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## THE SUFFERINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

by George Townshend

(Mr. George Townshend has specially requested that this talk, originally given at the Inter-Continental Conference at Stockholm in 1953, should be published in the *Bahá'í Journal*.)

The Prayers and Meditations of Bahá'u'lláh which the beloved Guardian has given us is in large measure an intimate remembrance of the Redeemer's sufferings. And Bahá'u'lláh wished us to meditate on these sufferings. In the Tablet of Ahmad He says: 'Remember My days during thy days, and My distress and banishment in this remote prison.'

In a great poem known as the Fire Tablet He records at length the tale of His calamities and writes at the close:

'Thank the Lord for this Tablet whence thou canst breathe the fragrance of My meekness and know what hath beset Us in the path of God.' He adds: 'Should all the servants read and ponder this, there shall be kindled in their veins a fire that shall set aflame the world.'

True religion in all ages has called on the faithful to suffer. On one hand it brings to mankind a happiness in the absolute and the everlasting which is found nowhere but in religion. No unbeliever knows any joy which in its preciousness can be compared to the joys of religion. 'The true monk,' it has been said, 'brings nothing with him but his lyre.'

On the other hand, Heaven is walled about with fire. This bliss must be bought at a great price. So it has ever been in all religions of mankind.

An ancient hymn of India proclaims a truth as real now as it was in distant times:

The way of the Lord is for heroes. It is not meant for cowards.

Offer first your life and your all. Then take the name of the Lord.

He only tastes of the Divine Cup who gives his son, his wife, his wealth and his own life.

He verily who seeks for pearls must dive to the bottom of the sea, endangering his very existence.

Death he regards as naught; he forgets all the miseries of mind and body.

He who stands on the shore, fearing to take the plunge, attains naught.

The path of love is the ordeal of fire. The shrinkers turn from it.

Those who take the plunge into the fire attain eternal bliss.

Those who stand afar off, looking on, are scorched by the flames.

Love is a priceless thing only to be won at the cost of death.

Those who live to die, those attain; for they have shed all thoughts of self.

Those heroic souls who are rapt in the love of the Lord, they are the true lovers.

All the founders of religions have had to endure rejection and wrong, and as mankind grew more and more mature and the victory of God more near, these wrongs, these sufferings have grown more and more severe continually.

We read little if anything of martyrdom in the Old Testament. But the New opens with Herod's slaughter of the innocents, his beheading of John the Baptist; its central figure is a Man of Sorrows acquainted with grief. It closes with the agony in Gethsemane and with the Cross, the Nails, the Spear, and history follows with the martyrdom of all the eleven apostles. The Báb Himself was martyred and His followers gave up their lives for love of Him, not by dozens only but by hundreds and by thousands. In establishing the victory of God Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá drank the cup of suffering to the dregs.

It is said there are three kinds of martyrdom: one is to stand bravely and meet death unflinchingly in the path of God without wavering or under torture denying for an instant their faith. The second is little by little to detach one's heart entirely from the world, laying aside deliberately and voluntarily all vanities and worldly seductions, letting every act and word become a speaking monument and a fitting praise for the Holy Name of Bahá'u'lláh. The third is to do the most difficult things with such self-sacrifice that all behold it as your pleasure. To seek and to accept poverty with the



same smile as you accept fortune. To make the sad, the sorrowful your associates instead of frequenting the society of the careless and gay. To yield to the decrees of God and to rejoice in the most violent calamities even when the suffering is beyond endurance. He who can fulfil these last conditions becomes a martyr indeed.

None can attempt to delineate the variety or to analyse the nature of the afflictions which were poured upon Bahá'u'lláh. Repeatedly He has Himself summarised them in a few brief powerful sentences. In one place He calls our particular attention to the fact that it was not the Black Dungeon of Tíhrán, for all its horrors and chains, which He named the Most Great Prison. He gave that name to 'Akká. We are left to surmise why, and we reflect that in the Black Pit, His sufferings were chiefly personal and physical; His enemies were external foes, the hope of redeeming the Cause was still with Him. But when he went down to 'Akká in 1868, the traitor Mírza Yahyá had done his deadly work; the kings and leaders had definitely rejected the Message, He was definitely cast out and silenced. Not He Himself alone but the Cause of God was in prison.

We can never imagine what numberless possibilities of immediate redemption the mad, sad, bad world had wantonly flung away; nor can our less sensitive natures know what the anguish of this frustration must have been to the eager longing of a heart as divinely centred, divinely loving as His.

But this much is abundantly plain: that the pains, the griefs, the sorrows, the sufferings, the rejections, the betrayals, the frustrations which were the common lot of all the High Prophets reached their culmination in Him.

Yet through all He remained calm, confident, his courage unshaken, His acquiescence for ever radiant.

No one is to imagine that the excess of His tribulations means that at any time the power of evil had prevailed against Him. Pondering as He would have us do over the significance of these afflictions, we are shown that the truth is quite otherwise. He reveals:

'Had not every tribulation been made the bearer of God's wisdom, and every ordeal the vehicle of God's providence, no one would have dared oppose Us, though the powers of heaven and earth were leagued against Us.' He writes that God had sacrificed Him that men might be born anew and released from their bondage to sin. He praises God for His sufferings, He welcomes them, and even prays that for God's sake the earth should be dyed with His blood and His head raised on a spearpoint. He continually protests that with every fresh tribulation heaped upon Him He manifests a fuller measure of God's Cause and exalts more highly still God's Word.

How bitterly felt were His tribulations, how acute His anguish, how real His grief and pain is shown a hundred times in His laments. His high divinity did not protect Him from human sensibility, but never did He quail nor blench, never did He show resentment.

Many of His laments are not over His woes themselves but over the effect they produce on the faithful whose hearts they sorely shook or on the enemies of the Cause whom they fill with joy.

Nothing could exhaust His patience nor damp His spirit. 'Though My body be pained by the trials that befall Me, though it be afflicted by the revelation of Thy decree, yet My soul rejoiceth.' He affirms that the tribulations that He and the faithful are made to endure are such as no pen in the entire creation can record, nor anyone describe. Yet 'We swear by Thy might, every trouble that toucheth us in our love for Thee is an evidence of Thy tender mercy, every fiery ordeal a sign of the brightness of Thy light, every woeful tribulation a cooling draught, every toil a blissful repose, every anguish a fountain of gladness.'

How then is it that 'by His stripes we are healed'?

It is because the intensity, the magnitude, the volume of the sufferings of Bahá'u'lláh called forth the fullest possible expression and outpouring of the infinite mercy and love of God.

Wrongs done to the founder of a religion have two inevitable effects: one is that of retribution against the wrong done — the severity of which we may judge from the two thousand year exile of the Jewish people. The other is that of reward to the High Prophet whom they enable to release fresh powers of life that otherwise would have lain latent, to pour forth Divine energies which in their boundlessness will utterly overwhelm the forces of evil and empower Him to say: 'Be of good cheer. I have overcome the world.'

The sufferings of Bahá'u'lláh enable us in some degree to measure the immensity of His love for mankind, to appreciate the sacrifice He made for love of us. The story of them enables us to keep in remembrance the heinous blackness and cruelty of the world of man from which He saved us; it enables us to realise the meaning and the need of Divine redemption, it proves to us the invincibility of God and the lone majesty of God's victory over evil.

It is for the sake of learning more fully the love and the glory and the might of God that we contemplate this story of Bahá'u'lláh's tribulations.

In that spirit we are to read it, and as a proof of His triumphant inviolable love He keeps the picture before us in many forms that we may be fortified and uplifted in our poor human struggle with the tests and afflictions of life.

The Fire Tablet adds all the poignancy and impassioned power of divine poetry to the story of the boundless suffering He and His beloved followers had to endure. In language of torrential eloquence He tells of the longing of the faithful for reunion with God being ungratified, He tells of the casting out of those most near to His heart, of dying bodies, of frustrated lovers left afar to perish in loneliness, of Satan's whisperings in every human ear, of infernal delusions spreading everywhere, of the triumph of calamity, darkness, and coldness of heart; He tells of the sovereignty in every land of hate and unbelief while He himself is forbidden to speak, left in the loneliness of His anguish, drowning in a sea of pain with no rescue ship to come and save Him. The light of honour and loyalty and truth are put out; slander prevails and no avenging wrath of an outraged God descends to destroy the wicked and vindicate God's messenger.

He calls to God for an answer. And the answer



comes, showing the inner significance of God's seeming to forsake His righteous ones.

Man's evil sets off God's goodness. Man's coldness of heart sets off the warmth of God's love.

Were it not for the night, how would the sun of the Prophet's valour show forth the splendour of its radiance. Through His loneliness, the unity of God was revealed; through His banishment, the world of divine singleness grew fair.

'We have made misery,' said God to Him, 'the garment of Thy glory, and sorrow the beauty of Thy temple. O Thou treasure of the worlds! Thou seest the hearts are filled with hate, and shalt absolve them, Thou Who dost hide the sins of all the worlds! Where the swords flash, go forward; where the shafts fly, press onward, O Thou victim of the worlds.'

In that battle which we — all of us — wage with pain and suffering and sorrow, those are God's last words to us:

'Where the swords flash, go forward;  
Where the shafts fly, press onward'.

For love is a priceless thing only to be won at the cost of death. Those who live to die, those attain; for they have lost all thoughts of self. Those heroic souls who are rapt in the love of the Lord, they are the true lovers.

### SUMMER SCHOOL IMPRESSIONS

The quiet grey and green setting of Glynllifon was perfect for a Summer School. Its wide lawns and stretches of water, the tall pillars of the house and the pine woods folded us into its atmosphere and made us feel as though we were an international community on a green island.

There had been much talk of the harmony and high spiritual level at Summer Schools, and this was my first visit to one. Sure enough, as the friends arrived, I could witness that thirsty reaching out of Bahá'í to Bahá'í, and at devotionals, at coffee-time and as the days passed, this deep harmony could be experienced. The spiritual atmosphere was felt in the first week when we sat, wide-eyed, listening to the details of Bahá'u'lláh's imprisonment and exile and 'Abdul-Bahá's danger and difficulties in 'Akká. If all lectures were to be like these, what would I be like at the end of the three weeks!

During the first week we were fortunate in having with us Dr. Moayyad, 'Abdul-Bahá's personal doctor, who told us of his work among the believers in Haifa, of how he longed to examine 'Abdul-Bahá himself and of when the opportunity finally came. We laughed with him at the story of the parrot sent by Indian believers, which had been taught to repeat Alláh-u-Abhá to anyone passing by. On another occasion, Dr. Moayyad gave us a moving account of how the remains of the Báb were transferred, over long years, to their final resting-place on Mt. Carmel. These accounts all brought the early history of the Faith very near and we were caught up in the enthusiasm and verve of those early days. In a series of discussions, led by Dr. Moayyad and Philip Hainsworth, we heard stressed the power of the Guardian and of the Covenant which

binds all Bahá'ís to God and helps us forward in teaching and pioneer work.

There were alternative courses each week on Bahá'í Administration and the 'Gleanings', also two series of lectures on Christianity and Islam. Our heads buzzed with flashes of stories, anecdotes, speculations,—time had to be found, at the expense of some lectures, to sort it all out, in the quiet background of Glynllifon's waterfalls, wild raspberries and sheep-pens.

However, Summer School was not all lectures, far from it. We danced, dressed up, sang, we made tape recordings and listened to plays. There was a very good play produced by the Manchester Community. During the youth evening, Dan Jordan gave a wonderful performance, with telephone numbers, on the piano and Ian Semple brought roars of laughter in two separate characters. The evenings ended with the alternative of dancing or discussion-cum-speculation, after which we nodded off to bed, feeling that life was very full.

During the day there was little bathing, as the weather was so bad and we were often confined to barracks. But what barracks! The spacious hall was ideal for impromptu meetings and our Feasts were held in the lounge, before a huge fire. On the last Sunday evening we attended the marriage ceremony of Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Leach, when the room was full of flowers and we all listened to the readings and the marriage tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. We wish them all success in their life together.

There were two very informative Brains Trust evenings and a debate, during which the proposers and those opposing the motion had to be almost forcibly kept apart. The motion, 'That this House would rather live in the future than in the present' was defeated! Much interest was aroused by David Hofman's review of George Townshend's book, *Christ and Bahá'u'lláh*, which we are told to expect towards the end of the year, and we are looking forward to its publication.

News came in from all parts of the world, and our visitors were many. On the first Sunday there was an 'Africa Evening', when Ted Cardell, Margaret Lloyd and Philip Hainsworth gave accounts of the pioneer work in various parts of Africa. Later, we heard details of this work from Mr. and Mrs. W. Sears, on an unforgettable evening when we were all seated on the hall carpet, rocking with laughter at the stories of Bahá'ís in a far continent, told in an inimitable American way. Has there ever been such laughter that greeted Mr. Quigley's stories? And after that hilarious moment we were sobered by the poetry in a description of how a certain native in Mombasa declared his belief in Bahá'u'lláh and of what he knew of the Faith. We were chastened too, I think, by the simple fervour and intensity of faith expressed by these new African believers. Their spontaneity in leaving everything to take up work in His service recalls the account of the 'Sifter of wheat' which we heard again in one of the first lectures.

An unexpected and very welcome visitor, Colonel McHenry of the American Air Force, told of how President Eisenhower was in daily conversation with a young Bahá'í during his convalescence and showed



an interest in the faith. A Norwegian friend, Kirsten Bonnevie, talked one evening of life and Bahá'í activity in Northern Norway. We were given news from all parts of England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and then our eyes were turned to the east, during Bernard Leach's lecture and film on 'Potting in Japan'. Truly, we were armchair travellers, covering far distant parts of the world, and stopping many times at our World Centre in Haifa, listening to the experiences of recent pilgrims who, with slides and films, one by Ruhíyyih Khánum herself, brought us so near to the Shrines and to our beloved Guardian. During the devotional part of an N.S.A. evening we were shown a slide of the inside of the Shrine of the Bahá'u'lláh, a very moving few minutes of silent contemplation.

At the end of these three weeks, how well I knew how little I knew! How little we are worthy to be members of this great Cause, and how, when pride and egoism break out, we ought to be brought to our knees and kept there, in recognition that it is truly through God's bounty that we have been able to recognise the truth at all. Thus we leave Summer School 1956 with impressions of fun, comradeship, love for each other and the Guardian and gratitude to God that we have been touched by His great bounty.

AUDRIE ROGERS

## THE BAHÁ'Í WORLD

### AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

An Aborigine Committee and a Maori Committee have been appointed. The goals of the two new Assemblies in Wellington and New Plymouth, New Zealand, have been realised. A talk relating the Declaration of the Báb on May 23rd with the 2,000th anniversary of the death of the Buddha, has been broadcast over two local Brisbane stations.

### BELGIUM

The Házíratu'l-Quds of Belgium was dedicated on April 1st and about 120 people attended.

### HOLLAND

The Házíratu'l-Quds of Holland was dedicated in May.

### INDIA

A Bahá'í Publishing Trust was established last November in New Delhi. Twenty-six translations have been undertaken—nine completed, five under way and three being negotiated.

### INDONESIA

A South-East Asia Bahá'í Teaching Conference was scheduled for August 15th—17th in Djakarta, Java.

### JAPAN

There are now eight L.S.A.s in Japan and an N.S.A. is scheduled for next year. This will be a regional one covering Hong Kong, Macao, Formosa and Korea. Of these, Formosa has a new L.S.A. of Tainan formed this Ridván.

### SOUTH AMERICA

Houses which will become Házíratu'l-Quds have been bought in the capital cities of Santiago, Chile; Asuncion, Paraguay; La Paz, Bolivia; and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Endowments have been acquired in the above-named countries and in Uruguay, Venezuela and Columbia. The L.S.A. of Buenos Aires, Argentin

tina, secured its legal incorporation in time to have its Házíratu'l-Quds registered in the name of the Assembly. During the year ten new members were accepted in Georgetown, British Guiana; two in Cayenne, French Guiana; two in Trinidad; one in the Windward Islands and one in the Island of Juan Fernandez. The L.S.A. of Medellin, Columbia; and Guayaquil, Ecuador, are re-established, making a total of twenty-two local Assemblies in the Continent this year.

### SOUTH PACIFIC

The first L.S.A. in this region was formed at Ridván in the Cook Islands. Despite ecclesiastical opposition a Bahá'í Native School was established last year in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands. There is also activity in the following islands: Fiji, Solomon, Samoa, Tongan, New Caledonia, New Hebrides and Society Islands.

### U.S.A.

Navajo American Indians are being attracted from their reservations to the Bahá'í Indian Centre in Gallup, N. Mexico, by English language classes. Ketchikan, an Alaskan Goal town, elected its Assembly this Ridván. The local Chicago television station has transmitted a three-minute programme on the Wilmette Temple giving details of the Faith.

## FOR MEDITATION

By the righteousness of God! These are the days in which God hath proved the hearts of the entire company of His Messengers and Prophets, and beyond them those that stand guard over His sacred and inviolable Sanctuary, the inmates of the celestial Pavilion and dwellers of the Tabernacle of Glory.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

## Additions to the Community

Since the last list was published, registration cards have been received from the following:

John Gresty	Stretford
William Sheppard	Southport
Iran Moosazadeh (from Iran)	• Reading
Christine Wade (Youth)	London
Paul Adams (Youth)	London
Evelyn Chilvers	Norwich
Mitra Naimaye-Kiani	London
(Youth from Iran)	
Edythe Wren	Portsmouth
Parichere Monadi (from Iran)	London
Gertrude Etherington	Nottingham

## Change of Address

*Bournemouth Secretary.* Stuart Sweet, Seaview Court Hotel, 14 Boscombe Spa Road, Boscombe, Bournemouth.

## BAHÁ'Í PUBLISHING TRUST

### MAGNIFIED BE THY NAME

This selection of prayers and readings for children is particularly suitable for a gift. Printed in two colours, with decorative illustrations, a photograph of the Shrine of the Báb, and a Bahá'í song approved by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, it is attractively bound in red cloth with coloured end-papers.

Price 8/6d.