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Home of Abdul Baha
Mount Carmel, Haifa Syria
February 11th 1915

Dear friends!

Line up, line up! Look straight! Don't break the rank! Stand in your places. Do not move. Go there at the end of the line." These were my orders given to more than two hundred - one battalion - boys and girls as I walked rapidly from one to the other end of the line, in preparation for the coming of Abdul Baha to distribute amongst them money. He was talking with the guards not far from us. Just a little away from the children another long line was formed composed of old men and women. Three of the soldiers assisted me in keeping the boisterous fellows in order. Many of them urged by impatience and the fear that they may be left behind tried to escape from the tail end of the line and pushed others to take their places. But I had to lay down the law of the Medes and the Persians that unless they stuck to their own places they will not get anything. This new proclamation had the desired effect and they became less noisy and vociferous. Then the Beloved was informed that everything ^{was} ready. With a smiling countenance and his patriarchal figure he advanced modestly and quietly toward the line. He started with the older people, stopping here and there to look lovingly into the innocent faces of the baby in the arms of their mothers. Oh how these poor souls invoked the blessings of heaven to ^{be} descended upon the head of the "Father of the needy!" In their rich, oriental hearts, they poured forth their invocations like unto a limpid stream, even the soldiers were affected, for as they said: who knows that our wives, mothers, sisters and children are even in this hour without the bare means of sustenance, but their fate was worse, because they did not have amongst them a man of God, like Abbas Effendi who is spending his time ^{and means} in relieving the miseries of the poor. Then the children, one by one received their share and ran away perfectly happy. The money distributed amongst the poor was out of the seventy Bashlecks contributed by Doctor Hahibollah who had received as fees for his ^{medical} service to those ^{in abject} families who could afford to meet such expenses.

The Master had brought with himself in the landeain Haji Mirza Kazydor Ali and Mirza Fazlollah Khan, - so when he finished his labor of charity we rode again and were driven far into the green country, weaving with rye. Before reaching the famous nunnery of the Carmelite Order we alighted and walked toward it. Here we met Sha'aban, a giant looking Arab, ^{and} an old friend of the Master. He alighted also from his donkey, tied its rope to the fence of a farm and accompanied the Beloved. They started to walk and talk and we kept ourselves about one hundred feet away from them. While he was laughing and joking we saw ^{he} raised his cane and brought it down on the back of the "son of the desert," and repeated the blows till they reached to twenty. Every time the cane touched his back he jumped up in the air, laughing, as though pleased with the punishment. He asked the Master to beat him with the handle of the cane and the castigation was renewed with greater severity and pleasantness. The farmers who were near left their work and watched the proceeding ^{with} open-mouthed wonder. Later on the Master said in the carriage that he deserved this chastisement. When we reached at the gate of nunnery we found Gaemmagam, the German Consul, Doctor Finkelstein, the engineer and a prominent citizen of Acca. They came forward and greeted the Master. We entered the spacious garden of the nunnery and the Beloved spoke with the gardener and gave money to his children. The ^{nuns} are sent away from the country and a few months ago it was impossible for any soul to enter the precinct. He walked back to the carriage with the officials, speaking with Gaemmagam about the roads which he is ^{tryin} to repair in different sections of the town. Bidding him farewell, they ^{roll} in their carriages and sped away. When we reached the landeain it was ^{surrounde} with so many more poor people and the Lord did not let them go away empty-handed. Since our arrival in Haifa, every day ever so many men, women and children come to the door, asking for assistance and all of them receive the same. Thus the table of the King of the spiritual world is widely spread and people of all race and religion ^{are} fed. They look to Abdul Baha for everything, for they know he has not fail them in the past and will ever come to their aid whenever they turn their faces toward him.

In the evening we sat under the shade of the tree of life, beside which the river of utterances flow to irrigate the parched ground of the hearts. After a few minutes the Beloved spoke as follow:- "This afternoon we passed by the nunnery and entered into its garden. The government forced the nuns to leave the country, although they were the most unoffending element of the country. Formerly no one was ever permitted to step in the enclosure. Indeed how much superstitious how much hatred, how much animosity exist amongst ^{the} religionists and the nations. Ignorance and lack of intelligence degrade mankind lower than the brute. The Pseudo-teachers of religion beguile these unsuspecting girls by unreal, ^{pleasant} pictures of solitude and retirement. They drag them away from their homes, parents and friends and confine them for all the rest of their lives in this prison. Their life in the nunnery is worse than the life of the inmates of a penitentiary, for the latter at least speak with each other, enjoy a little fresh air at stated time and look forward to the day when they are set at liberty. When these girls are brought from Europe, according to their theological opinions, the priests, make them the brides of Christ. Dressed in their beautiful white robes and adorned with all their precious things, they are conducted into the chapel. After the chanting of the hymns, the delivery of an appropriate sermon and the performance of other ceremonies their glorious crowns of hairs are cut, their white robes and jewelleries stripped off their bodies and dressed again in a coarse black, long robes. Then like unto the dead corpses they are placed in coffins and carried to their ^{dark} cells. Never again will they be permitted to cross the threshold of their cells. In the darkness of those living tombs many of them may regret their rash folly but there will be reparation. Years roll on, civilization advance, world-changing events transpire, but confined to their cloisters, they do not hear anything. Their Abbess suffer no intrusion to break their contemplation and devotion. They spend their days and nights in prayer and supplication in the most cheerless manner. Their faces become cadaverous and mournful. They banish the god-given light of joy out of their hearts, they renounce all the ^{natural} rights of man, some of them lose their minds and become ^{completely} apathetic. They become little by little sad and melancholy sorrowing.

apparitions, ghost-like and daleful shades of another world. They do not associate nor speak with one another. If the mother of one of them comes to see her daughter, she will not be permitted to enter her room. She may be permitted to speak with her only a few words from the small aperture in the wall or in the roof. If she desired to have something, she could write on a slip of paper, drop it into a basket which is whirled around all the rooms on a wire and then receive it from the abbess in the same manner. No physician could see her and if she got sick she had to describe her condition in writing, the best she knew how and receive help in the same way. In this manner these girls wasted away their precious lives and the tree of their existences yielded them nor the world any fruit. If they were out in the world, associating with their fellow-creatures, they might have heard about ^{us} Truth, but because they are so secluded, they are deprived of the knowledge of the manifestation. Their severance and detachment is, however, as complete as a human mind can grasp. If with this state of severance they associated with mankind, teaching them the precepts of sanctity and purity, each one of them would have shone forth like unto a sun. The Sisters of Mercy, although nuns, serve the people with the most unselfish spirit. They teach the children, nurse the sick, make the poor self-supporting and do many other useful services. The quintessence of religion is the knowledge of God and the love of mankind. There are many people who are deprived of these spiritual gifts. The glass is very transparent but no light shines therein. The body is in the utmost beauty but not animated with quickening spirit, the architecture of the house is exquisite and the furniture very costly but the owner is not in, the tree is tall, green and stately but it has produced no fruit. A small oil lamp ^{lighted} is better than an extinct electric ball. We must be lovers of the light and not the lamp, be attached to the beauty of the flowers and not the earthenware, admire the good qualities ^{matter} no what from whom they appear and seek the white pearls of Truth and not the crockeries of fallacy."