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ANNUAL TEACHING CONFERENCE

The Teaching Conference this year produced a constructive discussion which must have been useful to all those present. But, as one of the older members pointed out, it would have been of value if we had done nothing more than gather together in Manchester and sit in silence. It was repeatedly stressed at the conference that we must never forget that there are forces at work, wherever Bahá'ís meet to discuss teaching, which are still beyond our full understanding. In Christian churches each Sunday the clergyman speaks of forces which are at work whenever "two or three are gathered together in My name"; how much more potent must those forces be when Bahá'ís gather from the corners of England to discuss the spreading of the Word of God as revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in this most glorious age.

But we must also never forget Bahá'u'lláh's injunction that in this day words must be supported by deeds. If we had gone to Manchester and then not returned home resolved to make still greater efforts than we had before to spread the knowledge of the Cause of God, we should indeed have used our time unprofitably. Even then the Unity Feast, promoting unity amongst the believers of this country, would have given the journey purpose, for contact between the scattered believers must always be good. But it was for discussion of teaching that the conference was held, and it is good that it produced a crop of ideas concerning teaching by which all might make themselves more fruitful vehicles for the spreading of the Cause.

The outcome of the conference was to stress the two sides of teaching: the making-known

of the Cause, however slightly, to more and more of the people of the British Isles, and the gradual introduction of the more spiritually receptive individuals to a full understanding of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. It was the first of these methods which the Guardian stressed in his recent letter, in response to which the National Spiritual Assembly have set up a Publicity Committee for the spreading of the knowledge of the Cause by advertisements and other methods. The secretary of this committee appealed to those at the conference to take every opportunity to publicise the Cause through local papers, small circulation magazines appealing to likely supporters of the Cause, the notice boards of clubs, hotels or canteens, and other similar channels. The National Assembly would give advice through the Publicity Committee on a suitable form for advertisement, if any believers were able to place them. Books could be presented or lent to the lending libraries of clubs; and there were a number of small clubs and societies scattered throughout the country who might be glad to listen to a talk on the Bahá'í Faith if they were contacted by individual Bahá'ís.

This form of publicity is the sowing of the seed. In winter the earth is black, and when the seed is sown, it lies unnoticed beneath the earth for a long time. But in the spring, when the sun shines again, shoots appear above the surface of the earth and the effects of the sowing of the seed are seen. We must not be discouraged if this form of publicity does not produce a large and obvious effect at first, later its effects will become apparent.

We Bahá'ís are the nucleus out of which the Cause in this country will grow. We must ap-

preciate the responsibility which is given to us when we are privileged to see the Light of Bahá'u'lláh. Teaching the Cause of Baha'u'llah is the most important thing at this time in the life of a Bahá'í. Teaching does not depend upon learning or even upon intellect; we are repeatedly told both by Bahá'u'lláh and Abdul-Bahá that "He hath opened and will continue to open them (the doors of His manifold grace) in the face of all them that serve Him." In teaching we act as channels for the Holy Spirit, and it is our task to make ourselves suitable channels for its working, both by following the spiritual guidance of Bahá'u'lláh and by obeying the laws and ordinances which He has given to us. Our consciousness should be a Bahá'í consciousness, so that all things remind us of the Teachings and so that our life is truly Bahá'í. A speaker at the conference said that dates such as May 29th should remind us at once of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, just as December 25th reminds us at once of Christmas Day. Only when our life is truly Bahá'í, when we realise with all humility the heavy responsibility which has been laid upon us and the tremendous privilege which is ours, when we are liable to seize our opportunities and overcome our difficulties, when we see God in all things both good and bad, will we be worthy of the words of Bahá'u'lláh: "If he be kindled with the fire of His love, if he forgoeth all created things, the words he uttereth shall set on fire them that hear him. . . . Happy is the man that hath heard Our voice and answered Our call. He, in truth, is of them that shall be brought nigh unto Us."

CONSCRIPTION OF WOMEN

Now that conscription of women for National Service has become law, it seems desirable to state clearly the Bahá'í attitude on this matter. Women called up for interview are at present given a choice of service in the women's forces, civil defence work or industrial work, in all of which Bahá'ís can willingly serve their country. Appearance before a conscientious objectors' tribunal does not come in question, because at the moment women are not being conscripted for combatant duties.

In Memoriam

Death proffereth unto every confident believer the cup that is life indeed. It bestoweth joy and is the bearer of gladness. It conferreth the gift of everlasting life.—Bahá'u'lláh.

Miss Val Lavender of the Altrincham Group passed to the Abha Kingdom on January 8th, 1942.

CONVENTION

Convention this year will be held in London on April 25th and 26th. It is hoped that all friends who can possibly do so will attend. Details will be given later.

NEWS

The Altrincham Group has been depleted by the loss of three believers. The three remaining members have therefore been transferred to full membership of the Manchester community.

We welcome another new believer: Miss Edith Kahn of London.

Mr. R. Coulson has been elected to the National Spiritual Assembly in place of Mr. J. Joseph, who resigned.

The next meeting of the National Spiritual Assembly will be held in Manchester on March 14th and 15th.

We have just had news of the Summer School held last year for the Bahá'í Youth of Iran. There were five sessions of ten days each and no less than 720 believers attended. There was a special programme for younger Bahá'ís between five and fifteen years old, and a kindergarten.

Australia had a Summer School last year which was so successful that a Winter School was also held.

Greetings have been received from the Bahá'í friends in Sydney, Australia.

London was visited in December by Mr. William Laurie, a Bahá'í from Halifax, Nova Scotia, who is at present serving in the Canadian Navy. He also called on Dorothy Jacobs in Newcastle.

CONTACTING OF PROMINENT PEOPLE ABOUT THE CAUSE

The N.S.A. has made the following resolution:—

"The term 'prominent people,' who may only be approached by the N.S.A. shall comprise any person in political, Government or ecclesiastical circles, though they may of course be approached by any believer personally acquainted with them, in which case the N.S.A. should be informed. Believers are at liberty to communicate with all other prominent people, but before doing so, they are advised to ask the N.S.A. whether they have already been contacted."

We give below for the information and reminder of the friends certain items of Bahá'í teaching:—

Attention is once more called to the obligation to bring any complaint to the Local Spiritual Assembly, or in the case of an isolated believer to the National Spiritual Assembly. Spreading rumours, complaining against anyone to an individual, is in no-wise permitted, as it savours of back-biting, which is most emphatically forbidden by Bahá'u'lláh in the words: "he should consider back-biting as the most grievous error," and in the warning "the tongue is a smouldering fire." But provision is made for the statement and redress of grievances in the institution of the Local and National Houses of Justice, called for the time being 'Spiritual Assemblies.' So let us remember that one of their chief duties is the administration of justice; in other words, for Bahá'ís they take the place of a court of law. At the same time let us carry out the injunction of Bahá'u'lláh (Hidden Words, Part I, 27): "O, Son of Man! Breathe not the sins of others so long as thou art thyself a sinner. Shouldst thou transgress this command, accursed wouldst thou be, and to this I bear witness."

The Bahá'í month of 'Ulá—Loftiness, in the ordinary calendar March 2nd to 20th, is the month of Fasting. The Guardian says that fasting, together with the obligatory prayers, constitutes "the two pillars that sustain the revealed laws of God." "Fasting is a spiritual and vital obligation enjoined by Bahá'u'lláh on every believer who has attained the age of fifteen." Those who are travelling or are ill are, however, excepted. It involves complete abstinence from food and drink from sunrise till sunset. It is essentially a period of meditation and prayer, of spiritual recuperation, during which the believer must strive to make the necessary readjustments in his inner life, and to refresh and reinvigorate the spiritual forces latent in his soul."

Regarding cremation, 'Abdul-Bahá speaks as follows in "The Loom of Reality":—

"The body of man, which has been formed gradually, must similarly be decomposed gradually. This is according to the real and natural order and divine law. If it had been better for it to be burned after death, in its creation it would have been so planned that the body would automatically become ignited after death, be consumed and turned into ashes. But the divine order formulated by the heavenly ordinance is that after death this body shall be transferred from one stage to another different from the preceding one, so that

according to the relations which exist in this world, it may gradually combine and mix with other elements, thus going through stages until it arrives in the vegetable kingdom, there turning into plants and flowers, developing into trees of the highest paradise, becoming perfumed and attaining the beauty of colour.

"Cremation suppresses it speedily from attainment to these transformations, the elements becoming so quickly decomposed that transformation to these various stages is checked."

PUBLISHING TRUST

The new compilation of Bahá'í Scriptures is now ready and copies can be obtained from local assemblies or from the Bahá'í Publishing Trust at 5/- each.

It is felt that there is need for another small pamphlet. At present it is not possible to publish this for financial reasons and on account of paper shortage, but later it will have to be done. In order to have suitable material in hand to go ahead as soon as it becomes possible, the National Spiritual Assembly asks the friends to help by submitting to it drafts of such a pamphlet, which could be reviewed and co-ordinated in readiness. The contents have to be brief, to the point and simply written. It should state plainly and boldly the Bahá'í aim of World Unity, both in its Religious and Social aspects. On the social side the plan for the Universal House of Justice, the national and local Houses of Justice, etc., should be clearly stated. On the religious side, the evolution of true religion as a logical process should be shown, so that the periodical appearance of a Manifestation of God and the eventual unity of all existing faiths appear as the logical and natural outcome of the history of mankind. The National Assembly will be grateful for the help of the believers.

SUMMER SCHOOL

It has so far proved impossible to find a suitable place for Summer School. The help of all the friends is asked in this task. If you know of a guest house or hotel or a very small school which you think might be suitable, please make enquiries or send the name and address to the National Secretary. The accommodation required is for two weeks at the end of July and beginning of August, to include August Bank Holiday week-end. Summer School is one of the most important events in our Bahá'í year—please do your best to help us to hold it this year.

NATIONAL TEACHING COMMITTEE

Teaching Conference

Twenty-six friends were present in the Manchester Centre on January 19th, when the Chairman, Miss Baxter, opened the Teaching Conference by bidding all welcome and set the Bahá'í high ideals very vividly before us. The morning session was devoted to the consideration of "Opportunities and Difficulties in Teaching." Mr. Norton stressed the importance of regarding the positive aspect, i.e., the opportunities, instead of concentrating on our own limitations. A short report on co-ordinated national teaching activities was presented, before the next speech, in which Mrs. Brown urged the need for daily reading, besides the need to exemplify the Teachings in our daily lives. She emphasized the need for simplicity in presenting the Message, asking for literature of a concise nature, suitable for members of the Forces.

Valuable points from the discussion which followed were that: Reading alone will not suffice—only when presenting the Cause do we realise our own lack of knowledge. We are offering the most priceless gift, and if people do not accept it, we should not feel personally discouraged.

The afternoon session opened with prayer, then a cable was read which the Guardian sent recently to the American believers, also items of Bahá'í news from abroad. A report was given by the Publicity Committee and then open discussion took place. General opinion was that our task is first of all to concentrate on our own spiritual development, at the same time accepting our responsibility as Bahá'ís to teach the Cause of God continually. Mention was made of the two parallel lines to be followed in teaching: broadcast methods of publicity to make the Faith known as widely as possible and concentrated personal teaching of people who show interest in order to increase the number of Bahá'ís who in their turn can carry on the same work. Following this plan, we shall use all the qualities advocated by different friends, both the boldness and audacity of modern publicity methods and the slow patience and understanding needed to help individual souls in their path to God.

The Conference closed with a Unity Feast, at which thirty-two believers and friends were present. Regretfully all returned to their homes inspired to continue working till we all meet again at Convention.

"Advance always in the Kingdom of Bahá'u'lláh; occupy thy heart always by the mentioning of Bahá'u'lláh; take heed that only in your eyes is Bahá'u'lláh, in your heart is Bahá'u'lláh—in your inmost heart is Baha'u'llah. If you fall into trouble, say "Ya Bahá ul Abhá!" If anyone oppose you, say "Ya Bahá ul Abhá!" Even while at your work, mention "Ya Bahá ul Abhá!" Thou wilt be blamed for My sake; people will attribute to thee infidelity for My sake; thou wilt bear trouble for My sake. Be encouraged and do not fear. It happened like this also in the time of Jesus Christ.

"Know the greatness of these days!"

(‘Abdul-Bahá in "The Loom of Reality.")

"O thou spiritual friend! Thou hast asked the wisdom of prayer. Know thou that prayer is indispensable and obligatory and man under no pretext whatsoever is excused therefrom unless he be mentally unsound or an insurmountable obstacle prevent him.

"The wisdom of prayer is this, that it causes a connection between the servant and the True One because in that state of prayer man with all his heart and soul turns his face towards His Highness the Almighty, seeking His association and desiring His love and compassion. The greatest happiness for a lover is to converse with his beloved, and the greatest gift for a seeker is to become familiar with the object of his longing. That is why the greatest hope of every soul who is attracted to the Kingdom of God is to find an opportunity to entreat and supplicate at the ocean of His utterance, goodness and generosity.

"Besides all this, prayer and fasting is the cause of awakening and mindfulness and is conducive to protection and preservation from tests."

(‘Abdul-Bahá in "The Divine Art of Living.")

"The intention of the teacher must be pure, his heart independent, his spirit attracted, his thought at peace, his resolution firm, his magnanimity exalted and in the love of God a shining torch. Should he become as such, his sanctified breath will even affect the rock; otherwise there will be no result whatsoever. As long as a soul is not perfected, how can he efface the defects of others? Unless he is detached from aught else save God, how can he teach severance to others."

(‘Abdul-Bahá in "Divine Civilization.")