

... description: 1907, Hooper Harris - Pilgrim Letter author: Hooper Harris
title: Pilgrim Letter notes: This is a letter Berthelin Allien would like to share
with the friends. It was written by Hooper Harris in 1907. Sophia Englehorn
had this letter among her things. ...

Pilgrim Letter

Hooper Harris

1907

April 18, 1907

Dear Mr. Hoar: {{p1}} {.greet}

You write me that many of the friends in America are anxious to know my impressions of 'Akká and of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. How shall I write so as not to feed the fires of superstition on the one hand, or fail to do justice to the Greatness of the Subject on the other?

There are times when we find the symbols we call words entirely inadequate and when we know that in spite of all efforts to avoid it, we shall be misinterpreted and misunderstood. There are some unkind ones, who if we allow the heart to express itself freely, will accuse us of emotionalism and over credulity. And there are others who, if we restrain the heart and write of facts as facts, setting them forth in their physical aspect only; will accuse us of lack of spiritual comprehension, and almost of infidelity; however, God knows the heart, and acknowledging responsibility to Him alone, I shall endeavor to convey to all interested something of the impressions I received on my visit to 'Akká and the Beloved One in December 1906, now nearly four months ago.

To begin with, I would to God that all the people of the world could see 'Abdu'l-Bahá as I saw Him and knew Him; then indeed would war, strife and conflict cease, the fire of hell and hatred cease to burn, and Peace and Goodwill reign on earth. But if we write of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as a personality, as a man, we must describe Him as the simplest and most humble and most natural man in the world. He indulges in no poses, makes no pretensions, asserts no superiority, claims no special privileges and in no way whatever seeks to impress you with his dignity and importance. He will eat with you, walk with you, talk with you, ask about your health discuss the simplest matters with you, and answer your most trivial questions; in every sense of the word He is natural and in every sense of the word simple. The physical eye will observe no halo, see no sign of supernatural power, detect nothing in fact that might not be noticed in any really good, simple minded and naturally dignified man. We shall see one who, like all those in this world who wholly sacrifice themselves to God, the evil minded can lie about, accuse of evil and of ambition, mock at and

revile. In a word, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, will appear to us so simple and so natural that we will wonder what it is that some have been able to see in Him who have set in circulation certain stories which have appealed powerfully to the imagination of many and which may easily, in time, pass into records of signs, wonders and miracle. We will find it difficult at first to realize that this simple, dignified, kindly and lovable man is the center of a spiritual power of knowledge and inspiration which is recreating the world; and is the object of a love and devotion which no man in the history of the world except Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Father ever received in his lifetime, and this love and devotion is not confined to his followers, but is seen in those who know nothing of the religion of which He is the center. We will see high Turkish officials (his jailers), Turkish women of high rank, and people of all classes and conditions come to consult Him on their most important matters, to seek consolation and advice from Him in their domestic troubles and to ask for his prayers. Twice a week, we will see the poor gather around Him to receive gifts from Him, their only benefactor, their only real protector, in this prison city of squalor and wretchedness; We will plainly see even with the physical eye, that there is something in this simple, unpretentious man, which causes all around Him to lean upon Him in all things, and to regard

Him with a love and a devotion which prevents His bitter enemies, (a mere handful of envious and jealous ones) from speaking ill of Him, except in the most roundabout and stealthy manner. What is it in this Man that conquers all who come in contact with Him? This man to whom all about Him go in their troubles, but who Himself, if He has any troubles never mentions them, except to rejoice over them as victories; this Man who is so universal that from Him we never hear the words. {{p2}}

As I write this or these words, tears fill my eyes and run down my cheeks, I whose heart has often seemed to him like a stone, a man hard-headed and combative by nature, accustomed to giving and receiving blows, one who has never been regarded as sentimental or emotional — I, as I recall my impressions of this Man, am obliged to confess that my heart melts like wax, that the tears blind my eyes, and that all desire for controversy and argument, except as God wills it is taken out of me. What, I repeat, is the strange Power of this Man, so simple, so natural, so unassuming, who asks for himself no special consideration, or reverence whatever, but continually points us to the things of the Spirit and to God. To tell you so as to make myself understood, is beyond any power which God has given to me, or to any man. There are some things which the heart can comprehend, but the tongue can not utter. (In a Tablet to me the Master once wrote) “Turn with thy heart to the heart of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the hidden mysteries will be revealed to thee”. I have obeyed this command and the mystery has been revealed to me. But I cannot express it in words, not even He can do that. The Mystery however, is no mystery at all to those who can meet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá heart to heart, and this meeting can be had, and many have been had without paying a physical visit to ‘Akká. Only through the Spirit can the reality and power of this Man be apprehended. One is reminded of the words of

Jesus — “No man cometh unto Me except the Father draw him”.

In spite of all I have said, however, I will try and give you an outer description of the Master. First it must be remembered, that he is 63 years old and that he has lived a life of imprisonment, of constant anxieties and of hardship. He looks His age, but no sign of physical weakness is apparent, on the contrary He impresses you as being full of strength and energy, an example of splendid manhood at that age. His hair and beard gray and the thoughtful lines on His face are in keeping with His years. His beard is not very full, but silvery white and of fine quality. His hair, which is the same color as the beard, he wears it about level with His shoulders; while the hair like the beard is inclined to thinness, there is as I remember, no sign of baldness. His nose is large, slightly aquiline and finely molded. His mouth is large and firm, but without being in the slightest degree hard, indicating a combination of firmness and kindness. His forehead is high and broad and full giving the impression of great intellectual power. But the wonderful thing about the Master's physical personality is His eyes. When I returned to 'Akká the first of June, I shall endeavor to more closely examine and describe those wonderful eyes — at this writing I must confess my inability, and to tell what it is about them that makes them so remarkable; whether they are black or blue or gray, or a combination of colors, I cannot say; in fact, fact, they seemed to change even as I looked at them and into them, as I did more than once. Of this I am quite certain, however, that I cannot think of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, nor say my prayers, without seeing these indescribable eyes, and more than once since I left 'Akká they have looked love at me in my dreams. But one tires of physicalities, the important matter is to try to realize the fragrance of the spirit that is being wafted from that exile city and from that pure heart.

Truly, there is that of 'Akká which cannot be seen with the physical eye, heard with the physical ear or understood with the intellect; a something which the heart can feel and the soul alone apprehend and which cannot be reduced to the physical symbols we call words. When the Master speaks a something is set in motion vibration over and above the physical words, a something which is spirit and life and which bestows spirit and life; and it would seem that outer words are merely a means of contact, or a physical medium of connection between the soul and this spirit and life which is imparted to the soul; that which the soul receives from the words, is far more than the mere outer form of the words would seem to warrant. For instance, I asked the Master for the answer to a question, which had troubled me for more than a year. He answered me in a few words without apparent and particular effort at explanation, yet His simple statement conveyed to me immediately an understanding of the whole matter that perfectly satisfied, perhaps the same words spoken by another would have made no impression for His answer was a simple statement without proof. Uttered by Him, however, they seemed to change the whole current of my thoughts, create a new consciousness in me, and supply me with the power of comprehension, so that a matter which had puzzled me for more than a year was cleared up in an instant. I trust this will convey to you my meaning that the real power at 'Akká is the power of Love and Knowledge purely spiritual in its manifestations,

a matter of the heart and of the soul, and has no connection whatever with physical miracle and phenomena. To realize who ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is, to understand His relation to Bahá’u’lláh and to Christ, to comprehend that He needs no other glorification, commendation, or exaltation that He is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. To know why it is that He commands that no other name or title should be given Him and that by no explanation or interpretation can the station of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá be made more glorious than it is, one must be able with the spiritual eyes to see the things of the spirit. If we are like Him we must realize that we are nothing and that God is all — must eliminate the ego — surrender the self — and allow God to do His work in us instead of imagining that we have any power to accomplish it within ourselves. To be able to apprehend the station of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is to apprehend at least in part the great truth of renunciation of absolute surrender to God; how easy to say but how difficult to really understand and to do. It means to be conscious of our nothingness and to open our souls and let the Fragrance of the Spirit flow through them. To feel that God is in us is doing our seeing, our willing, our thinking and relieving us of the responsibility. It is to understand that He is the Great Burden Bearer on whose shoulders is the government of all things. Here is the vicarious atonement worth having — a vicarious atonement which brings rest and peace and real salvation. Who are we and what can we accomplish? It is true that the station of man is very high, but it is high because of his capacity to receive God. The breeze of the Spirit blows by the rocks and the trees and the animals, but they are unconscious of it. Man, however, has the power not only to become conscious of it, but to become the instrument of it in the enlightenment of mankind and of the verification of the world; and this is a matter of simple faith. When we realize that we are nothing and stand humbly before God, we will be clothed upon by the Spirit. Adam and Eve tried to make for themselves garments of fig leaves. Useless, God gave them coats of skins. Jesus said “consider the lilies, how they grow; they toil not, they spin not, and yet I say unto you that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If God then so clothed the grass which today is in the field and tomorrow cast into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, “O ye of little faith”, with all our toiling and spinning and fretting, the best we can do is to clothe ourselves with mere garments of fig leaves with mere symbols to hid our ignorance. But those who have found the secret of turning to God and with perfect self-surrender and sure faith, receive spiritual garment so beautiful that the toiling metaphysical schools with their product of so called knowledge becomes a useless trouble and becomes weariness of the flesh. The secret of real spiritual power is the renunciation of self and dependance upon God. This spirit of renunciation and absolute submission and surrender to God is the spirit in which one is bathed in ‘Akká. The lesson of complete reliance upon God for all guidance, and for all knowledge is the Great Lesson we receive there and this is the secret of the Love that radiates from there. For when we submit to God we realize His love in us and radiate it from us. The Master has said that when we “receive the confirmation of the Holy Spirit, we need no other teacher”; but we cannot get that confirmation until we learn to rely on the spirit wholly. I trust that all may learn this great lesson, and cutting themselves from outer

personalities, lean entirely upon the inner Reality of which the Prophets are the authoritative and confirmed outer manifestation. To be free from personality, we must be free from our own personality. Once we have attained this freedom other personalities will cease to trouble us. Escaping our own personality, we must find refuge in the personality of God, for God has His personality as we have ours. And to try to escape it is to go to the other extreme of the exaltation of the Ego and to commit spiritual suicide. We are all well.

With Bahá'í love and greetings, Your brother in El Bahá, { .sig }

Hooper Harris Ragoon, April 18, 1907 { .sig }

These are pilgrims notes. However, Mrs. Berthelin Allien would like to tell the friends, she knew both of these men. And she says she is living witness as to the complete change in character of Mr. Hooper Harris. "He was a very argumentive type person and always looking for a fight, but after his visit with 'Abdu'l-Bahá, he immediately became the most loving and gentle person you can image. It was a miracle!" { {p4} }

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