğlu, *Osmanlı Padişahlar Ansiklopedisi*, 3:783.

16. İnal, *Son Sadriazamlar*, 4:1717–18.

17. Shaw and Shaw, *History*, 2:320.

18. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 241–42; Zürcher, *Turkey*, 145, 154; Zürcher, *Unionist Factor*, 105. Zürcher states that the Greek invasion was significant as a means of mobilizing public opinion in western Anatolia.

19. Macfie, *End of the Ottoman Empire*, 194; Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy*, 47.

20. Mısıroğlu, *Kurtuluş Savaşında Sarıklı Mücahitler*, 297–98; Zürcher, *Turkey*, 158.

21. See P. Kinross, *Atatürk*.

22. Jung and Piccoli, *Turkey at the Crossroads*, 63.

23. Bahadıroğlu, *Osmanlı Padişahlar Ansiklopedisi*, 3:778.

24. In fact, there was resistance to demobilization, organized by Young Turk officers in the army, and obstruction of the surrender of arms and ammunition. See Zürcher, *Turkey*, 155; Zürcher, *Unionist Factor*, 101, 110.

25. Berkes, *Türkiye’de Çağdaşlaşma*, 465; Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 251, 402; Jung and Piccoli, *Turkey at the Crossroads*, 69.

26. Criss, *Istanbul under Allied Occupation*, 14, quoted from the *New York Times*, April 22, 1920, p. 1, c. 3.

27. Öke, “Said Nursi and Britain’s Psychological Warfare,” 30–43.

28. Shaw and Shaw, *History*, 2:329.

29. Tunaya, *Türkiye’de Siyasal Partiler*, 2:27.

30. Shaw and Shaw, *History*, 2:329–30.

31. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 126.

32. The Darü’l-Hikmet was one component of a series of reforms that commenced in 1916 and were initiated by Ziya Gökalp; they were designed to relegate “religious institutions to the realm of *diyanet* (piety)” and to sever the Şeyhül-İslam from politics, the Şeriat courts, the pious foundations (*evkaf*), and education. See Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, 415–16. On Gökalp’s thought, see Gökalp, *Turkish Nationalism and Western Civilization*, and idem, *Principles of Turkism*.

33. Albayrak, *Son Devrin İslam Akademisi*, 7–9.

34. *Mahrec* was one of the ranks of the ulama or religious establishment and was also known as *mahrec mevleviyeti*. It was higher than *kibar-ı müderrisin* and lower than *bilad-ı hamse mevleviyeti*. *Mahrec* was the equivalent of the civil ranks of *saniye sınıf-ı sanisi* and *mirü’l-ümeralık*, and of the military rank of *kaymakamlık* (lt. colonel). See Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 185.

35. Albayrak, *Yürüyenler ve Sürünenler*, 148–49.

36. Albayrak, *Son Devrin İslam Akademisi*; unpagged appendix; Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen*, 185–87.

37. Abdurrahman, *Tarihçe-i Hayatı*.

38. Nursi did in fact attend meetings of the Darü'l-Hikmet in the first months of its operation, for there are various minutes bearing his signature in the unpagged appendix to Sadık Albayrak's book. The majority are in 1918; the latest is dated April 29, 1919. See Albayrak, *Son Devrin İslam Akademisi*, 119.

39. For a scathing account of wartime profiteering, the complete destitution of a large section of the Istanbul population, and the extravagantly lavish lifestyle of a small minority of Unionist leaders and their hangers-on, see Ahmet Refik (Altınay), *İki Komite İki Kital*, 69ff. For postwar economic hardship, see Criss, *Istanbul under Allied Occupation*, 23, 29.

40. One of Nursi's students of later years, Mustafa Sungur, recorded Nursi's saying about this: "While I was in the Darü'l-Hikmet, I used to come and go to the place we were staying by ferry to Üsküdar and then walk up to Çamlıca. (It's around six kilometers.) But without my realizing it, Abdurrahman used to hire a phaeton. It was because of this that I dismissed him from stewardship of the money." See, Badilli, *Nursi*, 1:440 fn 10.

41. Abdurrahman, *Tarihçe-i Hayatı*, 27.

42. Criss, *Istanbul under Allied Occupation*, 1–2.

43. Zürcher, *Turkey*, 140–41.

44. Criss, *Istanbul under Allied Occupation*, 43–44.

45. *Ibid.*, 5–6.

46. Tunaya, *Türkiye'de Siyasal Partiler*, 2:280.

47. *Ibid.*, 2:279.

48. *Ibid.*, 2:472–73; Criss, *Istanbul under Allied Occupation*, 109–10.

49. See Edip, *Mehmet Âkif*, 125. This actually refers to Mehmed Âkif, but Nursi is certain to have backed him up.

50. See *ibid.*, 139–40.

51. Mısıroğlu, *Sarıklı Mücahitler*, 297–307.

52. Edip, *Risale-i Nur Muarızları* (Istanbul, 1952), quoted in Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen*, 238.

53. Nursi, "Tuluât," 105–6.

54. *Ibid.*, 105. The Ankara Grand National Assembly passed a prohibition law in 1920. See Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, 448.

55. Nursi, "Tuluât," 110.

56. For instance, while there were pro-nationalists like Nursi and Mehmed Âkif, Mustafa Sabri, one of the original members (Albayrak, *Son Devrin İslam Akademisi*, 178–79) and twice Şeyhül-İslam, in 1919 and 1920, was also one of the founders of the Freedom and Accord Party (FAP) (see Tunaya, *Türkiye'de Siyasal Partiler*, 2:264), and one of the leading lights of the anti-nationalist, pro-FAP *Teâlî-i İslâm Cemiyeti* (Tunaya, *Türkiye'de Siyasal Partiler*, 2:383).

57. Nursi, *Sünûhat*, 36–40.

58. Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 213–14.

59. Prof. Fahreddin Kerim Gökay, in Şahiner, *Aydınlar Konuşuyor*, 158–59.

60. As indicated in note 56 above, the Society for the Advancement of Islam (*Teâlî-i İslâm Cemiyeti*) developed close relations with the Freedom and Accord Party. Criss cites Said Molla, the founder of the Friends of England Association, as the founder of the above society, but he does not appear in Tunaya, *Türkiye’de Siyasal Partiler*, 2:382–85. See Criss, *Istanbul under Allied Occupation*, 110.

61. Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 227–30.

62. Nursi, “Tuluât,” 109.

63. Abdurrahman, *Tarihçe-i Hayatı*, unpagged appendix.

64. Albayrak, *Son Devrin İslam Akademisi*, unpagged appendix.

65. See also, Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 188–90.

66. For a study of this, see Öke, *Musul–Kürdistan Sorunu*.

67. Zürcher, *Turkey*, 153; Fromkin, *Peace to End All Peace*, 405.

68. Criss, *Istanbul under Allied Occupation*, 110.

69. *Ibid.*, 121.

70. Tunaya, *Türkiye’de Siyasal Partiler*, 2:186–229.

71. Öke, *Binbaşı E. W. C. Noel*, 18.

72. Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 216.

73. Mevlânzâde Rifat was a journalist and owner of the newspaper *Sermet*, where presumably this encounter took place. He had also owned and run the *Serbesti* newspaper following the proclamation of the constitution in 1908. He was a fierce opponent of the CUP and in 1918 founded the *Radikal Avam Fırkası* (Radical People’s Party). See Tunaya, *Türkiye’de Siyasal Partiler*, 2:85–88.

74. Ali Çavuş, Nursi’s student from Çoravanis near Van, wrote in his memoirs that Nursi visited Van while a member of the Darü’l-Hikmet and that “we gave him a room in the village.” See Erdem, *Davam*, 201. What year this was is not clear. It is also not entirely clear from Nursi’s own description of his return to the razed city of Van (see Nursi, *Flashes*, 314ff.) whether this occurred on his return in April 1923, or during a previous visit. In the present work it is taken as referring to the former.

75. *Mülâkat*, 35–37.

76. See, Öke, *Binbaşı E. W. C. Noel*, 74ff., 118–20.

77. *Ibid.*, 117–18.

78. Tunaya, *Türkiye’de Siyasal Partiler*, 2:193–94.

79. Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:517, 519.

80. *Ibid.*, 518–19.

81. Tunaya, *Türkiye'de Siyasal Partiler*, 2:188, 214–15.

82. Nursi, *Letters*, 488.

83. Nursi, "Rumuz," 85.

84. Nursi, *Rays*, 453.

85. *Ibid.*, 445.

86. Tunaya, *Türkiye'de Siyasal Partiler*, 2:29–30, 34–35.

87. Hanioglu, *Abdullah Cevdet*, 295–96.

88. Criss, *Istanbul under Allied Occupation*, 45.

89. Nursi, "İşarat," in *Asar-ı Bedi'iyye*, 96–97.

90. Nursi, *Rays*, 445. Eşref Edip describes how *Sebilürreşad* took on the printing and distribution of "works supporting Anatolia and attacking the British" by the writer Shaikh Müşir Husayn Qidway. This had to be done at night in the greatest secrecy. Nursi's work was doubtless the same. Edip applauds the Necm-i İstikbal printing house in this connection (*Mehmed Âkif*, 130–31), which was where Abdurrahman's biography had been printed.

91. Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 218–19.

92. Sometime in or after April 1920 Eşref Edip left Istanbul with his periodical *Sebilürreşad*, meeting up with Mehmed Âkif in Kastamonu. Their combined efforts made the *Sebilürreşad* the most effective press outlet informing and binding together the people of Anatolia during the independence struggle.

93. Tevfik Demiroğlu, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1993 ed.), 1:216–19.

94. Criss, *Istanbul under Allied Occupation*, 94ff.

95. *Ibid.*, 115ff.

96. *Ibid.*, 122.

97. Aydın, *Millî Mücâdele*, 260–65.

98. Tevfik Demiroğlu, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1993 ed.), 1:218.

99. For example, Nursi, *Rays*, 381.

100. *Ibid.*, 533.

101. Vahide, *The Author of the Risale-i Nur*, 190.

102. See Zürcher, *Turkey*, 159.

103. Mehmed Fırıncı, interview by the author, November 25, 2002.

104. Aydın, *Millî Mücâdele*, 145–48.

105. Zürcher, *Unionist Factor*, 83–84, 94.

106. Zürcher, *Turkey*, 165.

107. Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy*, 51.

108. Zürcher, *Unionist Factor*, 123.
 109. *Ibid.*, 130.
 110. Enver Paşa, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1993 ed.), 1:202–3.

Chapter 8

1. Nursi, *Sünühât*, 41–47.

2. This was not just wishful thinking. A contemporary Western observer, Lothrop Stoddard, commented that all the signs showed that despite Western domination, cooperation and unity between the nations of the Near East was on the increase. For evidence he cited an Islamic Congress held in Sivas in early 1921, chaired by Shaikh Ahmad Sanusi and joined by representatives from the Islamic world. See Lothrop Stoddard, *1. Cihan Harbi Sonrasında İslam Âlemi*, 231; also, Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 404. One source mentions Nursi as being involved in its organization together with Eşref Edip and Mehmed Âkif. See *TDVİA*, S. V. “Eşref Edip”; also, Albayrak, *Siyasi Boyutlarıyla Türkiye’de İslamcılığın Doğuşu*, 359, 361. On March 11, 1921, the Ankara government took the decision to hold a large Islamic congress. See Eğilmez, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Tarihine Giriş*, 54; also, *Sebülürreşad*, nos. 472 (March 21, 1921), 473 (March 25, 1921), and 474 (March 31, 1921). But this did not come to fruition due to the Greek occupation of Eskişehir.

3. See Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, 437ff.

4. *Ibid.*, 438.

5. Tunaya, *Türkiye’de Siyasal Partiler*, 2:288.

6. Nursi, *Sünühât*, 60–61; Nursi, *Letters*, 547.

7. Nursi, “Bediüzzaman-ı Kürdi’nin Fihriste-i Maksadı,” *Volkan*, no. 83, reprinted in Düzdağ, *Volken Gazetesi*, 402.

8. Nursi, *Muhâkemât*, 39.

9. Nursi, *Words*, 748.

10. Nursi, “Hubab,” 81.

11. Nursi, *Muhâkemât*, 37–38.

12. Nursi, *Sünühât*, 44; Nursi, *Words*, 146, 745–46.

13. Nursi, *Words*, 770–72.

14. Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 52–53; Nursi, *Words*, 421–22.

15. Nursi, *Sünühât*, 31–35.

16. *İsrâ’iliyât*: teachings and stories that, having been introduced into Islam by scholars of “the People of the Book” on their becoming Muslim in the early period of Islam, with time had been corrupted and become superstitions.

17. Nursi, *Muhâkemât*, 7.

18. Ibid., 16–18.
19. Nursi, *Sünühât*, 31–35.
20. Nursi, *Flashes*, 305.
21. Nursi, *Letters*, 516.
22. Nursi, *Flashes*, 306.

23. An incident that should be mentioned here was recorded by Nursi's student of later years, İbrahim Fakazlı, from the report of one of Nursi's Van students, Seyyid Şefik, who had joined Nursi in Istanbul on his return from captivity in Russia. Seyyid Şefik, who was subsequently the imam of Sultan Ahmed Mosque in Istanbul, told İbrahim Fakazlı how Said Halim Pasha, in the period following his resignation from the office of Sadriazam in 1917, and "before going abroad," had decided, since he had no heir, to make over to Nursi an estate on the Bosphorus containing woods and number of fine buildings for the purpose of founding an Islamic university. However, at this point Nursi had disappeared for a month. When it was learned he was on Yuşa Tepesi, word was sent to him that he had only to present himself at the Land Registry Office for the transaction to be completed. Nursi requested twenty-four-hours' grace to seek guidance, whereupon the two "Levhas," or tables in verse that began "Don't call me to the world!" occurred to him, and he turned down the offer. That is to say, Nursi had already taken the decision "to abandon the world," and on the strength of the two pieces, which he later included in the *Risale-i Nur* in the Seventeenth Word, did not go back on his decision (see *The Words*, 231–32). This event, which shows the esteem in which Nursi was held by the highest members of the Ottoman establishment, makes it probable that the first signs of his transformation into the New Said had begun at an early date. As a member of the CUP government that had taken Turkey into the First World War, Said Halim Pasha was arrested in early March 1919, and together with sixty-six others sent into exile in Malta on a British ship on May 28, 1919. See İnal, *Son Sadriazamlar*, 4:1909–12).

24. Nursi, *Rays*, 523.

25. The original is found in the 62nd *majlis*, p. 245, of Shaikh Geylani's work, *Al-Fath al-Rabbānī*, which in a printed edition of uncertain date was bound together with *Futūḥ al-Ghayb* under that title. For English translation, see *The Sublime Revelations (Al-Fath ar-Rabbani)* tr. Muhtar Holland (Ál-Baz Pub., 1993).

26. Nursi, *Sikke-i Tasdik-i Gaybî*, 116–17; Nursi, *Letters*, 418–19.

27. See works on him, Friedmann, *Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindî*; Ahmad, "Religious and Political Ideas of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindî," 259–270.

28. Nursi, *Letters*, 419.
29. Nursi, *Mesnevi-i Nûriye*, 7.
30. Nursi, *Letters*, 419.
31. Nursi, *Sikke-i Tasdik-i Gaybî*, 117.
32. Nursi, *Flashes*, 306.

33. Nursi, *Mesnevi-i Nûriye*, 7–8.
34. Mustafa Sungur, in Şahiner, *Aydınlar Konuşuyor*, 399.
35. Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:535, 536; Mehmet Teymuroğlu, “Muhterem Said Nursi’nin Doldurduğu Boşluk,” *Hilal Dergisi*, no. 13 (Şubat 1969), quoted in Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 239–40.
36. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 124.
37. Shaw and Shaw, *History*, 2:362–64.
38. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 259.
39. Danişmend, *İzahlı Osmanlı Tarihi Kronolojisi*, 4:470.
40. *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi* (Proceedings of Grand National Assembly) Session 1, Vol. 24, 135th gathering (*içtima*) (Thursday, Teşrin-i Sani (November) 9, 1338 (1922), 457, quoted in, Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 241.
41. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 129.
42. Nursi, *Flashes*, 233.
43. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 381.
44. Nursi, *Flashes*, 233.
45. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 124.
46. *Ibid.*, 125–27; Nursi, “Hubab,” 92–93.
47. His views differed, therefore, from those of the “clericals” and “reactionaries” described by Berkes as being opposed to republicanism and the abolition of the sultanate and caliphate. See Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, 449ff.
48. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 128.
49. For example, the deputy for Siverek, Abdülğani Ensari. See Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:572.
50. Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 1:242.
51. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 131; Nursi, *Rays*, 381–82.
52. Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 2:196.
53. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 128.
54. Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:563–71.
55. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 195.
56. Nursi, *Rays*, 381–82.
57. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 131.
58. Aktürk, “Defense Speech in Appeals Court,” 447.
59. Tevfik Demiroğlu, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1993 ed.), 1:219.

Chapter 9

1. For a moving description, see Nursi, *Flashes*, 314ff.
2. Abdullah Ekinci, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 1:192; Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:637.
3. Hamid Ekinci, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:200.
4. *Ibid.*, 198–99.
5. Nursi, *Letters*, 21–23.
6. İsmail Perihanoğlu, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 2:26–27.
7. Nursi, *Flashes*, 18–20. See Perihanoğlu, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 2:27.
8. Lucinda Mosher, “The Marrow of Worship and the Moral Vision”; in Abu-Rabi‘, *Islam at the Crossroads*, 181–97.
9. Rabia Ünlükul, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:63.
10. Perihanoğlu, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 2:27.
11. Hamid Ekinci, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:209.
12. *Ibid.*, 205–6.
13. Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 252–53.
14. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 266.
15. See, Zürcher, *Turkey*, 178.
16. There is no agreement among commentators on the motivation and character of the revolt (see Öke, *Musul-Kürdistan Sorunu*, 279–80); Shaw says it was “stimulated by Russian communists” (Shaw and Shaw, *History*, 2:381); Bruinessen emphasizes its nationalist character and points out religious elements (Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 265–305); Badıllı offers a lengthy analysis (Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:652–97) based on interviews and references to the revolt in Nursi’s works. He claims it was “only a reaction to the introduction of [antireligious] new laws because of religious sensitivity” (655). Lewis favors “the government’s description of it as a religious reaction against the secularizing reforms” (Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 409–10); Zürcher distinguishes between “the leadership,” who wanted an autonomous or independent Kurdistan, and “the rank and file,” who were religiously motivated (Zürcher, *Turkey*, 178–79).
17. Akşin, *Türkiye Tarihi*, 4:101–2; Zürcher, *Turkey*, 179.
18. Abdülbaki Arvasi, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:100.
19. İsmail Perihanoğlu, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 2:29.
20. Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 253–54.
21. *Ibid.*, 255–57.
22. For example, the one-time deputy for Van and president of the Grand National Assembly, Kinyas Kartal. See Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 2:17.

23. Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:660; quoted from Selahaddin Çelebi's biographical notes (1946).
24. Haydar Süphandağlı, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:95–96.
25. According to Abdülbaki Arvası, this was “the first caravan.” See Uslu, *Bediüzzaman'ın Kardeşi*, 30.
26. Abdullah Ekinci, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:193.
27. Kinyas Kartal, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 2:17.
28. Mustafa Ağralı, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:104–7.
29. H. Münir Bakan, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 4:371–72.
30. Ahmet Alpaslan, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:98; Said Şamil, in Şahiner, *Nurs Yolu*, 133–35.
31. Nursi, *Sikke-i Tasdik-i Gaybî*, 130. There is no report of such a fire in the Istanbul newspapers of 1925. That described here must be the fire of April 29, 1926, which destroyed a large part of the complex of buildings that had originally served as the Şeyhülislam's Office and Fetvahane. Reports appeared in the *Cumhuriyet* and *Son Saat* newspapers on May 1, 1926 (see Şahiner, *Nurs Yolu* 2, 109–17). The apparent discrepancy in dates may be put down to literary license.
32. The fact that Nursi was staying right by the Şeyhülislam's Office (*Şeyhülislam kapısında*) suggests that it had not yet been burned down. Tahsin Bey himself escorted the four others mentioned to Diyarbakır. Abdülkadir was sentenced to death May 27, 1925 (Mango, *Atatürk*, 425).
33. Tahsin Tandoğan, in Şahiner, *Aydınlar Konuşuyor*, 165–67.
34. In all, more than twenty thousand Kurds were deported to western Anatolia. See Zürcher, *Turkey*, 179.
35. Badıllı, *Nursi*, 1:735.
36. Nasihuzade Şeyh Mehmed Balkır, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 4:212–13.
37. Nursi, *Nur'un İlk Kapısı*, 6–7.
38. Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 261.
39. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 135–36.
40. Mehmed Sözer, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 2:211–2.
41. Nursi, *Flashes*, 70–71.
42. Nursi was actually nearly fifty years old.
43. Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 262–64.

Chapter 10

1. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 155; Nursi, *Letters*, 66–67.
2. Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, 463–64. See also Alp, *Kemalism*.

3. Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, 415; Mardin, "Religion and Secularism in Turkey," 362.
4. Ahmad, *Making of Modern Turkey* (2002 ed.) 77; Brockett, "Collective Action," 58.
5. For a chronological list of the reforms, see Toprak, "Religious Right," 630–31.
6. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 266.
7. See Brockett, "Collective Action," 49–50.
8. Akşin, *Türkiye Tarihi*, 4:111. Zürcher informs us that "under the Law on the Maintenance of Order nearly 7,500 people were arrested and 660 executed" (Zürcher, *Turkey*, 181). How many of these were related to dress is not stated.
9. Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 2:19; Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 323–24.
10. Zürcher, *Turkey*, 182.
11. The six principles of Kemalism were secularism, nationalism, republicanism, étatism, popularism, and revolutionism. See *ibid.*, 189–90.
12. Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 416.
13. Akşin, *Türkiye Tarihi*, 4:178.
14. Karaömerlioğlu, "People's Houses," 79–80.
15. Jung and Piccoli, *Turkey at the Crossroads*, 72.
16. See Zürcher, *Turkey*, 184–89.
17. See *ibid.*, 189, 244.
18. See Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, 484–85.
19. Toprak, "Religious Right," 637–38.
20. For a fairly detailed discussion of both Nursi's inner transformation and the new method he developed, which is fundamental to the *Risale-i Nur*, see my "Toward an Intellectual Biography," 10ff.
21. Mustafa Sungur, in Şahiner, *Aydınlar Konuşuyor*, 395.
22. Badıllı, *Nursi*, 2:931.
23. Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 272–73.
24. Nursi, *Barla Lahikası*, 171.
25. Ahmet Gümüş, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:324.
26. Akşin, *Türkiye Tarihi*, 4:473–74; Mango, *Atatürk*, 412, 535.
27. Şahiner, *Haşır Risalesi Nasıl Yazıldı?*, 31–32.
28. Nursi, *Words*, 106.
29. Nursi, *Barla Lahikası*, 169.

30. Ibid., 160.
31. Nursi, *Words*, 106–7.
32. Muhacir Hafız Ahmed, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 2:101–2.
33. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 147–48.
34. Nursi, *Barla Lahikası*, 178.
35. Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 278–79.
36. Ibid., 281.
37. İhsan Üstündağ, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 4:300.

38. Nursi explained as follows why he headed his letters with this verse: “This was the first door opened to me from the sacred treasuries of the All-Wise Qur’an. Of the divine truths of the Qur’an, it was first the truth of this verse that became clear to me, and it is this truth that pervades most parts of the *Risale-i Nur*. Another reason is that the masters in whom I have confidence used it at the heads of their letters.” See Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 285; Nursi, *Barla Lahikası*, 179.

39. For an interpretation, see Yvonne Haddad, “Ghurbah as Paradigm for Muslim Life,” 237–53.

40. Nursi, *Letters*, 42–43.
41. Ibid., 96.
42. Hacı Hulûsi Yahyagil, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:33–55.
43. Nursi, *Barla Lahikası*, 18.

44. Abdurrahman had remained in Ankara when Nursi left for Van in 1923, finding himself a position as a clerk in the Grand National Assembly. He married and had one son, named Vahdet. He died in Ankara in 1928 and is buried in what was at that time the village of Solfasol (Zü’l-Fazl) near Ankara. See Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (8th ed.), 202; (6th ed.), 190 n. 1.

45. Nursi, *Flashes*, 310–1.
46. Ibid., 313.
47. Re’fet Bey, in Şahiner, *Nurs Yolu*, 89–97.
48. Ahmed Asım Önerdem, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 4:144–46.
49. Sabri Arseven, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 2:112–14.
50. Husrev Altınbaşak, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 2:196–98.
51. Nursi, *Barla Lahikası*, 98–99.

52. For a general economic survey of the years 1923–45, see Ahmad, *Making of Modern Turkey*, 72–101.

53. Tapper and Tapper, “Religion, Education, and Continuity,” 59; Mardin, *Religion and Social Change*, 151–53.

54. Ahmad, *Making of Modern Turkey*, 81.

55. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 184.
56. Nursi, *Barla Lahikası*, 100–106.
57. Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 389–91.
58. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 144–46.
59. Nursi, *Kastamonu Lahikası*, 48.
60. Nursi, *Letters*, 417.
61. *Ibid.*, 434.
62. *Ibid.*, 436–42.
63. *Ibid.*, 116–17.
64. The mosque was raided three times: in 1929, 1932, and 1934. See Badıllı, *Nursi*, 2:813.
65. Cemal Can, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:212.
66. Nursi, *Letters*, 398.
67. *Ibid.*, 400–401; see also, 463–64.
68. *Ibid.*, 506–7.
69. Nursi, *Rays*, 255.
70. Nursi, *Words*, 474–75.
71. Nursi, *Letters*, 427.
72. See chap. 11, n. 3.
73. Nursi, *Letters*, 83.
74. *Ibid.*, 84–85.
75. *Ibid.*, 68–70.
76. Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:83.
77. Nursi, *Rays*, 320.
78. Re'fet Bey, in Şahiner, *Nurs Yolu*, 93.
79. *Ibid.*, 95–96.

Chapter 11

1. Süleyman Rüştü Çakın, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 4:141.
2. Mehmed Sözer, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 2:213–14.
3. For the laws enforcing secularism and circumscribing religious activities, see Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, 466, 498–99; Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 412; Zürcher, *Turkey*, 195.

4. His death was reported in the Istanbul newspaper *Tan* dated May 8, 1935, which carried the (denigrating) front-page headline “Bir Mürteci İfade Verirken Öldü!” (A Reactionary Died While Giving His Statement!); photo in Badıllı, *Nursi*, 2:975.

5. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 191–92.

6. Halil İbrahim Çöllüoğlu, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 4:121.

7. İsmail Karaman, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 2:86–87.

8. Mehmed Gülırmak, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:84.

9. Halil İbrahim Çöllüoğlu, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 4:121–23.

10. Mehmed Gülırmak, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:85; Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen*, 315.

11. Şükrü Şahinler, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:88.

12. Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 318–19.

13. Postacı Kâmil, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 4:147–50.

14. Nursi himself stated that this was the case; see Nursi, *Lem’alar*, 640, 647.

15. The court records are not available for scrutiny. So the precise charges are not known and can be only be taken or deduced from the defense speeches.

16. The treatise, which Nursi included in the *Risale-i Nur* as the Twenty-fourth Flash, was about the wisdom in Islamic dress for women. There was never any legislation banning “the veil,” but women were encouraged to follow their Western sisters in appearance and manners. They were granted equal political rights with men in 1934, when they got the vote. See Jung and Piccolo, *Turkey at the Crossroads*, 60–61; Ahmad, *Making of Modern Turkey*, 86–90.

17. Nursi, *Rays*, 314–15.

18. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 229.

19. Nursi, *Lem’alar*, 541, 603.

20. *Ibid.*, 563; *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 205.

21. Nursi, *Lem’alar*, 542.

22. *Ibid.*, 615.

23. *Ibid.*, 624–32; *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 229–32.

24. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 194–95.

25. *Ibid.*, 194–96.

26. *Ibid.*, 198.

27. For an analysis of these, see Brockett, “Collective Action,” 44–66.

28. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 207.

29. *Ibid.*, 218.

30. Ibid., 199.
31. Ibid., 201–2.
32. Ibid., 205.
33. Ibid., 195.
34. Ibid., 198–99.
35. Ibid., 221.
36. Ibid., 214.
37. Nursi, *Divan-ı Harb-i Örfî*, 12.
38. Nursi, *Letters*, 87.
39. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 214–15.
40. Ibid., 203.
41. Ibid., 227.
42. Ibid., 222.
43. Badıllı, *Nursi*, 2:1037.

Chapter 12

1. Nursi, *Flashes*, 333.
2. Çaycı Emin Bey, in Şahiner, *Nurs Yolu*, 100–103; Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:108–16.
3. Mehmed Feyzi Pamukçu, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 2:158–64.
4. Nursi, *Kastamonu Lahikası*, 12.
5. Çaycı Emin Çayır, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:112.
6. Hilmi Sema, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 5:202–3.
7. Çaycı Emin, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:110–11; Mehmed Münip Yalaz, in *Son Şahitler*, 2:188.
8. Sadık Demirelli, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 2:135–57.
9. Selahaddin Çelebi, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:136–38.
10. Nursi, *Kastamonu Lahikası*, 62.
11. Ibid., 72.
12. Ibid., 5.
13. Ibid., 10.
14. Ibid., 53.
15. Ibid., 48; also, 10.

16. Nursi, *Rays*, 188. A closer translation of “certain belief” (Turk. *tahkikî*; Ar. *tahqīqī*, *īmān*) would be “verified,” “ascertained through inquiry,” “resulting from investigation,” or “confirmatory.”

17. Nursi, *Kastamonu Lahikası*, 25.

18. Nursi, *Rays*, 123.

19. Nursi, *Sikke-i Tasdik-i Gaybî*, 76.

20. See Hanioglu, *Young Turks in Opposition*, 21.

21. Nursi, *Rays*, 133–34.

22. Nursi, *Flashes*, 380. Hadith: al-‘Ajluni, *Kashf al-Khafā*, 1:143; Ghazālī, *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, 4:409; al-Haythamī, *Majma’ al-Zawā’id*, 1:78.

23. Nursi, *Kastamonu Lahikası*, 171.

24. *Ibid.*, 174–75.

25. See, Nursi, *Letters*, 518ff.

26. Nursi, *Kastamonu Lahikası*, 10.

27. Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası*, 1:68.

28. This is conceded by Hamid Algar in his article “Centennial Renewer,” 291–311.

29. Al-Hākīm, *al-Mustadrak*; Abū Dā’ūd, *Sunan* (Kitāb al-Malāhim); al-Bayhaqī, *Shu‘ab al-Īmān*.

30. Nursi, *Kastamonu Lahikası*, 133.

31. Hacı Hasan Sarıkaya, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 4:357–58.

32. Mustafa Ramazanoğlu, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 4:225, 229.

33. Algar also notes this. See Algar, “Centennial Renewer,” 303.

34. See Nursi, *Sikke-i Tasdik-i Gaybî*, 41–2.

36. Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:234–35; 4:351–54; Şahiner, *Nurs Yolu*, 111–13.

37. Nursi, *Kastamonu Lahikası*, 63.

38. For Mawlana Khālīd, see Hourani, “Shaikh Khalid and the Naqshbandi Order,” 89–103; Algar, “Centennial Renewer,” 302–4.

39. Here is a definition of the *mujaddid* given by some of Nursi’s students: “The high servants of religion who are described in Hadiths as coming at the start of every century are not innovators, they are followers. That is to say, they do not create anything new themselves, they do not bring any new ordinances; they adjust and strengthen religion by way of following to the letter the fundamentals and ordinances of religion and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad; they proclaim the true and original meaning of religion; they remove and render null and void the baseless matters that have been mixed up with it; they refute and destroy the attacks made on religion; they establish the divine commands, and proclaim and make known the nobility and

exaltedness of the divine ordinances. However, without spoiling the basic position or damaging the original spirit, they carry out their duties through new methods of persuasion appropriate to the understanding of the age, and in new ways and with new details.” Nursi, *Rays*, 635.

40. Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 223ff.; Mardin, *Religion and Social Change*, 57–59, 149.

41. Şamlı Hafız cites this date as being Hijri; in fact, according to most extant documents, the year of Nursi’s birth was 1293 Rumi (1877).

42. Nursi, *Sikke-i Tasdik-i Gaybî*, 14–16.

43. Nursi, *Kastamonu Lahikası*, 139.

44. *Ibid.*, 57–58.

45. *Ibid.*, 69–71, 73–7.

46. *Ibid.*, 80–81.

47. *Ibid.*, 84.

48. *Ibid.*, 104.

49. *Ibid.*, 108.

50. Zürcher, *Turkey*, 207–8.

51. Nursi, *Kastamonu Lahikası*, 167; also, 99, 111, 148, 176–77.

52. *Ibid.*, 106–7.

53. *Ibid.*, 135.

54. *Ibid.*, 186.

55. *Ibid.*, 200.

56. *Ibid.*, 190.

57. *Ibid.*, 135.

58. *Ibid.*, 102.

59. *Ibid.*, 6–7.

60. Tahsin Aydın, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 3:104–5.

61. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 284.

62. Nadir Baysal, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 4:282–86.

63. Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 2:193–95.

64. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 278–79.

65. Nursi, *Kastamonu Lahikası*, 82–83.

66. *Ibid.*, 62.

67. For example, Nursi, *Kastamonu Lahikası*, 85.

68. Abdullah Yeğin, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:370–71.

69. Ibid., 380.
70. Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 309–10; Nursi, *Kastamonu Lahikası*, 157.
71. Nursi, *Kastamonu Lahikası*, 26–27.
72. Nursi, *Şuâlar*, 611, 625.
73. Nursi, *Kastamonu Lahikası*, 25–26.
74. Nursi, *Müdâfaalar*, 156.
75. Nursi, *Kastamonu Lahikası*, 157.
76. Ibid., 106.
77. Ibid., 166–67.
78. Ibid., 74.
79. Nursi, *Sikke-i Tasdik-i Gaybî*, 171.
80. Çaycı Emin Çayır, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:113–14.
81. Nursi, *Müdâfaalar*, 97.
82. Çaycı Emin Çayır, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 114–15; Mehmed Feyzi Pamukçu, in *Son Şahitler*, 2:161; *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 288.
83. Nursi, *Kastamonu Lahikası*, 203–4.
84. Nursi, *Flashes*, 333.
85. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 358.
86. Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 335–36.
87. Nadir Baysal, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 4:285–86.
88. Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 338.
89. See, Nursi, *Kastamonu Lahikası*, 203–4.
90. Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 338–40.
91. İsmail Tunçdoğan, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 3:101.
92. Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 2:19.
93. Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 340–41.
94. Some of Nursi's biographies have pointed out that Nevzat Tandoğan committed suicide three years later by shooting himself (July 9, 1946). See Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 340; Badilli, *Nursi*, 2:766.
95. Bayram Yüksel, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:446.
96. Abdullah Çaprazzade, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 2:116; Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 341.

Chapter 13

1. Osman Yıldırımkaaya, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 2:209.
2. Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 341.
3. Sadık Demirelli, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 2:146.
4. Selahaddin Çelebi, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:145.
5. İbrahim Fakazlı, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:178.
6. Selahaddin Çelebi, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:144.
7. Şahiner, *Bediüzzaman Said Nursi'den Hapishane Mektupları*.
8. Süleyman Hünkâr, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:183–88; Sadık Demirelli, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 2:135–57.
9. Mustafa Gül, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 4:328.
10. Nursi, *Rays*, 253.
11. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 377.
12. Mehmed Feyzi Pamukçu, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 2:163.
13. Selahaddin Çelebi, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:145.
14. Nursi, *Rays*, 298–99.
15. *Ibid.*, 305–6.
16. *Ibid.*, 312–13.
17. On the Antichrist in the Islamic tradition, see Zeki Saritoprak, “The Legend of al-Dajjâl (Antichrist).”
18. Nursi, *Müdüfaalar*, 97.
19. *Ibid.*, 97.
20. *Ibid.*, 130.
21. Nursi, *Rays*, 321.
22. *Ibid.*, 322.
23. Nursi, *Flashes*, 344.
24. Nursi, *Rays*, 340.
25. Nursi, *Flashes*, 334.
26. Nursi, *Rays*, 358–59.
27. *Ibid.*, 362.
28. *Ibid.*, 365.
29. Nursi, *Müdüfaalar*, 151.
30. Nursi, *Rays*, 365–66.
31. *Ibid.*, 367.

32. Nursi, *Müdâfaalar*, 123–32.
33. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 348.
34. See, Selahaddin Çelebi, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:146; İbrahim Fakazlı, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:179.
35. See Kara, *Türkiye’de İslamcılık Düşüncesi*, 3:113–239.
36. Şahiner, *Nurs Yolu*, 123–27.
37. Selahaddin Çelebi, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:148.
38. Nursi, *Rays*, 272–73.

Chapter 14

1. Sadık Demirelli, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 2:143–44.
2. Badıllı, *Nursi*, 2:1373.
3. Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 1:93.
4. Tahir Barçın, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 2:125–27; Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 352–53.
5. See, Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 4:41–114.
6. Economic conditions in Turkey deteriorated sharply during the Second World War and were accompanied by the imposition of stringent measures by the government (see Zürcher, *Turkey*, 207–8), which makes it doubly surprising that it should have proposed to buy off Nursi in this way.
7. Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 1:23, 36.
8. Mehmed Çalışkan, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 4:54–55.
9. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 403–6.
10. Abdurrahman Akgül, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 1:13.
11. Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (handwritten ed.), 6, quoted in Badıllı, *Nursi*, 2:1381.
12. Nursi, *Rays*, 262, 272.
13. Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 1:24.
14. Ziya Sönmez, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 2:183. For details of the appeals court decision and list of fifty-eight Nur students to whom the acquittal applied (ten had been discharged earlier and one had died), see Badıllı, *Nursi*, 2:1385–89.
15. Badıllı, *Nursi*, 2:1408–9.
16. Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 1:81.
17. *Ibid.*, 234–36.
18. *Ibid.*, 269.

19. Ibid., 154, 179.

20. In a footnote to the Twentieth Flash, *On Sincerity*, written in 1934, Nursi spoke of such cooperation. He wrote: "It is even recorded in authentic traditions of the Prophet that at the end of time the truly pious among the Christians will unite with the people of the Qur'an and fight their common enemy, irreligion. The people of religion and truth will sincerely unite not only with their own brothers and fellow-believers but also with the truly pious clergy of the Christians, temporarily refraining from the discussion and debate of points of difference in order to combat their joint enemy—aggressive atheism." *Flashes*, 203 n. 8.

21. Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 1:36.

22. Ibid., 1:80–81.

23. Badıllı, *Nursi*, 2:1409–110.

24. Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 1:101.

25. Ibid., 214–15.

26. Ibid., 1:189–90.

27. Mango, *Atatürk*, 530.

28. Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 1:20–21.

29. Ibid., 2:71, 164.

30. For example, *ibid.*, 1:29, 75–76.

31. Ibid., 1:77.

32. Mustafa Bilal, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 4:20.

33. Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 1:156.

34. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 473–74.

35. Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 1:270.

36. Ibid., 29–30; *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 460.

37. Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 1:168, 170, 277. This close connection between the *Risale-i Nur* and the universe and the creatures within it manifested as *tevafulkat*, or "coinciding," has been mentioned in various places in previous chapters, in both negative and positive contexts. There were numerous examples in *Emirdağ* of both, of which the above earthquakes were just one. Instances of positive contexts mostly involved birds of different varieties either acting heralds of good news or entering a room in a manner quite out of the ordinary and remaining over a period of time while the *Risale-i Nur* or Nursi's letters were read. See Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 1:46–47; 67; 86; *Passim*. For a list of nineteen, see, Badıllı, *Nursi*, 2:1469–71.

38. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 437.

39. *Kaymakam*: the chief representative of the state; lower in rank than a provincial governor.

40. Nursi also refers to this in several places. It was part of a campaign of slander that "no devil could in any way deceive anyone with," and showed that no other

weapon remained to them that they could use against the *Risale-i Nur*. See Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 1:257; also, Nursi, *Flashes*, 327.

41. Abdurrahman Akgül, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:11–18.
42. Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 364–65.

Chapter 15

1. Nursi, *Rays*, 370.
2. This refers to the article prohibiting the political use of religion being included in the penal code (1949). See Zürcher, *Turkey*, 260.
3. İbrahim Fakazlı, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 5:23.
4. Mehmet Kayıhan, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:19.
5. Nursi, *Rays*, 423, 510.
6. *Ibid.*, 500.
7. Nursi, *Flashes*, 327.
8. Nursi, *Rays*, 405.
9. Selahaddin Çelebi, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:148.
10. İbrahim Fakazlı, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 5:30.
11. *Ibid.*; also, Mustafa Sunger, in Şahiner, *Aydınlar Konuşuyor*, 382.
12. Hilmi Pancaroğlu, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 3:170; Şahiner, *Nurs Yolu*, 54–56.
13. Mustafa Acet, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:27–29.
14. İbrahim Fakazlı, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 5:33–34.
15. *Jawshan al-Kabir* is the famous supplication reputedly revealed to the Prophet Muhammad; comprising the divine names, it is said to possess many merits.
16. İbrahim Fakazlı, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 5:35–36.
17. Nursi, *Rays*, 569–70.
18. Kemal Bayraklı, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 4:288–89.
19. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 193.
20. Miracles (*mu'jizât*) are particular to prophets, while in saints and others such wonder-working is known in Turkish as *kerâmet*.
21. Hasan Değirmenci, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 1:31.
22. Hilmi Pancaroğlu, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 3:169–70.
23. Nursi, *Rays*, 481–82.
24. *Ibid.*, 533.

25. Badıllı, *Nursi*, 2:1551.
26. Nursi, *Rays*, 387.
27. *Ibid.*, 371–72.
28. *Ibid.*, 395 fn 16.
29. Nursi, *Müddâfaalar*, 464.
30. Nursi, *Rays*, 444–45.
31. *Ibid.*, 510.
32. *Ibid.*, 515.
33. *Ibid.*, 451.
34. *Ibid.*, 380.
35. *Ibid.*, 381.
36. *Ibid.*, 103.
37. *Ibid.*, 515.
38. *Ibid.*, 423–25.
39. *Ibid.*, 426–27.
40. *Ibid.*, 482.
41. Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 1:232–3; 2:6, 2:9.
42. İbrahim Mengüverli, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 3:123.
43. Ahmet Hikmet Gönen, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 3:178–79.
44. Mustafa Acet, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:28.
45. İbrahim Mengüverli, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 3:123.
46. Mustafa Ezener, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 4:180.
47. Nursi, *Rays*, 482.
48. Nihad Bozkurt, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 4:248–49.
49. Nursi, *Rays*, 531.
50. This is further proved by the fact that between 1949 and 1971 the *Risale-i Nur*, and the Fifth Ray in particular, which was made the main pretext of the Afyon judges' decision, were acquitted around 705 times in Turkish courts of law, and copies of the *Risale-i Nur* returned; see Berk, *Türkiye'de Nurculuk Davası*, endpaper.
51. Nursi, *Rays*, 532.
52. *Ibid.*, 569–70.
53. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 475–77, 539; Badıllı, *Nursi*, 3:1757–80.

Chapter 16

1. Nursi, *Rays*, 523; *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 537.
2. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 537.
3. Zürcher, *Turkey*, 244.
4. These “principles” are discussed in greater detail below.
5. Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 2:17.
6. *Ibid.*, 56.
7. *Ibid.*, 24.
8. *Ibid.*, 178.
9. *Ibid.*, 76, 83, 100.
10. See Vahide, “Said Nursi’s Interpretation of Jihād.”
11. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 537–38; Hilmi Pancaroğlu, in *Şahitler, Son Şahitler*, 3:169.
12. Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 2:6–7.
13. Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 414–5; Tahsin Tola, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:158.
14. Mehmet ÇalıŖkan, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 4:57, 59.
15. Hafız Nuri Güven, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 4:37.
16. Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 2:16.
17. *Ibid.*, 29.
18. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 569.
19. *Ibid.*, 570; Edip, *Said Nursî*, 119.
20. Nursi, *Müdâfaalar*, 477–80.
21. Edip, *Said Nursi*, 123.
22. M. Emin Birinci, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:258.
23. See also, Muhiddin Yürüten, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 3:80–81; Alaeddin Yılmaztürk, in *Son Şahitler*, 2:45–46.
24. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 575; Edip, *Said Nursi*, 125–30; Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 2:127–28.
25. Edip, *Said Nursi*, 130–52.
26. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 583.
27. Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 396.
28. See also, Avni Toktor, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 4:191.
29. Muhsin Alev, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:220–21; Osman Yüksel Serdengeçti, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 2:61–69.

30. Mehmet Şevket Eygi, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 5:218–19.
31. Muhsin Alev, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:221.
32. Mustafa Ramazanoğlu, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 4:223–24.
33. İbrahim Fakazlı, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 5:21. In one of his letters Nursi wrote that he had been poisoned a total of nineteen times. Other reports put it at twenty and twenty-one times. See Badıllı, 3:1755.
34. Edip, *Said Nursi*, 90.
35. See, Badıllı, *Nursi*, 3:1786–89.
36. Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 2:146–47.
37. Mehmet Fırıncı, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 3:234.
38. For a description, see also M. Emin Birinci, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:257.
39. Badıllı, *Nursi*, 3:1856.
40. Salih Özcan, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 3:130–31.
41. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 624, 626.
42. Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 2:138–40.
43. *Ibid.*, 148–50.
44. *Ibid.*, 63; Kâmil Acar, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 2:251–52.
45. Hakkı Yavuztürk, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 2:269–70.
46. Kâmil Acar, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 2:251–52.
47. For example, Ömer Adil Mehalifçi, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 5:122–23.
48. Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 2:62.
49. It may be noted here that only ten years subsequent to the sending of *Zülfikar*, which in particular puts forward proofs of the Prophethood of Muhammad and the Qur'an being the Word of God, Islam was recognized by the Second Vatican Council as a genuine revealed religion and means of salvation.
50. Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 405.
51. Mehmet Fırıncı, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 3:218.
52. *Ibid.*, 218–38.
53. A report dated May 18, 1953, states he is unfit to travel. See Badıllı, *Nursi*, 3:1828–30. Another, dated July 17, 1953, states that it was medically advisable for him to cover his head—that is, wear a scarf wound around it. See, Badıllı, *Nursi*, 3:1830.
54. See, Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 2:135–37.
55. *Ibid.*, 97–99. For English translation, see Nursi, *Damascus Sermon*, 126–31.
56. *TDVİA*, S. V. “Alfred Guillaume,” by İlhan Kutluer.
57. Mehmet Fırıncı, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 3:226–27.

58. The governor of Istanbul at the time was Fahreddin Gökay, a cofounder with Nursi of the Green Crescent Society in May 1920.
59. Muhsin Alev, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:223; Mehmet Fırıncı, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 3:234.
60. *Ibid.*, 221.
61. Hüseyin Cahid Payazağa, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 5:269–70.
62. *Ibid.*, 270.
63. Muhsin Alev, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:226.
64. Mehmet Fırıncı, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 3:235.
65. Bayram Yüksel, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:398, 406.
66. *Ibid.*, 386–461.
67. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı Müellifi*, 596–98.
68. Mahmud Çalışkan, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 4:68–69; Bayram Yüksel, in *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:409–10.
69. *Ibid.*, 414.
70. Mehmet Fırıncı, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 3:239–43; M. Emin Birinci, in *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:264–66; Hakkı Yavuztürk, in *Son Şahitler*, 2:267–73.
71. Bayram Yüksel, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:405–7.
72. Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 413–15.
73. Said Özdemir, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 5:49–50; M. Emin Birinci, in *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:266–67.
74. Mehmet Fırıncı, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 3:244.
75. M. Emin Birinci, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:284.
76. Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası*, 2:36–37.
77. Ahmed Gümüş, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:319.
78. Zürcher, *Turkey*, 244.
79. Giyaseddin Emre, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 2:56.
80. Toprak, “Religious Right,” 638.
81. Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy*, 126.
82. Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 2:194–97.
83. Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy*, 128.
84. See, Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 2:24, 56.
85. *Ibid.*, 35. The letter was dated May 25, 1952; see Badıllı, *Nursi*, 3:1895.
86. Badıllı, *Nursi*, 3:1891–96, 1965–66.
87. Mustafa Sungur, in *Nur-The Light*, Vol. V; No. 57 (Sept. 1990), 2–4.

88. Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy*, 129.
89. See my article "An Outline of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's Views on Christianity and the West," in Ian Markham and Ibrahim Özdemir (eds.), *Globalization, Ethics and Islam*, 106–15.
90. Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 2:82.
91. *Ibid.*, 97–98.
92. *Ibid.*, 81–83.
93. Al-Maghribi, *Jāmi' al-Shaml*, 1:450, No. 1668; al-'Ajlūnī, *Kashf al-Khafā'*, 2:463.
94. Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 2:132, 143.
95. *Ibid.*, 143.
96. Toprak, "Religious Right," 634.
97. Zürcher, *Turkey*, 243–44.
98. Akşin (ed.), *Türkiye Tarihi*, 4:186.
99. Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 415–16.
100. Ali Tayyar, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 5:112.
101. Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 2:203.
102. Hulûsi Yahyagil, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:40; Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 2:14.
103. See Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 4:307–16.
104. See M. Emin Birinci, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:267–77; Mustafa Türkmenoğlu, in *Son Şahitler*, 4:110–12.
105. Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 419–20.
106. Ali Tayyar, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 5:110–14.
107. Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 2:153–54, 162–63, 163–66, 189–91, 202.

Chapter 17

1. Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 2:198–99.
2. *Ibid.*, 2:172.
3. *Ibid.*, 2:172–73, 155.
4. *Ibid.*, 2:155–56.
5. *Ibid.*, 2:183.
6. *Ibid.*, 2:102–4.

7. Ibid., 2:120–21.
8. Ibid., 1:132–33.
9. Ibid., 2:173.
10. Ibid., 1:166.
11. Kâmil Acar, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 2:256.
12. Salih Özcan, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 3:131–32.
13. Vahdi Gayberi, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 4:12–13.
14. Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 2:187–88, 204–5, 206.
15. Akşin, *Türkiye Tarihi*, 4:184–85.
16. Transformed into a mosque by Fatih Sultan Mehmet on his conquering Istanbul in 1453, for nearly five hundred years Aya Sophia had been the symbol of Islamic supremacy over Christianity. It was made into a museum by secret cabinet decision in October 1934, and closed to worship. On the pretext of repairs, it has mostly remained closed to worship since then; it was opened to worship only partially in 1991. See *TDVİA*, S. V. “Ayasofya.”
17. Tahsin Tola, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:160.
18. Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 421.
19. Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 2:193.
20. Said Özdemir, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 5:53–54; Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 421.
21. See, Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 2:213–19.
22. See, Mehmet Fırıncı, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 3:248–49.
23. Said Özdemir, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 5:55.
24. Said Köker, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 5:151.
25. Giyaseddin Emre, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 2:57–58.
26. Tahsin Tola, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:160–61.
27. Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (1959 ed.), 2:208–9.
28. Fehmi Yılmaz, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:245.
29. For an account, see Re’fet Kavukçu, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 2:231–38. It includes some newspaper cuttings, one of which describes “the battle of words” in the Grand National Assembly between Menderes and İnönü on the subject of Said Nursi.
30. Said Özdemir, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 5:55.
31. Tahir Barçın, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler*, 2:133.
32. Bayram Yüksel, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:429–34.
33. The following account is taken from Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 440–51; Abdullah Yeğin in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:373–78, Bayram Yüksel, in Şahiner, *Son Şahitler* (1980 ed.), 1:434–40.

34. Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 461–63.

35. *Ibid.*, 456–57.

36. As Abdülmecid had mentioned, there were two coffins. One, of galvanized metal, was placed inside a large second coffin made of zinc. After being treated with chemicals they were sealed with solder on Nursi's body being placed in them.

37. Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen* (6th ed.), 463–64.

38. Badıllı, *Nursi*, 3:2197–98.

39. Nursi, *Words*, 727.

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Index

- ‘Abd al-Qadir Geylani, Shaikh, 5, 11,
17, 129, 165, 166, 184, 244
- ‘Abduh, Muhammad, 22
- Abdülhamid (II), Sultan, 17, 22, 27, 32,
35, 36, 43, 44, 47, 49, 50, 52, 59, 71,
72, 74, 80, 103, 104, 108, 159
- Abdülkadir, Seyyid, 146, 148, 184, 185
- Abdullah (Molla—Nursi’s brother), 3, 6,
7, 8–9, 12, 13, 132
- Abdullah, Cevdet, 57, 151, 195
- Abdülmecid (Nursi’s brother), 4, 111,
131, 177, 323, 337, 338, 339, 346, 347
- Abdurrahman (Nursi), 37, 131, 132,
138, 143, 152, 153, 165, 200–1, 203,
231; biography of, 24, 126, 138, 164
- Abdurrahman Taği, Shaikh, 5, 7, 26
- al-Afghani, Jamal al-Din, 22, 23
- Afyon, 216, 237, 271, 281, 283, 299,
347; Court, 258, 292–301, 308, 324;
Prison, 127, 272, 274, 283, 285, 290,
291, 306, 308, 335
- Ahmed Feyzi (Kul), 217, 299, 300
- Ahmad Hani, Shaikh, 11
- Ahmed Ramiz, 103
- Ahmed Rıza, 36, 57, 59, 69, 74
- A’isha Apa, 128
- Alev, Muhsin, 310, 312, 313, 314, 316,
318, 319
- Ali Akbar Shah, Sayyid, 315–16
- Ali Çavuş, 105, 106, 119, 120, 121, 181
- Altrok, Midhat, 229
- America, 36, 97, 307
- Anarchy, 70, 264, 279, 280, 294, 324
- Anatolia, 134, 140, 141, 151, 153, 154,
155, 168, 230, 237, 330; eastern, 3,
15, 26, 44, 74, 90, 108, 112, 134,
182, 245, 297
- Ankara, 134, 153, 154, 168ff., 189, 210,
229, 238, 251, 254, 260, 264, 266,
271, 299, 300, 305, 309, 315, 316,
321, 322, 330, 331, 337, 339, 340,
343; government, 135, 136, 149, 155,
168, 180, 210, 262
- Antalya, 185, 215
- Arab(s), 84, 94, 98, 102, 342; Revolt,
135; world, 325
- Arabia, 105, 182, 326
- Arabic, 10, 12, 25, 45, 94, 145, 169,
191, 203, 204, 208–9, 210, 316
- Arabic (Qur’anic) alphabet, 276, 281;
banning of, 191, 202, 205
- Armenian(s), 16, 44, 50, 89, 90, 108,
109, 111, 114, 115, 116, 117, 120,
121, 122, 123, 124, 133, 134, 136,
148, 149, 177, 314; question, 15–16
- Article 163 of Criminal Code, 215, 219,
220, 285, 300, 311, 331
- Arun, Ziya, 314, 318
- Asia, 55, 83, 99, 326, 348
- Âsım Bey, Binbaşı, 201, 215–16
- Âsiye Hanım, 237, 238
- Atatürk. *See* Mustafa Kemal
- Atheism, 169, 243, 278, 307, 317, 323,
326, 350
- Atheists, 224, 263, 265, 325
- Athenagoras, Patriarch, 317
- Austria, 61, 129
- Aya Sophia, 42, 66, 68, 73, 152, 221,
338, 340
- Aya Stefanos, 74, 75
- al-Azhar University, 30, 42, 94, 276, 316
- Badıllı, Abdülkadir, 14, 20
- Baghdad, 11, 14, 119, 237; Pact 325, 326

- Bakhit, Shaikh Muhammad, 42, 97
 Balkan Provinces, 52, 94
 Balkan War(s), 59, 103, 104, 105; First, 102, 103
 Barçın, Dr. Tahir, 272, 341
 Barla, 186, 187, 188, 189, 192, 194, 196–99, 208, 209, 210, 212, 243, 247, 321, 322
Barla Lahikası, 201
 Başid, Mount, 30, 106
 Batum, 83, 115, 154, 155
 Bayar (President) Celâl, 307, 309, 325, 326
 Bayram, Hüsnü, 341, 342, 343, 344
 Bediuzzaman (name of), 13, 29, 296
 Bekir Ağa Bölüğü (Military Prison), 77
 Bekir Berk, 330, 339
 Belief (faith), 87, 93, 232–33, 236, 323, 350; fundamentals of, 162, 163, 178; revitalization of, 177, 193, 233, 236, 240, 323, 350; truths of, 96, 193, 203, 234, 239, 265, 278, 279
 Believers, 163, 207, 232
 Belkan (tribe), 43
 Berlin, 131, 133; Treaty of, 35
 Besim Ömer Pasha, 124, 125
 Beytüşşebab, 30, 43
 von Bismarck (Chancellor Otto), 97
 Bitlis, 9, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 23, 24–26, 27, 30, 37, 47, 83, 108, 109, 115, 116, 117, 119, 123, 144, 145, 146, 272; fall of, 119ff., 122, 124; Incident, 3, 108–9
 Black Sea, 83, 115, 134, 165, 227
 Bolshevik(s), 154, 155; Revolution, 128, 133
 Bolvadin, 215, 217
 Britain, 16, 90, 111, 133, 135, 146, 307, 325
 British, 71, 84, 134, 135, 139, 146, 150, 151, 152, 153, 154; Intelligence Service, 72, 140; Mandate, 140, 148
 Burdur, 183, 185–86, 187
Burhan-ı Gelenbevî, 106
Büyük Cihad (newspaper), 315
Büyük Doğu (magazine), 313
 Çakmak, Marshal Fevzi, 154, 187
 Caliph, 39, 135; -Sultan 35;
 Caliphate, 141, 155, 170, 171; abolition of, 168, 180, 190; policy, 135
 Çalışkan, Ceylan, 273, 288, 306, 320
 Çalışkan, Mehmet, 273, 308
 Çalışkans, 341
 Çam Dağı (Pine Mountain), 197
 Carasso, Emanuel, 58
 Carlyle, Thomas, 97
 Caucasia, 84, 326
 Caucasian front, 106, 118, 127, 132, 143
 Caucasus, 112, 115, 122, 155
 Çaycı Emin, 227, 288, 245–46, 250, 251, 330
 Çelebi, Nazif, 230, 275
 Çelebi, Selahaddin, 230, 253, 258, 259, 268, 275, 276, 287, 316
 Cellad Hasan, 77
 Central Powers, 103, 111, 133
Ceride-i Sofiye Gazetesi, 77
 Cevdet Bey, 31, 112, 115, 116
 Christian(s), 93, 276, 317, 325; cooperation with, 317; Europe, 135
 Christianity, 158
 Civilization, 53, 54, 55, 81, 97–98, 278; European (present-day), 42, 48, 160, 326, 349; Islamic (true), 23, 48, 53, 56, 84, 98, 135, 157–60, 169, 349; material, 36; of the Qur'an, 193; Western, 55, 135, 157–60, 190, 317–18, 329, 350
 Cizre, 3, 18, 19, 20, 30
 'Coincidences' (*tevâfukat*), 206, 207, 231, 246, 308
 Collective personality, 88, 97, 170–71, 240, 335
 Communism, 276, 278, 280, 289, 306, 307, 314, 325, 350; threat of, 278, 279, 325
 Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), 31, 36, 37, 51–52, 53, 57–59, 62, 67, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 78, 80, 89, 94, 101, 133, 139, 151, 190; Nursi's relations with, 36–37, 51, 56–59

- Constitutional(ism) (government), 22, 33, 34, 46, 47, 52, 56, 57, 61, 63, 69, 79, 84, 85–86, 87, 89, 94, 95, 161, 349; objectives of, 53
- Constitutional movement, 31, 34–35, 349
- Constitutional Revolution, 36, 154, 224, 279
- Consultation, mutual (*şura, meşveret*), 46, 54, 55, 85, 99, 107, 349
- Damad Ferid Pasha, 139, 146
- Damascus, 3, 84, 94–95, 101, 161, 221, 238, 276; Sermon, 93, 94, 103, 323
- Darü'l-Hikmeti'l-İslamiye, 133, 136–41, 143, 144, 145, 150, 155, 164, 165, 172, 184, 222, 247, 250, 264, 297
- Dashnakzoutiun, 16, 90, 108, 109
- Demiroğlu, Tevfik, 152, 153, 168, 173, 183
- Democrat(s), 306, 307, 317, 324, 325, 327, 328, 329, 330, 337, 338, 339, 345; government, 191, 322; Party, 193, 285, 301, 305, 306, 309, 310, 325, 329, 343
- Denizli, 251, 252, 254, 258, 261, 264, 267, 268, 271, 283, 299; Court, 260–67, 272, 292, 297, 300, 312; Prison, 191, 250, 255, 257ff., 265, 268, 274, 285, 290, 299
- Dersaadet, 38, 77. *See also* Istanbul
- Despotism, 22, 36, 46, 51, 52, 53, 54, 58, 78, 79, 83, 85, 91, 95, 97, 161; Hamidian, 36, 51, 59; scholastic, 46
- Divine unity, 102, 150, 233, 289
- Diyarbakır, 30, 87, 94, 185, 330, 341, 346
- Doğan, Avni, 229
- (Doğu) Bayezit, 10, 11, 144
- Dr. Frew, 140
- Dürrizade Abdullah Efendi, Şeyhü'l-İslam, 140
- Eastern Provinces, 39, 40, 46, 50, 51, 53, 58, 61–62, 101, 102, 108, 148, 149, 172, 180, 216
- Education, 22–23, 37, 43, 62, 195, 278; unification of, 172, 190
- Educational reform, 10, 27, 29, 44, 61. *See also* Nursi
- Eğirdir, 187, 230, 322, 341, 347; Lake, 186, 187–88, 194, 201
- Egypt, 84, 237
- Elhüccetü'z-Zehra*, 274, 285, 289, 290
- Emin Efendi, Shaikh (of Bitlis), 9, 12, 14–15, 26
- Emirdağ, 260, 271ff., 277, 280, 281, 282, 283, 285, 288, 305, 308–9, 314–15, 320, 321, 330, 335, 336, 338, 340, 341, 344
- Emirdağ Lahikası*, 330
- Emre, Giyaseddin, 324, 340
- Entente powers. *See* Triple Entente
- Enver Bey (Pasha), 31, 37, 52, 58, 69, 103, 104, 105, 111, 112, 115, 116, 118, 132, 133, 137, 154–55
- Erek, Mount, 105, 177, 178, 181, 182, 187, 210
- Ertoshi tribe, 30, 43
- Erzurum, 111, 112, 113, 144, 183, 326; fall of, 118
- Eskişehir, 216, 251, 275, 310, 320, 330; Court, 251, 253, 258, 260, 292; Prison, 216ff., 227, 257, 285, 290
- Eşref Edip, 50, 142, 148, 152, 153, 154, 313
- Europe, 28, 31, 34, 36, 42, 55, 58, 97
- European(s), 33, 45, 90, 91, 96, 98, 102; powers, 15, 16, 135
- Faith. *See* Belief
- Fakazlı, İbrahim, 259, 288, 314
- Fakirullah Mollazade, 20
- Fatih (district), 38, 39, 133, 154, 311, 317, 319; Medrese, 39, 41; mosque, 272, 314
- Fatin Hoca, 38
- Fehim, Shaikh, 26
- Fethullah, Molla (of Siirt), 9, 13, 26, 29
- Fethullah Verkanisi, Shaikh, 26
- Fifth Ray, The, 249–50, 251, 260, 264, 265, 292, 296–97

- Fırıncı, Mehmed, 317, 319, 322
 First Expeditionary Force, 112, 115, 116
Flashes (Collection), *The*, 200, 212, 249, 322–23
 France, 111, 146, 307
 Freedom, 21, 22, 33, 50, 52ff., 63, 73, 84, 86–87, 90–91, 97; ‘in accordance with the Shari’ah’, 47, 97, 307
 Freedom and Accord Party (FAP), 139, 152
 Freemason(s), 65, 66, 151, 152
 Freemasonry, 73
 French, 34, 134, 135; thought, 192
Fruits of Belief, The, 257, 260, 262, 268, 274, 275
Futuh al-Ghayb, 129, 165, 166
 Gawth-ı Geylani. *See* ‘Abd al-Qadir Geylani
 Gawth-ı Hizan, 5, 9
 Gedik, Namık, 343
 Gelenbevi, 106
 Germany, 103, 111, 131, 147, 316
 Gevaş (Vastan), 10, 115, 123
 Ghazali, Imam (Abu Hamid), 11, 166, 244
 Gökalp, Ziya, 190
 Gökay, Fahreddin Kerim, 142
 Gönen, Ahmet Hikmet, 298, 299
 Gönenli Mehmet Efendi, 259
 Great Powers, 16, 35, 108
 Greeks, 133, 134, 136, 150, 151, 169, 202
 Green Crescent Society, 141–42
Guide for Women, A, 247
Guide for Youth, A, 247, 249, 275, 282, 296, 310, 311
 Guillaume, Alfred, 318
 Gündüzalp, Zübeyir, 276, 299, 306, 308, 314, 320, 323, 338, 341, 343, 344
 Hadith(s), 25, 41, 48, 63, 162, 236, 239, 260, 264, 276, 296, 329; allegorical, 264, 296, 297
 Hafız Ali, 230, 257, 268
Hakikat Çekirdekleri, 144, 153
 Halil Pasha, 112, 113, 115, 116, 119, 155
 Hamidiye regiments, 16, 17, 40, 181
 Hanım (Nursi’s sister), 3, 16
 Hasan Fehmi, 69, 70, 72
 Hasankale, 111, 114
 Haydar(an) (tribe), 43, 181
 Haydarizade İbrahim Efendi, Şeyhü’l-İslam, 140, 141
 Hinchaks, 16
 Hizan, 3, 5, 7, 9, 116, 144, 145, 146
Hizb al-Nuri, 235, 236, 249, 265
 Hoca Muhyiddin, 44
 Hoca Tahsin, 22
 Horhor Medrese, 91, 106, 110, 177
Hücumat-ı Sitte, 251
 Hulusi Bey (Yahyagil), 200, 201, 330, 344
 Hurşid Pasha, 78, 80
 Hüsrev (Altınbaşak), 201, 203, 213, 231, 232, 288, 308, 321
Hutuvat-ı Sitte, 144, 145, 153
 Ibn Sina, 195, 207
İkdam (newspaper), 148
İki Mekteb-i Musibetin. See Testamomial of Two Schools of Misfortune
 İleri, Tevfik, 315
Illuminating Lamp, The, 275, 296
 Independence Tribunal(s), 181, 185, 191
 İnebolu, 83, 229, 230, 254, 258, 259, 305, 314, 324
 Iran, 15, 112, 113, 115, 122, 182, 316, 325, 326
 Iraq, 316, 325, 326
İşârât, 144, 145, 153
Isharat al-I’jaz fi Mazann al-Ijaz, 106, 107, 114, 132, 144, 153, 323
 Islam, 33, 34, 45, 47, 53, 57, 60, 70, 84, 89, 92, 93, 95, 135, 148, 151, 157, 193, 278, 324, 325, 329, 337, 348, 350; disestablishment of, 190; revitalization of, 323; source of progress, 158, 278; Turkification of, 191
 Islamic morality (ethical principles), 53, 54, 56, 89, 96, 136, 306

- Islamic unity, 22, 23, 48, 60, 67–68, 76, 84, 91, 94, 104, 307, 325, 326
- Islamic world (world of Islam), 22, 23, 37, 46, 78, 83, 84, 136, 278, 279, 307, 316, 323, 325, 326; decline of, 45, 56, 92, 95ff., 161, 162
- Islamist(s), 157, 190, 193
- Islamization, 44
- İsparit, 6, 116, 144
- Isparta, 186, 187, 202, 204, 210, 211, 212, 215, 216, 230, 237, 243, 246, 249, 250, 251, 255, 260, 275, 281, 283, 299, 305, 308, 309, 310, 321, 336, 338, 339, 341, 343, 344
- Istanbul, 9, 13, 16, 27, 32, 33, 37, 41, 42, 50, 52, 55, 57, 58, 61, 63, 73, 77, 80, 83, 84, 101, 129, 131, 133, 134, 140, 145, 148, 154, 164, 180, 183, 238, 258, 296, 299, 305, 309, 310, 315, 317, 319, 321, 322, 329, 330, 331, 337, 339; occupation of, 133, 134, 135, 139, 151, 153; re-occupation of, 152, 153
- İttihad-ı Muhammedi Cemiyeti*. *See* Muhammadan Union
- İzmir, 101, 134, 183, 185
- İzmit, 77
- Japanese, 55, 95, 296
- Jawshan al-Kabir*, 235, 289
- Jihad*, 105, 109, 135, 140, 141, 151; declaration, 111; proclamations, 105
- Jihad of the word*, 307, 323–24
- Julfa, 124, 126
- Jurisprudence (*fiqh*), 4, 25, 136
- Kalam* (science of), 25, 28, 41, 48, 136
- Karakol* (organization), 153, 154
- Kastamonu, 225, 245, 246, 249, 250, 251, 252, 253, 254, 258, 259, 264, 275, 281, 283, 297, 309, 336
- Kastamonu Lahikası*, 227
- Kaya, Şükrü, 216, 219
- Kazım Karabekir (Pasha), 112, 170, 195
- Kel Ali (Çetinkaya), 119, 120
- Kemal, Namık, 21, 22, 34–35, 50, 53
- Kemalism, 191, 192, 306
- Kemalist, 192; revolutions, 195
- Key to Belief, The*, 264, 265
- Khalidiyyah, 3. *See also* Naqshi/Khalidi
- Khulasah al-Khulasah*, 235
- al-Khutbah al-Shamiyyah*, 102, 144, 145. *See also* Damascus Sermon
- Kısakürek, Necib Fazıl, 313
- Kologrif, 125, 126
- Konya, 4, 281, 330, 337, 338, 339, 340, 342, 345, 346, 347
- Kör Hüseyin Pasha, 181, 182
- Kosova, 102, 103
- Kosturma, 124, 125, 126, 128, 131
- Kuleönlü Mustafa, 201, 203
- Kurd(s), 43, 56, 60, 62, 85, 90, 148, 149, 180, 182, 225
- Kurdish, 45, 69, 108, 122, 134, 145, 292, 342; porters, 61
- Kurdistan, 3, 5, 30, 37, 38, 43, 45, 47, 49, 50, 81, 146–49, 326
- Kuşçubaşı, Eşref, 104, 105, 155
- Kutay, Cemal, 104, 105
- Lausanne, Treaty of, 135
- Law for the Maintenance of Order, 181, 190
- Lemeât*, 138, 144, 153, 159, 348
- Letters*, 200, 323
- Liberal Union Party, 59
- Liberals (*Ahrar*), 71, 74
- Macedonia, 36, 101
- Macedonia Risorta Masons' Lodge, 58
- Mahmud Şevket Pasha, 74
- Maktubat*, 165, 166
- Malatya Incident, 315
- Mardin, 20, 21, 22, 24, 33, 35
- Mardin, Şerif, 5, 15, 16, 104
- Materialism (scientific), 35, 224, 234
- al-Mathnawi al-'Arabi al-Nuri*, 166, 167, 323
- Mawlana Jalal al-Din Rumi, 166, 338, 340, 342, 345
- Mawlana Khalid Baghdadi, 94, 237–38, 336

- Medrese(s), 4, 5, 8, 27, 45, 46, 48, 203, 204; closure of, 172, 202; of eastern Anatolia, 8, 10, 43, 110; of Istanbul, 10; reform, 44–45. *See also* Nursi
- Medrese Teachers' Association, 142
- Medrese-i Yûsufiye, 217, 285
- Medresetü'l-Kuzat, 40
- Medresetü'z-Zehrâ, 30, 32, 33, 45, 46, 101, 102, 103, 105, 107–8, 149, 172, 234, 325, 326
- Mehmed Emin (Molla), 6, 7
- Mehmet Âkif, 38, 136, 148, 153
- Mehmet Feyzi (Pamukçu), 228, 237, 248, 250, 252, 259, 261, 288
- Memduh Bey, 119, 124
- Menderes, Adnan, 305, 308, 317, 322, 324, 325, 326, 327, 328, 329, 337, 338, 340, 343, 345
- Menemen Incident, 225
- Mevlid*, 66, 68
- Mim. Mim.* Group 153
- Minorities, 58, 60, 61; Christian, 16, 34, 135; ethnic, 62, 101, 108; nationalist aspirations of, 36
- Miran tribe, 17, 30
- Mirza, Sufî, 3, 4, 8, 77, 145, 166
- Misbah* (newspaper), 56
- Missionaries, 15–16; American, 276
- Mizan* (newspaper), 62, 68
- Mizancı Murad, 36, 62
- Modernization, 35, 97, 189
- Molla Habib, 106, 110, 111, 113, 116
- Molla Hamid, 178, 179, 181
- Molla Mehmed (Nursi's brother), 4, 17
- Molla Süleyman (Ayaz), 132, 152, 154, 168
- Moral renewal, 68, 84, 94
- Mosul, 27, 112
- Mudanya Armistice, 135, 168
- Mudros Armistice, 133
- Muhacir Hafız Ahmed, 196, 197
- Muhâkemat*, 92, 93, 144, 145, 161, 193
- Muhammadan Union, 65–68, 70, 71, 78, 79, 80
- Muhammed Celâli, Shaikh, 10, 11, 144
- Muhammed Feyyaz, 122, 123
- Muhammed Küfrevî, Shaikh, 26
- Müküslü Hamza, 194
- Münâzarat*, 21, 22, 45, 84, 92, 101, 144, 145
- Muş, 119, 324, 340
- Mustafa Kemal, 153, 154, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 173, 181, 183, 189, 190, 191, 192, 222, 264, 292, 297
- Mustafa Pasha, 17–20, 30
- Mustafa Sabri, Şeyhü'l-İslâm, 142
- Mutkan (tribe), 43
- Mutlu, Tahiri, 249, 275, 277, 320, 341
- Naqshbandi (order), 3, 26, 27, 180, 238
- Naqsh(band)i/Khalidi (order), 4–5, 26, 44, 237
- Nationhood, 60–61, 88; Islamic, 88, 98, 102, 295, 326
- National Forces, 134, 140, 141, 146, 147, 153
- National movement, 151, 154, 155
- National Unity Committee, 345
- Nationalism, 101, 190, 192, 279; Turkish, 59, 94
- New Said, 13, 32, 92, 108, 133, 153, 172, 173, 177, 178, 193, 194, 210, 211, 234, 295, 349; birth of, 164–67. *See also* Nursi
- Nicholas (Nicholayavich), Grand Duke, 116, 127, 171
- Niyazi Bey, 37, 52, 69, 101
- Nokta*, 144, 153
- Nur Âlemin Bir Anahtarı*, 310–11
- Nur Muhammad (Sayyid), 7, 26
- Nur movement, 205, 276, 298, 306, 311, 320, 329, 330, 350
- Nur students, 106, 193, 204–5, 216, 222, 231, 239, 240–43, 250–51, 255, 257ff., 263, 274, 275, 281, 286, 287, 288, 289, 293, 307, 310, 311, 316, 320, 321, 325, 329, 330, 339, 342, 344, 345; collective personality of, 231, 240, 243–44; defence speeches of, 298–99; new generation of, 306, 309–10, 322
- Nurcu(s). *See* Nur students

- Nuriye, 3, 8, 145
 Nurs, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 23, 33, 47, 116, 144, 145, 146
 Nursi, Bediuzzaman Said: attitude towards politics, 173, 177, 210, 211–12, 222, 239, 241–42, 293–94, 305, 306–7, 327; *curriculum vitae*, 144–45; debates with ulama, 13, 14, 16, 18–19, 47, 48; dress of, 30, 39, 40, 48, 177, 191, 227, 249, 252, 277, 314–15; feats of learning, 10–11, 24–25, 28–29; frugality of, 106, 138–39, 197–98, 219, 248, 268, 321; humanity of, 90, 115, 116, 245–46, 351; ideas on educational reform, 38, 39, 42–47, 48–49, 53, 107; opposition to Turkification of Islam, 209–10; prayer and worship of, 178–79, 188, 196, 228, 320–21; relations with his students, 201–2, 213, 231, 248, 258, 260, 287, 320. *See also* CUP, New Said, Old Said
 Nurşin, 7, 119
Nur'un İlk Kapısı, 185
Nutuk, 59, 103
- Old Said, 13, 108, 165, 166, 173, 178, 180, 194, 211, 234, 295, 349. *See also* Nursi
 Ömer Pasha, 24, 25, 26
 Operation Army, 65, 74, 75, 76, 77
 Ottoman(s), 15, 16, 53, 55, 76, 78, 97, 103, 114, 135, 159, 161; army, 113; educated classes, 33, 39; nation, 53, 54, 58, 61; state, 16, 42, 136
 Ottoman Empire, 22, 34, 48, 59, 90, 111, 133, 146, 147, 148, 168, 325; unity of, 36, 37, 45, 48, 54, 60, 94, 295
 Ottoman Red Crescent Society, 124
 Ottomanism, 57, 58–59, 60, 89, 94, 108, 148
 Özcan, Salih, 315, 336
 Özdemir, Said, 338, 339, 340
- Pakistan, 316, 325
 Pan-Islam. *See* Islamic unity
 Pan-Turkism, 104
 Paris, 36, 59; Peace Conference, 148, 149
 Pasinler, 113, 114, 115, 125
 Philosophers, 42, 167; of Europe, 224, 225; Illuminist, 11; Sophist, 40
 Philosophy, 32, 166, 317, 349; European, 164; (ancient) Greek, 92, 158, 162; 'human,' 164–65; materialist, 193, 235; Roman, 158; Western, 276, 278
 Porte (The Sublime), 43, 103
 Positive action, 307, 323
 Positivism, 35, 57, 192, 279
 Positivist, 36, 193
 Press, the, 35–36, 56, 59, 72, 73, 216, 219, 225, 330, 331, 338
 Press Law(s), 35, 70, 72
 Progress, 46, 47, 48, 53, 54, 60, 67, 87, 93, 95, 98, 99; material, 36, 97, 99; true, 328
 Prophet Muhammad, 9, 26, 63, 66, 67, 68, 163, 209, 269; Sunnah of, 66, 68, 162, 163, 335
 Protestant, 16
- Qadiri (order), 5
Qizil İjaz 'ala Sullam, 106, 153
 Qur'an, 6, 9, 25, 30, 31, 33, 41, 63, 93, 96, 97, 98, 106, 107, 150, 161–62, 166–67, 186–87, 219, 259, 278, 279, 318, 344, 349; as literature, 159–60; 'fundamental laws' of, 317, 318, 327–29; miraculousness (*i'jaz*) of, 31, 92, 106, 108, 173, 207, 210, 232, 326; social justice of, 160–61; translation of, 209–10, 274
 Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*), 25, 48, 161; updating of, 25, 92, 106–7, 162–63, 193, 233–34
 Qur'anic viewpoint, 234
- Rabia (Ünlükül), 177, 178
Rachatat al-'Awamm, 84
Rachatat al-'Ulama, 92
 Racialism, 325

- Ramazanoğlu, Mustafa, 237, 276
Ratifying Stamp of the Unseen, The, 249, 251, 275, 291
 Reaction (political) (*irtica'*), 71, 219, 221, 222, 224, 328
 Reactionaries, 215, 216, 328
 Reason (intellect) (*'aql*), 88, 93, 96, 166–67, 233, 236
 Red Crescent Association, 153
 Re'fet Bey (Barutçu), 13, 201, 212, 213
 Reforms, 34, 35, 48, 108
 Reflective thought (contemplation) (*tefekür*), 178–79, 193, 195, 234–35
 Regenerator (Renewer) of Religion, 236–37, 239, 335
Rehber-i Vatan (newspaper), 56
 Republican People's Party (RPP), 192, 229, 254, 279, 285, 292, 305, 306, 310, 324, 326, 328, 329, 330, 331, 337, 338
Resimli Ay Mecmuası, 195
Risale-i Nur, 6, 20, 29, 32, 41, 42, 93, 165, 167, 178, 189, 194, 197, 203ff., 219, 228ff., 246–47, 271, 274, 277–78, 280, 281, 286–87, 296, 301, 305, 308, 313, 314, 316, 319, 321, 325–26, 330, 333–35, 338, 340, 350; acquittals of, 266, 272, 285, 301; collective personality of, 335; court defences of, 219, 221–24, 261–64, 265, 293–95; dissemination of, 201, 208, 230–31, 268, 275–76, 316; function of, 232–33, 239–40, 280, 293, 294, 323–24; method of, 193, 195–96, 233–36, 310–11; printing (duplication) of, 204, 305, 308, 321–23; readings of (*ders*), 208, 320, 339, 340; students. *See* Nur students; study-centres (*dershane*), 322, 330, 336, 337; translations of, 323; writing of, 197, 249–50, 274
 Rumelia, 52, 55, 58, 101, 103
Rumûz, 144, 145, 150, 153
 Russia, 16, 35, 90, 111, 112, 122, 133
 Russian(s), 90, 108, 112, 114, 115, 116, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 126, 127, 177; invasion, 111
 Russo-Turkish War, 90, 108, 112
 Sabahaddin Bey (Prince), 36, 59–60
 Sabis, General, 112, 116
 Sadık Bey, Taşköprülü, 229, 259, 260, 271, 274, 336
 Şahiner, Necmeddin, 183
 Said Molla (Mısırlı), 146, 152
 Salonica, 51, 52, 56, 57, 65, 73, 77, 101, 103, 154
 Şamlı Hafız Tevfik, 194
 Samsun, 315
 Santral Sabri, 201, 230
 Sanusi, Shaikh (Ahmad), 172
 Sanusi (order), 22, 105
 Saraçoğlu, Şükrü, 251, 265
 Sarıyer, 144, 145, 165
Şark ve Kürdistan Gazetesi, 42
 Sasun (tribe), 43
 Sav, 204, 230, 231, 258, 260, 336
Sayqal al-Islam, 92
 Science(s) (modern, of civilization), 22–23, 27, 28, 32, 40, 43, 45, 46, 48, 54, 61, 88, 93, 95, 96, 107, 142, 172, 192, 233–34, 278, 310, 311, 326; Islamic, 25, 233; popular, 36; religious, 27, 40, 43, 45, 172, 326
Sebilürreşad (magazine), 50, 148, 153, 313
 Secular education (schools) (*mektep*), 34, 35, 41–42, 45, 46, 48, 56, 161, 172, 192, 195, 276
 Secular republic, 221, 224
 Secularism (principle of), 192, 219, 221, 222, 224, 271, 306, 311, 329, 331
 Secularization, 33, 34, 72, 189, 190, 192, 224, 323
 Secularizing reforms (measures), 28, 190–92, 202, 219, 349
 Şefik Pasha, 49
 Şekerci Han, 38–39, 41
 Selim, Sultan, the Grim, 22, 49

- Selim of Hizan, Shaikh, 108–9
Serbesti (newspaper), 69, 70, 72
 Şerif Pasha, 148, 149
 Sèvres, Treaty of, 134, 146
 Şeyhü'l-İslam, 74, 134, 137, 138, 143,
 144, 151, 190; office of, 132, 133,
 140, 141, 150, 184, 190
 Shaikh Said of Palu, 180, 182
 Shaikh Said Revolt, 109, 180–82, 184,
 186, 190
 Shari'ah, 24, 49, 52, 53, 54, 55, 57, 61,
 63, 67, 68, 69, 73, 74, 75, 76, 78, 79,
 85, 86, 89, 90, 93, 142, 158, 163,
 181–82, 239; of Creation, 93;
 dynamism of, 55, 93
 Shi'i, 15, 108
 Sibğatullah, Sayyid. *See* Gawth-ı
 Hizan
 Siirt, 9, 13, 14, 17
Sirat-ı Müstakim (magazine), 50
 Sipkan (tribe), 43
 Sirhindi, Shaikh Ahmad, 165, 166, 167,
 238, 244
Six Steps, The, 150, 151, 152, 154, 292
 Skopje, 101, 102
 Society for the Advancement of Islam, 142
 Society for the Advancement of
 Kurdistan, 146
 Society for the Propagation of Education
 among Kurds, 149
 Special Organization, 104, 105, 112,
 153, 155
Staff of Moses, The, 275, 276, 277, 282,
 296, 310, 323
 Stoddard, Philip H., 104, 105
Şuaât, 144, 153
 Suavi, Ali, 22, 44
 Sufi(s), 56, 161, 166, 235, 241; order
 (path) (*tariqat*), 5, 13, 190, 207, 241,
 260, 292, 294–95
 Sufism, 5, 167, 223, 235, 238
 Sultan (Mehmed) Reşad, 101, 102, 103,
 104, 139
 Sungur, Mustafa, 29, 167, 276, 306, 309,
 315, 320, 323, 341
Sünûhat, 141, 144, 153, 157, 162
Supreme Sign, The, 230, 233–36, 248,
 249, 257, 264, 274, 277
Tafsir. See Qur'anic exegesis
 Tağ, 6, 7
 Tahir Pasha, İşkodralı, 27, 28, 29, 30,
 31, 36, 37–38, 107, 112
 Tahsin Bey (Pasha), 104, 105, 107, 111,
 112, 168
 Tal'at Bey (Pasha), 52, 57, 112, 124, 125
Ta'liqat, 106, 144, 145
 Tandoğan, Nevzat, 191, 254–55
Tanin (newspaper), 80, 132
 Tanzimat, 15, 28, 33–34, 35, 44, 190
Tashkhis al-'İlla, 102
 Tashnak(zutiyouun). *See*
 Dashnakzutiyouun
 Technology, 54, 55, 95, 96
 Tenth Word, 194–95, 196, 200, 207,
 215
Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa. See Special
 Organization
*Testimonial of Two Schools of
 Misfortune*, 65, 103, 144, 145
 Third Said, 305, 306. *See also* Nursi
 Thirty-first of March Incident, 56, 65,
 67, 71, 74, 75, 78, 79, 80, 221, 224,
 314, 328
 Tiflis (Tblisi), 83, 124, 125, 126
 Tillo, 17
 Tola, Dr. Tahsin, 322, 340
 Toptaşı Mental Asylum, 44, 47
 Triple Entente, 111, 133, 139
Tuluât, 144, 153
 Turk(s), 61, 90, 94, 98, 102, 133, 134,
 135, 146, 169, 172, 182, 295
 Turkestan, 84, 112, 154, 326
 Turkey, 67, 133, 135, 139, 151, 189,
 192, 239, 242, 279, 306, 307, 325,
 344, 345; partition of, 134, 139
 Turkish (nation), 182, 278, 279, 291,
 295, 342; language, 28, 45, 94, 145,
 191, 203, 204
 (Turkish) Grand National Assembly,
 134, 136, 154, 168, 169, 170, 194,
 220, 285, 309

- Ubeyd, 4, 120
- Ulama, 20, 25, 27, 34, 39, 41, 42, 44, 45, 46, 47, 56, 57, 92, 102, 136, 140, 141, 142, 146, 161, 236; of Damascus, 94; of Anatolia (Kurdistan), 26, 28, 33, 37, 38, 46, 84, 107, 132; of Istanbul, 38, 40, 41, 42, 151, 296
- Unionists. *See* CUP
- Uran, Hilmi, 279
- Urfa, 20, 87, 94, 336, 338, 341, 342–46
- Vahdetî, Hafız Derviş, 65, 66, 68, 69–71, 72
- Vahideddin, Sultan, 139, 168
- Van, 16, 27, 30, 31, 33, 36, 37, 43, 51, 83, 84, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 115, 123, 124, 144, 152, 173, 177ff., 186, 215, 238, 326; Armenian revolt in, 115; (army) Division, 111, 112; Lake, 3, 102, 106, 115, 116, 119, 123, 178
- Vastan. *See* Gevaş
- Vatican, 316
- Venizelos, 134
- Village Institutes, 192, 280
- Volga, River, 125, 128, 129, 131, 164
- Volkan* (newspaper), 65, 66, 68, 69, 70, 71, 77
- Vollkan* (magazine), 312
- Wahhabi, 15
- War of Independence, 134, 135, 154, 168, 238, 244, 278, 349
- War Ministry, 76, 77, 112, 132, 137, 145, 314
- Warsaw, 129, 131
- West, the, 43, 96, 135, 157, 158, 172, 278, 279, 307, 317, 350
- Westernization, 33, 72, 169, 189, 229, 278, 317
- Words, The*, 197, 200, 206, 207–8, 322
- World War, First (One), 4, 13, 27, 31, 32, 33, 90, 102, 103, 104, 105, 107, 108, 109, 128, 135, 151, 325; Second (Two), 239, 241, 242, 307
- Yalçın, Mustafa, 114, 125, 126
- Yalman, Ahmet Emin, 315
- Yeğin, Abdullah, 247, 248, 249, 251, 336, 342, 343, 344
- Yıldız Palace, 35
- Young Ottoman(s) (movement), 21, 22, 34, 53, 58
- Young Turk(s), 36, 58, 62, 89, 94, 108, 111, 192, 234; Revolution, 52
- Yücel, Hasan Âli, 251, 265, 267
- Yüksel, Bayram, 320, 321, 341, 342, 343, 344
- Yuşa Tepesi, 165
- Zakat*, 8, 150, 160, 161, 318
- Zülfikar*, 275, 276, 277, 296, 310, 316