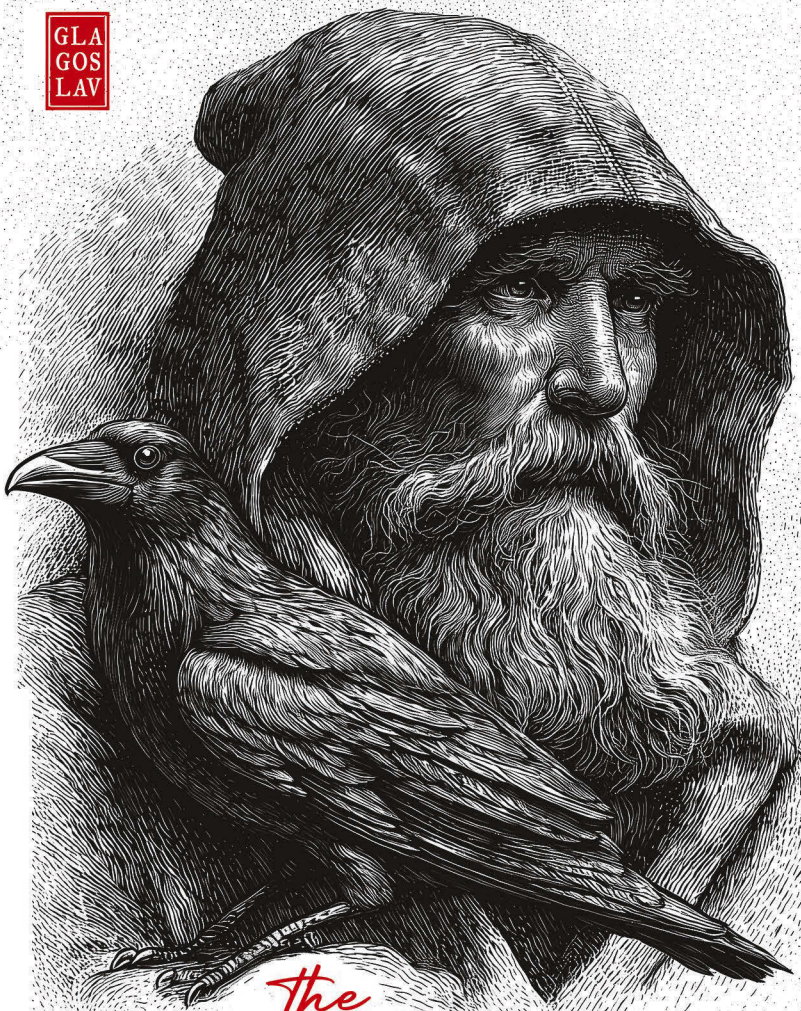


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The
HERMIT

Ilia Chavchavadze

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A LEGEND



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Ilia Chavchavadze

Translated from the Georgian by Marjory S. Wardrop

Edited by Jack Monro

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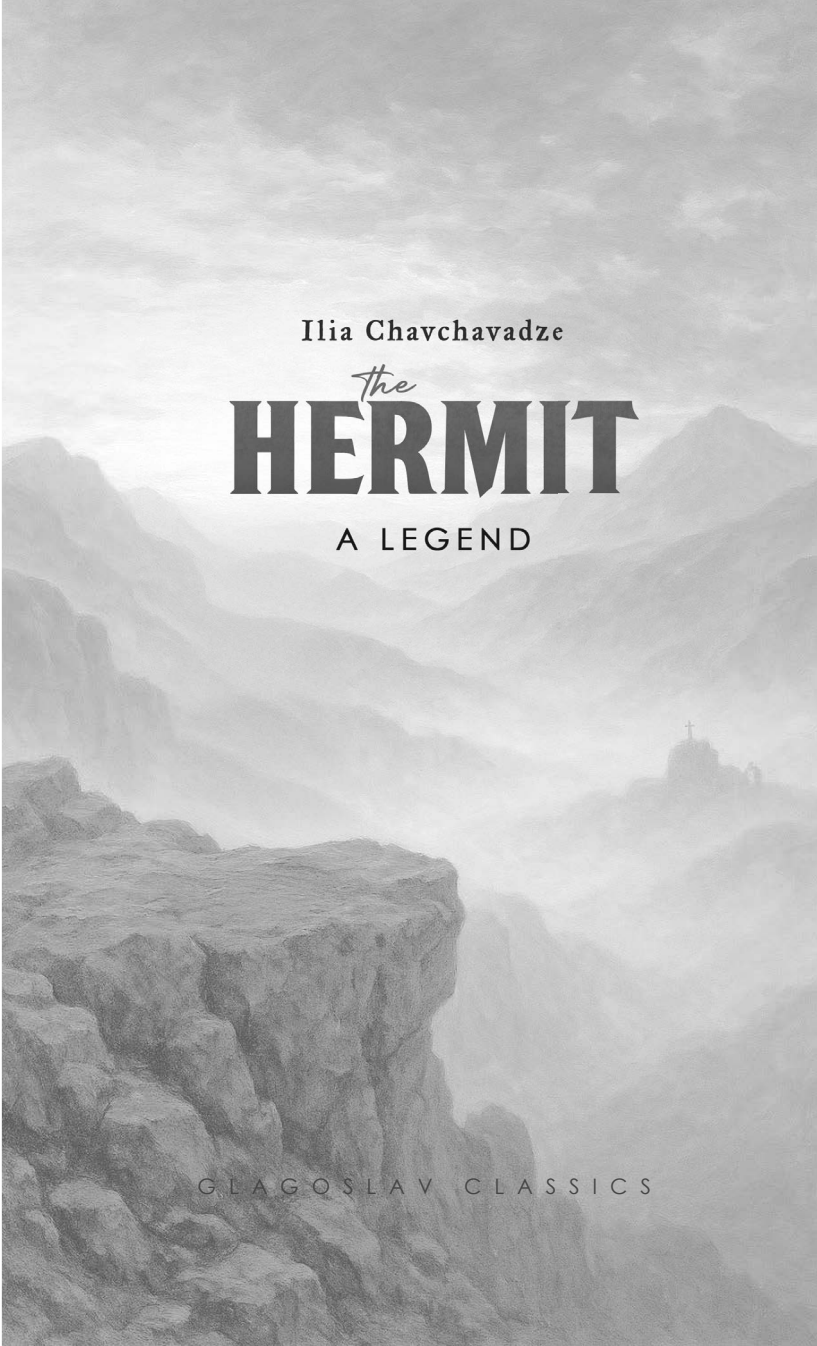
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THE HERMIT

I

There, where Mount Kazbek rears his noble brow.
Where eagle cannot soar, nor vulture fly,
Where, never melted by the sun's warm rays,
The frozen rain and snow eternal lie;
Far from the world's wild uproar set apart,
There, in the awful solitude and calm,
Where thunder's mighty roar rules o'er these realms,
Where frost doth dwell and winds sing forth their
 psalm;
There stood, in former days, a house of God,
Built by devout and holy men, the fame
Of that old temple still the folk hold dear.
And Bethlehem is still, to-day, its name.
The ice-bound wall of that secluded shrine
Was hollowed out from craggy, massive block,
And, like an eagle's eyrie on the cliff,
The door stood carved in the solid rock.
Straight downward from this gate unto the path
There hung descending a rough iron chain,
And save by that strange ladder's aid alone
Man could in no wise thereto entrance gain.

II

In days of old, monks left this world of woe,
And there they dwelt, devoted unto God,
In that wild wilderness they sang their songs
Of praise, and in the path of saints they trod.
There they withdrew to seek God's solitude,
There they abandoned all earth's vanity,
And, in that everlasting dwelling, sought
To fit themselves for God's eternity.
Those holy fathers sacrificed this world,
And, for the pain they suffered in that shrine,
The mountaineers revered them, and they sang
The praise of good deeds, and of grace divine.
And by the people still that place is held
So holy, even now, that in the chase
A refuge there the wounded beast may seek,
For there no huntsman dares to leave his trace;
None save the man whose life is given to God
Can rest within that ruin's sacred shade.
And he who breaks this law must perish there
By swift, avenging lightning's trenchant blade.

III

And there, in yon forsaken hermitage.
An anchorite took up his lone abode,
He left the fleeting world and, set apart,
Gave up the present for the life with God.
Far from the dwelling of the sinful man,
Far from the realm where wickedness holds sway,
Where e'en the just man scarcely can escape
From Satan's tempting power; where, night and day,
Man is pursued by evil, like a thief
Which tries to seize upon him unaware;
Where, e'en if right be known by its true name,
The hand of sin will still all evil dare;
Where faithlessness, corruption, rapine dwell,
And brother for his brother's blood doth lust,
Where discord turns the purest love of friends,
By scandal's breath, to hatred and mistrust . . .
He left that fleeting world where every gift
Is as a snare, and beauty but a lure;
The devil uses even virtues there
To wile th'unwary, and his prey secure.

IV

Alone the hermit dwelt, amid this ice,
A solitary anchorite, his mind
He troubled not henceforth with painful thoughts
Of all the sinful cares of human kind.
He banished from his heart each worldly grief,
Each thought, concern and wish that was profane.
That he might stand before the judgment seat
Of God, with spirit pure and free from stain.
Both day and night, with lamentation, prayer,
And scourging martyred he, for his soul's sake,
His flesh, and, like a vessel washfid clean,
With tears he strove his spirit pure to make;
Both day and night, with sighing and complaint,
The icy rocks re-echoed forth his groans,
And his fast-flowing, suppliant tears ceased not
In that lone home of weeping and of moans.
Far from this transitory earth apart.
His spirit like a flowfir there did bloom;
Each worldly wish was calmed and laid to rest.
And all desire was buried in the tomb.

V

He was not old—upon his saint-like face
 His soul's nobility was pictured fair,
 It could be seen his spirit was the home
 Of other thoughts than those of worldly care.
 His features melancholy, thin and sad,
 Yet beamed with loveliness of grace divine,
 Which from his deeply wrinkled, lofty brow,
 Like bright encircling halo, forth did shine.
 So gentle and so sweet was the deep thought
 Expressed in his clear, meditative eyes,
 It seemed as if in them was mirrored forth
 Virtue herself, arrayed in modest guise;
 As if, with gentle gladness, they rejoiced
 At Paradise's open entrance gate,
 Together with his soul, to meet their Lord,
 And hastened on, with faith secure, elate.
 In fasting and in prayer, with body weak,
 He lived like holy martyrs who attain,
 By many roads of suffering and of woe.
 To glory, conquering heroes over pain.

The Hermit (მთიანწივედგეო, 1883) is a powerful philosophical poem by Ilia Chavchavadze – Georgia’s literary father, moral reformer, and national icon. This edition revives the first English translation by Marjory Scott Wardrop, providing modern readers access to one of the foundational texts of 19th-century Georgian literature.

Written during a time of cultural and political struggle, *The Hermit* tells the story of a man who flees society

to seek meaning in the silence of nature. Through the Hermit’s voice, Chavchavadze reflects on moral decay, spiritual anguish, and the personal cost of witnessing injustice. The poem is at once an allegory of national conscience and an intimate confession of ethical pain.

Chavchavadze’s poetic style is refined and deeply resonant, fusing Romantic introspection with Christian ethics and patriotic sentiment. Though brief in length, *The Hermit* carries immense emotional weight – its language deceptively simple, its themes timeless: duty, exile, responsibility, and awakening.

Marjory Wardrop’s original late-19th-century translation is here restored, carefully annotated, and lightly edited for clarity. For readers of spiritual literature, Eastern European classics, and poetic philosophy, *The Hermit* offers a rare glimpse into the soul of a nation and the burden of moral clarity in a world that often chooses silence.

