

23
Home of Baha-Ollah
Acca Syria
March 19th 1915

Dear friends!

"His holiness Baha Ollah" the Beloved said "had a beautiful habit which was kept up till the last years of His Life. Every evening after having partaken of his dinner he would retire inside of His mosquito-net and then send for all the members of the Blessed Household to gather around and converse with him. This delightful nightly gathering ^{of the family} before sleep was an essential feature of the spiritual system of education fostered and upheld by the Blessed Perfection. Generally the meeting lasted one hour during which time he exhorted his hearers and tried to teach them in manifold ways, relating stories, uttering pithy remarks, cracking jokes and expressing truths laconically. In this manner he intended to instruct us but there were some who could not appreciate the efficacy and beauty of this method and took the strange notion in their heads that this was purely a nice way of passing the time in social intercourse. Arthy did not realize that Baha Ollah's stories and sayings on these occasions were meant for our moral education and culture they were not benefited therefrom. They listened to His stories and for the moment enjoyed them but missed the lessons and took them ^{not} to heart. I remember one night He related for us a historical anecdote of the period and time of Abbasside Khalifs in Bagdad which brought into relief the prophetic maxim that 'Salvation is in truth'. After the death of one of the Khalifs two persons by the name of Marmoun and Armeen arose and claimed the right of succession. At the time Marmoun was in Khorassan and Armeen in Bagdad. That city being the Centre of the Islamic world and the seat of the Khalifate the latter took hold of this advantage and usurped the holy See, proclaiming himself the natural and rightful successor and demanding prompt allegiance on the part of his subjects. When Marmoun heard about this felonious usurpation he

decided to take the only course open before him and avenge himself. ^{There-}fore he collected a large army and entrusted its generalship into the hand of a man whose name was Taker. The news of Mamoun's martial activities reached Bagdad and Ameen who had by this time assumed regal honours started to prepare himself for the attack. Consequently he issued a proclamation ^{of war} against Mamoun and gathered together the forces of the hierarchy. Appointing a commander whose name was Issa he issued an order that his army should pitch its tents a few miles outside of Bagdad and wait patiently for the arrival of the enemy. At last Taker and his army were sighted ^{in the distance} and the excited regiments were drawn in battle-array. Issa desiring to gain some reliable information as regards the strength and weakness of the enemy sent for his faithful officer Ali and commissioned him with this risky service. Ali rode on a camel and wended his way towards the camps of the enemies. Taker was inspecting and reviewing his soldiers when he saw in the far off horizon a man riding on a dromadery and coming towards his camp. When he ^{was} approached Taker accosted him. "Who art thou?" he asked. "I am Ali." "Where dost thou come from?" "From Bagdad." "Where dost thou go?" "To the camp of Taker." "For what reason?" "To spy his forces." "Who has sent thee?" "Issa." "Who is Issa?" "The commander of the army of Ameen." "What is the object of thy commission?" "I am sent as a spy to gain information as to the number of this army, whether they are well-provided with food, whether they are fatigued after their toilsome journey or fresh, are they brave and valiant, how long their ammunition will last, is the general vigilant and watchful, is he an experienced commander or a doctrinaire and impractical strategist, what are the names of the officers, are their characters incorruptible, are they inspired with devotion for their master, are they united amongst themselves, is it a regular and disciplined army or made up of a raging mob whose chief aim is spoils and rapine, ^{and} on which position the enemy is more vulnerable the right wing, the left wing or the centre?" Taker was astounded and could hardly hide his agitation. When he sufficiently recovered himself

he thundered out: 'Art thou telling me the truth? if so, thou must be put to death on the instant. How canst thou speak so plainly?' 'I swear by Allah that I have told you only the truth.' The Commander thought for a few minutes and as though decided on something he took the hand of the spy and with great affability conducted him to his ^{well} tent. 'Thou art welcome! I marvel ^{at} the strength of thy courage.' They talked on many subjects and exchanged views. Then they were served with a simple, frugal dinner. 'I must go out and finish my work' said Ali, when they were through with their food. 'All right. You may go from one end of my camp to another and put any number of questions to my captains, subalterns and privates.' Issuing an order that Ali must be received everywhere with honor and all his questions be answered he sent him away with his aid-de-camp and waited for their return. After 3 hours they came back. 'Hast thou collected all the information thou wert seeking?' Taher asked. 'Yes' answered Ali. 'Well tell me, what didst thou find about the conditions of my army?' The spy began by telling him all the information he had collected and Taher sat ^{there} listening with wonder at the thoroughness and completeness of his inspection. 'Wonderful, wonderful!' the commander exclaimed. 'I wish to God I had a spy like unto thee!' Then spreading the bed he invited him to sleep. While they were in bed Taher observed that Ali now and then throws pushes off the coverlet and peeps out with the utmost caution. 'What art thou doing?' 'I want to escape and am watching the time when thou wilt be asleep. I can't stay much longer because I must inform my general before sunrise.' Taher laughed and said, while closing his eyes: 'All right! Here I am going to sleep. Thou mayst leave at thine own discretion.' Soon Ali was out of the tent and beyond the reach of pursuit. Issa listened to his story with speechless amazement. 'How couldst thou be so frank? He might have killed thee!' he said. 'Hast thou not heard that Mohamad uttered the maxim: 'Salvation is in truth?''

After several battles Issa and his forces were defeated and Taher entered Bagdad as a victor. He made a search for Ali, the spy, and was glad to find him safe. 'Come my friend! I place ⁱⁿ thy hand the rein of all my affairs. I cannot find in all my army a more truthful man! Thou hast followed indeed the command

This morning the Beloved was sitting in front of the house. He was all alone and had drawn his coffee-colored Aba over his head. "Ah! thou art carrying in thy hand a rosary," he said "With the Mohamadans it has become a habit to play with the rosary all the time. It was originally intended for the repetition of certain divine attributes in order that the worshipper may become reminded, ^{thereby} and embody those attributes in their daily lives, such as self-sacrifice, generosity, wisdom, knowledge, devotion etc. but now it has become a mere rote-repetition of words without attention to meaning. It is a mockery on the spiritual qualities of God. Praise be to God that the Bahais are trying to live those eternal principles and when they hold a rosary in their hands and repeat the Most Great Name they visualize before their eyes the divine characteristics of the Manifestation and strive to walk in his footsteps. If they gain this ideal benefit from the rosary, well and good, otherwise there will be no difference between their manner of their worship and other communities. The friends of God must always try to know the why and the wherefore of every problem. God has given them the reason, the intellectual faculties, - so that they may search, investigate, ~~read~~ not accept anything blindly or on mere assertion. They must constitute themselves as a community of truth-seekers, truth-lovers and truth-spreaders. Certain ^{simple} forms may be necessary to conduct reverently and orderly a religious gathering but they must be extremely simple and in accord with common sense and spirituality; - in order that the worldly ones may become heavenly, the sleepy ones awakened, the apathetic dynamic, the dark ones illumined, the erring ones guided, the carnally-minded celestial, the indifferent animated, the congealed ones thawed down and the dead ^{ones} alive. Forms must be our gentle guides and not ^{our} tyrannous masters. They must release our hands and feet and not bind us more firmly. As soon as the adherents of a religion give more importance to the form than the spirit - they fall into futile wranglings and disputes. They forget the Kernel but idolize the empty shell."