

Port Said, Egypt
Nov 12th 1913

Dear friends!

Conscious that this is essentially a spiritual age, an age when man must become in the image and likeness of God, an age in which the potential virtues of the world of humanity must be fully portrayed, an age in which all the old ideas must be burned by the Fire of the Love of God, an age of super natural susceptibilities and an age of tremendous spiritual awakening, — it behooves the Bahais of the world to stop a few hours, ponder over ^{your} great responsibilities to mankind, realize them even if it is so dimly and dedicate themselves again to the service of their fellowmen. Everywhere people are seeking, searching, wandering, groping hither and thither with no apparent satisfaction. The divine urge within them is pushing them onward and forward and they try so hard to solve the problem — not so much of their own lives — but of the lives of their brothers and sisters. They are shattering cherished conventions, throwing to the winds fondled doctrines and breaking into shreds ideas once held sacred. From the depth of their hearts they are crying for Peace, the Peace that passeth all understanding but the scoffers and agnostics laugh at them and consider them mentally weak and irresponsible. The materialists have dethroned God, the majority of the leaders of religions have enthroned superstitions and thus you find people dissatisfied, peevish and replete with doubts. Everywhere in the West the standard of materialism is upheld and when the Ministers deliver sermons on Sundays they

are ^{not} *apostolic* in character, they are not emanated from the emanations of the Holy Spirit, they are not the unconscious outflow of the heavenly inspiration. They are rather the results of ^{the} theological training, ethics and morality and not the burning message of true Religion unadulterated by human interpretations and intellectual conceptions. Creeds and dogmas do not create a religious spirit, they stifle it. The present days sects are ~~like~~ so many commercial undertakings and business propositions. They are looked upon as good or bad investments. They are judged by the standard of dollars and cents. The eyes of a theatrical manager is to the Box office and the attention of a successful minister is riveted upon the collection plate. The Congregation is now and then and often regularly is warned ~~by~~ ^{for} their apparent negligence and insisted upon not to contribute cents, nickels and dimes but dollars. You hear people telling you "such and such a Pastor is the pastor of a rich Church, its members are wealthy. They are going to build a new temple or a magnificent Cathedral." Was Christ a success? from today's standpoint. Was it so easy for the rich man to enter the Kingdom of God? What was the simple direction of the Christ 2000 yrs ago and what are the confusing rules and the Babel-like ^{and common} regulations of the different denominations attributing themselves to Him in this age? Where and how can the ~~people~~ ^{people} arrive at the fountain of Reality and by what method can they catch a gleam of the light of truth? Modern intolerable social and economic conditions have driven pure religion out of the chamber of their hearts and placed in its stead a plaster-cast Christianity.

Now, again out of the mysterious heart of the Orient
 a new spirit of the same religion of God is gone
 abroad; out of the deep wells of the contemplative
 life of the East a new spring is gushed forth;
 from the shining eastern horizon a new sun hath
 arisen. The Bahais are those people who are
 quickened by this spirit, drank from this spring
 and are illumined by the rays of this sun. Men
 and women, adults and children are daily attracted
 to this new interpretation of the same fixed
 moral law. They are from amongst all religions
 and sects and are slowly and surely forming
 a spiritual nucleus of the brotherhood of huma-
 nity. People of various tastes, and diametrically
 opposed opinions and nationalities have sat
 around this heavenly table and their particular
 appetite and craving have been most wonderfully
 satisfied and afterward they have all shaken
 the hands of friendship and comradeship. Thus
 the Bahai Cause has just come in and without much
 ceremony has set to house-cleaning and cutting
 away the devitalized and atrophied organs of the
 body politics. It does not do away with that which
 is good. It is a constructive evolutionist and not
 a destructive revolutionist. It is a light that
 causes the disappearance of darkness. It is pri-
 marily a harmonizer and a pure agency for
 moral upliftment. It discards old, superannuated
 traditions and inculcates living truths; it emphasizes
 the common origin and destiny of mankind
 and it inspires the hearts with the highest
 and loftiest ideals of religion. It means the
 expulsion of prejudices and the ostracism
 of greed and irreligion.

I have promised you in a former letter to record in these pages a short talk by the Beloved on the eve of our departure from Ramleh. The question asked by Mrs. Von Lilienthal was:-

"Are there any lost souls?"

Abdul Baha. There are souls who are capable of becoming quickened by the Divine Fragrance and the statement of His Holiness Christ in regard to the second birth applies to them - that is one must be born again - born of the spirit. Every soul who is spiritually born through the assistance of the Holy-Spirit - that soul which receives the Breath of the Holy Spirit will have an upward journey and attain to a lofty station in the spiritual world.

As regards the souls who do not receive the Breath of the Holy Spirit they remain in the world of imperfection, they are as though blind, deaf, without intelligence and surrounded by darkness. They do not attain to the world of Light. Such souls although they have life, yet are as dead, as lost compared with the souls in the world of Light. To illustrate: Consider: the savages of Africa. Although they live a natural life yet they are as dead, because they are deprived of the benefits of civilization, do not enjoy a share of the human progress and are not imbued with the virtues of the world of humanity. They are submerged in the darkness of ignorance, so although they live they are accounted as dead. A person who is not aware of the knowledge of God is dead. A soul out of touch with the Kingdom of God is dead. A soul who does not receive a portion of the immeasurable Mercy of God is dead.

Question. Will God raise them?

Abdul Baha. God is powerful to do whatsoever He wills.
Question. Do souls chose to come to this world?

Abdul Baha. That is according to the Will of God. When God wills they step into the arena of human life.
Question. Do we exist as individual souls before coming here?

Abdul Baha. Individual consciousness is realized after birth.

I may also quote herein a wonderful epistle by Seneca the Roman philosopher on the life after death:
"A great and generous thing is the soul of man, reaching to the limits of a common intelligence with the Deity himself."

He says then of physical death and the life beyond:-
"Dismiss, therefore, without uneasiness these members which are no necessary part of you; this body which has long been your lodging. Let it be divided, destroyed, abolished. Why does the thought of this make you sad. It is the common destiny; thus what envelopes the newborn infant perishes. Why love you so much these things which are not your own? They are only your outward covering. The day will come which shall take this covering from you, and make you come forth from your present unclean quarters. Even now take your flight from them as much as you can, estranged even from those things which seem most necessary to you; fix your thoughts upon something else, higher and nobler."

"At some time or other the secrets of nature will be revealed to you, this darkness shall be dissipated, and light shall break it upon you on every side. Imagine within yourself how great will be that effulgence, when so many stars intermingle their glorious beams, no shadow shall

cross that pure, serene radiance; on every side the heavens shall be equally resplendent.

"Day and night are changes known to us only in this lower, elemental condition. Then you will say that hitherto you have lived in darkness; when wholly yourself you shall see around you that universal radiance which now you can but imperfectly discern through the narrow vision of your mortal eyes, and yet are filled with admiration at the distant spectacle. What, then, will be the effect of its divine effulgence, when in its own realm, you shall at last behold it.

"Such a thought will not allow anything sordid to settle in your mind; nothing base, nothing ungentle. . . . by dwelling upon which, in our thoughts, we are raised above the dread of Armies. no trumpet's sound can dismay us, no threats alarm. What can be fear, to whom death is an object of joyful expectation?"

When I presented myself this morning in the Presence of the Beloved his voice was weak, the result of sleeplessness last night, otherwise he was feeling well. He gave me a very large pomegranate, a basket of which was brought from Acca by the recent pilgrims. He said: "This is a pomegranate the tree of which was planted in the garden by Baha-o-lah himself. It is not yet big enough. They must be left on the trees, encased in a sack till the middle of the winter. Then its size will be doubled and its grains dark red like rubies; its taste most delicious." Then he went into his own room to sit quietly alone till the pilgrims come.

After awhile the pilgrims arrived and he bade them to sit down. As there were a few arab visitors he spoke in Arabic. He quoted a verse from the Koran. "Do the people think that by simply saying 'we believe', then they will not be tested?" "Belief without the test is not worth having. Praise be to God that we have presented the Proofs of God and His Manifestations to the inhabitants of the East and the West. We have rend asunder the veils of misunderstanding from amongst the religions and nations. In many churches and innumerable gatherings we demonstrated that Abraham, Moses, Christ and Mohamad were the prophets of God. Many prejudiced missionaries had written voluminous books against the prophet-hood of Mohamad and we cut clear through those iron walls of misrepresentations and made manifest the truth as the sun in midday. The apparent lethargy in the Islamic world is not because the religion of the Arabian prophet was or is false but it is because the Mohamadians have forgotten the pure, democratic principles of the first age of Islam and have taken hold of spurious ceremonies, false premises and are spending their times in the study of dead theology and worthless metaphysics. It is written in the Koran There is no virtue in this; whether thou mayst turn thy face (at the time of prayer) toward the East or the West but the virtue lies in this; that thou mayst adorn thyself with righteousness and practice philanthropy. Take the example of the theological students of the University of Al-azar. They spend all their lives in that institution with no visible result. When a young man enters a Western

college he comes out after a few years, either an ^{engineer} or electrician, or architect, or physician, or any of the many technical and practical professions; but these good-for-nothing students of Azhar waste their wonderful lives and are a heavy burden on the shoulder of the state. This is a crime! An unpardonable sin!" Then turning to a Bahai who has two of his boys in a French school said: - "Give to your children a manual profession, something that they may be able to support themselves and others. Let polite literature take care of itself; teach them a technical art or profession."

At noon Sheikh Moh-zeddin arrived from Cairo and the Master sent for him. He is a learned Bahai from Kordestan who is studying in the University of Azhar. In the afternoon he took him to a drive around the city and for the evening he was invited to dine with the Master. Fortune happily was on my side and I had the privilege also to be present at the table. The Master was jovial and witty. He brightened the evening by telling us many stories of the lives of Mohamad and his immediate followers. I had never heard these beautiful stories before but I assure you the Master laughed while he was relating them and of course what could we do but laugh and be happy. Again he went with a mail fist for the University of Azhar and its unprofitable system of education. He did not mince his words.

At the table he urged me to eat more Pilaw and kept on pushing Pilaw on my dish "because" he remarked "you will have lots of work tomorrow. There are more than one hundred letters from America that you must translate, so better be prepared."