

7
Nature's studies
Abou Senan, Acca, Syria
December 18. 1914

Dear friends!

Three P.M. and Badi Effendi, Mirza Momen and Mirza Farazollah appeared from behind the trees, one carrying in his hand the brewing samovar, another tea and sugar and lemons and the third cups, saucers etc. How grand! We are going to have a pic-nic. Isn't that fine! I spread my carpet on the primeval boulder and we all sit under the shadow of the large fig tree. In a few minutes the tea is ready and with the enchanting scene of nature before our eyes we drink its rich contents. Then we speak happily about the friends in the East and in the West and how anxious must they be to hear about the good health of the Beloved, read his words, daily falling from his golden lips and know his movements. But the path of correspondence in these days is rocky and quite impassable. The flood of confusion has cut deep holes through the formerly well-paved roads and washed away all the old landmarks. Turkey is barricaded from all sides and all the incoming and outgoing letters are read by the post office censors and a single injudicious statement will find the writer or the innocent recipient in jail. Already many people have received worse punishment in violating this unreasonable rule. On the other hand all the sea communications with the outside world were brought to an end the other day when the governors of the Syrian ports received the order that no Italian steamers must be received in the harbors. An Italian ship came to Haifa a day before yesterday and no boat approached her to land ~~her~~ passengers or receive her cargoes. It seems that this is like a declaration of war with Italy and some of the wiseacres claim that the diplomatic relations between the two governments are on the verge of breaking down and that Greece and Bulgaria have also declared war against Turkey. Many express the opinion that we are in for a long siege, others that we will be relieved by the military occupation of foreign vessels. Anyway, as soon as I see a ^{safe} ~~clear~~ path I will let you have these letters. Although somewhat ~~of~~ yet they will ^{give} you a faint picture of our daily events, thoughts and activities.

2

Towards the home of Sheik Saleh we treaded our way this morning and found the Master sitting in his accustomed place in the reception-room. Outside in the court there were cows, camels, horses, goats and sheep, streaming out of their stables and led by shepherds into their grazing pastures. The peasant life here is of the most primitive, one observing everywhere an entire absence of cleanliness, sanitary measures and the dirt and refuse are piled in the middle of the narrow, muddy streets. The women, although Mahamadan Druises do not veil their faces and some of them are good-looking and quite pretty. Poor things, the hardest and meanest labor of the community falls on their shoulders and their lot is very miserable; notwithstanding this often I find them laughing hilariously, enjoying amongst themselves a good joke. When they arise early mornings, they have to milk the cows and ^{the} goats, feed the chickens, attend to the babies, then go to the farms and work all day, then come back home, making dough for bread, then they have to bake the bread, cook the dinner and serve their lords and masters. Great heaven! When will these egoistic men treat their women better, when will they ^{manifest} that chivalrous spirit towards their "better halves", when will they be more gallant and knightly? On the other hand they have a very peculiar custom which is still practiced in some parts of Arabia: On the first night of marriage no sooner the bride enters the room of the bridegroom than he takes up a cudgel and goes for her without ceremony. With frantic cries and lamentations she runs out of the room, the bridegroom following her and beating her, while the people watch the performance with amused interest. Having received a sound thrashing they make up again and to all intent and purposes they become friendly. If some one asks the man, why he does ^{he} beat his "adorable" bride on the threshold of their union? His usual answer is that he wants ^{her} to be afraid of him, that his aim is to strike terror at her heart and that in the future she may be ever obedient and submissive. There must ~~truly~~ the conditions of women need improvement but the idea of men's minds must be changed; they need a greater and deeper education. We hope truth will be revealed, the hearts will become more susceptible that the gentler qualities burst into bloom, that the women of the East may ascend to a high degree of culture and refinement.

In the course of his talk the Master said this morning, "The agonizing groans and heart-breaking meanings of all the nations are lifted up to the throne of heaven. Tranquility and compassion are things of the past. The world has fallen within the grasp of a most appalling disaster. The current news of war and battle has covered the pages of the newspapers of the countries, sensational rumors and most wild stories find ready publication and acceptance by the over-excited public. From one end of the world to another nothing is heard but the topics of war. No one listens to the voice of Peace and international arbitration. They have fallen into a deep, dark vale of carnage and bloodshed, grasping in the gloom of faithlessness and atheism. The luminous rays of divine guidance do not reach its depth. They wallow in the mire of destruction." Then he spoke about the great military generals of different ages such as Attila, Hannibal, Alexander, Cyrus and others and the victories they achieved through cruelties.

An hour before sunset after taking a long walk down to Kofre-yassif on his return he called on us with Sheikh Saleh. We brought for them chairs and each sat before a window. Then he asked us to make tea for the Sheikh and after sitting for half an hour and giving him 3 cups of ~~tea~~ they left. We were very happy to entertain the Beloved and receive ^{him} in "his own room".

At last I had the pleasure of seeing Mrs. Pattinger to night. She was very glad to be in the blessed household again. She related to me several anecdotes of her eventful trip in India. Then I saw Miss Sanderson. Both of them are delighted to be among the members of the Holy Family and be the recipients of great spiritual blessings. For the present they will be here, participating in the Divine Life and filling their cups with the wine of the Love of God and preparing themselves for the greater service which await them in the outside world.

Again the talk of the Beloved this evening was as varied and as interesting as it was instructive. Now he spoke on anatomy, and then on fasting, then on Mohammed the II, the Conqueror of Constantinople and how he ordered the building of large vessels in Adrianople and brought them on land to the shore of Bosphorus. Then he spoke about the peculiar beliefs of Nusseyrtes and Bakdashis; how the former consider the woman as the accomplices of Satan, not trusting

them and keeping them in complete illiteracy and ignorance and the latter believing that wine-drinking will draw them near unto God. Then he presented a graphic description of the origin of idolatry, the Sabians, the polytheistic philosophers of Greece and Rome and how humanity in its early infancy worshipped the sun and the stars and the elements. ~~And Lakki~~ He spoke about "Bahlaoul" and his eccentric wise sayings. Inwardly he was a learned philosopher but outwardly he was a man of the class of Digenis and his Cynic school and followers. He lived during the time of Haroun Er-Rasheed and the golden era of Bagdad. One day the Caliph of the Muslims came out of his palace followed by "Bahlaoul". They were passing by a street on one side of which was the old palace of the former Kings and right on the opposite side their Moslems, Haroun-er-Rasheed asked his companion to give him a wise advice, "I do not need to teach thee by words," said Bahlaoul "Dost thou not observe the impermanency of this world in these glorious palaces and how their proud monarchs are laid there under the earth?"

At nine 30 P.M. Rahmatullah arrived from Haifa on an ^{important} mission, was taken into the Presence of the Beloved and having received his orders left immediately that he may reach there before sunrise.

A telegram was also received from Acca that Lakki Bey, the Commander of the Army Corps of Jerusalem who was our guest in Akko, will be in Haifa tomorrow night on his way to Nazareth and will be delighted if he could be privileged with a meeting with the Beloved. Therefore, putting two and two beside each other, I will not be surprised if we are met on our way to Haifa tomorrow morning. It will be a jolly experience anyway. This afternoon a sirrocco started with great velocity, so I do not believe I could camp in my Nature's studio. All the believers were in my Cabin till midnight pondering over the sudden developments of certain events and expressing regret over the unavoidable departure of the Master in the morning. Anyway, Good-bye for tonight, sleep shall refresh us for the tasks which await us tomorrow.