**From Adrianople**

**to ‘Akká**

A talk by A. Q. Faizi

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# Introduction

The glorious Sun of Truth rising from its homeland

had ascended in its orbit, and in the years of banish-

ment in Adrianople had mounted to its zenith of all-

conquering majesty and might.

As Bahá’u’lláh rose in His power and grandeur,

believers from all walks of life abandoned their homes

and sought haven and shelter in His nearness. When

faced with tests, trials and ordeals, rather than re-

nounce their faith, the true companions of Bahá

contented themselves with the bare necessities of life,

intensified their spiritual fervour, welcomed any

calamity in His path and through the sweat and

strain of suffering offered their very lives as humble

tokens of love at the sacred altar of the Lord of the

Age.

There were also those who, immersed in the

trivialities of life, enslaved by their own corrupt

inclinations and assisted by persons drunk with pride

and power, arose, with all the energy, evil, unmiti-

gated hatred and bitterness of their sinful souls, to

challenge the nascent and already vigorously grow-

ing Cause of God. The devastating effects of such

deeds created clouds of suspicion, hatred and wrath

that dimmed the radiance of the Greatest Name.

Never should we think of Bahá’u’lláh as one

amongst many. Though He appeared in a physical

human temple, He remained always far above—im-

measurably far above—the reach and ken of men.

No tempest could move the hem of His garment.

No waves of calamities could ever sprinkle a drop in

His serene presence. How can mortal man ever cover

the face of the Sun with the veil of his evil plottings?

Nay, the sun shines above all clouds and eventually

disperses them. So was to be the destined mission of

the Ancient Beauty throughout His eventful life.

Though sorely tried He remained lofty and unshaken.

Though relentlessly calumniated, He was never

resentful or vindictive. The evil deeds of the world

could never be commensurate with His intense long-

ing to save the children of men, to redeem their souls

and to put them on the right path to God.

No ingratitude, no lack of virtue could lessen His

love. No depths of infamy could prevent the seem-

ingly hopeless and unrepentant humanity from re-

ceiving the open treasures of His clemency and

compassion.

In the innermost shrine of His own Being, He

remained calm and serene. The rays of His redeeming

light continued to penetrate the clouds of accumu-

lated vice which had covered the sin-stained souls of

men.

With these thoughts in mind let us review the

events that marked the different stages of Bahá’u’-

lláh’s banishment from Adrianople to the Fortress

of ‘Akká.

I The latter days in
Adrianople

The followers of Azal, long-standing enemies of

Bahá’u’lláh, finding all their attempts to destroy the

Faith abortive, tried to tarnish the lustre His Cause

had achieved through Himself, His family and His

followers.

First they sent people to the Court to complain

that they had insufficient means of livelihood, blam-

ing the Blessed Perfection for this. Then Áqá Ján-i-

Kaj-Kuláh, instigated by Siyyid Muḥammad, wrote

letters to the dignitaries and government representa-

tives containing the false accusation that Bahá’u’lláh

had made an alliance with Bulgaria, and had gathered

together many people under His sway for the sole

purpose of conquering Constantinople.

The Persian Ambassador in Constantinople, who

had always been prepared to initiate or support any

plot against Bahá’u’lláh and His followers, took

advantage of the disturbance in Turkey and immedi-

ately informed the Persian Consuls in Egypt and

‘Iráq that the Turkish Government had withdrawn

its protection of the Bábí Sect. This news convulsed

both countries and unleashed the hidden forces of

malice and mischief.

‘Abdu’r-Rasúl-Qumí, who was one of the excep-

tional souls and a true and enthusiastic lover of the

Ancient Beauty, had suffered long years of imprison-

ment in Ṭihrán, and, after his release visited Bahá’u’l-

láh in Adrianople and took his residence in Baghdád.

To soften the pangs of separation from Him and

to assuage the burning fire within his heart, he

undertook the responsibility of taking care of the

garden in the House of Bahá’u’lláh in Baghdád.

Every day he brought water in skin bags from the

Tigris River and watered the roses in his Beloved’s

garden. Thus he had become well-known and a

target of the Muslims’ cruel attacks. One day, at the

hour of dawn, a number of these people, rushing out

from their hiding places, stabbed him from all sides.

Though fatally wounded, with blood gushing forth

he succeeded in dispersing his attackers, retained his

balance and dragged himself to the garden of his

Beloved where, for the last time, he watered the

flowers of the House before yielding his last heroic

breath.[1]

It was also during these latter days that Nabíl

arrived in Adrianople after a very long, exhausting

and successful teaching tour in Persia and ‘Iráq. He

became very sad when he looked upon the counten-

ance of the Ancient Beauty. He found Him as if sus-

pended in boundless space, attacked with swords and

spears by the whole world. Bahá’u’lláh had no shel-

ter except His Most Great Branch who, like a com-

pass, never ceased to turn to, and circle around, His

Lord.

Bahá’u’lláh’s true and faithful brother, Mírzá

Músá, with the permission of Bahá’u’lláh, had been

living in Smyrna. Yaḥyá lived in Adrianople,

1 Bahá’u’lláh mentioned him in many Tablets, con-

soling his mother and relatives and appointed his son

caretaker of the pilgrims in ‘Akká. The son served in

this post until the days of the beloved Guardian. The

Master advised Rasúl’s relatives to perpetuate his

name.

unreasonably filled with fear because of the majesty

and power with which the Tablets to the Kings had

been revealed. Such was the extent of his fear that

he ventured to suggest to Bahá’u’lláh that it would

have been better if Bahá’u’lláh’s address to the Sulṭán

described the Divine Message as a humble provision

offered to the King. Bahá’u’lláh’s reply was that if He

were the Divine Messenger He would describe His

message as nothing short of abundant provision.

Nabíl was commissioned to deliver a Tablet of

Bahá’u’lláh to His brother, Mírzá Músá, also known

as Áqáy-i-Kalím. On arriving at Smyrna Nabíl

gave the Tablet to him, and after reading it,

said, “The days of hardships are approaching. At

times of suffering I do not like to be away from His

Holy Presence.” He therefore accompanied Nabíl on

his return to Adrianople. On the way they received

the news that some of the believers had already been

arrested. “These are the first waves of the ocean of

Calamity” was Kalím’s immediate remark as he

heard the news.

It was in the middle of winter and snow had

covered the mountains and plains when our two

precious travellers arrived in the Land of Mystery,

only to find it in a state of confusion.

Bahá’u’lláh had openly encouraged the friends to

disperse as He did not want them to be inflicted with

more hardships nor did He desire them to be exiled

or imprisoned. He would rather have them scattered

around the world to propagate the Word of God and

to win victories for His struggling Faith in various

lands. But those who lived in His nearness were so

enthralled by His love that they remained heedless

of His warnings, preferring hardship to separation

from Him.

Bahá’u’lláh instructed Nabíl to proceed to Egypt

and appeal to the Khedive on behalf of the friends

who had been unjustly treated.

It was during these days also that the loving heart

of the Supreme Manifestation was turned towards His

persecuted friends in different parts of the world.

The shadow of the dark days ahead was slowly

approaching and He could see the sorrow and grief

of His lovers, who at times were utterly cut off from

any news of Him and His family. Therefore He

revealed several brief Tablets to be despatched to the

friends. These Tablets are extremely touching, inti-

mate and uplifting. They were meant to strengthen

His oppressed followers so that they would not lose

heart if they did not hear from or about Him for a

long time.

The contents of these Tablets are sources of delight

and encouragement to all the friends throughout

eternity. In them He praises God and offers thanks-

giving and gratitude for this further humiliation

inflicted in the path of God. In one instance He

addresses Himself and says that He should remember

God and bear in mind His promise[2] that He would

stand with Him forever and would help and assist

Him under all conditions. The Ancient Beauty

addresses the people of the earth in one of these

Tablets, and lamenting, asks them how and when

they could prevent the Divine Youth from mention-

ing the All-Knowing God. He asserts the utter

failure of all the united forces of the world to extin-

guish the fire of His Faith. He seeks to awaken in the

hearts of men the consciousness that no power in the

universe can prevent the blowing of winds, and that

He Himself, like unto a leaf, is powerless to stir

except when the winds of the Will of God are blow-

2 The same promise is mentioned in the Epistle to

the Son of the Wolf.

ing. In several places He exhorts the friends never to

forget Him even if the cruel ones of the earth should

cast Him in a fathomless pit because, in such a state,

the fire of His love would burn more intensely than

before. This fire was of such a nature that if all the

seas were poured on it, it would continue to burn. In

some places He explicitly mentions that the Prisoner

of Adrianople says that the place of His incarceration

is the Fortress of ‘Akká, well-known for its putrid

air and foul water. He furthermore points out that

though the sole aim of such banishments is to humi-

liate the Manifestation of God, the friends should,

under no circumstances, feel sad and despondent,

because such sufferings in the path of the Lord are

like unto the showers of rain on the plains, and serve

as fuel for the celestial Lamp. Were His head to

adorn the point of the spear, His tongue would con-

tinue to proclaim the name of the All-Merciful. At

the end of one of these Epistles, He says that the

Divine Youth is prevented from writing. His enemies

had imprisoned Him and His pen. The latter was

more unbearable to Him. Had it not been for such

restrictions He would have sent a message to every

one of the believers throughout the world.

Thus He wrote His Tablets, and thus He dispersed

His friends. He sent the pilgrims away, He strength-

ened the hearts of His lovers in all lands, and He

remained as ever contented and prepared to welcome

the shafts of the enemy.

II Events preceding
His exile

The people in Turkey, and especially those who were

privileged to live near Bahá’u’lláh, such as the

inhabitants of Adrianople, had the highest respect

and reverence for Him and in the course of time

they came to know and love Him from the depths

of their beings. The successive local governors of the

city one after the other paid their homage to the

Blessed Beauty. Amongst them the noble and honest

Khurshíd Páshá shines as the radiant sun from the

horizon of faithfulness. In answer to reports from

Constantinople he courageously refuted the unjust

accusations heaped upon Bahá’u’lláh. As long as he

was governor he visited Bahá’u’lláh on the occasion

of Feasts and, wherever he went, he openly declared

that nothing except sanctified words and holy deeds

emanated from His Holy Presence. He never

approved of or agreed with the deeds of the unjust

rulers in the capital. Bahá’u’lláh praised him in one

of His Tablets by characterizing him as the strongest

pillar of the Ottoman Government whose heart

enshrined the greatest amount of love. Yet, Bahá’u’l-

láh continues, even to him no word was mentioned

about personal affairs. To Bahá’u’lláh this would

have been the lowest of deeds.

Khurshíd Páshá was very sad and disheartened

when the authorities in Constantinople would not

handle the affairs of Bahá’u’lláh with justice and faith.

When the hour struck and he found matters beyond

his control, he felt so ashamed of such cruel treatment

towards a great Person that he abandoned his

official responsibilities and left everything in the

hands of a Registrar.

The inhabitants of Adrianople were well ac-

quainted with the friends and knew of the detached

way they had lived amongst them. The people

really loved them and very much desired that they

would be allowed to continue living in their town.

The news of the unexpected decrees, therefore, sur-

prised and grieved them. As they met in mosques,

coffee-houses or markets, they invariably asked one

another, “Why should these people be victims of

such cruel treatment? We have not seen anything

from them except honesty and truthfulness.” When

they found that Bahá’u’lláh and His companions

were to be forced to depart, they all wept and

wailed.

Not only did the people, dignitaries and authorities

in Adrianople show their grief and sorrow, but the

representatives of European countries were also

moved. Some of them sought the presence of

Bahá’u’lláh and pleaded with Him to utter one word

and they would arise to help Him and His friends

and rescue them from their difficulties. They even

said that they would inform their respective govern-

ments to resolutely prevent the perpetration of such

inhuman deeds. To all of them Bahá’u’lláh replied

that He sought no remover of difficulties save God

and would turn His face in supplication to no place

except to His Threshold. He then showered His love

and bounties upon them and sent them away from

His presence resigned and contented.

Meanwhile contradictory rumours had been

spread which lent their share to the convulsion of

affairs. Some said that only those whose names had

been registered in Government books could accom-

pany their Lord. Others reported that Bahá’u’lláh

and His brothers and families would be taken to

different destinations, the rest being sent to their own

respective countries. In the words of one of the

companions, “I well remember as though it were

only yesterday, the fresh misery into which we were

plunged, to be separated from our Beloved; and He,

what new grief was in store for Him? He accepted

all vicissitudes with His calm, beautiful smile, cheer-

ing us with wonderful words.”

Those who had lived day and night in or near His

house, found separation the most unbearable of all

sufferings. They decided, therefore, that they would

undergo any bitter test rather than be deprived of

His presence.

One night the friends were gathered in a house

and naturally discussed the prevailing rumours of the

city. Ḥájí Ja‘far-i-Tabrízí, one of the staunch fol-

lowers of Bahá’u’lláh, was also there. In the middle

of their conversation they heard a faint voice from

under the window—the voice of someone struggling

for breath. They rushed out and found Ḥájí Ja‘far in a

desperate condition. He had cut his throat with a

razor and blood was gushing out. The friends first

informed the Master Who immediately sent men to

fetch a surgeon and a Qádí. The surgeon’s house was

near and fortunately he came quickly, treated the cut

and enabled Ḥájí Ja‘far to talk. When the Qádí

reached the scene, he asked who had been responsible

for the deed. He asked Ḥájí Ja‘far several times, and

every time he replied, “When I came to know that

I would be deprived from His Holy Presence, I did

not desire to live any more.” When asked again he

confirmed, “Feeling lonely and separated from Him

prompted me to sacrifice my life.” The people who

loved the Bahá’ís and revered them increased in their

wonderment as they witnessed such acts of love,

detachment and spiritual consecration. It was

remarked by them that the Bahá’ís knew that they

would be taken to exile and imprisonment and yet

they were ready to meet greater hardships, to offer

their lives, and to welcome even death, as they could

not bear the thought of separation from their

Beloved. What ties held them together? How could

they comprehend those mysterious bonds of love

which were beyond the reach of men’s concepts and

standards? Ḥájí Ja‘far received assurance and treat-

ment and became better. On another day, shortly

afterwards, Bahá’u’lláh received him, promised him

that he would eventually attain his heart’s desire, and

exhorted him not to be sad. He must be patient, fix

his gaze upon God, feel happy and abide by His

Will.

III His departure to
Gallipoli and the
episode of Dhabíḥ
(surnamed Anís)

One day soldiers were posted at the doors of

Bahá’u’lláh’s residence in order to guard the House

and allow no one to go in or out,

His companions were also arrested, taken to the

Governor’s office and imprisoned one night. In the

course of the investigations they were asked whether

they were followers of Bahá’u’lláh, to which they

invariably answered with great courage and audacity,

professing their faith in Him. They were then com-

manded to sell their property and get ready for depar-

ture. Needless to say, the friends auctioned their

belongings and lost almost everything they possessed,

yet they stood firm and resolute, determined to

accompany their Beloved to the ends of the earth.

The day of departure was fixed. Carriages were

brought to the House, and the friends helped in load-

ing them with luggage. These went first.

Mírzá Yaḥyá and Siyyid Muḥammad also de-

parted on the same day. One week passed and then

came the turn of Bahá’u’lláh.

On the morning of departure, the members of the

household took their seats in the carriages. About

noon Bahá’u’lláh came out of His House.

Throngs of people had gathered at the door to bid

Him farewell and look for the last time upon His

countenance. Their grief had no end. Signs of

anguish and sorrow were witnessed on all faces. They

approached the Ancient Beauty and either kissed

His hand or knelt and touched the hem of His robe,

reverently kissing it too. They uttered words which

expressed their sorrowful state and deprivation. It

was indeed a strange day. It seemed that even the

walls and gates of the town were lamenting. Amidst

such expressions of profound love and respect

Bahá’u’lláh set out at midday on the last stage of His

banishment, depositing “beneath every tree and

every stone a trust, which God will ere long bring

forth through the power of truth.”[3]

3 Súriy-i-Ra’ís.

Thus the Sun of Truth pursued its course towards

its setting point.

They spent four days on their way to Gallipoli, a

town on the shore of the Sea of Marmara. All the

captives were to be gathered in this town, whence

their journey on the sea would begin.

Jináb-i-Dhabíḥ, afterwards surnamed Anís, and

his friends, who had gone to Adrianople during the

last days of Bahá’u’lláh’s sojourn in that city and

were instructed to proceed to Gallipoli, were already

here and attained the presence of their Lord.

Here again the companions of Bahá’u’lláh under-

went fresh tests by hearing contradictory reports

about the possible dispersion of the friends and fresh

plights to be heaped upon Bahá’u’lláh.

Ḥasan Effendi, the Turkish Captain who had

escorted Bahá’u’lláh and His companions to the port,

sought His presence in absolute humility and sub-

mission to bid farewell. Through him Bahá’u’lláh

sent a verbal message to the Sulṭán in Constantinople.

“Tell the King that this territory will pass out of his

hands, and his affairs will be thrown into confusion.

Not I speak these words, but God speaketh them.”[4]

He then told the Captain that it would have been

fair if the Sulṭán had arranged a gathering of the

divines where Bahá’u’lláh could bring forth the

proofs of His truthfulness. If the Sulṭán could find

anything in the community which created corrup-

tion and upheaval in his domains, then it would be

just for him to treat them in the way that he had

chosen. What had been done, He affirmed, was

according to the desires of those who had grudges

in their hearts and followed their passions and base

desires instead of the true path of God. They had

4 *God Passes By*, page 181.

committed unwarranted deeds without the least

proof. The Captain promised to convey Bahá’u’lláh’s

message to the King.

Thus was Ḥasan Effendi sent back to Constanti-

nople. A Major, ‘Umar Effendi, replaced him, who

brought the confusion created by the rumours to an

end. He announced that those whose names had not

been registered in the Government books could

board the ship, provided they would arrange their

own affairs.

Before leaving Gallipoli, Bahá’u’lláh informed the

friends of the hard days ahead of them and warned

them against the divine tests which would befall

each and all of the companions. He asked them to

ponder His words and to return if they found them-.

selves unprepared. He even warned them against the

impossibility of returning in case of repentance.

To reach the Austrian boat which had anchored far

away from the shore the passengers had to cross in

small sailing boats. At the time that Bahá’u’lláh was

entering one of these boats He was already uttering

verses. Jináb-i-Anís and his companions were stand-

ing on the shore watching their Beloved on His way

to a destination as yet undisclosed; a poignant sorrow

pressed their hearts and tears flowed down their

cheeks. Bahá’u’lláh, beholding them thus stricken

with grief, consoled them and strengthened their

hearts by showering His love and compassion upon

them. Thus He cheered the burning hearts of His

lovers throughout the world in their moments of

grief and separation. When He took His seat in the

small boat, He assured everyone they would sail in

absolute safety even if every wave beat upon the boat

or the strongest tempest surrounded it.

Boarding the Austrian steamer they found pas-

sengers, including some Persians. Bahá’u’lláh did not

talk to anyone, but went ahead to a spacious place

where several chairs were arranged. He occupied

one of these chairs and permitted the friends to take

their seats too.

“In this small boat,” one of the prisoners related,

“we, seventy-two persons, were crowded together

in unspeakable conditions for eleven days of horror.

Ten soldiers and two officers were our escort. There

was an appalling smell in the boat, and most of us

were very ill indeed. We had embarked so hurriedly

that we had been unable to provide for the voyage

and a few loaves and a little cheese … was all the

food we had for those indescribable days … There

was no place in which we could lie down in the

vessel … our lack of food had reduced us to a

seriously weak state of health.” The steamer sailed

in the evening and the next day at about sunrise

touched the shores of Smyrna.

IV Smyrna and
Ismu’lláhu’l-Muníb

Jináb-i-Munír, surnamed Ismu’lláhu’l-Muníb, was a

very handsome and radiant young man from the

city of Káshán, Persia. Before embracing the Faith,

he had led a comfortable life, and, having had the

opportunity to study, he had become accomplished

in much of the accepted and prevailing knowledge

of his time. In calligraphy, which was considered the

art *par excellence*, he was one of the few recognized

masters. He had also a melodious and penetrating

voice and a gentle temperament. His heart brimmed

with infinite love. He was a great soul.

When Bahá’u’lláh was in Baghdád, he brought

his God-given gifts and offered them at the altar of

His Beloved. Thus when the caravan of exiles started

on their journey from Baghdád to Constantinople

with all glory and might, he volunteered to walk

beside the steed of the Blessed Perfection. Great had

been the honour conferred upon him, and tremen-

dous too were the sufferings which he willingly

accepted with joy and radiant acquiescence. ‘Abdu’l-

Bahá said that this noble soul traversed the distance

between Baghdád and Constantinople on foot and,

throughout the journey, was in perfect happiness.

Day and night he was in a state of prayer. ‘Abdu’l-

Bahá described him as the companion of His soul and

the beloved of His heart. Some nights the Master and

Muníb would walk on the two sides of Bahá’u’lláh’s

steed. Their joy had no end and remained for ever

beyond words to describe. Some nights Muníb with

his silvery voice would sing songs and odes of great

Persian poets such as those of Háfiz. His voice

resounded through the silence of those memorable

nights.

When they reached Constantinople, Muníb was

instructed to go on a teaching tour to Persia and

‘Iráq. This he accomplished with distinction, and,

after a long and arduous tour, he returned to Turkey

in the latter days of Bahá’u’lláh’s sojourn in Adrian-

ople. The teaching tour had been too exacting, but

although his health was now in a precarious condi-

tion, he begged Bahá’u’lláh to permit him to be

included amongst those who had the honour of being

exiled with Him. He would not even consider.

remaining behind to undergo medical care and

treatment, his only aim and aspiration being to

sacrifice his life in the path of the Ancient Beauty.

His request was granted. He was so weak that three

persons had to carry him on board the ship, and by

the time they reached Smyrna, Muníb’s condition

had deteriorated. He was melting away like a candle

in the ignited fire of love within him; he could not

even utter a word. The Captain forced him to return

to shore. When the inevitable moment of separation

came, he dragged his frail body to reach the feet of

Bahá’u’lláh, and burst into tears. At that moment

signs of intense grief were seen on the countenance

of the Ancient Beauty. It was clear that there and

then Muníb had reached his exalted paradise of

sacrifice and his Beloved had accepted the gift of his

life. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has related that He and those in

His company took him to the hospital in Smyrna and

spent one hour with him before returning to the

boat. They laid his blessed body in bed and tenderly

embraced him, but had to leave soon as the officers

bade them return. They were immersed in sorrow as

they left him alone in the hospita1.[5]

V Alexandria and
Nabíl

Three days the Ancient Beauty had been sailing on

the waters of the Mediterranean Sea between

Smyrna and Alexandria. In Alexandria they were to

change boats and some were allowed to go ashore

5 Muníb died two or three days after the departure

of Bahá’u’lláh from Smyrna.

to purchase provisions. Muḥammad Ibráhím, one

of the companions who catered for Bahá’u’lláh’s

retinue, was amongst those who went ashore.

This was providential, because one of the most

interesting episodes of Nabíl’s life took place as a

result.

We remember that Bahá’u’lláh ordered Nabíl to

go to Egypt. He obeyed, and went there, but after

some time he was arrested and put in prison. There

he met a certain Christian physician and priest, Fáris

Effendi, imprisoned on a charge of an offence in a

financial transaction. Nabíl taught him the Faith and

in a short while he became a very ardent and en-

thusiastic follower of Bahá’u’lláh. Because of this,

the sorrow of being in prison was changed into joy

and both felt extremely happy. Sometimes they

would sit at the window of their cell watching the

people passing by, and one day when Nabíl was

alone at his window, he was astounded to see

Muḥammad Ibráhím passing by. He called him.

When Muḥammad Ibráhím saw Nabíl he was even

more surprised. Nabíl asked him what had brought

him there. Ibráhím related the story of Bahá’u’lláh’s

banishment and pointed out the steamer carrying

the Blessed Perfection. Nabíl’s sorrows knew no

bounds. To be so near and yet so cruelly deprived

from beholding the Countenance of the One Who

was the point of his adoration! This was unbeliev-

able!

After a little while, Fáris Effendi came to the cell

and found the happy Nabíl drowned in oceans of

sorrow. When he heard the reason, he felt even

sadder than Nabíl. He longed for a single glance of

Him, but this was utterly impossible. There was

only one thing for them to do: to send Him a

message of love and loyalty.

This was immediately written; but how to send

it was the main problem. God has always His own

ways for those who supplicate Him with all their

hearts. He will never abandon them. There passed

by the window of the cell a young man by the name

of Constantine who was known to Fáris Effendi, who

at once asked him if he could take a letter to someone

on board the Austrian steamer. This was an un-

expected and rather arduous task to demand. But the

young man agreed to do it, took the letters and made

for the steamer.

Nabíl and Fáris were watching intently from their

prison cell. They even saw the young man get in a

small boat and go out to reach the steamer. But to

their utter dismay and grief they heard the siren and

saw the steamer sailing away before the small boat

had reached her.

What a disappointment to the two prisoners

whose letters would not even reach their Beloved!

Then that which seemed utterly impossible took

place. The steamer stopped. The small boat reached

her. In the afternoon Constantine returned to the

prison. As he handed to Nabíl and Fáris Effendi a

small packet from Bahá’u’lláh, he exclaimed in great

excitement : “By God! My eyes have fallen on the

face of the Father.”

Afterwards the companions of Bahá’u’lláh related

that although they witnessed many extraordinary

events while in His presence, the incident of the

steamer in Alexandria was the most astonishing.

When the steamer was sailing away the Captain

noticed a sailing boat hastening towards the ship. He

immediately anchored. All were astonished at the

unexpected halt for such a cause. The passengers

stood in a state of bewilderment. They saw a young

man climb the companionway and, according to the

indications given to him by Nabíl, go directly to the

place occupied by Bahá’u’lláh and, as there was not

time to transcribe it, it was sent in the rough pen-

manship of the amanuensis. The Master and the

Purest Branch sent handkerchiefs, flowers and per-

fume as gifts for Nabíl and his co-prisoner.

When Constantine returned, the steamer resumed

its journey.

In his letter Fáris Effendi had begged Bahá’u’lláh to

accept him as one of His devoted servants and con-

firm him to teach the Faith of God.

The receipt of this letter so pleased Bahá’u’lláh

that He has related this story in one of His Tablets

to the friends and at the end He has quoted the letter

of Fáris Effendi. The perusal of such words teaches us

to read and study the writings with the discerning

eye of the spirit. Let us ponder upon the situation of

the Ancient Beauty when He received this communi-

cation. Though captive in the hands of oppressors,

He proclaimed in this Tablet that His banishment

had marked the dawn of the day when the divine

fragrances wafted throughout East and West, and

the pearls of wisdom had been deposited under

every stone and in the fullness of time would pro-

claim: “He is the Beloved of the world.” He then

states that when the ship touched the harbour, one

of the followers of the Son brought Him a letter

from which the fragrance of sanctity could be

inhaled, as its writer had been ignited with the fire

of the love of his Lord. Anyone who reads his letter

will realize how Almighty God changes the hearts

of men. Here are some fragments of the letter:

“O Thou Glory of the All Glorious, and the

Exalted One of the Most Exalted … I am honoured

to write and send this supplication to Thy Presence

… They did to Thee what they did to Jesus, the

Manifestation of His Wisdom … They became

the scattered and lost sheep of the flock. May I

entreat Thee to include my people and myself

amongst those who are immersed in the bounties of

the oceans of Thy grace … Thou art the Ever-

Abiding, Ever-Flowing Fountain of Purity and

Holiness … I supplicate Thee by Thy innermost

Secret, by Thy Kalím (Interlocutor)[6], by Thy Son[7],

by Thy Ḥabíb (Beloved)[8], and by Thy Forerunner

Who embraced the Cross for the sake of His love for

Thee … that Thou may not deprive me and my

poor family from beholding the light of Thy

Countenance … Make our faith complete, choose

us to serve the chosen ones amongst Thy servants,

and accept us as martyrs, who offered their blood for

the sake of Thy love … We are weak, ignorant and

unworthy, do not make us of the losers … Give us

the bounty of love, faith and hope and enable us to

tear away from our hearts that which pleaseth Thee

not … make us forget ourselves. We demand no

comfort except in that which pleaseth Thee. Thou

art the Searcher of hearts … a wooden vessel is

carrying Thee. How intensely do I long to be in Thy

company! … O Sea! What hath befallen thee? I

see thee disturbed. Is it because of the fear of thy

Lord, the Most Great? O, Alexandria! I see thee sad

because of the departure of thy Lord, the Living, the

Most Patient. The ruinous city of ‘Akká is applaud-

ing Thy coming with great joy. It is rejoicing because

it can welcome the Greatest of all Glories …”

6 Moses.

7 Jesus.

8 Muḥammad.

VI Haifa

After a brief stop in Port Sa’id and Jaffa the steamer

touched Haifa where extreme consternation struck

the party because of the cruel decision to separate

some of the friends from Bahá’u’lláh and force them

to go to Cyprus with Mírzá Yaḥyá. This news fell

like a thunderbolt from the blue on the friends and

they recoiled in horror.

“The friends, though prostrated by sickness, worn

out by the wretchedness of the voyage and crushed

by this further blow, refused to submit, as one of the

companions reported.

“The heat of that month was overpowering. We

were put into sailing boats. There being no wind, and

no shelter from the burning rays of the sun, we spent

eight hours of misery.”

A sailing boat was ready to take Bahá’u’lláh across

the bay from Haifa to ‘Akká. One of the believers

condemned to this separation was ‘Abdu’l-Ghaffár.

When he saw the hand of the officer raised to take

him away from his Beloved, he cast himself into the

sea crying, “Yá Bahá’u’l-Abhá.”

Bahá’u’lláh rebuked the officers responsible

pointing out that this was the result of their cruel

decree, and asked them to rescue ‘Abdu’l-Ghaffár.

He was rescued, but pitilessly forced to go to Cyprus

where he remained for some time. As soon as pos-

sible, however, he travelled to ‘Akká and lived under

the shadow of his Lord.

VII ‘Akká

“A generation of vipers” as described by the Son,

were gathered on the seashore at ‘Akká to behold the

Father. They crowded on the walls of the Fortress

and thronged the crooked lanes of the town. Though

steeped in the miseries and misfortunes of their fate,

they shamelessly raised their voices shouting, “God

of the Persians!”, as the majestic figure of Bahá’u’lláh

bearing the weight of His tribulations, passed through

the Sea Gate and entered the last stage of His banish-

ment in the Promised Land. The members of His

family and His friends followed in the footsteps of

their Beloved, marching in with pride and calm. The

officers in charge counted them. In the words of one

of the prisoners, they were “counted as if they were

sheep”.

“All the town’s people had assembled to see the

arrival of the prisoners. Having been told that we

were infidels, criminals and sowers of sedition, the

attitude of the crowd was threatening. Their yelling

of curses and execrations filled us with fresh misery.

We were terrified of the unknown. We knew not

what the fate of our party, the friends and ourselves

would be. We were described as enemies of God, as

the worst kind of criminals. The people were

exhorted to shun these vile malefactors …”

The divine procession was led through the dark

crooked and filthy streets of ‘Akká, surrounded by

the sneering laughter of the populace, till they

reached the Army barracks.

The moment Bahá’u’lláh stepped into the citadel

He stopped and made a remarkable pronouncement

—remarks which will echo throughout eternity in

the hearts of all the adherents of His Faith. He pointed

out to all who accompanied Him to the Most Great

Prison, the exalted position they occupied. He

reminded them that thereafter their lives would take

another form and would have a deeper significance.

Even a breath breathed in that atmosphere and a step

taken along that path would be immortalized. He

saw a broken branch near His feet. He looked at it

and declared that even that broken twig would be

mentioned in East and West. Thus He demanded

from His family and followers an unswerving recti-

tude of character and an unflinching devotion to the

Cause of God, so that all their words and deeds

would become worthy of eternity.

He entered His prison cell, placing the fate of

humanity in the balance.

Through His writings we realize the significance

of His banishments and imprisonment. Through His

words we behold the divine reality behind all these

scenes. He accepted to dwell in the most desolate

town of the world so that the citadels of men’s hearts

might become pure and prosperous. He carried the

burdens of degradation so that the children of men

might be glorified and rescued from humiliation. He

suffered the chains of captivity so that all the chains

of human bondage might be broken asunder.

Drowned in tempests of accusations and calumnies

and snared in the traps of apparent frustration, He

raised His clarion call and strengthened the hearts of

His persecuted followers throughout the world. He

assured them that the drops of the blood of the

martyrs, the toils and troubles of the teachers and the

pioneers, and the hardships borne by each individual

believer in His path would be amply rewarded.

In the mirror of the knowledge of God a drop

would be seen as an ocean and a pebble as a mountain.

Thus he proclaimed that His Faith would cover all

lands, seas and islands. He assured the friends that ere

long they would hear the cry of “Here am I, Here

am I,” from all sides. He comforted them in their

sufferings by giving them the glad tidings of the

splendid dawn of a day when no voice would be

raised betwixt earth and heaven save in praise of His

Cause.

VIII Prophecies fulfilled

Thus we see that when Bahá’u’lláh entered the Most

Great Prison, the promises of all ages and religions

of the past were fulfilled. The dilapidated city of

‘Akká emerged from under the veils of centuries of

obscurity and became the “Valley of Hope” for all

mankind. Pilgrims started to move to it. The blessings

of the Lord on lands in the neighbourhood of Jerusa-

lem, as foretold in the Qur’án, became known to all.

That illustrious Person Who was destined to adorn

the plain of ‘Akká and change it into the Lord’s

“Banquet Hall” was drawn to it, by force of the

Caliph’s Farmán, and imprisoned in its Fortress.

Indeed, such a consummation, He assures us, had

been actually prophesied “through the tongue of the

Prophets two or three thousand years before”. God,

“faithful to His promise”, had, “to some of the

Prophets”, “revealed and given the good news that

the ‘Lord of Hosts should be manifested in the Holy

Land.’” Isaiah had, in this connection, announced in

his Book: “Get thee up into the high mountain, O

Zion, that bringest good tidings; lift up thy voice

with strength, O Jerusalem, that bringest good tid-

ings; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of

Judah: ‘Behold your God! Behold the Lord God

will come with strong hand, and His arm shall rule for

Him.’” David, in his Psalms, had predicted: “Lift

up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye

everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come

in. Who is this King of Glory? The Lord of Hosts,

He is the King of Glory.” “Out of Zion, the per-

fection of beauty, God hath shined. Our God shall

come, and shall not keep silence.” Amos had, like-

wise, foretold His coming: “The Lord will roar from

Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem; and the

habitations of the shepherds shall mourn, and the

top of Carmel shall wither.”

“‘Akká, itself, flanked by the ‘glory of Lebanon’,

and lying in full view of the ‘splendour of Carmel’,

at the foot of the hills which enclose the home of

Jesus Christ Himself, had been described by David

as ‘the Strong City’, designated by Hosea as ‘a door

of hope’, and alluded to by Ezekiel as ‘the gate that

looketh towards the East’, whereunto ‘the glory of

the God of Israel came from the way of the East’,

His voice ‘like a noise of many waters’. To it the

Arabian Prophet had referred as ‘a city in Syria to

which God hath shown His special mercy’, situated

‘betwixt two mountains … in the middle of a

meadow’, ‘by the shore of the sea … suspended

beneath the Throne’, ‘white, whose whiteness is

pleasing unto God’. ‘Blessed the man,’ He, moreover,

as confirmed by Bahá’u’lláh had declared, ‘that hath

visited ‘Akká, and blessed he that hath visited the

visitor of ‘Akká.’ Furthermore, ‘He that raiseth

therein the call to prayer, his voice will be lifted up

unto Paradise. And again: ‘The poor of ‘Akká are

the kings of Paradise and the princes thereof. A

month in ‘Akká is better than a thousand years else-

where.’ Moreover, in a remarkable tradition, which

is contained in Shaykh Ibnu’l-‘Arabí’s work, en-

titled ‘Futúḥát-i-Makkíyyih,’ which is recognized as

an authentic utterance of Muḥammad and is quoted

by Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl in his ‘Fará’id’, this significant

prediction has been made: ‘All of them (the com-

panions of the Qá’im) shall be slain except One Who

shall reach the plain of ‘Akká, the Banquet Hall of

God.’”[9]

IX Conclusion

Now after the lapse of one century we can stand in the

precincts of the Fortress to gaze at the windows of

His prison cell. We remember the dauntless pilgrims

who crossed deserts and mountains on foot with the

sole aim of beholding the countenance of their

Beloved. When they reached those sacred shores

some were forbidden to enter; others came in, but

could not behold His face, nor were their hearts

attracted by hearing His melodious voice. A few—

only a few—saw His hand waving from the same

windows. They saw little and received physically

less, but were so imbued with the spirit of pilgrimage

that they returned home and consecrated their lives

to the service of the Cause.

We ask ourselves, “Where are the Caliphs, the

Sulṭáns, their ministers and their officers who hand

in hand and with all their material forces tried to

9 *God Passes By*, pp. 183–184.

exterminate the Faith of God?” We see with our

own eyes that the dazzling lights of their vanishing

glory have long been extinguished. Their command-

ing voices have been stilled by the ignominious

death they all suffered. Forsaken and forgotten, they

are buried in the ruins of their own schemes,

intrigues and plots. Then once more we remember

the sweet and assuring words of the Master, uttered

in the darkest hour of His precious life when He said

that all the plans made by the enemies of the Cause

would eventually prove to be nothing but painting on

water. Then we behold the All-conquering Figure

of Bahá’u’lláh emerging from the mists of myriads

of crises and upheavals like a beautiful silhouette

against the evening sky above—far above the reach

of men. We feel His merciful hand raised to wipe

away our tears, to touch our fever-laden brows, to

comfort our suffering hearts, to assuage our pain and

to give reassurance to our struggling souls.

Let us renew the pledge of love and devotion we

made to such a compassionate Lord and decide to

return home with unflinching determination. Let us

disperse; yet, united in our aim and welded together

in His love, let us take our place amongst the rank

and file of the Army of Life and with a powerful

and animated spirit raise the cry of “Yá Bahá’u’l-

Abhá!” in all climes, countries, lands and plains and

on all the seas and the mountain tops. Undaunted by

the overwhelming tragedies of the world around us,

let us tread the path of love and sacrifice, looking

forward to the advent of that promised dawn when

the world will bathe in the light and warmth of the

Sun of Truth shining with all its God-given splen-

dour, when man can live in abiding peace and unity

and when the earth will become the true mirror of

the Abhá Kingdom.