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Josephine Cowles

1905

Alláh-u-Abhá!

To the dear friends and maid-servants of the Merciful, of Chicago:

Greetings and Salutation!

Our beloved sister, Agnew, has requested me to write to you of something with which I was deeply impressed while in ‘Akká, “the White City, the New Jerusalem by the tideless sea.”

To me while there, each day, hour, and moment, were fraught with such deep and impressive experiences, that the number perplexes me: “Like stars in a rich cluster in the heavens, they run together into a haze of brightness, only to be resolved into their separate elements by the strongest glass.” Each incident, if drawn apart and studied separately, affords reflection for both the mind and the heart.

Today the Master stands among us talking with us face to face like a brother, and giving us through His own Spirit, glimpses of that Heavenly rest, for which at times all the world doth sigh.

The Precious Words fell from his Divine Lips like strings of pearls seemed to fascinate as much as is wonderful Presence astonished.

One event which stands out pre-eminently and most impressive was the Anniversary of the Departure of Bahá’u’lláh – the revered Father of our beloved Master – on the 28th of May.

After a sojourn with those beloved people of nearly seven weeks, and my visit was about complete, it seemed like leaving Paradise, and I thought my heart would break. I knew that it was wrong, for had I not been blessed beyond all that I could ask or think? While I remained there what could I do to serve the Glorious Cause to which I desire to devote the remainder of my life!

To leave an atmosphere of love, which like the fragrance of rare exotics, permeated every thought, and where every service rendered was Divine – was almost beyond the power of human will, I knew that it was best – and while I was willing – I did not wish to go. But when the dear Master, like a pitying Father,

said – “Do not weep, I will be with you” – my heart was comforted; and again, when He told me that I was to remain until after the night of the Departure and receive that blessing, - I was almost happy.

On that evening, all the believers repaired to the Holy Tomb (which you probably know is about 2 miles outside of the city) there to spend the night. After we were driven there, where we met all the members of the Holy Household and the believers. The Tomb is connected with the main building (The Bahj) by a kind of chapel or enclosed garden, at the entrance of which you remove your shoes, and advance to the Holy Threshold, at which you kneel and pray.

The rooms were brilliantly illuminated with lamps and candelabra and thickly carpeted with rich Oriental rugs, all of which are love offerings from the many pilgrims from all over the world.

The Tomb proper was covered with a costly and most beautiful Persian shawl, and thickly strewn with flowers. The night was wondrously beautiful. The full moon was shining with such magnificence that it was almost as light as day. Through the open window we could see the Mediterranean in the distance, and the air was heavy with the fragrance of jasmine and roses. The only audible sound was the wail of a solitary night bird, whose cry seemed like some lone wanderer whose lamp had become extinguished and who was calling out for help. Within the chapel the aisles were filled with kneeling women, and one of the Holy Leaves chanted the prayers. The sky, the air, the sea – and even the flowers with which the room was profusely decorated – were in perfect concord. The solemn chanting amid those prostrate forms was a scene long to be remembered; and there we remained until midnight. Then we retired to the rooms on the left of the chapel, and the men in like manner filled the places so recently occupied by us. In that gathering were venerable men who have suffered years of imprisonment, whose shining faces beamed with holy light; young men were there, too, whose every look spoke of the deep veneration and love with which they had dedicated their lives to the Holy Cause; even the little grand-children were there, whose gentle and subdued manner spoke of [??]. One of the venerable believers chanted the Holy Utterances and Prayers, - and for three hours they remained in solemn devotion.

During that time there was a singular phenomenal occurrence. While from the open window we could distinguish the sea and sky in distance, which were beautifully calm and clear – not a cloud to be seen, where we were – there was quite a heavy thunder storm. The lightning flash and the reverberations of the thunder through the heavens seemed, indeed, as if God were speaking. The bowed forms of the worshippers and the solemn chanting, made one feel as if they stood upon the boundary of an invisible world – “One not made with hands, but eternal in the heavens.”

At three o’clock the men retired, the women went into the chapel and prayers again were chanted. Three of us went into the “Holy of Holies” – the Sacred Tomb – and there prostrated ourselves in prayer.

I have often wondered if the believers in other lands could think what was the burden of our supplications that night. While no one spoke to the other, I afterwards learned that the release of our beloved Master was the burden of all hearts poured out at the Holy Threshold of the Exalted and Divine Father, Lord of all the worlds.

On the Threshold of the Tomb were a few sprays of jasmine, which the Greatest Holy Leaf separated and gave a part to me.

In the early dawn we passed out and walked in the fields. The full moon was still above the horizon. The blue of the distant sea, the paling of the stars, the pure azure of the sky without a single cloud, the purple line of the low mountains in the east, and the plain of 'Akká, which had been the scene of some of earth's greatest conflicts – were all before us. As we wondered in the early dawn there was a calm such as would follow a night of deep excitement, and a feeling of expectancy as if we were waiting for something. It would take a mightier pen than mine to describe the wonderful emotion which took possession of us, and I could only think of the Holy women of nineteen hundred years ago watching at the Tomb of our crucified Saviour, Jesus Christ!

[??] is the dawn advanced the birds began to chant their morning matins, and as the sun burst forth upon our expectant vision in all of its splendour and poured a flood of golden light over the world, I could but exclaim: "The Lord is risen; yes, He has risen, indeed!"

O my beloved friends! How powerless are my words to make you see and feel what I experienced on the memorable night! It was like standing in some Holy sanctuary of a borders of a world beyond where we had entered into the Sacred Place of the Most High and communed with the Angels. A few hours of such a recollection will suffice for a lifetime. It is an experience never to be forgotten. It seemed as if we could never leave such an influence; and when we thought of the Precious Casket entombed in that Sacred Shrine, and what It had manifested to the world, we could but feel our utter unworthiness. To think of self or to harbour one selfish thought were worst than sacrilege.

But where this night is our Beloved Master? The Center of the Covenant, the Lover, the Friend of all the world? He is not with us. His Holy feet have not pressed the earth outside the city gates for four long years, but every foot of ground inside those walls have been made sacred and blessed.

In a little room on top of the house where He dwells, from whence He could see the Holy Tomb, He kept His lonely vigil. No – not alone, for who can tell what Heavenly Angels were there ministering unto Him, and like the Prophets of old, He may have talked with God. When we saw Him the next day His Face was resplendent with Divine Glory, and the Voice of the Holy Spirit rang clear in His every Utterance!

To perfect souls sorrow is not needed, but to the creatures like ourselves, seeking to escape the thrall and burden of animal propensities, sorrow is helpful and

necessary. As the frost unlocks the hard shell and sets free the kernel of fruit therein, so sorrow develops in us ripe fruit of the Spirit, and in noble natures unfolds the great plan of righteousness; only in gentle school master to those who are exercised thereby. Thus like raindrops falling to the earth but to spring up in flowers, all the good in the world which has risen has been born from some great soul's sorrow.

We all march under a Captain Who has been made perfect through suffering, and we are to find peace only as we learn of Him in the school of patience and obedience.

Our blessed Master has said that "when we are all in perfect unity in America, every door of inner significance will be opened," This is the vital need of the hour and can never be accomplished until we learn to serve that we may become "producers of Unity" in the highest service. Our Merciful Lord has been so patient and long-suffering that we must not be satisfied with a little unity: nothing short of falling at His Feet in perfect obedience will ever bring the desired result.

"Our Beloved Lord is surrounded by trials, difficulties, and sorrows, the greatness of which it is impossible for us for one moment to realize, and the only thing which can render assistance unto Him, is the unision of the hearts of His people, the binding together of the nation and the universal spreading of the knowledge of the Greatest and Most Glorious Manifestion and the acceptance of His Covenant, which He has made to endure forever and ever. We squander life's forces in intermitted effort, while our endowments are great. Yet they are frittered away uselessly. But when we unite in one grand spontaneous harmonious whole and all become part of one reality, there will be a breadth, a depth, which will yield more of joy than we can now realize. If we carry a lighted torch can we keep the light from shining in other people's eyes?"

How few are those who have only obtained a glimpse of Him Whose Holy Fragrance makes 'Akká the Mecca of longing hearts! But to be there and behold Him in His Majesty, it is impossible to ever again be separated from Him! Still many behold Him, yet see Him not! Many hear His Words, yet know not their meaning!

As we come to the mildness and serenity of spring only through the blustering and boisterous days of March, - so the now Kingdom must enter through a period of resistance and persecution, and all who are taking part in the early establishment have to accept persecution and learn to find joy in it, as the sign that they are exalted to a superior realm of experience, to the companionship of the noble heroes of prophetic ages, and the fellowship with God.

"It all lies herein, entrance into the reality of the Covenant, Realization of the Mysteries, glories of love, servitude, prayer, holiness, humility and the inner apprehension of the meaning of Allah-u-Abhá."

Your humble sister and servant,

(signed) Josephine C. Cowles

Read at the Tea, March 29th 1905.