

From Adrianople to Akka: A talk to the Oceanic Conference

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Conqueror of Hearts table of contents

Introduction

The glorious Sun of Truth rising from its homeland had ascended in its orbit,
and in the years of banishment in Adrianople had mounted to its zenith of all-conquering majesty and might.

As Bahá'u'lláh rose in His power and grandeur, believers from all walks of life abandoned their homes and sought haven and shelter in His nearness. When faced with tests, trials and ordeals, rather than renounce their faith, the true companions of Bahá contended themselves with the bare necessities of life, intensified their spiritual fervor, welcomed any calamity in His path and through the sweat and strain of suffering offered their very lives as humble tokens of love at the sacred altar of the Lord of the Age.

There were also those who, immersed in the trivialities of life, unmitigated
in their hatred, enslaved by their own corrupt inclinations and assisted by persons drunk with pride and power, arose, with all the energy, evilness and bitterness of their sinful souls, to challenge the nascent and already vigorously-growing Cause of God. The devastating effects of such deeds created clouds of suspicion, hatred and wrath that dimmed the radiant fame of the Greatest Name.

Never should we think of Bahá'u'lláh as one amongst many. Though He appeared in a physical human temple, He remained always far above--immeasurably far above--the reach and ken of men. No tempest could move the hem of His garment. No waves of calamities could ever sprinkle a drop in His serene presence. How can mortal man ever cover the face of the Sun with the veil of his evil plottings? Not, the sun shines above all clouds and eventually disperse them. So was to be the destined mission of the Ancient Beauty throughout His eventful life. Though sorely tried He remained lofty and unshaken. Though relentlessly calumnized, He was never resentful or vindictive. The evil deeds of the world could never be commensurate with His intense longing to save the children of men, to redeem their souls and to put them on the right path to God.

No ingratitude, no lack of virtue could minimize His love. No depths of infamy could prevent the seemingly hopeless and unrepentant humanity from receiving the open treasures of His clemency and compassion.

In the innermost shrine of His own Being, He remained calm and serene. He continued emitting rays of His redeeming light through the clouds of accumulated vice which had covered the sin-stained souls of men.

With these thoughts in mind let us review the events that marked the different stages of Bahá'u'lláh's banishment from Adrianople to the Fortress of `Akká.

The Latter Days in Adrianople.

Events Preceding His Exile.

His Departure to Gallipoli and the Episode of Dhabih (surnamed Anís).

Smyrna and Ismu'lláhu'l-Muníb.

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`Akká

I. The Latter Days in Adrianople

The followers of Azal, long-standing enemies of Bahá'u'lláh, finding all their attempts to destroy the Faith abortive, tried to tarnish the luster His Cause had achieved through Himself, His family and His followers.

First they sent people to the Court to complain that they had insufficient means of livelihood, blaming the Blessed Perfection for this. Then `Aqá Ján Kajkuláh, instigated by Siyyid Muhammad, wrote letters to the dignitaries and government representatives containing the false accusation that Bahá'u'lláh had made an alliance with Bulgaria, and had gathered together many people under His sway for the sole purpose of conquering Constantinople.

The Persian Ambassador in Constantinople, who had always been prepared to initiate or support any plot against Bahá'u'lláh and His followers, took advantage of the disturbance in Turkey and immediately informed the Persian Consuls in Egypt and `Iráq that the Turkish Government had withdrawn its protection of the Bábí Sect. This news convulsed both countries and unleashed the hidden forces of malice and mischief.

Abdu'r-Rasúl-Qumí, one of the exceptional souls and a true and enthusiastic lover of the Ancient Beauty, who had suffered long years of imprisonment in Tihrán, had, after his release, visited Bahá'u'lláh in Adrianople and was residing in Baghdád. Every day he brought water in skin bags from the Tigris River and watered the roses in his Beloved's garden. Thus he had become well-known and a target of the Muslims cruel attacks. One day, at the hour of dawn, a number of these people, rushing out from their hiding places, stabbed him from all sides. Though fatally wounded, with blood gushing forth in profusion, he succeeded in dispersing his attackers, retained his balance and

dragged himself to the garden of his Beloved where, for the last time, he watered the flowers of the House before yielding his last heroic breath.[1]

It was also during these latter days that Nabíl arrived in Adrianople after a very long, exhaustive, and successful teaching tour in Persia and `Iráq. He became very sad when he looked upon the countenance of the Ancient Beauty. He found Him as if suspended in boundless space, attacked with swords and spears by the whole world. Bahá'u'lláh had no shelter except His Most Great Branch Who, like a compass, never ceased to turn to, and circle around, His Lord.

Bahá'u'lláh's true and faithful brother, Mírzá Músá, with the permission of Bahá'u'lláh, had been in living in Smyrna. Yayhá lived in Adrianople, unreasonably filled with fear because of the majesty and power with which the Tablets to the Kings had been revealed. Such was the extent of his fear that he ventured to suggest to Bahá'u'lláh that it would have been better if Bahá'u'lláh's address to the Sultán described the Divine Message as a humble provision offered to the King. Bahá'u'lláh's reply was that if He were the Divine Messenger He would describe His message as nothing short of abundant provision.

Nabíl was commissioned to deliver a Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh to His brother, Mírzá Músá, also known as Áqáy-I-Kalím. On arriving at Smyrna Nabíl gave the Tablet to him who, after reading it, said, "The days of hardships are approaching. At times of suffering I do not like to be away from His Holy Presence." He therefore accompanied Nabíl on his return to Adrianople. On the way they received the news that some of the believers had already been arrested. "These are the first waves of the ocean of Calamity" was Kalím's immediate remark as he heard the news.

It was in the middle of winter and snow had covered the mountains and plains when our two precious travelers arrived in the Land of Mystery, only to find it in a state of confusion.

Bahá'u'lláh had opened encouraged the friends to disperse as He did not want them to be inflicted with more hardships nor did He desire them to be exiled or imprisoned. He would rather have them scattered around the world to propagate the Word of God and to win victories for His struggling Faith in various lands. But those who lived in His nearness were so enthralled by His love that they remained heedless of His warnings, preferring hardship to separation from Him.

Bahá'u'lláh instructed Nabíl to proceed to Egypt and appeal to the Khedive on behalf of the friends who had been unjustly treated.

It was during these days also that the loving heart of the Supreme Manifestation was turned towards His persecuted friends in different parts of the world. The shadow of the dark days ahead was slowly approaching and He could see the sorrow and grief of His lovers, who at times were utterly cut off from any news of Him and His family. Therefore He revealed several brief Tablets to be dispatched to the friends. These Tablets are extremely touching, intimate and uplifting. They were meant to strengthen His oppressed followers so that they would not lose heart if they did not hear from or about Him for a long time.

The contents of these Tablets are sources of delight and encouragement to all the friends throughout eternity. In them He praises God and offers thanksgiving and gratitude for this further humiliation inflicted in the path of God. In one instance He addresses Himself and says that He should remember God and bear in mind His promise^[2] that He would stand with Him forever and would help and assist Him under all conditions. The Ancient Beauty addresses the people of the earth in one of these Tablets, and lamentingly asks them how and when they could prevent the Divine Youth from mentioning the All Knowing God. He asserts the utter failure of all the united forces of the world to extinguish the fire of His Faith. He seeks to awaken in the hearts of men the consciousness that no power in the universe can prevent the blowing of winds, and that He Himself, like unto a leaf, is powerless to stir except when the winds of the Will of God are blowing. In several places He exhorts the friends never to forget Him even if the cruel ones of the earth should cast Him in fathomless pits because, in the such a state, the fire of His love would burn more intensely than before. This fire was of such a nature that if all the seas were poured on it would continue to burn. In some places He explicitly mentions that the Prisoner of Adrianople says that the place of His incarceration is the Fortress of `Akká, well-known for its putrid air and foul water. He furthermore points out that though the sole aim of such banishments is to humiliate the Manifestation of God, the friends should, under no circumstances, feel sad and despondent, because such sufferings in the path of the Lord are like unto the showers of rain on the plains, and serve as fuel for the celestial Lamp. Were His head to adorn the point of the spear, His tongue would continue to proclaim the name of the All-Merciful. At the end of one of these Tablets, He says that the Divine Youth is prevented from writing. His enemies had imprisoned Him and His pen. The latter was more unbearable to Him. Had it now been for such restrictions He would have sent a message to every one of the believers throughout the world.

Thus He wrote His Tablets, and thus He dispersed His friends. He sent the pilgrims away, He strengthened the hearts of His lovers in all lands, and He remained as ever contented and prepared to welcome the shafts of the enemy.

II. Events Preceding His Exile

The people in Turkey, and especially those who were privileged to live near Bahá'u'lláh, such as the inhabitants of Adrianople, had the highest respect and reverence towards Him and in the course of time they came to know and love Him from the depths of their beings. The successive local governors of the city one after the other paid their homage to the Blessed Beauty. Amongst them the noble and honest Khurshíd Páshá shines as the radiant sun from the horizon of faithfulness. In answer to reports from Constantinople he courageously refuted the unjust accusations heaped upon Bahá'u'lláh. As long as he was governor he visited Bahá'u'lláh on the occasions of Feasts and, whenever he went, he openly declared that nothing except sanctified words and holy deeds emanated from His Holy Presence. He never approved of or agreed with the presumptuous deeds of the unjust rulers in the capital. Bahá'u'lláh praised him in one of His Tablets by characterizing him as the strongest pillar of the Ottoman Government whose hearts enshrined the greatest amount of love. Yet, Bahá'u'lláh continues, even to him no word was mentioned about personal affairs. To Bahá'u'lláh this would have been the lowest of deeds.

Kurshíd Páshá was very sad and disheartened when the authorities in Constantinople would not handle the affairs of Bahá'u'lláh with justice and faith. When the hour struck and he found matters beyond his control, he felt so ashamed of such cruel treatment towards a great Person that he abandoned his official responsibilities and left everything in the hands of a Registrar.

The inhabitants of Adrianople were well acquainted with the friends and knew of the detached way they had lived amongst them. The people really loved them and very much desires that they would be allowed to continue living in their town. The news of the unexpected decrees, therefore, surprised and grieved them. As they met in mosques, coffee-houses or markets, they invariably asked one another, "Why should these people be victims of such cruel treatment? We have not seen anything from them except honesty and truthfulness." When they found that Bahá'u'lláh and His companions were to be forced to depart, they all wept and bewailed.

Not only did the people, dignitaries and authorities in Adrianople show their grief and sorrow, but the representatives of European countries were also moved and astounded. Some of them sought the presence of Bahá'u'lláh and pleaded with Him to utter one word when they would arise to help Him and His friends and rescue them from their difficulties. They even said that they would inform and appeal to their respective governments to resolutely prevent the perpetration of such inhuman deeds. To all of them Bahá'u'lláh replied that He sought no remover of difficulties save God and would turn His face in supplication to no place except to His

Threshold. He then showered His love and bounties upon them and sent them away from His presence resigned and contented.

Meanwhile contradictory rumors had been spread which lent their share to the convulsion and confusion of affairs. Some said that only those whose names had been registered in Government books could accompany their Lord. Others reported that Bahá'u'lláh and His brothers and families would be taken to different destinations, the rest being sent to their own respective countries. In the words of one of the companions, "I well remember as though it were only yesterday, the fresh misery into which we were plunged, to be separated from our Beloved; and He, what new grief was in store for Him? He accepted all vicissitudes with His calm, beautiful smile, cheering us with wonderful words."

Those who had lived day and night in or near His house, found separation the most unbearable of all sufferings. They decided, therefore, that they would undergo any bitter test rather than be deprived of His presence.

One night the friends were gathered in a house and naturally discussed the prevailing rumors of the city. Hájí Ja`far-I-Tabrízí, one of the staunch followers of Bahá'u'lláh, was also there. In the middle of their conversation they heard a faint voice from under the window--the voice of someone struggling for breath. They rushed out and found Hájí Ja`far in a desperate condition. He had cut his throat with a razor and blood was gushing out. The friends first informed the Master Who immediately sent men to fetch a surgeon and a Qádí. The surgeon's house was near and fortunately he came quickly, treated the cut and enable Hájí Ja`far to talk. When the Qádí reached the scene, he asked who had been responsible for the deed. He asked Hájí Ja`far several times, and every time he replied, "When I came to know that I would be deprived from His Holy Presence, I did not desire to live any more." When asked again he confirmed, "Feeling lonely and separated from Him prompted me to sacrifice my life." The people who loved the Bahá'ís and revered them increased in their wonderment as they witnessed such acts of love, detachment and spiritual consecration. It was remarked by them that the Bahá'ís knew that they would be taken to exile and imprisonment and yet they were ready to meet greater hardships, to offer their lives, and to welcome even death, as they could not bear the thought of separation from their Beloved. What ties held them together? How could they comprehend those mysterious bonds of love which were beyond the reach of men's concepts and standards? Hájí Ja`far received assurance and treatment and became better. On another day, shortly afterwards, Bahá'u'lláh received him, promised him that he would eventually attain his heart's desire, and exhorted him not to be sad. He must be patient, fix his gaze upon God, feel happy and abide by His Will.

III. His Departure to Gallipoli and the Episode of Dhabíh (surnamed Anís)

One day soldiers were posted at the doors of Bahá'u'lláh's residence in order to guard the House and allow no one to go in or out.

His companions were also arrested, taken to the Governor's office and imprisoned one night. In the course of the investigations they were asked whether they were followers of Bahá'u'lláh, to which they invariably answered with great courage and audacity, professing their faith in Him. They were then commanded to sell their properties and get ready for departure. Needless to say, the friends auctioned their belongings and lost almost everything they possessed, yet they stood firm and resolute, determined to accompany their Beloved to the ends of the earth.

The day of departure was fixed. Carriages were brought to the House, and the friends helped in loading them with luggage. These went first.

Mírzá Yahyá and Siyyid Muhammad also departed on the same day. One week passed and then came the turn of Bahá'u'lláh.

On the morning of departure, the members of the household took their seats in the carriages. About noon Bahá'u'lláh came out of His House.

Throngs of people had gathered at the door to bid Him farewell and look for the last time upon His countenance. Their grief had no end. Signs of anguish and sorrow were witnessed on all faces. They approached the Ancient Beauty and either kissed His hand or knelt and touched the hem of His robe, reverently kissing it too. They uttered words which expressed their sorrowful state and deprivation. It was indeed a strange day. It seemed that even the walls the gates of the town were lamenting. Amidst such expressions of profound love and respect Bahá'u'lláh set out at midday on the last stage of His banishment, depositing "beneath every tree and every stone a trust, which God will ere long bring forth through the power of truth."^[3]

Thus the Sun of Truth pursued its course towards its setting point.

They spent four days on their way to Gallipoli, a town on the shore of the Marmara Sea. All the captives were to be gathered in this town, whence their journey on the sea would begin.

Jináb-I-Dhabíh, afterwards surnamed Anís, and his friends, who had gone to Adrianople during the last days of Bahá'u'lláh's sojourn in that city and were instructed to proceed to Gallipoli, were already here and attained the presence of their Lord.

Here again the companions of Bahá'u'lláh underwent fresh tests

by hearing contradictory reports about the possible dispersion of the friends and the extermination of Bahá'u'lláh.

Hasan Effendi, the Turkish Captain who had escorted Bahá'u'lláh and His companions to the port, sought His presence in absolute humility and submission to bid farewell. Through him Bahá'u'lláh sent a verbal message to the Sultán in Constantinople. "Tell the King that this territory will pass out of his hands, and his affairs will be thrown into confusion. Not I speak these words, but God speaketh them." [4] He then told the Captain that it would have been fair if the Sultán had arranged a gathering of the divines where Bahá'u'lláh could ring forth the proofs of His truthfulness. If the Sultán could find anything in the community which created corruption and upheaval in his domains, then it would be just for him to treat them in the way that he had chosen. What had been done, He affirmed, was according to the desires of those who had grudges in their hearts and followed their passions and base desires instead of the truth path of God. They had committed unwarranted deeds without the least proof. The Captain promised to convey Bahá'u'lláh's message to the King.

Thus was Hasan Effendi sent back to Constantinople. A Major, `Umar Effendi, replaced him, who brought the confusion created by the rumors to an end. He announced that those whose names had not been registered in the government books could board the ship, provided they would arrange their own affairs.

Before leaving Gallipoli, Bahá'u'lláh informed the friends of the hard days ahead of them and warned them against the divine tests which would befall each and all of the companions. He asked them to ponder His words and to return if they found themselves unprepared. He even warned them against the impossibility of returning in case of remorse.

To reach the Austrian boat which had anchored far away from the shore the passengers had to cross in small sailing boats. At the same time that Bahá'u'lláh was entering one of those boats He was already uttering verses. Jináb-I-Anís and his companions were standing on the shore watching their Beloved on His way to a destination as yet undisclosed; a poignant sorrow pressed their hearts and tears flowed down their cheeks. Bahá'u'lláh, beholding them thus stricken with grief, consoled them and strengthened their hearts by showering His love and compassion upon them. Thus He cheering the burning hearts of His lovers throughout the world in their moments of grief and separation. When He took His seat in the small boat, He assured everyone they would sail in absolute safety even if every wave beat upon the boat or the strongest tempest surround it.

Boarding the Austrian steamer they found passengers, including some Persians.

Bahá'u'lláh did not talk to any one, but went ahead to a spacious

place where several chairs were arranged. He occupied one of these chairs and permitted the friends to take their seats too.

"In this small boat," one of the prisoners related, "we, seventy-two persons, were crowded together in unspeakable conditions for eleven days of horror. Ten soldiers and two officers were our escort. There was an appalling smell in the boat, and most of us were very ill indeed. We had embarked so hurriedly that we had been unable to provide for the voyage and a few loaves and a little cheese. . . was all the food we had for those indescribably days. . . . There was no vessel. . . our lack of food had reduced us to a seriously weak state of health." The steamer sailed in the evening and the next day at about sunrise touched the shores of Smyrna.

IV. Smyrna and Ismu'lláhu'l-Muníb

Jináb-I-Munír, surnamed Ismu'lláh'l-Muníb, was a very handsome and radiant young man from the city of Káshán, Persia. Before embracing the Faith, he had led a comfortable life and, having had the opportunity to study, he had become accomplished in many of the accepted and prevailing notions of his time. In calligraphy, which was considered the art par excellence, he was one of the few recognized masters. He had also a melodious and penetrating voice and a gentle temperament. His hearts brimmed with infinite love. He was a great soul.

When Bahá'u'lláh was in Baghdád, he brought his God-given gifts and offered them at the altar of his Beloved. Thus when the caravan of exiles started on their journey from Baghdád to Constantinople with all glory and might, he volunteered to walk beside the steed of the Blessed Perfection. Great had been the honor conferred upon him, and tremendous too were the sufferings which he willingly accepted with joy and radiant acquiescence. `Abdu'l-Bahá said that this noble soul traversed the distance between Baghdád and Constantinople on foot and, throughout the journey, was in perfect happiness. Day and night he was in a state of prayer. `Abdu'l-Bahá described him as the companion of His soul and the beloved of His heart. Some nights the Master and Muníb would walk on the two sides of Bahá'u'lláh's steed. Their joy had no end and remained forever beyond words to describe. Some night Muníb with his silvery voice would sing songs and odes of great Persian poets such as those of Hafíz. His voice resounded through the silence of those memorable nights.

When they reached Constantinople, Muníb was instructed to go on a teaching tour to Persia and `Iráq. This he accomplished with distinction, and, after a long and arduous tour, he returned to Turkey in the latter days of Bahá'u'lláh's sojourn in Adrianople. The teaching tour had been too exacting, however, but although his health was now in a precarious condition, he begged Bahá'u'lláh to permit him to be included amongst those who had the honor of being exiled with Him. He would

not even consider remaining behind to undergo medical care and treatment, his only aim and aspiration being to sacrifice his life in the path of the Ancient Beauty. His request was granted. He was so weak that three persons had to carry him on board the ship, and by the time they reached Smyrna, Muníb's condition had deteriorated. He was melting away like a candle in the ignited fire of love within him; he could not even utter a word. The Captain forced him to return to shore. When the inevitable moment of separation came, he dragged his frail body until he reached the feet of Bahá'u'lláh, and burst into tears. At that moment signs of intense grief were seen on the countenance of the Ancient Beauty. It was clear that there and then Muníb had reached his exalted paradise of sacrifice and his Beloved had accepted the gift of his life. `Abdu'l-Bahá has related that He and those in His company took him to the hospital in Smyrna and spent one hour with him before returning to the boat. They laid his blessed body in bed and covered him with kisses, but had to leave soon as the officers bade them return. They were immersed in sorrow as they left him alone in the hospital.[5]

V. Alexandria and Nabíl

Three days the Ancient Beauty had been sailing on the waters of the Mediterranean Sea between Smyrna and Alexandria. In Alexandria they were to change boats and some were allowed to go ashore to purchase provisions. Muhammad Ibrahím, one of the companions who catered for Bahá'u'lláh's retinue, was amongst those who went ashore.

This was providential, because one of the most interesting episodes of Nabíl's life took place as a result.

We remember that Bahá'u'lláh ordered Nabíl to go to Egypt. He obeyed, and went there, but after some time he was arrested and put in prison. There he met a certain Christian physician and pries, Fárís Effendi, imprisoned on a charge of an offense in a financial transaction. Nabíl taught him the Faith and in a short while he became a very ardent and enthusiastic follower of Bahá'u'lláh. Because of this the sorrow of being in prison was changed into joy and both felt extremely happy. Sometimes they would sit at the window of their cell watching the people passing by, and one day when Nabíl was alone at his window, he was astounded to see Muhammad Ibrahím passing by. He called to him. When Muhammad Ibrahím saw Nabíl he was even more surprised. Nabíl asked him what had brought him there. Ibrahím related the story of Bahá'u'lláh's banishment and pointed out the steamer carrying the Blessed Perfection. Nabíl's sorrows knew no bounds. To be so near and yet so cruelly deprived from beholding the Countenance of the One Who was the point of his adoration! This was unbelievable!

After a little while, Fárís Effendi came to the cell and found the

happy Nabíl drowned in oceans of sorrow. When he heard the reason, he felt even sadder than Nabíl. He longed for a single glance of Him, but this was utterly impossible. There was only one thing for them to do: to send Him a message of love and loyalty.

This was immediately written; but how to send it was the main problem. God has always His own ways for those who supplicate Him with all their hearts. He will never abandon them. There passed by the window of the cell a young man by the name of Constantine who was known to Farís Effendi, who at once asked him if he could take a letter to someone on board the Austrian steamer. This was an unexpected and rather arduous task to demand. But the young man agreed to do it, took the letters and made for the steamer.

Nabíl and Fárís were watching intently from their prison cell. They even saw the young man get in a small boat and go out to reach the steamer. But to their utter dismay and grief they heard the siren and saw the steamer sailing away before the small boat at reached her.

What a disappointment to the two prisoners whose letters would not even reach their Beloved!

Then that which seemed utterly impossible took place. After proceeding for some distance, the steamer stopped. The small boat reached her. In the afternoon Constantine returned to the prison shouting: "By God! My eyes falls on the face of the Father!" Saying these words in great excitement, he gave a small parcel to Nabíl and Fárís Effendi.

Afterwards the companions of Bahá'u'lláh related that although they witnessed many extraordinary events while in His Presence, the incident of the steamer in Alexandria was the most astonishing. When the steamer was sailing away the Captain noticed a sailing boat hastening toward the ship. He immediately anchored. All were astonished at the unexpected halt for such a cause. The passengers stood in a state of bewilderment. They saw a young man climb the companionway and, according to the indications given to him by Nabíl, go directly to the place occupied by Bahá'u'lláh and His retinue.

After the perusal of the letter, a Tablet was immediately dictated by Bahá'u'lláh and, as there was not time to transcribe it, it was sent in the rough penmanship of the amanuensis. The Master and the Purest Branch sent handkerchiefs, flowers and perfume as gifts for Nabíl and his co-prisoner.

When Constantine returned, the steamer resumed its journey.

In his letter Fárís Effendi had begged Bahá'u'lláh to accept him as one of His devoted servants and confirm him to teach the Faith of God.

The receipt of this letter so pleased Bahá'u'lláh that He has related this story in one of His Tablets to the friends and at the end He has quoted the letter of Fáris Effendi. The perusal of such words teaches us to read and study the Writings with the discerning eye of the spirit. Let us ponder the situation of the Ancient Beauty when He received this communication. Though captive in the hands of oppressors, He proclaimed in this Tablet that His banishment had marked the dawn of the day when the divine fragrances wafted throughout East and West, and the pearls of wisdom had been deposited under every stone and in the fullness of time would proclaim: "He is the Beloved of the world." He then states that when the ship touched the harbor, one of the followers of the Son brought Him a letter from which the fragrance of sanctity could be inhaled, as its writer had been ignited with the fire of the love of his Lord. Anyone who reads his letter will realize how the Almighty God changes the hearts of men. Here are some fragments of the letter:

"O Thou Glory of the All Glorious, and the Exalted One of the Most Exalted...! I am honored to write and send this supplication to Thy Presence. . . They did to Thee what they did to Jesus, the Manifestation of His Wisdom. . . They became the scattered and lost sheep of the herd . . . May I entreat Thee to include my people and myself amongst those who are saturated by the bounties of the oceans of Thy grace. . . Thou art the Ever-Abiding, Ever-Flowing Fountain of Purity and Holiness. . . I supplicate Thee by Thy innermost Secret, by Thy Kalím (Interlocutor),[6] by Thy Son,[7] by Thy Habib (Beloved),[8] and by Thy Forerunner Who embraced the Cross for the sake of His love for Thee. . . that Thou may not deprive me and my poor family from beholding the light of Thy Countenance. . . Make our faith complete, choose us to serve the chosen ones amongst Thy servants, and accept us as martyrs, who offered their blood for the sake of Thy love. . . We are weak, ignorant and unworthy, do not make us of the losers. . . Give us the bounty of love, faith and hope and enable us to tear away from our hearts that which pleaseth Thee not. . . make us forget ourselves. We demand no comfort except in that which pleaseth Thee. Thou art the Searcher of hearts. . . a wooden vessel is carrying Thee. How intensely do I long to be in Thy company!. . . O Sea! What hath befallen thee? I see thee disturbed. Is it because of the fear of thy Lord, the Most Great? O, Alexandria! I see thee sad because of the departure of thy Lord, the Living, the Most Patient. The dilapidated city of `Akká is clapping its hands to welcome Thee with great joy. It is rejoicing because it can welcome the Greatest of all Glories."

VI. Haifa

After a brief stop in Port Sa'id and Jaffa, the steamer touched Haifa where extreme consternation struck the party because of the cruel decision to separate some of the friends from Bahá'u'lláh and force them to go to Cyprus with Mírzá Yahyá. This news fell like a

thunderbolt from the blue on the friends and they recoiled in horror.

"The friends, though prostrated by sickness, worn out by the wretchedness of the voyage and crushed by this further blow, determined to refuse submission," as one of the companions reported.

"The heat of that month was overpowering. We were put into sailing boats. There being no wind, and no shelter from the burning rays of the sun, we spent eight hours of positive misery."

A sailing boat was ready to take Bahá'u'lláh across the bay from Haifa to `Akká. One of the believers condemned to this separation was `Abdu'l-Ghaffár. When he saw the hand of the officer raised to take him away from his Beloved, he cast himself into the sea crying, "Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá."

Bahá'u'lláh in a tone of sadness rebuked the officers responsible for such unnecessary treatment, telling them that their cruel decree resulted in this pitiful situation. He then asked them to immediately rescue `Abdu'l-Ghaffár. He was rescued, but pitilessly forced to go to Cyprus where he remained for some time. As soon as possible, however, he traveled to `Akká and lived under the shadow of his Lord.

VII. `Akká

"A generation of vipers," as described by the Son, were gathered on the seashore at `Akká to behold the Father. They crowded on the walls of the Fortress and thronged the crooked lanes of the town. Though steeped in the miseries and misfortunes of their fate, they shamelessly raised their voices shouting, "God of the Persians!", as the majestic figure of Bahá'u'lláh emerged from the oceans of His tribulations, passed through the Sea Gate and entered the last stage of His banishment in the Promised Land. The members of His family and His friends followed in the footsteps of their Beloved, marching in with pride and calm. The officers in charge counted them. In the words of one of the prisoners, they were "counted as if they were sheep."

"All the townspeople had assembled to see the arrival of the prisoners. Having been told that we were infidels, criminals and sowers of sedition, the attitude of the crowd was threatening. Their yelling of curses and execrations filled us with fresh misery. We were terrified of the unknown. We knew not what the fate of our party, the friends and ourselves would be. We were described as enemies of God, as the worst kind of criminals. The people were exhorted to shun these vile malefactors. . . ."

The Divine parade was led through the dark, crooked and filthy

streets of

`Akká, surrounded by the sneering laughter of the populace, till they reached the Army Barracks.

The moment Bahá'u'lláh stepped into the citadel He stopped and made a remarkable pronouncement--remarks which will echo throughout eternity in the hearts of all the adherents of His Faith. He pointed out to all who accompanied Him to the Most Great Prison the exalted position they occupied. He reminded them that thereafter their lives would take another form and would have a deeper significance. Even a breath breathed in that atmosphere and a step taken along that path would be immortalized. He saw a broken branch near His feet. He looked at it and declared that even that broken twig would be mentioned in East and West. Thus He demanded from his family and followers an unswerving rectitude of character and an unflinching devotion to the Cause of God, so that all their words and deeds would become worthy of eternity.

He entered His prison cell, placing the fate of humanity in the balance.

Through His Writings we realize the significance of His banishments and imprisonment. Through His words we behold the vistas behind all these scenes. He accepted to dwell in the most desolate town of the world so that the citadels of men's hearts might become pure and prosperous. He carried the burdens of degradation so that the children of men might be glorified and rescued from humiliation. He suffered the chains of captivity so that all the chains of human bondage might be broken asunder.

Drowned in tempests of accusations and calumnies and snared in the traps of dismay and apparent frustration, He raised His clarion call and strengthened the hearts of His persecuted followers throughout the world. He assured them that the drops of the blood of the martyrs, the oils and troubles of the teachers and the pioneers, and the hardships borne by each individual believer in His path would be amply rewarded.

In the mirror of the knowledge of God a drop would be seen as an ocean and a pebble as a mountain. Thus He proclaimed that His Faith would cover all lands, seas and islands. He assured the friends that ere long they would hear the cry of, "Here am I, here am I," from all sides. He comforted them in their sufferings by giving them the glad tidings of the splendid dawn of a day when no voice would be raised betwixt earth and heaven save in praise of His Cause.

Prophecies Fulfilled.

Thus we see that when Bahá'u'lláh entered the Most Great Prison, the promises of all ages and religions of the past were fulfilled. The dilapidated city of `Akká emerged from under the veils of centuries of

obscurity and became the "Valley of Hope" for all mankind. Pilgrims started to move to it. The blessings of the Lord on lands in the neighborhood of Jerusalem, as foretold in the Qur'án, became known to all. That illustrious Person Who was destined to adorn the plain of `Akká and change it into the Lord's "Banquet Hall" was drawn to it, by force of the Caliph's farmán, and imprisoned in its fortress.

"Indeed such a consummation, He assures us, had been actually prophesied `through the tongue of the Prophets two or three thousand years before.' God, `faithful to His promise,' had, `to some of the Prophets' `revealed and given the good news that the `Lord of Hosts should be manifested in the Holy Land.' Isaiah had, in this connection, announced in his Book: `Get thee up into the high mountain, O Zion that bringest good tidings; lift up thy voice with strength, O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings. Lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah: "Behold your God! Behold the Lord God will come with strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him.'" David, in his Psalms, had predicted: `Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in. Who is this King of Glory? The Lord of Hosts, He is the King of Glory.' `Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined. Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence.' Amos had, likewise, foretold His coming: `The Lord will roar from Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem; and the habitations of the shepherds shall mourn, and the top of Carmel shall wither.'

`Akká, itself, flanked by the `glory of Lebanon,' and lying in full view of the `splendor of Carmel,' at the foot of the hills which enclose the home of Jesus Christ Himself, had been described by David as `the Strong City,' designated by Hosea as `a door of hope,' and alluded to by Ezekiel as `the gate that looketh towards the East,' whereunto `the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the East,' His voice `like a noise of many waters.' To it the Arabian Prophet had referred as `a city in Syria to which God hath shown His special mercy,' situated `betwixt two mountains ... in the middle of a meadow,' `by the shore of the sea ... suspended beneath the Throne,' `white, whose whiteness is pleasing unto God.' `Blessed the man,' He, moreover, as confirmed by Bahá'u'lláh, declared, `that hath visited `Akká, and blessed he that hath visited the visitor of `Akká.' Furthermore, `He that raiseth therein the call to prayer, his voice will be lifted up unto Paradise.' And again: `The poor of `Akká are the kings of Paradise and the princes thereof. A month in `Akká is better than a thousand years elsewhere.' Moreover, in a remarkable tradition, which is contained in Shaykh Ibnu'l-`Arabi's work, entitled `Futúhát-i-Makkíyyih,' and which is recognized as an authentic utterance of Muhammad, and is quoted by Mírzá Abu'l-Fadl in his "Fará'id," this significant prediction has been made: `All of them (the companions of the Qá'im) shall be slain except One Who shall reach the plain of `Akká, the Banquet-Hall of God.'"[9]

Conclusion

Now after the lapse of one century we can stand in the precincts of the Fortress to gaze at the windows of His prison cell. We remember the dauntless pilgrims who crossed deserts and mountains on foot with the sole aim of beholding the countenance of their Beloved. When they reached those sacred shores some were forbidden to enter; others came in, but could not behold His face, nor were their hearts attracted by hearing His melodious voice. A few--only a few--saw His hand waving from the same windows. They saw little and received physically less, but were so imbued with the spirit of pilgrimage that they returned home and consecrated their lives to the service of the Cause.

We ask ourselves, "Where are the Caliphs, the Sultáns, their ministers and their officers who hand in hand and with all their material forces tried to exterminate the Faith of God? We see with our own eyes that the dazzling lights of their vanishing glory have long been extinguished. Their commanding voices have been stilled by the ignominious death they are suffered. Forsaken and forgotten, they are buried in the ruins of their own schemes, intrigues and plots. Then once more we remember the sweet and assuring words of the Master, uttered in the darkest hour of His precious life when He said that all the plans made by the enemies of the Cause would eventually prove to be nothing more but painting on water. Then we behold the All-Conquering Figure of Bahá'u'lláh emerging from the mists of myriads of crises and upheavals like a beautiful silhouette against the evening sky above--far above the reach of men. We feel His merciful hand raised to wipe away our tears, to touch our fever-laden brows, to comfort our suffering hearts, to assuage our pain and to give reassurance to our struggling souls.

Let us renew the pledge of love and devotion we made to such a compassionate Lord and decide to return home with unflinching determination. Let us disperse; yet, united in our aim and welded together in His love, let us take our place among the rank and file of the Army of Life and with a powerful and animated spirit raise the cry of "Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá!" in all climes, countries, lands and plains and on all the seas and the mountain tops. Undaunted by the over-whelming tragedies of the world around us, let us tread the path of love and sacrifice, looking forward to the advent of that promised dawn when the world will bathe in the light and warmth of the Sun of Truth shining with all its God-given splendor, when man can live in abiding peace and unity and when the earth will become the true mirror of the Abhá Kingdom.

Notes

[1] Bahá'u'lláh mentioned him in many Tablets, consoling his mother and relatives and appointed his nephew

caretakers of the pilgrims in `Akká. The nephew served in this post until the days of the beloved Guardian. The Master advised Rasúl's relatives to perpetuate his name.

[2] The same promise is mentioned in the Tablet to the Son of the Wolf.

[3] Súriy-i-Ra'is

[4] God Passes By, p. 181.

[5] Muníb died two or three days after the departure of Bahá'u'lláh from Smyrna.

[6] Moses.

[7] Jesus

[8] Muhammad.

[9] God Passes By, pp. 183-184.

— From Adrianople to Akka: A talk to the Oceanic Conference, Palermo, Sicily (Used by permission of the curator)