

that nothing short of the transmuting spirit of God, working through His chosen Mouthpiece in this day, can ultimately succeed in bringing it about. It, moreover, enjoins upon its followers the primary duty of an unfettered search after truth, condemns all manner of prejudice and superstition, declares the purpose of religion to be the promotion of amity and concord, proclaims its essential harmony with science, and recognizes it as the foremost agency for the pacification and the orderly progress of human society.

Mírzá Husayn-‘Alí, surnamed Bahá’u’lláh (the Glory of God), a native of Mázindarán, Whose advent the Báb [Herald and Forerunner of Bahá’u’lláh] had foretold, was imprisoned in Tíhrán, was banished, in 1852, from His native land to Baghdád, and thence to Constantinople and Adrianople, and finally to the prison city of ‘Akká, where He remained incarcerated for no less than twenty-four years, and in whose neighborhood He passed away in 1892. In the course of His banishment, and particularly in Adrianople and ‘Akká, He formulated the laws and ordinances of His Dispensation, expounded, in over a hundred volumes, the principles of His Faith, proclaimed His Message to the kings and rulers of both the East and the West, both Christian and Muslim, addressed the Pope, the Caliph of Islám, the Chief Magistrates of the Republics of the American continent, the entire Christian sacerdotal order, the leaders of Shí’ih and Sunní Islám, and the high priests of the Zoroastrian religion. In these writings He proclaimed His Revelation, summoned those whom He addressed to heed His call and espouse His Faith, warned them of the consequences of their refusal, and denounced, in some cases, their arrogance and tyranny.

The Faith which this order serves, safeguards and promotes is essentially supernatural, supranational, entirely non-political, non-partisan, and diametrically opposed to any policy or school of thought that seeks to exalt any particular race, class or nation. It is free from any form of ecclesiasticism, has neither priesthood nor rituals, and is supported exclusively by voluntary contributions made by its avowed adherents. Though loyal to their respective governments, though imbued with the love of their own country, and anxious to promote at all times, its best interests, the followers of the Bahá’í Faith, nevertheless, viewing mankind as one entity, and profoundly attached to its vital interests, will not hesitate to subordinate every particular interest, be it personal, regional or national, to the over-riding interests of the generality of mankind, knowing full well that in a world of interdependent peoples and nations the advantage of the part is best to be reached by the advantage of the whole, and that no lasting result can be achieved by any of the component parts if the general interests of the entity itself are neglected.

To say that we live in an age of crisis is to utter a platitude. Hundreds of books, thousands of articles, speeches, sermons and lectures play endless variations on this frightening theme. The facile optimism of an H.G. Wells, the irrational faith in an automatic betterment of human life, the confident expectations of a universal triumph of peace and democracy have given way to

anxiety, fear and despair. There is remarkable agreement that the world is sick, that “something went wrong” with Western civilization at the very moment when it was about to become world civilization, that yesterday’s utopias have proved cruelly disappointing, that man’s future is threatened by his own destructive impulses, which are much stronger than he had suspected and which he seems unable to control. However, there is little agreement about the causes of the crisis and none about the necessary cure. Lost in the labyrinth of conflicting ideologies, blinded by glittering theories which distract him for a brief moment, lacking a vital system of values, modern man, almost in spite of himself, continues on the road to catastrophe and total self-destruction.

Having voluntarily renounced his spiritual nature and proclaimed himself nothing more than a higher animal, modern man is as yet incapable of discerning the simple truth that his happiness and his very survival depend upon the establishment of harmony between his will and the Will of the Author of the universe. The cause of man’s tragedy lies in his rejection of the principles which constitute the sole basis of human existence, principles which are as real as physical laws but apprehended through reason and faith rather than through reason and the senses.

Twenty years ago in the midst of the second World War, Shoghi Effendi addressed to the Bahá’ís of the West a long letter which became a book. In it he spelled out in clear and powerful language the Bahá’í understanding of the crisis of our age. “The powerful operations of this titanic upheaval,” Shoghi Effendi unequivocally proclaimed, “are comprehensible to none except such as have recognized the claims of both Bahá’u’lláh and the Báb. Their followers know full well whence it comes, and what it will ultimately lead to.” The certitude expressed in these lines is derived from faith in Bahá’u’lláh as a divine Messenger Who had opened a new era in mankind’s history.

Whereas in the last hundred years most thinkers have been trying to interpret history either in terms of itself, which is an impossible task, or to interpret the totality of human activity by some part of it such as economics or politics, which is equally impossible, Shoghi Effendi looks at history in the light of its essence: the relationship between temporal man and eternal God. Viewed in this light, history reveals a meaning and a pattern which were not perceptible before. Man’s actions acquire significance when it is demonstrated that it was his own recalcitrance, his rejection of God’s will that led to the turmoil, the upheavals, in which he has become so hopelessly enmeshed. In a sense, the horrors of this century can be called God’s vengeance upon man for having severed the ties which bound him to his Creator. In another sense, man’s torment is a result of his own stubborn unwillingness to recognize his spiritual nature and the nature of spiritual laws which govern it.

Eloquently and vigorously Shoghi Effendi sketches the outlines of Bahá’u’lláh’s mission and of the response it evoked. In numerous

messages to “emperors, kings and princes, chancellors and ministers, the Pope himself, priests, monks and philosophers, the exponents of learning, parliamentarians and deputies, the rich ones of the earth, the followers of all religions,” Bahá’u’lláh proclaimed His message and unfolded before the unseeing eyes of the rulers of the world the Divine Plan destined to raise mankind to a higher level of development and to create a new, a spiritually sounder civilization.

The disintegration of the traditional foundations of civilized society, the overthrow of its ancient institutions and values created a vacuum which inevitably had to be filled. When humanity turned its back on Bahá’u’lláh, refusing to accept His message, it opened the door to false and vicious doctrine which quickly captured its mind and heart. Today, as Shoghi Effendi points out:

The chief idols in the desecrated temple of mankind are none other than the triple gods of Nationalism, Racialism and Communism, at whose altars governments and peoples, whether democratic or totalitarian, at peace or at war, of the East or of the West, Christian or Islamic, are, in various forms and in different degrees, now worshiping. Their high priests are the politicians and the worldly-wise, the so-called sages of the age; their sacrifice, the flesh and blood of the slaughtered multitudes; their incantations outworn shibboleths and insidious and irreverent formulas; their incense, the smoke of anguish that ascends from the lacerated hearts of the bereaved, the maimed, and the homeless.

Dark as the present is, it carries within it the promise of a bright future. The decaying old order has already given birth to the new. The process of disintegration is paralleled by the as yet almost invisible process of growth. The very suffering which humanity has inflicted upon itself slowly but surely creates the necessary conditions for the unification of mankind. Shoghi Effendi repeatedly emphasizes how mysteriously and “resistlessly God accomplishes His design, though the sight that meets our eyes in this day be the spectacle of a world hopelessly entangled in its own meshes” and heedless of its high destiny.

The Promised Day is Come is not a history of the last century, nor is it a philosophy of history in the more technical sense of the term. Yet it conveys in less than a hundred and fifty pages a truer picture of the cataclysmic changes which have occurred in Europe and Asia since the middle of the nineteenth century than whole libraries of heavily footnoted tomes. Shoghi Effendi’s analysis penetrates to the core of events and personalities. His brief characterizations of Napoleon III, Pope Pius IX, Násiri’ d-Dín Sháh, Wilhelm II, are brilliant examples of bold and precise condensation, in which a few sentences suffice to reveal the most important qualities of each man. The same genius for concise formulation is displayed in discussing such complicated events as the downfall of monarchic institutions, the collapse of the Caliphate, the crumbling of religious orthodoxy, or the rise of Bolshevism. Unerringly he selects the essential characteristics of each; and the event, the

institution, or the movement comes to life and yields its meaning to the astonished reader.

The style, formal and elaborate, is entirely original. Some readers find it difficult at first but soon discover how completely it corresponds to the task the author set himself, how perfectly it fits the subject. The sentences are long and the vocabulary vast, but nothing is superfluous. Every noun, every verb, every adjective obeys the author's purpose and adds its share to the majestic effect which the book invariably produces on the attentive reader.

Though written during the second World War and immediately inspired by events which are already growing dim in mankind's memory, *The Promised Day is Come* has not lost, nor will it ever lose, any of its relevance and significance. On the contrary, its message will seem even more urgent to a generation which lives in the threatening shadow of the Bomb. Better than anyone else it should be able to understand the full implications of these words of Bahá'u'lláh translated and quoted by Shoghi Effendi: "And when the appointed hour is come, there shall suddenly appears that which shall cause the limbs of mankind to quake."

This remarkable book, ostensibly addressed to the Western Bahá'ís, is a challenge to everyone. Rapidly and dramatically, it tells the story of the last of God's messengers speaking to the entire humanity but being heard by only a few. It shows the frightening consequences of such recalcitrance: the downfall of the old order and the obscure birth of the new. It shows the depth of present-day darkness and predicts a new dawn to a humanity which would respond to the Divine Call. But above all, it forcefully reminds modern man that he is not alone in the universe, that his existence is not meaningless, that his destiny is significant, and that the way to God is once again open to him.

FIRUZ KAZEMZADEH

New Haven, Connecticut, June, 1961

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