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Edwin W. Woodcock

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When I first heard of what {{p1}} is commonly called the New Religion, as practiced by the followers of Bahá'u'lláh, a Persian Prophet, and Who call themselves Bahá'ís, I was not much impressed or interested, as I believed it to be another religions cult springing up in this country, like many others of mushroom growth, which for a time create a mild sensation among a select few, and then gradually fade away into "innocuous desuetude."

I remained in this condition of mind until my brother, Perey Woodcock, made a visit to 'Akká some two years ago. It was some time after his return before I had an opportunity to hear a recital of his satisfactory experiences and talks with "The Master" and other great souls, who are held in bondage by the Turkish political authorities.

While listening to him, although still skeptical, I became greatly impressed, because I intuitively felt that undoubtedly there was a great soul manifesting there, and I was inspired with a longing desire to cone into personal contact with his personality and teachings.

Fortunately, conditions became favorable to my making a trip to Egypt and on January 5th last I sailed from New York in company with Mrs. Woodcock and Mrs. J. D. Chapman, her mother whose willing and thankful guests we were.

'Akká, at the present time, is the mecca of many pilgrims from all parts of the world, who go there to see and hear 'Abbás Effendi Whom they lovingly call "The Master," explain his teachings of {{p2}} divine love. Being a prisoner, and subject to many physical restrictions and conditions, it can be readily understood how difficult it is for him to serve all. Yet, strange as it may appear, none are turned away empty handed. It seems to be another case of the loaves and fishes.

'Abbás Effendi is the son and spiritual successor of the great Manifestation Bahá'u'lláh, which name interpreted means "Glory of God," and. Whose coming to earth was clearly foretold in the Holy Scriptures and was further proclaimed by a forerunner called in Persian "The Báb" or "Gate," the same as the Manifestation of Christ was proclaimed by John the Baptist.

Bahá'u'lláh was born into this world through a Persian family of distinction

and great wealth, in the year 1817, but, on account of the reclamation of his divine teachings, his property was confiscated and he and his family have been exiles and prisoners for fifty years. He died at ‘Akká in 1892. There he was held prisoner for many years and it was there he wrote many of the new laws and revelations whose great and beneficent influence is already being felt and manifested over the entire world. When he died he enjoined upon his son, ‘Abbás Effendi, the loving task of elucidating and spreading these divine laws and revelations, and he is doing his allotted work nobly and well. He does not want to be called “Master.” He simply desires to be known as the humble Servant of God.

To be received in his prison household, it is first naturally necessary to receive permission. Not having time to receive this much desired permission before leaving home, I started on my journey, fortified with letters of introduction to believers in {{p3}} Cairo, and buoyed up with the hope that my desires might be realized.

On arrival at Cairo I presented my letter of introduction to Ḥájí Ḥasan Khurasání who is a rich indigo merchant and a firm believer. He has thrown open his large house for the convenience and use of numerous believers who reside in Cairo and who regularly meet and receive inspiration and spiritual instruction through the reading of tablets from the pen of their beloved “Master.” We were received most royally by this band of earnest souls, composed of many different nationalities, and, although we could not understand or speak their language, they extended to us the hand of good fellowship and brotherly love, which added materially to the pleasures of our visit to the ancient city of the Pharaohs.

We were not altogether helpless or speechless amidst this interesting group, owing to the kind assistance of a young and ardent believer named Mires Ḥusayn Rúhí who acted as our interpreter and guide, and who favored us with many other acts of disinterested kindness during the remainder of our stay in Cairo.

Mírzá Rúhí is a young Persian who has practically educated himself, has become proficient in his knowledge of the English language and is doing a great educational work in the primary schools of Egypt and in promoting the spiritual and practical teachings as elucidated by ‘Abbás Effendi. Although a young man with a family of his own to provide for, he has added to his responsibilities by adapting and educating four or five promising young boys to take their place in the world’s affairs, and serve in the great Cause. This was my first experience in the practical teachings of “The Master” and I was much impressed by the object lesson. {{p4}}

Another thing that greatly impressed me, as I learned of the different nationalities of the group referred to, and noted the beaming intelligence and love expressed in the faces of each one, was the perfect grace and harmony in their relations toward each other and strangers, and the dignity and even majesty of the bearing of each one of these dark skinned and different races of people,

Whom we in the west, in our ignorance and pride, have been brought to look upon and regard practically as heathen. Surely, I thought, there must be some great silent power at work here, and if it is the result of the teachings emanating from ‘Akká, the sooner I become inspired with these teachings the better.

At this time I had the privilege of meeting Dr. de Bohn and his good wife, Edith, from Switzerland, - believers, - who had received permission to visit “The. Master” and were on their way to ‘Akká for that purpose. I had not yet received the desired permission, but, after consulting with the doctor and his wife and other of the good friends, it was decided that I should accompany them as far as Haifa, and there await an answer to my supplication which had been made on my arrival at Cairo.

We, therefore, one bright morning, took the train for Port Sa‘íd, encouraged by the presence of a host of the believers and friends who came to the station to bid us Godspeed on our journey. On arriving at Port Sa‘íd, we immediately embarked on board one of the Khedevial line of steamers and were soon thereafter joined by that good soul Mírzá Aḥmad Yazdí who has done such good work in “The Master’s” service in receiving and forwarding communications, and another earnest co-worker, Mírzá Núri’d-Dín, both of whom remained with us {{p5}} until the boat sailed late in the evening.

On arrival at Jaffa the next morning, we were held up by quarantine regulations for twenty four hours, at the end of which time we proceeded on our way without further incident, arriving at Haifa late in the evening.

As we sailed along, and in full view of the Syrian coast, many Bible scenes, and incidents long forgotten, were recalled to memory, accompanied with regrets that I had not been more of a student of that great book of books, and more especially as the biblical historical Mount Carmel came into view. As we caught a glimpse of the town of Acre, or ‘Akká, we realised that the end of our journey was near, and we gazed upon this white City (White from a distance only) with mingled feelings of joy, hope and wonder. In addition to harboring the Great Soul we were in quest of, it possessed other historical interest that claimed our attention. History tells us that Acre is also called St. Jean D’Acre and is a place of the highest antiquity mentioned in the history of the Jews, Persians and Ptolemies and is renowned for its desperate sieges and defences. In the days of the crusades, it suffered one of its most daring assaults by Richard Coeur De Lion in 1191. After its capture by the Christians in that year, it remained under the control of the Knights of St. John, Who fortified it strongly and occupied it until 1291 when they were compelled to evacuate it by the Sultán of Egypt. The Turks occupied it early in the sixteenth century. In 1779, supported by Sidney Smith and a few British soldiers, they kept Bonaparte and the French army at bay for sixty days, when he raised the siege and departed. It now belongs to Turkey. It has been, and is now, used by that government as a penal colony. Here {{p6}} “The Master” finds refuge. But his history is too well known to be repeated here.

On landing, and after passing through the customs formalities at Haifa, our little party obtained accommodation at a fairly comfortable hostelry kept by a German family who took good care of us during our stay. The weather was cold and disagreeable, and I, unfortunately, became quite ill – with a complicated bronchial trouble; but, thanks to the kind nursing and attention of Dr. de Bohn and his good wife, whose kindness I can never repay nor forget, I was able, when the glad summons came, to join them at ‘Akká, in the presence of “The Master.” When I arrived I was met by some members of his household, and, shortly after being assigned to one of the guest chambers, (which is permitted through the courtesy of the Turkish authorities) he, himself, came to greet me. There were with me at this important moment Dr. de Bohn and his wife and two of the worthy interpreters who are devoting their lives to the Cause. As “The Master” neared the entrance to the room, we all arose. He almost, seemed to glide into the apartment, and, as he approached and welcomed me in his gracious manner, I gazed into his great, luminous and kindly loving eyes. He first took my hand and then instantly seemed to enfold me in a loving embrace. I seemed to immediately feel at rest and peace with all the world, although tears, which I could not repress, filled my eyes and I almost sobbed. In fact it was some minutes before I could regain control of myself. He sat down on a divan and motioned me to come and sit beside him, which I humbly and gladly did. Holding one of my hands, he entered into a general conversation, through the interpreters, of which I can remember but little, as I was trying to analyze the {{p7}} sensations of joy and gladness which seemed to possess me.

Gradually he directed his conversation to me, at the same time throwing one arm over my shoulder. As I nestled more closely against him, and as he spoke of the wondrous love of God, everything for the moment seemed clear to me, and all doubts that I may have had vanished instantly. I did, not need any verbal arguments, or assurances, to convince me that divine love was the ruling and saving force of this world. I experienced it then and there, and the desire to so live as to radiate even a slight reflection of this love to others, was newly born, and, before leaving ‘Akká, became greatly intensified. During the remainder of my stay, which was cut short owing to my illness, “The Master” gave us table talks during meals and several times came to my room where such talks were continued, and he, seemingly, to answer many unasked questions which I had in mind. There were, of course, many, many things I desired to learn, but, owing to the difficulty of communicating through a third party, was content to simply be in the presence of this great, kindly and loving soul, knowing that by research, and study of His writings, and of the writings of other scholarly, noble and developed souls, who are His followers and are devoting their lives to the propagation of divine truths, I could gain the enlightenment, in connection with these truths, that I was so desirous of obtaining.

It was my great privilege, while waiting at Haifa, to meet that great and illumined soul, Mírzá Asadu’lláh, who has recently given to us “The School of the Prophets;” and, also, while at Cairo, it was my great privilege to meet, several times, that other {{p8}} gloriously illumined soul, Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl, who, in

addition to many other pearls of thoughts has given us the valuable book of “The Bahá’í Proofs.” Both of these noble men are humble but mighty disciples and followers of “The Master,” and they are earnestly and patiently paving the way for brighter and more enlightened days to come.

One evening while at ‘Akká, I, with several others, was on the roof of the prison house which shelters “The Master,” looking over the plains surrounding the walled town, gazing at the grand expanse of the blue Mediterranean, and watching for the glorious descent of the sun as it majestically sinks below the horizon. “The Master” was taking his accustomed exercise on the crumbling embankment walls. As he paced slowly back and forth, with his hands clasped behind his back, I could not help wondering what his thoughts were and why he has been compelled to endure so much physical and more poignant mental suffering. My thoughts also reverted to the physical and mental sufferings of Christ, that other great and perfectly developed soul, who, two thousand years ago, was sent to earth on a like mission to point and show the way to eternal life. We who think we suffer, and cry out with self pity, have no idea or conception of what real suffering means and the majesty of it. As “The Master” looked up and caught sight of us, he graciously waved us a salute. His face was illumined with that great love which he bears to all mankind, and, as he continued his walk I was inspired by the thought that it was my privilege, in a humble way, to follow in his footsteps and, perhaps lighten his Sufferings somewhat by living such a life as would reflect to some extent the inestimable value of his {{p9}} sacrifice and divine teachings.

Since leaving ‘Akká I have pondered much, and the more I think and the more familiar I become with the teachings emanating from this Manifestation, the more convinced I am that they are divine, and my determination to try to so live that I may cultivate and develop a sane and spiritual growth has been greatly strengthened.

I appreciate the fact that the first real struggle in living the higher life is with self. We are like children and we cannot attain to youth and manhood with one bound. We must constantly struggle to overcome self, and grow, and little by little we will catch glimmerings of that great light, which, if we help to radiate, will at last lead us triumphantly into the presense of, and association with, great souls.

What impressed me was the more than kingly majesty and the great simplicity of “The Master,” who is hemmed in by poverty and is restricted by every condition that ignorant humanity can ingeniously devise and contrive. Notwithstanding all these most unfavorable conditions, he is constantly enlightening and spiritually influencing the entire world through the many pilgrims from every known civilization, who are drawn to this “Door of Hope” by the mighty but invisible and irresistible power of God. These pilgrims are not ignorant and superstitious worshippers - they comprise some of the brightest and most enlightened minds of the world, and the majority of them have passed through the various and highest grades of intellectual and educational accomplishments. They come in

the spirit of scepticism, bringing to bear all of their greatest guns and batteries of the accumulated learning of centuries. But when they come within the influence of that powerful, spiritual aura which seems to surround “The Master” in his lowly prison, their {{p10}} carefully prepared logical shaft of learning and arguments fall broken and harmless against the shield of divine truths presented and taught by him, and they become speedily disarmed. After two thousand years of additional experience and learning they are more confounded than were the wise men of old when the hay Nazarene pointed out to them the error of their thoughts and ways and directed them to the true paths of God’s glory and righteousness. Unlike these wise men, who heeded not the enlightenment and beneficence Of Christ’s teachings which, spreading through the ages, moulding, softening and mellowing humanity, have made possible this present day era of the Manifestation of reason and love, these pilgrims become almost instantly convinced of the divinity of the wisdom and truths expressed by “The Master.” Their hearts become filled with divine love, their intelligences become ignited with the fire of understanding, and they return to their homes and countrymen as living torch lights of God’s great love.

On my way to and from ‘Akká, at Port Sa’íd and at Cairo, it was my privilege to meet several of these pilgrims, and, on the morning sailed from Haifa, nine of them arrived there on their journey of, knowledge and enlightenment. They were from China, India, Japan and other Asiatic and European countries; and all noble specimens the many and varied civilizations.

These intelligent and inquiring souls have been for some years and are now constantly moving to and from ‘Akká in an almost continuous stream and spreading the spiritual enlightenment they receive through all of the best channels and avenues peculiar to their different national environments. It is true that this stream sometimes interrupted through the ignorant prejudice of enemies and... (incomplete)