

THE MESSAGE OF JENABE FAZEL

IN the spring of 1920, a Persian gentleman, Jenabe Fazel Mazandarani, came to America, accompanied by an interpreter, and remained for a year. He came as the representative of Abdul Baha, who in several letters commended him in the highest terms. It is quite clear that Abdul Baha reposed the highest confidence in this man, and believed him equipped in every way to give correctly the substance of the Bahai Revelation. Now that he is gone, and we can read in printed form a number of the addresses which we were not privileged to hear personally delivered, it may be profitable to consider the general tenor and import of the message he bore.

We get a broad inclusive picture. The ideas are couched in generous universal terms. There is little specialization, so that it is difficult to fix the points in memory after the first impression has passed. We seem to visualize the Great Shepherd gathering all his flock into the One Green Pasture (and not a single lamb shall be left behind!); but exactly how He has accomplished this miracle is not so clear to the sober second thought. The argument flows on, and we are carried unresisting on the tide of its eloquence, and it is only on after-reflection that we miss the sharp details. He tells us that the fact is accomplished. The Bahai Revelation has proved a unifying force. We do not deny, nor doubt, but we feel that we would like to have been told a little more of the method in detail. It is written in Baha'o'llah's book, we learn, and so, perhaps, the omission is intentional, that we may the more profoundly study these remarkable writings. Yet, aside from this reference, there is strangely little mention of Baha'o'llah, and still less of Abdul Baha. Their personalities, in Fazel's vision, do not seem to directly support the Bahai Revelation, which stands in inherent strength as a thing apart. That Baha'o'llah gave the message is affirmed; but it is so complete as to need no after-support. It stands in itself, erect and strong, sufficient and all-inclusive, and therefore no citations or proofs of the sufficiency and power of the Prophet who gave it forth are necessary. Indeed, they are superfluous, and would but tend to distraction of thought from the Message itself to personalities. This is the first impression which we draw from Fazel's utterances.

Now, the generality of these statements works in two directions. On the one hand, nobody is inclined to deny them. Everyone admires virtue in the abstract, and is inclined to subscribe to a philosophy which will bring everybody together in peace and harmony, so long as his own pet ideas do not seem to be abridged. The picture

of the One Green Pasture is pleasant, while the individual sheep does not visualize sharply the castigations that are necessary to drive him thither from the dung-pile in which he has chosen to place himself. People will agree with Jenabe Fazel, and straightway go on as they were before. They agree, but they do not act, and thus the generalizations we have heard work in two opposite directions: they produce outward agreement and assent, but actually little change. The ointment is too soothing. It does not produce in the patient a healthy reaction. To the well man, balm indeed; but to him whose soul is ill, a more bitter draught we think is required.

We do not intend this as a criticism of Jenabe Fazel's method so much as a suggestion to his readers. We must take him more whole-heartedly. We must reflect not only that what he is giving us is the Bahai Revelation, but that which he does not say, that is *not* the Bahai Revelation. Does not this open up a wide field of thought? He tells us what to do, but he does not tell us what not to do. Probably he thinks that we are past this childish stage. Would that we were! But we were bred in a harsher school. We are accustomed to the denial. The Ten Commandments are our heritage. Did you ever think what these are? Thou shalt not, and thou shalt not, nine prohibitions to one direct command. We look in vain for one prohibition in all of Jenabe Fazel's talks. And so, like the frisky colt, we think we are at liberty to run riot where we will to destroy with heedless feet the young plants of the Master's vineyard. Let us take our instruction more soberly.

If we are to do what Jenabe Fazel says, and not to do what he does not say, the proposition becomes worthy of serious study. The broadness and generality of the teachings takes on a new light. We must remain broad and general in our thoughts and principles. No narrowness, no bigotry, no formal creeds, no imitations or literal interpretations, no, not of the very Prophets themselves who were the founders of this revelation! The Revelation is a thing in itself, which the Prophets have not the power to alter, even if they had the desire, which they certainly have not. Their words may not be used to alter or abrogate the generality of this foundation. This is the second great impression which we draw from Fazel's utterances.

As to the methods necessary to produce this great rapprochement of all mankind, Fazel says little, as we were inclined to complain in the beginning. A little study will show the method in this. We are not told the method, for that is left to us, to suit to the needs of the time and place. The object is made clear before us. We are told that it can be done, since it has been done, and we have some general principles. We must ourselves be wise, diligent and effective. No set rules or methods. Suit the means to the occasion, is what the method says. And this generality places all means in our hands. Religion is truth, and may call science to its aid. Special cases are

not to be solved by pronouncements of religious leaders, but by patient investigation and arrival at the facts. We are not to copy a fine sentiment from the writings of the prophet, inscribe it on a banner and rush madly down the street crosswise of the traffic. No, that is not the method at all. It was the former method of all zealots, but Jenabe Fazel does not say we are to do it, and what he does not say is not a part of the message he bears. The more we reflect on this point, the stronger it becomes. This third important impression seems to make the message all-inclusive.

I have tried to give this message, as I see it, as a whole, in a nutshell. I think that the Message is greater than the man. I doubt if Jenabe Fazel himself fully appreciates the importance of his mission. That Abdul Baha does appreciate this, I fully believe, and I think it is Abdul Baha's Message that has been conveyed. It has been well done.

There have been many speeches, and I have not read them all, but I think that the same message is included in each. From each comes the same inspiration. I have taken them broadly, to get at the spirit back of them, lest vision be obscured by dwelling on a minor point. I have wholly excluded consideration of Fazel's answers to questions. Many of the questions were vague or intentionally leading, and some of them he clearly did not understand. But in any case the messenger came to deliver a message to America, a great message. He did not come to confirm hobbies, guess riddles, or answer childish queries. His amiability compelled him to do his best in these circumstances which were forced upon him, but to my mind we may profit most by wholly ignoring these answers to questions, except of course as they affected the individuals in a personal sense. They should have no wider application.

Let us arise to follow Jenabe Fazel. All Bahais together, united in general principles, though each think differently in detail as his judgment and experience shall compel. Surely the foundation is broad enough for us all to stand on, the Cause is great and urgent, and how few there be to understand and preach it!

Devils Lake, North Dakota, July 18, 1921.