

Home of Beha Olleh 12
Acca, Syria, December 23rd 1914

Dear friends,

So far as the news of the outside world is concerned we are like Robinson Crusoe stranded on an uninhabited island. The post offices do not receive even unsealed letters for Foreign parts, not even the United States. We cling to the Italian steamer as a ship wrecked sailor to the cliff but that also was denied us and now we are only made acquainted with warships whose missions are anything but friendly and whose objects are to watch the opportunity for bombardment. To day two other ships of war appeared from the North and after staying for awhile before Haifa and Acca steamed away towards the South. Bulletins were distributed in the streets that one of the English cruisers had gone to Alexandrette (Syria) and bombarded the ^{railway} station and a few houses but small damages were done. This ^{conference} shows that the combined Fleet of England and France have started their program of hostilities in the Syrian waters and it may be a question of hours or days before our turn comes up. A few days ago the English cruiser had landed fifty soldiers in Tyre and Sidon, cutting 52 telegraphic poles and mutilating the wires in a complete tangle, thus to stop communication of the central and local authorities. While thus engaged in their business a farmer with a few women pass by. One of the soldiers speaking Arabic quite well takes hold of the farmer and asks him: In what direction the Turkish army is marching? Where can one find the war ammunitions and stores. Being a farmer he gives negative answers. Then they give him two newspapers telling him to carry them to the governor and tell him Turkey soon shall feel the reversion of the English arms. The farmer was scared and tears the newspapers to pieces but the women relate the incident to the townsfolk and it reaches the ears of the governor. He was brought to Acca the other day, interrogated and such fantastically the same story was repeated. It seems that there was a corps of ^{8 Turkish} guards on the spot but seeing the boat landing 50 soldiers they escape to save their lives. Having finished their work of destruction they return to the ship with two cows, ~~being~~ ^{finding} them grazing in the field they were no doubt reminded of a good beef steak and thus they desired to appease their forthcoming appetite.

In Haifa I saw several stores torn down to make the streets broader and on my way up the Pilgrims Home I observed more than hundred laborers repairing the havoc wrought by the last torrent to the road. I was wondering ^{how is it that} that during these crucial days the municipal authorities have become so paternal but afterwards I heard, these repairs are being done as military measures, that soon four big guns will be ~~beamed~~ ^{hoisted} up to the top of Mount Carmel and the abode of Peace will be transformed into a scene of war. I only hope that this will not come to pass for the mounting of guns on Mount Carmel will subject it to a heavy, ruthless bombardment from the warships.

The Army that is going to invade Egypt is currently believed to be numbered between three and four hundred thousand. It is also believed that when these Turkish hosts reach the Suez Canal, the Egyptians will rise en masse against their Foreign rulers and oppressors and join their co-religionists and together drive them away from the land. In Acca and Haifa the government is now forming two regiments to join the army; the first acting as pack animals for different officers and the second consisting of bakers, smiths, masons, tailors, shoemakers, cobblers etc to serve the army in their individual or collective abilities. All these men have to work without any fees or wages. Many of them are old men and their lives will no doubt be exposed to danger as much as the lives of the soldiers. Many will die through sheer exhaustion. It is also said that there are numerous desertions from the army almost every day and several such deserters were hanged in Damascus to serve as a prohibitory examples for others contemplating the same course. The government needing leather for shoes, repair, iron, cement, etc for masonry along their march, has forced several important merchants in Haifa to give up everything they have. Some of these merchants have protested in strong language but who will listen to their complaints? Because ^{one of} the leather merchant was away they broke through his store in broad daylight and took away all that they needed. The poor farmers in all the villages are also compelled to give their winter provisions for the insatiable army. These instances of extortion have become so numerous that are beyond computation. They have encouraged the thieves to start their profession and so other night four stores in Acca were robbed of their contents.

The regiment of soldiers garrisoned during the past month in Kofre yassiff in the English Monastery have decamped and gone to Shafa-Amer, a village about two hours from the latter place. The Master suggested this removal to the Colonel of the regiment and he complied therewith, because in Shafa Amer they have a Military Barracks and all of them can be housed there comfortably till they are called to the front. Thus the neighborhood of Akbar Senan is freed from the intolerable burden of the rude and rough soldiers.

This morning the Beloved came down and for two or three hours he was sitting at the threshold in the warm and delightful sunshine. Many people stopped and talked with him. He inspired everyone to be firm and calm in these trying days. His cheerful voice rung through the hearts and caused the faces laugh and smile, while the warship was slowly passing before us. At noon Sheik Saleh took dinner with us. He says he shall not leave Akbar till he takes the Master with himself to Akbar Senan. In the afternoon we were all summoned into the Presence of the Lord. Meanwhile the Commissioner of Police, Osman Bay, was ushered into the room. In the course of conversation the Beloved said, "The citizens of a country are like the various members and organs of the body. So long as the brain and the nervous system co-ordinate together in their functions there will be no jar in the constitution, but when they fall out of harmony evident disturbances become manifest. Similarly when the government represents the ideals of progress and justice, the people will advance and co-operate in their dealings. The ideal communication will bind ^{together} the hearts and the root of poverty will be struck. For the source of all miseries and evils is the avoidable poverty. The rulers must be prompted with mercy and solicitation for the conditions of the unfortunates." Then he related the examples of some celebrated Mohamadan saints who for three successive nights gave up their foods to the poor, and orphans and strangers. In the evening, the Persian Consul and four other gentlemen called on him and were in his presence for more than two hours. Then we ate supper and afterwards Sheik Saleh was a guest of the Beloved for the night.