

House of Behe Ollah 43
Acra. Syria
January 17th 1915

Dear friends:

While the Beloved was walking this morning in the Fakhour he said "The future of Syria is full of dangers. We are face to face with the most hazardous day of her history. People are entirely ignorant of what is going to happen. As the Danger approaches with its darksome forebodings they receive a momentary glimpse of the real conditions, are horrified, shuddering with fear and then return to their indifference. Were the knowledge of the supreme difficulties and horrors in store revealed, not one single soul would have stayed in ^{all} Syria nor could they sleep quietly in their beds. I do not speak about these things. Even the highest officials act like automaton machines and are totally unaware of the disintegrating and destructive forces with which they are being surrounded."

I was really quite afraid of this dark picture presented by the Master and fell in thinking unpleasant thoughts and what would become of all of us encircled as we are by many harsh circumstances and living in a strange land among strange people. I got a glimpse of the realization of what the Master said in the evening by the happening of the following event. The Commander of the army stationed in and around Acra, the Collector of the Customs, the Commissioners of Harbor and Police, Modir - Tahreerat and a few other officials called on the Beloved. Sherbat was already served and the conversation had taken a high flight into the sphere of practical morality and the rehabilitation of the working forces underlying civil government and democratic polity; Khosro was preparing tea and bubble-bubbles for the honored guests - when suddenly an agitated young officer was seen running up the stairs with unusual haste, and without giving time to anyone to announce him and his object, he rushed into the room more like unto a maniac than a soldier who must be calm and unperturbed even under a storm of shells. "Two warships have entered the harbor and have brought down two large boats full of soldiers and are heading for the Pier!" His face was ashen, his body trembled, his tongue faltered and he could not continue his speech but began to stare in the faces of his superior officers. He would describe to you graphically their horrified looks when this bomb-like news be-

in their midst. They stared at each other absent-mindedly and had become momentarily speechless with the shock; only the Master was calm and composed but realizing the gravity of situation preferred silence. For one word on his part might have been construed differently by each one of those present. Then coming back to their senses and feeling that their duties and responsibilities make it imperative upon them to be at their positions as hastily as possible they jumped up from their seats, got hold of their swords, hats, military coats, sticks and umbrellas in a precipitant manner and dashed out of the room, flying down the stairs and disappearing into the dark night. This was about 10 P.M. It took less time than I can tell you when several hundred soldiers with loaded muskets in their hands ranged in front of the pier ready to shoot at any foreigner who would dare to land on the Turkish soil. The news soon spread through the city and the people, many of them getting out of their beds, hastened towards the shore to see what danger is now threatening them. A cordon of police was formed behind the soldiers and the furious, fearful inhabitants were kept at bay and forced as far back as they could. The war ships were seen on the calm surface of the water of the Bay and the two boats instead of coming near the shore kept at a safe distance, apparently measuring the depth. For more than one hour the people were kept in this vacillating suspension and then the boats returned to their ships of war. They, however, stayed in the harbor till 2 Am and in the morning no trace of them could be seen on the wide sea. Were I not conscious of its rude reality I would have ascribed the whole thing to a phantasmic dream. This was indeed a big scare for the already over-burdened people of Acca. Every one offered wild guesses for this unusual nightly visit but none of them hit at the truth. But there was one consensus of opinion to the effect that they would like to see the end of this intolerable state, one way or another.

It seems to me that the world and its denizens are being hurried by the all-consuming fire of hatred and malice and the hearts are being hardened with the thoughts of hostility and enmity. But the heart of Abdul Baha is warm with the heat of universal love and those who come in touch with him are warmed, energized and transformed.

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This morning we were most happy to bask under the sunshine of the Presence of the Beloved. Mashadi Ibrahim, one of the old Bahaws related a story about a christian gentleman in Acca in whose keeping was trusted one hundred and fifty pounds by a merchant. After a time the latter called him to get back the money and to his amazement he found the entire sum ^{was} missing. He did not say anything about his loss but went out, borrowed the money from several of his friends with a high interest and offered it to the merchant. After seven months he was going to move from one office into another and was surprised and rejoiced to find the small bundle of £ 150 fallen behind his desk. The Master then spoke about trustworthiness and how this quality like a jewel in the crown of existence shines and gleams and how the world of humanity will become illumined through its light. Then he related the following story: - "During the reign of Kaliph Abdol Malek Mervan there lived in Damascus a merchant. At first every one trusted him and deposited in his safe ^{large} large amounts of money. But later on, it became evident that he was a charlatan and an imposter. He ate of the substance of the people and his duplicity and deceit was at last exposed. He fell into utter discredit and his double-dealings became proverbial. He was made a by-word for dishonesty and fraud. He was disgraced in the estimation of the public, hence every one shunned his association and avoided meeting him in the streets and bazaars. Finally he died and there was no one to mourn over his grave, even his only son would have nothing to do with his burial."

"The son learning through the bitter experience that the life of his father was a sorry failure resolved to carve for himself an honest and manly career, impressing upon the minds of his fellowmen that his character was not soiled with the dirt of his father's misdeeds. He made honesty, integrity, trustworthiness and fair-dealing the corner stone of all his business transactions and little by little he gained reputation for honor and probity and the public came to trust him as a good, truthful man. But there were ~~some~~ ^{some} doubters who shook their heads ~~when~~ ^{with} grew misgivings whenever his name and veracity were the subject of discussion and the majority inclined to the belief

that he will sooner or later revert back to the quack dealings of his father. They thought this present honesty but only a mask to catch the unwary and a snare to hunt down the unsuspected. If the father was dishonest surely the ~~father~~^{son} would incline toward the same direction and if the father was corrupt and sinful how could the son escape the evil, irresistible influence of heredity. Notwithstanding these vicious insinuations the rising young man did not fulfill any of their suppositions and ~~imaginations~~ and relying on the transforming power of the spirit he grew day by day in the beauty of truth and manliness. It seemed as though an invisible spirit was guiding him in all his undertakings, keeping his character high and unsullied.

In the course of time the Kaliph declared war against a neighboring country whose prince had become rebellious. He ordered the mobilization of the army - to be rushed to the frontier and attack the enemy without giving him time for military preparation. Amongst the Generals there was a wise man who had a large family and wished ^{to have} something for the rainy days of his children. Hearing about the honesty and integrity of the merchant he called on him and left in his safe keeping ten thousand Dinars. He enjoined upon him that should he be killed in the war and his remaining properties be confiscated by the different heirs, he should come to the rescue of his sons, lest they may die from starvation. The general further stipulated with him that one tenth of this sum should be appropriated by him as his right of trustee.

Then with his mind at rest he went away and joined his regiment. The war lasted several months and one day the news was brought back that he was killed in one of the battles. The different members of his family availing themselves of this opportunity divided his large estate and wealth amongst themselves, leaving very little for his minor sons. Several ~~months~~^{years} passed and they grew to manhood, only finding to their cost that they were face to face with want and misery. After consulting together about the ^{consequences of the} evil days in which they had come upon them they finally decided to draw up a petition to the Kaliph begging him to appropriate

for them a pension because their father had given up his life in his service and that of the country. Strange to say Fate guided their steps to the office of their merchant in whose trust their father had left the ten thousand dinars for exactly such a day. Not knowing the details of their father's foresight and precaution they simply went on relating to the merchant the facts of their history and their present financial stress. He did not tell them anything but complying with their request he drew up the petition to the Kaliph and stated therein their case. It happened that when it was presented to ~~him~~ ^{Kaliph} he was not in the right psychological mood and after reading its contents he threw it aside, and deprecating their appeal he uttered the following words: 'It is impossible to yield to their request. Nothing can we do for them. Thousands of men were fallen in those battles and ~~this~~ ^{this is} a policy that shall breed much discontent should we grant pensions to a few and exclude others.' When the sons of the general heard this answer they were utterly disappointed and left the royal court without the least hope. Passing out of the gate with their dejected faces they saw the merchant standing there as though waiting for someone. He beckoned to them and as they approached he asked about the result of their petition to the Kaliph. They related to him exactly what had happened. Then the merchant realizing that this was the time that they should know about their father's bequest he told them about the 10,000 Dinars which the old man had left in his trust for their succor before going to war. At first they could not believe it but when the papers were produced and ~~they~~ ^{they} were convinced of its truthfulness they gave vent to their joy over this unexpected turn of fortune and declared the merchant to be no less than their benefactor and god-inspired deliverer. Subtracting the one thousand dinars he placed into their hands the rest of the fund and they went away overjoyed and full of gratitude. Immediately they were engaged in business and because they were honest they prospered and waxed wealthy and honorable.

"On the other hand the Kaliph had a good custom that during the hours of the night he would order the historian of his realm to read to him the records of his reign. One night he was reading a chapter of the history

of the war in which the father of these ^{young} men had taken ~~his~~ part and rendered conspicuous services. Many pages were devoted to his heroism, self-sacrifice, courage and final death. The heart of the Kaliph was moved and he remembered the petition of his sons. He mentioned to his Ministers that sometimes ago they had appealed to him for pension but he had waved it aside but now after listening to the remarkable services rendered by their father he would like to remunerate them in some fitting way and offer them his apologies for his neglect. Then the historian related to the Kaliph the rest of their story and how they ^{had} come into the possession of a considerable amount of money left by their father with a merchant before his going to war. The Kaliph expressed great surprise and delight over the trustworthiness of the merchant and ordered his courtiers to bring him next day to the Court.

"When he came into the presence of the Commander of the Faithful he was received with the honors due to a Minister of State and at the end of the interview ^{the Kaliph} ^{him} placed at the head of the Finance department. "For what reason, the All-powerful Kaliph puts on me such trust and confidence," the merchant exclaimed in surprise. "How can I find a more trustworthy man in my whole country?" And forthwith he was installed in office with acclamation and rejoicing." X

In the afternoon we were again in his presence and drank tea from his blessed hand. He spoke about those heedless men who would go the length of committing any unseemly act rather than obeying the command of God, preferring self to truth, pride to humility, pleasure of senses to the joyful tidings of the spirit and the gratification of momentary delights to the satisfaction of eternal realities. Such men are the bestial types of this atheistic age, the representatives of ~~the~~ Satan and its seducing ways, the blind followers of the flesh and its weaknesses. God has willed to purge the world from the blighting effect of these carnally-minded men and women. He will create a new race and bring forth new ideals. Mankind then will remember their Maker and turn their faces toward Him and beg of Him light and guidance.