

Fire and Light

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FIRE AND LIGHT1

Extracted from

Writings and Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Baha

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I

O Lord! These pure souls have ascended unto the realms on high. They have proved themselves nimble and sprightly in Thy service. They rid themselves of all, drew nigh unto Thee, and reached the Fountainhead of eternal life. They have now taken their flight from this world on the wings of longing and have attained Thy kingdom of glory. Gladden Thou their hearts in the world of the unseen and let them abide beneath the shadow of the tree of hope. Bestow upon them Thine infinite mercy and grant them Thy boundless pardon. Make them the signs of Thy forgiveness and the manifestations of Thy forbearance and bounty. Verily Thou art the Bestower, the Loving, the One Who forgiveth the sins of men.

II

O Lord! These stainless souls grew contemptuous of the world of dust and have ascended unto Thy kingdom. From this dreary world they have winged their flight unto the realm of resplendent glory. Weary and dejected they languished in this puny nest, eagerly waiting to set out for their celestial habitation. They moved swiftly and sped forth on their flight until they attained unto Thee. O Forgiving One! Grant them Thy forgiveness. O All-Loving One! Bestow upon them Thy tender care. O All-Sufficing One! Give them Thy bounty and be their comforter and companion. Thou art the Pardoner, the Resplendent, the Bestower, the Lord of Strength.

III

O Forgiving Lord! These birds that sang Thy praise left their mortal remains buried in desolate tombs, and ascended with the wings of their spirits unto the Frequented Fane. They freed themselves from the pitfalls of this world of dust, so that they might partake of immortal life in the realms above, might seek shelter beneath the shadow of the tree of hope and abide in a nest upon the twigs of eternity in the Abha Paradise, the Kingdom on High, singing hymns of glory and praise in wondrous accents and sweet melodies.

[656] O Thou kind Lord! These souls are the birds of Thy meadows, the nightingales of Thy rose-garden. Let them dwell within the orchard of Thy forgiveness and grant them access to the concourse wherein Thine eternal glory shineth resplendent, wherein Thy divine beauty is unveiled and perpetual communion with Thee is assured. Enable them to live eternally and lo endure

forevermore.

Thou art the Forgiving, the Bountiful, the All-Loving.

IV

O Thou kind Lord! From the horizon of detachment Thou hast manifested souls that, even as the shining moon, shed radiance upon the realm of heart and soul, rid themselves from the attributes of the world of existence and hastened forth unto the kingdom of immortality. With a drop from the ocean of Thy loving kindness Thou didst oft-times moisten the gardens of their hearts until they gained incomparable freshness and beauty. The holy fragrance of Thy divine unity was diffused far and wide, shedding its sweet savours over the entire world, causing the regions of the earth to be redolent with perfume.

Raise up then, O Spirit of Purity, souls who, like those sanctified beings, will become free and pure, will adorn the world of being with a new raiment and a wondrous robe, will seek no one else but Thee, tread no path except the path of Thy good-pleasure and will speak of naught but the mysteries of Thy Cause.

O Thou kind Lord! Grant that this youth may attain unto that which is the highest aspiration of the holy ones. Endow him with the wings of Thy strengthening grace--wings of detachment and divine aid--that he may soar thereby into the atmosphere of Thy tender mercy, be able to partake of Thy celestial bestowals, may become a sign of divine guidance and a standard of the Concourse on high. Thou art the Potent, the Powerful, the Seeing, the Hearing.

V

He is God

O Remnants of the martyrs in the path of God!

Your letters have been received and despite the lack of a moment's spare time they were perused with the utmost attention. Since it is impossible to answer each letter separately, I am writing you collectively, and this you will surely excuse.

Indeed as a result of the outrages perpetrated by the wicked, the attacks of the rapacious beasts and the onslaught of the ravening wolves, those blessed souls have endured woeful tribulations and have borne dire sufferings and distressing calamities, each of which calleth for weeping and wailing, for [657] sighing and lamentation. Were eyes to shed tears of blood, they would afford no consolation. By reason of these tragic events Abdu'l-Baha is assailed by despondency and anguish and is beset by bitter sadness and grief.

However, when we ponder carefully it will be observed that these unceasing trials and afflictions, these successive ordeals, though they break one's back, crush one's strength, and exhaust one's endurance, are among the greatest gifts of God, the Ever-Living, the All-Powerful, for He thereby accepteth the self-sacrifice which certain souls are prompted to make in His path, enabling them to attire their heads with the glorious crown of martyrdom and to establish themselves upon the throne of everlasting sovereignty. Such hath ever

been the qualification of them that enjoy near access unto God, such are the attributes of the pure in heart.

This life will surely pass away like unto a fleeting shadow and the gay trappings of this earthly existence will soon be rolled up. The cup of bitter death will be borne round and the fire of anguish and despair will be set ablaze. The foundation of human life will crumble and this clamorous outcry and tumult will be hushed to silence and stillness. Rejoicings will cease and pleasures will come to an end. The souls will set out empty-handed on their journey to the next world, compassed by intense grief and anguish. Of the contemplations of bygone days, of the former life of comfort, joy and power not a single vestige will be left. Utter perdition will prevail and everyone's grievous loss and deprivation will be laid bare.

However, such faithful friends as have laid down their lives as martyrs will be stirred by the waves of the ocean of ecstasy. They will be filled with joy and radiance through the revelation of heavenly glad-tidings, will receive divine confirmations of loving-kindness and will be sustained by the wondrous blessings of the peerless Lord in such wise that they will be moved to say: 'Praise be unto God that during our lifetime in this mortal world we became the target of darts in the path of God and were exposed to the dire peril of arrows and spears. Every day a shaft of cruelty was hurled at us, and every moment we drank our fill from the draught of affliction, till eventually we hastened forth to the field of martyrdom for the sake of His love, and offered up our hearts and souls in the path of the All-Merciful'.

Indeed at that moment such souls will rejoice with exceeding gladness and will be so carried away by the joyful tidings of God that they will wing their flight to the heaven of eternal glory with the utmost ecstasy, exultation and spiritual blissfulness. It is Our ardent hope now that We too may partake of a drop from this celestial cup and may receive a portion from this life-giving draught. Verily my Lord will vouchsafe His special favours unto whomsoever He pleaseth. No God is there but Him, the All-Bountiful, the Most Generous.

Now praise be to God that the remnants of the families of the martyrs stand like a mighty structure, firm, steadfast and immovable. Before the eyes of the peoples of east and west they have proved themselves to be wholly self-sacrificing, eager to rush forth to the field of martyrdom, denizens of the [658] kingdom of His love, seated upon the throne of eternal glory, knights of the arena of sacrifice, and rulers of the realm of renunciation and constancy.

Therefore ye should not be sad or sorrowful, nor be oppressed with grief and despondency. Rather it behoveth you to render Him thanksgiving for being the survivors of those illustrious souls, the remnants of them that are favoured at the Threshold of the Almighty. In truth these calamities and sufferings are a glorious diadem whose glittering gems will shed lustre upon ages and centuries to come.

He is the All-Glorious

O Ye friends of God! O ye favoured ones at the Threshold of the One Who transcendeth all limitations!

That distinguished martyr, like unto a lucky star, shineth from the dawning-place of divine unity, luminous, resplendent and unmistakable, though mortal eyes are debarred from beholding him.

With his face beaming with light, with a luminous brow and enthralling beauty, he is calling aloud from the summit of the heaven of glory, saying:

'O my friends! O honoured ones! I quaffed the cup that brimmeth over with the consummate bounty of God and tasted the sweetness of the Abha Kingdom even from the edge of the sword. I have divested myself of my wornout garments and raised up my banner in the realm of glory. From the world of dust till the heights of the heavens I spurred on the charger of martyrdom and from this luminous horizon I call out and say:

"O my loved ones! The portals of His most great favour are flung open and the hearts of the people of Baha are dilated with joy. The chalice of His bounty is being borne round and the sweet melodies of the birds of the all-highest Paradise reach every receptive ear. The reviving breeze wafting from the garden of the Abha Kingdom is laden with perfume and everyone who hath suffered long is granted intimate communion within the retreats of the Lord of Truth. From the Threshold of the Almighty, the AllWise, His summons hath gone forth unto all men, and from the realm of the Concourse on high the voice of glad-tidings: Happy are ye! is continually raised."

Know ye the excellence of this gracious favour, and esteem the value of this precious gift. The outpourings of the mercy of God are copious like unto a boundless ocean and the manifold blessings of the Abha Beauty are shed abroad even as the radiance of the shining moon. Were ye to know how great is the revelation of this bounty, how plenteous the gifts that have been vouchsafed, I swear by the ravishing beauty of the Abha Beloved and by the soul-stirring smile of that peerless Charmer of hearts, that ye would dance with delight in your eagerness to lay down your lives and would leap with joy as ye hasten to the field of sacrifice. Ye would raise, with one hand the brimful cup of self-sacrifice, and with the other the laurel of the supreme [659] bounty successfully won. Thus in the arena of renunciation while uttering the triumphal cry: Great is our blessedness! Great is our blessedness! Happy are we! Happy are we! ye will attain the desire of your hearts, the most glorious martyrdom.

O ye friends of my heart and soul! Slumber not for a moment; relax not nor linger for an instant. In a spirit of exceeding joy and gladness, with unswerving constancy in the Covenant and the Testament of the everforgiving Lord and in anticipation of attaining His luminous horizon, make the greatest effort to diffuse His sweet savours and bend your energies to promote His Cause. Be ye heralds of the Covenant, and bearers of the glad-tidings of His

Testament. Receive your portion from the breast of His grace, and with high resolve exert your utmost endeavour. Be set aglow with the fire of the love of God, and raise the anthem of jubilation with the full enthusiasm of your heart and soul, so that ye may become intimately familiar with His Call and be initiated into divine knowledge and wisdom.

This world is the empire of the spiritual sovereignty of the Abha Beauty, and this realm is the seat where the mighty throne of the Kingdom of the Exalted One (the Bab) is established. Its effulgent sun, its shining moon never set, its brilliant stars never fade, its bright horizon is never overcast. Its oceans surge and its birds soar in the heights. Its streams are living waters, soft-flowing rivers of immortality. Its trees are saplings planted in the orchard of the Lord of Glory. Its dominion is the immensity of the realm of the placeless, and its territory the domain of the heart. Its abiding joy is attainment unto the presence of the ever-forgiving Lord. Its sustenance is the liberal bounty that His adored Beauty hath bestowed. Its chalice is the cup tempered at the Camphor Fountain, its designation. the Expanse of Eternal Life. a life that transcendeth the limitations of countless ages.

O my friends! This is the Call of the Covenant. This is the Dispensation of the Well-Beloved of all mankind. This is the gift that the Day-Star of the world hath graciously given. This is the revelation of His incorruptible grace, the manifestation of His perpetual assistance, the evidence of the power that is born of God and the potency of the bestowals proffered by the All-Merciful. What else do ye want? What else do ye expect? Which path do ye tread? Be quick, be quick! O companions! hurry, hurry! O ye loved ones!

And upon ye be His glory!

VII

O Remnants of those effulgent lights! O children of those tabernacles of holiness! O remembrances of those resplendent spirits! Although your distinguished fathers surrendered their souls in the field of glorious martyrdom, hastened away from the abyss of this sordid world of dust unto the lofty heights of the Abha Kingdom, and raised the banner of the most great bounty among the Concourse on high, ye have not been left behind, forsaken and [660] lonely. Although your fathers have ascended unto the realms above, Almighty God, more affectionate than a father, is ever present. Indeed could ye but know how dear ye are in the presence of your true and heavenly Father, ye would stretch forth your wings and take your flight. And upon ye, O loved ones of God, be His glory!

VIII

He is the All-Glorious

O Offshoot of him who in a transport of delight drank of the chalice of martyrdom in the path of God! That essence of being is so graciously confirmed in this day with boundless grace and favour at the court of the sovereign Lord of the seen and the unseen that the embodiments of spiritual majesty and the

exponents of true glory are eagerly yearning to render service unto him. Although to outward seeming he was put to a shameful death, in reality he is established upon the throne of unfading exaltation. The day is approaching when kings will seek blessing from his dust and all heads will bow down in his honour, the day when all men will express humility at the revelation of the majesty and grandeur with which the martyrs are invested and all faces will be downcast before the indomitable power of their testimony. If such is what will take place in this visible world, then imagine what it will be in the spiritual realms of God, so exalted above the comprehension of all beings.

IX

O Thou who art seeking the goodpleasure of the Lord of Glory! I have no time to spare. I am completely absorbed in thinking of, in meditating upon and in lamenting for those distinguished martyrs--may My life be offered up as a sacrifice for them.

On the one hand this grievous calamity hath, like unto a dagger, inflicted upon me so profound an injury that no salve can soothe, nor can any balm assuage; while on the other the scene of sacrifice is seen bedecked with such splendid pageantry, such marvellous festivity that the holy ecstasy of its wine seizeth forevermore the minds of those that are godly and spiritual. Moreover, the Concourse on high and the dwellers in the Abha Kingdom are now expounding the mystery of sacrifice, the main purport of all heavenly Scriptures. Therefore this hath to some degree relieved my grief. In short, the day is approaching when the meads of the Cause of God, having been watered with blood, will have put forth roses and lilies in such profusion that East and West will become fragrant and North and South perfumed. Peace be upon you!

X

[661] He is God

O Ye who have been wronged in the path of God! The loved ones of the Almighty have always been exposed to the dire oppression and tyranny of the people of iniquity, and His chosen ones have continually suffered woeful cruelties at the hand of the perfidious. The friends of God have always quaffed the cup of adversity proffered by the hand of the immortal Cup-Bearer. They have been made targets for the darts and spears of the curses, accusations and reviling that the rebellious and the wicked hurled at them, and have been persecuted and ill-treated by their opponents among the people of the world. Indeed these tribulations are the very draught with which the Wellbeloved of the world was inebriated, and these calamities are but the effulgent light whereby the luminous brow of the Day-Star of the world was illumined.

Therefore think not that this fierce opposition and cruelty hath brought humiliation and abasement upon you. Nay, I swear by God, besides Whom there is none other God, they redound to imperishable glory and unfading bounty. Indeed this persecution is a cooling draught and these trials a source of delight. This poison is but sugar and this venom the essence of sweetness. This stab in the breast is a soothing balm to heart and soul, and this bitter medicine a

healing remedy. One's sense of taste must be unimpaired to perceive its sweetness and to savour its relish. Otherwise to a bilious patient sugar and honey taste more bitter than venom, and to the diabetic a sweet drink is more harmful than deadly poison.

Meanwhile, O ye loved ones of God, let not these sufferings grieve you, nor let your hearts be sore with sorrow. Ere long will all take a pride in them and will seek distinction and glory in both worlds. One will say: In one period I endured hardships by reason of my faith and certitude in the one true God and was recompensed with certain bounties. Another will state: Because of the love I cherished for the Best Beloved of the world, I once quaffed a deadly poison like unto a cup of eternal life and since then I have received His perpetual grace. Yet another will exclaim: In the path of servitude at the Threshold of the Almighty I was cast into prison and gained boundless favours in return. Another will declare: As a result of the illumination I received from the Day-Star of ethereal glory I was made captive and held fast in chains and stocks, for which exceptional rewards were lavished on me. Another will say: My heart was set ablaze with the fire of His love in such wise that I hastened to the field of sacrifice, and kissed the edge of the sword. Another will state: The blessed body of my illustrious father was hacked to pieces in the arena of sacrifice for the sake of my glorious Lord. Another will say: My honoured grandfather was inebriated with the cup of martyrdom which the Cup-Bearer of God's eternal Covenant proffered unto him and he became the recipient of manifold favours and [662] bestowals. Still another will exclaim: Our blessed household was ruined in the path of the Adored One. And still another will exclaim: Our innocent ancestors were made homeless for having promoted the Word of God. In short, everyone, well-pleased, jubilant and leaping with joy will recount these events at length and will glory in them before the other peoples and kindreds of the earth. Then it will become unmistakably clear and manifest, even to outward seeming, what a great bounty, what a supreme blessing these afflictions and trials in the path of the Blessed Perfection had truly been.

Therefore it behoveth you, O loved ones of God, to raise up your hands in thanksgiving unto the Threshold of the peerless One and say:

O one and only God, O matchless Creator. Praised and glorified art Thou for having placed this splendid crown upon the brow of these helpless ones, and this mantle of eternal glory on the shoulders of these indigent ones. The rays of Thy sanctity fell upon bodies of clay and the lights of the world of eternity shone forth. A flame of Thy bestowal from the enkindled fire appeared and gave the hearts eternal life. Thanks be to Thee for this blessing and this bestowal and this bounty with which Thou hast distinguished these helpless ones. Thou art the Generous, the Merciful and the All-Loving.

XI

O Thou who art resigned to His irrevocable Decree!

Render thanks unto God for having attained so sublime a station. Thou art treading the path of His good-pleasure; thou hast surrendered thyself

unreservedly to that which is ordained and destined by Him; thou hast placed thy whole trust in Him and manifested unswerving constancy and fortitude in the face of this grievous calamity. Thus indeed doth it beseem the loved ones of God to conduct themselves, so that when they are beset by hardships or hemmed in by dire affliction they may be able to comfort others and impart consolation unto them, their faces may glow with the light of radiant acquiescence and they may deliver to the flames the veil of moaning, sighing and lamentation, inasmuch as resort to sadness and grief in the midst of tribulation is but an indication of lack of assurance and certitude.

In truth were man to attain the stage of certitude in his spiritual development, no affliction could ever depress his spirits, though he would undoubtedly be influenced by reason of his human susceptibilities. Nevertheless, man's inner being will be so revived by the breeze of divinely-ordained woes and trials that the dust of wailing and lamentation will entirely subside and the light of submissive resignation unto His Will shall shine forth like unto a radiant morn. And upon thee be greetings and praise.

XII

He is the All-Glorious

O Ye who are inebriated with the draught of His Covenant! [663] It is time to pass beyond the desolate wilds of remoteness, so that ye may reach the retreats of the Beloved, drink your fill from the wine of the bestowals of the All-Merciful, hold a heavenly festival, deck forth the stage for a spiritual celebration and, to the strains of harp and lute and the melodies of the Concourse on high and of the songsters in the meads of holiness. break into sweet lays and wondrous tunes in praise and glorification of the Abha Beauty.

O ye friends of God! Let not the cavils of the foolish grieve you nor the tribulation of this world dismay you. Indeed, the motivating impulse whereby the sweet savours of God are diffused throughout the world is none but the suffering that befalleth His loved ones and the dire troubles that constantly touch His chosen ones.

Consider a while, the greater the affliction they suffered, the higher was raised the banner of devotion and faithfulness, and the more grievous the trials they endured, the more abundant were the outpourings of grace from the Abha Beauty. For it is during the darksome night that the radiance of light is conspicuous and the illumination of the lamp most perceptible. Therefore enlightened faces when exposed to dire hardships shine forth with the utmost radiance and brightness, and the hearts of His chosen ones when held in chains and fetters are filled with exceeding joy, gladness and ecstasy.

In the Qayyumu'l-Asma the Exalted One (the Bab) addresseth the Abha Beauty in these words: 'O Thou our great and omnipotent Master! I have sacrificed myself wholly for Thee and have yearned for naught but martyrdom in Thy path.' Ponder ye carefully. The highest aspiration cherished by Him Who is the Leader of the righteous and the Day-Star of divine splendour was to lay down His life for the sake of the One Who doeth whatsoever He willeth. Thus it is clear and manifest

what should be the supreme aspiration and longing of the loved ones of God.

And upon ye be greetings and praise!

XIII

He is God

O Servants of the one true God! O handmaids of the Merciful!

'From the outset love was rebellious and bloodthirsty,
So as to put every stranger to flight.'

One of the requisites of true love is willingness to bear every suffering and tribulation that hath occurred in the past or may occur in the future. Hence a passionate lover is always stained with blood, and he that yearneth to meet the Beloved a constant wanderer. How well is it said:

'The worldly wise who garner the ears of grain are unaware of Layla's secret,

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For unto none was accorded the great glory but Majnun--he who set the whole harvest afire.'

Thus throughout all ages and centuries the righteous have been made a target to the darts of adversity and have fallen victim to the swords of oppression. At one time they quaffed the cup of dire ordeal, at another they tasted the venom of bitter woe. Not for a moment did they enjoy rest and comfort, nor did they repose for a fleeting breath upon the couch of tranquillity. Rather did they endure agonizing torment and patiently carry the burden of hardship that every oppressor was wont to impose upon them. Having been consigned to dungeons and prisons, they severed themselves from the world and all its peoples.

In this way most of the favoured ones of God offered up their lives as martyrs in the field of sacrifice. He Who is the resplendent Morn of divine guidance, the Exalted One (the Bab) sank below the horizon of sacrifice. Quddus sought companionship with the Beloved through glorious martyrdom. Mulla Husayn opened a new gate to the field of martyrdom. Vahid distinguished himself as a peerless figure in the arena of sacrifice. Zanjani (Hujjat) offered up his life as a martyr upon the plain of tribulation. The King of Martyrs hastened forth to the place of sacrifice. The Beloved of Martyrs was enraptured with ineffable gladness when he offered up his life for the sake of God. Ashraf attained the heights of honour as he unflinchingly set his face towards the arena of sacrifice. Badi', as he breathed his last, exclaimed: 'Magnified be my Lord, the Most Glorious!' The martyrs of the land of Ya (Yazd) drank their fill with relish from the draught of glorious martyrdom, and the martyrs of Shiraz laid down their lives in the arena of ardent love to the tune of sweet and wondrous melodies. Those massacred in the land of Nayriz were inebriated with the brimful cup of sacrifice, and the martyrs of Tabriz were seized with ecstatic joy and unleashed new energies in the field of sacrifice. Those who renounced their lives in Mazandaran exclaimed: 'O Lord! Destine for us this cup that brimmeth over with the choice wine'; while the martyrs of Isfahan laid down

their lives with utmost joy and radiance.

In brief, there is not a spike whose tip is not tinged with the blood of the martyrs, nor is there a place not dyed crimson with the blood of His ardent lovers. The purpose is to enable you to know that one of the tenets of those that thirst after Him and the highest aspiration of such as long to behold His face is to endure hardship, to submit to trials and martyrdom in the path of the Lord of grace. Therefore it behoveth you to render thanks unto God for the bounty of having drunk your fill from this draught and for having tasted deadly poison in the path of the Best-Beloved. Indeed far from being a poison this is pure honey and sugar, and far from being bitter in taste, this is the essence of sweetness.

O. how eager am I to bear affliction in the path of God! O, what a great joy to suffer hardship for His love! O, how blessed the man who tasteth [665] the bitterness of woe, and how well is it with him who is swept into the ocean of tribulation in his eagerness to attain the presence of God! It behoveth you to offer thanksgiving at every moment, inasmuch as ye became the target of atrocities in the path of divine guidance and were exposed to grievous oppressions for the sake of the love ye cherish for the Almighty.

In truth those that are guided solely by their reason would be unable to perceive the sweetness of this cup, but the ardent lovers will be overjoyed and enraptured by the holy ecstasy which this wondrous draught doth produce. Every discerning observer who hath gazed upon the countenance of that graceful Beloved was prompted to lay down his life as a martyr, and every receptive ear which had hearkened unto that celestial melody suffered its listener to become so enraptured with joy as to offer up himself without hesitation as a sacrifice. The moth which is animated by love will burn its wings as it flitteth round the lamp of God and the phoenix of tender affection will be set ablaze by the fire of ardent desire. No unfamiliar bird can partake of the heat of this Fire, nor can the fowls that dwell upon the dust plunge forth into this heavenly Ocean. However, praise be unto God, ye are the leviathans of this ocean, the birds of this pasture, the moths of this lamp, the nightingales of this meadow.

And upon ye rest the glory of the Most Glorious!

XIV

He is God

O Faithful friends in the Abha Beauty! By reason of the oppression and atrocities that have befallen those two souls whom the people of the world have wronged ye have raised the cry of lamentation and grieving and have wept and sighed bitterly. This is meet and right for those two gazelles of the meadow of oneness were held fast in the talons of ferocious beasts, and those two nightingales of the rose-garden of divine unity were gripped in the claws of depraved ravens.

There is no doubt that as a result of those dire woes and sufferings the hearts

of the friends of God have been set aflame like unto a candle and they bemoan their grief with tearful eyes. I swear by God besides Whom there is none other God, were ye to scrutinize carefully, ye would observe that every tree, every rock or clod of earth hath wept sore over this grievous injustice and hostility, and is wasted away by reason of this world-consuming fire.

Indeed those wronged ones had never hurt the feelings of even a moth, nor had they ever put forth the hand of molestation toward a helpless ant. They were innocent of any crime and sought no refuge except the threshold of the Ever-Living, Self-Subsisting Lord. They had committed no error save that of having shanken off their slumber, and had incurred no guilt but that of becoming captive to His musk-laden tresses. Their grave offence was to [666] display a glimpse of the beauty of the heavenly Peacock. To do this they spread out the plumage of sanctity and intoned sweet melodies even as the warbling of a nightingale. This was the only guilt they had committed; their faithfulness was regarded as a crime, and their sincerity as deceit. Yet notwithstanding their manifold expressions of love and fellowship, the revening wolves attacked those two radiant, Joseph-like beings and ripped open not only their shirts but their breasts. Indeed so vehement was their hatred and rancour that they unhesitatingly shed their sacred blood. Ere long will God punish those wicked-doers, both in this world and hereafter for that which they have wrought and will bring dire humiliation upon them in this life and in the next. Verily God is the Avenger, the Almighty.

As to those blessed souls: they will, even as the doves of holiness, wing their flight unto the Concourse on high and in the meads of the Abha Kingdom will burst into melodious songs, whose strains of sanctity will exhilarate every attentive ear, and whose wondrous accents will be heard at all times by the people of abiding faithfulness. What gift is there greater than this? What blessing is mightier than shedding these few drops of blood in the path of the peerless Lord? What felicity is more meritorious than the bounty of being aided by the mystery of sacrifice to consecrate themselves to the love of the Abha Beauty? May my life be offered up for those two martyrs; may my whole being be sacrificed for their sake; may my heart be laid down as a ransom for them. Verily, this is a supreme favour, this is a most glorious felicity.

And upon you be salutation and praise.

XV

In these days when the wicked have created violent disturbances and the opponents have bestirred themselves, they have, in every region stretched forth the hand of aggression and raised the banner of injustice and animosity. In every locality they have launched attacks against the oppressed.

As is currently known this grievous assault hath assumed nationwide proportions. In Isfahan they aroused a great commotion; in Rasht the foundations of the city were shaken, and in Qazvin they committed manifest atrocities. Indeed throughout the country agitation is aroused through vehement hostility and dust is stirred up by a raging tempest of hate.

And all this notwithstanding that everyone is fully aware that the friends of God are those whom the people of the world have oppressed. and they who are the well-wishers of all kindreds and nations. They tread the path of righteousness and seek to foster amity and fellowship with all mankind. They are contemptuous of their own selves, and inebriated with the wine of the love of the Almighty. They are sincere and steadfast, shining and radiant. They speak forth, they are competent. They defend the helpless, and are a refuge to the fugitive, an asylum to the poor, a haven for the distressed, a [667] remedy for the afflicted and a balm to the wounds of the needy. They eagerly seek to live in perfect peace with the warlike and quarrelsome tribes, and to those who oppose them, they show forth composure, serenity and kindness.

Be not saddened and grieved by reason of the atrocities the enemies have perpetrated. The day is fast approaching when the light of love will have dispelled the darkness of animosity and the splendours of the sun of truth will have driven away the gloomy night. This spirit of heavenly fellowship, this uprightness of the friends of God will promote the well-being and tranquillity of all mankind. Warring factions will become peaceful, opposing kindreds friendly, hostile peoples reconciled and aggressive nations united. This is the imperishable glory of the human world. This is the supreme illumination in the kingdom of the Lord of Mercy.

XVI

He is the All-Glorious

O Ye wronged captives! The divines in that land have put forth the hand of aggression and have surpassed in cruelty the Pharaohs who executed their victims upon the stakes, and the people of Nimrod, Thamud and 'Ad. They have closed the eye of justice and with the darts of tyranny have pierced the hearts of the oppressed. They have set on fire the harvest of the wronged ones, and deemed it expedient to inflict upon them every cruelty, molestation and torture, that perchance by so doing the divinely kindled fire might be extinguished, the seething and roaring of the ocean of God's bounty might subside. the outpourings of the clouds of His loving-kindness be stopped, the meteor of heavenly guidance be hindered from shedding its radiance upon those regions, the reviving breezes of divine blessing which blow from the direction of His tender mercy be withheld, the fragrance of the rose of His gracious providence may no longer be diffused from the garden of divine unity, the light of its brilliant orb be obscured, and the secrets of the manifestation of heavenly bestowals be forgotten.

Alas! Alas! Those divines are unaware that the waves of the ocean of glory will surge high and the pervasive power of the Cause of God will acquire unprecedented glory. Its orb will shine resplendent and the effulgent light of its meteor will permeate the world. Its spark will develop into a flame, its luminous star into a sun, and its drop into a downpour and a flood. Its grain will grow into a harvest, its glittering gem will sparkle in every gathering, its fame will be noised abroad. and the anthem of its glorification will reach the highest heavens.

As to these servants and homeless ones: We were so inebriated with our fill from the draught of the love of God that we yearned to drink deep of that wine of God's Covenant. Thus chalice in hand, dancing and leaping with joy, we hastened into the arena of sacrifice. We offered supplications begging

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For adversity. We exposed our breasts as a target for the shafts of oppression and with the whole affection of our hearts and souls we welcomed the sword of injustice.

This body is the abode of ills and this darkened self a cage to every, warbling bird. One's corporeal frame shall become dust and a target to dreadful darts. Therefore if it were offered up in the field of sacrifice for the sake in God, no favour or blessing could be greater than this. Earthly possessions will certainly be lost, and what hath been accumulated will be dispersed; excessive riches will be cast adrift, and the flush of fortune will wither away and fade into nothingness; immense treasures will be squandered and the wealth gathered up by the wind will eventually be blown away by the wind. Hence, better is it for one's riches to be pillaged and plundered in the path of God, than be a booty of the changes and chances of the world.

As to lofty buildings, imposing mansions, and magnificent palaces: every inhabited and flourishing place will become desolate and every mighty edifice reduced to ruin. Therefore, how much better it is for these habitations which are more fragile than a spider's web to be wrecked and ruined for the love of the sovereign Lord of the Kingdom. For if a house of clay be destroyed, there will be reared in its stead a glorious mansion within the souluplifting immensity of the realms above. If one's home and dwelling-place be laid waste in this transitory dust-heap, one will be provided with a matchless and incomparable nest within the rose-garden of eternity.

Thus all that is related to the loved ones of God, their former glory, their present services, the grievous sufferings they have borne--all will, even as carving on slabs of emerald, be recorded on the scrolls of the Abha Kingdom, and therefrom will they shed their radiance upon all the worlds of God. Then when that light sheddeth its rays upon the tongues of the world of existence, it giveth rise to expressions of praise and glorification; when directed towards human hearts, it evoketh the memory of noble traits, deeds and virtues; when reflected upon the pages of the world, it becometh the object of the verse: 'and give me renown among posterity;'² it illumineth the surface of the earth, it is made manifest in the form of consecrated spots and sacred Shrines.

XVII

He is God

O Servant of Baha! It behoveth thee to render thanks unto the Threshold of the Lord of Oneness for the afflictions that have befallen thee, inasmuch as the adversities that are borne in the path of the one true God are but the revelations of His tender mercy, and any such tribulation is the essence of His bounty.

This life is like unto vapour in a desert and the existence of every thing is as a mere illusion, evanescent and bound to extinction. That which endureth [669] is the spiritual reality, it is the shining essence; it is life eternal, it is undisturbed felicity, unfading and perpetual, flourishing and plenteous. The revolution of cycles is powerless to ravage it, nor can the succession of ages and centuries molest it. Therefore, this divinely-ordained reality, this heavenly sign, must needs be preserved.

And the amazing thing is this that the most effective means whereby this light of truth is safeguarded and protected is the onslaught of the enemies, grievous ordeals and manifold hardships. The globe of this lamp is the tempestuous winds and the safety of this ship lieth in the violence of tumultuous waves.

Therefore one must show forth gratitude in the face of Job-like afflictions and must evince joy and pleasure at the unyielding cruelty of evildoers, inasmuch as such tribulations lead to immortality, and serve as the supreme factor to attract His consummate blessings and infinite bestowals.

And upon thee be the glory of the Most Glorious.

He is God

O Spiritual friends and loved ones of the All-Merciful! In every Age believers are many but the tested are few. Render ye praise unto God that ye are tested believers, that ye have been subjected to every kind of trial and ordeal in the path of the supreme Lord. In the fire of ordeals your faces have flushed aglow like unto pure gold, and amidst the flames of cruelty and oppression which the wicked had kindled, ye suffered yourselves to be consumed while remaining all the time patient. Thus ye have initiated every believer into the ways of steadfastness and fortitude. You showed them the meaning of forbearance, of constancy, and of sacrifice, and what leadeth to dismay and distress. This indeed is a token of the gracious providence of God and a sign of the infinite favours vouchsafed by the Abha Beauty Who hath singled out the friends of that region to bear grievous sufferings in the path of His love. Outwardly they are fire, but inwardly light and an evidence of His glory. Ye have been examples of the verse: 'Let them that are men of action follow in their footsteps.' 'And to this let those aspire who aspire unto bliss.'³

In short, the day is approaching when the gay trappings of this earthly life will have been rolled up and the sorry plight and adversity of the people of iniquity will have waxed more grievous than those experienced by the oppressed. The inmates of palaces will have been subjected to the confinement of graves, and such as occupy the seats of honour will have fallen upon the dust of misery and abasement.

However, those who have offered up their lives as martyrs will shine resplendent even as a candle, and the effulgent glory of the friends of God will shed its radiance from the horizon of eternity like unto a brilliant star. Behold how wondrous is the bounty whereunto ye have attained. Ye have

Followed the example set by Him Whom the world hath wronged. Like unto the Day-Star of the world ye have outwardly suffered an eclipse by reason of the injustice the people of malice have wrought. However, far from an eclipse, this is naught but splendour; far from concealment, this is naught but the defeat of the legions. Ere long ye shall behold the shining light of the one true God shedding its radiance upon the whole world, while the heedless ones find themselves in the darkness of extinction.

In the estimation of the loved ones of God abasement is exaltation itself, and affliction leadeth to faithfulness. Earthly glory and comfort are but a mirage of illusion, while in the realm of the spirit heavenly gifts are everlasting and imperishable. The lights in the nether world may be bright, but they are put out at the break of dawn, whereas the stars that shine in the heaven of the love of God will sparkle continually throughout ages and centuries. Such is everlasting glory; such is infinite bounty; such is life eternal; and such is boundless grace.

And upon you rest salutation and praise.

XIX

The legions of the world cannot withstand this mighty Army. Its weapons are divine knowledge and assurance, and its sword is its world-encircling light. Physical powers are capable of resisting earthly armies, but are impotent before the onslaught of the hosts of heaven. Thousands of times this hath been tried and proven.

The wicked people of Thamud who manifested fierce hostility towards Salih were unable to withstand His indomitable power. Likewise, the tribes of 'Ad perpetrated revolting outrages, but the spiritual sword of Hud remained unsheathed and the divinely-kindled light proved unquenchable. Although the clash of the arms of the wretched Nimrod reached the ears of all peoples, he failed to suppress the glory of Abraham. The misguided Copts marshalled their troops against Moses, yet could not engage Him in battle. The Jews who gainsaid God's Cause aroused violent commotion, regarded the Beauty of the Promised One (Jesus) as a fire no longer bright, stirred up fierce opposition and launched a campaign of attacks and aggression against Him, but in the end their opposition proved of no avail. The leaders of Hijaz inflicted grievous ordeals and atrocities upon the Prince of Mecca (Muhammad), tormented and injured Him as much as it lay in their power, until their assaults grew so vehement that the Lord of the righteous migrated unto Medina where He proclaimed the Word of God. Later, various kindreds and peoples leagued themselves together, waged tribal war and encircled that focal Centre of Light from every direction, but failed to subdue Him. This is but a brief account of past experiences.

Nevertheless it is highly deplorable that subsequent generations, wholly unaware of this outstanding truth, still seek to oppose the Beauty of the [671] Promised One with utter heedlessness. They have armed themselves with a myriad darts of iniquity and swords of transgression and are engaged in unrelenting attacks. Ere long will they realize the grievous mistake they have committed.

They seek to compress the unlimited ocean; they try to stop forthwith the wondrous outpourings of the vernal showers. But alas for them! The reviving breeze that bloweth from the direction of the Abha Kingdom cannot be halted and the musk-laden fragrance of faithfulness that wafteth from the rose-garden of the All-Glorious can never be arrested.

During the ministry of Christ the Cause of God did not pass beyond the regions of Jerusalem. Whatever else was achieved came afterwards. Likewise in the days of the Prince of Mecca--may the souls of the favoured ones of God be offered up for His sake--the reputation of His sublime Faith was confined to the boundaries of Hijaz. However, the fame of this glorious Cause reached the east and the west during the lifetime of the Blessed Beauty, and Tablets were revealed for the crowned heads of the world.

This blameworthy people have already heard and learned how the wicked grievously failed in their opposition towards the Prince of the righteous, yet they are still heedless. This blessed, this mighty Cause which hath stirred the whole earth to its foundation, cannot be restrained by the hostility that these bands of weaklings have unleashed. Ere long will they find themselves in manifest loss.

XX

May my life be offered up for the dust of these martyrs; may my entire being be a sacrifice for the blood of the chosen ones of God, they who enjoy near access to His exalted Threshold, who are attracted to the summit of transcendent glory, and established upon the seat of truth in the all-glorious Kingdom.

O ye who have suffered martyrdom! O trustees of His Revelation! O distinguished men of virtue! O illustrious and noble ones! May my inmost reality, my spirit, my entire being and whatsoever God hath bestowed upon me through His bounty and grace be laid down as a sacrifice for you.

I bear witness that ye are the radiant stars, the gleaming meteors, the resplendent full moons, the brilliant orbs in this wondrous Revelation. Well is it with you, O birds that warble in the gardens of divine unity; blessed are ye, O lions that roar in the forests of detachment; happy are ye, O leviathans that swim in the waters of His oneness. Verily ye are the signs of divine guidance, ye are the banners that flutter in the field of sacrifice.

I beseech God to bless me, through the breezes of holiness wafted from that glorious centre of sacrifice, and to quicken me with the reviving breath of heavenly communion blowing from that blessed region. [672] I beg you to intercede on my behalf in the presence of the ever-living, sovereign Lord that He may graciously suffer me to quaff my fill from the choice sealed wine, may grant me a portion from the unbounded felicity that ye enjoy and may exhilarate my heart by giving me to drink from your chalice which is tempered at the Camphor Fountain. Verily my Lord is merciful and forgiving. By bestowing the bounty of sacrifice in this realm of existence, He aideth whomsoever He willeth with whatsoever He pleaseth.

And upon you rest the glory of the Most Glorious!

FOOTNOTES

1. Translated by Mr. Habib Taherzadeh, with the assistance of a Committee at the Baha'i World Centre, from *Fire and Light [Nar va Nur]* (Hofheim-Langenhain: Baha'i Verlag, 1982), a compilation from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, 'Abdu'l-Baha, and Shoghi Effendi.

2. Qur'an 26:84.

3. Qur'an 83:26.

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