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March of 1921

Interviews with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá at Tiberias.

The following exquisite picture describes the approach of two very devout Christians, Professor and Mrs. Kuns to the Holy Land and their interviews with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá at the Easter season in 1921. Professor Kunz is a University scientist. His wife is the daughter of a prominent professor of Theology. They were sojourning in Switzerland, their homeland, whence they travelled to Palestine in March of 1921.

With ‘Abdu’l-Bahá at Tiberias and Haifa.

By Anna Kunz.

To approach Haifa by boat is most wonderful. It was just a few minutes before midnight of March the twenty-second, 1921, when the “Karlshad” entered the blessed harbor of Haifa, drooping anchor stout a mile off the shore. The full moon stood bright and glorious over Mount Carmel along the sea shore up towards the mountain every house could be seen. There were a few lights only, but the moon illumined the whole country most beautifully. My heart was aching as I stood in silent prayer, but the wonderful spirit of that sacred place and land soon filled my heart and I realized that we had finally reached the Holy Land holy in the past, holy in this great day of God and holy forever.

Early in the morning my husband and I were met by Dr. Luṭfu’lláh Ḥakím, whom ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had sent, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was not at Haifa. After a severe illness, he had gone to Tiberias for a rest. In his absence, we were beautifully taken care of by his family and friends. Awaiting ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s further instructions as to when we should be permitted to meet him, we enjoyed Haifa and ‘Akká.

In the pilgrim house, located near 'Abdu'l-Bahá's house, we were given room with a view up Mount Carmel. It did not take us long to understand why this rather low mountain range is called the Mountain of God, His spirit indeed lingers there. The whole atmosphere seemed laden with a glorious something, with a great peace, with a joy from on high. This mountain, sacred through the memory of past prophets has received a new baptism of the spirit in this dispensation. Shortly after our arrival we were climbing over the rocky path to the Tomb of the Báb. It was a glorious spring morning. The birds were singing, flowers of all kinds were blooming everywhere. Mount Carmel seemed to speak aloud of all the blessings that God had spread there. It is true, we were greatly favored to be permitted to come to those places during the year's most beautiful season. But we deeply felt, though the outward beauty of that country was heavenly, that there was another beauty dominant, beauty that could never vanish. The beauty of the spirit will always linger there and will be found by the pilgrims of any season. God's spirit surrounds us certainly everywhere, but there it seems to hover in great abundance, as it has led God to bless this country above others. This spirit of love and rearm, of service and self-forgetfulness, emanates as it were from a great consciousness of God's presence overwhelmed us constantly. This happened again and again as we entered the Tomb of the Báb, while at the Holy Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh, and while with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's family. And him, through whom in this age this splendor is conveyed to God's creature we finally saw at Tiberias, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Servant of God, we were permitted to see.

As on that beautiful spring morning, so also at other times, once at night with the moon as our guide, we went to the Tomb of the Báb. Oh, that all the Bahá'ís could realize the fragrance of that place! Each time we went there it seemed more beautiful. As one enters that sanctuary one feels at once in union with the higher world. As we knelt there in prayer my heart seemed to melt, there was but one great longing. When we prayed there for the last time, it was in the evening before our departure, it was as if my heart would break. I knew that I loved this place more than any other place in the world. Since we have gone away, during all these past months, there would often come over me a great longing for that holy shrine and again and again my thoughts wander there and I kneel down at this shrine and rest. Now that this building is the resting place of 'Abdu'l-Bahá too, it must be more glorious than ever.

'Abdu'l-Bahá's family keeps open house all the time. The women pilgrims are always welcome among those beautiful women and their children. They live a Life of great simplicity; their life is a reflection of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's life. Their thoughts are with him always; they love him with a deep abiding love; they serve in his footsteps and for his sake serve all mankind. Many a precious lesson was taught to me while in this household. Often I was surprised to see that in spite of their restricted life these women uphold a truly broad attitude towards life in general; they are full of the universal spirit; they know no narrowness they are all-inclusive and therefore heavenly.

On Good Friday, before sunrise, we started for ‘Akká and Bahjí. We were a beautiful little group, two grandsons of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, some other young men, the Master’s youngest daughter, Monaver Khánum, Mr. Kunz and myself. From the station we walked over the green meadows towards Bahjí, Passing Bahjí palace we soon reached the little house, where ‘Abdu’l-Bahá often stayed for days and where all the visiting friends rest before entering the Tomb. When we passed through the blooming garden, which was fragrant like the place around the Tomb of the Báb, after removing our shoes, we entered the court. There we all knelt at the door which leads to the holy shrine of Bahá’u’lláh, while Monaver Khánum with a sweet voice chanted the Visiting Tablet. Then he opened the door and invited us to follow her. The place was filled with the fragrance of Jasmine blossoms, a heavenly light filled the room. Here we felt at ones at rest and were permitted to pray for our friends, for the world, whose savior had come as a thief in the night. Here heaven and earth seemed to meet. He certainly has made his resting place glorious. Before the onrush of his spirit all human thoughts had to die; there was but one prayer possible, that all the world would soon be enabled to serve at this holy Threshold. This was my great longing and this only had importance before so meek glory. Tears were welcome, they brought relief to the heart so overfull. Everybody slowly withdrew leaving Mr. Kuns and myself alone at the Holy Shrine, whence for ages to some people of all classes, races and religion will derive new strength and assurance of God’s nearness. When we finally had reached the garden again, we found a few Hindu soldiers there. They were talking with the Tomb keeper and we were told that many of them, (not Bahá’ís at all) would often come to the gate of this sacred place, kiss the wall and withdraw again, explaining that they felt and knew that they were standing on Holy ground.

During the afternoon we saw the Ridván. We also visited the barracks, where the first Bahá’ís with Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spent their years of imprisonment. Filled with seared memories we returned in the evening to Haifa. The next morning we were to leave for Tiberias, where the blessed Master expiated us.

‘Azíz’u’lláh Bahadur accompanied us to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. From the train we could see Nazareth. We finally reached the Jordan valley and arrived, after three hours ride, at the southern end of Lake Tiberias whence we continued by boat to the old and unique little town of Tiberias. So we finally reached the goal of our journey. We were to see ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

How I wish that I could be worthier to tell of his glory, as he walked among men in human flesh, unknown to most people, and understood by a few only. On the day of our arrival we got only a few glimpses of the Beloved, but they were sufficient to make us realize that his power and authority were not of this world. It was a bright and luminous Easter morning when the Master called us into his room. Oh, that I could picture him to all those who never saw him, could picture him in these simple surroundings at the shores of that same lake where Christ walked and taught. Though I feared to approach him, after his loving

words of welcome this fear vanished. Here we sat before our Master, in a little room with only the most necessary furnishings on top of the hotel, with a view of that blessed lake. His look seems to go into ones very heart. Yes, he knows his children and their need. As I think of him now, I always love to think, first, of his great simplicity, his marvellous humility which knows of no self-existence, and last, or better, first, of his boundless love. To us his outward appearance seemed similar to that of the old Hebrew Prophets.; his humility, his simplicity and love were like the Christ. This boundless love conquered the hearts at once. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá talked to us with a ringing, piercing voice which will forever sound in my ears. His words would come forth with that unique simplicity, then he would pause for a while, often closing his eyes. His spirit, it seemed when I dared to look at him, had left his body; he was looking into infinitude, communing with that world for which we long. Having seen him, we could understand well what he meant when he said to us, “the Prophet discerns by sight.” We came before him, my husband especially with many, many questions in our minds, but sitting in his rooms we seemed to forget them or better, there did not exist any unsolved problems. He said, “God has created a remedy for every disease”, and while in his presence, we tasted of this remedy.

During the days of our stay at the hotel we saw ‘Abdu’l-Bahá often. We followed him as he walked peacefully to a nearby garden. Unknown he passed through the crowd. We saw him come back to the hotel, climbing the many steps to his room with a youthfulness that made a husband say “It looks as if he were carried over these flights of steps by union hands.” Though he was at Tiberias for a rest he received visitors all day long. During those three days spent near him his love would more and more fill our hearts, so that my was sad and depressed when on Tuesday morning I realized that he was to say goodbye to us that day. And as he bade us goodbye our hearts wore near to breaking. As our tears of love and gratefulness flowed he suddenly left his room telling us to remain within.

Before leaving Haifa we saw the Master not unexpectedly again. A few beautiful pictures of how he lived and loved in his own home I shall cherish forever. And as we left his glorious earthly home I felt as others, permitted to come into his presence, have felt. I realized that we could in no way comprehend him, we could only love him, follow him, obey him and thereby draw nearer to his beauty.

His words spoken to us we herewith gladly share with all the friends.

Tiberias. Easter morning.

The Master welcomed us heartily and said: “I was very glad to hear of your coming. When all the people are negligent you have been chosen by God! You came to the Holy Land, attained to the pleasure of visiting the Holy Tomb and were able to come and visit me here. How are the friends in America?” We told the Master that the friends are well.

We told the Master of a group of Jews who were on the boat from Brindisi to

Palestine. He said: "In their heavenly books the prophets have spoken of the Day of the Lord, the Last Day, and what they have spoken is all being realized in this day. The Blessed Beauty sixty years ago in some of his tablets premised the Jews that they would come back to the Holy Land and what he said will be realized. The pavilion of the Lord will be pitched on the mountain and this was fulfilled. The pavilion of the Blessed Beauty was often pitched on Mount Carmel and the plain and hills around 'Akká while he was a prisoner. He was subject to two despotic kings and he was under severe restrictions. Then guards were placed at the gate everybody was forbidden to in him. But his pavilion was pitched on the hills. He would go and spend some days in them, and yet he was a prisoner.

We told the story of Mr. Schneider. (Mr. Schneider was a refugee from Russia. He reached the northern boundary of Persia penniless, knowing no one and ignorant of his route. Some people met him and took him to their home where he sojourned for several days and then was taken by his host to the next village and to a home where he was welcomed and entertained. From village to village he was conducted, and cared for, until at last in safety he reached the sea coast. On inquiring at last who could be these people who had treated him with such marvelous kindness he learned that they were all Bahá'ís.) He ('Abdu'l-Bahá) said such should be the case with all the Bahá'ís. They should be the mercy of God to all the people of the earth without distinction of race and religion. Bahá'u'lláh's light has shone forth upon all. His rain of mercy has fallen on every spot just as the sun shines upon the pure and the sinner. The rain falls upon good soil and the rocks. The attributes of the Bahá'ís should be the same. They should be the light of guidance to all the people. We said: "Easter has a new significance for us. Resurrection has a new meaning." 'Abdu'l-Bahá said: "It is a good, significant coincidence that we meet at this place where Christ told 'fisher to become a fisher of men." He pointed out the place, about 150 meters away, where this happened. The Sermon on the Mount was preached on Mount Tabor, which, as an accompanying Jew told us, dominates Galilee.

Monday morning at 7:30

Looking at our children's picture his beautiful face lighted up and after looking at it for a long while he said: "They have bright faces. They will be real Bahá'ís because they will have a Bahá'í education. They will become good Bahá'ís.

Question: "Science denies immortality. How does the prophet know the contrary?"

The Master said: "Science does not know; but the Manifestation makes discoveries with the power of the Spirit. For instance: a philosopher with induction finds out a way. But the prophet discerns with sight. A blind man has to find his way with a stick from point to point; so a philosopher through arguments from premises goes to conclusions, and not by sight. But the Manifestations see with their inner eye (own eye); they do not go from premises to conclusions.

The prophets see many things with their inner eye. They do not need to go by discoveries. The scientist with induction is like a blind man who cannot see two steps ahead of him. The prophet sees a long distance."

Question: "Shall I find my mother again?"

The Master said: "Certainly. Separation is only in the world of bodies."

Questions "Will the day come when all mankind will be able to discern by sight?"

He said: "There will always be some. Only a special number will have this attainment. As Christ said, 'Many are called, but few are chosen.' It will always be so. The transformation depends upon divine bounty. The mineral progresses in its own world. Put from the mineral to the vegetable it progresses only by divine bounty. Also transformation from the vegetable to the animal is God's plan. Of itself the transformation cannot take place. In the realm of men transformation is possible only through another person."

Question: "When people deny religion how shall we deal with them?"

Answer: "You must be tolerant and patient, because the station of eight is a station of bounty; it is not based on capacity. They must be educated."

Question: "What are the requisites for a successful meeting?"

Answer: "Before the meeting you must pray and supplicate for divine assistance."

Question: "Shall we devote much time to the study of philosophy?"

Answers "Everything must be done moderately. Excess is not desirable. Do not go to extremes. Even in thinking do not go to excess but be moderate. If there is too much thinking you will be unable to control your thoughts."

I asked the Master to assist me in the physical sciences, in the solution of problems. He said: "You will be able to solve these problems."

Addressing both of us: "You are confirmed. Another power will help you." - (besides the power of science.)

Question: "Why so much evil in the world?"

Answer: "God has created a remedy for every disease. One must apply the remedy. Now these patients run away from the expert physician. They neglect him. Under inexperienced physicians they get worse. The words of the religious leaders have no influence, no effect. These physicians are more diseased than their patients. The spiritual leaders now have no faith, though they claim to have faith in order to secure their positions."

Monday afternoon at 4 o'clock

We thanked the Master for the prayer revealed for our children. He said "It is for your sake that I wrote it."

Question: "What is the best method to spread this Cause?"

Answer: "Explain the teachings, the principles of this Cause. Some of them were revealed fifty years ago, some sixty years ago. Fifty years ago there was no thought of universal peace and arbitration. No one spoke of the oneness of religion and science. Now many spread them in their own ways, I spread them through numerous churches and papers in America; then glee in Europe.

"The word of God is powerful. It will come to pass."

Question: Should these principles be spread under the name of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, or without these names?"

Answer: In the beginning you should mention Bahá'u'lláh. They are his and are spread by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. When all the world was in disorder, when warfare was prevailing in the East and the West, Russia with Turkey, Persia with England and Afghánistán, and Garibaldi was fighting, the East was in intense darkness. There was prejudice of race and religion, national and political prejudice. The East was in intense darkness; the sun was very dark. And at such a time Bahá'u'lláh arose and spread a set of teachings."

Question: "The students in the schools have to study so many subjects! There are arising more and more sciences. What should be the remedy?"

Answer: "It is too much. One must be moderate in choosing the number of subjects. When there are too many the result is confusion. Moderation is necessary. For instance: if a man has the power to carry a load of three hundred (pounds) he no doubt would fall if we give him one thousand (pounds). He cannot bear it. In the same way, one brain must not be overburdened. For instance: students should not have more than six hours a day, lessons and preparations included. Otherwise they will not succeed. The brain becomes tired"

Monday afternoon, March 28, 1921

The Master! "This lake is very blessed. His Holiness Christ and the other prophets walked along its shore and were in communion with God all the time and spreading the divine teachings. Now, praise be to God that you reached this land safely and we met one another on the shore of this same lake! You will receive great results from this visit afterwards. You will become the cause of the illumination of the world of humanity. You will release the hearts of the people from the intense darkness of different prejudices, so that each soul may love all the people of the world, without distinction. Just like a shepherd who is affectionate to all his sheep, without preference or distinction you should be

affectionate, to all. You should not look at their shortcomings. Consider that they are all created by God who loves them all.”

Tuesday morning, March 29th

The Master: “You have been here three days. They are equal to three years. In the Bible in the days of the Lord one day was equal to one year. I hope that these three days are equal to three years. The results of this visit will be equal to the results of three years. Now you should go back in perfect harmony and joy and with supreme glad tidings. You should gladden the hearts with glad tidings of the Beauty of Abhá. Say to the friends: ‘The Kingdom of God has been opened to you. The tree of life is yours. Heavenly graces are bestowed upon you. The effulgence of the Sun of Truth is shed on you. God has chosen you. This crown He has placed upon your head. This eternal life has been given you. Therefore you should be very happy. Turn day and night to the Kingdom of Abhá. Supplicate for boundless favors from that Kingdom.’

“I am praying every night and supplicate and implore. I beg of God to bestow upon you infinite grace so that all at us may attain to the station of servitude, so that we Say do as ‘do wishes us to do. We are all His drawing light from the Sun of Abhá.”