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Abdul Baha Talks to Kate Carew of Things Spiritual and Mundane

Oriental Who Would Break Down Sectarian Lines and Unite Mankind Under a Single Simple Religious Creed Finds in the Power of the Spirit an Answer to All Worldly Problems.

WHAT do you expect? What you don't expect? I found myself repeating this formula of the fortune teller, facing her pack of cards, as I entered the corridor of the Hotel Ansonia, on my way to interview the Persian teacher, Abdul Baha, leader of the Bahaites.

What I expected to find was the apostle of peace, the advocate of the simple life and the universal brotherhood of man in some quiet, unobtrusive sort of place, a little apart from the maddening crowd, where solitude and reflection might be his for the asking.

The Hotel Ansonia, situated at one of the traffic centres, 72d street and Broadway, scarcely answers that description, does it?

It was near the dinner hour. I stopped for a moment to watch the well-dressed, well-fed looking crowd pass to and fro, women with pet Poms, noisy children under guardianship of patient governesses; men, reminiscent of the 5 o'clock cocktail, bustling in from showy limousines, polite officials, overbuttoned butlers, squirrel cage entrances whirling madly—in fact, everything moving at a high rate of speed.

I said to myself: "Well, of all the places to find the Master!"

What I didn't expect.

I might have lapsed into quite a cynical frame of mind if it had not been just then I noticed how soft and squishy the carpets were, and I thought of the forty years Abdul Baha had spent in prison, and I said, "Of course it's the carpets. They must seem awfully nice to feet that have trod prison stones. I don't blame him."

Quite recovered, I received the news from the chirpy clerk, "Fifth floor, Room 311," with a chirpy response, and skipped into the elevator.

On my way to the more rarefied atmosphere of the upper floors I found myself hoping that the Baha would tell me I had a lovely soul. They say he finds out the strangest things about you.

One of my friends has a rose sent to her seven years before from Akka, which, she says, still preserves the aroma of the Baha's wonderful spirit, and another, after making me promise I wouldn't tell, crosses my heart and all that—that stated that he had told her she was a wise woman.

to find myself one of a concourse of people, all actuated by the same interest.

My editor had given me the information that there were five thousand Bahaites in America and about twenty million in the world, so why I should have expected to have the Baha all to myself I do not know, but I did.

I solaced my disappointment by studying the visitors, curious to learn what sort of people the faith drew to itself.

An enthusiastic, plump, middle-aged little person, gowned in a very worldly manner, haloed with a new spring hat, whose artificial algettes had the real optimistic slant, was telling the stranger seated near of a domestic disturbance. Of course it had to do with a cook.

"I just knew if I believed hard enough," said she, "I could make her feel the same."

A young woman—daughter, I judged—cast a resigned look mother's way.

Daughter was Burne Jones, patient to parent's aggressive personality, with the tolerance of the young-old for the old-young. Her thin, willow frame was the expression of the gentle cynicism that comes from living with one who is over-balanced with altruistic words.

My glance then caromed with a man who had sped down the corridor ahead of me.

He had flying coattails and a black sombrero, so I classified him as from the Middle West, for in my Roget's Thesaurus the terms are synonymous.

After several groups of fowls, alert, silent, expectantly, drew my regard. Many prosperous-looking business men and many interesting women.

There was a pretty girl on a narrow seat. You felt she must have lots of overcoat. She wore a sad, withdrawn look as of one who lives on the heights. A stout man, baldish, with a fringe of long hair on his neck, had the remaining two-thirds of the seat, loling against her, and turning up his eyes to gaze into hers, which were, in turn, turned up. They were very much in the picture. Some suburbanites stared their way admiringly, wishing they could do it.

Suddenly there was a stir, murmurs of "The Master!" Many stood up, a few rushed from the room, among them the Enthusiast.



AN APPLE-CHEEKED YOUTH GOT A NICE, PATERNAL LITTLE PAT FROM THE MASTER.

One and another he termed "My child!" and they were not all young who responded to this greeting.

He stopped longest before the young girls and boys, those "blossoms on life's branch," as he speaks of them in Oriental imagery.

A blushing young woman introduced her escort—"Master, we have just been married."

Such a look of joy illumined the face that in repose looks like a sheet of parchment on which Fate has scored deep, calligraphic lines.

He did not want to leave them. He held their hands a long time, then turned and blessed the young man.

My dears, if that young man ever thinks of straying from the path of loyalty, me-thinks the pressure of that hand will weigh heavy on his soul.

He patted several people on the cheek, an old man, an apple-cheeked youth and myself. I got a nice, paternal little pat which has made me feel, oh, so much more like folks.

We seated ourselves about him. A good-looking young Turk understudying Dr. Fareed explained modestly: "You know it is very difficult to translate the Master literally. I can tell you the words, but no one could possibly interpret the beautiful soul that informs them."

Rather nice, that, I thought! The Baha repeated a statement he had made that day to the students of Columbia University.

"The great need of this country is the spiritual philosophy, the philosophy of the language of God. Every one wants to find scientific truths, but we should seek the scientific truths of the spirit as well."

"Natural philosophy is like a very beautiful physical body, but the spiritual philosophy is the soul of that body. If this body unites with this spirit, then we have the highest perfect society."

"What God gives us in this world is for a time, our body is for a time, our millions of dollars are for a time, our houses, our automobiles, the same. But the spiritual gifts of God are forever. The greatness of this world will come to an end, but the greatness of the spiritual world is eternal. Read history. See how emperors and kings came and went. Nothing is left. The kingdom of the world passes; the kingdom of God will endure."

Several questions were asked. A socialist looking person inquired:

"Do you believe in dividing property and everything?"

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Leader of the Bahaites, Who Has Been Called the "Breeze of God," Reveals to Interviewer a Day's Processes in His Quiet Campaign for the Advancement of His Spiritual Philosophy.

powers of the earth, and try by their means to make a union where all will love each other, where all will have peace—but such means will end in failure. But look how the spiritual power has brought us all together and makes us love each other. This meeting has been brought about by spiritual means. You have come because the spiritual power led you.

"Will the East and West ever be united?" inquired another.

The Baha answered immediately:

"It would be impossible by the natural forces only, but that union between the East and the West, of love between the people here and there, will come through the spiritual power. Mahomet All, the founder of the Bahaites faith, said that if he could spend all the cash of the universe to bring love among mankind it would result in failure, but with the spiritual power he succeeded in making the people of the East and the people of the West love each other. Your coming here tonight proves this. It is a gift of God."

Some one interrogated him concerning the mission of the theatre.

He was much agitated at this question, and the Master spoke:

"The Master says that he went to the theatre to-day where they show how Christ was crucified ('The Terrible Meek'). He saw the acts. He wept. It is more than one thousand, nine hundred years since that time. He was unable to help him. Yes, he wept, and not only he, but many others wept, too."

I can imagine repeating his phrases to some of my clever friends, who would be sure to say:

"Why, that's as old as the hills. I don't see anything to make a fuss about in that."

But the time honored words, even repeated by an interpreter, are so fraught with the Baha's wonderful personality that they seem never to have been uttered before. His meaning is not couched in any esoteric phrases. Again and again he has disclaimed the possession of hidden lore. Again and again he has placed the attainments of the heart and soul above those of the mind.

After a few more questions and answers the meeting is declared adjourned. Abdul Baha rises and passes into the inner room, where he gives some private hearings.

No one starts to go. He has actually made New York people forget the dinner hour.

That in itself is a victory, I think. Don't you?

From my corner I wait my turn, again absorbed watching the human current.

Bride and bridegroom pass with ecstatic faces. Middle West smooths his dominant coattails. Miss Burne Jones follows at a discreet distance Enthusiastic Parent, who flies about kissing everybody. I gain a damp salute on my chin.

Newspaper people go in and out. Turks, Syrians, business men, domestic and society women. Children.

It is said that the wife and daughters of Abdul Baha, brought up according to Western ideas of education, are living in Alexandria, more or less fettered by the conventionalities of that Eastern city. It is also true that in the early days of the Bahaites movement women performed prodigious acts of bravery and sacrifice for the faith, so I ask:

"Do you believe in woman's desire for freedom?"

He adjusts his turban—a frequent mannerism.

"The soul has no sex."

"In a supreme moment, as in that of the Titanic disaster, should both sexes share the danger equally?"

"There are more delicate than men. This delicacy men should take into consideration. That is their obligation. If the time ever comes when the average woman will be no need for this consideration; but not until then."

As he says this he shakes the wonderful, full-jomed head and the sinuous neck which has a note of great sweetness.

I thought of his childhood, passed among such unspeakable scenes of distress—early matured into knowledge of sin and sorrow. I marvelled at his childlike simplicity, which is combined with a sort of ageless, spiritual wisdom. I asked:

"Is it possible for us ever to rid ourselves of our grown-up illusions and become, as Christ said, 'as little children'?"

"Certainly. There is such a thing as innocence due to ignorance, due to weakness. It is innate in the child to be simple, but when a person becomes matured there should be such a thing as innocence of knowledge, of strength. For instance, a child, owing to certain weakness, may not lie. Even if the child wishes to tell an untruth it is incapable of doing it. This is due to his impotence; but when it becomes old and its morals receive rectitude, then through pure, conscious potency can it restrain itself from lying."

"Do we most need suffering or happiness to open to us the door of spiritual understanding?"

"Trials and suffering for the perfect man are good. For an imperfect they are a test. For example, a drunkard may, through his sin, lose all his possessions. He is cast into a great ordeal. That is his punishment. But the man who is endeavoring along the paths of virtuous achievement may meet ordeals which are really bounties, for they will help him."

"Why is a child near the spirit land?"

"Because children are so innocent. They have no stratagems. Their hearts are like spring meadows."

"Should we train the young mind with fairy tales or something more realistic?"

"Fairy tales will not help a child. Anything without a foundation of truth lacks permanence. We should begin early to cultivate in children virtues, to teach them the realities of life."



"THE GREAT NEED OF THIS COUNTRY IS THE SPIRITUAL PHILOSOPHY."

Of course I wouldn't tell that, knowing her as I do.

I felt all sorts of mystic possibilities awaited me the other side of the door. I stripped my mind of all its worldly debris. By a tremendous effort I shut out the seething noises of the hotel. I closed my eyes. I attained the holy calm.

At my finger's pressure on the bell the door flew open with a most unholy speed.

No fumes of incense, no tinkling of bells, no prostrate figures and whispered benedictions.

A ruddy faced, red haired youth with the facial line of the Orient was before me. He was in his shirt sleeves.

I had been criticizing the lack of simplicity and when I saw it I wasn't satisfied.

Isn't that the woman of it?

Certainly there is nothing more simple than shirt sleeves!

Surprise made me speechless. He was, however, not perturbed in the least, stood aside for me to pass and said, "Abdul Baha and Dr. Fareed are driving. Will you come inside and wait?"

I sent the perfume of many flowers in my long pilgrimage from the door to the salon, passing several rooms en suite, a little world by itself, an oasis in the sandstorms of glitter and glare.

Slipping into a ready chair, I looked about

From an inner apartment came now a strange medley of sounds. There was a chatter of high-pitched American voices; a beautifully modulated one, I learned afterward, was that of Dr. Fareed, the interpreter and friend. Dominating all, by a peculiar, weird quality, was a nasal monotone unlike any sound I had ever heard. In my retired corner I seemed to see again, as once before, at dusk, the flock of little lambskins in the park, newly born and bleating. The vision deepened and changed until in place of these were the other flocks of Scriptural days, on the slopes of Carmel, near the Galilean Sea, those watched over by the shepherds at night. The monotone ceased.

I blinked my eyes. Everybody in the room was standing, breathlessly expectant. I rose mechanically.

Abdul Baha entered.

He is scarcely above medium height, but so extraordinary is the dignity of his majestic carriage that he seemed more than the average stature.

He wore, over bicorne colored velvet trousers girded with white, a long, full robe of grayish wool. The Panama fez was wound with white folds.

While slowly making the round of the room his soft, penetrating, faded eyes studied us all, without seeming to do so.



THE INTERPRETER SAID: "I CAN TELL YOU HIS WORDS, BUT IT IS DIFFICULT TO GIVE YOU THE SOUL—THE SPIRIT—OF HIS MESSAGE."



THE MASTER.

I recall that it has been said of Abdul Baha that he is the only man in the world who at his dinner table has gathered Persian, Zoroastrian, Jew, Christian, Mahometan.

The last one is a small boy, brimming over with vitality, who rushes through the room like a whirlwind. He describes his impressions in one curt word:

"Radiator!"

The little, pale mother looks mildly apologetic.

As I respond to Dr. Fareed's signal and pass into the inner room I notice everywhere symptoms of departure. I get the impression of a large, masculine family migrating from one part of the world to another, bringing messages of good cheer and brotherly feeling. It is very inspiring.

I find the Baha seated in a comfortable easy chair at the bay window. Dr. Fareed sits near him as soon as I have taken my place. His beautiful voice, like a golden echo, follows close the termination of each sentence.

The master looks very spiritual. He is in a relaxed attitude, sometimes "going into the silence." So much more akin to the spirit world than this does he seem that I find myself often addressing Dr. Fareed personally, referring to him in the third person.

"Do you think our luxury degenerates," I ask, "as in this great hotel?"

Abdul Baha strokes his long white beard. "Luxury has a limit. Beyond that limit it is not commendable. There is such a thing as moderation. Men must temperate in all things."

"Does the attention paid at present in this country to material things sadden you? Does it argue to you a lack of progress?"

"Your material civilization is very wonderful. If only you will allow divine idealism to keep pace with it there is great hope for general progress."

"Is there any way of making this life in a commercial city less crude for the young boy and girl?"

"It would be well to get them together and say 'Young ladies, God has created you all human; isn't it a pity that you should pass your energy along animalistic lines? God has created you men and women in order that you may acquire his virtues, that you may progress in all the degrees, that you may be veritable angels, holy and sanctified.'"

"There are so many temptations put in their way," I murmur.

The Abdul Baha looks very sympathetic, but his sinuous tones are relentlessly firm.

"Let them try a little of the delicacy of the spiritual world, the sweetness of its perfection and see which life is preferable. One leads man to debasement, the end of it is remorse, the end of it is scorn, the end of it is confusion. 'Praise be to God you are gifted with intellect.' I would say to them, 'God has created you noble, why are you willing to degrade yourself? God has created you bright, radiant, how are you willing to be steeped in darkness? God has created you supreme. Why are you willing to be degraded into the abyss of despair? Admonish them in this way and exhort them.'"

I noticed a trembling of the eyelids and that the gestures of arranging his turban and stroking his beard were more nervously frequent. Dr. Fareed answered to my inquiry, "Shall I go now?"

"He has been giving of himself to every one since 7 o'clock this morning. I am a perfect physical wreck, but he is willing to go on indefinitely."

Abdul Baha opened the half-closed eyelids to say:

"I am going to the poor in the Bowery now. I love them."

I was invited to accompany them. The

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