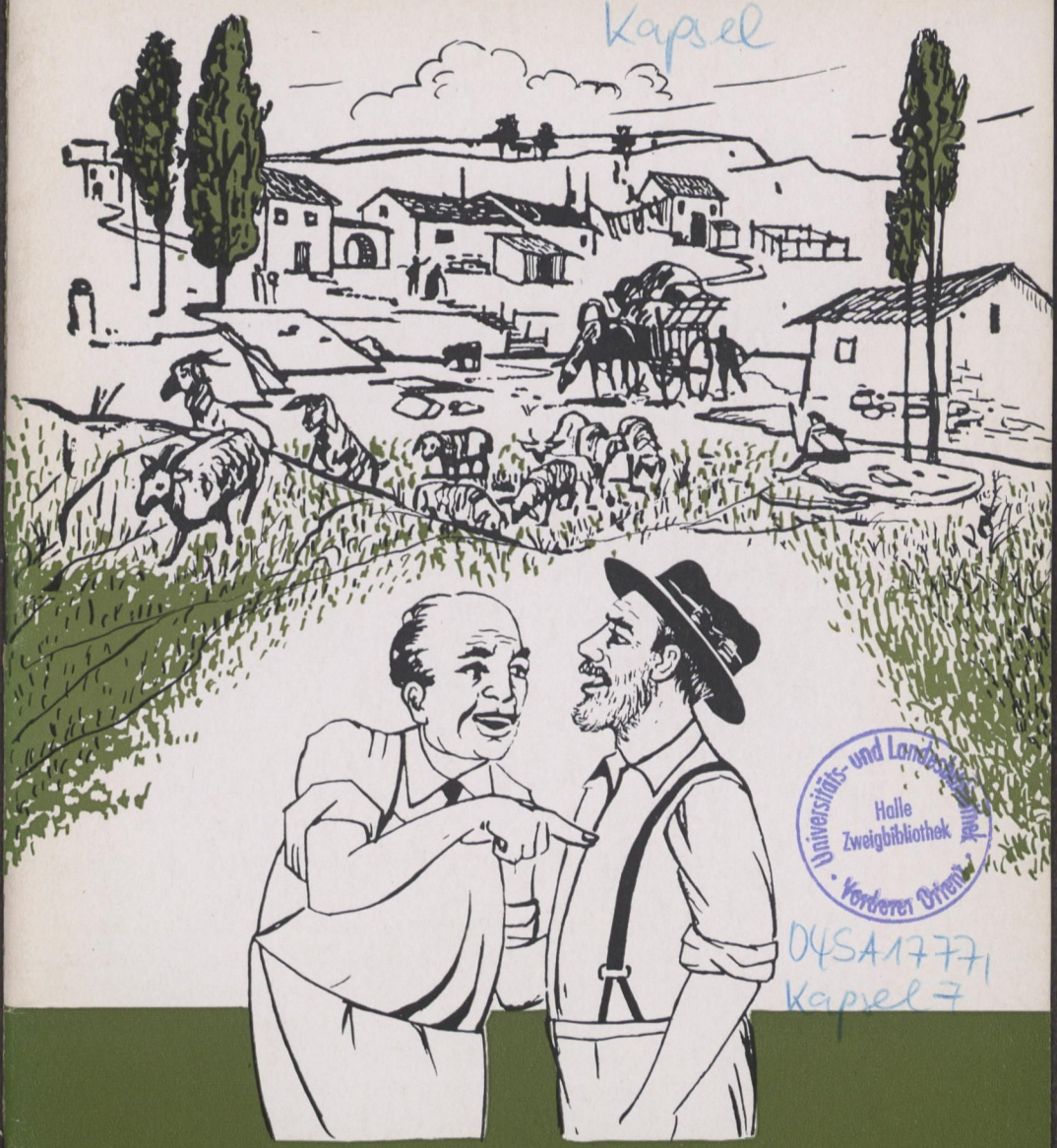


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THE
GROCCER
 AND THE
CHIEF

By DANIEL LERNER





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This article covers an aspect of Turkish life about which very little has appeared in print so far. The Turkish Information Office is greatly indebted to Mr. Daniel Lerner, the author who penned it, and to Harper's Magazine which published it in the September 1955 issue, for their generous permission to reprint this most illuminating and thought-provoking study.

*The research project which sent Daniel Lerner on his quest for "The Grocer and the Chief" was begun in 1950 by Columbia University's Bureau of Applied Research which undertook to collect more than 2,000 interviews — approximately 300 each from Turkey, Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, and Greece. The interviews were done by nationals in each country who had been specially trained by an American social scientist, and the results were sent back to Columbia where Dr. Lerner, a visiting professor of sociology from Stanford, was study director. In 1954 both the project and Dr. Lerner moved to Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Center for International Studies. The book which grew out of this is tentatively entitled *Modernizing the Middle East* and will be published by MIT.*

THE GROCER and THE CHIEF

By DANIEL LERNER

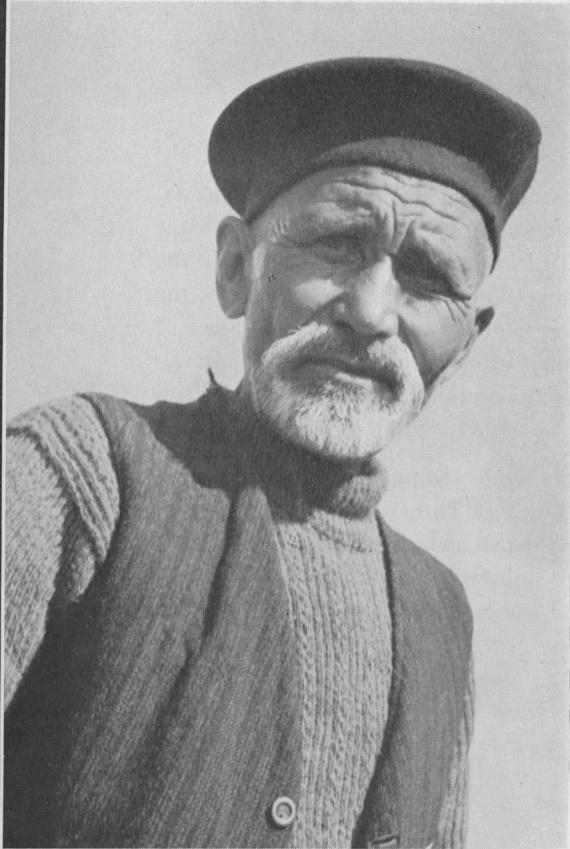
THE TURKISH village of Balgat lies about five miles out of Ankara, in the southerly direction. It does not show on the standard maps and it does not figure in the standard histories. I first heard of it in the autumn of 1950 and most Turks have not heard of it today. Yet the story of the modern Middle East is summed up in the recent career of Balgat. Indeed the personal meaning of modernization in underdeveloped lands everywhere is traced in miniature in the lives of two Balgati — the Grocer and the Chief.

My first exposure to Balgat came while leafing through several hundred interviews that had been recorded in Turkey during the spring of 1950. One caught my eye because of the underlying tone of bitterness in the interviewer's summary of his impressions, his earnest sense of the hopelessness of place and people. I was moved by his five interviews in this village; even so, something in the perspective seemed awry. For one thing, the interviewer was clearly more sensitized to what he saw than what he heard. The import of what had been said to him, and duly recorded in his reports, had somehow escaped his attention. For another, in the interval between the interviews and my reading of them, there had been a national election in which, as a stunning surprise to everybody, practically all Turks over twenty had voted and the government had been turned out of office.

Nothing like this ever happened before in Turkey, possibly because universal suffrage with an opposition party in a fair election had never been tried before. The dazed experts who explain Middle Eastern events could only say of this epochal deed, while sparring for time, that the Anatolian villagers had done it. Since it would be hard to imagine Anatolian villagers of more standard pattern than the Balgati whose collected opinions were spread before me, I had it on top authority that during the summer of 1950 they had entered History. But it was not immediately obvious by what route.



Four years later, the Balgati interviews had become part of an oversized draft manuscript on the modernizing of the Middle East. To provide at



least the internal satisfaction of having been "there," I went out to Turkey myself in the spring of 1954 — an odyssey which terminated where my ideas began: in Balgat, on the eve of a second national election.

The interviewer who recorded Balgat on the verge — his name was Tosun B. — had detected no gleam of the future during his sojourn there. "The village is a barren one," he wrote. "The main color is gray, so is the dust on the divan on which I am writing now." Tosun was a serious young scholar from Ankara and he loved the poor in his own fashion. He had sought out Balgat to find the deadening past rather than the brave new world. He found it: "I have seen quite a lot of villages in the barren mountainous East,

but never such a colorless, shapeless dump. This was the reason I chose the village. It could have been half an hour to Ankara by car if it had a road, yet it is about two hours to the capital by car without almost any road and is just forgotten, forsaken, right under our noses."

Tosun also sought and found persons to match the place. Of the five villagers he interviewed, his heart went straight out to the village shepherd. "The respondent was literally in rags and in this cold weather [*sic*] he had no shoe," wrote Tosun, in his own spelling, "but the mud and dirt on his feet were as thick as any boot. He was small, but looked rugged and sad, very sad. He was proud of being chosen by me and

though limited tried his best to answer the questions. Was so bashfull [*sic*] that his blush was often evident under the thick layer of dirt on his face. He at times threw loud screams of laughter when there was nothing to laugh about. These he expected to be accepted as answers, for when I said 'Well?' he was shocked, as if he had already answered the question."

Tosun attributed to the Chief of Balgat his frustration in not getting more interviews. He reported that the chief "imposed himself on me all the time I was in the village, even tried to dictate to me, which I refused in a polite way. I couldn't have followed his directions, as I would have ended up only interviewing his family." Tosun did succeed in talking privately with two Balgat farmers, but it is clear that throughout these interviews he was still haunted by the shepherd and bedeviled by the Chief. Not until he came to interview the village grocer did Tosun find another Balgati who aroused in him a comparable emotional response. Tosun's equal hostility to these very different men made me curious, and eventually convinced me of the notion that the parable of modern Turkey was the story of the Grocer and the Chief.

ASIDE from resenting the containment strategy which the Chief was operating against him, Tosun gave few details about the man. He reported only the impression that "the *Mubtar* is an unpleasant old man. Looks mean and clever. He is the absolute dictator of this little village." Nor did Tosun elaborate his disapproval of the *Mubtar's* opinions beyond the comment that "years have left him some sort of useless, mystic wisdom." But the main source of Tosun's hostility, it appeared, was that the Chief made him nervous. His notes concluded: "He found what I do curious, even probably suspected it. I am sure he will report it to the first official who comes to the village."

Against the Grocer, however, Tosun reversed his neural field. He quickly perceived that he made the Grocer nervous; and for this Tosun disliked *him*. His notes read:

The respondent is comparatively the most city-like dressed man in village. He even wore some sort of a necktie. He is the village's only grocer, but he is not really a grocer, but so he is called, originally the food-stuffs in his shop are much less than the things to be worn, like the cheapest of materials and shoes and slippers, etc. His greatest stock is drinks and cigarettes which he sells most. He is a very unim-

pressive type, although physically he covers quite a space. He gives the impression of a fat shadow. Although he is on the same level with the other villagers, when there are a few of the villagers around, he seems to want to distinguish himself by keeping quiet, and as soon as they depart he starts to talk too much. This happened when we were about to start the interview. He most evidently wished to feel that he is closer to me than he is to them and was curiously careful with his accent all during the interview. In spite of his unique position, for he is the only unfarming person and the only merchant in the village, he does not seem to possess an important part of the village community. In spite of all his efforts, he is considered by the villagers even less than the least farmer. Although he presented to take the interview naturally, he was nervous and also was proud to be interviewed although he tried to hide it.

All of this posed a weighty question: Why did the Chief make Tosun nervous and why did Tosun make the Grocer nervous? Looking for answers, I turned to the responses each had made to the fifty-seven varieties of opinion called for by the standard questionnaire used in Tosun's interviews.

The Chief, it became clear immediately, was a man of few words on many subjects. He dismissed most of the items on Tosun's schedule with a shrug or its audible equivalent. What interested him were questions having to do with the primary modes of human deportment. Only when the issues involved first principles of conduct did he consider the occasion appropriate for pronouncing judgment. Of the Chief it might be said, as Henry James said of George Eliot's salon style, "*Elle n'aborde que les grandes thèmes.*"

The Chief has so little trouble with first principles because he desires to be, and usually is, a vibrant sound box through which the traditional Turkish virtues may resonantly echo. His themes are obedience, courage, loyalty — the classic values of the Ottoman Imperium reincarnate in the Ataturk Republic. For the daily round of village life these are adequate doctrine; and as the Chief had been outside of his village only to fight in two wars he has never found his austere code wanting. When asked what he wished for his two grown sons, for example, the Chief replied promptly: "I hope they will fight as bravely as we fought and know how to die as my generation did."

With his life in Balgat, as with the Orphic wisdom that supplies its rationale, the Chief is contented. At sixty-three his desires have been quieted and his ambitions achieved. To Tosun's question on contentment he replied with another question. "What could be asked more? God has brought me to this mature age without much pain, has given me sons and daughters, has put me at the head of my village, and has given me strength of brain and body at this age. Thanks be to Him."

THE GROCER is a very different style of man and, though born and bred in Balgat, lives in a different world — an expansive world, populated more actively with imaginings and fantasies, hungering for whatever is different and unfamiliar. To Tosun's probe, the Grocer replied staccato: "I have told you I want better things. I would have liked to have a bigger grocery shop in the city, have a nice house there, dress nice civilian clothes." He perceives his story as a drama of *Self versus Village*. "I am not like the others here. They don't know any better. And when I tell them, they are angry and they say that I am ungrateful for what Allah has given me."

Clearly, from the readiness and consistency of his responses to most questions, the Grocer had in fact brooded much over his role. At one point in the interviews, after asking each respondent to state the greatest problem facing the Turkish people, Tosun was obliged by the questionnaire to ask what the person would do about this problem if he were the president of Turkey. Some were shocked by the impropriety of the very question. "My God! How can you say such a thing?" gasped the



shepherd. "How can I . . . I cannot . . . a poor villager . . . master of the whole world."

The Chief, Balgat's virtuoso of the traditional style, summarized prevailing sentiment by his laconic reply to this question with another question: "I am hardly able to manage a village, how shall I manage Turkey?" When Tosun prodded him (by rephrasing the question to ask "What would you suggest for *your village* that you cannot handle yourself?"), the Chief said he would ask for "help of money and seed for some of our farmers." When the turn of the Grocer came, he told what he would and would *not* do, if he were president of Turkey, without embarrassment or hesitation: "I would make roads for the villagers to come to towns to see the world and would not let them stay in their holes all their life."

To get out of his hole the Grocer even declared himself ready — and in this he was quite alone in Balgat — to live outside of Turkey. This came out when Tosun asked: "If you could not live in Turkey, where would you want to live?" The standard reply of the villagers was simply that they *would not* live anywhere else. When Tosun persisted by asking, "Suppose you *had* to leave Turkey?" the shepherd replied finally that he would rather kill himself.

The Chief again responded on this issue with the clear and confident voice of traditional man. "Nowhere," said the Chief, and then added, with a calm assurance that this was all the reason required, "I was born here, grew old here, and hope God will permit me to die here." To Tosun's further probe, the Chief responded firmly: "I wouldn't move a foot from here." Only the Grocer found no trouble in imagining himself outside of Turkey, living in a strange land. Indeed he seemed fully prepared, as a man does when he has already posed a question to himself many times. "America," said the Grocer, and, without waiting for Tosun to ask him why, stated his reason, "because I have heard that it is a nice country, and with possibilities to be rich even for the simplest persons."

THE VIVID sense of cash displayed by the Grocer was perhaps his most grievous offense against Balgat ideas of taboo talk. In the code regulating the flow of symbols among Anatolian villagers, cravings for blood and sex are permissible but not for money. To talk of money at all — possibly because so little of it exists — is an impropriety. To reveal a *desire* for money is — Allah defend us! — an impiety. The

Grocer, with his "city-dressed" ways and his "eye at the higher places" and his visits to Ankara, provoked the Balgati to wrathful and indignant expressions of this code. But occasional, and apparently trivial, items in the survey suggested that some Balgati were talking loud about the Grocer to keep their own inner voices from being overheard by the Chief — or even by themselves.

As we were interested in knowing who says what to whom in such a village as Balgat, Tosun had been instructed to ask each person whether others ever came to him for advice, and if so what they wanted advice about. Naturally, the Balgati whose advice was most sought was the Chief, who reported: "Yes, that is my main duty, to give advice. [Tosun: *What about?*] About all that I or you could imagine, even about their wives and how to handle them, and how to cure their sick cow." But this conjunction of wives and cows, to illustrate all the Chief could imagine, runs the gamut only from A to B. Tosun discovered that some Balgati went for advice also to the disreputable Grocer. What did they ask his advice about? "What to do when they go to Ankara, where to go and what to buy, how much to sell their things. . . ."

The cash nexus, this suggested, was somehow coming to Balgat and with it a new role for the Grocer as cosmopolitan specialist in how to avoid wooden nickels in the big city. Also, how to spend the nickels one got, for the Grocer was a man of clear convictions on which coffee houses played the best radio programs for their customers and which were the best movies to see in Ankara. While his opinions on these matters were heterodox as compared, say, to the Chief's, they had an open field to work in, since most Balgati had never heard a radio or seen a movie and were not aware of what constituted orthodoxy with respect to them.

At the time of Tosun's visit, there was only one radio in Balgat, owned by no less a personage than the Chief. In the absence of a standard doctrine on radio inherited from the great tradition, the Chief — who was also of course the large landowner of Balgat — had bought a radio to please his sons. He had also devised an appropriate ceremonial for its use. Each evening a select group of Balgati forgathered in the Chief's guest room as he turned on the newscast from Ankara. They heard the newscast through in silence and, at its conclusion, the Chief turned the radio off and made his commentary. "We all listen very carefully," he told Tosun, "and I talk about it afterwards."

Tosun inquired of the Grocer, a frequent attendant at the Chief's salon, how he liked this style of radio session. Without complaining directly about the Chief's exclusive preoccupation with Radio Ankara news of "wars and the danger of wars" — which turned out in fact to be a rather single-minded interest in the Korean War to which a Turkish brigade had just been committed — the Grocer indicated that after all *he* had opportunities to listen in the coffee houses of Ankara where the audiences exhibited a more cosmopolitan range of interests. "It is nice to know what is happening in the other capitals of the world," said the Grocer. "We are stuck in this hole, we have to know what is going on outside our village."

The Grocer had his own aesthetic of the movies as well. Though the Chief had been to the movies several times, he viewed them mainly as a moral prophylactic: "There are fights, shooting. The people are brave. My sons are always impressed. Each time they see such a film they wish more and more their time for military service would come so that they would become soldiers too." For the Grocer, movies were more than a homily on familiar themes; they were his avenue to the wider world of his dreams. It was in a movie, he told Tosun, that he had first glimpsed what a *real* grocery store could be like — "with walls made of iron sheets, top to floor and side to side, and on them standing myriads of round boxes, clean and all the same dressed, like soldiers in a great parade."

This fleeting glimpse of what sounds like the Campbell Soup section of a supermarket had provided the Grocer with an abiding image of how his fantasy world might look. No petty pedantries obstructed his full sensory relationship to the movies; he delivered clear net judgments in unabashedly hedonist categories. "The Turkish ones," he said, "are gloomy, ordinary. I can guess at the start of the film how it will end. . . . The American ones are exciting. You know it makes people ask what will happen next?"

Here, precisely, arose the question that speculation could only rephrase but not answer. In Balgat, the Chief carried the sword, but did the Grocer steer the pen? When the Balgati sought his advice on how to get around Ankara, would they then go to see the movies that taught virtue or those that taught excitement? True, few Balgati had ever been to Ankara. But things were changing in Turkey and many more Balgati were sure to have a turn or two around the big city before they died.

What would happen next in Balgat if more people discovered the tingle of wondering what will happen next?

I REACHED Ankara last April via a circuitous route through the Middle East. The glories of Greece, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Persia touched me only lightly, for some part of me was already in Balgat. Even the Blue Mosque and Santa Sophia seemed pallid and I left Istanbul, three days ahead of schedule, for Ankara. I had saved this for last, and now here I was. I was half afraid to look.

I called a limousine service recommended by the hotel clerk and explained that I wanted to go out the following day, a Sunday, to a village some five miles south that might be hard to reach. As I wanted to spend the day, would the driver meet me at 8:00 A.M. and bring along his lunch?

While I waited for the car, next morning, my reverie wandered back through the several years since my first reading of the Balgat interviews. Was I chasing a phantom? Tahir S. appeared. With solitude vanished anxiety; confidently we began to plan the day. Tahir had been a member of the original interview team, working in the Izmir area. As Tosun had joined the Turkish foreign service and was stationed in North Africa, where he was conducting an inquiry among the Berbers, I had arranged in advance for Tahir to revisit Balgat with me in his place. Over a cup of sirupy coffee, we reviewed the questions that had been asked in 1950, noted the various responses and silences, decided the order in which we would repeat the old questions and interpolate the new ones.

As our plan took shape, Zilla K. arrived. She had no connection with the original survey, but I had decided to take along a female interviewer who could add some Balgat women to our gallery while Tahir and I were working over the men. I had not seen Zilla before, but had "ordered" her, through a colleague at Ankara University, "by the numbers": thirtyish, semi-trained, alert, compliant with instructions, not sexy enough to impede our relations with the men of Balgat but chic enough to provoke the women. A glance and a word were enough to demonstrate that Zilla filled the requisition. The hall porter came in to say our car was waiting. We settled back for a rough haul, debating niceties of procedure. Twenty minutes later, the driver said briskly: "There's Balgat."

We looked puzzled at each other until Tosun's words of 1950 recurred to us: "It could have been half an hour to Ankara if it had a road." Now it did have a road. What was more, a *bus* was coming down the road, heading toward us from the place our driver had called Balgat. As it passed, jammed full, none of the passengers inside waved or even so much as stuck out a tongue at us. Without these unfailing signs of villagers out on a rare chartered bus to celebrate a great occasion of some sort, we could only make the wild guess that Balgat had acquired a regular bus service. And indeed, as we entered the village, there it was — a "bus station," freshly painted benches under a handsome new canopy. We got out and looked at the printed schedule of trips. "The bus leaves every hour, on the hour, to *Ulus* Station. Fare: 20 Kurus." For about 6 cents Balgati could now go, whenever they felt the whim, to the heart of Ankara.

The villagers were getting out of their holes at last.

Overhead wires were stretched along the road, with branch lines extending over the houses of Balgat. The village had been electrified. Alongside the road deep ditches had been dug, in which the graceful curve of new water pipe was visible. Feeling strange, we made our way along the erratic path through the old village, led and followed by a small horde of children, to the house of the Chief. Tahir knocked, an old woman with her head covered by a dark shawl appeared; the children scattered. We were led into the guest room.

The Chief looked as I had imagined. His cheeks a bit more sunken, perhaps, but the whole *présence* quite familiar. Tall, lean, hard, he walked erect and looked me straight in the eye. His own eyes were Anatolian black and did not waver as he stretched out a handful of long, bony fingers. "*Gün aydın, Bey Efendim,*" he said, "good day, sir, you are welcome to my house." I noted in turn the kindness which opens a door to strangers and the Chief responded that we honored his house by our presence. This completed the preliminary round of *formules de la politesse* and steaming little cups of Turkish coffee were brought in by the Chief's older son. The son was rather a surprise — short, pudgy, gentle-eyed, and soft spoken. He bowed his head, reddening slightly as he stammered, "*Lütfen*" (Please!) and offered the tray of demitasses to me. I wondered whether he had learned to fight bravely and die properly.

As the Chief set down his second cup of coffee, signifying that we could now turn to the business of our visit, I explained that I had come from America, where I taught in a university, with the hope of meeting him. There, in my own country, I had read about Balgat in some writing by a young man from Ankara who, four years ago, had talked at length with the Chief and other persons in his village. This writing had interested me very much and I had often wondered, as the years passed by, how things were going in the village of Balgat and among its people. When I had the opportunity to come to Turkey, I immediately decided that I would visit Balgat and see the Chief if I could.

The Chief heard me through gravely, and when he spoke I knew I was in. He by-passed the set of formulas available to him — for either rejecting or evading my implied request — and responded directly to the point. I was right to have come to see Balgat for myself. He remembered well the young man from Ankara. Much had changed in Balgat since that time. Indeed, Balgat was no longer a village. It had, only last month, been incorporated as a district of Greater Ankara. This was why they now had bus service and electricity and a supply of pure water that would soon be in operation. Where there had been fifty houses there were now over five hundred, and even he, the *Mubtar*, did not know any more all the people living here.

Yes, he had lived in Balgat all his life and never in all that time seen so much happen as had come to pass in these four years. "It all began with the election that year. The *Demokrat* men came to Balgat and asked us what was needed here and told us they would do it when they were elected. They were brave to go against the government party. We all voted for them, as the *Halk* men knew no more what to do about the prices then, and the new men did what they said. They brought us this road and moved out the *gendarmerie*. Times have been good with us here. We are all *Demokrat* party in Balgat now."

The Chief spoke in a high, strong, calm voice, and the manner of his utterance was matter-of-fact. His black eyes remained clear and his features retained their shape. Only his hands were animated, though he invoked only the thumbs and the index fingers for punctuation. When he had completed his statement, he picked his nose thoughtfully for a moment and then laid the finger alongside the bridge. The tip of the long, bony finger reached into his eye socket.

I explained then that the young lady had come with us to learn how



such changes as the Chief mentioned were altering the daily round of life for the village women. Might she talk with some of them while Tahir Bay and I were meeting the men? The Chief promptly suggested that Zilla could speak with the females of his household. (We recalled Tosun's resentful remark that, had he followed the Chief's suggestions, "I would have ended up only interviewing his family," when Zilla reported on her interviews later that day. All had identified the biggest problem of Balgat as the new fashion of young men to approach girls shamelessly on the village outskirts — precisely what the Chief had told me, in answer to the same question.)

But if the Chief still used his containment tactics with the women, in other directions he had taken a decidedly permissive turn. Tahir and I, he said, could walk about Balgat entirely as we wished and speak with whomsoever it pleased us to honor — even, he added with a smile in response to my jest, some non-*Demokrat* party men, if we could find any. We chatted a bit longer and then, having agreed to return to the Chief's house, we set out for a stroll around Balgat. Our next goal was to find the Grocer.

AFTER a couple of bends and turns, we came to a coffee house. Here was something new and worth a detour. We stopped at the door and bade the proprietor "*Gün aydin!*" He promptly rushed forward with two chairs, suggested that we sit outdoors to benefit of the pleasant

sunshine, and asked us how we would like our coffee. (There are five ways of specifying the degree of sweetening in Turkish coffee.) Obviously, this was to be on the house, following the paradoxical Turkish custom of giving gratis to those who can best afford to pay. In a matter of minutes, the male population of Balgat was assembled around our two chairs, squatting, sitting on the ground, looking us over with open and friendly curiosity.

Top man among the group was one of the two farmers Tosun had interviewed in 1950. He too was tall, lean, hard. He wore store clothes with no patches and a sturdy pair of store shoes. His eyes were Anatolian black and his facial set was much like the Chief's. He sat with his chair tilted back and kept his hands calmly dangling alongside, as he ambled along in conversation, with no apparent terminus in view. Interrupting him, even long enough to steer his flow of words in another direction, was not easy. His voice was deep and harsh, with the curious suggestion of strangling in the throat that Anatolian talk has, and the content was elusive. He spoke from such a height to such a height, located somewhere in the space above my head into which he gazed steadily, that little of his discourse made concrete contact with my notebook.

As I review my notes on that hour of monologue-with-choral murmurs, he appears to have certified the general impression that great changes had occurred in Balgat during the four years past. But in his recital, these great events lost some of their luster. The tough old farmer did not look shining at new styles of architecture, nor did he look scowling, but simply looked. Under his gaze the new roofs in Balgat were simply new roofs; the wonder of there being new roofs *in Balgat* brightened other eyes and cadenced other voices.

These other voices were finally raised — either because he had exhausted the prerogative of his position (he had certainly exhausted Tahir S., whose eyes were glazed and vacant) or because the issue was grave enough to sanction discourtesy toward a village elder — when the quondam farmer undertook to explain why he was no longer a farmer. He had retired, over a year ago, because there was none left in Balgat to do an honest day's work for an honest day's lira. Or rather two lira (about 36 cents) — the absurd rate, he said, to which the daily wage of farm laborers had been driven by the competition of the vora-

cious Ankara labor market. Now, all the so-called able-bodied men of Balgat had forsaken the natural work which Allah had intended men to do and swarmed off to the factories of Ankara where, for eight hours of so-called work, they could get five lira a day.

The protests that rose did not aim to deny these facts, but simply to justify them. Surprised, we asked whether it was indeed true that there were no farm laborers left in Balgat. "How many of you," we quickly rephrased the question, "work on farms now?" Four hands were raised among the twenty-nine present, and all of these turned out to be small holders working their own land. (These four were sitting together and, it later developed, were the only four members of the *Halk* party among the group.)

Galvanized by the intelligence now suddenly put before us (even Tahir S. had reawakened promptly upon discovering that there were hardly any farmers left in Balgat), we started to fire a battery of questions of our own. As this created a din of responding voices, Tahir S. — once again the American-trained interviewer — restored order by asking whether each man around the circle would tell us, in turn, what he was now working at and how long he had been at it. This impromptu occupational census was never quite completed. As it became clear that most of the male population of Balgat was now in fact working in the factories and construction gangs of Ankara — *for cash* — our own impatience to move on got the better of us.

How did they spend the cash they earned? Well, there were now over a hundred radio receivers in Balgat as compared to the lone receiver Tosun had found four years earlier. There were also seven refrigerators, four tractors, three trucks, and one Dodge sedan. Also, since there was so little farming in Balgat now, much of the food came from the outside (even milk) and had to be bought in the grocery stores (of which there were now seven in Balgat). Why milk? Well, most of the animals had been sold off during the last few years. What about the shepherd? Well, he had moved to a village in the east a year or so ago, as there were no longer any flocks for him to tend. How was the Grocer doing? "*Which one?*" The original one, the great fat one that was here four years ago? "*Oh that one, he's dead!*"

Tahir S. later told me that my expression did not change when the news came (always the American-trained interviewer). I asked a few more questions in a normal way — “What did he die of?” “How long ago?” — and then let the questioning pass to Tahir. I don’t recall what answers came to my questions or to his. I do recall suddenly feeling very weary and, as the talk went on, slightly sick. The feeling got over to Tahir S. and soon we were saying good-by to the group of Balgati,



relieved that the ritual for leave-taking is less elaborate than for arriving. We promised to return and said our thanks. “*Güle, güle,*” answered those who remained (“Smile, smile” signifying farewell).

“What a lousy break,” growled Tahir in a tone of reasonable indignation as we started back toward the house of the Chief. He was speaking of the Grocer. I didn’t know what to say by way of assent. I felt only a sense of large and diffuse regret, of which indignation was not a distinct component. “Tough,” I agreed. As we came up to the Chief’s house, I told Tahir we might as well return to Ankara. We had gathered quite a lot of information already and might better spend the afternoon putting it together. We could come back again the next day to interview the Chief. The Chief was agreeable to this

plan and invited me to be his guest for lunch next day. We collected Zilla K. and our driver, and drove back to the city.



I SLEPT late the next morning and was tired when I awoke. While dressing slowly and ingesting a full-scale breakfast, I decided that the Grocer was — and, to face right up to it, had been right from the start — *my* man.

I recalled Tosun's unflattering sketch of him as a pretentious phony, as "the only unfarming person in the village . . . who is even less than the least farmer." But I had never minded this about the Grocer, nor Tosun's disgust that "he even wore some sort of a necktie." What had located all these details in a context I could understand, what had made the Grocer a man I recognized, was Tosun's acid remark: "He most evidently wished to feel that he is closer to me than he is to the other villagers and was curiously careful with his accent all during the interview."

There was something in this sentence that had sounded to me like History. Maybe it was the eighteenth-century field hands of England who had left the manor to find a better life in London or Manchester or Liverpool. Maybe it was the nineteenth-century French farm lad, who, wearied by his father's burdens of the *taille* and the *tithe* and the *gabelle*, had gone off to San Francisco to hunt gold and finding none, tried his hand as a mason, mechanic, printer's devil; though none of these brought him fortune, as he cheerfully wrote home (in a letter noted by the perspicacious Karl Marx), he was going to stay in this exciting new city where the chance to try his hand at anything made him feel "less of a mollusk and more of a man."

The Grocer of Balgat stood for some part of all these figures as he nervously edged his psyche toward Tosun, the young man from the big city. I'm like you, the Grocer might have been feeling, or I'd like to be like you and wish I could get the chance. It was harsh of Tosun, or perhaps only the antibourgeois impatience of a consecrated young scholar looking for the suffering poor in a dreary village, to cold-shoulder this fat and middle-aged man yearning to be comfortably rich in an interesting city. But the Grocer had his own sort of toughness. He had, after all, stood up to the other villagers and had insisted, even when they labeled him infidel, that they ought to get out of their holes.

This time I was going out to Balgat by bus instead of taxi, to see how the villagers traveled. The way the villagers traveled, it turned out, was in a shiny new bus from Germany that held three times as many

passengers as there were seats. The bus was so new that the signs warning the passengers not to smoke or spit or talk to the driver (while the bus is moving) in German, French, and English had not yet been converted into Turkish. There was, in fact, a great deal of smoking (some Turkish tobacco is used *in* Turkey) and several animated conversations between the driver and various passengers occurred, in the intervals between which the driver chatted with a crony whom he had brought along for just this purpose.

In Balgat I reported directly to the Chief. He was out on his land but appeared after a few minutes, steaming and mopping his large forehead. He had been pruning some trees and, in this warm weather, such work brought the sweat to his brow. This was about the only work he did any more, he explained, as he had sold or rented most of his land in the last few years, keeping for himself only the ground in which he had planted a small grove of trees that would be his memorial on earth. The Chief agreed to show me his trees and as we strolled away from the house he resumed his discourse of yesterday.

Things had changed, he repeated, and a sign of the gravity of these changes was that he — of a lineage that had always been *Muhtars* and land-owners — was no longer a farmer. Nor was he long to be *Muhtar*. After the coming election, next month, the incorporation of Balgat into Greater Ankara was to be completed and thereafter it would be administered under the general municipal system.

"I am the last *Muhtar* of Balgat, and I am happy that I have seen Balgat end its history in this way that we are going."

The new ways, then, were not bringing evil with them? "No, people will have to get used to different ways and then some of the excesses, particularly among the young, will disappear. The young people are in some ways a serious disappointment; they think more of clothes and good times than they do of duty and family and country. But it is to be hoped that as the *Demokrat* men complete the work they have begun, the good Turkish ways will again come forward to steady the people. Meanwhile, it is well that people can have to eat and to buy shoes they always needed but could not have."

And as his two sons were no longer to be farmers, what of them? The Chief's voice did not change, nor did his eyes cloud over, as he

replied: "They are as the others. They think first to serve themselves and not the nation. They are my sons and I speak no ill of them, but I say only that they are as all the others."

I felt at this moment a warmth toward the Chief which I had not supposed he could evoke. His sons had not, after all, learned to fight bravely and die properly. These two sons through whom he had hoped to relive his own bright dreams of glory had instead become *shopkeepers*. The elder son owned a grocery store and the younger one owned Balgat's first clothing store. As we turned back to the house, the Chief said we would visit the shops after lunch and his sons would answer all my questions.

That afternoon we went first to the elder son's grocery store, just across the road from the Chief's house and alongside the village fountain. The central floor space was set out with merchandise in the immemorial manner — heavy, rough, anonymous hemp sacks each laden with a commodity requiring no identity card, groats in one and barley in another, here lentils and there chicory. But beyond the sacks was a distinct innovation, a counter. What is more, the counter turned a corner and ran parallel to two sides of the square hut. Built into it was a cash drawer and above each surface a hygienic white porcelain fixture for fluorescent lighting. Along the walls was the crowning glory — a case of shelves running from "top to floor and side to side, and on them standing myriads of round boxes, clean and all the same dressed, like soldiers in a great parade." The Grocer's words of aspiration came leaping back to mind as I looked admiringly around the store. His dream house had been built in Balgat — in less time than even he might have forecast — and by none other than the Chief!

The irony of the route by which Balgat had entered History stayed with me as we walked in quartet, the Chief and I ahead, the sons behind, to the clothing store of the younger son. This was in the newer part of the village, just across the new road from the bus station. The stock inside consisted mainly of dungarees, levis, coveralls — all looking rather like U. S. Army surplus stocks. There was a continuous and growing demand for these goods, the Chief stated solemnly, as more and more men of Balgat went into the labor market of Ankara, first discarding their *shalvars* (the billowing bloomers of traditional garb in which Western cartoons always still portray the "sultan" in a harem

scene). In a corner of the store there was also a small stock of "gentleman's haberdashery" — ready-made suits, shirts, even a rack of neckties.

The younger son, who maintained a steady silence in the presence of the Chief, replied to a direct question from me that he had as yet sold very few items from this department of the store. The Balgat males by and large were still reticent about wearing store-bought clothes. A few, however, had purchased in a *sub rosa* sort of way neckties which remained to be exhibited in public. But wearing them would come, now that several owned them, as soon as an older man was bold enough to wear his first. The owners of the neckties had only to get used to them in private, looking at them now and then, showing them to their wives and elder sons, and some one of them had to show the way. I remembered Tosun's rather nasty comment, as though this were his most telling evidence against the Grocer's preposterous pretences, "*He even wore some sort of a necktie.*" As one saw it now, the Grocer *had* shown the way, and it was now only a hop, skip, and jump through history to the point where most men of Balgat would be wearing neckties.

The Grocer's memory stayed with me all afternoon, after I had expressed intense satisfaction with the shops, wished the sons good fortune, thanked the Chief again and, with his permission, started out to walk among the alleys and houses of Balgat. On the way, I absently counted sixty-nine radio antennas on the roofs and decided that yesterday's estimate of "over a hundred" was probably reliable. And only four years ago, I reminded myself, there was but a single radio in this village. The same theme ran through my recollection of the numbers of tractors, refrigerators, and "unfarming persons." That was what Tosun had called the Grocer — "the only unfarming person in the village." Several of these newly unfarming persons, recognizing their interlocutor of yesterday's coffee-house session, greeted me as I strolled along. One stopped me long enough to deliver his opinion of the Turkish-Pakistani pact (strong affirmation) and to solicit mine of the proposed law to give Americans prospecting rights on Turkish oil (qualified affirmative).

Weary of walking, I turned back to the coffee house. The ceremony of welcome was warm and the coffee was again on the house, but the conversational group was smaller. Only eleven Balgati appeared to praise the weather and hear my questions. The group got off on politics, with some attention to the general theory of power but more intense

interest in hearing each other's predictions of the margin by which the *Demokrat* party would win the elections next month. There was also general agreement, at least among the wiser heads, that it would be better to have a small margin between the major parties. "The villagers have learned the basic lesson of democratic politics," I wrote in my notebook.

The afternoon was about over before I got an appropriate occasion to ask about the Grocer. It came when the talk returned to the villagers' favorite topic of how much better life had become during the past four years of *Demokrat* rule. Again they illustrated the matter by enumerating the new shops in Balgat and the things they had to sell that many people could buy. "How are these new grocery shops better than the old grocery shop of years ago owned by the fat grocer who is now dead?" I asked. The line of response and the examples cited were obvious in advance, but the question served to lead to another. What sort of man had the Grocer been? The answers were perfunctory, consisting mainly of *pro forma* expressions of good will toward the departed. I tried to get back of these ritual references to the Grocer by indirection. How had he dressed? Why had he been so interested in the life of Ankara? The light finally shone in one of the wiser heads and he spoke the words I was seeking: "Ah, he was the cleverest of us all. We did not know it then, but he saw better than all what lay in the path ahead. We have none like him among us now. He was a prophet."



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BALGAT

