

THE  
BAHÁ'Í  
WORLD

# ‘Abdu’l-Bahá



*The Mystery of God*

SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

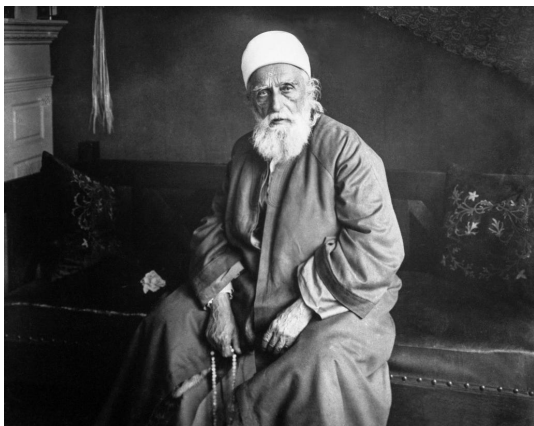
# THE BAHÁ'Í WORLD <sup>1</sup>

SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ  
The Mystery of God

November 2021 will mark one hundred years since the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. "The observance of this anniversary," writes the Universal House of Justice, "will undoubtedly prompt individuals and communities alike to contemplate the significance of that infinitely poignant moment when He Who was the Mystery of God departed from this world." This collection will, in the coming months, be augmented with articles published in honor of the Centenary.

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2021

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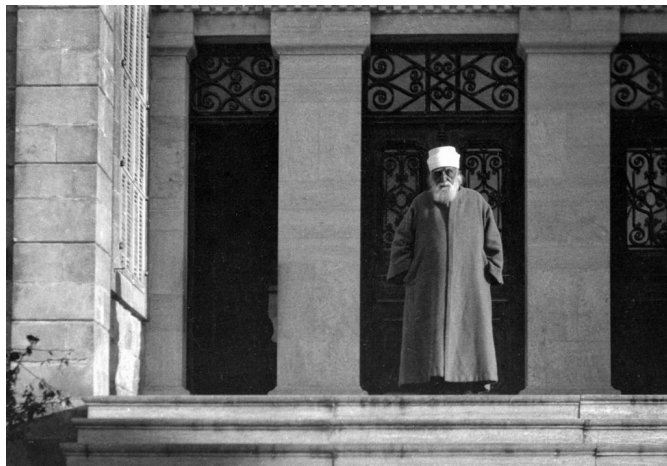
## The Way of the Master

THURSDAY APRIL 21, 1932

BY

GEORGE TOWNSHEND

In this penetrating and moving essay, George Townshend reflects upon ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s character and the lessons and example He offered for the lives of people everyone.



‘Abdu’l-Bahá on the steps of 7 Haparsim Street, the House of the Master, May 1921

To live today in deed and truth the kind of life that Jesus of Nazareth lived and bade his followers lead; to love God wholeheartedly and for God’s sake to love all mankind even one’s slanderers and enemies; to give consistently good for evil, blessings for curses, kindness for cruelty and through a career darkened along its entire length by tragic misrepresentation and persecution to preserve one’s courage, one’s sweetness and calm faith in God – to do all this and yet to play the man in the world of men, sharing at home and in business the common life of humanity, administering when occasion arose affairs large and small and handling complex situations with foresight and firmness – to live in such a manner throughout a long and arduous life, and, when in the fullness of time death came, to leave to multitudes of mourners a sense of desolation and to be remembered and loved by them all as the Servant of God – to how many men is such an achievement given as it has been given in this age of ours to ‘Abbás Effendi.

The story would be too sad to recount or to recall were it not that the impression which it fixes on the mind is less that of human perverseness and depravity than that of the power of the soul of man, aided by God, to face, endure and transcend the utmost power of earthly evil – evil in its most mean and most malevolent form: hypocrisy, jealousy, guile, implacable hate and frigid cruelty. Enveloped by it stand the figures of a few unarmed and unresisting victims whose resolution is not weakened, whose enthusiasm is not lowered, whose calmness is not shaken by the fury or the length of the persecution, but who after an ordeal lasting an old man’s lifetime emerge with their great purpose achieved and their foes beaten from the field. Here is everything of high colour and of

strong contrast to give to the narrative force and sharpness of impression. Here is the luxury of the Orient and here its sloth, its squalor and its baseness. Here is the saint, the philosopher, the reformer, the crusader; and here the outraged despot, the subtle vazir, the fanatical priest, the jailer, the torturer, the headsman and the howling mob. Reversal follows upon reversal, and the inevitable yields place to the impossible. Power and wealth dissolve; force is vanquished by weakness; the defeated win the spoils, and they who inherit all are the meek and the poor in spirit. The story seizes and holds fast the attention of the reader. Now it attracts and now repels; now horrifies, now softens; now uplifts the heart and now makes the blood run cold. But its final and lasting effect is to sweeten, to exhilarate, to strengthen, and to infuse into the soul a yet profounder faith in the overruling might of God.

To the historian, the psychologist, the student of comparative religion, the narrative in all its aspects has much to offer of interest and value. But to the practising Christian of the twentieth century the personal life and character of 'Abbás Effendi make a direct and peculiar appeal. The Christian who has set himself really to follow the precepts of Christ finds himself in special difficulties today. The very understanding and knowledge of the will of Christ, as well as the performance of it, seem now less easy to attain than they were for our forefathers. The accuracy of the Gospel record not only in phrase and detail but in larger matters likewise is questioned by an increasing number of scholars. The record in any case is brief and fragmentary; and the utterances attributed to the Christ are not only very few but so terse and epigrammatic that their bearing is often uncertain and they admit of diverse interpretations. The problems of the contemporary world too are so much more complex than those of the period in which Christ lived that his words which suited so well the conditions of the past are difficult to apply to the present. Those who profess themselves the teachers of Christendom speak with such different voices and offer much contradictory advice that the public mind is bewildered. And since many of these self-appointed guides fail to be true in their lives to those injunctions of Jesus which all admit to be authentic, the bewilderment becomes mixed with impatience and disrespect. Guidance from both the ancient Book and from living example, is therefore less easy to gain than it was once. And the natural weakness of our nature which finds so arduous the moral life demanded by Christ is no longer supported by custom and general opinion but is on the contrary further enervated by the influence of a self-willed and flippant age.

In the story of 'Abbás Effendi the Christian comes upon something which he ardently desires and which he finds it difficult to obtain elsewhere. There awaits him here reassurance that the moral precepts of Christ are to be accepted exactly and in their entirety, that they can be lived out as fully under modern conditions as under any other, and that the highest spirituality is quite compatible with sound common sense and practical wisdom. Many of the incidents in 'Abbás Effendi's life form a commentary on the teachings of Christ and illuminate the meaning of the ancient words. Being a philosopher as well as a saint he was able to give to many a Christian enquirer explanations of the Gospel which had the authority not only of their own reasonableness and beauty but also the authority of his own true love for Christ and his life of Christlike righteousness.

Thus the beauty of Christ and of his words, obscured by so much in modern life, is through 'Abbás Effendi brought nearer to us and made real again, and a perusal of the story imparts to the Christian encouragement and light.

Christ taught that the supreme human achievement is not any particular deed nor even any particular condition of mind: but a relation to God. To be completely filled -heart-mind-soul- with love for God, such is the great ideal, the Great Commandment. In 'Abbás Effendi's character the dominant element was spirituality. Whatever was good in his life he attributed not to any separate source of virtue in himself but to the power and beneficence of God. His single aim was servitude to God. He rejoiced in being denuded of all earthly possessions and in being rich only in his love for God. He surrendered his freedom that he might become the bondservant of God; and was

able at the close of his days to declare that he had spent all his strength upon the Cause of God. To him God was the centre of all existence here on earth as heretofore and hereafter. All things were in their degree mirrors of the bounty of God and outpourings of his power. Truth was the word of God. Art was the worship of God. Life was nearness to God; Death remoteness from him. The knowledge of God was the purpose of human existence and the summit of human attainment. No learning nor education that did not lead towards this knowledge was worth pursuit. Beyond it there was no further glory, and short of it there was nothing that could be called success.

In ‘Abbás Effendi this love for God was the ground and cause of an equanimity which no circumstances could shake, and of an inner happiness which no adversity affected and which in his presence brought to the sad, the lonely, or the doubting the most precious companionship and healing. He had many griefs but they were born of his sympathy and his devotion. He knew many sorrows but they were all those of a lover. Warmly emotional as he was he felt keenly the troubles of others, even of persons whom he had not actually met nor seen, and to his tender and responsive nature the loss of friends and the bereavements of which he had to face more than a few brought acute anguish. His heart was burdened always with the sense of humanity’s orphanhood, and he would be so much distressed by any unkindness or discord among believers that his physical health would be affected. Yet he bore his own sufferings however numerous and great with unbroken strength. For forty years he endured in a Turkish prison rigours which would have killed most men in a twelvemonth. Through all this time he was, he said, supremely happy being close to God and in constant communion with Him. He made light of all his afflictions. Once when he was paraded through the streets in chains the soldiers who had become his friends, wished to cover up his fetters with the folds of his garment that the populace might not see and deride; but the prisoner shook off the covering and jangled aloud the bonds which he bore in the service of his Lord. When friends from foreign lands visited him in prison and seeing the cruelties to which he was subjected commiserated with him he disclaimed their sympathy, demanded their felicitations and bade them become so firm in their love for God that they too could endure calamity with a radiant acquiescence. He was not really, he said, in prison; for “there is no prison but the prison of self” and since God’s love filled his heart he was all the time in heaven.

From this engrossing love for God came the austere simplicity which marked ‘Abbás Effendi’s character. Christ’s manner of life had been simple in the extreme. A poor man poorly clad, often in his wanderings he had no drink but the running stream, no bed but the earth, no lamp but the stars. His teaching was given in homely phrases and familiar images and the religion he revealed however difficult to follow was as plain and open as his life. His very simplicity helped to mislead his contemporaries. They could recognise the badges of greatness but not greatness itself, and they could not see the light though they knew its name. He was neither Rabbi nor Shaykh though he was the Messiah. He had neither throne nor sword though all things in heaven and in earth were committed into his charge.

The life of ‘Abbás Effendi too was simple and severe. Familiar during much of his life with cold, hunger and all privation, he chose for himself in his own home the most frugal fare. The room in which he slept and in which he would sometimes deny himself even the comfort of a bed served him as a work-room too. His clothing was often of the cheapest kind; and he taught his family so to dress that their apparel might be “an example to the rich and an encouragement to the poor.” The household prayers which he held morning and evening were quite informal.

Partly from a natural modesty but also from a resolve to do nothing that might encourage in others a tendency to formalism, he objected to any parade or unnecessary ceremonial, particularly if he were to be concerned in it. When, as he was about to leave the ship on his first visit to New York, he saw that his reception was to be made a public spectacle he peremptorily declined to have anything to do with the arrangement, dismissed the company, and at a later hour went ashore as unostentatiously as possible. In Haifa on another occasion, he managed to turn the tables on those who sought to do him an unacceptable honour and created a diversion which had not the less



its serious meaning because he invested it with the spirit of high comedy. Some wealthy visitors from the Occident planned to involve him in a picturesque scene in which a page boy, a chased bowl flowing with crystal water, and a scented towel had their part. Just before the meal hour 'Abbás Effendi saw the designful group approaching across the lawn. He divined their intention at once; and running over to a little water-trough performed quickly in it the customary ablution, wiped his fingers on the gardener's cloth that hung close by and then turned to greet with his radiant smile his guests, who a moment later were receiving at his hands the elaborate attention they had designed for him.

Even if some degree of circumstance and formality were called for, 'Abbás Effendi would reduce them to the smallest possible proportions. When on April 27th 1920 he was to receive in the grounds of the Governor's Residence at Haifa the honour of knighthood he evaded the equestrian procession and the military reception prepared for him by slipping unobserved from his house and making his way to the rendezvous by some unaccustomed route. When all were in perplexity and many thought that he was lost, he appeared quietly at the right place and the right time and proceeded in the prescribed manner with the essential part of the ceremony.

Of all material things, as of food, clothing, shelter he sought and desired for himself the barest sufficiency. But asceticism was not part of his creed nor of his teaching. "Others may sleep on soft pillows; mine must be a hard one," he said once in declining a kind friend's offer of some little comfort for his room. Men were to take what God had given them, and to enjoy the good things of nature: but with renunciation. Fasting was a symbol, and as such had high value, but in itself was no virtue: "God has given you an appetite," he said; "eat." Riches he thought no blessing: if they had been, Christ would have been rich. The poverty however which he inculcated was not impecuniousness but the heart's poverty of him who is so rich in love for God that he is destitute of all desire for aught else.

He was the most unassuming of men. He counted himself personally as less than others, put himself below them and served them in every way he could find with unaffected humility. He used to entertain at his table visitors from far and near; but if the occasion were one of special importance he would rise and wait on his guests with his own hands – a practice he recommended to other hosts. When his father was alive and dwelt outside 'Akká among the mountains, 'Abbás Effendi used frequently to visit Him, and though the way was long he habitually went on foot. His friends asked him why he did not spare himself so much time and effort and go on horseback. "Over these mountains Jesus walked on foot," he said. "And who am I that I should ride where the Lord Christ walked?" Once when in his latter days he had to return from a distance to his home, he took a seat in the common stage. The driver thought this unseemly in a man of his standing and remonstrated with him for not hiring a private carriage; but 'Abbás Effendi insisted on using the stage. At the end of his journey as he alighted, he was accosted by a beggar to whose pleading he listened and to whom he gave a gold coin. Then turning to the driver, he said – "Why should I travel in a carriage when such as he need money?"

But this humility did not come from any weakness. It was a proof of his strength and a cause of his spiritual power. Once when a child asked him why all the rivers of the earth flowed into the ocean, he said, "because it sets itself lower than them all and so draws them to itself." Pride repels; humility attracts. When commenting on Christ's direction to be as little children, he emphasised the fact that the virtues of children are due to weakness, and adults must learn to have these virtues through strength. A palsied arm cannot strike an angry blow; but the virtue of forbearance belongs to one who can but will not. His humility was not due to any diffidence or other failing. Nor did it imply any self-abasement or self-deprecation. What it meant was the obliteration of the personal self. His separate ego had no existence at all save only as an instrument of expression for the higher self that was one with God. He did not minimise his spiritual station, nor did any circumstance large or small separate him from it. He upheld under all conditions the cause to which his heart was given. Somebody who knew him in

the West remarked that he was always master of the situation, and amid the novel and alien surroundings of such cities as London, Chicago, and New York he preserved his self-possession and his power. On one occasion in America when he had arrived at a house where he was to be a guest at luncheon, a coloured man called on him just before the meal hour. Being known to the hostess the caller was admitted but 'Abbás Effendi observed that according to the prevailing social custom there was no intention of admitting him to sit at the table with the regular guests. Now race prejudice is what 'Abbás Effendi could not tolerate. At his own table members of all races and religions met on an equality as brothers. He was not going to countenance it among his friends in America if he could help it. What was the surprise of the hostess and of everyone else present when he was observed clearing a place beside him and calling for knives and forks for the new arrival. Before any seemly way of countering 'Abbás Effendi's initiative was found, before anyone had quite realized how it had happened, the lady found herself doing what neither she nor any other hostess in her position would have dreamed of doing and entertaining at her table with her white friends a negro. 'Abbás Effendi had become the spiritual host. He spread before those who sat with him the reality of the Fatherhood of God. Such was his radiant power that the unconventional challenging meal passed off without unpleasantness or embarrassment to any who partook of it.

Pouring forth unceasingly kindness and compassion he forgot himself, and thought only of others: not of some others only, but of all. His love seemed to know no bounds and showed itself throughout his whole life in every variety of shape.

It was told of him as a little boy that he once was sent out to inspect the shepherds who had charge of his father's flocks among the Persian hills. When the review was completed he was told by his attendant it was customary to give each of the shepherds a present. He said he had nothing to give; but was told the men would expect something and something should be given them. The boy thereupon presented the shepherds with the flocks. His father hearing of this munificent gift was pleased at his son's generosity but said "We shall have to watch 'Abbás; for next he will give away himself."

Even when some years later, 'Abbás Effendi and his father, as exiles and prisoners, were reduced to destitution, he still managed to help others and contrived (so his companions said) somehow to find something to give away.

In his old age when he was living in Haifa he used to set aside a special hour each Friday for dispensing charity to the poor who came to ask for it; and many visitors have left pictures of the strange wild scene as the crowd of alms-seekers, many of them guileful-menacing-violent, many of them dreadful to look on, but all of them pitiable, jostled around the venerable figure of their host who walked among them distributing smiles and good cheer and warm encouragement along with the material gift that seemed to fit each case of need. It was his practice too to seek out the poor and needy in their homes, and the sight of their deprivations brought him great sadness. Returning from such a visit of charity he could hardly bring himself to partake of his own frugal supper, for thinking of their greater poverty.

When he traveled in the West it was his custom to take out with him a bag of silver pieces to give to the poor whom he met; and being brought down one evening to the Bowery Mission in New York he delivered there one of the most compassionate and moving of his addresses. It is recorded in the third volume of the *Star of the West*, and reads in part as follows:

"Tonight I am very happy for I have come here to meet my friends. I consider you my relatives, my companions, and I am your comrade. You must be thankful to God that you are poor, for his Holiness Jesus Christ has said, 'Blessed are the poor'; he never said, 'Blessed are the rich.' He said too that the Kingdom is for the poor. Therefore you must be thankful to God that though in this world you are indigent yet the

treasures of God are within your reach; and although in the material realm you are poor, yet in the Kingdom of God you are precious. His Holiness Jesus himself was poor. He did not belong to the rich. He passed his time in the desert travelling among the poor, and lived upon the herbs of the field. He had no place to lay his head, no home; yet he chose this rather than riches. It was the poor who accepted him first, not the rich. Therefore you are the disciples of Jesus; you are his comrades; your lives are similar to his life, your attitude is like unto his, you resemble him more than the rich. Therefore we will thank God that we have been so blest with real riches and in conclusion I ask you to accept me as your servant.”

At the end of the meeting ‘Abbás Effendi stood at the Bowery entrance to the Mission Hall, shaking hands with from four to five hundred men and placing within each palm a piece of silver.

With not less tenderness he answered the need of those whose poverty was spiritual. His guards and jailers, servants of a cruel and despotic master, were won by his kindness and became his friends. “What is there about him,” people would say, “that he makes his enemies his friends?” Towards those who displayed to him personal ill-will and malice he showed forbearance and generosity. Missionary work, he said, is not promoted by being overbearing and harsh; bad people are not to be won to God by criticisms and rebukes, nor by returning to them evil for evil. On the contrary the cause of God advances through courtesy and kindness and the bad are conquered by intercession on their behalf and by sincere unflagging love. “When you meet a thought of hate, overcome it with a stronger thought of love.” Christ’s command to love one’s enemies was not obeyed by assuming love nor by acting as though one loved them: for this would be hypocrisy. It was only obeyed when genuine love was felt. When asked how it was possible to love those who were hostile or personally repugnant, he said that love could be true yet indirect. One may love a flower not only for itself but for the sake of someone who sent it. One may love a house because of one who dwells in it. A letter coming from a friend may be precious though the envelope which held it was torn and soiled. So one may love sinners for the sake of the universal Father and may show kindness to them as to children who need training, to sick persons who need medicine, to wanderers who need guidance. “Treat the sinners, the tyrants, the bloodthirsty enemies as faithful friends and confidants,” he would say. “Consider not their deeds; consider only God.” His kindness was persistent and unflagging: he forgave until seventy times seven. A neighbour of his in Haifa (a self-righteous Muslim from Afghánistán, who regarded ‘Abbás Effendi as a renegade and an outcast) pursued him for years with hate and scorn. When he met ‘Abbás Effendi on the street he would draw aside his robes that he might not be contaminated by touching a heretic. He received kindnesses with obdurate ill will. Help in misfortune, food when he was hungry, medicine in sickness, the services of a physician, personal visits, all made no impression on his hardened heart. But ‘Abbás Effendi did not relax nor despair. For five and twenty years he returned continuously good for evil; and then suddenly the man’s long hate broke down, his heart warmed, his spirit awoke and with tears of disillusion and remorse he bowed in homage before the goodness that had mastered him.

Even with enemies much more dangerous and cruel than this poor Afghán, ‘Abbás Effendi showed the same forbearance and good will. He would suffer or invite any personal loss or humiliation rather than miss an opportunity of doing a kindness to an enemy; he would suffer calamity in order to avoid doing something which might be to the spiritual detriment of an ill-wisher. When he had been liberated, a secret enemy procured his re-imprisonment by misrepresentations to the authorities. ‘Abbás Effendi might probably have secured his release by a special appeal; but he declined to take this action. He went back to the prison and was held there for years, one reason for this non-resistance to evil being that the success of his appeal would but deepen the envy and degradation of his enemy: “he must know that I will be the first to forgive him.” In this submissiveness he acted in the same spirit as his father in parallel circumstances. For during that period when a certain jealous member of their entourage was by various means covertly seeking His life, Bahá’u’lláh and all the members of His family,

including His eldest son, remained (so Professor Cheyne records) on cordial relations with him, admitting him as before to their company, even though they thus afforded him further opportunities of pursuing his deadly designs.

So confident were all who knew ‘Abbás Effendi that they could count on his largeness of mind that even the Sháh of Persia, when in extremity and threatened with revolution, stooped to send a letter to him asking for his opinion and advice, and received an assurance that if he would end despotism and establish a constitution he might count on a happy reign but that if he persisted in his present path he would be dethroned. The Sháh neglected the counsel and brought down upon himself the fate from which his generous prisoner would have shielded him.

He that is faithful in a very little will be faithful also in much. The foot of a Hercules will be enough to reveal the giant dimensions of his strength. And from the few phrases and incidents quoted in this brief sketch one may recognise the keenness of ‘Abbás Effendi’s insight into the spiritual meaning of the Gospel, and the Christlikeness of his character and his life.

Who can even casually regard this story without being touched to the quick by this spectacle of wisdom held in chains and tender love scourged by bloodthirsty hate, and without being moved to long wonder at the obliquity of our human nature which metes out to a heaven-born goodness either icy neglect or ferocious persecution? It is strange that ‘Abbás Effendi should have walked the streets of Christendom and spoken in its halls, little honoured and little heeded, and that when he had gone, the sluggish tides of materialism should have closed over his tracks and rolled on their accustomed course. Yet it is still more strange that in Islám every virtue in his breast should have called forth in the breast of priest and politician its opposite, and that he should have been a target for the last extremes of all injustice. But even in these unparalleled tribulations appears the unveiling hand of Almighty God. The spiritual eminence of the central figure stands out with a loftier majesty because it rises from an uttermost abyss, and the world could never have realised the tremendous power of that character had it not been put to the proof by trials proportioned to its strength.

## 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Historic Meeting with Jane Addams

TUESDAY APRIL 21, 1936

BY  
RUTH J MOFFETT

In this article from the 1934-1936 volume of *The Bahá'í World*, Ruth J. Moffett writes about her audience with Jane Addams, who had invited 'Abdu'l-Bahá to speak at the Hull Settlement House on April 30, 1912, before an audience that surpassed the building's capacity of 750 people.



Photo credit: Library of Congress

*"Oneness of the world of humanity ensures the glorification of men. International peace is the assurance of the welfare of all mankind. There are no greater motives and purposes in the human soul." ... "Your efforts must be lofty. Exert yourselves with heart and soul so that perchance through your efforts the light of Universal Peace may shine and this darkness of estrangement and enmity may be dispelled among men; that all men may become as one family and consort together in love and kindness; that the East may assist the West and the West give help to the East, for all are the inhabitants of one planet, the people of one original nativity and the flocks of one shepherd." – 'Abdu'l-Bahá*

It was on a warm, springlike day, April 30, 1912, that Hull House in Chicago was all astir. For 'Abdu'l-Bahá, a great and holy Personage from Palestine was expected. This important visit was planned by Jane Addams, "Mother of Hull House," or "Chicago's Most Useful Citizen," as the people of Chicago lovingly call her.

Seldom has biographer presented two more significant and inspiring world figures, both working earnestly for the Unity of Mankind and the establishment of Universal Peace than 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Center of the Covenant of the Bahá'í World, and Jane Addams, the President of the Woman's International League for Peace and Freedom: one Who had been chosen as a Divine Exemplar to humanity, and the other reflecting the spirit of service. How fitting that Hull House an outstanding example of the application of the great principle of the Oneness of mankind, should be the place of meeting.

During a recent interview with Miss Addams, the writer learned that it was in 1844 that the Quaker father of Jane Addams moved to Illinois. A pine-crowned hill is the living memorial of the bagful of seeds planted by him in that memorable year of world history. In 1860 a little girl was born at Cedarville, Illinois, in the shadow of those

piners. As a child, she was a shy, conscientious, sensitive, idealistic girl. These qualities developed into high moral courage, the unswerving devotion to duty, and the passion of self-sacrifice for others. These characteristics served to make this frail woman elect to pass her life in an unsavory quarter of this great industrial city, Chicago, and to spend there, in behalf of the poor, her inheritance; which would have maintained her in comfortable idleness amid the beautiful things that she loved. Here she has ministered to and educated those in dire need and thus worked indefatigably for the establishment of the unity and amity of mankind.

As the years unfolded, Jane Addams received her A. B. degree at Rockford College, Rockford, Illinois, in 1881. Then she spent two years in Europe, 1883-1885, because of imperfect health. In 1888 she studied in Philadelphia, and the next year opened Hull House with the assistance of Miss Ellen Gates Starr, and has ever since been its Head Resident. For three years she served as inspector of streets and alleys on the southwest side of Chicago. She received her LL.D. from the University of Wisconsin in 1904 and in 1910 was honored in the same way by Smith College. Later she became president of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections. Yale University granted her its A. M. degree in 1910. In 1912 she became vice-president of the National Woman's Suffrage Association and chairman of the Woman's Peace Party. In 1915 she was elected delegate to the first Peace Convention at The Hague, and the same year became the founder-president of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, and still remains its active president. She was the delegate to the Peace Conventions at Zurich in 1917, at Vienna, in 1921, and at The Hague in 1922. On January 12, 1923 she started on a six months tour of the world in the interests of world peace. During all these years many books have come from her pen, and she has served on numerous state and national committees having to do with social, philanthropic, industrial and international problems.

Hull House, one of the first American settlements, stands as a dream fulfilled. It was established in 1889, to become a spacious and hospitable home, tolerant in spirit, equipped to care for the pressing physical, mental, social and spiritual needs of a poor, alien, complicated community.

About fifty men and women of various races and creeds and backgrounds form the residential staff, mostly college graduates who pledge themselves to remain two years. In addition, one hundred and fifty others come to Hull House each week as teachers, visitors or directors of clubs. About nine thousand persons come to the settlement each week during the winter months, as members of the audiences or classes. Miss Addams explained that the attractions offered include classroom instruction in English, current topics, typing, arts and crafts, music, drawing, folk dancing and nearly all phases of domestic arts. Public lectures and clubs of many kinds supply the needs of men, women and children of all classes, beliefs and shades of color. A circulating library of two thousand volumes stimulates mental interest. A well trained, working boy's band of sixty-two pieces is a source of great joy, as are the many tournaments and contests, enjoyed especially by the little children of foreign lands. The monthly gymnasium attendance is three thousand, and the fifteen showers are kept in constant use. During the year six thousand paid showers and twelve thousand free showers help to keep up the physical, mental and moral standards. The Italian, Jewish and Greek nationalities seem to predominate in the clubs and classes.

In Miss Addams' high-ceiled living room, the writer asked her, "What has been one of the central ideas of the activities of Hull House?" Her kindly eyes brightened as she said, "The things which make men alike are finer and better than the things that keep them apart, and these basic likenesses, if they are properly accentuated, easily transcend the less essential difference of race, language, creed and tradition." After a time she continued with an alert enthusiasm.

"Life at the Settlement discovers above all what has been called the extraordinary pliability of human nature; and it seems impossible to set any bounds to the moral capabilities which might unfold under ideal civic and



educational conditions. In order to obtain these conditions, the Settlement recognizes the need of cooperation, both with the radical and conservative elements. Hull House casts aside none of those things which cultivated man has come to consider reasonable and goodly, but it insists that those belong as well to that great body of people who because of toilsome and underpaid labor, are unable to procure them for themselves. Added to this is the profound conviction that the common stock of intellectual enjoyment should not be difficult of access because of the economic position of him who would approach it, that 'those best interests of civilization' upon which depend the finer, freer and nobler aspects of living must be incorporated into our common life and have free mobility through all the elements of society, if we would have a true, enduring democracy. The educational activities of a Settlement, as well as its philanthropic, civic and social undertakings, are but differing manifestations of the attempt to socialize true democracy, which is the very existence of Hull House itself. It is thus that peace and unity are established."

"Do you think that the people of the world generally are more peace-minded than before the World War?" she was asked.

"Oh, yes. The war startled and shocked them into a realization of the need of peace as never before. It has been more discussed and written about and has become the most vital problem before man."

"What do you consider the greatest forces of the world today working for peace?" "There are three," she replied: "First, psychological; second, political; and third, mechanical. First, the psychological includes all the books, newspapers, magazine articles and all the addresses and discussions on the subject, but something more than all of these, the interest and overwhelming desire in the heart for peace. Second, the political, even, has become a force for peace. International instruments to take care of the affairs of all the nations of the world must be created before peace can be maintained. These are only just beginning, in the League of Nations, the World Court, an International Code of Law and an International Police Force to enforce the law. Many other international instruments of this nature will be required. Third, nothing can stay the progress of the machine age, the invention, the improved methods of intercommunication and intertransportation. This is also a great force, bringing about better understanding in the world which is the basis of peace."

"You ask what I consider to be the greatest need of the world today?" she continued. "I would put it in one word, *understanding*—understanding between individuals, classes, races, nations. Literature, history and mechanics are bringing it about much more rapidly today. Are not nations simply families living together, learning to adjust themselves to each other for the best good for the greatest number?"

"Yes, you are right," she said in reply to my question. "The problems of the world which are caused by wrong mental attitudes are returning to the heart and mind of man and the solution must come through changed mental attitudes."

Although having spoken on the same platform with Miss Addams many times and dined as her guest, yet during this interview at Hull House, alone in the spacious living room with her, the writer was more than ever impressed with a fine quality of innate courtesy, a sympathetic sensitiveness, a queenly dignity and greatest of all the keenness of a brilliant intellect expressing a well-balanced and well-ordered mind.

When the author asked her if she had met that distinguished Personage of Palestine Whom Great Britain had knighted as one of the greatest advocates and establishers of World Peace and the Unity of Mankind that the world had known, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, she replied with an emphatic "Yes." In a low pitched, well modulated voice, she spoke of inviting 'Abdu'l-Bahá to visit Hull House on April 30, 1912, to speak *in* Bowen Hall, and although the hall seats 750 people, it was far too small to hold the crowds that poured in. In streams the rich and poor, the

educated and ignorant, the managers of business and the industrial slaves came. Hull House was all astir. So was Halstead Street, that bit of cross-section, seemingly, of all the markets, bazaars, cafes and wayside churches of all the races, nationalities and creeds of the world.

Miss Addams herself, acting as chairman, welcomed 'Abdu'l-Bahá and graciously presented Him to the audience. Dr. Bagdadi, a physician of Chicago, served as His interpreter, having known and loved 'Abdu'l-Bahá years before in the Holy Land.

To attempt to describe 'Abdu'l-Bahá is like trying to paint the lily. As he stood before the sea of hungry upturned faces, His magnetic personality, His radiance, His penetrating potency, the power of His inspiration, the very purity of His life, and the great understanding compassionate love, made an impression upon His listeners that they can never forget.

Because in 1912 racial prejudice and hatred were very intense and because of the outstanding historical work that Miss Addams had achieved, 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke of the races being like many varieties of flowers in one garden, all adding to the fragrance and beauty of the garden. He spoke of the benefit to be derived by all humanity when universal peace and racial amity have spread over the earth. This depends upon the spirit and intelligence of man. The basis for the establishment of world peace and the amity of man cannot be based upon color, but only upon noble qualities. With an almost overwhelming power, 'Abdu'l-Bahá declared, "The standard can be no other than the divine virtues which are revealed in him. Therefore, every man imbued with divine qualities, who reflects heavenly moralities and perfections, who is the expression of ideal and praiseworthy attributes, *is verily in the image and likeness of God*...a divine station which is not sacrificed by the mere accident of color."

'Abdu'l-Bahá at the close of the meeting in Hull House went out into the dingy crowded street, mingled with the little children and the under-privileged poor, and gave to them freely from a bagful of coins, with many kindly words of encouragement, sympathy, love and hope, which brightened the eyes, strengthened the courage and uplifted the faith and hope of all who met Him.

'Abdu'l-Bahá expressed his pleasure at meeting Miss Jane Addams because she was serving mankind. According to His own words, He was chosen by His Father, Bahá'u'lláh (the Glory of God) to be the Servant of humanity, and because Miss Addams has devoted her life unreservedly to others she certainly reflects the beautiful light of servitude. One of the bounties of the Bahá'í Revelation is that women of heavenly capacities can never more be hindered by the ancient stupid form of male supremacy, but may rise to help in the establishment of the New World Order, and of peace and good will to all mankind.

As the writer said farewell to Miss Addams, who was leaving on an extended trip for her health, she presented her with an autographed copy of her photograph and her book, "Twenty Years at Hull House," and spoke again of being deeply impressed with 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and with the beauty and spirit emanating from the Bahá'í Temple. She expressed the hope that more people would feel the great need and rise today to help bring amity permanently to the world.

Gazing at the very building in which took place the historic meeting of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Jane Addams, and in which 'Abdu'l-Bahá had so perfectly voiced the note of the Oneness of all Mankind, and left His spirit like a benediction hovering over all, one saw people of all races streaming in and out of Hull House, honoring the founder before her departure. With a deeper consciousness of realization, one recognized the fulfillment of those priceless words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá: "Today the most important purpose of the Kingdom of God is the promulgation of the cause of Universal Peace and the principle of the Oneness of the World of Humanity. Whosoever rises in the accomplishment of this preeminent service, the confirmation of the Holy Spirit will descend upon him."



## Memories of the Sojourn of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Paris

TUESDAY APRIL 21, 1936

BY

LADY SARA LOUISA BLOMFIELD

'Abdu'l-Bahá's first stay in Paris in 1911 was documented by Lady Blomfield, a Bahá'í from London, who penned this memoir of the four month visit. The notes taken by her daughters and their friend Beatrice Platt were later published as the book *Paris Talks*.



Abdu'l-Bahá with a group of Bahá'ís under the Eiffel Tower in Paris, France, January 1913

Much has been written of the journeys of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 'Abbás Effendi. Having been released from the prison fortress of 'Akká, after forty years of captivity, he set himself to obey the sacred charge laid upon him by his Father, Bahá'u'lláh. Accordingly he undertook a three years' mission into the Western World. He left the Holy Land and came to Europe in 1911.

During that and the two following years, he visited Switzerland, England, Scotland, France, America, Germany and Hungary.

When the days of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's first visit to London (in the autumn of 1911) were drawing to a close, his friends, Monsieur and Madame Dreyfus-Barney, prepared an apartment for his residence whilst in the French capital. It was charmingly furnished, sunny, spacious, situated in the Avenue de Camöens (No. 4) whence a flight of steps led into the Trocadero Gardens. Here the Master often took solitary, restful walks. Sheltered in this modern, comfortable Paris flat, he whom we revered, with secretary servitors and a few close friends, sojourned for an unforgettable nine weeks.

I shall try to describe some of the events which took place, but these events owe their significance to the atmosphere of otherworldliness which encompassed the Master and his friends.

We, at least some of us, had the impression that these happenings became, as it were, symbols of Sacred Truths.

Who is this, with branch of roses in his hand, coming down the steps? A picturesque group of friends – some Iránians wearing the kola, and a few Europeans following him, little children coming up to him. They hold on to his cloak, confiding and fearless. He gives the roses to them, caressingly lifting one after another into his arms, smiling the while that glorious smile which wins all hearts. Again, we saw a cabman stop his fiacre, take off his cap and hold it in his hands, gazing amazed, with an air of reverence, whilst the majestic figure, courteously acknowledging his salutation, passed by with that walk which a friend had described as “that of a king or of a shepherd.”



Another scene. A very poor quarter in Paris – Sunday morning – groups of men and women inclined to be rowdy. Foremost amongst them a big man brandishing a long loaf of bread in his hand, shouting, gesticulating, dancing.

Into this throng walked ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, on his way from a Mission Hall where he had been addressing a very poor congregation at the invitation of their Pastor. The boisterous man with the loaf, suddenly seeing him, stood still. He then proceeded to lay about him lustily with his staff of life, crying “Make way, make way! He is my Father, make way.” The Master passed through the midst of the crowd, now become silent and respectfully saluting him. “Thank you, my dear friends, thank you,” he said smiling round upon them. The poor were always his especially beloved friends. He was never happier than when surrounded by them, the lowly of heart!

Who is he?

Why do the people gather round him?

Why is he here in Paris?

Shortly before Bahá’u’lláh “returned to the shelter of Heaven,” He laid a sacred charge upon his eldest son, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (literally Servant of God, the Most Glorious). This charge was that he should carry the renewed Gospel of Peace and Justice, Love and Truth, into all lands, with special insistence on the translating of all praiseworthy ideals into action. What profit is there in *agreeing* that these ideals are good? Unless they are put into practice, they are useless.



I hope to indicate, albeit too inadequately, something of that Messenger, the “Trusted One,” who came out of an Eastern prison to bring his Father’s message to the bewildered nations of earth. During the Paris visit, as it had been in London, daily happenings took on the atmosphere of spiritual events. Some of these episodes I will endeavour to describe as well as I can remember them.

Every morning, according to his custom, the Master expounded the Principles of the Teaching of Bahá’u’lláh to those who gathered round him, the learned and the unlearned, eager and respectful. They were of all nationalities and creeds, from the East and from the West, including Theosophists, Agnostics, Materialists, Spiritualists, Christian Scientists, Social Reformers, Hindus, Súffis, Muslims, Buddhists, Zoroastrians and many others. Often came workers in various Humanitarian societies, who were striving to reduce the miseries of the poor.

These received special sympathy and blessing.



‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke in Iránian which was translated into French by Monsieur and Madame Dreyfus-Barney. My two daughters, Mary and Ellinor, our friend Miss Beatrice Platt, and I took notes of these “Talks” from day to day. At the request of the Master, these notes were arranged and published in English. It will be seen that in these pages are gathered together the precepts of those Holy Souls who, being Individual Rays of the ONE were, in divers times and countries, incarnated here on Earth to lead the spiritual evolution of human kind.



The *words* of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá can be put on to paper, but how to describe the smile, the earnest pleading, the loving-kindness, the radiant vitality, and at times the awe-inspiring authority of his spoken words? The vibrations of his voice seemed to enfold the listeners in an atmosphere of the Spirit, and to penetrate to the very core of being. We were experiencing the transforming radiance of the Sun of Truth; henceforth, material aims and unworthy ambitions shrank away into their trivial obscure retreats.



‘Abdu’l-Bahá would often answer our questions before we asked them. Sometimes he would encourage us to put them into words.

“And now your question?” he said.

I answered, “I am wondering about the next world, whether I shall ask to be permitted to come back here to Earth to help?”

“Why should you wish to return here? In My Father’s House are many mansions—many, many worlds! Why would you desire to come back to this particular planet?”



The visit of one man made a profound impression upon us: “O ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, I have come from the French Congo, where I have been engaged in mitigating the hardships of some of the natives. For sixteen years I have worked in that country.”

“It was a great comfort to me in the darkness of my prison to know the work which you were doing.”

Explanations were not necessary when coming to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá!



One day a widow in deepest mourning came. Weeping bitterly she was unable to utter a word.

Knowing her heart’s grief, “Do not weep,” said ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, wiping away the tears from the piteous face. “Do not weep! Be happy! It will be well with the boy. Bring him to see me in a few days.”

On her way out, this mother said, “O my child! He is to go through a dangerous operation today. What can I do!”

“The Master has told you what to do. Remember his words: ‘Do not weep, it will be well with the boy. Be happy, and in a few days bring him to see me.’”

In a few days the mother brought her boy to the Master, perfectly well.





One evening at the home of Monsieur and Madame Dreyfus-Barney, an artist was presented to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

“Thou art very welcome. I am happy to see thee. All true art is a gift of the Holy Spirit.”

“What is the Holy Spirit?”

“It is the Sun of Truth, O Artist!”

“Where, O where, is the Sun of Truth?”

“The Sun of Truth is everywhere. It is shining on the whole world.”

“What of the dark night, when the Sun is not shining?”

“The darkness of night is past, the Sun has risen.”

“But, Master! how shall it be with the blinded eyes that cannot see the Sun’s splendor? And what of the deaf ears that cannot hear those who praise its beauty?”

“I will pray that the blind eyes may be opened, that the deaf ears may be unstopped, and that the hearts may have grace to understand.”

As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke, the troubled mien of the Artist gave place to a look of relief, satisfied understanding, joyous emotion.



Thus, interview followed interview. Church dignitaries of various branches of the Christian Tree came. Some earnestly desirous of finding new aspects of the Truth—“the wisdom that buildeth up, rather than the knowledge that puffeth up.” Others there were who stopped their ears lest they should hear and understand.

One afternoon, a party of the latter type arrived. They spoke words of bigotry, of intolerance, of sheer cruelty in their bitter condemnation of all who did not accept their own particular dogma, showing themselves obsessed by “the hate of man, disguised as love of God”—a thin disguise to the penetrating eyes of the Master! Perhaps they were dreading the revealing light of Truth which he sought to shed upon the darkness of their outworn ecclesiasticism. The new revelation was too great for their narrowed souls and fettered minds.

The heart of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was saddened by this interview, which had tired him exceedingly. When he referred to this visit there was a look in his eyes as if loving pity were blended with profound disapproval, as though he would cleanse the defiled temple of Humanity from the suffocating diseases of the soul! Then he uttered these words in a voice of awe-inspiring authority,

“Jesus Christ is the Lord of Compassion, and these men call themselves by His Name!

*Jesus is ashamed of them!”*

He shivered as with cold, drawing his ‘abá closely about him, with a gesture as if sternly repudiating their misguided outlook.



The Japanese Ambassador to a European capital (Viscount Arawaka—Madrid) was staying at the Hôtel d’Jéna. This gentleman and his wife had been told of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s presence in Paris, and she was anxious to have the privilege of meeting him.

“I am very sad,” said her Excellency. “I must not go out this evening as my cold is severe and I leave early in the morning for Spain. If only there were a possibility of seeing him!”

This was told to the Master, who had just returned after a long, tiring day.

“Tell the lady and her husband that, as she is unable to come to me, I will call upon her.”

Accordingly, though the hour was late, through the cold and the rain he came, with his smiling courtesy, bringing joy to us all as we awaited him in the Tapestry Room.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá talked with the Ambassador and his wife of conditions in Japan, of the great international importance of that country, of the vast service to mankind, of the work for the abolition of war, of the need for improving conditions of life for the worker, of the necessity of educating girls and boys equally.

The religious ideal is the soul of all plans for the good of mankind. Religion must never be used as a tool by party politicians. God’s politics are mighty, man’s politics are feeble.

Speaking of religion and science, the two great wings with which the bird of humankind is able to soar, he said, “Scientific discoveries have greatly increased material civilization. There is in existence a stupendous force, as yet, happily, undiscovered by man. Let us supplicate God, the Beloved, that this force be not discovered by science until Spiritual Civilization shall dominate the human mind! In the hands of men of lower material nature, this power would be able to destroy the whole earth.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá talked of these and of many other supremely important matters for more than an hour. The friends, wondering, said, “How is it possible that having spent all his life imprisoned in an eastern fortress, he should so well understand world problems and possess the wisdom to solve them so simply?”

Truly we were beginning to understand that the majesty of greatness, whether mental or spiritual, is always simple.



One day, I received a disquieting letter, “It would be well to warn ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that it might be dangerous for him to visit a certain country, for which I understand he proposes to set forth in the near future.”

Having regard to the sincere friendship of the writer, and knowing that sources of reliable information were available to him, this warning obviously could not be ignored.

Therefore, as requested, I laid the matter before the Master.

To my amazement, he smiled and said impressively, “My daughter, have you not yet realized that never in my life have I been for one day out of danger, and that I should rejoice to leave this world and go to my Father?”

“Oh, Master! We do not wish that you should go from us in that manner.” I was overcome with sorrow and terror.

“Be not troubled,” said ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. “These enemies have no power over my life, but that which is given them from on High. If my Beloved God so willed that my lifeblood should be sacrificed in His path, it would be a glorious day, devoutly wished for by me.”

Therefore, the friends surrounding the much-loved Master were comforted and their faith so strengthened, that when a sinister-looking man came to a group who were walking in the gardens and threateningly said, “Are you not yet sufficiently warned? Not only is there danger for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, but also for you who are with him,” the friends were unperturbed, one of them replying calmly, “The Power that protects the Master protects also His other servants. Therefore we have no fear.”

The man departed, abashed, saying nothing more.



Two days before the close of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s visit, a woman came hurriedly into the gathering at the Avenue de Camoëns:

“Oh, how glad I am to be in time! I must tell you the amazing reason of my hurried journey from America. One day, my little girl astonished me by saying: ‘Mummy, if dear Lord Jesus was in the world now, what would you do?’ ‘Darling baby, I would feel like getting on to the first train and going to Him as fast as I could.’ ‘Well, Mummy, He is in the world.’ I felt a great awe come over me as my tiny one spoke. ‘What do you mean, my precious? How do you know?’ I said. ‘He told me Himself, so of course He is in the world.’ Full of wonder, I thought: Is this a sacred message which is being given to me out of the mouth of my babe? And I prayed that it might be made clear to me.

“The next day she said, insistently and as though she could not understand, ‘Mummy, darlin’, why isn’t you gone to see Lord Jesus? He’s told me two times that He is really here, in the world.’ ‘Tiny love, mummy doesn’t know where He is, how could she find Him?’ ‘We see, Mummy, we see.’

“I was naturally perturbed. The same afternoon, being out for a walk with my child, she suddenly stood still and cried out, ‘There He is! There He is!’ She was trembling with excitement and pointing at the windows of a magazine store where was a picture of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. I bought the paper, found this address, caught a boat that same night, and here I am.”

The above was written down as it was related to me. It is again the second instance of the pictured face of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá arresting the beholder with a compelling force. The first incident was that of a man in deadly despair, about to take his own life; and now this innocent child!

It was of great interest to notice the effect the presence of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had upon some children. One little girl whispered, “Look, that is Jesus when He was old.” Perhaps their unstained nature sensed the breath of holiness which was always with Him and caused them to liken Him to the Most Holy One of whom they were conscious.



One day a certain man of high degree came to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. “I have been exiled from my country. I pray you intercede for me that I may be permitted to return.”

“You will be allowed to return.”

“Some of my land has been bought by one of the Bahá’í friends. I desire to possess that property once more.”

“It shall be given back to you and without payment.”

“Who is the young man standing behind you? May he be presented to me?”

“He is ‘Aga Mírzá Jalál, son of one of the martyred brothers of Isfáhán.”

“I had no part in that crime.”

“The part you took in that event, I know. Moreover, your motive I know.”

This man, with his fellow conspirator, the “Wolf” (so named because of his ruthless cruelty and greed) had borrowed large sums of money from the two noble and generous brothers of Isfáhán. To accuse them of being followers of Bahá’u’lláh, to bring them before a tribunal which condemned them to be executed, and to have the brothers put to death, was their plot to *avoid being required to repay the loans*.



After the death of the “Wolf” some documents were discovered, relating to the borrowed money. This, with the addition of the interest which had accumulated, now amounted to a considerable sum. The lawyer who was in charge of the affair wrote to the son of the martyr, asking into what bank the moneys should be paid. The reply sent, with the approval of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, was that he declined to accept repayment of money which had been one reason for the shedding of his father’s blood.

‘Aga Mírzá Jalál was now married to a daughter of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.



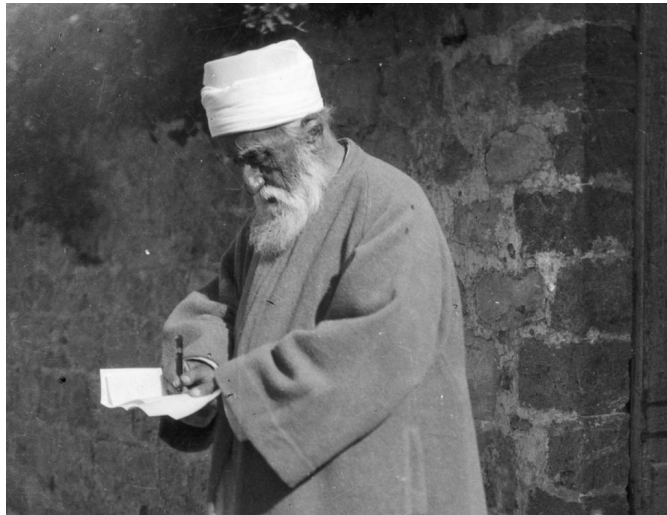
Whilst these episodes were taking place, we who witnessed them seemed to be in a higher dimension where there were natural indications of the presence of the Light which in all men is latent and in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá transcendent.

The constant awareness of an exhilaration, which carried us out of our everyday selves, and gave us the sense of being One with the Life-Pulse which beats through the Universe, is an experience to be treasured rather than an emotion to be described. The reader will understand that it is impossible to find fitting words for the thoughts and feelings which were with us in those Paris days.

## The Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

SATURDAY APRIL 21, 1973

By  
AMÍN BANÁNÍ



The Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá are the fruit of more than half a century of prolific labour from His early twenties to the seventy-eighth and final year of His life. Their full volume is as yet unknown; and much remains to be done in gathering, analyzing, and collating His literary legacy.

His Writings consist of personal correspondence, general tablets, tablets on specific themes, books, prayers, poems, public talks, and recorded conversations. Approximately four-fifths of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Writings are in Persian; the rest – with the exception of a very small number of prayers and letters in Turkish – are in Arabic. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was both fluent and eloquent in these three languages. Transcriptions of His extemporaneous speeches are often indistinguishable from His Writings. In a culture that placed a high premium on rhetoric ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was recognized by friend and foe, Arab and Persian, as a paragon of distinctive style and eloquence.

It is the intent of this article to touch upon the character of that style and to present an overview of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Writings in various genres and categories. Discussion of the language and style is inherently limited, as it must be attempted across twin barriers of culture and tongue; the attempt at categorization is necessarily arbitrary and is meant to serve only as a catalogue. Obviously any number of criteria, such as chronological, thematic and linguistic, can provide different sets of categories. Furthermore, some works cited as examples of certain categories could easily be put under others.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá was, of course, not a prophet and at no time claimed to have received direct revelation from God. But the Centre of the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh, and the appointed Interpreter of His Revelation, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Bahá’ís believe, was divinely inspired and guided. His Writings, therefore, constitute for the Bahá’ís at once a part and an interpretation of their Scriptures.

The question of divinely inspired language has traditionally posed a dilemma and given rise to baseless dogma in the religions of the past. In their literal-minded zeal to aver the authenticity of their Holy Writ, devotees of traditional religions have often insisted on the divine authorship of the very lexical and syntactic form of that Writ. This view not only reduces God to the use of particular and different human tongues, but it also attempts to isolate religious writings from the body of the language in which they were written. It equates divine origin with absolute linguistic and literary originality. Those who uphold this view tend to be resentful of any comparison and precedence, and through their unwarranted notion of originality they completely miss the often striking literary originality of holy books that can only be perceived in the light of traditions in their languages. By ignoring the literary traditions, conceptual methods, cultural associations – in short by denying the life of the language – they reduce rather than enhance comprehension and true appreciation of holy scriptures.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s two primary languages have vigorous and highly developed literary traditions with more than a thousand years of life. Only the briefest mention of facets of these traditions that are germane to the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’ is possible here. Since most of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Writings are in Persian, the main focus here is on Persian literary traditions. But so many of these are shared with Arabic – indeed in many cases they are reflections of Arabic norms in Persian – that the observations will generally be true of the Arabic literary traditions as well.

For nearly a thousand years since the formulation and the crystallization of classical criteria in Arabic and Persian literature there has existed a preoccupation with and a primacy of form. Needless to say, tightly metered and fully rhymed poetry, as the most formal of literary arts, has been the master art form for the Arabs and the Persians. Prose writers from their aesthetically inferior position have attempted to ennoble their work with qualities of poetry, evolving a technique known as *saj’*. It introduces the basic poetic ingredients of rhyme and rhythm into prose without actually transforming it into equal-footed lines. A symmetry of expression is achieved by use of lexical devices such as synonyms, antonyms, and homonyms giving prose an architectural plasticity and rendering it memorable. This style of writing in Persian reached its apex during the thirteenth century A.D. and declined rapidly thereafter. By the end of the eighteenth century it had reached a nadir of artificial verbosity and lost its power to communicate.

The style of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is the outward mode of His inspiration and expression. The animus is the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh. The clay is the Persian language with its characteristics. The mystery of His person forms it into a unique style. It is distinctive, unmistakably personal, and therefore original. Yet it is in the purest mould of literary tradition. It is a new flowering of *saj’*. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has breathed new life into a familiar form; but by harmonizing form and content He has banished contrived artifice.

In the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá form is an approach to the content. He makes use of poetic imagery and of a vast range of rhetorical and literary devices such as metaphors, similes, symbols, allegories, alliterations, assonances, and dissonances, not in order to draw a veil around the subject, but to expand the reader’s mind by refraction of the same reality through different planes of perception, cognition and intuition. This is the difference between sterile formality and organic integrity of form in a truly creative sense.

Two brief examples may illustrate this harmony of form and content in the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. First is the phrase “the Sun of Reality” which occurs frequently in His Writings both as a metaphor and a symbol for the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh. There is mutual illumination of the concrete and the abstract here – at once self-evident, life-giving, and pervasive. But it also can remind us of creatures that avoid the sun. How often ‘Abdu’l-Bahá referred to the Sun of Reality dawning over gatherings of bats! The other example is the imagery evoked in



His own Tablet of Visitation: "... Give me to drink from the chalice of selflessness; with its robe clothe me..."

The paragraph is made of a series of related cultural images of admittance to court, proffering of the cup of favour, and granting of the ceremonial bejewelled robe: all evoke the ceremony of a royal audience and the bestowal of high rank – traditionally an occasion of pomp, pride and vanity. By this dramatic inversion of images, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has underlined the nobility of servitude and humility.

This use of artistic form for the expression of meanings and purpose is a hallmark of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Writings. To cultivate an appreciation of the poetic qualities of His Writings is to enhance one’s understanding of His meaning.

It must be admitted that the same qualities place an enormous burden on the translator; and much can be lost in inadequate hands. Fortunately, Shoghi Effendi, particularly in his translations of some of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s prayers, has left us a true standard. The foregoing should not lead the reader to infer that the style of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, although at all times recognizable and personal, is unvarying. His subjects, ranging from philosophical treatises to meditative poems, are expressed in language appropriate to them. Before proceeding to the differentiation of the various categories of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Writings it might be helpful to clarify the traditional term Tablet (*lawh*) which is applied to the majority of His Works. It designates all His Writings that are addressed to specific individuals or groups. As such it is applied to everything from His personal correspondence to such fundamental documents as the *Tablets of the Divine Plan* and the *Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*.

For purposes of analysis ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Writings can be divided into twelve groups of which personal correspondence (Tablets to individuals) constitutes by far the largest segment, despite the undoubted fact that a portion of this precious heritage has been irretrievably lost, and a portion remains in non-Bahá’i hands. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s letters are masterpieces of Persian epistolary genre. They are marked by directness, intimacy, warmth, love, humour, forbearance, and a myriad other qualities that reveal the exemplary perfection of His personality. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá addresses everyone as an equal in the service of Bahá’u’lláh. His letters often open with an invocation of the quality of faith of the recipient rather than his name or identity – epithets such as “O the Firm One in the Covenant”, “O Lover of the Blessed Beauty”. (Later when the Persians were required by law to adopt family names, many Bahá’is chose as surnames words of address from the Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to themselves or to their fathers.) In subject matter, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s letters range from responses to the personal and ephemeral requests of His correspondents to profound elaborations, elucidations and interpretations of the Bahá’í Revelation. But mostly they are concerned with direction and exhortation of the friends to spread the Teachings.

Tablets of specific topical or thematic significance addressed to individuals are perhaps best exemplified by the Tablet to Professor Auguste Forel which is in fact a philosophical treatise written by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in September, 1921, in answer to questions put to Him by the noted Swiss psychologist.

Tablets addressed to Bahá’í communities in various parts of the world chronicle ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s loving and vigorous leadership of the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh and its propagation from a handful of countries in the Near and the Middle East to some thirty-five countries in every continent on the globe. The most important in this group are undoubtedly the series of the *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, written at the close of the first World War.

Among the Tablets written to world groups or congresses, the best known is the Tablet sent in 1919 to the Central Organization for a Durable Peace at the Hague.

*The Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* is a unique document, written in three parts, that constitutes the charter<sup>1</sup> of the Bahá’í Administrative Order. Although undated, it is clear from its contents that the first part was written in 1906/7 during the most perilous and yet most prolific period of His life.

The next category is that of prayers. The Arabic and Persian languages distinguish between what is translated in English as prayer (*munáját*) and obligatory prayer (*salát*). The prayers of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá are *munáját*. Approximately one half of these are in Persian and the other in Arabic, with a very few in Turkish. The term *munáját* has a history in Persian literature beginning with Khwájih ‘Abdu’llah-i-Ansári, a Súfí mystic of the eleventh century A.D. The *munáját* of Ansári are highly stylized epigrammatic forms of communion with God. From a literary point of view these brief evocative compositions bear only the slightest generic resemblance to the *munáját* of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, which, although called by the same name, are clearly a literary innovation and original creations in the Persian and Arabic languages. Their chief distinguishing quality is the sustained and expanding expression of man’s experience of the Holy by means of poetic language. The prayers of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, particularly, partake in the fullest measure of poetic qualities. Some actually include fragments or lines of metrical verse which are indistinguishable from the texture of the whole prayer. The purity and sanctity of natural imagery reveal a state of cosmic harmony. The musicality of some of them transcends limitations of language. Poetry is made to serve the ultimate goal of rising above “the murmur of syllables and sounds”. The emotional intensity of some of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s prayers, especially those that recall the sufferings of and separation from Bahá’u’lláh is unrivalled.

Prayers written for special occasions such as meetings of Spiritual Assemblies, or embarking on teaching trips, focus upon overcoming of self and reliance upon confirmations from God.

Tablets of Visitation, virtually all written in Arabic, are primarily for commemoration of individual heroes and martyrs of the Faith, and are to be chanted when visiting their graves. The majority were written in the final years of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s life and are another testimony of His abiding love and faithfulness to the memory of those who sacrificed themselves for the Cause of God.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s poems are few in number, and mostly in *Mathnaví* (rhymed couplet) form. His love for this form – universally associated with the great spiritual masterpiece of the thirteenth century poet Rúmi – and His love for Rúmi’s poetry are further evinced by frequent quotations of lines from the latter’s works in His Writings.

Books and treatises, of which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá left three, are *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, written in 1875 (also known as *A Treatise on Civilization*); *A Traveller’s Narrative*, written about 1886; and a short volume entitled *A Treatise on Politics*, written in 1893. The first two have been translated into English. The latter, available only in Persian, may be considered a sequel in subject and purpose to *The Secret of Divine Civilization*. The fundamental theme is the generative force of religion and the degenerative role of priestly power in human affairs. The first book is addressed to the Persian nation as a whole; the second is directed to the Baha’i community in that land. Their import obviously transcends the historical aims and the immediate occasion of their writing, but they also constitute significant documents within that context.

*The Secret of Divine Civilization*, particularly, occupies a pre-eminent historical position among the literature of modernization in Persia. Seen in the light of the unfolding Bahá’í Revelation, it is, of course, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s elaboration of the principles enunciated by Bahá’u’lláh in His Tablets to the rulers of the earth. But read in the light of modern analytical literature on the nature and problems of modernization, it is a unique document of equally profound implications. In it ‘Abdu’l-Bahá presents a coherent programme for the regeneration of Persian society. The programme is predicated on universal education and eradication of ignorance and fanaticism. It calls for responsibility and participation of the people in government through a representative assembly. It seeks to safeguard their rights and liberties through codification of laws and institutionalization of justice. It argues for the humane benefits of modern science and technology. It condemns militarism and underscores the immorality of heavy expenditures for armaments. It promulgates a more equitable sharing of the wealth of the nation.

Of the long list of indictments that could be brought against the one hundred and twenty five years of Qájár misrule of Persia, few could be as damaging as their neglect of this blueprint in 1875. Not until nearly twenty years later do some of these ideas appear piecemeal and unrelated in the writings of other so-called reformers and modernists in Persia. But the significance of *The Secret of Divine Civilization* is not merely that it represents the earliest and the only coherent scheme for the modernization of Persia. We have come to recognize as the fatal flaw of nearly all reformist ideas and modernizing efforts of the last hundred years (not only in Persia but in many parts of the world), a naive imitation of effects without grasping the causes – superficial borrowing of forms unrelated to their underlying values. Everything in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s proposals is firmly based upon the validity and potency of divine guidance. It is not westernization of the East that He advocates. He has as much to say to the spiritually impoverished societies of the West as to the people of Persia. Through a revivification of the spiritual and moral potentialities of man ‘Abdu’l-Bahá seeks to create new institutions and viable political forms – to lay the foundation of a truly divine civilization.

*A Traveller’s Narrative*, which is a history of the episode of the Báb, was written for the seeker and the curious. It presents a brief and dispassionate account of that portentous dispensation in a simple and moving narrative style. Like *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, this book was published anonymously. It may be another indication of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s humility before Bahá’u’lláh that He did not place His name on the two books He wrote for the public beyond the Bahá’í community during the lifetime of His Father. He also wished to emphasize, as He points out in *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, that He had no expectation of personal gain from His efforts.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s discourses are extensive transcriptions of His utterances on various topics. The two major examples of the genre are *Some Answered Questions* and *Memorials of the Faithful*. The generic affinity of these two works is, however, strictly formal; for in subject matter they are widely different. The final written versions of both were examined by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and approved for publication. *Some Answered Questions* is a compilation of the table talks of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in response to questions put to Him by Laura Clifford Barney on spiritual tenets of the Bahá’í Faith and on the Bahá’í understanding of some Christian beliefs. The conversations, their recording, editing, and authentication occurred in the difficult years immediately preceding ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s relative freedom in 1908. The compilation was first published in 1907.

*Memorials of the Faithful*, which has only lately (1971) been translated into English, is a compendium of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s remembrances of some seventy early believers, spoken to gatherings of Bahá’ís in Haifa during the early years of World War I. These were compiled, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s permission for their publication was granted in 1915 but due to the strictures of wartime the book was not published until 1924 when it was again authorized by Shoghi Effendi.

The outward form of *Memorials of the Faithful* is a collection of brief biographical sketches. Its title in the original, *Tadhkiratu’l-Vafá*, places it in a Persian literary tradition some nine centuries old. It brings to mind the *Tadhkiratu’l-Awliyá* (Remembrance of Saints) of the twelfth century mystic poet ‘Attár. The spiritual and cultural impulses that have given rise to the literary form of *tadhkirib* have little to do with the particular, the personal and the ephemeral aspects of human life. It is the quality of soul, the attributes of spirit, the quintessential humanity and the reflection of the divine in man that is the focus here.

The root word *dhikr* in the title means prayerful mention – reverent remembrance. It implies that it is not the biographer nor the reader who memorializes a human life, but rather the quality of that life which has earned immemorial lustre and sheds light on all who remember that quality. Quite literally this book is a remembrance of

*vafá* – faithfulness – not just memories of individual lives, but remembrance of that essential quality which was the animating force of all those lives.

The people whose “lives” are depicted here all share one thing in common. They are propelled by their love for Bahá’u’lláh. So great is this magnetic force in their lives that they literally travel vast distances and overcome every barrier to be with Him. Some of them arrive virtually with their dying breath, to expire happily after having seen the face of their Beloved; some die on the arduous path. Despite the peculiarities of time and place, it should not take the reader long to recognize a gallery of timeless and universal human types in this book.

The spoken language of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is figurative and almost indistinguishable from His written style. He makes use of a rich fund of literary devices – rhymed phrases, symmetrical forms, alliterations, assonances, metaphors, similes, and allusions – that, far from sounding contrived and artificial, are naturally matched to the subject matter: the essence of faithfulness. With concrete images He describes spiritual states and psychic levels of consciousness, as if to assert the primacy and reality of the realm of spirit. Should the reader experience difficulty with the style, let him savour it slowly, allowing the unfamiliar language to create its own spirit and breathe life into its allusions. Let the words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá trace in his mind the shape of the valley of love and faithfulness.

In His usual self-effacing way ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’ says almost nothing about Himself in this book. But occasional events in the lives of these companions are interwoven with His own. In these passages we have some thrilling glimpses of that essence of humanity and humility that was ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

Next to His personal correspondence, talks comprise the largest segment of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s recorded words. One may distinguish between talks given to Bahá’ís and addresses to the general public, such as societies, groups, universities and congregations. Generally they have the same literary marks and rhetorical patterns that are characteristic of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Writings. This vast body of Writing, boundless in its wisdom, consummate in form, generous and loving in spirit and rich in significance, is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s literary legacy, a legacy that, like His own prayer, rises “above words and letters” and transcends “the murmur of syllables and sounds”. It is the reality of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá so far as we the grateful readers are capable of perceiving.

## **An Account of the Passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá**

**SATURDAY APRIL 21, 1973**

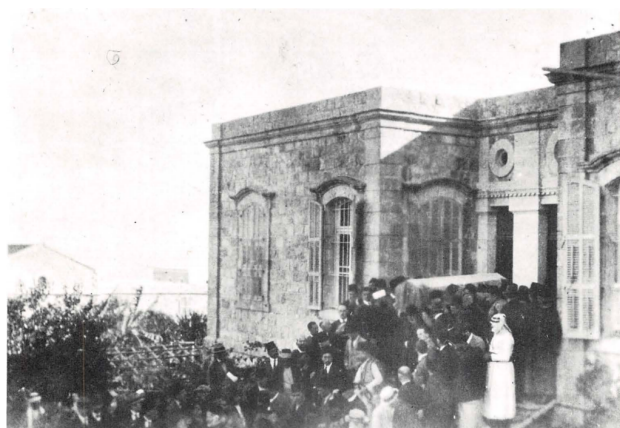
**By**

**SHOGHI EFFENDI**

**AND**

**LADY BLOMFIELD**

Reproduced from The Bahá'í World, Volume 15 (1968-1973) in commemoration of the 50 year anniversary of the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.



The funeral procession leaving ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s home, No. 7 Persian (Haparsim) Street, Haifa, Tuesday, November 29, 1921.

It is well known that the loved ones of ‘Abdu’-Bahá, in every part of the world, are anxiously waiting to receive some details of the closing events of His unique and wonderful life. For this reason the present account is being written.

We have now come to realize that the Master knew the day and hour when, His mission on earth being finished, He would return to the shelter of heaven. He was, however, careful that His family should not have any premonition of the coming sorrow. It seemed as though their eyes were veiled by Him, with His ever-loving consideration for His dear ones, that they should not see the significance of certain dreams and other signs of the culminating event. This they now realize was His thought for them, in order that their strength might be preserved to face the great ordeal when it should arrive, that they should not be devitalized by anguish of mind in its anticipation.

Out of the many signs of the approach of the hour when He could say of His work on earth, “It is finished,” the following two dreams seem remarkable. Less than eight weeks before His passing the Master related this to His family:

I seemed to be standing within a great temple, in the inmost shrine, facing the east, in the place of the leader himself. I became aware that a large number of people were flocking into the temple; more and yet more crowded in, taking their places in rows behind me, until there was a vast multitude. As I stood, I raised loudly the “Call to Prayer”. Suddenly the thought came to me to go forth from the temple.

When I found myself outside I said within myself, “For what reason came I forth, not having led the prayer? But it matters not; now that I have uttered the call to prayer, the vast multitude will of themselves chant the

prayer.”

When the Master had passed away, His family pondered over this dream and interpreted it thus:

He had called that same vast multitude—all peoples, all religions, all races, all nations, and all kingdoms—to unity and peace, to universal love and brotherhood; and, having called them, He returned to God the Beloved, at whose command He had raised the majestic call, had given the divine message. This same multitude—the peoples, religions, races, nations and kingdoms—would continue the work to which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had called them, and would of themselves press forward to its accomplishment.

A few weeks after the preceding dream the Master came in from the solitary room in the garden, which He had occupied of late, and said:

“I dreamed a dream and behold the Blessed Beauty [Bahá’u’lláh] came and said unto me, ‘Destroy this room!’”

The family, who had been wishing that He would come and sleep in the house, not being happy that He should be alone at night, exclaimed, “Yes, Master, we think Your dream means that You should leave that room and come into the house.” When He heard this from us, He smiled meaningly as though not agreeing with our interpretation. Afterwards we understood that by the ‘room’ was meant the temple of His body. ...”

In the same week He revealed a Tablet to America, in which is the following prayer: “Yá Bahá’u’l-Abhá! [O Thou the Glory of Glories] I have renounced the world and the people thereof, and am heartbroken and sorely afflicted because of the unfaithful. In the cage of this world I flutter even as a frightened bird, and yearn every day to take my flight unto Thy kingdom.”

“Yá Bahá’u’l-Abhá! Make me to drink of the cup of sacrifice and set me free. Relieve me from these woes and trials, from these afflictions and troubles. Thou art He that aideth, that succoureth, that protecteth, that stretcheth forth the hand of help.”

After lunch He dictated some Tablets, His last ones, to Rúhí Effendi. When He had rested He walked in the garden. He seemed to be in a deep reverie.

His good and faithful servant Ismá’il Áqá, relates the following:

Some time, about twenty days before my Master passed away, I was near the garden when I heard Him summon an old believer saying:

“Come with me that we may admire together the beauty of the garden. Behold, what the spirit of devotion is able to achieve! This flourishing place was, a few years ago, but a heap of stones, and now it is verdant with foliage and flowers. My desire is that after I am gone the loved ones may all arise to serve the divine cause and, please God, so it shall be. Ere long men will arise who shall bring life to the world.”

Three days before His ascension, whilst seated in the garden, He called me and said, “I am sick with fatigue. Bring two of your oranges for me that I may eat them for your sake.” This I did, and He, having eaten them, turned to me, saying, “Have you any of your sweet lemons?” He bade me fetch a few. ... Whilst I was plucking them, He came over to the tree, saying, “Nay, but I must gather them with my own hands.” Having

eaten of the fruit, He turned to me and asked “Do you desire anything more?” Then with a pathetic gesture of His hands, He touchingly, emphatically, and deliberately said, “Now it is finished, it is finished!”

These significant words penetrated my very soul. I felt each time He uttered them as if a knife were struck into my heart. I understood His meaning but never dreamed His end was so nigh.

It was Ismá'il Aqá who had been the Master's gardener for well nigh thirty years and who, in the first week after his bereavement, driven by hopeless grief, quietly disposed of all his belongings, made his will, went to the Master's sister, and craved her pardon for any misdeeds he had committed. He then delivered the key of the garden to a trusted servant of the household and, taking with him means whereby to end his life at his beloved Master's tomb, walked up the mountain to that sacred place, three times circled round it, and would have succeeded in taking his life had it not been for the opportune arrival of a friend who reached him in time to prevent the accomplishment of his tragic intention. ...

During the evening 'Abdu'l-Bahá attended the usual meeting of the friends in His own audience chamber.

In the morning of Saturday, November 26, He arose early, came to the tea-room, and had some tea. He asked for the fur-lined coat which had belonged to Bahá'u'lláh. He often put on this coat when He was cold or did not feel well, He so loved it. He then withdrew to His room, lay down on His bed, and said, “Cover me up. I am very cold. Last night I did not sleep well, I felt cold. This is serious, it is the beginning.”

After more blankets had been put on, He asked for the fur coat He had taken off to be placed over Him. That day He was rather feverish. In the evening His temperature rose still higher, but during the night the fever left Him. After midnight He asked for some tea.

On Sunday morning, November 27, He said. “I am quite well and will get up as usual and have tea with you in the tea-room.” After He had dressed, He was persuaded to remain on the sofa in His room.

In the afternoon He sent all the friends to the tomb of the Báb, where on the occasion of the anniversary of the declaration of the Covenant a feast was being held, offered by a Pársi pilgrim who had lately arrived from India.

At four in the afternoon, being on the sofa in His room, He said, “Ask my sister and all the family to come and have tea with me.”

His four sons-in-law and Rúhí Effendi came to Him after returning from the gathering on the mountain. They said to Him, “The giver of the feast was unhappy because You were not there”. He said unto them:

But I was there, though my body was absent, my spirit was there in your midst. I was present with the friends at the tomb. The friends must not attach any importance to the absence of my body. In spirit I am, and shall always be, with the friends, even though I be far away.

The same evening He asked after the health of every member of the household, of the pilgrims, and of the friends in Haifa. “Very good, very good,” He said when told that none were ill. This was His very last utterance concerning His friends.

At eight in the evening He retired to bed after taking a little nourishment, saying, “I am quite well.”

He told all the family to go to bed and rest. Two of His daughters, however, stayed with Him. That night the Master had gone to sleep very calmly, quite free from fever. He awoke about 1.15 a.m., got up, and walked across to a table where He drank some water. He took off an outer night garment, saying, "I am too warm." He went back to bed; and, when His daughter Ruha Khanum, later on, approached, she found Him lying peacefully; and, as He looked into her face, He asked her to lift up the net curtains saying:

"I have difficulty in breathing, give me more air." Some rose water was brought of which He drank, sitting up in bed to do so, without any help. He again lay down, and as some food was offered Him, He remarked in a clear and distinct voice:

"You wish me to take some food, and I am going?" He gave them a beautiful look. His face was so calm, His expression so serene, they thought Him asleep.

He had gone from the gaze of His loved ones!

The eyes that had always looked out with loving-kindness upon humanity, whether friends or foes, were now closed. The hands that had ever been stretched forth to give alms to the poor and the needy, the halt and the maimed, the blind, the orphan and the widow, had now finished their labour. The feet that, with untiring zeal, had gone upon the ceaseless errands of the Lord of Compassion were now at rest. The lips that had so eloquently championed the cause of the suffering sons of men, were now hushed in silence. The heart that had so powerfully throbbed with wondrous love for the children of God was now stilled. His glorious spirit had passed from the life of earth, from the persecutions of the enemies of righteousness, from the storm and stress of well nigh eighty years of indefatigable toil for the good of others.

His long martyrdom was ended!



The room occupied by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and in which He passed away in the early morning hours of November 28, 1921.

Early on Monday morning, November 28, the news of this sudden calamity had spread over the city, causing an unprecedented stir and tumult, and filling all hearts with unutterable grief.





The funeral procession for 'Abdu'l-Bahá, wrote Shoghi Effendi, was one "the like of which Haifa, nay Palestine itself; had surely never seen, so deep was the feeling that brought so many thousands of mourners together, representative of so many religions, races and tongues." More than 10,000 people attended 'Abdu'l-Bahá's funeral, held on 29 November 1921, the day after His passing. This photo shows the start of the funeral procession outside of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's home in Haifa at the bottom of Mount Carmel. His remains were temporarily laid to rest in a vault inside the Shrine of the Báb. The construction of a permanent Shrine of 'Abdu'l-Bahá is well under way.

The next morning, Tuesday, November 29, the funeral took place, a funeral the like of which Haifa, nay Palestine itself, had surely never seen, so deep was the feeling that brought so many thousands of mourners together, representative of so many religions, races and tongues.

The High Commissioner of Palestine, Sir Herbert Samuel, the Governor of Jerusalem, the Governor of Phoenicia, the chief officials of the government, the consuls of the various countries, resident in Haifa, the heads of the various religious communities, the notables of Palestine, Jews, Christians, Muslims, Druses, Egyptians, Greeks, Turks, Kurds, and a host of his American, European and native friends, men, women and children, both of high and low degree, all, about ten thousand in number, mourning the loss of their beloved One.

This impressive, triumphal procession was headed by a guard of honour, consisting of the City Constabulary Force, followed by the Boy Scouts of the Muslim and Christian communities holding aloft their banners, a company of Muslim choristers chanting their verses from the Qur'an, the chiefs of the Muslim community headed by the Mufti, a number of Christian priests, Latin, Greek, and Anglican, all preceding the sacred coffin, upraised on the shoulders of His loved ones. Immediately behind it came the members of His family, next to them walked the British High Commissioner, the Governor of Jerusalem, and the Governor of Phoenicia. After them came the consuls and the notables of the land, followed by the vast multitude of those who revered and loved Him.

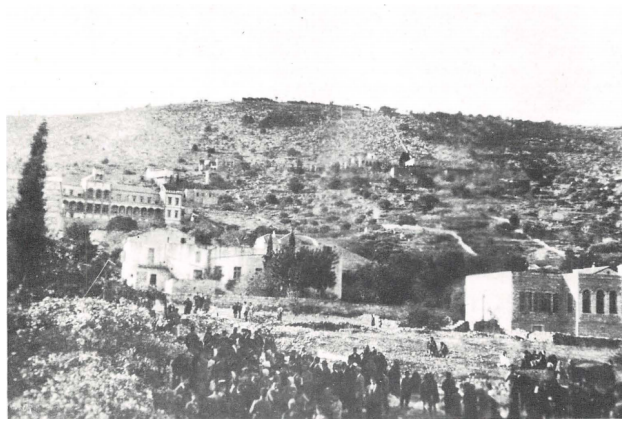
On this day there was no cloud in the sky, nor any sound in all the town and surrounding country through which they went, save only the soft, slow, rhythmic chanting of Islam in the call to prayer, or the convulsed sobbing moan of those helpless ones, bewailing the loss of their one Friend, Who had protected them in all their difficulties and sorrows, Whose generous bounty had saved them and their little ones from starvation through the terrible years of the "Great Woe."

"O God, my God!" the people wailed with one accord, "Our father has left us, our father has left us!"

O the wonder of that great throng! Peoples of every religion and race and colour, united in heart through the manifestation of servitude in the lifelong work of 'Abdu'l-Bahá!

As they slowly wended their way up Mount Carmel, the Vineyard of God, the casket appeared in the distance to be borne aloft by invisible hands, so high above the heads of the people was it carried. After two hours walking,

they reached the garden of the tomb of the Báb. Tenderly was the sacred coffin placed upon a plain table covered with a fair white linen cloth. As the vast concourse pressed around the tabernacle of His body, waiting to be laid in its resting place, within the vault, next to that of the Báb, representatives of the various denominations, Muslims, Christians, and Jews, all hearts being ablaze with fervent love of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, some on the impulse of the moment, others prepared, raised their voices in eulogy and regret, paying their last homage of farewell to their loved one. So united were they in their acclamation of Him, as the wise educator and reconciler of the human race in this perplexed and sorrowful age, that there seemed to be nothing left for the Bahá’ís to say.



Funeral cortege ascending Mt. Carmel

The following are extracts from some of the speeches delivered on that memorable occasion.

The Muslim voicing the sentiments of his coreligionists spoke as follows:

O concourse of Arabians and Persians! Whom are ye bewailing? Is it He who but yesterday was great in this life and is today in His death greater still? Shed no tears for the one that hath departed to the world of eternity, but weep over the passing of virtue and wisdom, of knowledge and generosity. Lament for yourselves, for yours is the loss, whilst He, your lost one, is but a revered wayfarer, stepping from your mortal world into the everlasting home. Weep one hour for the sake of Him who, for well nigh eighty years, hath wept for you! Look to your right, look to your left, look East and look West and behold, what glory and greatness have vanished! What a pillar of peace hath crumbled! What eloquent lips are hushed! Alas! In this tribulation there is no heart but aches with anguish, no eye but is filled with tears. Woe unto the poor, for lo! goodness hath departed from them, woe unto the orphans, for their loving father is no more with them! Could the life of Sir ‘Abdu’l-Bahá ‘Abbás have been redeemed by the sacrifices of many a precious soul, they of a certainty would gladly have offered up their lives for His life. But fate hath otherwise ordained. Every destiny is predetermined and none can change the divine decree. What am I to set forth the achievements of this leader of mankind? They are too glorious to be praised, too many to recount. Suffice it to say, that He hath left in every heart the most profound impression, on every tongue most wondrous praise. And He that leaveth a memory so lovely, so imperishable, He, indeed, is not dead. Be solaced then, O ye people of Bahá! Endure and be patient; for no man, be he of the East or of the West, can ever comfort you, nay he himself is even in greater need of consolation.

The Christian then came forward and thus spoke:

I weep for the world, in that my Lord hath died; others there are who, like unto me, weep the death of their Lord . . . O bitter is the anguish caused by this heart-rending calamity! It is not only our country’s loss but a world affliction. . . He hath lived for well-nigh eighty years the life of the messengers and apostles of God.

He hath educated the souls of men, hath been benevolent unto them, hath led them to the way of Truth. Thus He raised His people to the pinnacle of glory, and great shall be His reward from God, the reward of the righteous! Hear me O people! ‘Abbás is not dead, neither hath the light of Bahá been extinguished! Nay, nay! this light shall shine with everlasting splendour. The Lamp of Bahá, ‘Abbás, hath lived a goodly life, hath manifested in Himself the true life of the Spirit. And now He is gathered to glory, a pure angel, richly robed in benevolent deeds, noble in His precious virtues. Fellow Christians! Truly ye are bearing the mortal remains of this ever lamented One to His last resting place, yet know of a certainty that your ‘Abbás will live forever in spirit amongst you, through His deeds, His words, His virtues, and all the essence of His life. We say farewell to the material body of our ‘Abbás and His material body vanisheth from our gaze, but His reality, our spiritual ‘Abbás, will never leave our minds, our thoughts, our hearts, our tongues.

O great revered Sleeper! Thou hast been good to us, Thou hast guided us, Thou hast taught us, Thou hast lived amongst us greatly, with the full meaning of greatness, Thou hast made us proud of Thy deeds and of Thy words. Thou hast raised the Orient to the summit of glory, hast shown loving kindness to the people, trained them in righteousness, and hast striven to the end, till Thou hast won the crown of glory. Rest Thou happily under the shadow of the mercy of the Lord Thy God, and He, verily, shall well reward Thee.

Yet another Muslim, the Mufti of Haifa, spoke as follows:

I do not wish to exaggerate in my eulogy of this great One, for His ready and helping hand in the service of mankind and the beautiful and wondrous story of His life, spent in doing that which is right and good, none can deny, save him, whose heart is blinded ...

O Thou revered voyager! Thou hast lived greatly and hast died greatly! This great funeral procession is but a glorious proof of Thy greatness in Thy life and in Thy death. But O, Thou whom we have lost! Thou leader of men, generous and benevolent! To whom shall the poor now look? Who shall care for the hungry? And the desolate, the widow and the orphan?

May the Lord inspire all Thy household and Thy kindred with patience in this grievous calamity, and immerse Thee in the ocean of His grace and mercy! He, verily, is the prayer-hearing, prayer-answering God.

The Jew when his turn came, paid his tribute in these words:

[In a century of exaggerated positivism and unbridled materialism, it is astonishing and rare to find a philosopher of great scope, such as the lamented ‘Abdu’l-Bahá ‘Abbás, speak to our heart, to our feelings, and especially seek to educate our soul by inculcating in us the most beautiful principles, which are recognized as being the basis of all religion and of all pure morality. By His Writings, by His spoken Word, by His intimate conversations as well as by His famous dialogues with the most cultivated and the most fervent adepts of sectarian theories, He knew how to persuade; He was always able to win our minds. Living examples have a special power. His private and public life was an example of devotion and of forgetfulness of self for the happiness of others ... His philosophy is simple, you will say, but it is great by that very simplicity, since it is in conformity with human character, which loses some of its beauty when it allows itself to be distorted by prejudices and superstitions ... ‘Abbás died in Haifa, Palestine, the Holy Land which produced the prophets. Sterile and abandoned for so many centuries, it is coming back to life and is beginning to recover its rank and its original renown. We are not the only ones to grieve for this prophet; we are not the only ones to testify to His glory. In Europe, in America, yea, in every land inhabited by men conscious of their mission in this base world, athirst for social justice, for brotherhood, He will be mourned

as well. He is dead after suffering from despotism, fanaticism, and intolerance. ‘Akká, the Turkish Bastille, was His prison for decades. Baghdad, the Abbassid capital, has also been His prison, and that of His Father. Persia, the ancient cradle of gentle and divine philosophy, has driven out her children, who brought forth their ideas within her. May one not see herein a divine will and a marked preference for the Promised Land which was and will be the cradle of all generous and noble ideas? He who leaves after Him so glorious a past is not dead. He who has written such beautiful principles has increased His family among all His readers and has passed to posterity, crowned with immortality.][<sup>2</sup>

The nine speakers having delivered their funeral orations, then came the moment when the casket which held the Pearl of loving servitude passed slowly and triumphantly into its simple, hallowed resting place.

O the infinite pathos! that the beloved feet should no longer tread this earth! that the presence which inspired such devotion and reverence should be withdrawn!

Of the many and diverse journals that throughout the East and West have given in their columns accounts of this momentous event, the following stand as foremost among them:

*Le Temps*, the leading French paper, in its issue of December 19, 1921, under the title ‘Un Conciliateur’ (A Peacemaker), portrays graphically the life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. ...

*The London Morning Post*, two days after His passing, among other highly favourable comments, concluded its report of the movement in the following words:

The venerated Bahá’u’lláh died in 1892 and the mantle of his religious insight fell on his son ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, when, after forty years of prison life, Turkish constitutional changes permitted him to visit England, France and America. His persistent messages as to the divine origin and unity of mankind were as impressive as the Messenger himself. He possessed singular courtesy. At his table Buddhist and Mohammedan, Hindu and Zoroastrian, Jew and Christian, sat in amity. “Creatures”, he said, “were created through love; let them live in peace and amity.”

The *New York World* of December 1, 1921, published the following:

Never before ‘Abdu’l-Bahá did the leader of an Oriental religious movement visit the United States. ... As recently as June of this year a special correspondent of the *World* who visited this seer thus described him: “Having once looked upon ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, his personality is indelibly impressed upon the mind: the majestic venerable figure clad in the flowing ‘abá, his head crowned with a turban white as his head and hair; the piercing deep set eyes whose glances shake the heart; the smile that pours its sweetness over all.” ...

Even in the twilight of his life ‘Abdu’l-Bahá took the liveliest interest in world affairs. When General Allenby swept up the coast from Egypt he went for counsel first to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. When Zionists arrived in their Promised Land they sought ‘Abdu’l-Bahá for advice. For Palestine he had the brightest hopes. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá believed that Bolshevism would prove an admonition to the irreligious world. He taught the equality of man and woman, saying: “The world of humanity has two wings, man and woman. If one wing is weak, then the bird cannot fly.” ...

Nearly all representative American newspapers devoted attention to the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. The *Evening Telegram*, New York, December 4, 1921, found in the international peace movement a complete vindication for

the Bahá'í ideals. "In all countries of the world today can be found mourners of the prophet 'Abdu'l-Bahá. ... Churches of all denominations in New York City and Chicago were thrown open to him for, unlike the leaders of many cults, he preached not the errors of present religions but their sameness." The *New York Tribune* on December 2 carried an editorial entitled 'Abdu'l-Bahá. "A prophet, as his followers believe, and the son of a prophet, was 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who is now at rest with all prophetic souls bygone. He lived to see a remarkable expansion of the quietist cult of which he was the head ... Bahá'u'lláh over sixty years ago set forth a peace plan not dissimilar to the aspirations of today."

The magazine *Unity*, published in Chicago, included an article on the Master in its issue of December 22. "'Abdu'l-Bahá voiced and made eloquent the sacred aspiration that yearns dumbly in the hearts of men. He embodied in glorious, triumphant maturity that ideal which in others lies imprisoned behind the veil. Men and women of every race, creed, class, and colour are united in devotion to 'Abdu'l-Bahá because 'Abdu'l-Bahá has been a pure, selfless mirror reflecting only the noblest qualities of each."

The *Sphinx*, of Cairo, Egypt, on December 17 described 'Abdu'l-Bahá as a great leader of men. "In his personality and influence 'Abdu'l-Bahá embodied all that is highest and most striking in both the Christian and Moslem faiths: living a life of pure altruism, he preached and worked for inter-racial and inter-religious unity. ... When in the presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá thoughtful inquirers soon realized that they were speaking to a man of unique personality, one endowed with a love and wisdom that had in it the divine quality."

The *Times of India*, in its issue of January 1922, opens one of its editorial articles as follows:

In more normal times than the present the death of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, which was sorrowfully referred to at the Bahá'í Conference in Bombay would have stirred the feelings of many who, without belonging to the Bahá'í brotherhood, sympathize with its tenets and admire the life-work of those who founded it. As it is we have learned almost by chance of this great religious leader's death, but that fact need not prevent our turning aside from politics and the turmoil of current events to consider what this man did and what he aimed at.

Sketching then in brief an account of the history of the movement it [the *Times of India*] concludes as follows:

It is not for us now to judge whether the purity, the mysticism and the exalted ideas of Baha'ism will continue unchanged after the loss of the great leader, or to speculate on whether Baha'ism will some day become a force in the world as great or greater than Christianity or Islam; but we would pay a tribute to the memory of a man who wielded a vast influence for good, and who, if he was destined to see many of his ideas seemingly shattered in the world war, remained true to his convictions and to his belief in the possibility of a reign of peace and love, and who, far more effectively than Tolstoy, showed the West that religion is a vital force that can never be disregarded.

Out of the vast number of telegrams and cables of condolence that have poured in, these may be mentioned:

His Britannic Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies, Mr. Winston Churchill, telegraphing to His Excellency the High Commissioner for Palestine, desires him "to convey to the Bahá'í community, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, their sympathy and condolence on the death of Sir 'Abdu'l-Bahá 'Abbás, K.B.E."

On behalf of the Executive Board of the Bahá'í American Convention, this message of condolence has been received:

He doeth whatsoever He willeth. Hearts weep at most great tribulation. American friends send through Unity Board radiant love, boundless sympathy, devotion. Standing steadfast, conscious of His unceasing presence and nearness.

Viscount Allenby, the High Commissioner for Egypt, has wired the following message, through the intermediary of His Excellency the High Commissioner for Palestine, dated November 29, 1921:

Please convey to the relatives of the late Sir ‘Abdu’l-Bahá ‘Abbás Effendi and to the Bahá’í community my sincere sympathy in the loss of their revered leader.

The loved ones in Germany assure the Greatest Holy Leaf of their fidelity in these terms:

All believers deeply moved by irrevocable loss of our Master’s precious life. We pray for heavenly protection of Holy Cause and promise faithfulness and obedience to Centre of Covenant.

An official message forwarded by the Council of Ministers in Baghdád, and dated December 8, 1921, reads as follows:

His Highness Sayed Abdurrahman, the Prime Minister, desires to extend his sympathy to the family of His Holiness ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in their bereavement.

The Commander in Chief of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force sent through His Excellency the High Commissioner for Palestine these words of sympathy:

General Congreve begs that you will convey his deepest sympathy to the family of the late Sir ‘Abbás al-Bahá’í.

The Theosophical Society in London communicated as follows with one of the followers of the Faith in Haifa: “For the Holy Family Theosophical Society send affectionate thoughts.”

The thousands of Bahá’ís in Tīhrán, the capital of Persia, remembering their Western brethren and sisters in London and New York assure them of their steadfast faith in these words: “Light of Covenant transferred from eye to heart. Day of teaching, of union, of self sacrifice.”

And lastly, one of the distinguished figures in the academic life of the University of Oxford, a renowned professor and an accomplished scholar, whose knowledge of the Cause stands foremost among that of his colleagues, in the message of condolence written on behalf of himself and wife, expresses himself as follows:

The passing beyond the veil into fuller life must be specially wonderful and blessed for One Who has always fixed His thoughts on high and striven to lead an exalted life here below.

On the seventh day after the passing of the Master, corn was distributed in His name to about a thousand poor of Haifa, irrespective of race or religion, to whom He had always been a friend and a protector. Their grief at losing the “Father of the Poor” was extremely pathetic. In the first seven days also from fifty to a hundred poor were daily fed at the Master’s house, in the very place where it had been His custom to give alms to them.

On the fortieth day there was a memorial feast, given to over six hundred of the people of Haifa, 'Akká and the surrounding parts of Palestine and Syria, people of various religions, races and colours. More than a hundred of the poor were also fed on this day. The Governor of Phoenicia, many other officials and some Europeans were present.

The feast was entirely arranged by the members of the Master's household. The long tables were decorated with trailing branches of bougainvillea. Its lovely purple blooms mingled with the white narcissus, and with the large dishes of golden oranges out of the beloved Master's garden, made a picture of loveliness in those spacious lofty rooms, whose only other decoration was the gorgeous yet subdued colouring of rare Persian rugs. No useless trivial ornaments marred the extreme dignity of simplicity.

The guests received, each and all, the same welcome. There were no "chief places". Here, as always in the Master's home, there was no respecting of persons.

After the luncheon the guests came into the large central hall, this also bare of ornament, save only for the portrait of Him they had assembled to honour and some antique Persian tapestries hung upon one wall. Before this was placed a platform from which the speeches were made to the rapt and silent throng, whose very hearts were listening.

The Governor of Phoenicia, in the course of his address, spoke the following:

Most of us here have, I think, a clear picture of Sir 'Abdu'l-Bahá 'Abbás, of His dignified figure walking thoughtfully in our streets, of His courteous and gracious manner, of His kindness, of His love for little children and flowers, of His generosity and care for the poor and suffering. So gentle was He, and so simple that, in His presence, one almost forgot that He was also a great teacher and that His writings and His conversations have been a solace and an inspiration to hundreds and thousands of people in the East and in the West.

His ['Abdu'l-Bahá's] detailed and powerfully written Will and Testament reveals the following words of general counsel to all His friends:

O ye beloved of the Lord! In this sacred Dispensation, conflict and contention are in no wise permitted. Every aggressor deprives himself of God's grace. It is incumbent upon everyone to show the utmost love, rectitude of conduct, straightforwardness and sincere kindness unto all the peoples and kindreds of the world, be they friends or strangers. So intense must be the spirit of love and loving-kindness, that the stranger may find himself a friend, the enemy a true brother, no difference whatsoever existing between them. For universality is of God and all limitations are earthly. Thus man must strive that his reality may manifest virtues and perfections. the light whereof may shine upon every one. The light of the sun shineth upon all the world and the merciful showers of Divine Providence fall upon all peoples. The vivifying breeze reviveth every living creature and all beings endued with life obtain their share and portion at His heavenly board. In like manner, the affections and loving-kindness of the servants of the One True God must be bountifully and universally extended to all mankind. Regarding this, restrictions and limitations are in no wise permitted.

Wherefore, O my loving Friends! Consort with all the peoples, kindreds and religions of the world with the utmost truthfulness, uprightness, faithfulness, kindness, goodwill and friendliness, that all the world of being may be filled with the holy ecstasy of the grace of Bahá, that ignorance, enmity, hate and rancour may vanish from the world and the darkness of estrangement amidst the peoples and kindreds of the world may give way to the Light of Unity. Should other peoples and nations be unfaithful to you show your fidelity unto

them, should they be unjust toward you show justice towards them, should they keep aloof from you attract them to yourselves, should they show their enmity be friendly towards them, should they poison your lives, sweeten their souls, should they inflict a wound upon you, be a salve to their sores. Such are the attributes of the sincere! Such are the attributes of the truthful!

O ye beloved of the Lord! Strive with all your heart to shield the Cause of God from the onslaught of the insincere, for souls such as these cause the straight to become crooked and all benevolent efforts to produce contrary results.

He prays for the protection of His friends:

O Lord, my God! Assist Thy loved ones to be firm in Thy Faith, to walk in Thy ways, to be steadfast in Thy Cause. Give them Thy grace to withstand the onslaught of self and passion, to follow the light of Divine Guidance. Thou art the Powerful the Gracious, the Self-Subsisting, the Bestower, the Compassionate, the Almighty, the All-Bountiful!

For His enemies this is His prayer:

I call upon Thee , O Lord, my God! with my tongue and with all my heart, not to requite them for their cruelty and their wrong-doings, their craft and their mischief, for they are foolish and ignoble and know not what they do. They discern not good from evil, neither do they distinguish right from wrong, nor justice from injustice. They follow their own desires and walk in the footsteps of the most imperfect and foolish amongst them. O my Lord! Have mercy upon them, shield them from all afflictions in these troubled times and grant that all trials and hardships may be the lot of this Thy servant, that hath fallen into this darksome pit. Single me out for every woe and make me a sacrifice for all Thy loved ones! O Lord, Most High! May my soul, my life, my being, my spirit, my all be offered up for them! O God, my God! Lowly, suppliant and fallen upon my face, I beseech Thee with all the ardour of my invocation to pardon whosoever hath hurt me, to forgive him that hath conspired against me and offended me, and to wash away the misdeeds of them that have wrought injustice upon me. Vouchsafe unto them Thy goodly gifts, give them joy, relieve them from sorrow, grant them peace and prosperity, give them Thy bliss and pour upon them Thy bounty.

Thou art the Powerful, the Gracious, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting.

And now, what appeal more direct, more moving, with which to close this sad yet stirring account of His last days, than these His most touching, most inspiring words?

Friends! The time is coming when I shall be no longer with you. I have done all that could be done. I have served the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh to the utmost of my ability. I have laboured night and day, all the years of my life. O how I long to see the loved ones taking upon themselves the responsibilities of the Cause! Now is the time to proclaim the Kingdom of Bahá! Now is the hour of love and union! This is the day of the spiritual harmony of the loved ones of God! All the resources of my physical strength I have exhausted, and the spirit of my life is the welcome tidings of the unity of the people of Bahá. I am straining my ears toward the East and toward the West, toward the North and toward the South that haply I may hear the songs of love and fellowship chanted in the meetings of the faithful. My days are numbered, and, but for this, there is no joy left unto me. O how I yearn to see the friends united even as a string of gleaming pearls, as the brilliant Pleiades, as the rays of the sun, as the gazelles of one meadow!



The mystic nightingale is warbling for them all; will they not listen? The bird of paradise is singing; will they not heed? The angel of Abhá is calling to them; will they not hearken? The herald of the Covenant is pleading; will they not obey?

Ah me, I am waiting, waiting, to hear the joyful tidings that the believers are the very embodiment of sincerity and truthfulness, the incarnation of love and amity, the living symbols of unity and concord. Will they not gladden my heart? Will they not satisfy my yearning? Will they not manifest my wish? Will they not fulfil my heart's desire? Will they not give ear to my call?

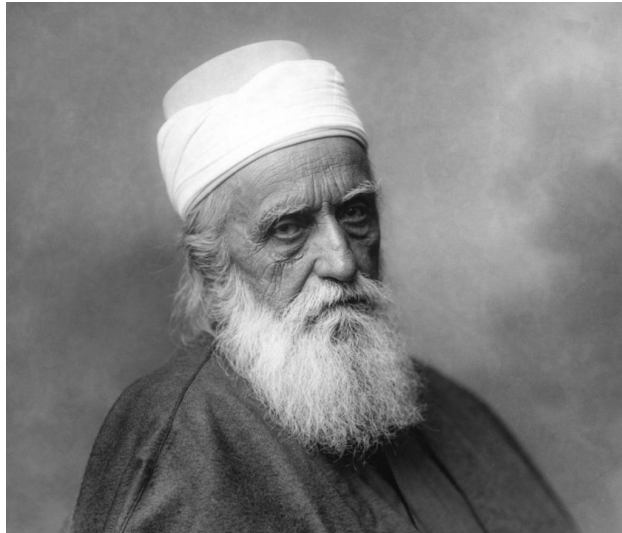
I am waiting, I am patiently waiting.

## The Station and Titles of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

SATURDAY APRIL 21, 1973

By  
**SHOGHI EFFENDI**

Reproduced from The Bahá’í World, Volume 15 (1968-1973) in commemoration of the 50 year anniversary of the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, this piece comprises two excerpts from Shoghi Effendi’s writings, one from a letter titled “The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh” and the other from *God Passes By*.



*Portrait of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá taken in 1911, studio of Boissonnas and Taponier, 12, rue de la Paix, Paris.*

*My name is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. My qualification is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. My reality is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. My praise is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Thralldom to the Blessed Perfection is my glorious and refulgent diadem, and servitude to all the human race my perpetual religion . . . No name, no title, no mention, no commendation have I, nor will ever have, except ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. This is my longing. This is my greatest yearning. This is my eternal life. This is my everlasting glory.*

An attempt I strongly feel should now be made to clarify our minds regarding the station occupied by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the significance of His position in this holy Dispensation. It would be indeed difficult for us, who stand so close to such a tremendous figure and are drawn by the mysterious power of so magnetic a personality, to obtain a clear and exact understanding of the rôle and character of One Who, not only in the Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh but in the entire field of religious history, fulfills a unique function. Though moving in a sphere of His own and holding a rank radically different from that of the Author and the Forerunner of the Bahá’í Revelation, He, by virtue of the station ordained for Him through the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh, forms together with them what may be termed the Three Central Figures of a Faith that stands unapproached in the world’s spiritual history. He towers, in conjunction with them, above the destinies of this infant Faith of God from a level to which no individual or body ministering to its needs after Him, and for no less a period than a full thousand years, can ever hope to rise. To degrade His lofty rank by identifying His station with or by regarding it as roughly equivalent to, the position of those on whom the mantle of His authority has fallen would be an act of impiety as grave as the no less heretical belief that inclines to exalt Him to a state of absolute equality with either

the central Figure or Forerunner of our Faith. For wide as is the gulf that separates ‘Abdu’l-Bahá from Him Who is the Source of an independent Revelation, it can never be regarded as commensurate with the greater distance that stands between Him Who is the Center of the Covenant and His ministers who are to carry on His work, whatever be their name, their rank, their functions or their future achievements. Let those who have known ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, who through their contact with His magnetic personality have come to cherish for Him so fervent an admiration, reflect, in the light of this statement, on the greatness of One Who is so far above Him in station.

That ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is not a Manifestation of God, that, though the successor of His Father, He does not occupy a cognate station, that no one else except the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh can ever lay claim to such a station before the expiration of a full thousand years—are verities which lie embedded in the specific utterances of both the Founder of our Faith and the Interpreter of His teachings. ...

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s own statements, in confirmation of this warning, are no less emphatic and binding: “... My station is the station of servitude—a servitude which is complete, pure and real, firmly established, enduring, obvious, explicitly revealed and subject to no interpretation whatever... I am the Interpreter of the Word of God; such is my interpretation.”

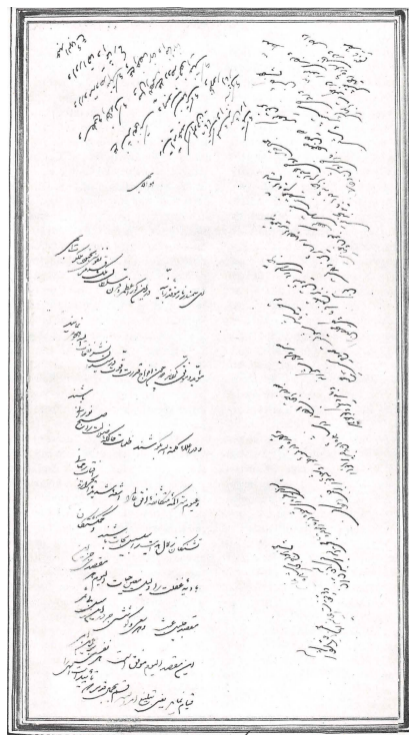
... From such clear and formally laid down statements, incompatible as they are with any assertion of a claim to Prophethood, we should not by any means infer that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is merely one of the servants of the Blessed Beauty, or at best one whose function is to be confined to that of an authorized interpreter of His Father’s teachings. Far be it from me to entertain such a notion or to wish to instill such sentiments. To regard Him in such a light is a manifest betrayal of the priceless heritage bequeathed by Bahá’u’lláh to mankind. Immeasurably exalted is the station conferred upon Him by the Supreme Pen above and beyond the implications of these, His own written statements. Whether in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the most weighty and sacred of all the works of Bahá’u’lláh, or in the Kitáb-i-Ahd, the Book of His Covenant, or in the Súriy-i-Ghúsn (Tablet of the Branch), such references as have been recorded by the pen of Bahá’u’lláh—references which the Tablets of His Father addressed to Him mightily reinforce—invest ‘Abdu’l-Bahá with a power, and surround Him with a halo, which the present generation can never adequately appreciate.

He is, and should for all time be regarded, first and foremost, as the Center and Pivot of Bahá’u’lláh’s peerless and all-enfolding Covenant, His most exalted handiwork, the stainless Mirror of His light, the perfect Exemplar of His teachings, the unerring Interpreter of His Word, the embodiment of every Bahá’í ideal, the incarnation of every Bahá’í virtue, the Most Mighty Branch sprung from the Ancient Root, the Limb of the Law of God, the Being “round Whom all names revolve,” the Mainspring of the Oneness of Humanity, the Ensign of the Most Great Peace, the Moon of the Central Orb of this most holy Dispensation—styles and titles that are implicit and find their truest, their highest and fairest expression in the magic name ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. He is, above and beyond these appellations, the “Mystery of God”—an expression by which Bahá’u’lláh Himself has chosen to designate Him, and which, while it does not by any means justify us to assign to Him the station of Prophethood, indicates how in the person of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá the incompatible characteristics of a human nature and superhuman knowledge and perfection have been blended and are completely harmonized. ...

“O Thou Who art the apple of Mine eye!” Bahá’u’lláh, in His own handwriting, thus addresses ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “My glory, the ocean of My loving-kindness, the sun of My bounty, the heaven of My mercy rest upon Thee. We pray God to illumine the world through Thy knowledge and wisdom, to ordain for Thee that which will gladden Thine heart and impart consolation to Thine eyes.” “The glory of God rest upon Thee,” He writes in another Tablet, “and upon whosoever serveth Thee and circleteth around Thee. Woe, great woe, betide him that opposeth and injureth Thee. Well is it with him that sweareth fealty to Thee; the fire of hell torment him who is Thine

enemy.” “We have made Thee a shelter for all mankind,” He, in yet another Tablet, affirms, “a shield unto all who are in heaven and on earth, a stronghold for whosoever hath believed in God, the Incomparable, the All-Knowing. God grant that through Thee He may protect them, may enrich and sustain them, that He may inspire Thee with that which shall be a wellspring of wealth unto all created things, an ocean of bounty unto all men, and the dayspring of mercy unto all peoples.”

“Thou knowest, O my God,” Bahá’u’lláh, in a prayer revealed in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s honor, supplicates, “that I desire for Him naught except that which Thou didst desire, and have chosen Him for no purpose save that which Thou hadst intended for Him. Render Him victorious, therefore, through Thy hosts of earth and heaven... Ordain, I beseech Thee, by the ardor of My love for Thee and My yearning to manifest Thy Cause, for Him, as well as for them that love Him, that which Thou hast destined for Thy Messengers and the Trustees of Thy Revelation. Verily, Thou art the Almighty, the All-Powerful.”<sup>3</sup>



A Tablet in the handwriting of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá revealed for Shaykh Kázim, surnamed “Samandar,” one of the nineteen Apostles of Bahá’u’lláh and the father of the Hand of the Cause Tarazu’lláh Samandari.

He alone had been accorded the privilege of being called “the Master,” an honor from which His Father had strictly excluded all His other sons. Upon Him that loving and unerring Father had chosen to confer the unique title of “Sirru’lláh” (the Mystery of God), a designation so appropriate to One Who, though essentially human and holding a station radically and fundamentally different from that occupied by Bahá’u’lláh and His Forerunner, could still claim to be the perfect Exemplar of His Faith, to be endowed with super-human knowledge, and to be regarded as the stainless mirror reflecting His light. To Him, whilst in Adrianople, that same Father had, in the Súriy-i-Ghusn (Tablet of the Branch), referred as “this sacred and glorious Being, this Branch of Holiness,” as “the Limb of the Law of God,” as His “most great favor” unto men, as His “most perfect bounty” conferred upon them, as One through Whom “every mouldering bone is quickened,” declaring that “whoso turneth towards Him hath turned towards God,” and that “they who deprive themselves of the shadow of the Branch are lost in the wilderness of error.” To Him He, whilst still in that city, had alluded (in a Tablet addressed to Hájí Muḥammad Ibráhím-i-Khalíl) as the one amongst His sons “from Whose tongue God will cause the signs of His power to stream forth,” and as the one Whom “God hath specially chosen for His Cause.”

On Him, at a later period, the Author of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, in a celebrated passage, subsequently elucidated in the “Book of My Covenant,” had bestowed the function of interpreting His Holy Writ, proclaiming Him, at the same time, to be the One “Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient Root.” To Him in a Tablet, revealed during that same period and addressed to Mírzá Muḥammad Qulíy-i-Sabzivári, He had referred as “the Gulf that hath branched out of this Ocean that hath encompassed all created things,” and bidden His followers to turn their faces towards it. To Him, on the occasion of His visit to Beirut, His Father had, furthermore, in a communication which He dictated to His amanuensis, paid a glowing tribute, glorifying Him as the One “round Whom all names revolve,” as “the Most Mighty Branch of God,” and as “His ancient and immutable Mystery.” He it was Who, in several Tablets which Bahá’u’lláh Himself had penned, had been personally addressed as “the Apple of Mine eye,” and been referred to as “a shield unto all who are in heaven and on earth,” as “a shelter for all mankind” and “a stronghold for whosoever hath believed in God.” It was on His behalf that His Father, in a prayer revealed in His honor, had supplicated God to “render Him victorious,” and to “ordain ... for Him, as well as for them that love Him,” the things destined by the Almighty for His “Messengers” and the “Trustees” of His Revelation. And finally in yet another Tablet these weighty words had been recorded: “The glory of God rest upon Thee, and upon whosoever serveth Thee and circleth around Thee. Woe, great woe, betide him that opposeth and injureth Thee. Well is it with him that sweareth fealty to Thee; the fire of hell torment him who is Thy enemy.”

And now to crown the inestimable honors, privileges and benefits showered upon Him, in ever increasing abundance, throughout the forty years of His Father’s ministry in Baghḏád, in Adrianople and in ‘Akká, He had been elevated to the high office of Center of Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant, and been made the successor of the Manifestation of God Himself—a position that was to empower Him to impart an extraordinary impetus to the international expansion of His Father’s Faith, to amplify its doctrine, to beat down every barrier that would obstruct its march, and to call into being, and delineate the features of, its Administrative Order, the Child of the Covenant, and the Harbinger of that World Order whose establishment must needs signalize the advent of the Golden Age of the Bahá’í Dispensation.

The immediate effect of the ascension of Bahá’u’lláh had been... to spread grief and bewilderment among His followers and companions, and to inspire its vigilant and redoubtable adversaries with fresh hope and renewed determination. ...

Yet, as the appointed Center of Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant and the authorized Interpreter of His teaching had Himself later explained, the dissolution of the tabernacle wherein the soul of the Manifestation of God had chosen temporarily to abide signalized its release from the restrictions which an earthly life had, of necessity, imposed upon it. Its influence no longer circumscribed by any physical limitations, its radiance no longer beclouded by its human temple, that soul could henceforth energize the whole world to a degree unapproached at any stage in the course of its existence on this planet.

Bahá’u’lláh’s stupendous task on this earthly plane had, moreover, at the time of His passing, been brought to its final consummation. His mission, far from being in any way inconclusive, had, in every respect, been carried through to a full end. The Message with which He had been entrusted had been disclosed to the gaze of all mankind. The summons He had been commissioned to issue to its leaders and rulers had been fearlessly voiced. The fundamentals of the doctrine destined to recreate its life, heal its sicknesses and redeem it from bondage and degradation had been impregably established. The tide of calamity that was to purge and fortify the sinews of His Faith had swept on with unstemmed fury. The blood which was to fertilize the soil out of which the institutions of His World Order were destined to spring had been profusely shed. Above all the Covenant that was

to perpetuate the influence of that Faith, insure its integrity, safeguard it from schism, and stimulate its world-wide expansion, had been fixed on an inviolable basis.



A calligraphic arrangement by Mishkin-Qalam of titles conferred upon 'Abdu'l-Bahá or mentioned in various Tablets.

His Cause, precious beyond the dreams and hopes of men; enshrining within its shell that pearl of great price to which the world, since its foundation, had been looking forward; confronted with colossal tasks of unimaginable complexity and urgency, was beyond a peradventure in safe keeping. His own beloved Son, the apple of His eye, His vicegerent on earth, the Executive of His authority, the Pivot of His Covenant, the Shepherd of His flock, the Exemplar of His faith, the Image of His perfections, the Mystery of His Revelation, the Interpreter of His mind, the Architect of His World Order, the Ensign of His Most Great Peace, the Focal Point of His unerring guidance—in a word, the occupant of an office without peer or equal in the entire field of religious history—stood guard over it, alert, fearless and determined to enlarge its limits, blazon abroad its fame, champion its interests and consummate its purpose. ...

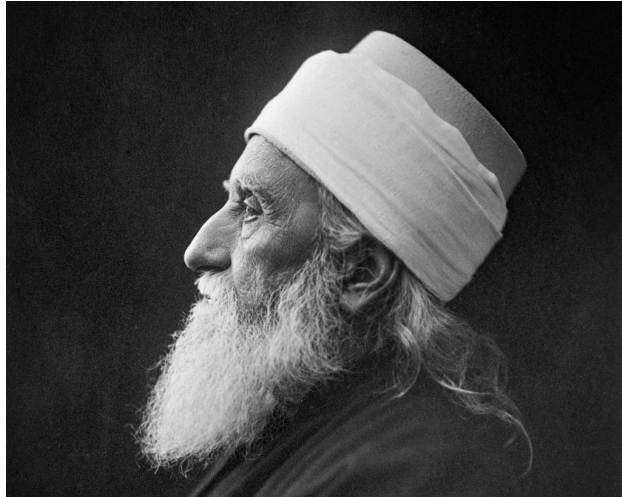
The cloud of despondency that had momentarily settled on the disconsolate lovers of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh was lifted. The continuity of that unerring guidance vouchsafed to it since its birth was now assured. The significance of the solemn affirmation that this is “the Day which shall not be followed by night” was now clearly apprehended. An orphan community had recognized in 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in its hour of desperate need, its Solace, its Guide, its Mainstay and Champion. The Light that had glowed with such dazzling brightness in the heart of Asia, and had, in the lifetime of Bahá'u'lláh, spread to the Near East, and illuminated the fringes of both the European and African continents, was to travel, through the impelling influence of the newly proclaimed Covenant, and almost immediately after the death of its Author, as far West as the North American continent, and from thence diffuse itself to the countries of Europe, and subsequently shed its radiance over both the Far East and Australasia.<sup>4</sup>

## Memories of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

SATURDAY APRIL 21, 1979

By

AZÍZ YAZDÍ



In 1856, or thereabouts, even as the little city of Yazd, in the very heart of Persia, was carrying on its lackluster existence, something was astir. The town's population for the most part lived in poverty and ignorance, unaware of what was happening in the rest of the world. But there was something stirring. There was hushed talk of the Báb, the new Prophet Who had been martyred, and of the Message He had brought. There were people secretly spreading the news at the risk of their lives.

A youth, only fourteen, came into contact with these people, heard the Message and wholeheartedly accepted it. Only fourteen years of age! His name was Shaykh 'Alí. He was the eldest son of the well-to-do and highly respected Hájí 'Abdu'r-Rahím Yazdí. The family was alarmed. The boy was in grave danger. His allegiance could bring ruin to the whole family. But Shaykh 'Alí was ablaze. To distract him from the Bábí Faith, his family sent him to Kirmán with enough goods to start a business. The shop was successful but soon rumors floated back that he was meeting with the Bábís. 'Abdu'r-Rahmín went to Kirmán and brought him home.

In Yazd the boy again attended the secret meetings and took aid to the beleaguered Bábís who were imprisoned there. One night he was so late returning home that his mother, terribly worried, waited for him at the door and when he came in, slapped him, without saying a word. In silence he took her hand, kissed it tenderly, and gazed at her with deep love.

Throughout this difficult time, in the face of the calumnies and persecutions heaped upon the Bábís by their enemies, Shaykh 'Alí displayed a kindness and fearlessness remarkable in one so young. As time passed, his character, his behavior, his attitude and his actions gradually won over the whole family. One by one they joined the Faith. Now meetings were held in the Yazdí home though the need for secrecy remained paramount. Teachers came from other cities, each with new tales. Some who came from Baghdád spoke of Bahá'u'lláh. Later they came from Adrianople, and then from 'Akká.

My father, Hájí Muhammad, who like his brother had joined the Faith when he was fourteen, left for the Holy Land with a friend, a donkey, lots of faith and very little money. He and his companion set out to see Bahá'u'lláh and traveled over steep, rugged mountains and across hot, arid plains until they arrived in 'Akká, around 1870. Other members of the family followed later. Hájí 'Abdu'r-Rahím, my grandfather, left Yazd after he had been tortured, beaten and bastinadoed. The story of this 'precious soul', as the Master called him, his arrival in 'Akká, and his life there, is told with tender compassion by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in *Memorials of the Faithful*. Each member of the Yazdí family was given an assignment by Bahá'u'lláh and sent out to accomplish it. Hájí Muhammad, my father, and two other youthful believers were sent to Egypt where they worked hard for many years and eventually built up a prosperous business.

Through these believers – all young people – the Faith was first established in Alexandria, Cairo and Port Said. Although they were not free to openly teach the Faith they were on good terms with the population and were generally well-liked and respected.

My family and I lived in a suburb of Alexandria called Ramleh, a beautiful and peaceful residential district on the edge of the Mediterranean. The house in which I was born and where I lived until I was about four or five, had a separate guest house and a large garden surrounded by a wall of rough-hewn stone. Within the garden there were many lime, sweet lemon, orange and pomegranate trees as well as rose bushes. In the summer a tropical scent hung in the air. The house to which we then moved also had a large garden. Jasmine grew over the veranda, a large porch adjoining the garden. Here our family often had breakfast, with father presiding at the samovar and dispensing glasses of hot tea to the adults and, to the children, hot water with a drop of tea floating on top. Before breakfast, however, we chanted our morning prayers and heard father tell wonderful stories about his experiences with Bahá'u'lláh and the Master, or read the latest communications from the Holy Land.

It was in this setting, when I was a child of eleven, that I heard the news of the coming of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to Ramleh. The news came suddenly, without warning. The Master had left Haifa without notice on a steamer bound for Europe. Because of ill health and fatigue, He had stopped in Port Said and was coming on to Alexandria. Then the news came that *He was coming to Ramleh! To Ramleh where we lived! What a miracle!* There was intense joy within the Bahá'í community, within my family, within me. Of all the places in the world, He happened to choose Ramleh as His headquarters for His trips to Europe and America during the period 1910-1913. Excitement, curiosity, anticipation swirled through my mind. All I knew about 'Abdu'l-Bahá was what my father had told us. No one in the immediate family except father and grandfather had seen Him. The only photograph was an early one taken when He was a young man in Adrianople. He was a prisoner beyond our reach, a legendary figure. Now He was free and coming to Ramleh! The Bahá'í Faith was an integral part of me, not something superimposed. In Ramleh I was surrounded by it, lived it, believed it, cherished its spiritual concepts and goals and principles. I realized its fundamental importance, its necessity for the world today. Yet my studies at the French school which I attended had opened other areas to my mind. The discoveries of science fascinated me and I believed they provided us with effective tools for the implementation of the teachings of the Faith. I prayed that I might be guided to play some role in this endeavour. I sensed that my contact with 'Abdu'l-Bahá would provide the inspiration and the impetus to move in this direction. So I waited eagerly for the day of His arrival.

There was a crowd gathered in front of the Hotel Victoria. Suddenly there was a hush, a stillness, and I knew that He had come. I looked. There He was! He walked through the crowd – slowly, majestically, smiling radiantly as He greeted the bowed heads on either side. I could only get a vague impression as I could not get near Him. The sound of the wind and surf from the nearby shore drowned out His voice so I could hardly hear Him. Nevertheless, I went away happy.



A few days later, a villa was rented for the Master and His family, not far from the Hotel Victoria, in a lovely residential section that lay right next to the beautiful Mediterranean and the beaches. Like all the villas in that area, it had a garden with blossoms and flowering shrubs. It was there that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá chose to receive His guests – a great variety of notables, public figures, clerics, aristocrats, writers as well as poor and despairing people. I went there often, sometimes on the way home from school, sometimes on weekends. When I was not in school I spent most of my time in His time in His garden. I would wait to catch a glimpse of Him as He came out for His customary walk, or conversed with pilgrims from faraway places. To hear His vibrant and melodious voice ringing in the open air, to see Him, somehow exhilarated me and gave me hope. Quite often, He came to me and smiled and talked. There was a radiance about Him, an almost unlimited kindness and love that shone from Him. Seeing Him, I was infused with a feeling of goodness. I felt humble and, at the same time, exceedingly happy.

I had many opportunities to see the Master – as we always called Him – at meetings and on festive occasions. I especially remember the first time He came to our house to address a large gathering of believers. The friends were all gathered, talking happily, waiting. Suddenly all grew quiet. From outside, before He entered the room, I could hear the voice of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, very resonant, very beautiful. Then He swept in, with His robe flowing! He was straight as an arrow. His head was thrown back. His silver-gray hair fell in waves to His shoulders. His beard was white; His eyes were keen; His forehead, broad. He wore a white turban around an ivory-colored felt cap.

He looked at everyone, smiled and welcomed all with *Khushámádíd! Khushámádíd!* (Welcome! Welcome!) I had been taught that in the presence of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, I should sit or stand with my hands crossed in front of me, and look down. I was so anxious to see Him that I found myself looking up furtively now and then. He often spoke – I was privileged to hear Him speak on many subjects. For nine months it seemed like paradise. Then He left us and sailed for Europe. How dismal everything became. But there was school and there were duties. Exciting news came from Europe, and there were memories! ‘Abdu’l-Bahá came back four months later. Paradise returned. He spoke to me on several occasions, calling me *Shaykh* ‘Alí, the name He Himself had given me, after my uncle who was the first member of the family to join the Faith. When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke to me, I would look into His eyes – blue, smiling and full of love.

Again He left us, this time for America. I will never forget the scene of His departure as He came out of the house and turned to wave gazing down from the veranda above. They were greatly concerned about His safety and well-being. He was sixty-eight years old. He had suffered many hardships and endured severe trials. He had been in prison for forty years of His life and now He was undertaking this journey to a far-off country utterly different from any to which He was accustomed. But ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had made up His mind and nothing could turn Him back. He walked out of the garden gate and never looked back again. He walked for several blocks near the shore to take the electric train to Alexandria where He would board the ship that was to take Him to New York. He was followed by about thirty believers who walked silently behind Him. I was one of them. What ‘Abdu’l-Bahá accomplished in America is now history. He went to Europe and came back to Ramleh on 3 July 1913, to remain until the following December. Then He left for Haifa, never to return.

That was the first chapter of my experience with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá when I was a child between the ages of eleven and fourteen. In 1914 my family moved to Beirut, Lebanon, only a short distance north of Haifa. This opened the second chapter when I was privileged to be in the presence of the Master again, but only on special occasions. I was at that time a student at the American University of Beirut, then known as the Syrian Protestant College. In the summer of 1917 I spent my summer vacation with my uncle, Mírzá Husayn Yazdí, in his house on Mt. Carmel, a memorable two months for me. Every evening before sunset I had the bounty of being in the presence of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. I would join the other believers gathered in front of the Master’s house. The entrance had an

iron gate and then a garden. He would come out with a cheerful and warm greeting, welcome all, and take His seat on the platform at the head of the wide stairs. The sun was going down, and it was very quiet. Sometimes He sat in a relaxed attitude and didn't speak at all. Usually, however, He spoke. He talked in His commanding voice, looking straight ahead, as if He were addressing posterity. He talked about Bahá'u'lláh, about His Teachings, and about significant world events in the history of the Faith. He told stories sprinkled with humour. Often, however, He talked of the believers around the world and of their progress in spreading the Faith. Then He would become wistful. For three years, while World War I raged, He had little news from abroad. The isolation and constraint weighed heavily upon Him. Now and then He would address individuals in the audience, ask them about their families, their work, their problems; He would offer advice and help. Toward the end, He would ask one of the believers to chant verses from the poems of Bahá'u'lláh. When the chanting ended, the meeting was over. 'Abdu'l-Bahá would arise and enter the house. Dusk would have descended over Haifa.

There were frequent visits to the Shrine of the Báb. 'Abdu'l-Bahá would ride the old horse-drawn, bus-like vehicle up the mountain. The rest of us would walk along the rocky road, past the Pilgrim House, to the terrace overlooking the city of Haifa, the blue bay beyond and, in the distance, the hazy outline of 'Akká. We would gather there until 'Abdu'l-Bahá appeared and entered the Shrine. He would chant the Tablet of Visitation. Sometimes He asked Shoghi Effendi to chant this prayer. And when it was all over and the believers began to leave the Shrine, He would stand at the door with a bottle of rose water and put a little in each one's hand. There were also trips – less frequent – to 'Akká and Bahjí, and visits to the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh. There were also times that summer when 'Abdu'l-Bahá went in the horse-drawn carriage to Tiberias, Lake Tiberias and the Sea of Galilee, of Biblical renown. His purpose on these trips was to oversee the grain crops which the believers, under His supervision, had planted in the Jordan Valley. The grain the Master had stored in ancient Roman pits was to be distributed to everyone who needed it, Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í alike. On 27 April 1920, in the garden of the Military Governor of Haifa, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was invested with the insignia of the Knighthood of the British Empire in recognition of His humanitarian work during the war for the relief of distress and famine.

I would sometimes go into 'Abdu'l-Bahá's garden and talk with Ismá'il Áqá, the gardener, an old man beloved by the Master. On one of my visits to the Master's garden I noticed that everyone was quiet. When I asked why, I was told that a commission of inquiry was interrogating 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His room. I could hear 'Abdu'l-Bahá's clear, commanding voice through the open window above our heads. He spoke to the members of the commission with dignity and authority as if He were the investigator and they the suspected culprits.

Although He was humble in many ways, 'Abdu'l-Bahá never really bowed to anyone; at the right time, and in the right way, He was proud. He would not compromise the Cause of God. Somehow, the confidence with which the Master spoke gave me confidence and faith that He would be spared. Those were dangerous and difficult days. The violators were active and Jamál Páshá had vowed that he would crucify 'Abdu'l-Bahá when he returned victorious from his campaigns. When he did return, however, he was fleeing in defeat and humiliation. Despite the turbulence of this period the Master conferred upon the Bahá'ís of the west their world mission by revealing the Tablets of the Divine Plan, eight in 1916 and six in 1917.

I remember other little details from the summer of 1917, such as eating at 'Abdu'l-Bahá's table. He ate very simply, but He insisted on others having the proper amount of food. Quite often He would come behind the guests and speak to them. I remember His standing behind my chair saying, 'Why aren't you eating?' I was hungry, but my shyness prevented my eating. 'Why aren't you eating, Shaykh 'Alí?' And He placed a generous portion of rice on my plate. I had to eat it! One day, when I was walking along a curved street up the hill toward the House of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, I turned the corner and there He was!

I saw the Master walking down the hill, followed by two of the believers. As was the custom, I stepped to one side and bowed. The Master stopped and walked over to me, stopped right in front of me, and looked me straight in the eyes. I shall never forget having seen ‘Abdu’l-Bahá face to face.

What was He like? His bearing was majestic, and yet He was genial. He was full of contrasts: dominant, yet humble; strong, yet tender; loving and affectionate, yet He could be very stern. He was intensely human, most keenly alive to the joys and sorrows of this life. There was no one who felt more acutely than He did the sufferings of humanity.

At the end of the summer I went to see my family in Damascus before going back to college to graduate. Then I returned home. The war seemed to drag on and on, but finally the end came. Our great concern was Haifa: what had happened there? But soon the news arrived: General Allenby and the British had occupied Haifa and the Master was safe. As the doors to the outside world opened again we began to make plans. There was much thinking and counting of pennies. I had studied civil engineering and had been hired as a draftsman by the government. From my earnings I had saved a little, but it wasn’t enough to enable me to go on with my graduate studies. News of this reached ‘Abdu’l-Bahá through my uncle, Mirza Husayn, and the Master offered me one hundred pounds which, in those days, was the equivalent of about \$500.00. That made it possible for me to go. I wasted no time. In the autumn of 1919 I went to Haifa in order to say farewell to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. I was on my way to Europe – Switzerland and then Germany – for my graduate studies. I was twenty years old. This was to be my last experience with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

I was in Haifa for two or three days. Just before I left ‘Abdu’l-Bahá called me to His room. I was there alone with Him; the only other person was Shoghi Effendi, who was in and out. The Master invited me to be seated and He asked Shoghi Effendi to bring me some tea. He spoke to me, gave me instructions on how to live, mentioned that He had hopes for me. He said, ‘You are a good boy, Shaykh ‘Alí. The tea that Shoghi Effendi brought in a glass was boiling hot. I tried to drink it, but couldn’t. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said, ‘Drink! Drink your tea!’ So I had to drink it! It didn’t matter! At the very end He gave me His blessing. Then He stood up and beckoned me to Him. I went to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and He put His arms around me and kissed me on both cheeks. I never saw Him again.

Two years later, when I was at the University of California studying civil engineering, I learned of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s ascension. Looking back, I can see that the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá marked the end of an era. He was passionately devoted to the single goal of spreading the Teachings of Bahá’u’lláh. It was His mission to establish the brotherhood of man on earth in fact, as well as in principle. Nothing stopped Him; nothing deflected Him from His purpose. And yet it was not easy, for despite His high station, He was also intensely human, and He suffered a great deal. He was often very happy, and He always asked the Bahá’ís to be happy. *Be happy! Be happy!* That was His counsel to the believers, and He set the example. But there were times when I would see Him with the burdens of the whole world upon His shoulders.

There is something I learned from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá which I feel should not be forgotten. His life was not really His life alone; it was the life of every one of us. It was an example for every one of us. A new generation of Bahá’ís is being attracted to the Faith, and a new generation is growing up within the Bahá’í community. They will acquire knowledge of the Faith from books. But this is a living Faith. The Manifestation of God has appeared and initiated a new era. Bahá’ís have lived and worked and died for this Cause. The Faith is not something extraneous; it is not merely something beautiful, logical, just and fair – it is the very blood and fibre of our being, our very life. If men and women all over the world were to arise in ever-increasing numbers and make ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s way of life their own, each pursuing His path with zest and confidence, what would the world be like? Would not these individuals be a new race of men?



## Remembering ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Call for Unity, a Century after World War I

MONDAY NOVEMBER 26, 2018

BAHÁ’Í WORLD NEWS SERVICE



*This 1920 photo shows ‘Abdu’l-Bahá walking from His house on Haparsim Street in Haifa. He worked tirelessly to promote peace and to tend to the safety and well-being of the people of Akka and Haifa.*

Today, Bahá’ís commemorate the Day of the Covenant, a day dedicated to the remembrance of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s unique station in Bahá’í history. A century after the end of World War I—the bloodiest conflict humanity had ever known until then—today’s remembrance also harks back to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s urgent efforts to promote peace in the years preceding the war, His critical actions to ease suffering during the crisis, and the relevance of His call for peace today.

During His tour of Europe and North America from 1911 to 1913, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá often described Europe as on the brink of war. “The time is two years hence, when only a spark will set aflame the whole of Europe,” He said in an October 1912 talk. “By 1917 kingdoms will fall and cataclysms will rock the earth.”

Newspaper reports of His talks highlighted His warnings to humanity of an impending war and the urgent need to unify:

- “The Time Has Come, He Says, for Humanity to Hoist the Standard of the Oneness of the Human World...” –The New York Times, 21 April 1912
- “APOSTLE OF PEACE HERE, PREDICTS AN APPALLING WAR IN THE OLD WORLD” –The Montreal Daily Star, 31 August 1912
- “PERSIAN PEACE APOSTLE PREDICTS WAR IN EUROPE” –Buffalo Courier, 11 September 1912
- “Abdul Baha Urges World Peace” –The San Francisco Examiner, 25 September 1912



An article in *The New York Times* on 21 April 1912 describes the talks 'Abdu'l-Bahá gave while visiting the city.

In July 1914, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia, and the Great War began.

Noting the significance that 'Abdu'l-Bahá gave to the issue of peace, *Century of Light*, a publication commissioned in 2001 by the Universal House of Justice, states: "From the beginning, 'Abdu'l Bahá took keen interest in efforts to bring into existence a new international order. It is significant, for example, that His early public references in North America to the purpose of His visit there placed particular emphasis on the invitation of the organizing committee of the Lake Mohonk Peace Conference for Him to address this international gathering.... Beyond this, the list of influential persons with whom the Master spent patient hours in both North America and Europe—particularly individuals struggling to promote the goal of world peace and humanitarianism—reflects His awareness of the responsibility the Cause has to humanity at large."

Having raised the warning and urged the world to work for peace, 'Abdu'l-Bahá returned on 5 December 1913 to Haifa, then part of the Ottoman Empire. Aware of the coming war, He took steps to protect the Bahá'í community under His stewardship and to avert a famine in the region. One of His first decisions upon returning to the Holy Land was to send home all the Bahá'ís who were visiting from abroad.

Less than a year later, war broke out in Europe. As the Ottoman Empire joined the Central Powers of Germany and Austria-Hungary, the Allied Powers—including France, Britain, and eventually the United States—formed a strict blockade around Haifa. Communication and travel in and out of the area were almost impossible. Haifa and Akka were swept into the hysteria of war.

To protect the resident Bahá'ís of Haifa and Akka from danger, 'Abdu'l-Bahá decided to move them to a nearby Druze village called Abu-Sinan, while He remained in Akka with only one other Bahá'í. However, bombardment by the Allied forces necessitated that He eventually join the other Bahá'ís in the village; at one point, a shell landed, but did not explode, in the Ridvan Garden near Akka. 'Abdu'l Baha had the Bahá'ís in Abu-Sinan establish a dispensary and a small school for the area's children.

'Abdu'l-Bahá also intensified efforts to protect the surrounding populations. He directed Bahá'í farmers in the Jordan River Valley to increase their harvest yields and store extra grain in anticipation of a future shortage. After the war broke out and food supplies became scarce, He ensured that wheat would be distributed throughout the region. In July 1917, for example, He visited one farm in Adasiyyih, in present-day Jordan, for 15 days during the wheat and barley harvest. He had the surplus carried by camel to the famine-stricken Akka-Haifa area.

Throughout His ministry as the head of the Bahá'í Faith, from Bahá'u'lláh's ascension in 1892 to His own passing in 1921, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was in constant correspondence with Bahá'ís around the world. But during the war, His contacts with those outside the Holy Land were severely restricted.



*'Abdu'l-Bahá walking outside 7 Haparsim Street in Haifa, c. 1919*

Still, during this time, 'Abdu'l-Bahá took on two of His well-known works: *Memorials of the Faithful* and *Tablets of the Divine Plan*. The first was the publication of a series of talks He delivered during the war, eulogizing 79 heroic Bahá'ís. The latter was a series of letters, written in 1916 and 1917, that laid the foundation for the global spread of the Bahá'í Faith.

Eventually, during the war, 'Abdu'l-Bahá resumed weekly gatherings in His home, warmly greeting visitors and meeting with people from all segments of society, including Ottoman, British, German, and other military and government figures.

“Agony filled His soul at the spectacle of human slaughter precipitated through humanity's failure to respond to the summons He had issued, or to heed the warnings He had given,” *Shoghi Effendi* later wrote about 'Abdu'l-Bahá during this time in *God Passes By*.

Following Haifa's liberation on 23 September 1918, the city was in a frenzy. 'Abdu'l-Bahá maintained an atmosphere of calm and dignity as He received a continual flow of visitors including generals, officials, soldiers, and civilians.

News of His safety gave relief to Bahá'ís around the world. With the end of the war, 'Abdu'l-Bahá would soon meet many more Bahá'ís and other visitors from abroad as the doors to that sacred land were open again.



*'Abdu'l-Bahá receiving knighthood for relief of distress and famine during the war, 27 April 1920*





*Indian lancers march through Haifa after it was captured from the Ottomans in September 1918 (Credit: British War Museum, accessed through Wikimedia Commons).*

While Europe was jubilant with the end of the Great War and a world-embracing institution was taking form in the League of Nations, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote in January 1920:

“The ills from which the world now suffers will multiply; the gloom which envelops it will deepen. The Balkans will remain discontented. Its restlessness will increase. The vanquished Powers will continue to agitate. They will resort to every measure that may rekindle the flame of war.”

Conscious of the threat of yet another war, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá showed great interest in movements working for peace. In 1919, for example, He corresponded with the Central Organization for a Durable Peace at The Hague, which had written to Him three years earlier. In a message, referred to as the [Tablet to The Hague](#), ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, while praising the organization, was also candid in stating that peace would require a profound transformation in human consciousness and a commitment to the spiritual truths enunciated by Bahá’u’lláh.

“At present Universal Peace is a matter of great importance, but unity of conscience is essential, so that the foundation of this matter may become secure, its establishment firm and its edifice strong,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote in that letter. “Today nothing but the power of the Word of God which encompasses the realities of things can bring the thoughts, the minds, the hearts and the spirits under the shade of one Tree.”

In His will, Bahá’u’lláh appointed His oldest son, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, as the authorized interpreter of His teachings and head of the Bahá’í Faith. Upholding unity as the fundamental principle of His teachings, Bahá’u’lláh established a Covenant through which His religion would not split into sects after His passing. Thus, Bahá’u’lláh instructed His followers to turn to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá not only as the authorized interpreter of the Bahá’í writings but also as the perfect exemplar of the Faith’s spirit and teachings.



## PERSIAN PEACE APOSTLE PREDICTS WAR IN EUROPE

**Abdul Baha Urges Local Bahaists to Do All in Their Power to Avert Terrible Bloodshed Which He Says Is Pending in East.**

Warning against a great European war and pleading that the people of this country do what they can to avert terrible bloodshed, Abdul Baha, Persian peace apostle, addressed the local body of Bahaists at the Iroquois hotel last evening. Of the seventy persons in attendance about sixty were women.

The Persian prophet and his three secretaries, Dr. Fareed, M. Ahmad and M. Mohinrood were escorted to the reception parlor by J. Harrison Mills at whose home, No. 494 Elmwood avenue, the local followers hold regular meetings. Abdul Baha wore a black robe with a white turban, one of the secretaries wore all black and the other two wore plum colored robes with black turbans. One acted as interpreter and each of the others took a seat to right and left of their leader and took down in Arabic shorthand his words. He said:

"The very cause of life is due to the Supreme One's love, for by His grace we move, we see, we hear, we feel, and all phenomena is based on His love. The prophets are sent to bear a message of holy love and the philosophers and all the wise men of by-gone ages have sung with sweet melody the theme of love. But, alas, the shadow obscuring the sun of affection. Alas, that on earth should breed a contrary spirit in the hearts of men. Alas, that hatred and enmity should spring forth to make a hell of war and bloodshed.

"Even now in the orient are widows weeping, children lamenting and others bereaved for the bloodshed of their dear ones. The continent of

**Peace Apostle Who Predicts Bloodshed**



ABDUL BAHÁ.

Europe is one vast arsenal, which only requires one spark at its foundations and the whole of Europe will become a wasted wilderness.

"And what flimsy, what impudent pretexts they use. Patriotism, say they; glory, say they; the upbuilding of the continent, say they. What a travesty on God's truth."

Abdul Baha will speak again this evening at 8 o'clock at the Church of the Messiah, Mariner and North streets.

An article from the Buffalo Courier on 11 September 1912 reports on 'Abdu'l-Baha's talk the previous night, in which He predicted the coming war.

"The continent of Europe is one vast arsenal, which only requires one spark at its foundations and the whole of Europe will become a wasted wilderness," the newspaper quotes 'Abdu'l-Baha as saying.

# 40 Years in Jail Brings Wisdom

## Abdul Baha Urges World Peace

Famous Oriental Philosopher  
Will Visit San Francisco to  
Spread Doctrine.

ABDUL BAHÁ

Abdul Baha, after being in prison for forty years, is on his way to San Francisco to preach the faith he learned to follow during his confinement.

Abdul Baha is the son of Baha Ollah, the founder of Bahaism, which is, in brief, the doctrine of universal peace. He will remain here for two weeks or more, urging the peoples of the world to peace and brotherhood.

Abdul Baha was imprisoned with his father at Baghdad for preaching the religion of the Dawn of a New Day. From Baghdad, Baha Ollah was removed to Akka or Acre and there with his son, Abdul Baha, who is about to visit this city, he issued pamphlets, known as tablets, announcing the faith of Bahaism.

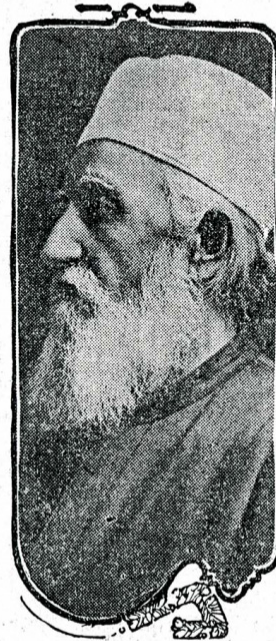
In 1904 the father died in prison calling upon the world to listen to the message of his son. With the revolution of the young Turks in 1908, Abdul Baha was released from prison and emerged into the world after having been hidden in dark dungeons for more than forty years.

He went to Egypt and Europe and was received with open arms by the wise men of the west, who allowed him to preach and teach after his own manner.

His mission has lasted in the open world for four years. He has now fifteen million followers known as Bahaism.

Abdul Baha speaks with the tongue of prophecy, though he resents being called a prophet, since he claims that what he has to say is of what there is and not what there shall be. He is a philosopher of wisdom gained not from books but from a life of solitude, during which his only literature has been the Bible, and his father's works. But Abdul is a scholar of amazing culture. He speaks like a fountain of wisdom.

He has the insight of Omar Khayyam, combined with the optimism of the Christian belief. He offers something more than a worldly hope men set their hearts upon. He offers a reality of life that comes only through peace of mind. This he declares is the first step towards peace of nations, though he fears that at present the nations



of the world are striving at peace in the midst of discord.

Abdul Baha is now in Denver on his way West. He will arrive in San Francisco this week and various pulpits in the city will be lent to him to preach from. He preaches from all kinds of pulpits and it makes no difference to him, or to the people he preaches to the denomination of the church where he takes his stand.

*This article from The San Francisco Examiner on 25 September 1912 describes 'Abdu'l-Baha's plans to visit the city.*

Europe Heading Straight for a  
Terrific Conflict, Abdul  
Baha Declares.

**THE BAHAI LEADER  
ARRIVES IN MONTREAL**

**Canadians Should Be Happy in  
Their Freedom from Great  
Armaments, Says Eastern  
Seer.**

A "Be happy! You're in Canada, live in a magnificent, peaceful country. Be happy!"

This was the kindly greeting of Abdul Baha, messenger of peace from the Orient to the Occident, who, as head of the Bahai movement has a following of three million people in Persia, whom he arrived in Montreal from Boston last night, to remain in the city for a week. Accompanying him were two Persian interpreters, Mirza Ahmad Subhan and Mirza Hashem. The party drove at once to 716 Penn Avenue West, where they will remain during their stay. Dr. Amern Fazel, the chief interpreter, will arrive tomorrow.

106 This man, interesting, with a friendly smile, was friendly, and his appearance was that of an eastern prince, with white hair and long white beard. He expressed himself to be representative of the Star as delighted to be in Canada, whose people should be very happy to live in such a splendid country. He expressed himself as greatly pleased with his mission to the United States, where the message of peace and international unity had been given a splendid welcome. The people of America he believed to be wonderfully kind and helpful. In fact, he said that the Atlantic was a very wonderful bridge.

PEACE MESSAGE  
WELCOMED ON THIS SIDE

The people of the United States, Abdul Illah said, he had found to be remarkably receptive to the movement which was, he devoted, making good headway on this side of the Atlantic. In most marked contrast to the com-

In the old world the inventive genius of man now steered to be turned almost exclusively to the fabrication of inhuman weapons of warfare, and these were turned out on such an enormous scale in all lands that Europe

**GREAT WAR BEFORE**  
**UNIVERSAL PEACE**

[illegible]

**A GREAT CONTRAST**  
**PRESENTED BY CANADA**

"What a contrast," said Abdul Baki, "is presented in your country. Canada should be a very happy land. So far removed from such a condition of strife. On this side of the Atlantic the peace message is well received; but in Europe, there is an another a different

Alfred Hahn will preach at the morning service, 11 a.m., in the Church of the Messiah, Albion street west, on Sunday. During his stay he will welcome all visitors interested in his movement, if acknowledgments are made.

## AN ORIENTAL PROPHET IN MONTRÉAL



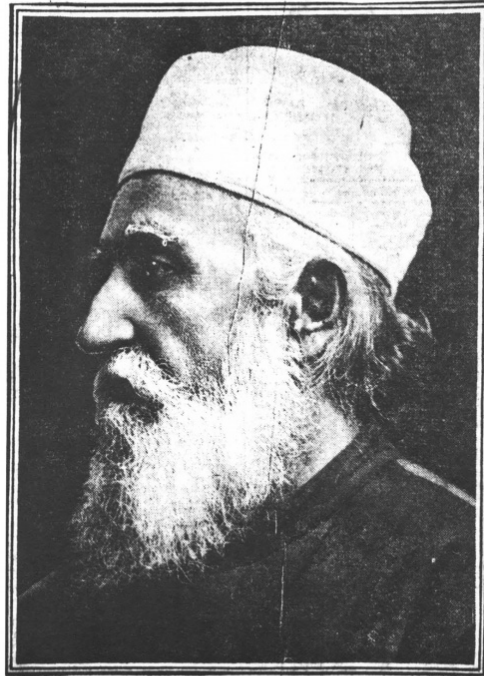
Abdul Baha, of Persia, leader of the Bahai movement, who says Christians should be busy to live as far from the strife of the Old World

*The 31 August 1912 issue of The Montreal Daily Star includes a prominent article about 'Abdu'l-Baha's talk the night before. "Apparently the era of universal peace would not be ushered in before a war of colossal proportions had been fought. Such a war would be the most appalling in the world's history. Europe to-day was heading straight for this," the newspaper quoted 'Abdu'l-Baha as saying.*



Boston, Mass., Post.  
Friday, August 23, 1912

## Persian to Plead for World Peace



ABDUL BAHÁ, WHO IS TO MAKE SEVERAL ADDRESSES IN BOSTON FOR  
UNIVERSAL PEACE.

Abdul Baha, the Persian philosopher and reformer, will be in Boston the latter part of the week and will make several addresses in the interest of universal peace. He is touring the continent on that mission and is now in Green Acre, Me.

He will stop temporarily at 68 High street, Malden, and it is expected that he will stay in or near Boston for a week or two. It is anticipated that he will give one evening to the Franklin Square House. It has not been definitely decided where else he will speak.

The teachings of Abdul Baha are attracting many because of their broadness. In a recent interview he said: "In this day every subject that is presented to a thoughtful audience must be done so with rational proofs corroborated with logical illustrations."

*A short report published in The Boston Post on 23 August 1912 notes 'Abdu'l-Baha's plans to speak on the pressing issue of peace.*

## ABDUL BAHÁ ASKS FOR WORLD PEACE

Famous Persian Mystic Ad-  
dresses Two Congrega-  
tions in Native Tongue

Favors Common Standard of Edu-  
cation and Ethics and Sex  
Equality

Clad in the garments of his native Persia, from which he was exiled because of his teachings, Abdul Baha, head of the Baha movement, presented the gospel of the universal brotherhood of man to two large congregations of this city yesterday. The famous Persian spoke in his native tongue, but his words, repeated in English by a clear-voiced interpreter, held his auditors in rapt attention. Baha, in his address, explained the views which have for some time attracted the interest of thousands throughout the world. Using the expression, "oneness," he urged that but one religion prevail throughout the world, and that man's holier nature be developed so as to prevail over his materialistic instincts. He declared himself as favoring universal peace, a common standard of education and ethics throughout the world, and the equality of the sexes.

The visitor spoke at the First Unitarian Church, Fifteenth street and Girard avenue, in the morning, and in the evening delivered an address at the Baptist Temple, Broad and Berks streets.

In the morning address he said:

**Wants Bond of Unity**  
"I come here from distant countries, from the Oriental climes, from countries wherefrom the lights of heaven have ever shone forth, from climes wherein the manifestations of God have ever come forth, countries wherein the guidance and power of God have become manifest, and my intention and purpose of this visit are that perchance a bond of unity and agreement might be established between the east and the west, the divine love may encompass all, the divine radiance shall enlighten both continents, and the bounties of the heavenly spirit shall revivify all. Therefore I supplicate at the threshold of God that the orient and the occident may become as one, that these peoples shall become one people, and that all souls may become as one soul."

Baha told in detail of the teachings of Baha O'llah, his father, one of the early leaders of the movement, in whose steps he is following.

"Baha O'llah appeared from the eastern horizon promulgating the oneness of the human kind, and the oneness of the divinity," he said, "he taught that all humanity was the servant of one God, all have come into being through the bestowal of the one Creator, who is kind to all. God provides for all, He rears all. He protects all, and He deals lovingly with all races of people. Inasmuch as God is kind to all, why should we be unkind? Inasmuch as God is loyal to all, why should we be disloyal? Inasmuch as God deals with all, why should we deal with animosity and hatred?"

*The Philadelphia Inquirer reported on 10 June 1912 about two talks 'Abdu'l-Baha delivered the previous day.*

## A New Cycle of Human Power

### *'Abdu'l-Bahá's encounters with modernist writers and artists*

SATURDAY JANUARY 16, 2021

BY

ROBERT WEINBERG

During the early years of the twentieth century, 'modernist' writers and artists rejected time-honored conventions in their quest to convey the sensibilities of a new age. This essay brings to light the little-known personal meetings that a number of these influential figures had with 'Abdu'l-Bahá and their responses to His personality and message.



Credit: Mark Tobey, *The New Day*, 1945

On 10 September 1911 and at the age of 67 years, 'Abdu'l-Bahá delivered the first public address of His life. From the pulpit of the City Temple in London, He announced to the reported 3,000-strong congregation: "This is a new cycle of human power." Humanity's dynamic acceleration toward greater levels of unity, He explained, was a consequence of the "light of Truth ... shining upon the world."<sup>5</sup>

Throughout the ensuing two years of His travels, 'Abdu'l-Bahá—finally free after more than half a century of imprisonment and exile—continued to elucidate, in both open presentations and private conversations, the distinctive capacities of humanity in this "new day."<sup>6</sup> In Paris, for example, He stated:

Look what man has accomplished in the field of science, consider his many discoveries and countless inventions and his profound understanding of natural law.

In the world of art it is just the same, and this wonderful development of man's faculties becomes more and more rapid as time goes on. If the discoveries, inventions and material accomplishments of the last fifteen hundred years could be put together, you would see that there has been greater advancement during the last hundred years than in the previous fourteen centuries.<sup>7</sup>

By the early years of the twentieth century, such advances were familiar in the Western societies into which 'Abdu'l-Bahá ventured, which had been impacted by the scientific challenge to Bible-centric worldviews, technological progress and urbanization, shifts in governance and global consciousness, the intensification of financial exchange and improvements to the status of women. These and numerous other advancements—also taken up in distant corners of the planet, many of which had been annexed, colonized and influenced by



Imperialist powers—are often included in the humanities and social sciences as some of the characteristics of “modernity.”

Concurrently, a wide variety of beliefs and practices later labelled ‘modernist’ were taking root. Ideals of truth, reason, and liberty were shared through diverse branches of human thought and endeavor, ranging from the materialistic to the esoteric. For the purposes of this exploration pertaining particularly to cultural pursuits, ‘modernism’ might be seen as both an outcome and, at times, a rejection of aspects of modernity. Rebelling against widely accepted norms, modernists in the arts set out to shun tradition and break rules, or at least push them to their limits. Painters dismissed the accurate depiction of reality, exploring instead the expressive and space-defining potential of color, experimented with abstracted forms, and revealed their process in the creation of an image; composers tested novel approaches to melody, harmony and rhythm; dancers drew upon the gestures of daily life or looked back to ancient civilizations for physical movements that stretched the possibilities of bodily expression; writers and dramatists departed from the established rules of prose, poetry, and playwriting to articulate the new sensibilities of the time. Some modernists conceived of utopian visions of society, albeit in certain cases by spreading the supremacy of their own nationalistic cultural heritage over neighboring traditions. At the heart of all of this burgeoning experimentation, however, was an aspiration for change, to which the subjective ‘self’ of the practitioner was central.

Ironically, while modernists often scorned uniformity and the imposition of Western values on the earth’s populations, they also turned for inspiration to the very cultures that were then becoming even more familiar to the public as a result of the expansionist ambitions of the powers under which they lived. A new universal art, some modernists believed, would emerge as they opened their eyes to what they considered to be the exciting, radical, and inventive qualities of the folk art and tribal crafts of the colonies, on display in museums and great expositions. Often it was the enormous wealth—extracted from colonialized subjects abroad and exploited lower classes at home—that enabled modernist projects, pursuits, and indulgences in the West.

Since the mid-nineteenth century, when Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution began to mount its challenge to the Biblical, anthropocentric conception of creation, the search for “an exotic and syncretic world religion” also became “an early modernist aim.”<sup>8</sup> New translations made accessible such religious texts as *The Upanishads*, *The Bhagavad-Gita*, and the *Tao Te Ching*. Elements of the religions of India and Tibet—and the more mystical strands of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—were incorporated into modernist thinking, often through the teachings of the Theosophical Society, and especially among women seeking a spirituality that cut out the literal middle man.

Such was the burgeoning cultural landscape in the West when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá arrived with His message of the dawning of a new era in human evolution, in which the unity and equality of all humanity would be recognized and conflict and contention would give way to an enduring peace.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s discourse on progress was rooted in the conviction that the discoveries and developments of the age represented an instinctive response on the part of humanity to a new infusion of divine power into creation. Fundamental to the Bahá’í conception of history is the belief that, when a Manifestation of God appears in the world, the accompanying forces required to accomplish His divinely-ordained purpose are also released, setting in motion irresistible processes of societal transformation. Bahá’u’lláh proclaimed:

The world’s equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order. Mankind’s ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System—the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed.<sup>9</sup>



The spiritual forces released by the Revelations of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh were thus breaking down barriers and pushing an unknowing humanity toward the consciousness and realisation of its essential oneness, regardless of race, gender, class, or other divisive factors. Such forces had deranged the stability of the existing world order and instigated transformation at every level:

Through that Word the realities of all created things were shaken, were divided, separated, scattered, combined and reunited, disclosing, in both the contingent world and the heavenly kingdom, entities of a new creation ...<sup>10</sup>

These “spiritual, revolutionary forces,” observed ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s grandson Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith, “... are upsetting the equilibrium, and throwing into such confusion, the ancient institutions of mankind.”<sup>11</sup> Humanity, either in its overt resistance to—or in its attempts to stimulate—social transformation was, in Shoghi Effendi’s analysis, experiencing the “commotions invariably associated with the most turbulent stage of its evolution, the stage of adolescence, when the impetuosity of youth and its vehemence reach their climax ...”<sup>12</sup> While the internal physiological processes within an individual trigger the onset of adolescence, the release into the world of Divine Revelation affects the inner fibre of human life and thought, and has an impact far beyond the personal orbit of a Manifestation of God and those who physically hear His message or respond directly to His call. It suffuses every aspect of existence and at a subliminal level is received by sensitive human hearts and minds, as yet oblivious to its source.



‘Abdu’l-Bahá with a group of Bahá’ís under the Eiffel Tower in Paris, France, January 1913

At the time of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s arrival in Paris on 3 October 1911, the French capital was maintaining its status as the most fertile arena for artists, writers, and musicians—including countless Americans—engaged in a passionate quest to live and work free from stifling convention. “I like Paris because I find something here, something of integrity, which I seem to have strangely lost in my own country,” wrote the African-American writer Jessie Redmon Fauset. “It is simplest of all to say that I like to live among people and surroundings where I am not always conscious of ‘thou shall not.’”<sup>13</sup> For women such as Fauset, who were escaping their homeland, where even educated Black citizens were still prohibited from participating in most social spaces, Paris offered the opportunity for fearless experimentation and acceptance. It was a city in which scientists such as the Polish Nobel Prize-winning physicist and chemist Marie Curie could train and embark on their careers, and where literary salons—including those hosted by expatriates Gertrude Stein and Natalie Clifford Barney—flourished, offering spaces where artists and writers could uninhibitedly share their ideas and work.

Women had also played a significant role in the establishment, in Paris, of the first Bahá’í centre in Europe at the close of the nineteenth century. Through the efforts of May Ellis Bolles (later Maxwell), many important figures

in early Western Bahá'í history embraced the message of Bahá'u'lláh in the city. Among them were other Americans and Canadians, including painters such as Juliet Thompson and Marion Jack, and heiress Laura Clifford-Barney, Natalie's sister. Impressionist painter Frank Edwin Scott, architect William Sutherland Maxwell, poet and art gallery manager Horace Holley and the Irish-born philanthropist Lady Blomfield also first came across the Bahá'í teachings in Paris. Experimental dancer Raymond Duncan, brother of the more renowned Isadora, and composer Dane Rudhyar were included in the Bahá'í circle. Rudhyar was a modernist who intuitively felt that Western civilization was coming to "the autumn phase of its cycle of existence."<sup>14</sup> Later composing *Commune*—based on the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá—Rudhyar deemed the Bahá'í message to have embodied "clearly the most basic keynotes of the collective spirit of the age ..."<sup>15</sup>

To exhausted communities of the world [the Bahá'í Revelation] gives vital impetus which, we hope, will soon energize new creative manifestations and produce an inspired art, equal or superior to that of early Christianity.<sup>16</sup>

Many artists and writers of the period were continuing to take a Symbolist approach. As a prelude to more far-reaching forms of abstraction, Symbolists strove to represent universal truths through metaphorical language and imagery, in an attempt to "illumine the deepest contradictions of contemporary culture seen through the prism of various cultures."<sup>17</sup> The novelist Andrei Bely wrote:

... we are now experiencing, as it were, the whole of the past: India, Persia, Egypt, Greece ... pass before us ... just as a man on the point of death may see the whole of his life in an instant ... An important hour has struck for humanity. We are indeed attempting something new but the old has to be taken into account ...<sup>18</sup>

It seems natural, then, that the opportunity to see in person a striking, venerable figure from Persia was intriguing to those who sought enlightenment from the East to find a language appropriate for expressing the modern world. The influential critic and Symbolist poet Remy de Gourmont, for example, met 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Paris on 20 October 1911. From Gourmont's account, published in *La France*, 'Abdu'l-Bahá appears to have been alert to the fact that he was a writer for whom a metaphorical depiction of spiritual reality would have appeal:

... The eloquent patriarch spoke to us of the simple joys experienced in the Bahá'í city, of pleasures designed to delight the docile hearts, where spring is eternal, ever-flowering with the perpetual blooming of lilies, violets and roses, where women smile and men are happy in the perfume air of love. And we spoke of the great truth that excels all the previous truths, in which our little human errors are melted and transformed, as such quarrels disappear in the shade of the greatest Peace. And we felt a deep passion in the faintly halting voice, roughly punctuated by the guttural sounds of the Persian language, but also gently punctuated by the phrasing of his musical laughter. For the prophet is joyful and we all feel within him the gaiety of being a prophet, upon whom forty years of prison have left no trace. He had with him a bouquet of violets, offering one to each of his visitors; to the most resistant to his teachings and to those who had the audacity to stubbornly oppose him, the parma violets serve as his arguments, as do his hearty laugh, his beautiful and poetic arguments, and the simplicity of his Persian dress.<sup>19</sup>

Evidently touched by their exchange, Gourmont urged his readers to seek out 'Abdu'l-Bahá's public appearances. Subsequently, using a pseudonym, Gourmont even penned a review of his own *La France* article for another journal.

Another significant modernist who learned of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was Guillaume Apollinaire, although whether they met is not known. One of the foremost poets of the early twentieth century and a close associate of such emerging painters as Picasso, Braque, and Marie Laurencin, Apollinaire is credited with coining the terms “Cubism” in 1911 and “Surrealism” in 1917. His “Le Béhaïsme” appeared in the *Mercure de France* on 17 October 1917. That article concludes:

A new voice is coming out of Asia. Already many in Europe believe that the word of Beha-Oullah[sic] does not contradict our modern science and can be assimilated for we[sic] Europeans, who need comforting. Isn’t it just that this comfort comes to us from Asia as it came before?<sup>20</sup>

In like manner, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s stay in London was widely reported in the publications of the day. One weekly magazine, aptly titled *The New Age* and supported by the future Nobel Prize-winning writer George Bernard Shaw, was dedicated to publishing modernism in literature and the arts. In its 21 September 1911 edition, two weeks after ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s arrival in the city, *The New Age* reported, “Seeds of strange religions are wafted from time to time on our shores. But fortunately or unfortunately, they do not find the soil in us in which to flourish ... The latest to land in public is Bahaism, of which, indeed many of us have heard in private these many years.”<sup>21</sup>

The pioneering modernist poet Ezra Pound was a regular contributor to *The New Age*. The day after “Bahaism” was mentioned in its pages, Pound stated somewhat arrogantly to his future wife, Dorothy Shakespear, “They tell me I’m likely to meet the Bahi[sic] next week in order to find out whether I know more about heaven than he does ...”<sup>22</sup> Following their meeting, Pound then wrote to Margaret Cravens, a friend who lived in the French capital, “I met the Bahi yesterday, he is a dear old man. I wonder would you like to meet him, he goes to Paris next week. I’ll arrange for you anyhow and you can go or not, as you like.”<sup>23</sup> In a further communication to Cravens, Pound was clearly eager for his friend to see ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, placing His significance above that of the French post-Impressionist painter Paul Cézanne:

The Bahi—Abdul Baha, Abbas Effendi, or whatever you like to call him is at the Dreyfus Barney’s ... and any one interested in the movement can write and see him there by appointment. It’s more important than Cezanne, & not in the least like what you’d expect of an oriental religious now. At least, I went to conduct an inquisition & came away feeling that questions would have been an impertinence. The whole point is that they have *done* instead of talking ...<sup>24</sup>

Despite Pound’s later, well-documented inclination towards fascism—which is about as ideologically far removed as can be imagined from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s purpose—it nevertheless appears that he was momentarily disarmed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. The poet even revived his memory of that day more than two decades later in his monumental verse cycle *The Cantos*. “Pound did not interest himself in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s message beyond expressing approval of its unexpected modernity,” literature scholar Elham Afnan has observed, yet the “portrait of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá [in *Canto XLVI*], despite its flippancy, is basically sympathetic and as respectful as Pound can manage to be.”<sup>25</sup>



Ezra Pound

Pound was also a contributor to the modernist journal *Blast*, in which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s name appeared in a somewhat surprising fashion. *Blast* was the creation of the painter and novelist Percy Wyndham Lewis, founder of the short-lived Vorticist movement, which was inspired by the Cubism of Picasso and Braque, and the Italian Futurists’ celebration of the machine age. The first edition of *Blast* contained an extensive list of people, institutions, and objects that were, in the Vorticist view, either “Blessed” or “Blasted.” Curiously, included among those “Blasted” is the name “Abdul Bahai.” Since there is no record of Wyndham Lewis having met ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the inclusion of His name in such a provocative list is perhaps more indicative of the contempt in which *Blast*’s editors held organized religion, or anything they deemed “bourgeois” and “establishment,” which may have encompassed the involvement of wealthy Londoners in Eastern movements.

In time, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s fame reached and impacted modernists much farther afield than the cities in which He spoke. In August 1911, the influential Japanese writer Yone Noguchi had sent Ezra Pound two books of his poems. Pound was very taken with Noguchi’s work, saying, “If east and west are ever to understand each other that understanding must come slowly and come first through art.”<sup>26</sup>



Yone Noguchi

Noguchi later learned of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá from Agnes Alexander, a Hawaiian-born Bahá’í who had been sent by Him to share the Bahá’í Teachings in Japan.<sup>27</sup> Noguchi wrote:

I have heard so much about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, whom people call an idealist, but I should like to call Him a realist, because no idealism, when it is strong and true, exists without the endorsement of realism. There is nothing more real than His words on truth. His words are as simple as the sunlight; again like the sunlight, they are universal. ... No Teacher, I think, is more important today than ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.<sup>28</sup>

During the early days of the First World War, Agnes Alexander also introduced the Bahá’í Faith to the highly influential English potter Bernard Leach, who recalled: “We asked what had brought her to Japan and I was struck by the quietness of her smile when she answered ‘... you will not understand, but I came because a little

old Persian Gentleman asked me to come.”<sup>29</sup> Leach—who became the most significant figure in the revival of craft pottery in modern Britain—dedicated his entire life to encouraging the union of East and West, fully embracing the Bahá’í Faith in 1940 after he was re-introduced to it by the American painter Mark Tobey, when they were both teaching at the progressive arts school Dartington Hall in Devon, England.



Bernard Leach with his son, David and students in the Old Pottery in St. Ives, England. From the Bernard Leach archive at the Crafts Study Centre, University for the Creative Arts, BHL/8999A.

Also favorable in his response to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was another enthusiast for modernism, Professor Michael Sadler. A progressive educationalist and university administrator, Sadler was president of the Leeds Arts Club, which mixed socialist and anarchist politics with the philosophy of Nietzsche, suffragette feminism, Theosophy, avant-garde art, and poetry. Sadler built up a remarkable collection of art, including a Symbolist masterpiece by Paul Gauguin and works by the Russian Expressionist painter Wassily Kandinsky, at a time when his paintings were either unknown or dismissed in London, even by well-known supporters of modernism. In Kandinsky’s seminal 1911 treatise, *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* (Concerning the Spiritual in Art), translated into English by Sadler’s son, the painter proposed that abstraction in painting was the best weapon for transforming a corrupt, materialist society.



Michael Sadler

Michael Sadler presided over ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s farewell talk at the conclusion of His first visit to London, on 29 September 1911, saying:



We have met together to bid farewell to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and to thank God for his example and teaching, and for the power of his prayers to bring Light into confused thought, Hope into the place of dread, Faith where doubt was, and into troubled hearts, the Love which overmasters self-seeking and fear.

Though we all, among ourselves, in our devotional allegiance have our own individual loyalties, to all of us ‘Abdu’l-Bahá brings, and has brought, a message of Unity, of sympathy and of Peace. He bids us all be real and true in what we profess to believe; and to treasure above everything the Spirit behind the form. With him we bow before the Hidden Name, before that which is of every life the Inner Life! He bids us worship in fearless loyalty to our own faith, but with ever stronger yearning after Union, Brotherhood, and Love; so turning ourselves in Spirit, and with our whole heart, that we may enter more into the mind of God, which is above class, above race, and beyond time.<sup>30</sup>



In January 1913, when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá travelled to Edinburgh, Scotland’s main proponents of modernist painting—known as the Scottish Colourists—were working abroad in France, where their pictures were exhibited and sold predominately by the Paris gallery managed by Horace Holley. Symbolism, however, was a strong component of the Celtic Revival movement, in which artists and writers drew inspiration from the ancient myths and traditions of Gaelic literature and the early British mediaeval style to create art in a modern idiom. While in Edinburgh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke with a number of artists through introductions from leading Celtic Revivalist Sir Patrick Geddes, the celebrated philanthropist and town planner (who also had the dubious honor of being “blasted” by Wyndham Lewis). Geddes presided over a public gathering with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, saying of Him:

We approve of the ideal He lays before us of education and the necessity of each one learning a trade, and His beautiful simile of the two wings on which society is to rise into a purer and clearer atmosphere, put into beautiful words what was in the minds of many of us. What impressed us most is that courage which enabled Him, during long years of imprisonment, and even in the face of death, to hold fast to His convictions.<sup>31</sup>

Geddes invited ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to visit a protégé of his, the painter John Duncan and Duncan’s wife Christine who had connections to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s friends Wellesley Tudor Pole and Alice Buckton, who shared in her Spiritualist interests. Among Duncan’s paintings, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá viewed *St. Bride*—now housed in the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art—depicting the Irish saint who, legend has it, was transported by angels from Ireland to Bethlehem to attend the birth of Christ. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá reportedly blessed the paintings, much to the delight of the Duncans.



John Duncan, "Saint Bride"

At the Edinburgh College of Arts, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá also encouraged a prize-winning sculptor, Fanindra Nath Bose, from Calcutta. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá praised Bose’s work, suggesting he return to India to found a new school of sculpture.<sup>32</sup> Later in 1913, Bose relocated to Paris to work under the great sculptor Auguste Rodin, which led to his becoming part of the “new sculpture” movement in Britain, creating small, figurative, Symbolist statues.

In addition to conversing with artists, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá occasionally agreed to have His portrait painted. During the nine days in April 1913 that He stayed in Budapest, Hungary, He sat three times for Róbert Nádler, a celebrated painter and teacher at the Academy of Fine Arts and president of the city’s Theosophical Society. Two decades later, Nádler warmly recalled the experience, saying, “I saw with admiration that in his facial expression peace, clean love, and perfect good intentions reflected themselves. He saw everything in such a beatific light; he found everything beautiful the outer life of the city, as well as the souls of its inhabitants.”<sup>33</sup> Nádler’s sympathetic painting of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is unique among the portraits made of Him, taking an Impressionistic *impasto* approach, particularly in the treatment of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s gossamer-like beard, made up of rhythmic brushstrokes.

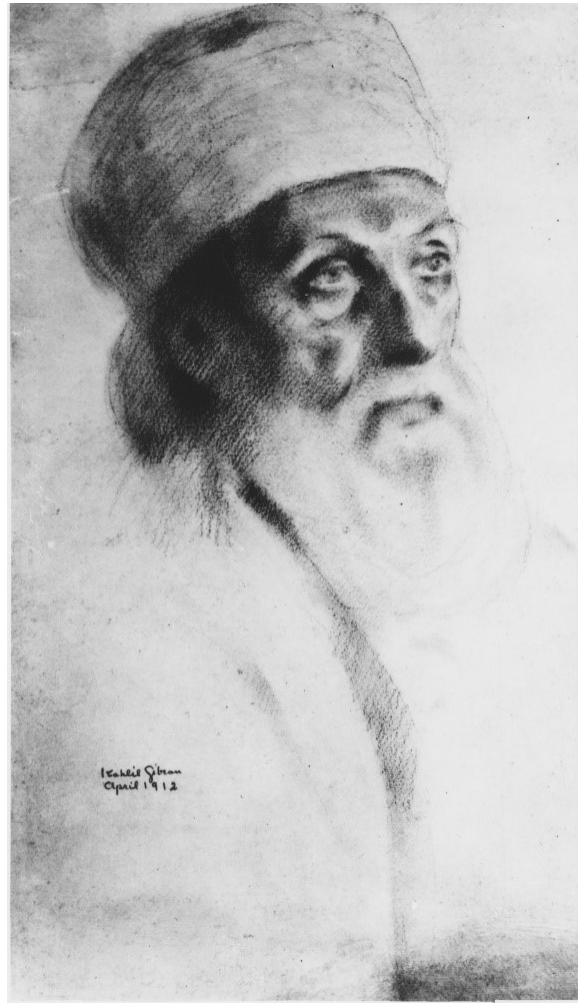


Portrait of 'Abdu'l-Bahá by Róbert Nádler, a celebrated painter and teacher at the Academy of Fine Arts and president of the city's Theosophical Society

During 'Abdu'l-Bahá's nine-month sojourn in North America, the most well-known literary personality to encounter Him was the Syrian-born, Lebanese-American writer and artist Kahlil Gibran, a central figure of Arabic literary modernism. Gibran arrived in New York City at the end of April 1911, his creative horizons having expanded during his exposure to modernists in Paris. Greenwich Village, where Gibran settled, was a gathering place for radical political and bohemian thinkers who were committed to an imminent revolution in human consciousness and social change. Art, they believed, would provide people with new values, giving rise to a new social order. In 1913, modern European art arrived forcefully in New York, when astonished Americans saw for the first time more than 300 avant-garde works at the infamous Armory Show. While remaining unmoved by most of the pieces on display, Gibran was sensitive to the motivations of modern artists, saying, "... the spirit of the movement will never pass away, for it is real—as real as the human hunger for freedom."<sup>34</sup>

Gibran "simply adored" 'Abdu'l-Bahá, recalled Juliet Thompson, who was Gibran's neighbour. "He was with Him whenever he could be."<sup>35</sup> On 19 April 1912, Gibran sketched a portrait for which 'Abdu'l-Bahá sat and, for the rest of his life, "often talked of Him, most sympathetically and most lovingly."<sup>36</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá may well have been a source of inspiration for Gibran's most famous work, *The Prophet*. The name of the book's main protagonist Almustafa, it has been posited, resembles that of 'Abdu'l-Bahá with only the consonants changed,<sup>37</sup> and the villagers in the narrative refer to him as 'The Master,' an appellation commonly used in relation to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. While Thompson did not later recall there being any definite connection between *The Prophet* and Gibran's meeting with 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the author did tell her that when he was writing *The Son of Man*, "he thought of 'Abdu'l-Bahá all through."<sup>38</sup> He also expressed his intention—though it was never realised—to write a book specifically about 'Abdu'l-Bahá.





Portrait of 'Abdu'l-Bahá by Kahlil Gibran, 1912.


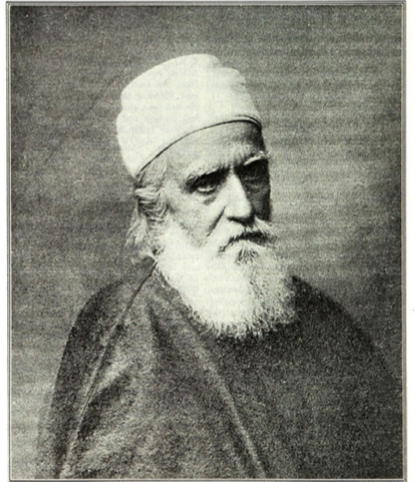
Juliet Thompson also arranged for 'Abdu'l-Bahá to sit for the outstanding photographer Gertrude Käsebier. Since 1899, Alfred Stieglitz—a prominent New York gallery owner who championed American modernism—had promoted photography through his 'Photo-Secession' movement, which aimed to advance photography as a serious new art form and exhibit the finest work by American practitioners. Käsebier, who Stieglitz deemed to be the leading artistic portrait photographer of the day, was at the heart of Photo-Secession and believed the medium could be a particularly suitable art form and source of income for women. "I earnestly advise women of artistic tastes to train for the unworked field of modern photography," she said in a lecture. "It seems to be especially adapted to them, and the few who have entered it are meeting a gratifying and profitable success."<sup>39</sup>

Käsebier had distinguished herself by her sympathetic, powerful portraits of America's indigenous peoples, focusing on their expressions and individuality, rather than costumes and customs, a sensitivity she deployed in her portrait session with 'Abdu'l-Bahá on 20 June 1912. "I shall never forget the Master's beauty in the strange cold light of her studio," wrote Thompson in her diary, "a green, underwater sort of light, in which He looked shining and chiselled, like the statue of a god. But the pictures are dark shadows of Him."<sup>40</sup> Käsebier, though, told Thompson afterwards, that she would like to live near Him.



Photograph of 'Abdu'l-Bahá by Gertrude Käsebier during her portrait session with Him on 20 June 1912

Although those who came into contact with 'Abdu'l-Bahá were deeply impacted by His presence and personality, some appear not to have consciously or explicitly made the profound connection between the Revelation He propagated and the revolutionary period during which they were making their distinctive mark. Yet, other leading modernists did respond more directly and thoughtfully to His Message.

ABDUL BAHÁ. THE PERSIAN TEACHER OF BROTHERHOOD

MEN OF THE MONTH

A PERSIAN TEACHER.

ON April 12 Abdul Baha, the head of the religious movement known as Bahaism, arrived in America to visit his rapidly increasing band of followers. His coming is of particular interest to those of us who believe in the brotherhood of man, for that is the doctrine the Bahais emphasize above all other things. Because they have taught it, their first leader was put to death, their second died in prison, while Abdul Baha, their third head, has spent all his life, until a few years ago, in the Turkish prison at Acca, in Syria, the "new holy city" of the Bahais.

It is only seventy years since the movement of which he is the leader originated in Persia; to-day it numbers 10,000 disciples and is growing at an amazing rate. It is not, properly speaking, a "new religion." It does not ask a Christian to cease professing Christianity or a Mohammedan to give up his Mohammedanism. It does, however, demand that each person shall follow the spiritual truths of his religion, and it pays little attention to dogma.

The movement presents in many respects a striking parallel with the early growth of Christianity. Like Christianity, it began as a protest against the corruption of established, intolerant, unspiritual religion, and also like Christianity it drew on itself the most inhuman persecutions. The number of martyrs is estimated at about 50,000. They have been burned alive, beheaded, torn in pieces, hanged and tortured in all the ways official cruelty could devise. There has not been an instance of recantation. The records of the Bahais speak of the victims as "athirst for the draught of martyrdom," and it is indeed true that they died with songs on their lips.

There were persecutions and martyrdoms so recently as nine years ago, but the great time of trial was in the years 1848 to 1850, when the movement was beginning and the Persian government saw, in the growth of this enthusiasm for brotherhood, a menace to its arbitrary power. Perhaps twenty thousand men, women, and even children, died during these years of persecution.

It was in 1844 that a young Persian named Mohammed Ali began to preach a doctrine of simplicity and spirituality. He called himself "the Bah," which in Persian means "the gate." It was not uncommon for teachers to adopt this title, signifying that wisdom did not originate with them, but came from heaven, using them as the gate by which to approach humanity. The Bah was only 25 years old, but he soon won a large number of followers, so soon that the great persecution began when he had preached but four years.

The accusations brought against the followers of the Bah were very similar to those brought against the early Christians. They were charged with being "bad citizens," because they taught love to all men of all races, and of immortality, because they practised a kind of community of goods, like that of the early Christians.

The Bah found martyrdom in the course of time, being hanged from the wall of a prison and shot; so, in the words of the chronicle, did "that holy spirit escape from its gentle frame and ascend to the supreme horizon." But, like John the Baptist, he had continually spoken of someone to follow him and perfect his work, and soon after his death a man arose who was generally received as the head of the movement. This was Baha Ulla, the father of Abdul Baha.

Baha Ulla was a man of great wealth and high rank. He did not long keep either, for the Persian government, afraid perhaps to kill him, confiscated his goods and exiled him. "Thank God, I am now free," cried Baha Ulla when he heard that all his wealth was lost. With the greatest suffering he and his family, with a band of followers, made their way from Persia toward the coast. No sooner had they arrived than the Turkish government arrested them and threw them in prison at Acca. Baha Ulla never left the prison again, and Abdul Baha grew up and spent all his life there, until the "Young Turk" seized the government a few years ago and gave him his freedom.

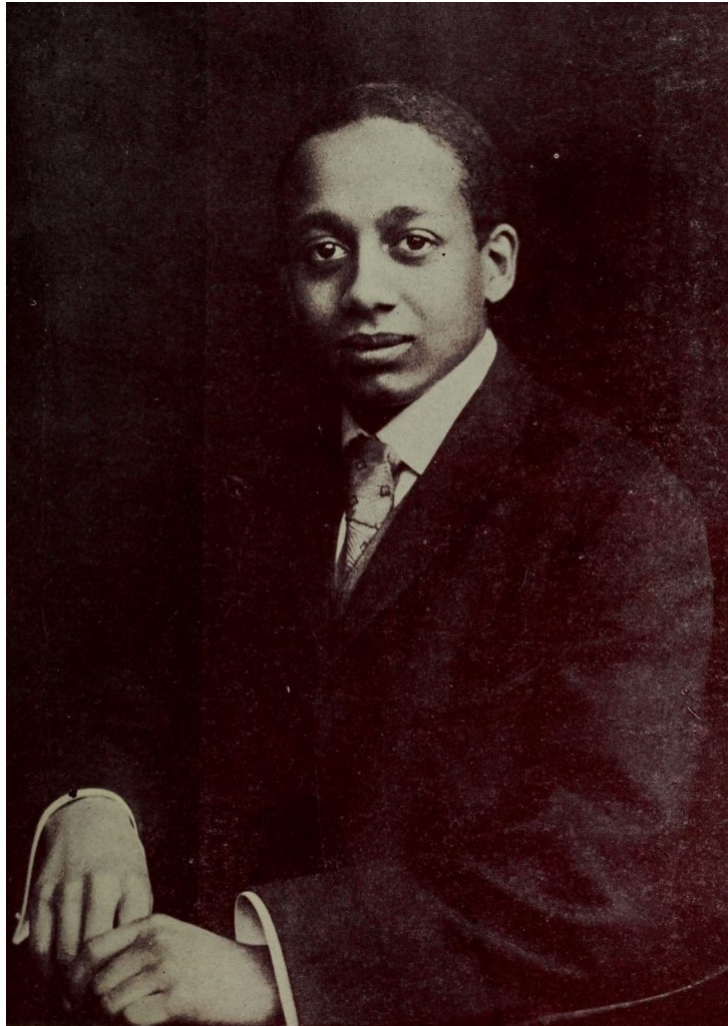
At first the family suffered greatly, but by degrees, as the jailers saw that they were kindly and gentle people, they were given some privileges, so that friends could see them and the work could be carried on from the prison. Baha Ulla did a great deal to simplify the somewhat complicated and Oriental teachings of the movement. His son was accepted by all as his successor, although there is no theory of a priestly family which is to rule the Bahais.

At Abdul Baha's house in Acca all men are welcomed. Persian, African, Frenchman, American—they all meet as brothers before the master. He is the most generous

The June 1912 edition of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's official magazine *The Crisis* published 'Abdu'l-Bahá's speech at its fourth conference.

One of the Bahá'í principles promulgated with urgency by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His travels in the United States was the elimination of racial prejudice. His address at the fourth conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) made a strong impact, for example, on sociologist and writer W.E.B. Du Bois, who published 'Abdu'l-Bahá's speech in full in the June 1912 edition of the NAACP's official magazine *The Crisis* and made Him one of the 'Men of the Month' in the July issue. The Bahá'í teachings on race unity also resonated forcefully with Alain LeRoy Locke—the philosophical architect of the Harlem Renaissance artistic movement, which aimed to create a body of African American writing and art comparable to the best from Europe, to celebrate and transcend the stereotypes of black American culture and encourage social integration.

Locke asserted that, drawing on African American sources, black “artists could transcend the narrow conventions of Western art creating a genuinely human art.”<sup>41</sup>



Alain LeRoy Locke

Locke formally accepted the Bahá'í Faith in 1918. Five years later, making his first pilgrimage to the Bahá'í Shrines in the Holy Land, he had a profoundly affecting experience in the Shrine of the Báb and the Shrine of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, where he became “strangely convinced that the death of the greatest teachers is the release of their spirit in the world. ...”<sup>42</sup>

Through their encounters with 'Abdu'l-Bahá, then, thousands of souls in the West came into direct contact with the human embodiment of the spiritual forces released by the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, a Revelation through which, although few of them discerned it, “... the whole creation was revolutionized, and all that are in the heavens and all that are on earth were stirred to the depths.”<sup>43</sup> One particular aspect of that Revelation, of which most of the artists and writers He met probably remained unaware, concerned the radical redefinition of art as being an act of worship. 'Abdu'l-Bahá described it thus to Juliet Thompson:

I rejoice to hear that thou takest pains with thine art, for in this wonderful new age, art is worship. The more thou strivest to perfect it, the closer wilt thou come to God. What bestowal could be greater than this, that one's art should be even as the act of worshipping the Lord? That is to say, when thy fingers grasp the paintbrush, it is as if thou wert at prayer in the Temple.<sup>44</sup>

This consecration of humanity’s creative pursuits would, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá foresaw it, in the centuries ahead give rise to “a new art, a new architecture, fused of all the beauty of the past, but new.”<sup>45</sup> Despite all of its cultural ferment and experimentation, then, the early years of the twentieth century—with its “landscape of false confidence and deep despair, of scientific enlightenment and spiritual gloom,”<sup>46</sup> a landscape on which the “luminous figure of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá”<sup>47</sup> appeared— might thus be seen merely as the first streaks of the dawn of a “new cycle of human power.”<sup>48</sup>

The author is grateful to Debra Bricker Balkan, Hari Docherty, Dannah Edwards, Sky Glabush, Jan Jasion, Michael Karlberg, Arlette Manasseh, Anne Perry, and Nathan Rainsford for their assistance in the preparation of this essay.



# The Cause of Universal Peace

## *'Abdu'l-Bahá's Enduring Impact*

TUESDAY FEBRUARY 23, 2021

BY  
KATHRYN JEWETT HOGENSON



Postcard of Lake Mohonk Mountain House, Mohonk Lake, N. Y. around 1930-1945. Credit: Boston Public Library,  
[https://www.flickr.com/photos/boston\\_public\\_library/6967292620](https://www.flickr.com/photos/boston_public_library/6967292620)

In the late summer of 1911 in the United States, Albert Smiley found a letter sent from Egypt among the items in his mail. Dated August 9, it was from 'Abdu'l-Bahá, head of a religion which Smiley had only briefly encountered the year before.<sup>49</sup> The letter addressed Smiley as the founder and host of the Lake Mohonk Conferences on International Arbitration and praised those gatherings and their goal of establishing arbitration as the means to settle disputes between nations. 'Abdu'l-Bahá stated emphatically, "What cause is greater than this!" Explaining how His Father, Bahá'u'lláh, had advocated the unity of the nations and religions, He asserted that the basis of this unity was the oneness of humanity.<sup>50</sup> To ensure that His message to the sponsors was received and considered, a second letter was sent on August 22 to the Conference secretary, Mr. C. C. Philips. It began, "The Conference on International Arbitration and Peace is the greatest results [sic] of this great age."<sup>51</sup> In response, the organizers invited 'Abdu'l-Bahá to take part in the 1912 Conference and to address one of its sessions.<sup>52</sup>

Even though other groups in the United States and Europe were holding meetings to promote peace, 'Abdu'l-Bahá singled out the Lake Mohonk Conferences; for this reason, these exceptional gatherings are worthy of close examination. At them, Albert Smiley and his identical twin brother, Alfred, created an atmosphere that not only illuminated the issue under discussion but resulted in practical action.

The devoutly religious, idealistic Smiley brothers were lifelong members of the Society of Friends, the Christian Protestant denomination better known as Quakers. In their youth, they worked as educators. Then, in 1869, they pursued a different direction by purchasing a dilapidated hunting lodge on the shore of Lake Mohonk in the Catskill Mountains, half a day's travel by train from New York City, and they successfully developed it into a fashionable resort.

Albert gained a reputation for civic-mindedness and, out of a desire to ameliorate the ills of society, developed a keen interest in social movements. Consequently, Rutherford Hayes, then President of the United States,

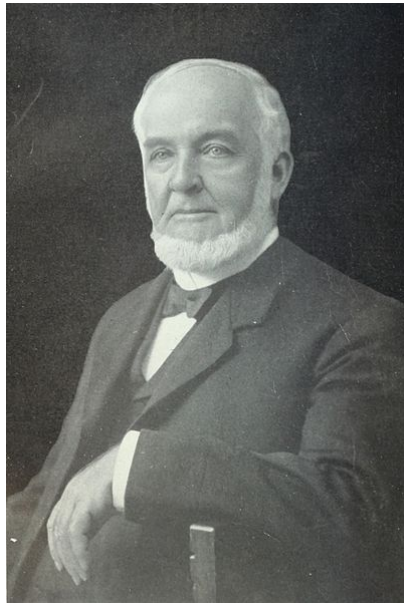
appointed him to the federal Board of Indian Commissioners. In the course of this service, Smiley recognized an urgent need to create a space where issues regarding America's indigenous peoples could be explored, and solutions proposed and acted upon. To that end, in 1883, he invited his fellow commissioners and others working on behalf of indigenous populations to his resort for a conference, which proved useful enough to be held annually until 1916. The consultation which occurred during those sessions influenced the course of government policy. Pleased with the success of the Smiley efforts, President Hayes suggested that the brothers establish a similar conference focused on addressing injustices faced by Americans of African descent. The Smileys organized and hosted the first national conference on the situation of Black Americans in 1890, but the extraordinary challenge posed by the issue forced them, with great reluctance, to abandon the conference after just two years.<sup>53</sup>

Unlike many of their fellow Quakers, the Smileys were not strict pacifists; however, their religious upbringing had instilled in them an unshakeable reverence for life.<sup>54</sup> They were wholeheartedly committed to the cause of peace. Drawing upon what they had learned from experience, in 1895 they established the Conferences on Arbitration at Lake Mohonk. During that first gathering, a standing international court of arbitration was proposed and discussed at length. Among the participants was the man who would serve as head of the US delegation to the conference at the Hague a few years later when the Permanent Court of International Arbitration was established. The exploration of the ins and outs of such a court at Lake Mohonk informed the thinking of many of the participants, especially the American delegation.<sup>55</sup> This would be the first tangible fruit of the arbitration conferences.

Managing two annual conferences, Albert Smiley developed a set of working principles. First, the topic had to be one that could lead to action. One reason the conferences on indigenous populations were influential was that all policy regarding the indigenous peoples in the United States was set by one national government agency, so a handful of officials could implement the recommendations that were made. In contrast, most of the laws and policies that affected the situation of African Americans were set and executed by countless state and local level governments.<sup>56</sup> The issue of international arbitration, while global in scope, shared more in common with the first example because a small number of highly placed politicians, officials, and diplomats determined policy. This meant that the number of people requiring educating and persuading was manageable.

Smiley's second underlying principle was that religion had a major role to play in resolving social problems, including the promotion of world peace. Religious leaders were invited to take part in all the conferences. The meetings themselves had a religious overtone and the participants were expected to adhere to the Quaker moral code, which included an unwritten prohibition against drinking alcoholic beverages and playing cards.<sup>57</sup>

The Smileys also learned how to conduct consultation effectively. A variety of points of view were welcome and fostered, and Albert chose chairmen who would not use their role to promote their own viewpoints or agendas and would be even-handed. The Smileys ensured that no group or position dominated the discussion portions of the sessions. Discussion was to be conducted at the level of principle rather than based upon specific matters, especially those that were controversial, such as the Spanish American War. The Smileys did not allow speakers at the arbitration conference to give talks about the horrors of war, lest the consultation become less about solutions and more about sentiment. The conferences were, however, an opportunity to provide information about legislation, treaties, and other news related to the topic at hand.



Albert Smiley (1828-1912)

At the outset, idealistic leaders of social movements whose worldviews were not always practical filled the arbitration sessions, so the Smileys began to invite representatives of the business community. Nothing was worse for the average businessman than the economic disruption and uncertainty of a war. Women were always invited and fully participated, which was liberal for the time.

Finally, Albert Smiley recognized that the conference schedule must allow time for informal meetings and the networking that naturally occurs through socializing. The plenary sessions only lasted two hours in the morning and two hours in the evening, with the rest of the day unscheduled except for meals. The expansive property, much of which was woodlands with hiking trails surrounding the lake, provided welcome opportunities both to meditate in nature and to discuss ideas privately.<sup>58</sup>

By the time ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote to the organizers of the conferences, the gatherings had become influential. The groundwork necessary for the establishment of the Permanent Court of Arbitration at the Hague, for instance, was established there, and the American Society of International Law was also created at the conference, in the 1905 session.<sup>59</sup>

Establishing the Court of Arbitration was only the beginning, for as that institution undertook its work, other issues arose: How could countries be encouraged or required to bring matters to the Court rather than resort to war? How were the decisions of the Court to be upheld? Treaties became an obvious instrument and topic for discussion. Because the conferences were held annually with many of the same participants, different layers of the matter of arbitration were explored over their 21-year history.

When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá addressed the conference as its opening speaker on the evening session on May 15, 1912, He was introduced by the conference chairman, Nicholas Murray Butler, President of Columbia University, who would be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931. Among the approximately 200 people in attendance were the future Prime Minister of Canada, W. MacKenzie King, ambassadors, jurists, journalists, academics, religious leaders, businessmen, trade unionists, and leaders of civic organizations, including peace activists. The speakers who followed Abdu’l-Bahá that evening came from Nicaragua, Argentina, Germany, and Canada—a sampling of the many countries represented.<sup>60</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Bahá was allotted twenty minutes for His talk, most of which was in the form of reading a previously submitted English translation. His address began with a discussion of Bahá’u’lláh’s emphasis on the oneness of humanity and His promise of the coming of the “Most Great Peace.” He explained to the audience that Bahá’u’lláh promulgated His Teachings during the nineteenth century when wars were raging throughout the world among religious sects, ethnic groups, and nations. His Father’s teachings, explained ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, inspired many people to put aside their prejudices and instead love and closely associate with their former enemies. The talk then turned to the importance of investigating reality and forsaking blind imitation; for, as He pointed out, once people see truth clearly, they will behold that the foundation of the world of being is one, not multiple. Following His discussion of the oneness of humankind, He explored the agreement of science and religion. Throughout the speech, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá stressed that religion should bring about a bond uniting the peoples of the world, not be the cause of disunity; that all forms of prejudice must be abolished, including racial, religious, national, and political; and that women should be accorded equal status with men. He then briefly touched upon the problem of the disparities of wealth and poverty. Finally, He stated that philosophy is incapable of bringing about the absolute happiness of mankind: “You cannot make the susceptibilities of all humanity one except through the common channel of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>61</sup>

The members of His entourage recorded that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s talk was well-received and that many people approached Him afterward to thank Him and to speak with Him.<sup>62</sup> The full translation of His talk was included in the widely distributed report of the conference and much of the press coverage also mentioned it.<sup>63</sup>

Earlier that day, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had taken advantage of the unscheduled afternoon to give at least one informal talk and to speak with a number of the conference participants. He did not stay for the entire event but returned to New York the following morning after spending His last hours at the resort visiting with Albert Smiley.<sup>64</sup>

The 1912 conference was the last one attended by the far-sighted Albert Smiley. Alfred had already passed away and Albert followed his twin in December of that year. Their brother, Daniel, whose attention to detail in planning the conferences was part of their success,<sup>65</sup> continued to host the conferences until circumstances forced him to discontinue them when the United States entered WWI in 1917. Years later, Dr. Butler, reviewing his own participation in the conferences between 1907 and 1912, reflected, “it is extraordinary how much vision was there made evident.” However, he concluded, “it is more than pathetic that that vision is still waiting for fulfilment.”<sup>66</sup> All the efforts of peace organizations and gatherings such as the Lake Mohonk Conferences culminated in the creation of the League of Nations at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. However, although President Woodrow Wilson was given credit for conceiving the League, the US Congress refused to ratify the treaty that would make the United States a member. Thus, despite hopeful expectations, the League was born handicapped and, after a few initial achievements, proved to be ineffective at preventing wars. It was, nevertheless, a beginning.

Following the Great War, the United States returned to its default foreign policy position of isolationism; namely, the conviction that the country should stay out of the conflicts afflicting other parts of the world. It was as if all the work done before the war to promote world peace through internationalism had been undone. This situation was exacerbated by the 1919 “Red Scare,” during which anarchists and communists were accused of instigating several violent incidents. Moreover, in the 1920s, deep-seated prejudices took firmer hold of US public policy. Congress passed restrictive immigration legislation in 1924 to keep out Jews and Catholics. It became all but impossible for Africans to legally immigrate, and Chinese immigration was banned by law.

Meanwhile, in 1919, white people attacked and set fire to black neighborhoods in Chicago and, in 1921, attacked and even bombed from the air a prosperous black district in Tulsa, Oklahoma, leaving untold black citizens dead and the lives of the survivors ruined. The white supremacist, anti-Catholic, and anti-Semitic organization, the Ku



Klux Klan, experienced a resurgence, demonstrating its strength with a large parade through Washington, D.C. in 1926, its members' distinctive white-hooded uniforms blending with the backdrop of the gleaming white marble of the U.S. Capitol building.

On the international front, fascism and communism arose quickly from the still-smoldering ashes of Europe. The armistice of 1918 would prove to be only an intermission before war erupted again in the 1930s. In the Far East, Japan's armies were on the move, beginning with the 1931 invasion of the Manchurian region of China. In country after country, rearmament accelerated. If ever the peoples of the world needed to grasp Bahá'u'lláh's message that humankind is one, it was during the period between the World Wars.

World peace remained the primary focus of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talks when He visited California a few months after His appearance at the Lake Mohonk Conference. In a talk given at the Hotel Sacramento on 26 October 1912, He said that "the greatest need in the world today is international peace," and after discussing why California was well-suited to lead the efforts for the promotion of peace, He exhorted attendees: "May the first flag of international peace be upraised in this state."



Leroy C. Ioas (1896-1965)

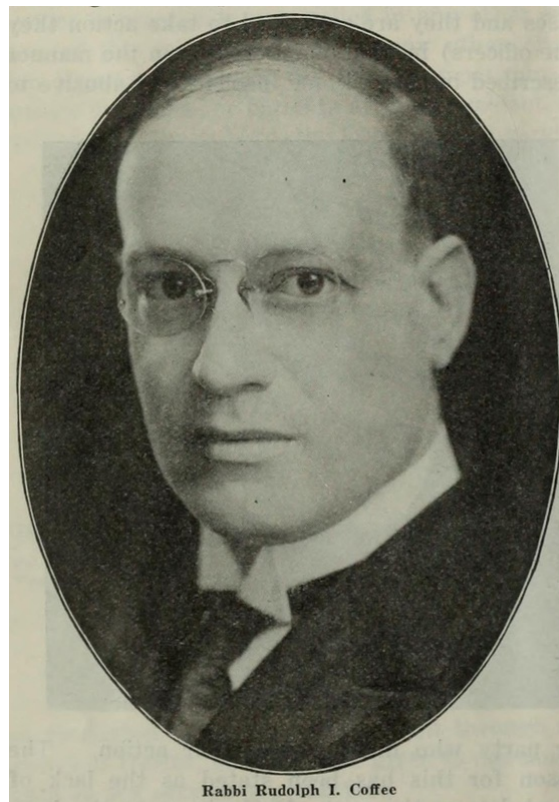
One of those inspired by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's vision of California as a leader in the promotion of world peace was Leroy Ioas, a twenty-six-year-old resident of San Francisco and rising railway executive. He remembered how 'Abdu'l-Bahá had met with many prominent people during His ten months in the United States and, drawing upon His example, some years later Ioas became determined that Bahá'í principles should be widely promulgated among community leaders, especially those in positions to put them into effect or to influence the thinking of the citizenry. In 1922, Ioas wrote to Agnes Parsons in Washington, DC, to solicit her opinion and guidance about the prospect of a unity conference in his city. The previous year, at the express request of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, she had organized a successful, well-attended Race Amity Conference in her own racially polarized region of the South. Ioas noted in his letter that the challenge on the West Coast was not simply prejudice towards black people, for their numbers were few, but strong animosity towards the more numerous Chinese and Japanese citizens. Parsons

responded with encouragement and suggestions. Armed with this guidance, Ioas approached two of the pillars of the Bay Area Bahá'í community—Ella Goodall Cooper and Kathryn Frankland—to gain their support for a conference. With this groundwork laid, he proposed a unity conference to the governing council for the San Francisco Bahá'í community, which decided it was not timely.



Ella Goodall Cooper (1870-1951)

Undeterred, Ioas approached Rabbi Rudolph Coffee, head of the largest synagogue in the Bay Area and the first Jewish person to serve as chaplain of the California State Senate. Coffee shared many of the Bahá'í ideals and became an enthusiastic ally. Ioas again turned to the Bahá'í council, and this time it supported his plan to form a committee that included Cooper and Frankland as members.



Rabbi Rudolph I. Coffee

(1878-1955)

The committee's first order of business was to draft a statement of purpose. It said that the goals of the conference were "to present the public ... the spiritual facts concerning the beauty and harmony of the human family, the great unity in the diversity of human blessings, and the harmonizing of all elements of the body politic as the Pathway to Universal Peace." The group also decided that the expenses of the three-day conference set for March 1925 would be covered by the Bahá'í community so that participants would not be asked to contribute money—but, despite the Bahá'í underwriting of the event, the program would not have any official denominational sponsorship. The committee booked the prestigious Palace Hotel, the city's first premier luxury hotel, as the venue for the event.

Cooper, listed on the San Francisco Social Registry,<sup>67</sup> had access to the leading citizens of the area. As experienced event organizers, Cooper and Frankland set to work soliciting leading city residents to serve as "patrons". The greatest coup was enlisting Dr. David Starr Jordan, founding president of Stanford University, to serve as the honorary chairman of the conference. Jordan had met 'Abdu'l-Bahá and was known in peace movement circles for having developed his own peace plan. Other note-worthy speakers accepted, and the first World Unity Conference was born. The committee even hired a public relations firm to advertise the event and assist with arrangements.

Over the course of the evenings of March 21, 22, and 23, speakers addressed, before large audiences, the issues of the status of women and of the black, Chinese, and Japanese communities, as well as topics related to world peace. The roster of accomplished presenters included not only Rabbi Coffee and Dr. Jordan but also the senior priest of the Catholic Cathedral, a professor of religion, a Protestant minister of a large African-American congregation, distinguished academics, and a foreign diplomat. The last one to address the conference was the Persian Bahá'í scholar, Mírzá Asadu'llah Fádíl Mázandarání, the only Bahá'í on the program.

Measured by attendance and favorable publicity, the conference was an unqualified triumph. But as the last session drew to a close, the inevitable question was put to Ioas by Rabbi Coffee: What next? Hold such a conference annually? The planners did not have an answer. Just like the Smileys, Rabbi Coffee realized that the conference should lead to action. Undertaking one conference had stretched the financial and human resources of the San Francisco Bahá'í community. It had also provided a glimpse of what they could achieve. The ideas presented were, however, scattered to the wind with only the hope that some hearts and minds had been changed.<sup>68</sup>

Ioas provided the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada—the governing council for the Bahá'í communities of the two countries—with a report, and he suggested that similar World Unity Conferences be held in other communities. The National Assembly enthusiastically agreed and established a three-person committee, including two of its officers, to assist other localities in their efforts to hold conferences. The committee members were Horace Holley, Florence Reed Morton, and Mary Rumsey Movius.<sup>69</sup> Human resources and all funds were to come from the sponsoring communities, but the national committee would help to promote the conferences and offer other assistance, including speakers.

During 1926 and into 1927, eighteen communities held World Unity Conferences. These included Worcester, Massachusetts; New York, New York; Montreal, Canada; Cleveland, Ohio; Dayton, Ohio; Hartford, Connecticut; New Haven, Connecticut; Chicago, Illinois; Portsmouth, New Hampshire; and Buffalo, New York. They followed the format of the San Francisco conference with three consecutive nights of programs featuring a diversity of speakers—the majority of whom were not Bahá'ís—on topics that were encompassed within Bahá'í principles. Among the presenters were clergy, academics, politicians, including the first woman to serve in the Canadian Parliament,<sup>70</sup> but this guidance was not implemented systematically.

As the series of conferences drew to an end and attention turned to other matters, a growing sense of urgency motivated the three committee members because they took to heart 'Abdu'l-Bahá's warning that another war greater than the last one was coming; they hoped that bringing the Bahá'í message to the attention of important people might prevent it.<sup>71</sup> They devised a plan to establish a World Unity Foundation that would both sponsor ongoing conferences and provide speakers to other events. In addition, they decided to create a proper organization—a movement—with local councils and a journal titled *World Unity*. The National Spiritual Assembly approved of the proposal but decided that it should be an individual initiative rather than an official activity of the Faith. The Assembly also encouraged the Bahá'í community to be supportive of the Foundation.<sup>72</sup>

Each of the three members<sup>73</sup> made important contributions to the new endeavor.



Morton, a prosperous businesswoman who owned a factory, provided most of the funding and served as treasurer. Holley, with a professional background in writing, publishing, and advertising, assumed the management of the journal. Movius, a writer and another source of funds, became president of the board of directors. They hired Dr. John Herman Randall, an ordained Baptist minister and associate pastor of a non-denominational, liberal church—The Community Church in New York City—to be the Foundation’s public face as director and editor.<sup>74</sup> Randall was a gifted, widely sought-after orator and author who was keenly interested in and sympathetic towards the Bahá’í Faith, even though he was not a professed adherent. Randall had spoken at several of the World Unity Conferences and shared the ideals underlying them. The four individuals then established a non-profit corporation, the World Unity Foundation, with Randall as director and journal editor.<sup>75</sup>

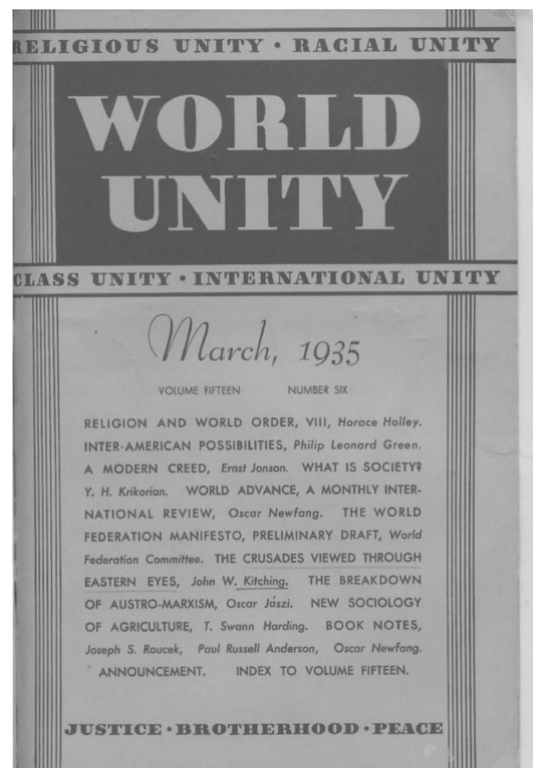


John Hermann Randall (1899-1980)

The original plan was that Dr. Randall, working full time for the Foundation, would ensure that World Unity Conferences were held all over the country. The talks from those events would provide the content for the journal, and conference participants would be encouraged to form local councils to carry forward the work of spreading the cause of peace. None of this went as planned, despite a few early successes. Speakers rarely followed through with written versions of their talks. Local committees often dissolved within a year. Limited resources made it impossible to give attention to the innumerable details required to attract and retain a growing membership.<sup>76</sup>

Despite setbacks associated with the conferences, in October 1927, the first issue of *World Unity* was published, providing an expansive view of the world and current international affairs. It covered not only important peace subjects such as the League of Nations and the Paris (Kellogg-Briand) Pact of 1928—the first attempt to make war illegal—but also articles introducing to the Western reader various countries, religions, arts, and other topics that would engender a sense of world citizenship. The contributors by and large were not Bahá’ís, though the three Bahá’í directors tried to ensure the publication reflected Bahá’í ideals. A number of those featured in its pages had been regular participants at the Lake Mohonk Arbitration Conferences, including leading peace activists Hamilton Holt, Edwin D. Mead and Lucia Ames Mead, and Theodore Marburg. A small number had spoken at World Unity Conferences, among them Dr. Jordan and Rabbi Coffee. Though the majority of articles were written specifically for the magazine, some were taken from speeches or other publications. Over seven

years, the magazine published articles by notables such as Nobel Peace Prize recipient Norman Angell; eminent sociologist and advisor to President Wilson, Herbert Adolphus Miller; scholar of international law Philip Quincy Wright; the foremost scholar on auxiliary languages, Albert Léon Guérard, who heard ‘Abdu’l-Bahá speak in California; the first president of the Republic of Korea, Syngman Rhee; the well-known writer and philosopher Bertrand Russell; eminent U.S. foreign policy historian and official historian of the San Francisco Conference to establish the United Nations, Dexter Perkins; Charles Evans Hughes, chief justice of the US Supreme Court; philosopher and influential social reformer John Dewey; socialist, pacifist, and US presidential candidate Norman Thomas; Philip C. Nash, executive director of the League of Nations Association; and Robert W. Bagnell, a leader of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the preeminent American civil rights organization. The journal occasionally carried talks by or about the teachings propagated by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Famed architect Frank Lloyd Wright designed one version of the masthead and also penned an article.<sup>77</sup> But perhaps one of the most praiseworthy attributes of the journal was its inclusion of well-reasoned articles by ordinary people who would have not found another national outlet for their voices.<sup>78</sup>



There were two aspects of the work of the Foundation that proved problematic. First, the objectives were lofty, but too broad. For example, the journal’s subhead was: “A monthly magazine promoting the international mind.” This allowed for wide participation in the Foundation’s work, but it also left ambiguous the question of what exactly the journal stood for. In 1932, the Foundation sought to bring greater clarity to this question, first by explicitly promoting the Bahá’í concept of world federation and then by adopting the tenets set forth in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s 1919 letter to the Central Organisation for Durable Peace in The Hague.

A second challenge was that the initial approach taken by the Foundation confused and dismayed many Bahá’ís. In the beginning, the founders were concerned that associating the World Unity Foundation explicitly with religion would turn away some people who otherwise shared Bahá’í ideals and would cause their primary target audience, leaders of thought, to ignore its activities. In fact, the Bahá’í background of the Foundation was so well-concealed that most who have written about it after it was discontinued have also believed that Dr. Randall was its sole founder and proponent.<sup>79</sup> To address the confusion that had arisen, the magazine began in 1933 to



include articles explicitly based on the Bahá'í Faith.<sup>80</sup> During its last years of publication, it was openly a Bahá'í journal.

Because of the controversy the Foundation generated within the Bahá'í community, Shoghi Effendi addressed the matter in a letter to the National Spiritual Assembly, discussing at length the approach of putting forth the Bahá'í message without mentioning the source of the ideas. Referring to the World Unity Conferences held earlier by Bahá'í communities, he wrote, "I desire to assure you of my heartfelt appreciation of such a splendid conception." He then explored why a variety of approaches, both direct and indirect, to conveying the teachings of the Faith were appropriate and desirable if executed with thoughtful care under the supervision of a National Spiritual Assembly.<sup>81</sup>

Just as the Foundation and its journal were gaining traction, they encountered one challenge that could not be overcome: The Great Depression of the 1930s. Morton could no longer pay her factory employees, much less continue to fund the organization. Movius experienced her own economic setbacks. Randall resigned at the end of 1932. In a last effort to save the journal, Holley took over as editor.<sup>82</sup> But the times were against it. The world's rapid march towards war was already underway. Peace movements seemed out of touch and magazines promoting their ideals became a luxury. No matter the sacrificial strivings of the proponents of the World Unity Foundation, their resources proved insufficient to further any interest that had been generated. As Movius wrote to Holley, "I like extremely the editorials you are writing for 'World Unity,' and only hope they will bear fruit. They will, undoubtedly, even if we never hear of it."<sup>83</sup>

Finally, in 1935, after consulting the institutions of the Bahá'í Faith, it was decided to merge *World Unity* with another publication, *Star of the West* (renamed *The Bahá'í Magazine* in its later volumes) to become a new entity, *World Order*.<sup>84</sup> This magazine was published from 1935 to 1949, revived in 1966, and ran until 2007. Like *World Unity*, its erudite articles covered a wide range of topics aimed at the educated public, but it was unmistakably a Bahá'í organ under the auspices of the US National Spiritual Assembly and never acquired as broad a readership as *World Unity*.

Did the World Unity Foundation and its journal have any impact? The renowned head of the Riverside Church in New York City, Harry Emerson Fosdick, said of *World Unity Magazine* that it represented, "one of the most serious endeavors ... to use journalism to educate the people as to the nature of the world community in which we are living."<sup>85</sup> Perhaps the foremost scholar of internationalism during the early twentieth century, Warren F. Kuehl, listed the magazine as one of only a tiny handful at the time discussing issues promoting peace through international order, noting that it seemed unique in its advocacy of a world federation.<sup>86</sup> Another scholar of diplomatic history, Anne L. Day, concluded that *World Unity's* primary contribution was creating a space for lesser-known people interested in international peace to put forth their ideas.<sup>87</sup>

... the conferences and the magazine helped foster a world outlook without prejudice and a faith in humanity which survived the horrors of World War II. *World Unity Magazine* gave young scholars a medium to which they could hone their insights toward global humanitarian values, thus broadening consciousness to recognize the moral and spiritual equality, "to realize that the interests of all men are mutual interests."<sup>88</sup>

The World Unity Foundation was formally dissolved just as armies were moving into a growing number of hot spots in Europe and Asia. Within a few short years, much of the globe would be plunged into the most horrible conflict mankind had ever known. As the end of World War II came into view, a few far-sighted leaders became determined that such a catastrophe should never afflict humanity again and looked to the future. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt called for an international conference to be held in October 1945 to create a new

organization of countries that would improve upon the impotent League of Nations. The United Nations would be born that year.

That historic conference was held in San Francisco, fulfilling ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s wish that California would be the first place to hoist the banner of international peace. Seated in the audience were official representatives of the worldwide Bahá’í community, including Holley’s close friend and protégé, Mildred Mottahedeh, who would later serve as the Faith’s representative to the United Nations. Indeed, from the very inception of the United Nations, the Bahá’í International Community (BIC) has actively participated in its work as an official non-governmental organization.

Those representing the Bahá’í Faith to the United Nations and its agencies are building on the foundation laid by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’ over a century ago, drawing on His example and the lessons that have been learned since. First and foremost, they have been guided by the conviction that all participation in endeavors to remedy the ills of humanity should be based on moral and spiritual principles. This precept applies to the design, implementation, and evaluation phase of any initiative. Discussing difficult issues by first identifying underlying principles naturally enhances unity and understanding. Furthermore, over the course of the past century, Bahá’ís have consistently fostered the broad inclusion of voices in public discourse, enabling the diverse voices of humanity to contribute, on equal footing, to those discussions that impact the great issues of the day.



Bahá’í delegation to the United Nations International Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations. (L to R) Amin Banani, Mildred R. Mottahedeh, Hilda Yen and Matthew Bullock; Lake Success, NY, USA; 4-9 April 1949.

This deliberate approach, along with always adhering to the attributes of trustworthiness, inclusiveness, and dependability, has gained the BIC a positive reputation among Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). In 1970, the BIC representative was elected to serve on the Executive Board of the United Nations Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations. Subsequently, Bahá’í representatives have been elected or appointed to officer positions on a number of significant NGO committees and advisory bodies to the United Nations, often serving as chairpersons, such as the election of BIC Representative Mary Power as Chair of the NGO Commission on the Status of Women from 1991-1995.

The BIC’s wide-ranging engagement in the world’s most pressing issues has not gone unnoticed. As early as 1976, Kurt Waldheim, then United Nations Secretary-General, addressed the Bahá’í community with the following statement:

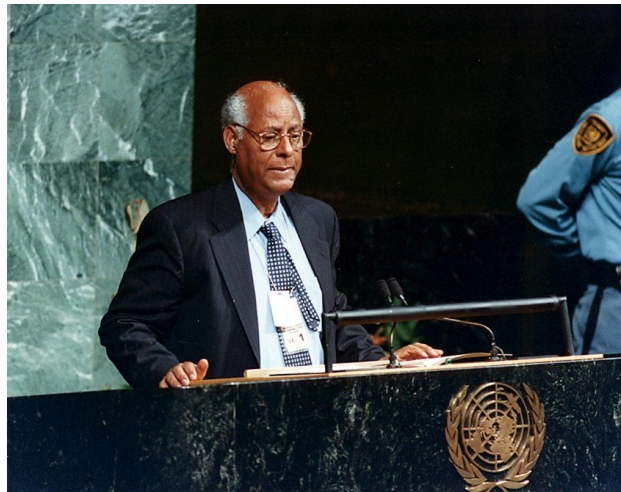
Non-governmental organizations such as yours, by dealing comprehensively with the major problems confronting the international community and striving to find solutions which will serve the interests of all



nations, make a very substantial and most important contribution to the United Nations and its work.<sup>89</sup>

In 1987, Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar designated the BIC as “Peace Messengers,” an honor bestowed upon only three hundred organizations. Approaching the turn of the century, Secretary-General Kofi Annan called for both a Millennium Summit for the leaders of the world and a Millennium Forum for the world’s peoples, represented through non-governmental agencies. In recognition of its consistently principled approach to its work, its integrity, and its even-handedness, the BIC was chosen to co-chair the Forum and to provide the speaker from the Forum to address the Summit.

On September 8, 2000, Dr. Techeste Ahderom, then the BIC Principle Representative to the United Nations, addressed the assembled heads of state of more than 150 nations on behalf of the peoples of the world.<sup>90</sup> In his talk, Ahderom reminded the assembled leaders that the very idea of the League of Nations and, later, the United Nations, arose through the participation of civil society in various forms. He closed with the words from the Millenium Forum Declaration: “In our vision we are one human family, in all our diversity, living on one common homeland ...”<sup>91</sup>



Techeste Ahderom, principal representative of the Bahá’í International Community to the United Nations, speaking before the Millenium Summit, September 2001 in his capacity as co-chairman of the Millennium Forum.

As resources have allowed and capacity has increased, the BIC has addressed vital issues including racial discrimination, human rights, the status of women, protection of the environment, science and technology, the rights of indigenous peoples, education, health, youth, freedom of religion or belief, global governance, and UN reform.

According to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His address at Lake Mohonk, the issue of peace is multifaceted, and it will not be attained until an environment is created that will ensure a lasting end to conflict. In its approach to the promotion of peace, the Bahá’í community has always sought a holistic approach to the question of global peace. In this light, the BIC New York Office in 2012 instituted a regular forum where ideas could be discussed freely, on the condition that the identity of the person or organization offering the information is not disclosed. Participants in these forums have thereby, regardless of their functions and roles, had the freedom to engage in consultation without it being assumed that their comments represent the official position of their country or organization. By mid-2020, more than sixty of these discussions had been held covering a wide range of topics.<sup>92</sup> Through this and many other efforts, the BIC has been learning to draw on the unseen power of consultation to create environments where those entrusted with global leadership and whose decisions impact the fortunes of the planet are able to deliberate in a distinctive environment on the major issues of our time..

To mark the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, the BIC issued a [statement](#) asserting that to meet the needs of the twenty-first century will require a far greater level of global integration and cooperation than anything that has existed before.<sup>93</sup> The statement calls for the strengthening and evolution of the consultative process of international dialogue and for world leaders to give priority to that which will benefit the whole of humankind. It argues that what is needed now is a radical change in the approach to solving the problems of the world—a process that conceives of the world as an organic whole and takes into consideration the essential need for spiritual and ethical advancement to be commensurate with scientific and technological progress.<sup>94</sup> Ultimately, the goal of the Bahá'í Faith is to bring about a universal recognition that we are all one people—with the profound implications that carries through all areas of life, requiring no less than a restructuring of society. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá through His words and actions pointed out the way to promote this most essential of all truths, and a clear thread can be seen from His contributions to peace to the efforts of the Bahá'í community since. Such efforts will doubtless continue for decades, perhaps centuries, until the time arrives when all decisions will rest upon the indisputable reality of the oneness of humankind and the world will transform into a new world—a peaceful world where war is relegated to the sad accounts found only in history books.

*Historian and lawyer Kathryn Jewett-Hogenson is the author of [Lighting the Western Sky: The Hearst Pilgrimage and the Establishment of the Baha'i Faith in the West](#) and is now writing a biography of [Hand of the Cause of God Horace Holley](#).*

## Reading Reality in Times of Crisis

### *'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Great War*

SATURDAY MAY 8, 2021

BY

AMIN EGEA

In this article, Amín Egea looks at how 'Abdu'l-Bahá's analysis of the crises of His time was profoundly distinct from contemporaneous "progressive" movements and thinkers. "'Abdu'l-Bahá's warnings about the causes of war could not be understood by societies immersed in paradigms of thought totally different from the ones He presented," writes the author. "And just as the meanings and diagnoses of the causes of war differed between those provided by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the dominant discourses of the time, so did proposals for the establishment of peace." The article also explores three ways that 'Abdu'l-Bahá addressed the crises He foresaw.



'Abdu'l-Baha visits Green Acre in 1912. (from centenary.bahai.us)

When 'Abdu'l-Bahá visited Europe and North America between 1911 and 1913, the West was experiencing a period of great prosperity and peace. Europe had gone almost forty years without a battle on its soil, while the United States had spent nearly half a century healing the wounds of its civil war. The accelerating technological and industrial advances on both sides of the Atlantic were proudly displayed year after year at international expositions visited by citizens and rulers from all corners of the globe. The Western economies had reached unprecedented prosperity, which brought about changes in social organization. It is not surprising, then, that decades later, when describing the gestalt of public opinion in the years preceding the outbreak of World War I, a famous Austrian writer would state: "Never had Europe been stronger, richer, more beautiful, or more confident of an even better future."<sup>95</sup>

Such confidence in a peaceful and prosperous future was also supported by rapid changes in international politics. The peace conferences held in The Hague in 1899 and 1907 convinced many statesmen and prominent thinkers that the possibility of war was increasingly remote. For the first time, most of the world's nations had collectively reached global agreements aimed at preventing war, perhaps the most promising of which was the establishment of an International Court of Arbitration. Experts in international law believed that, through arbitration, countries in conflict could resolve their disputes without resorting to arms or shedding a drop of blood. From 1899 until the outbreak of the Great War, hundreds of arbitration agreements were signed to secure peace between signatory countries. Even Great Britain and Germany signed an agreement in 1904.<sup>96</sup> Each of these advances was applauded by the many statesmen who were interested in internationalism as a path to peace. The Inter-Parliamentary Union, for example, which brought together more than 3,000 politicians from around the

world, supported the court without reservation. Leaders such as President Theodore Roosevelt and his successor, William Taft, supported the court. Philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, who was president of the New York Peace Society—an organization that had invited ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to speak to its members—paid for the construction of the Peace Palace in The Hague. The building was inaugurated with great pomp in August 1913, just one year before the outbreak of the Great War.

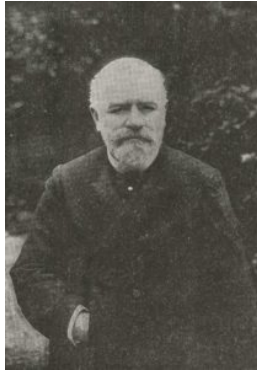


William Howard Taft, the 27th president of the United States and the tenth Chief Justice of the United States.

The conviction that the solution to war lay primarily in international organization was so strong that the Hague Convention of 1907 agreed on the establishment of an International Court of Justice, which would not merely arbitrate but also administer justice and enforce international law. The details of such a court were postponed to a future Hague Conference, planned for the fateful year of 1915.

The academic world also gave credibility, through individuals' works and studies, to this optimistic vision of the future. Scholars reasoned that a war between world powers would be so costly economically and so devastating militarily that the business world, the banks, the political parties, and public opinion in general would undoubtedly impose reason on any warlike temptation.

“The very development that has taken place in the mechanism of war has rendered war an impracticable operation,” wrote Ivan S. Bloch (1836–1902) in *The Future of War*. He added, “The dimensions of modern armaments and the organization of society have rendered its prosecution an economic impossibility.”<sup>97</sup>



Ivan S. Block

Along similar lines, Norman Angell presented psychological and biological arguments in *The Great Illusion* (1911)—which was translated into more than twenty languages—to show that war would be an exercise in irrationality and suicide for the contending parties.

Optimism also spread to the peace movement, which was not only more influential than it is today but enjoyed far more resources and support. David Starr Jordan, who held a leading position in the World Peace Foundation and was the first president of Stanford University—and who invited ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to speak at Stanford—went so far as to ask in 1913, “What shall we say of the Great War of Europe, ever threatening, ever impending, and which never comes? Humanly speaking, it is impossible. ... But accident aside—the Triple Entente lined up against the Triple Alliance—we shall expect no war.”<sup>98</sup>



David Starr Jordan (Credit: Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.)

Andrew Carnegie, who had met ‘Abdu’l-Bahá personally and received at least three letters from Him, would speak in similar terms a year before the war: “Has there ever been danger of war between Germany and ourselves, members of the same Teutonic race? Never has it been even imagined ... We are all of the same Teutonic blood, and united could insure world peace.”<sup>99</sup>



As in other spheres, many in the internationalist movement expressed absolute faith in arbitration as the ultimate means of ending war. "I am able to prove, and this is very essential," said J. P. Santamaria, an Argentinian representative at the Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration in the same year that 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke at the distinguished event (1912), "that the majority of the Latin American republics have already exchanged treaties whereby armed conflicts become practically impossible."<sup>100</sup>

"We believe not only that France, but Germany and Japan as well, would gladly join with England and the United States in treaties of arbitration which would make war forever impossible," said another of the event's speakers.<sup>101</sup>

Whether as a result of faith in technological progress, hope in the positive influence of international policy aimed at peace, assurance in the power of the economy, or confidence in the supremacy of scientific reason, the prevailing visions for the future of humanity at the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit to the West were strictly based on material criteria. The outbreak of World War I demonstrated the fallacy of that premise.

#### **'Abdu'l-Bahá's Radical Analysis of the Causes of War**

The diagnosis of the world situation presented by 'Abdu'l-Bahá was very different from that of His contemporaries. Although on numerous occasions He referred to the need to establish international bodies with global reach and sufficient executive power to intervene in conflicts between countries,<sup>102</sup> He also impressed on His audiences the urgent need to focus on the moral causes of war and the spiritual requirements for the establishment of peace.

Far from arguing that war was simply the result of deficient international organization, He asserted that it was also rooted in erroneous conceptions of the human being, which led irremediably towards division and contention. He especially warned of the dangers of racism and nationalism, which define the individual according to material parameters—bodily appearance and community of birth, respectively—and prioritize human beings and entire societies according to these factors, thus generating inequality and injustice, and fostering hatred and alienation, among human groups. He also referred to religious hatred, which He described as contrary not only to the foundation of religions but also to divine will.

"All prejudices, whether of religion, race, politics or nation, must be renounced, for these prejudices have caused the world's sickness," He said in a talk in Paris in 1911. Prejudice, He asserted, is "a grave malady which, unless arrested, is capable of causing the destruction of the whole human race. Every ruinous war, with its terrible bloodshed and misery, has been caused by one or other of these prejudices."<sup>103</sup>

"Man has laid the foundation of prejudice, hatred and discord with his fellowman," He explained in 1912 in a speech at a Brooklyn church, "by considering nationalities separate in importance and races different in rights and privileges."<sup>104</sup>

"As long as these prejudices prevail, the world of humanity will not have rest," He wrote years later.<sup>105</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá rejected the premises on which each of these models of thought were based. He denied, for example, the objective existence of races, stating instead that "humanity is one kind, one race and progeny, inhabiting the same globe."<sup>106</sup> He also denied that nations are natural realities, referring to national divisions as "imaginary lines and boundaries."<sup>107</sup> He denied any essential differences between religions, since they all have a common origin, share the same spiritual foundations, and are essentially one and the same. Furthermore, He



affirmed that religious differences are due to “dogmatic interpretation and blind imitations which are at variance with the foundations established by the Prophets of God,”<sup>108</sup> stressed that these aspects of religion must disappear, and even went so far as to declare that “if religion be the cause of enmity surely the lack of religion is better than its presence.”<sup>109</sup>

He spoke at a time when the ideologies characteristic of a culture of inequality (racism, nationalism, sexism, and so on) were on the rise, gradually pushing humanity into what would be the bloodiest and most catastrophic century of its history. Racism, for example, was endorsed by a significant portion of the scientific community of the time and was firmly established in large parts of the world in the form of discriminatory and segregationist laws. It was even undergoing a major transformation equipped by new “scientific” techniques—such as craniometry, phrenology, and physiognomy—that inspired new and abhorrent “social reform” initiatives, such as eugenics and racial hygiene. Nationalism, for the first time in history, had instilled in the majority of humanity the vision of a globe divided into parcels of land defined by races, cultures, and languages. It drove imperialist and colonialist policies, while colonialism, in turn, exported nationalism, imposing previously nonexistent categories and definitions on citizens and territories worldwide. At the same time, longstanding religious conflicts were still very much present, reviving old grievances and warlike moods—as exemplified by the chronic problems in the Balkans, which were in full swing when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá visited the West.

Even individuals and organizations with noble goals held such doctrines of inequality. Many pacifists, for example, saw war not so much as a moral problem, but as a biological one. Influenced by racism and social Darwinism, they based their criticism of war on the argument that “fit” men were sent to the battlefield, where they died, while “unfit” men stayed behind and reproduced. The consequence of such a phenomenon, they believed, was “racial weakening.”

“Only the man who survives is followed by his kind,” wrote the aforementioned David Starr Jordan. “The man who is left determines the future. From him springs the ‘human harvest’ ...”<sup>110</sup>

Along the same lines, Norman Angell also criticized colonial expansion in biological terms, arguing that domination and contact between civilizations prolonged the life of “weak races.”

“When we ‘overcome’ the servile races,” Angell reasoned in his internationally best-selling book, “far from eliminating them, we give them added chances of life by introducing order, etc., so that the lower human quality tends to be perpetuated by conquest by the higher. If ever it happens that the Asiatic races challenge the white in the industrial or military field, it will be in large part thanks to the work of race conservation, which has been the result of England’s conquest ...”<sup>111</sup> In 1933 Angell would be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Benjamin Trueblood, secretary of the American Peace Society, who met ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Washington, D.C., raised the possibility of a future world federation as a consequence of a “great racial federation” in the Anglo-Saxon world.<sup>112</sup> This idea was similar to that put forward by Andrew Carnegie.

In this context, we can understand—with the perspective provided by the passage of more than a century since His travels—that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s warnings about the causes of war could not be understood by societies immersed in paradigms of thought totally different from the ones He presented.

And just as the meanings and diagnoses of the causes of war differed between those provided by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the dominant discourses of the time, so did proposals for the establishment of peace. As explained, the international community had placed its hope in legislation and international institutions as mechanisms for ensuring peace; some pacifists sincerely believed that such changes also required the racial hegemony of certain

peoples. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, however, emphasized a completely different concept: peacemaking would only be possible when humanity reached the understanding that it is one and acted in accordance with this principle. He brought this idea forward in a great number of His talks. For instance, in Minneapolis, He stated that human beings “must admit and acknowledge the oneness of the world of humanity. By this means the attainment of true fellowship among mankind is assured, and the alienation of races and individuals is prevented ... In proportion to the acknowledgment of the oneness and solidarity of mankind, fellowship is possible, misunderstandings will be removed and reality become apparent.”<sup>113</sup>

By making such a statement, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá presented His listeners with a radical challenge. The recognition of the oneness of the human race implies, on one hand, the acceptance that there is a primordial identity common to all human beings, which goes beyond any physical or accidental diversity between individuals. It also implies the abandonment of any vision of the human being—foundational to beliefs such as racism, sexism, unbridled nationalism, and religious exclusivism—that justifies human inequality. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s approach, therefore, clashed head-on with the discourses of the time and the materialistic premises that underpinned them.

### **The Great War**

Although ‘Abdu’l-Bahá praised on numerous occasions progress that humanity was experiencing, for example in economics, politics, science, and industry, He also warned that material progress alone would not be capable of bringing true prosperity without a commensurate spiritual advancement.

“Material civilization concerns the world of matter or bodies,” He explained during His visit to Sacramento, “but divine civilization is the realm of ethics and moralities. Until the moral degree of the nations is advanced and human virtues attain a lofty level, happiness for mankind is impossible.”<sup>114</sup>

From this perspective, the ideologies of inequality that permeated all areas of human endeavor were totally incapable of promoting lasting peace, including in movements that promoted pacifism, internationalism, and diplomacy.

“The Most Great Peace cannot be assured through racial force and effort,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explained in an address in Pittsburgh:

It cannot be established by patriotic devotion and sacrifice; for nations differ widely and local patriotism has limitations. Furthermore, it is evident that political power and diplomatic ability are not conducive to universal agreement, for the interests of governments are varied and selfish; nor will international harmony and reconciliation be an outcome of human opinions concentrated upon it, for opinions are faulty and intrinsically diverse. Universal peace is an impossibility through human and material agencies; it must be through spiritual power ...

For example, consider the material progress of man in the last decade. Schools and colleges, hospitals, philanthropic institutions, scientific academies and temples of philosophy have been founded, but hand in hand with these evidences of development, the invention and production of means and weapons for human destruction have correspondingly increased ...

If the moral precepts and foundations of divine civilization become united with the material advancement of man, there is no doubt that the happiness of the human world will be attained and that from every direction the glad tidings of peace upon earth will be announced.<sup>115</sup>



Based on this premise, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá challenged a falsely optimistic vision of the world, noting that, if the moral and spiritual dimensions of social reality were also assessed, it would become apparent that the world was experiencing a moment of great decadence. “If the world should remain as it is today,” He said in Chicago in 1912, “great danger will face it.”<sup>116</sup>

“Observe how darkness has overspread the world,” he explained in Denver:

In every corner of the earth there is strife, discord and warfare of some kind. Mankind is submerged in the sea of materialism and occupied with the affairs of this world. They have no thought beyond earthly possessions and manifest no desire save the passions of this fleeting, mortal existence. Their utmost purpose is the attainment of material livelihood, physical comforts and worldly enjoyments such as constitute the happiness of the animal world rather than the world of man.<sup>117</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Bahá warned of the acute risk of an impending international conflict on no less than seventeen occasions. “Europe itself,” He said in Paris in 1911, “has become like one immense arsenal, full of explosives, and may God prevent its ignition—for, should this happen, the whole world would be involved.”<sup>118</sup>

Despite this and other explicit warnings, His audiences remained for the most part unmoved. Confidence in material well-being weighed more heavily on public opinion than His diagnosis of the moral state of the world.<sup>119</sup>

He reiterated his warnings in the years between the end of World War I and His passing in 1921. In His correspondence, He explained that a second world conflagration was imminent, despite the terror caused by the first world war and the enormous progress that had been made in international governance with the establishment of the League of Nations.

“Although the representatives of various governments are assembled in Paris in order to lay the foundations of Universal Peace and thus bestow rest and comfort upon the world of humanity,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote in 1919, “yet misunderstanding among some individuals is still predominant and self-interest still prevails. In such an atmosphere, Universal Peace will not be practicable, nay rather, fresh difficulties will arise.”<sup>120</sup>

“For in the future another war, fiercer than the last, will assuredly break out,” He wrote in 1920. “Verily, of this there is no doubt whatever.”<sup>121</sup>

In another letter sent the same year, He was even more explicit. After presenting—as He had done in His addresses in the West—some of the spiritual requirements for the establishment of peace, He closed by enumerating some of the elements that would eventually lead humanity to World War II just nineteen years later:

The Balkans will remain discontented. Its restlessness will increase. The vanquished Powers will continue to agitate. They will resort to every measure that may rekindle the flame of war. Movements, newly born and worldwide in their range, will exert their utmost effort for the advancement of their designs. The Movement of the Left will acquire great importance. Its influence will spread.<sup>122</sup>

#### **The Birth of a New Society**

No reader of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá should be tempted to think that, in His exposition of Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings, He moved only within the theoretical realm. On the contrary, while His efforts to spread Bahá’u’lláh’s message were enormous, His endeavors to bring those teachings into the realm of action were colossal. In a conversation in London, for example, referring to one of the many congresses held at the time, bringing together philanthropists

eager to improve the world, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá stressed, “To know that it is possible to reach a state of perfection, is good; to march forward on the path is better. We know that to help the poor and to be merciful is good and pleases God, but knowledge alone does not feed the starving man ...”<sup>123</sup>

Throughout His ministry, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá directed the Bahá’í community to make itself a model of the future society foretold by Bahá’u’lláh—one through which humanity might witness the transformations that accompany the application of Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings to social and interpersonal relations.

In several of His talks, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá described the Bahá’ís of Persia (now Iran) as one such example. They lived in an environment in which religious segregation was a social reality. Zoroastrians, Jews, Christians, and other religious minorities lived in isolation from their Muslim neighbors and also separated from each other. Being considered impure beings (*najis*), the minority groups were subject to strict rules that regulated not only their relations with Muslims, but also the jobs they performed and even the clothes they wore. In this environment, bringing people from different religious backgrounds together in the same room was not just taboo, but unthinkable. Despite this, the Bahá’í community in Persia managed to become—first under the guidance of Bahá’u’lláh and then of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá—a cohesive group comprising people from all religious backgrounds. Having in common their faith in the transformative capacity of Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings, they were able to set aside prejudices inherited from the surrounding society and their ancestors and work together to improve conditions for their fellow citizens. It was not long before Persian Bahá’ís—men and women alike—learned to make decisions collectively and to implement them without regard for different backgrounds or genders.

Such a change not only resulted in the unprecedented growth of the Bahá’í community, but also in the proliferation of numerous social and charitable projects throughout the country. For example, during the ministry of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the Persian Bahá’ís managed to establish no less than twenty-five schools, including some of the country’s first schools for girls. Beginning in the first decade of the twentieth century, Bahá’ís in Persia also established health centers in several cities, including the Sahhat Hospital in Tehran, which followed the instructions of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to include in its mission statement that it would provide “service to mankind, regardless of race, religion and nationality,” a revolutionary statement at that time and place.<sup>124</sup>

While this was happening in the East, American Bahá’ís were working under the leadership of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to racially integrate their community.

“Strive with heart and soul in order to bring about union and harmony among the white and the black and prove thereby the unity of the Bahá’í world wherein distinction of color findeth no place, but where hearts only are considered,” He wrote in one of His letters to them. “Variations of color, of land and of race are of no importance in the Bahá’í Faith; on the contrary, Bahá’í unity overcometh them all and doeth away with all these fancies and imaginations.”<sup>125</sup>

He also exhorted them to “endeavor that the black and the white may gather in one meeting place, and with the utmost love, fraternally associate with each other.”<sup>126</sup>

“If it be possible,” He wrote on another occasion, “gather together these two races—black and white—into one Assembly, and create such a love in the hearts that they shall not only unite, but blend into one reality. Know thou of a certainty that as a result differences and disputes between black and white will be totally abolished.”<sup>127</sup>

The process by which the Bahá’í community in the United States became a model of racial integration was accelerated by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s visit to North America—through His personal example, His participation in

integrated meetings, His encouragement to Bahá'ís who held them, and His constant instructions in all the cities He visited on the issue of race.

After the war, 'Abdu'l-Bahá commissioned Agnes Parsons, a Bahá'í and member of high society in Washington, D.C., to organize the first Race Amity Conference, which took place in May 1921. The event, promoting racial unity and harmony, triggered a national movement that replicated the Conference in different parts of the United States in the following years, involving not only the American Bahá'í community, but also many other organizations and societal leaders. The result of these efforts was the transformation of the Bahá'í community into a group actively engaged in banishing the racial prejudices so present in its surrounding society.



Agnes Parsons

In His efforts to demonstrate, through the global Bahá'í community, empirical proof that unity and freedom from prejudice leads to peace, 'Abdu'l-Bahá also promoted collaborative ties between the Bahá'ís of the West and the East. Beginning in the early twentieth century, He encouraged Persian Bahá'ís to travel to Europe and North America, and Western Bahá'ís to visit Persia or India. He promoted communications between Bahá'í communities. For example, the *Star of the West*, the journal of the Bahá'ís of the United States, included a section in Persian and was regularly sent to Persia. As development projects in Persia grew and became more complex, 'Abdu'l-Bahá encouraged Western Bahá'ís to support them and extend assistance. As a result, in 1909, Susan Moody, M.D., moved to the country to work at the Sahhat hospital in Tehran. Moody was followed by other Bahá'ís, including teacher and school administrator Lilian Kappes, nurse Elizabeth Stewart, and fellow doctor Sarah Clock. In 1910, the Orient-Occident Unity was founded with the aim of establishing collaboration in different fields between the people of Persia and the United States.<sup>128</sup> The work of this organization involved not only many Bahá'ís, but other prominent organizations and individuals.



Susan Moody



From left to right: Lillian Kappers, Muhibbih Sultan, his wife Muchul Khanum, Dr Susan Moody, Dr. Sarah Clock, and Elizabeth Stewart, 1911 in Tehran.

All these transformations provided glimpses of the social implications of the principles promulgated by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and presented examples of the effects generated by applying in the field of action the principle of world unity and the conception of the human being enunciated by Bahá’u’lláh.

#### **Addressing the immediate needs**

On 24 June 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the throne of Austrian-Hungarian Empire, was assassinated in Sarajevo. A few weeks later, the European powers were at war, and the disaster predicted by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá only a few years earlier became a reality.

The Ottoman regions of Syria and Palestine did not escape the dire consequences of the conflagration. The area was hit by famine caused by pillaging Ottoman troops as they crossed the territory to reach Egypt, where they were defending the strategic Suez channel. In the Haifa area, circumstances were particularly complicated. The local population held diverging alliances. The Arabs were divided between those sympathizing with the French and those supporting the Ottoman Empire, while the members of the large German colony supported their own country. These divisions caused tension and sometimes produced violence. The city was also the target of bombings from the sea. Thus, within a few weeks, Haifa and its surroundings experienced a rapid transition from a relative state of peace to severe insecurity associated with a humanitarian crisis. The conflict caused acute needs that required urgent attention.

Before the war, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had taken steps that would allow Him to ameliorate these conditions. His most visible contribution was to provide food for the people of Haifa and its vicinity. At the beginning of the twentieth century, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had established various agricultural communities around the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan Valley, with the most important one in ‘Adasiyyih, in present-day Jordan. During the hardest years of the war, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá sent shipments of foodstuffs from this location to Haifa, using some two hundred camels for just one trip, which gives an idea of the scale of the aid.<sup>129</sup> To distribute the food within the population, He organized a sophisticated rationing system using vouchers and receipts to ensure that the food reached all those in need while preventing abuse.

“He was ever ready to help the distressed and the needy,” a witness was quoted as saying in 1919 in London’s *Christian Commonwealth*:

... often He would deprive himself and his own family of the necessities of life, that the hungry might be fed and the naked be clothed. ... For three years he spent months in Tiberias and Adassayah, supervising extensive works of agriculture, and procuring wheat, corn and other food stuffs for our maintenance, and to distribute among the starving Mohamedan and Christian families. Were it not for his pre-vision and ceaseless activity none of us would have survived. For two years all the harvests were eaten by armies of locusts. At times like dark clouds they covered the sky for hours. This, coupled with the unprecedented extortions and

looting of the Turkish officials and the extensive buying of foodstuffs by the Germans to be shipped to the “Fatherland” in a time of scarcity, brought famine. In Lebanon alone more than 100.000 people died from starvation.<sup>130</sup>

“Abdul Baha is a great consolation and help to all these poor, frightened, helpless people,” another report read.<sup>131</sup>

A few years later—just after the war—a British army officer described ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s role in reuniting the divided peoples of Haifa, saying, “Many are looking to him to solve the problems arising between Moslem and Christian sects.”<sup>132</sup>

### Reading Reality in Times of Crisis

The three levels of action taken by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on the issue of war—participation in the discourses of His time, building a community based on spiritual principles, and paying attention to the immediate needs arising from the outbreak of war—offer us an opportunity to reflect, nearly one hundred years after His passing, on the appropriateness of the models of thought that currently influence global decision-making.

Today, as then, the world is beset by a large number of threats. The progressive environmental decline, the deficient global economic system—which allows for the existence of extremes of wealth and poverty and, at the same time, periodically causes major economic crises—the prevalence of war in a multitude of forms and its constant threat in a context of unprecedented technological development, the rapid spread and assimilation of hate mongering of all kinds and of all orientations, and the rise of an unfettered nationalism with an associated drive against human diversity and resistance to the processes of global convergence, are just some of the challenges facing humanity. In addition to these, which have been created by human beings themselves, there are others of an unexpected and natural character which, like the current global pandemic, highlight the fragility of a human ecosystem that has been greatly weakened by internal divisions and inequalities.

If the response to these crises—some of them unprecedented—is to be based on contradictions similar to those of the internationalists or pacifists of the years before the Great War, we can anticipate that any remedy applied will be dramatically limited in its influence. Can, for instance, a humanity that still clings to a nationalistic world view provide an adequate response to global problems? Is it possible for societies that perceive consumerism and the accumulation of goods as a path to true happiness to find solutions to crises such as global warming?

If we heed ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s advice, the diagnosis of these and future crises should not depend solely on an analysis of the material circumstances that converge in each of them, but should also address the ultimate, moral causes of these phenomena. Some of these include the pursuit of self-interest, submission to materialism, the perception that struggle and strife are legitimate means of resolving conflicts, the persistence of prejudices that deny human equality, and the distortion of the purpose of religion. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá consistently stated in His talks and writings, the solutions to the problems that afflict the human race depend not only on a change in the material conditions of humanity but also on a transformation in our understanding of what it means to be human, of our existential purpose, and of the moral framework upon which we base our actions.

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## **‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the Bahá’í Students**

**FRIDAY OCTOBER 22, 2021**

**BY  
REED BRENNEMAN**

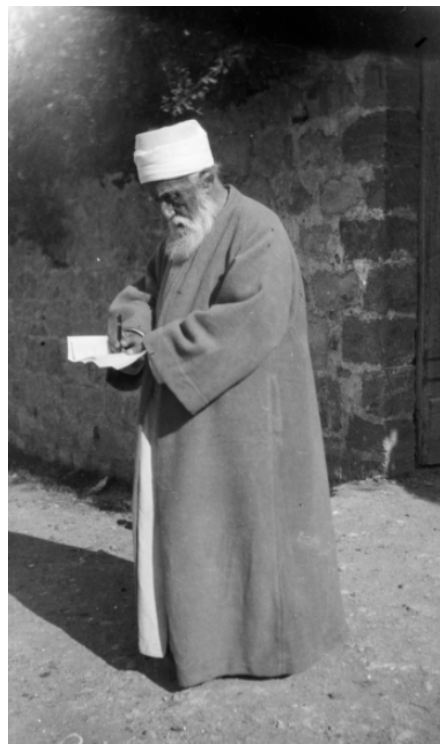


Bahá’í students in Beirut and some members of the Bahá’í community, 1929-30.

By 1914, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was well-known in many parts of the globe for His life of service to humanity. In the Holy Land, where He had lived most of His adult life, He was revered for His service to the poor and needy in the community and for His engagement in the discourses of the day with local and regional dignitaries. His lengthy sojourns in Egypt before and after His historic visits to Europe and North America also attracted considerable attention, earning Him even more admirers from all walks of life. His travels in the West, from which He had only recently returned in early 1914, have been particularly well-documented; in both formal and informal settings and to diverse audiences, His explications of the Teachings of His Father, Bahá’u’lláh, in the context of the urgent promotion of global peace, made Him a unique Figure on the world stage. In the war years, He would win widespread acclaim for helping to avert a famine in His home region of Haifa and ‘Akká. And for many around the world, the example of His life and His voluminous Writings were and continue to be sources of guidance and elucidation.

However, rather less well known today is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s sustained promotion of modern education in the Middle East. Perhaps most striking in this regard is how, over a period of several years, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá encouraged and nurtured a group of Bahá’í students in Beirut to pursue higher education in a way that was coherent with the students’ identities as Bahá’ís.





'Abdu'l-Bahá in the Holy Land, c. 1920. Credit: Bahá'í Media Bank, available at <https://media.bahai.org/detail/1781734/>



Howard Bliss. Credit: "Howard Bliss Photo Collection," AUB Libraries Online Exhibits, accessed October 22, 2021, <http://online-exhibit.aub.edu.lb/items/show/158>.

Among 'Abdu'l-Bahá's many visitors in early 1914 was Howard Bliss, the president of the Syrian Protestant College (SPC), an institution with which 'Abdu'l-Bahá had maintained a longstanding relationship and at which a group of Bahá'í students had become an established presence by the time of Bliss's visit that February.<sup>133</sup> Bliss, an American who had grown up on the campus of the college in Beirut (his father, Daniel Bliss, was the college's first president) and who spoke fluent Arabic, was visiting, in part, to arrange for the Bahá'í students to spend their upcoming spring break in Haifa in the vicinity of the Shrines of Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb, affording them an opportunity to meet and learn from 'Abdu'l-Bahá. But the conversation between 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Bliss extended to topics of pressing concern for the former. Much as He had done on numerous occasions during His travels, 'Abdu'l-Bahá encouraged Bliss to foster in his students "principles" such as the "oneness of the world of humanity," among others, so that their education could be directed toward "universal peace."<sup>134</sup>

Bliss's receptivity to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's remarks and encouragement was evident in a speech Bliss gave just ten days later. On 25 February, in a meeting with a group of students that was representative of the school's rich diversity,

Bliss urged it to include the “establishing of universal peace” as one of its “missions.”<sup>135</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Bliss’s exchange, indeed, was emblematic of the larger conversation the Bahá’í community and the college had been having for several years, a conversation centering on the college’s self-styled “experiment in religious association” to which the Bahá’í students had been striving to contribute.

#### **‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Modern Education**

The Syrian Protestant College was founded in 1866 and formally renamed the American University of Beirut (AUB) in 1920. Long before any Bahá’í students had enrolled there, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in an 1875 treatise known today as *The Secret of Divine Civilization*<sup>136</sup> encouraged the establishing of modern schools in His native Persia, advocating for the “extension of education, the development of useful arts and sciences, the promotion of industry and technology.”<sup>137</sup> Education, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asserted, should uplift individuals for the ultimate purpose of benefiting society. Over the following decades, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was instrumental in the establishment of dozens of schools throughout His native land; notably, these schools, including many for girls, welcomed students of all faiths.<sup>138</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Bahá personally supervised such initiatives in His local community in ‘Akká as well. In 1903, for example, about twenty children from the Bahá’í community were assembled for classes in English, Persian, math, and other subjects including practical instruction in trades like carpentry, shoemaking, and tailoring.<sup>139</sup> Many of these students continued their studies at local schools, such as a French one in Haifa.<sup>140</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá encouraged students such as these, including His own grandchildren, to continue their education at colleges and universities, the closest of which was SPC; Shoghi Effendi, His eldest grandson and successor as Head of the Bahá’í Faith, graduated from SPC in 1917.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá repeatedly qualified his support of such schools with the condition that they attend to the whole student and produce graduates who had progressed not only scientifically but also morally. During his visit to North America in 1912, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke at Columbia and Stanford universities, praising the value of the scientific education they provided while also emphasizing the necessity of “spiritual development...the most important principle [of which] is the oneness of the world of humanity, the unity of mankind, the bond conjoining East and West, the tie of love which blends human hearts.”<sup>141</sup>

By this time, Bahá’í students from Haifa and ‘Akká, as well as Persia, Egypt, and Beirut, had attended SPC for about a decade, in increasing numbers over the previous few years. There were no comparable institutions in their own countries, and attending universities in Europe or America was not yet practical for most. As SPC became a popular choice, the prospect of joining an existing group of Bahá’í students was an additional attraction. A sizable group of students as well attended the Université Saint-Joseph (USJ), also in Beirut. Together, they constituted a single coherent group, meeting together, visiting each other, and collaborating, for example, in the activities of the “Society of the Bahá’í Students of Beirut,” which was formed in 1906.<sup>142</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Himself visited SPC during at least one of his visits to Beirut in 1880 and 1887.<sup>143</sup>

The Bahá’í students’ engagement with educational institutions like SPC was very much framed in the terms ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had been setting forth for many years, perspectives inspired by the Teachings of His Father, Bahá’u’lláh. One such Teaching was the harmony of science and religion; as noted, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was calling for education to attend to the building of character as well as the shaping of intellects. This was a matter of intense interest at the college as well. While colleges in America had moved away from direct religious instruction, at SPC, there was still an effort to provide it.<sup>144</sup> Around the time of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s first visit, the faculty and missionaries associated with SPC had become sharply divided over just how to reconcile this religious education with the school’s scientific training. This rift had only deepened over the decades even as the younger Bliss had

taken the college in increasingly “secular,” or liberal, directions. By 1908, the college’s course catalogue framed its approach in decidedly liberal terms, asserting that the “primary aim” of the curriculum is to “to develop the reasoning faculties of the mind, to lay the foundations of a thorough intellectual training, to free the mind for independent thought.”<sup>145</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was supportive of the college’s efforts in this regard. As He Himself recorded in conversation with other visitors a week after Bliss’s visit:

The American College at Beirut is carrying on a sacred mission of education and enlightenment and every lover of higher culture and civilization must wish it a great success... Years ago I went to Beirut, and visited the College in its infancy. From that time on I have praised the liberalism of this institution whenever I found an opportunity.<sup>146</sup>

Yet Bliss and others were intent on maintaining the Christian identity of the college. Heavily influenced by the Social Gospel and Progressive movements, Bliss’s conception of religious education “melded religion, character, and social service”<sup>147</sup> and, in his words, sought to “set so high, so noble, so broad, so ecumenical a type of Christianity before our students” as to inspire their education and future services to society.<sup>148</sup>

Howard Bliss presumably had this project in mind when, on 15 February 1914, he asked ‘Abdu’l-Bahá for His thoughts on “ideal” education.<sup>149</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s response set forth “three cardinal principles.” These principles affirm the need for unfettered intellectual inquiry in education; however, they also call for the moral and ethical development of students and their reorientation toward a broadly conceived mission of service to humanity. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s comments were as follows:

In this age the college which is dominated by a denominational spirit is an anomaly, and is engaged in a losing fight. It cannot long withstand the victorious forces of liberalism in education. The universities and colleges of the world must hold fast to three cardinal principles.

First: Whole-hearted service to the cause of education, the unfolding of the mysteries of nature, the extension of the boundaries of pure science, the elimination of the causes of ignorance and social evils, a standard universal system of instruction, and the diffusion of the lights of knowledge and reality.

Second: Service to the cause of morality, raising the moral tone of the students, inspiring them with the sublimest ideals of ethical refinement, teaching them altruism, inculcating in their lives the beauty of holiness and the excellency of virtue and animating them with the excellences and perfections of the religion of God.

Third: Service to the oneness of the world of humanity; so that each student may consciously realize that he is a brother to all mankind, irrespective of religion or race. The thoughts of universal peace must be instilled into the minds of all scholars, in order that they may become the armies of peace, the real servants of the body politic – the world. God is the Father of all. Mankind are His children. This globe is one home. Nations are the members of one family. The mothers in their homes, the teachers in the schools, the professors in the college, the presidents in the universities, must teach these ideals to the young from the cradle up to the age of manhood.<sup>150</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s vision for education, as expressed above, included an implicit repudiation of social Darwinism, a theory which in the decades between His visit to SPC and His 1914 meeting with its college president had become increasingly popular. Ironically, while conservative thinkers initially rejected Darwin’s scientific theory of evolution, they later embraced its implications for society, when they associated a certain conception of progress as connected with “dominant” races and civilizations, that is, white and European ones.<sup>151</sup> The more liberal wing at the college also conflated its approach to Protestant education with “Americanism.”<sup>152</sup> As one

commentator has put it, the college was sending the message that only “America and Protestantism had the tools for this progressive future.”<sup>153</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, however, urged Bliss to encourage his students to see themselves as serving the higher interests of humanity, not the particular ones of race or nation. In October of 1912, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had implored assembled students, faculty, and staff at Stanford University along much the same lines, explaining that “the law of the survival of the fittest” did not apply to humanity.<sup>154</sup> Acceding to such a law would be similar to allowing nature to remain uncultivated and unfruitful. Human progress, then, required education in the “ideal virtues of Divinity,” for humanity is inherently “lofty and noble” and “specialized” to “render service in the cause of human uplift and betterment.”<sup>155</sup>



Shoghi Effendi, standing in the second row (third from the left) with his class at the Syrian Protestant College (later called American University of Beirut); circa 1914. Credit: *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 54.

### Responding to a Crisis at the College

At the time of Bliss’s visit, a major controversy was raging at the college: the question of mandatory attendance at the school’s religious services. The college’s religious requirements had relaxed over the years and, partly as a result, the school had begun to attract a more diverse student body, not only Christians from various denominations but also more Muslims, Jews, Druze, and Bahá’ís. Spurred on by the Young Turk revolution of 1908 which, among others, advocated for religious freedom and equality, in early 1909, the majority of the Muslim students refused to attend Christian religion services and Bible classes, presenting a petition to the faculty a few days later requesting that such attendance become voluntary.<sup>156</sup> In addition to widespread opposition from Jewish students as well, the college also faced opposition from the local Muslim community, the Ottoman authorities, and American diplomats. While making some concessions to the striking students, the college largely withstood the pressure, and the mandate remained until 1915, when an Ottoman law made attendance voluntary. Bliss’s 1914 visit, in fact, was part of a tour of the region in which he engaged with a number of civil and religious leaders in order to defend the college’s approach to religious education.

It was in this particular context that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s comments to Bliss about the “cardinal principles” of education were made. While it was clear to many, including ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, that missionary institutions like SPC were in a “losing fight” and the forces of liberalism were in the ascendant, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was unstinting in His support of religious education of a certain type, an education in “service to the cause of morality” and “animating [students] with the excellences and perfections of the religion of God.” As He had explained a year and a half before at Stanford:

Fifty years ago Bahá’u’lláh declared the necessity of peace among the nations and the reality of reconciliation between the religions of the world. He announced that the fundamental basis of all religion is one, that the

essence of religion is human fellowship and that the differences in belief which exist are due to dogmatic interpretation and blind imitations which are at variance with the foundations established by the Prophets of God.<sup>157</sup>

For ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, religion was one, and it was indispensable to the success of any educational enterprise if it encouraged love and unity. However, as He repeatedly made clear, “if religious belief proves to be the cause of discord and dissension, its absence would be preferable.”<sup>158</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s vision for religious education, then, was unifying but also demanding; such education had to generate higher levels of unity than that previously attained.

Responding to the well-documented protests of those in the Muslim community, including many reformers, who thought the religious services would have a negative effect on the students, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá remarked, “I am sure the morals of the students will not be corrupted. They will be informed with the contents of the Old and New Testament. What harm is there in this? A church is house of prayer. Let them enter therein and worship God. What wrong is there in this?”<sup>159</sup> Indeed, He viewed such attendance as a potential benefit to all concerned:

I have no doubt that much good will be accomplished, and many misunderstandings will be removed, if the [Muslims] attend the Churches of the Christians with reverence in their hearts and sincerity in their souls, and likewise the Christians may go [to] Mohammedan Mosques and magnify the Creator of the Universe. Is it not revealed in the Holy Scriptures that ‘My House shall be called of all nations the House of Prayer? All the houses of different names, — Church, Mosque, Synagogue, Pagoda, Temple are no other than the House of Prayers. What is there in a name? Man must attach his heart to God and not to a building. He must love to hear the name of God, no matter from what lips...<sup>160</sup>

To be clear, His support was not out of sympathy with the college’s longstanding mission, however liberally construed, to convert students to Protestantism, but out of a conviction of the oneness of God and religion, stressing universality and commonality of worship. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s approach bore some commonalities with those of Muslim reformist thinkers and other liberals but differed in key respects. The well-known reformer Muhammad ‘Abduh, whom ‘Abdu’l-Bahá visited as well during his 1880 visit to Beirut, embraced the adoption of modern science for the benefit of Islamic societies; however, he advocated for the development of Muslim schools and criticized the effect on students of attending foreign ones, for it estranged them from their own culture and religion.<sup>161</sup> The modernizer Rashid Rida also pointed to the “corrupting” force of such schools, though conceding that those who had had adequate religious instruction could attend them without any danger of losing faith. Even so, while supportive of the education the college provided, he disapproved of participation in “Christian” services.<sup>162</sup> And though liberal figures (such as Suleyman al-Bustani, Beirut’s parliamentary representative in Istanbul) voiced support for the idea that the younger generation could transcend racial and religious differences and worship together,<sup>163</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s comments explicitly and seriously included the idea of Christians themselves going to mosques to worship as well, a possibility that others would have found difficult to imagine. His was a voice for a kind of radical equality that challenged liberals at the college and reformists in the wider society alike.

During those years, liberals at the college like Bliss had been moving SPC in directions that were increasingly consonant with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s bold vision. Giving up on converting students to Protestantism as the college’s primary goal, Bliss identified the fostering of religious harmony as integral to the college’s mission. As he put it, the “equal treatment for men of all religions” produces “an atmosphere of good will and moral sympathy among



men of the most divergent religious belief.”<sup>164</sup> In response to the 1909 crisis, Bliss had reminded his board of trustees:

We must put ourselves in the place of our non-Christian students,— our Moslems, our Tartars, our Jews, our Druses, our Bahais... We must not dishonor his sense of honor; and we must not feel that the work of the College has fulfilled the mission until these men and their fellow religionists who form a great majority of the Empire’s population are touched and molded by the College influence.<sup>165</sup>

In 1922 Laurens Hickok Seelye, a member of the AUB faculty, published in *The Journal of Religion* an article entitled “An Experiment in Religious Association” in which he presented the college’s (now university’s) religious policy as a “radical step” for a “Christian institution.”<sup>166</sup> Howard Bliss, he wrote, had redefined the “faith of the missionary,” which was not to “urge upon others conformity, but a gracious invitation...to learn together of the progressing revelation of God.”<sup>167</sup> Bliss “put into actual missionary achievement the belief of every scientific student of religious experience.”<sup>168</sup> Seelye highlighted as a concrete sign of Bliss’s success the number of Muslims and other non-Christians the college had attracted.<sup>169</sup> In 1920-1921, they, in fact, outnumbered the Christians by 511 to 490, with 382 Muslims, 66 Jews, 41 Druze, and 22 Bahá’ís.<sup>170</sup>



American University of Beirut, (AUB). Chapel. Students emerging from service. Taken some time between 1920 and 1933. Credit: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/pp.print>



American University of Beirut, (AUB). College Hall. Taken between 1920 and 1933. Credit: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/pp.print>

#### **“An Experiment in Religious Association”**

In the 1910s, the college's religious instruction and "influence" increasingly involved interfaith dialogue, in which the Bahá'í students actively participated. The college chapter of the Young Men's Christian Association, or YMCA, attracted a diverse group of students eager to discuss religious subjects, according to Bayard Dodge, Bliss's son-in-law and successor as college president. Dodge joined the faculty in 1913 and was also executive secretary of the YMCA chapter. In his 1914 annual report for the YMCA, he wrote:

This winter about fifteen men used to gather every Sunday morning to discuss the five different types of religion which they represented. They took a keen interest, but never were intolerant or even hot-headed, so that they showed what an easy matter it is to talk over differences and reforms, without any fear of unpleasant feeling.<sup>171</sup>

It is evident that the "five different types of religion" included Bahá'ís, along with Christians, Muslims, Druze, and Jews. The Bahá'í students had already received the college's unofficial consent to hold their own meetings on campus, though many at the college and in the missionary community opposed the practice. On Sunday afternoons, the members of the Society of the Bahá'í Students of Beirut would "gather under the trees in the university [SPC] or in their private rooms, chanting prayers and talking over matters of religious concern."<sup>172</sup>

Dodge had written: "On Sunday morning I meet a group of Moslems and Bahá'ís, who discuss all sorts of religious questions in a most broadminded way and are intensely interesting."<sup>173</sup> In one of Dodge's earliest letters from the College, dated 26 November 1913, he singled out the Bahá'ís for their interest in such activities: "they try to take the best out of all religions."<sup>174</sup> While such interfaith activities were encouraged, they were seen to take place under the umbrella of the college's Christianity. A very small number (12 out of 177) of YMCA members were not Christians, perhaps because as non-Christians, they could join only as associate members. By Dodge's own admission, many other such students attended "most of the meetings, but feared to have the name 'Christian' in any way associated with them."<sup>175</sup> Despite the disinclination felt by many students toward being part of a Christian association, however, Dodge did not yet perceive any conflict with the fact that the YMCA was the only formal organization for these kinds of activities. Ottoman pressure ultimately succeeded in forcing the college to disband all student societies, including the YMCA, in May 1916.

During the war, the college's religious regulations underwent dramatic changes. The subsequent, and in part consequent, upsurge in enrollment of Muslim students to the college who would now be exempt from mandatory religious exercises had caused deep anxiety in Bliss, Dodge, and others. West Hall, constructed in 1914 for student activities, became a refuge for the students from the increasingly harsh wartime conditions outside the college walls. It was also a venue for the college's experiment in religious association to break new ground. The closing of the YMCA, along with the other student societies, in 1916; the continuation of the informal interfaith discussion groups started before the war during which time "the association in worship became freer than ever"<sup>176</sup>; and the much-vaunted sense of solidarity that the war seemed to intensify – all of these had paved the way for the formal creation of a new organization, a "Brotherhood," envisioned by Bliss in a speech at the building's opening. In a sermon given on 8 February 1914 titled "God's Plan for West Hall," Bliss had identified as the new building's "supreme purpose the awakening in the men who make use of West Hall of the spirit of service, of 'the struggle for the life of others'"; instrumental for such a purpose, Bliss proposed, was "a West Hall Brotherhood."<sup>177</sup>

It was not until 1920, however, that the West Hall Brotherhood properly got on its feet, when Laurens Seelye arrived to become the director of West Hall. Two years later, in his aforementioned article "An Experiment in Religious Association," he explained the emergence of the West Hall Brotherhood. Deriding the patronizing



policy of associate membership for non-Christians in the YMCA, Seelye discussed the delicate balance he and others tried to achieve in making the Brotherhood “non-Christian” even while the University remained a “Christian missionary institution.”<sup>178</sup> Important to membership in the Brotherhood was the belief that, as stated in its Preamble, “a thoughtful, sincere man, whether Moslem, Bahai, Jew or Christian can join this Brotherhood without feeling that he has compromised his standing in relation to his own religion.”<sup>179</sup> A few Bahá’ís would have been among the twelve non-Christian members of the YMCA in 1913-14, as these twelve were “very equally divided amongst men of the different sects.”<sup>180</sup> Yet, as with the other non-Christians, joining the Brotherhood would have been a far more acceptable alternative for the Bahá’ís. The Brotherhood’s “Pledge” did not name any single religion but only “this united movement for righteousness and human brotherhood.”<sup>181</sup> In 1921, Dr. Philip Hitti, the renowned Princeton scholar who was then a young faculty member at his alma mater AUB, wrote that the Brotherhood’s “watchword shall be ‘unity through diversity.’”<sup>182</sup>



Photograph of students in the Students' Union, 1914-1915. Shoghi Effendi can be seen standing in the second row, fourth from the right. Credit: AUB Library Archives

### The Bahá’í Students’ Contribution

The Bahá’í students’ participation in such intercommunal spaces was complemented by similar experiences they had gained within their own community, both in Beirut as well as in Haifa and Egypt. Part of the reason for Bliss’s 1914 visit was to arrange for the April visits of the Bahá’í students in Beirut, 27 of whom would make the trip (out of around 30-35 total students)<sup>183</sup>; 20 students, in two groups, visited ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Egypt in September 1913.<sup>184</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá met with these students often during their visits (sometimes twice a day), encouraging them in their studies and asking them if their teachers “took pains to instruct the students.”<sup>185</sup> He urged them to “strive always to be at the head of [their] classes through hard study and true merit” and to “entertain high ideals and stimulate [their] intellectual and constructive forces.”<sup>186</sup> He prioritized the study of agriculture and directly encouraged students to study medicine, in addition to subjects that would lead to careers in commerce and industry. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá also encouraged postgraduate studies, at Stanford, for example.<sup>187</sup>

Beyond their academic pursuits, however, the Bahá’í students received an education in the kind of united world ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was so interested in cultivating. He urged them to “strive to beautify the moral aspect of [their] lives” through the “divine ideals [of] humility, submissiveness, annihilation of self, perfect evanescence, charity, and loving kindness.” They must, He added, “Love and serve mankind just for the sake of God and not for anything else. The foundation of [their] love toward humanity must be spiritual faith and divine assurance.”<sup>188</sup> Not only did ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spend time with them and address them on various subjects, but the students also read copies of His talks from His 1912 trip to America.

The effect of these visits on the students was immense. As Badi Bushrui, who was among the students that visited ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in both Egypt and Haifa, later reflected, “Here is an interesting scene: the Hindu, the Zoroastrian, the Jew, the Moslem, and the atheist start singing songs of joy, praising BAHÁ’O’LLAH that, through His Grace, they were enabled to meet on the common-ground of Unity...”<sup>189</sup> Bushrui here is identifying people by their

source communities, emphasizing the unifying effect of their attraction to the Bahá'í teachings. Indeed, the Bahá'í students were themselves a diverse group; though most were from Persia, they came from Muslim, Jewish, and Zoroastrian backgrounds. In addition, on all their visits, the students interacted with Bahá'ís from Western countries, Americans especially.

The Bahá'í students' experience visiting 'Abdu'l-Bahá reinforced their efforts to contribute to the life of the college, and they actively sought out spaces in which they could put into practice their spiritual education. It was through this lens that Bahá'í students participated in religious services at SPC. They were not simply tolerating the Protestant services but viewing them in this far more unifying spirit. They also took advantage of opportunities to participate in the intercommunal spaces that opened up when the services became optional for non-Christians.

But the main venue for the Bahá'í students' contribution to the college was the Students' Union, which put on plays and organized a Social Service Institute and a Research Club, besides holding meetings. The most important ones were its weekly Saturday night meetings at which various topics were discussed and debated and the business meetings at which "parliamentary rules [were] observed and practiced."<sup>190</sup> There were also speaking contest meetings, election meetings, and reception meetings. The twin aims of the Union were "to cultivate and develop public speaking and parliamentary discipline in its members."<sup>191</sup> Published every two months was the *Students' Union Gazette*, the student magazine that had the longest run during this period.<sup>192</sup> The Union operated "exclusively" in English<sup>193</sup>, and indeed in his history of AUB, Bayard Dodge refers to the Union as an "English society."<sup>194</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá encouraged the Bahá'í students to perfect their English and to give talks in the language, something they practiced while visiting Him in Egypt and Haifa.<sup>195</sup>

By 1912 at least, this group was playing an active role in campus life. From the time the Bahá'í students began to form a recognizable group on campus, they became dynamic members of the Union, being elected to the Union's Cabinet, contributing to the *Gazette*, participating in and winning prizes in debate contests, and also proposing subjects for debate at the Saturday night meetings. From 1912 until 1916, when all student societies were closed down, Bahá'í students were almost continuously represented in the Students' Union Cabinet, elections for which were held twice a year. Twice Bahá'í students were elected its president; twice its vice president; at least once its secretary; once its associate secretary; twice the editor of the *Students' Union Gazette*; once the president of its Scientific Department; and several times as members-at-large.

Their contribution to the Union – through the topics they suggested for debate, the talks they gave, and the articles they wrote – reveal the focus of their interests: promoting greater unity among the diverse groups of students in the service of universal peace, all the while including a dynamic role for religion. In April 1914, one student proposed that a "universal religion is possible" while another, 'Abdu'l-Husayn Isfahani, put forth that "Universal Reformation in all the different phases of life can never be effected except through religion"<sup>196</sup>; Isfahani in a January 1913 speaking contest on "Is reputation an index of true greatness?" had elaborated on this conception of a "universal religion," basing his argument on the transcendent universality of the founders of major religions – their "creative and inspiring power."<sup>197</sup> Jesus Christ, Muhammad, and Buddha, he argued, through their "brilliant commanding genius" accomplished what they did in the face of societal opposition. Thus, their reputations do indicate true greatness. Isfahani also proposed that month that "racial differences do not exist."<sup>198</sup>

The Bahá'ís continued their involvement with the Students' Union in the following decades. In 1929, for example, Hasan Balyuzi gave a talk for a speaking contest on the "religion of the future," which would be characterized by "plasticity, absence of hypocrisy, and spirit of universal brotherhood."<sup>199</sup>

At a time when issues of war and peace were very much of the moment, the Bahá'í students sought to promote universal peace. In the years immediately before World War I, Bahá'í students proposed antiwar debate topics, such as "war must inevitably stop," and wrote articles such as "Towards International Peace." One such student, Aflatun Mirza, proposed that "a universal language is essential to the progress of the world."<sup>200</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His talks in America and Europe had supported the establishing of a secondary, auxiliary language to facilitate greater unity and lead to peace.<sup>201</sup> In the 1920s, in fact, many Bahá'ís became active members of the worldwide Esperanto movement. One Bahá'í student, Zeine N. Zeine, was an enthusiastic promoter of the language on campus, giving talks on it, including, on at least one occasion, a short one in Esperanto itself.<sup>202</sup>

However, even more revealing of the way the Bahá'í students understood their contribution to this discourse was a speech given by Zeine in 1929, a talk that won a prestigious speaking contest. In "Mental Disarmament," he claimed that such disarmament was more "necessary to peace and happiness of the world than the disarmament of the sword." Attitudes, he continued, such as "intolerance, ignorance, hatred, prejudice" and so on "play more havoc than the cannon, and bring about strife and war."<sup>203</sup> (Appropriately, Zeine, upon his graduation that year, was hired as assistant director of West Hall and an instructor of Sociology.) In a similar vein, the president of the Students' Union, not a Bahá'í, at the Brotherhood's year-opening reception in October 1926, remarked, "the Druze, the Moslem, the Jew, the Bahai, the Christian all unite together to oppose others of the same religion for the welfare of the Union."<sup>204</sup> Back in June 1914, Badi Bushrui, who was the outgoing president of the Union, offered a succinct summary of the way Bahá'ís sought to contribute not only in their words but also in their deeds:

Let the Union, as often suggested by President Bliss, stand for universal peace and the oneness of the world of humanity. I am glad that the spirit which the college tries to infuse into her students is finding expression in the life of the Union. Racial and religious differences play no part there. The President for the first term this year was a Christian, the last President was a Bahai and the new President is a Moslem. I believe this is the biggest stride the Union has taken to be able to choose the best man without regard to religious or racial affinity.<sup>205</sup>

Furthermore, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's guidance addressed the practical outcomes of their education. In Egypt in 1913, for example, 'Abdu'l-Bahá told the students that it was "his hope that they would make extraordinary progress along spiritual lines as well as in science and art; so that each one might become a brilliant lamp in the world of modern civilization, and upon their return to Persia that country might profit from their acquired knowledge and experience."<sup>206</sup> Out of 24 Master's theses written before 1918, five were written by Bahá'í students.<sup>207</sup> Two theses, both written in 1918, exemplify this focus on serving the best interests of their nation. "Social Evils or Hindrances to Persia's Progress" and "Persia in Transformation," both written by Bahá'í students, identified elements of Persia's religious, social, and political life needing attention and articulated a progressive vision for the country, assigning prominent places to education and the rights of women.<sup>208</sup>

In a letter to his father dated 22 June 1914, Dodge commented on this mission of the Bahá'í students. "Most of these students travel to the College from three to four weeks away," he related, and "speak in a most serious way of getting an education here and then returning to help their unfortunate land."<sup>209</sup> Dodge's initial encounters with the Bahá'í students in 1913 led him to state that "they uphold all sorts of good reform movements."<sup>210</sup>

The Bahá'í students also contributed to the college-wide efforts to render service to the local community, efforts which greatly accelerated during the war, including medical relief activities, among others. Not long after the war broke out, most of the Bahá'ís in Haifa and 'Akká, including Badi Bushrui and another recent SPC graduate Habiballah Khudabakhsh, later known as Dr. Mu'ayyad, were received as guests in the Druze/Christian village of

Abu-Sinan.<sup>211</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s warm relationship with the village leaders had made this arrangement possible. In an article titled “A New Experience,” published in a fall 1915 number of the *Students’ Union Gazette*, Bushrui relates how Dr. Mu’ayyad started a medical clinic in the village, performing many operations and treating a variety of conditions over a period of eight months.<sup>212</sup> Bushrui and an American Bahá’í woman, Lua Getsinger, acted as nurses and assistants; Bushrui also taught some of the children. Such an experience of social service would have resonated deeply with the emerging ethos of the college, to be sure.

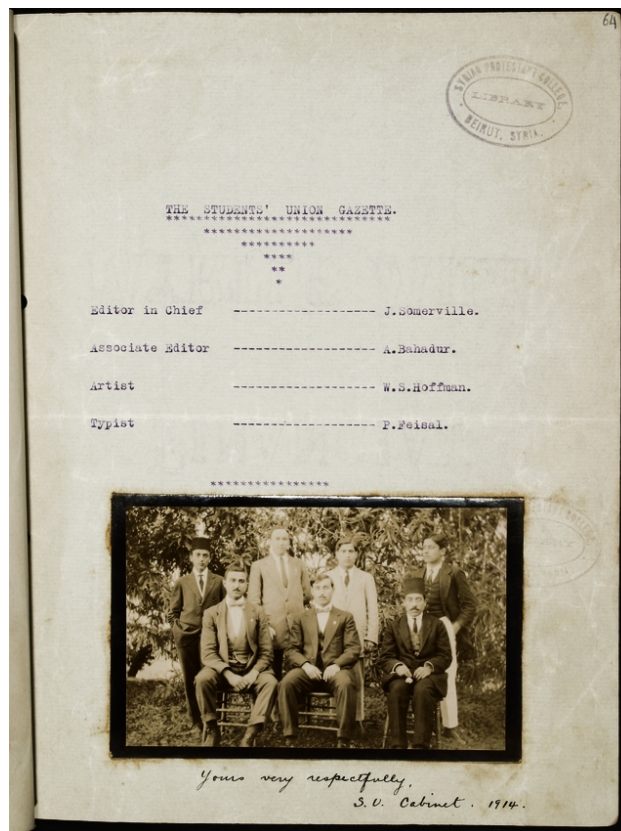
The Bahá’í students’ contributions became a recognized fact of life at the college over the coming decades. In an article titled “Education as a Source of Good Will” published in the 1930-32 volume of *The Bahá’í World*, President Bayard Dodge outlined the university’s mission, confirming AUB’s strong relationship with the Bahá’ís and its view of them as a like-minded group. From Dodge’s perspective, the university’s “interpretation of the gospel of Jesus and the teachings of the prophets” was “similar to that proclaimed by the great Bahá’í leaders,” and so there had “naturally been a bond of sympathy” between the university and the Bahá’ís.<sup>213</sup> As previously noted, the Bahá’ís’ active involvement before and during the war in the interfaith discussion groups made quite a deep impression on Dodge. Writing in 1930, when there were three Bahá’ís on the university staff and twenty-six students, Dodge listed the twenty-eight graduates of the university (there were in fact thirty<sup>214</sup>) up to that point, adding that they had “become a great credit to their Alma Mater.”<sup>215</sup> The list included two women trained as nurses and midwives (women were first admitted to the university in 1921). Dodge himself noted that the list did not include the many Bahá’ís who spent time at the university but never graduated. Dodge detailed three distinguishing qualities of the Bahá’í students:

In the first place, they have acquired from their parents an enviable refinement and courtesy. As far as I can tell, all of them have been easy to get along with, good natured with their friends, and polite to their teachers. Their reputation for good manners and breeding is well established.

In the second place, the Bahá’í students have been marked by clean living and honesty. The older men have had a good influence on the younger ones, so that it is a tradition that they avoid bad habits. Every Sunday afternoon they meet together for devotional and social purposes at the house of Adib Husayn Effendi Iqbal. The older students are able to keep in touch with what the younger ones are doing and their influence is worth as much as a whole faculty of teachers.

In the third place, the Bahá’ís intuitively understand internationalism. They mix with all sorts of companions without prejudice and help to develop a spirit of fraternity on the campus...<sup>216</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s qualified encouragement of modern education bore fruit in the activities of these Bahá’í students. While taking advantage of their academic opportunities, they were also guided by moral principles, perceiving no conflict between their scientific and religious education. While highly cohesive and united as a group, they sought to be a unifying force at the school, promoting the oneness of humanity and universal peace among their classmates “without prejudice.” Becoming an established presence at a time when SPC was liberalizing its approach to religious education, the Bahá’í students found the college a receptive space in which to express their identities as Bahá’ís, and, inspired by the example and teachings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, it is clear that they made an important contribution to the life of the college. Their example shows, moreover, that when a group like the Bahá’í students is empowered in such a setting, significant results can accrue for the whole.



An issue of the Students' Union Gazette. Shoghi Effendi can be seen in the photograph.

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## **‘Abdu’l-Bahá**

### ***Champion of Universal Peace***

FRIDAY OCTOBER 22, 2021

BY

**HODA MAHMOUDI AND JANET KHAN**



‘Abdu’l-Bahá with a group of friends in Stuttgart, Germany, 4 April 1913. Credit: media.bahai.org.

In October 1911, as the world teetered towards collapse and the prospects of war loomed large, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá delivered a speech in Paris to a group of individuals who were seeking creative solutions to the issues of the day. He spoke about the pragmatic relationship between “true thought” and its application. “If these thoughts never reach the plane of action,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explained, “they remain useless: the power of thought is dependent on its manifestation in deeds.”<sup>217</sup>

In this paper we explore ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s active promotion of the broad vision of peace set out in the teachings of the Bahá’í Faith and examine His contributions to mobilizing widespread support for the practice of peace. The realization of peace, as outlined in the Bahá’í writings and elucidated by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, is dependent on spiritual thoughts based on spiritual virtues expressed through human deeds.

#### **‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Reading of Social Reality**

‘Abdu’l-Bahá is a figure unique in religious history. Understanding His critical role is essential to understanding the workings of the Bahá’í Faith – in its past, present, and future.

For forty years ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was a prisoner of the Ottoman Empire, having been exiled as a nine-year-old child, when members of Bahá’u’lláh’s family were expelled from Iran to the Ottoman domains. Undeterred by the restrictions to His freedom and the challenges of daily life, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá directed His attention to administering the affairs of the growing Bahá’í community and to easing the plight of humanity by actively promoting a vision of a just, united, and peaceful world.

Keenly aware of the events transpiring in the world at large, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá viewed the establishment of universal peace as one of the most critical issues of the day. His writings and public talks outline the Bahá’í approach to peace and methods for its attainment and explain and illuminate the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh. They reflect a profound and sensitive understanding of the state of the world and demonstrate the relevance of the Bahá’í

teachings to the alleviation of the human condition. The Bahá'í approach stresses a reliance on the constructive power of religion and on the forces of social and spiritual cohesion as a way to impact the world.<sup>218</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Bahá saw in World War I a harrowing lesson of the human necessity for peace – and of the darkness that can ensue without peace. He knew and wrote extensively that nothing short of the establishment of the spiritual foundations for peace could result in lasting peace and security for humanity. In His written works, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá repeatedly draws our attention to the need for establishing the spiritual prerequisites for peace, requisites which, in turn, remove the barriers to peace, such as racial prejudice, sexism, economic inequalities, sectarianism, and nationalism.

That remarkable time in the history of the world provides the backdrop to the *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, a series of letters ‘Abdu’l-Bahá addressed to the Bahá'ís of North America. A study of these letters together with two detailed letters<sup>219</sup> on peace addressed to the Executive Committee of the Central Organization for a Durable Peace at The Hague provides an opportunity to better understand the nature of universal peace as envisioned in the Bahá'í writings, the prerequisites of peace, and how peace can be waged. The *Tablets of the Divine Plan* set out a systematic strategy aimed at strengthening embryonic Bahá'í communities, founded on the principle of the oneness of humankind, and mobilizing their members to engage in activities associated with spreading the values of peace. The Tablets to The Hague are examples from among ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s tireless efforts to contribute to the most relevant discourses of His time and to engage like-minded individuals and groups throughout the world in the pursuit of peace.<sup>220</sup>

#### **A Power of Implementation**

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s caveat that “the power of thought” depends on “its manifestation in action,”<sup>221</sup> is particularly relevant to the idea of peace. Consider! Nearly 20 million men, women and children were killed during the four years of World War I!

‘Abdu’l-Bahá took the principles of global peace revealed by Bahá'u'lláh and shaped them into a practical grand strategy for how to understand, practice, and pursue peace. Among the voluminous writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the fourteen letters of the *Tablets of the Divine Plan* outlined detailed instructions and systematic actions for the spread of the spiritual teachings of the Bahá'í Faith throughout the world. Their aim was the establishment of growing communities throughout the world that would embody the values of peace, would comprise the diverse populations of the human family, and would contribute to the spiritualization of the planet—a vision that was being promoted as the world was witnessing the horrors and sufferings of the war:

Black darkness is enshrouding all regions... all countries are burning with the flame of dissension...the fire of war and carnage is blazing throughout the East and the West. Blood is flowing, corpses bestrew the ground, and severed heads are fallen on the dust of the battlefield.<sup>222</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Bahá called on the recipients of the *Tablets* to arise and take action, establishing throughout the planet new communities founded on the spiritual principles of love, goodwill, and cooperation among humankind. Through such calls for acts of sacrificial service that arising to spread the divine teachings would entail, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was promoting an antidote to the social and spiritual illnesses that contribute to the conditions of war. He reminded the recipients of His letters of the power of spiritual forces to transform hatred, division, war, and destruction into love, unity, dignity, and the nobility of every human being. “Extinguish this fire,” He wrote, “so that these dense clouds which obscure the horizon may be scattered, the Sun of Reality shine forth with the rays



of conciliation, this intense gloom be dispelled and the resplendent light of peace shed its radiance upon all countries.”<sup>223</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Bahá explained that if we desire peace in the world, we must begin by planting peace in our own hearts. This principle can be found throughout the writings of Bahá’u’lláh:

What is preferable in the sight of God is that the cities of men’s hearts, which are ruled by the hosts of self and passion, should be subdued by the sword of utterance, of wisdom and of understanding. Thus, whoso seeketh to assist God must, before all else, conquer, with the sword of inner meaning and explanation, the city of his own heart and guard it from the remembrance of all save God, and only then set out to subdue the cities of the hearts of others.<sup>224</sup>

While ‘Abdu’l-Bahá sought to mobilize the Bahá’ís of North America to spread the unifying message of Bahá’u’lláh throughout the world, He also pursued numerous opportunities to introduce into the discourses of His time essential concepts and principles that would help the thinking of His contemporaries to evolve and assist humanity to move towards the realization of peace.

Indeed, in His letters to the Central Organization for a Durable Peace, written in 1919 and 1920 after the war’s conclusion, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá gently but unequivocally challenged His audience to broaden its conception of peace. Specifically, in His first letter, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explored “many teachings which supplemented and supported that of universal peace,” such as the “independent investigation of reality,” “the oneness of the world of humanity,” and “the equality of women and men.” Some other related teachings of Bahá’u’lláh that were explained by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá included the following: “that religion must be the cause of fellowship and love,” “that religion must be in conformity with science and reason,” “that religious, racial, political, economic and patriotic prejudices destroy the edifice of humanity,” and “that although material civilization is one of the means for the progress of the world of mankind, yet until it becomes combined with Divine civilization, the desired result, which is the felicity of mankind, will not be attained.”<sup>225</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá then reiterated His point, stating:

These manifold principles, which constitute the greatest basis for the felicity of mankind and are of the bounties of the Merciful, must be added to the matter of universal peace and combined with it, so that results may accrue.<sup>226</sup>

In the Second Tablet to the Hague, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá observed that for peace to be realized in the world, it would not be enough that people were simply informed about the horrors of war. “Today the benefits of universal peace are recognized amongst the people, and likewise the harmful effects of war are clear and manifest to all,” wrote ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

But in this matter, knowledge alone is far from sufficient: A power of implementation is needed to establish it throughout the world.... It is our firm belief that the power of implementation in this great endeavour is the penetrating influence of the Word of God and the confirmations of the Holy Spirit.<sup>227</sup>

Abdu’l-Bahá asserted that it is through this power of implementation that “the compelling power of conscience can be awakened, so that this lofty ideal may be translated from the realm of thought into that of reality.” “It is clear and evident,” He explained, “that the execution of this mighty endeavour is impossible through ordinary human feelings but requireth the powerful sentiments of the heart to transform its potential into reality.”<sup>228</sup>

Understanding ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s approach to peace also demands we understand Bahá’u’lláh’s direct engagement with the world and His doctrinal declarations concerning the Bahá’í Faith. Bahá’u’lláh’s writings describe a “progressive revelation” of religion in which individual religions arise to meet the need of their times. Bahá’u’lláh stated that particular religions were entrusted with a message and a spirit that “best meet the requirements of the age in which” that religion appeared.<sup>229</sup> In this context, religions are viewed as the gradual unfolding of one religion that is being renewed from age to age. The variations in the teachings of these religions are attributable to a world that is constantly changing and needing spiritual renewal and spiritual principles. Because “ancient laws and archaic ethical systems will not meet the requirements of modern conditions,” then, as a new religion takes shape, new sets of laws and principles are revealed to humanity and new spiritual beliefs must always emerge.<sup>230</sup>

Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation calls on individuals to internalize spiritual principles and express them through actions. He proclaimed “to the world the solidarity of nations and the oneness of humankind.”<sup>231</sup> He described “a human race conscious of its own oneness.”<sup>232</sup> Complex concepts such as human oneness and the global order were transformed from utopian ideals to spiritual commands of the highest order; the Bahá’í writings unfold and clarify how such commands might be fulfilled. Bahá’u’lláh’s vision also details the need for the construction of a World Order, an order comprising administrative institutions at the local, regional, national, and international levels. Such institutions, among other things, serve as channels for the application of spiritual principles. As the institutions evolve over decades and centuries, a new world order will eventually produce the conditions conducive to global peace. Yet, even as the Bahá’í writings envision a long-term process of global transformation and maturation of the human race, they also assert that change will also arise from individual and collective efforts at the grassroots of society. In exploring the creative Word and learning to apply it to their individual and collective lives, individuals are spiritually transformed from the inside-out, and they contribute to the transformation of communities, institutions, and society at large.

In describing the Bahá’í Faith’s strong prohibition on waging war, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, stated that Bahá’u’lláh “abrogated contention and conflict, and even rejected undue insistence. He exhorted us instead to ‘consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship.’ He ordained that we be loving friends and well-wishers of all peoples and religions and enjoined upon us to demonstrate the highest virtues in our dealings with the kindreds of the earth....What a heavy burden was all that enmity and rancour, all that recourse to sword and spear!” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote of the impact of war on humanity. “Conversely, what joy, what gladness is imparted by loving-kindness!”<sup>233</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Bahá viewed peace as a central facet of the work of the Bahá’í Faith. There was no separating peace from the Bahá’í Faith, nor was there any separation between the Faith and peace. Peace was both medium and message, and the Bahá’í Faith itself was the vehicle for establishing peace. He explained, in His Second Tablet to the Hague, that the followers of Bahá’u’lláh were actively engaged in the establishment of peace, because their

desire for peace is not derived merely from the intellect: It is a matter of religious belief and one of the eternal foundations of the Faith of God. That is why we strive with all our might and, forsaking our own advantage, rest, and comfort, forgo the pursuit of our own affairs; devote ourselves to the mighty cause of peace; and consider it to be the very foundation of the Divine religions, a service to His Kingdom, the source of eternal life, and the greatest means of admittance into the heavenly realm.”<sup>234</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Bahá dedicated His life to the advancement of the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh and to the establishment of universal peace. His peace activities in the West include many talks given in Europe and North America. He had close contact with civic leaders and social activists and participated in the 1912 Lake Mohonk Conference on Peace and Arbitration in upstate New York attended by over 180 prominent people from the United States and other countries. He addressed a variety of American women’s organizations, gave presentations at universities and colleges, spoke in Chicago at the NAACP’s annual conference, and gave lectures at churches and synagogues.

Yet for all His courageous activities, and all the efforts of the Bahá’ís, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was greatly saddened by the world’s apparent indifference to Bahá’u’lláh’s call for global peace and to the efforts He Himself had made in the course of His travels. Shoghi Effendi, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s grandson and His appointed successor, wrote: “Agony filled His soul at the spectacle of human slaughter precipitated through humanity’s failure to respond to the summons He had issued, or to heed the warnings He had given.”<sup>235</sup>

Given the turbulent condition of the world and the dangers facing humankind, He devised a detailed strategic plan to address the situation and to assign responsibility for its implementation. His plan, devised in 1916 to 1917 and set out in fourteen letters, known collectively as the *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, was entrusted to the members of the Bahá’í community in the United States and Canada. The pivotal goal of the *Tablets of the Divine Plan* is directly associated with the long-range process that will lead to the achievement of peace in the world as envisaged in Bahá’u’lláh’s writings.

Designated as “the chosen trustees and principal executors of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Divine Plan,”<sup>236</sup> the North American Bahá’ís were called upon to assume a prominent role in taking the message of Bahá’u’lláh to all the countries of the world and for effecting the transformation in values necessary for the emergence of a world order characterized by justice, unity, and peace. This great human resource – the body of willing believers in the West – was notable for its enthusiasm, determination, and deep commitment to Bahá’u’lláh’s vision for change. These communities were ideal incubators for the processes of peace.

At the time the messages of the *Tablets of the Divine Plan* were being written, North American Bahá’ís comprised but a small percentage of the total Bahá’ís in the world (though many had met ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in 1912). Commenting on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s choice of the North American Bahá’ís and the link between World War I and the *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, Shoghi Effendi indicated that the Divine Plan “was prompted by the contact established by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Himself, in the course of His historic journey, with the entire body of His followers throughout the United States and Canada. It was conceived, soon after that contact was established, in the midst of what was then held to be one of the most devastating crises in human history.”<sup>237</sup> Shoghi Effendi offered further comment concerning the historic bond between ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the North American community: “This is the community,” he reminded us,

which, ever since it was called into being through the creative energies released by the proclamation of the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh, was nursed in the lap of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s unfailing solicitude, and was trained by Him to discharge its unique mission through the revelation of innumerable Tablets, through the instructions issued to returning pilgrims, through the despatch of special messengers, through His own travels at a later date, across the North American continent, through the emphasis laid by Him on the institution of the Covenant in the course of those travels, and finally through His mandate embodied in the Tablets of the Divine Plan.<sup>238</sup>

It is clear that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was aware of the potential capacity of the North American Bahá’ís to carry out the task with which they had been entrusted. His extensive travels in North America afforded the opportunity to assess, at first hand, the spiritual, social, and political environment of the continent and to appreciate the freedoms – intellectual, artistic, political, and, particularly, the religious freedom—inherent in North American society. And it is also apparent that He understood the spiritual possibilities of the West and the desire of women and men to seek a fuller expression of all things – of themselves, of their society, of the world.

#### **Significance of the *Tablets of the Divine Plan***

As described above, the *Tablets of the Divine Plan* constitute the charter for the propagation of the Bahá’í Faith and outline ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s plan for the spiritual regeneration of the world. The letters therein set out the prerequisites for peace and assign responsibility to the North American believers “to plant the banner of His Father’s Faith . . . in all the continents, the countries and islands of the globe.”<sup>239</sup> They focus on the work of promulgating and implementing Bahá’u’lláh’s salutary message of unity, justice, and peace in a systematic and orderly manner. They represent a strategic intervention put in place by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to ensure the ongoing and systematic dissemination of the values of peace and the promotion of activities associated with moral and social advancement. They describe a spiritually based approach to peace that is pragmatic, long-term, flexible, and durable.

In those darkest days of World War I, the means of communication between ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Palestine (then under the rule of the Ottoman Empire) and the community of His followers around the world were disrupted and, for a period, severed. The first eight Tablets were written in the spring of 1916, and the second group was penned during the spring of 1917. The first group did not arrive in North America until the fall of 1916, while the delivery of the remaining Tablets was delayed until after the cessation of hostilities.<sup>240</sup>

The Great War of 1914-1918 rocked the very foundations of society and dramatically changed the shape of the world. The historian Margaret MacMillan provides a telling summary of the impact of the War:

Four years of war shook forever the supreme self-confidence that had carried Europe to world dominance. After the western front Europeans could no longer talk of a civilizing mission to the world. The war toppled governments, humbled the mighty and overturned whole societies. In Russia the revolutions of 1917 replaced tsarism, with what no one yet knew. At the end of the war Austria-Hungary vanished, leaving a great hole at the centre of Europe. The Ottoman empire, with its vast holdings in the Middle East and its bit of Europe, was almost done. Imperial Germany was now a republic. Old nations—Poland, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia—came out of history to live again and new nations—Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia—struggled to be born.<sup>241</sup>

The Tablets captured the mood of the day—the complex fusion of anxiety and despair, the burning desire to end a war more brutal than any the world had ever known, and a desire for a new approach to peaceful existence. Addressing this heartfelt yearning, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá offered a contrasting vision of how the world might be if it lived in harmony:

This world-consuming war has set such a conflagration to the hearts that no word can describe it. In all the countries of the world the longing for universal peace is taking possession of men. There is not a soul who does not yearn for concord and peace. A most wonderful state of receptivity is being realized. This is through the consummate wisdom of God, so that capacity may be created, the standard of the oneness of the world of humanity be upraised, and the fundamental of universal peace and the divine principles be promoted in the East and the West.<sup>242</sup>

In another Tablet, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá reflected on the impact of World War I on humankind and offered a context for understanding the “wisdom of this war”:

In short, after this universal war, the people have obtained extraordinary capacity to hearken to the divine teachings, for the wisdom of this war is this: That it may become proven to all that the fire of war is world-consuming, whereas the rays of peace are world-enlightening. One is death, the other is life; this is extinction, that is immortality; one is the most great calamity, the other is the most great bounty; this is darkness, that is light; this is eternal humiliation and that is everlasting glory; one is the destroyer of the foundation of man, the other is the founder of the prosperity of the human race.<sup>243</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s response to war, as set out in the *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, went far beyond providing an alternative vision. He called for constructive mobilization consistent with the local situation. For example, tapping into peoples’ receptivity to new ideas resulting from the sufferings associated with war, He directed the Bahá’ís to take steps to spread Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings, and He set out other concrete actions that could be immediately taken. These activities aimed not only to enlarge the Bahá’í community but were considered essential to spreading the values of peace in the wider society. To this end, He invited “a number of souls” to “arise and act in accordance with the aforesaid conditions, and hasten to all parts of the world.... Thus in a short space of time, most wonderful results will be produced, the banner of universal peace will be waving on the apex of the world and the lights of the oneness of the world of humanity may illumine the universe.”<sup>244</sup>

The *Tablets of the Divine Plan* underlined the contribution of religion to individual and social development. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá stated:

Consider how the religions of God served the world of humanity! How the religion of Torah became conducive to the glory and honor and progress of the Israelitish nation! How the breaths of the Holy Spirit of His Holiness Christ created affinity and unity between divergent communities and quarreling families! How the sacred power of His Holiness Muḥammad became the means of uniting and harmonizing the contentious tribes and the different clans of Peninsular Arabia—to such an extent that one thousand tribes were welded into one tribe; strife and discord were done away with; all of them unitedly and with one accord strove in advancing the cause of culture and civilization, and thus were freed from the lowest degree of degradation, soaring toward the height of everlasting glory!<sup>245</sup>

Within this context, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá affirmed that the Bahá’í community’s historic mission was at heart a spiritual enterprise, and He illustrated the capacity of the community to unite peoples of different background. He wrote:

Consider! The people of the East and the West were in the utmost strangeness. Now to what a high degree they are acquainted with each other and united together! How far are the inhabitants of Persia from the remotest countries of America! And now observe how great has been the influence of the heavenly power, for the distance of thousands of miles has become identical with one step! How various nations that have had no relations or similarity with each other are now united and agreed through this divine potency! Indeed to God belongs power in the past and in the future! And verily God is powerful over all things!<sup>246</sup>

The community-building activities initiated by the Bahá’ís at the behest of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the diversity of the Faith’s emerging community constitute a powerful means to engage the interest and attract the collaboration of

like-minded people who are also committed to the cause of enduring social change and are willing to work for the creation of a culture of peace.

The vision of the *Tablets of the Divine Plan* is a vision that regards all human beings as being responsible for the advancement of civilization. The Bahá'í Faith looks to ensure such advancement is possible by highlighting the pathways of unity. To initiate the processes of individual and social transformation, 'Abdu'l-Bahá calls on his followers to embrace a series of tasks – in a sense, to get to work – so that they might

occupy themselves with the diffusion of the divine exhortations and advices, guide the souls and promote the oneness of the world of humanity. They must play the melody of international conciliation with such power that every deaf one may attain hearing, every extinct person may be set aglow, every dead one may obtain new life and every indifferent soul may find ecstasy. It is certain that such will be the consummation.<sup>247</sup>

Humankind is asked to flee “all ignorant prejudices” and work for the good of all. In the West, individuals are charged to commit to “the promulgation of the divine principles so that the oneness of the world of humanity may pitch her canopy in the apex of America and all the nations of the world may follow the divine policy.”<sup>248</sup>

The great changes described in the Tablets will evolve slowly. For though the Tablets call for a time when “the mirror of the earth may become the mirror of the Kingdom, reflecting the ideal virtues of heaven,”<sup>249</sup> translating this poetic vision into a concrete plan will take time. But this delay is not cause for slowing the activities of peace, rather the scale of change demands a systematic approach to peace.<sup>250</sup> For instance, 'Abdu'l-Bahá lists countries by name and specifies the order in which tasks are to be completed.<sup>251</sup>

But along with all His specificity, 'Abdu'l-Bahá also describes a lofty vision meant to inspire. He calls upon His followers to become “heavenly farmers and scatter pure seeds in the prepared soil,” promises that “throughout the coming centuries and cycles many harvests will be gathered,” and asks followers to “consider the work of former generations. During the lifetime of Jesus Christ, the believing, firm souls were few and numbered, but the heavenly blessings descended so plentifully that in a number of years countless souls entered beneath the shadow of the Gospel.”<sup>252</sup>

### Looking Ahead

Written just over a century ago during one of humanity's darkest hours, the *Tablets of the Divine Plan* “set in motion processes designed to bring about, in due course, the spiritual transformation of the planet.”<sup>253</sup> These letters continue to guide Bahá'ís as they pursue the current Divine Plan under the authority of the Universal House of Justice, the international governing council of the Bahá'í Faith, and they serve as an inspiration to many others who study them. In fourteen letters, 'Abdu'l-Bahá laid out a charter for the teaching, building, and communal activities that define the Bahá'í theatre of action. While its long-term vision encompasses all humanity, the Divine Plan's execution is tied to the Bahá'í community's spiritual evolution and the development of its administrative institutions. It is also tied to humanity's receptivity and willingness to pursue peace.

Today, Bahá'ís throughout the world are actively engaged in the application of the Divine Plan through a long-term process of community building inspired by the principle of the oneness of humankind. Embracing an outward-looking orientation, Bahá'ís maintain that to systematically advance a material and spiritual global civilization, the contributions of innumerable individuals, groups, and organizations is required for generations to come. The process of community building that is finding expression in Bahá'í localities throughout the world is open to all peoples regardless of race, gender, nationality, or religion.



In these communities, Bahá'ís aspire to develop patterns of life and social structures based on Bahá'u'lláh's principles. Throughout the process they are *learning* how to strengthen community life based on spiritual principles including the prerequisites for the establishment of global peace as identified in the Bahá'í writings. The Plan, in both urban and rural settings, is comprised of an educational process where children, youth, and adults explore spiritual concepts, gain capacity, and apply them to their own distinct social environment. As individuals participate in this ongoing process of community building, they draw insights from science and religion's spiritual teachings toward gaining new knowledge and insights.

The acquisition of new knowledge is continually applied to nurturing a community environment that is free from prejudice of race, class, religion, nationality, and strives to achieve the full equality of women in all the affairs of the community as well as the society at large. A natural outcome of this transformative learning process of spiritual and material education is involvement in the life of society. In this regard, Bahá'ís are engaged in two interconnected areas of action: social action and participation in the prevalent discourses of society. Social action involves the application of spiritual principles to social problems in order to advance material progress in diverse settings. Second, in diverse settings, Bahá'í institutions and agencies, in addition to individuals and organizations, whether academic or professional, or at national and international forums, also participate in important discourses prevalent in society with the goal of exploring the solutions to social problems and contributing to the advancement of society. Aware of the complex challenges that lie ahead of them in this work, Bahá'ís are working jointly with others, convinced of the unique role that religion offers in the construction of a spiritual global order.<sup>254</sup>

Stressing the vital significance of striving to enhance the learning processes associated with the implementation of peace, a recent message addressed to Bahá'ís and their collaborators, observed that

none who are conscious of the condition of the world can refrain from giving their utmost endeavour... The devoted efforts that you and your like-minded collaborators are making to build communities founded on spiritual principles, to apply those principles for the betterment of your societies, and to offer the insights arising—these are the surest ways you can hasten the fulfillment of the promise of world peace.<sup>255</sup>

The Divine Plan continues to unfold over the decades as the collective capacity of the Bahá'í community grows in tandem with the world's openness to change. Implementation of the Plan continues and will continue so that the world might achieve “the advent of that Golden Age which must witness the proclamation of the Most Great Peace and the unfoldment of that world civilization which is the offspring and primary purpose of that Peace.”<sup>256</sup>

### **About the Authors:**

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## Notes

[←1]

The material used in this eBook is taken directly from one of a series of Special Collections found at [The Bahá'í World](http://www.bahai.org). This website features essays and long-form articles that convey Bahá'í perspectives on the vital issues of our time, seek new insights from the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and from Bahá'í experience, and highlight significant aspects of the Faith's history and commemorates the Centenary of the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

[←2]

Translated from French

[←3]

Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*.

[←4]

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*.

[←5]

'Abdu'l-Bahá in London. London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1987, p.19.

[←6]

'Abdu'l-Bahá in London. London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1987, p.19.

[←7]

'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Paris Talks*. Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing, 2006, p.84.

[←8]

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[←9]

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[←10]

Bahá'u'lláh. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*. London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1978, LXX, p.135.

[←11]

Shoghi Effendi. *The Promised Day is Come*. Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980, p.95

[←12]

Shoghi Effendi. 'The Unfoldment of World Civilization', *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*. Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991, p.202

[←13]

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[←14]

Rudhyar Archival Project. <http://www.khaldea.com/rudhyar/biol.shtml>

[←15]

Dane Rhudyar, cited in *The Bahá'í World* Vol. XIII 1954-1963. Haifa: The Universal House of Justice, 1970, p.829

[←16]

Dane Rhudyar, cited in *The Bahá'í World* Vol. XIII 1954-1963. Haifa: The Universal House of Justice, 1970, p.829.

[←17]

Andrei Bely. *The Emblematics of Meaning: Premises to a Theory of Symbolism*, 1909

[←18]

Andrei Bely. *The Emblematics of Meaning: Premises to a Theory of Symbolism*, 1909

[←19]

See Amin Egea. *The Apostle of Peace* Vol.1: 1871-1912. Oxford: George Ronald Publisher, 2017, p.164.

[←20]

Guillaume Apollinaire, "Le Béhaïsme." *Mercure de France*, 16 October 1917, p.768

[←21]

A.R. Orage. "Notes of the Week." *New Age* 9, September 1911, p.484

[←22]

Ezra Pound, cited in Elham Afnan, "'Abdu'l-Bahá and Ezra Pound's Circle", *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies* Volume 6 No.2, June-September 1994, p.8

[←23]

Omar Pound and Robert Spoo, editors. *Ezra Pound and Margaret Cravens: A Tragic Friendship 1910-1912*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1988, p.90.

[←24]

Omar Pound and Robert Spoo, editors. *Ezra Pound and Margaret Cravens: A Tragic Friendship 1910-1912*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1988, p.95.

[←25]

Elham Afnan, "'Abdu'l-Bahá and Ezra Pound's Circle", p.11

- [←26] Cited in Howard J. Booth and Nigel Rigby, *Modernism and Empire*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000, p.82.
- [←27] Agnes Baldwin Alexander, *History of the Bahá'í Faith in Japan 1914-1938*. Tokyo: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1977, p.41.
- [←28] Yone Noguchi, cited in *The Bahá'í World* Vol. VIII 1938-1940. Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981, p.624.
- [←29] Bernard Leach, "My Religious Faith" in Robert Weinberg, ed., *Spinning the Clay into Stars*. Oxford: George Ronald Publisher, 1999, p.60.
- [←30] 'Abdu'l-Bahá in London. London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1987, p.34.
- [←31] H.M. Balyuzi. 'Abdu'l-Bahá: The Centre of the Covenant. Oxford: George Ronald Publisher, 1971, p.365.
- [←32] H.M. Balyuzi. 'Abdu'l-Bahá: The Centre of the Covenant. Oxford: George Ronald Publisher, 1971, p.11.
- [←33] Cited in Martha Root, "'Abdu'l-Bahá's Visit to Budapest", in Kay Zinky, ed., *Martha Root: Herald of the Kingdom*. New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983, pp.361-370
- [←34] Jean Gibran and Kahlil Gibran. *Kahlil Gibran: His Life and World*. Edinburgh, Canongate Press, 1992, p.252
- [←35] Marzieh Gail, "Juliet Remembers Gibran", *Other People, Other Places*. Oxford: George Ronald Publisher, p.230.
- [←36] Marzieh Gail, "Juliet Remembers Gibran", *Other People, Other Places*. Oxford: George Ronald Publisher, p.230.
- [←37] See David Langness, 'The Bahá'í influence on Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet*'. <https://bahaiteachings.org/bahai-influence-on-kahlil-gibrans-the-prophet/>
- [←38] Gail, *Other People, Other Places*, p.228
- [←39] Cited in Stephen Petersen and Janis A. Tomlinson, eds. *Gertrude Kasebier – The Complexity of Light and Shade*. University of Delaware Press, 2013, p.11.
- [←40] Juliet Thompson. *The Diary of Juliet Thompson*. Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1983, p.317.
- [←41] William B. Scott and Peter M. Rutkoff. *New York Modern – The Arts and the City*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999, p.139.
- [←42] Alain Locke. "Impressions of Haifa", *The Bahá'í World* Vol.3, 1928-1930. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980, p.280.
- [←43] Bahá'u'lláh. *Prayers and Meditations*. Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1987, CLXXVIII, p.295
- [←44] Extract from a Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, [www.bahai.org/r/925134802](http://www.bahai.org/r/925134802)
- [←45] Cited in *Star of the West*, Vol.VI No.4, 15 May 1915, pp.30-1.
- [←46] *Century of Light*. Haifa, Bahá'í World Centre, 2001, p.7.
- [←47] *Century of Light*. Haifa, Bahá'í World Centre, 2001, p.7
- [←48] 'Abdu'l-Bahá in London. London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1987, p.19.
- [←49] Two Bahá'ís had attended the 1911 Lake Mohonk Conference and another Bahá'í met Albert Smiley at a different conference in 1911, which may in part explain how 'Abdu'l-Bahá was aware of the annual Lake Mohonk Conferences. Egea, Amin, *The Apostle of Peace: A Survey of References to 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the Western Press 1871-1921, Volume One: 1871 – 1912*, p. 635, note 12.
- [←50] "Tablets from Abdul-Baha," *Star of the West*, Vol. II, No. 15, December 12, 1911, pp. 3-4.
- [←51] "Tablets from Abdul-Baha," *Star of the West*, Vol. II, No. 15, December 12, 1911, p. 4.
- [←52] Egea, Amin, *The Apostle of Peace: A Survey of References to 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the Western Press 1871-1921, Volume One: 1871 – 1912*, p. 302

- [←53] Larry E. Burgess, *The Smileys: A Commemorative Edition*, Moore Historical Foundation, Redlands, California, 1991, pp. 30-45.
- [←54] Larry E. Burgess, *The Smileys: A Commemorative Edition*, Moore Historical Foundation, Redlands, California, 1991, p. 5.
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- [←56] Larry E. Burgess, *The Smileys: A Commemorative Edition*, Moore Historical Foundation, Redlands, California, 1991, p. 40.
- [←57] Davis, Calvin C., "Albert Keith Smiley", Harold Josephson, editor, *Biographical Dictionary of Modern Peace Leaders*, Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, 1985, p. 889.
- [←58] For a lengthy discussion of how the conferences were conducted, see Burgess, pp. 61-67.
- [←59] For a brief discussion of the fruits of the Lake Mohonk Arbitration Conferences see Burgess, p. 890.
- [←60] *Report of the Eighteenth Annual Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration*, Published by the Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration, 1919, pp. 42 – 63.
- [←61] *Report of the Eighteenth Annual Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration*, Published by the Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration, 1919, pp. 42 – 44.
- [←62] *Mahmud's Diary*, p. 101. Note that the chronicler, Mahmud, was confused about the dates.
- [←63] The conference published an annual report which was sent to all libraries across the United States with more than a 10,000 book collection (the average size of a small community or branch library). Burgess, p. 65. One of the promoters of the conferences was the wealthy industrialist, Andrew Carnegie, who established public libraries across the United States as well as for the Carnegie Endowment for Peace. (There are indications that Carnegie was present when 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke at Lake Mohonk, but that is unconfirmed.) For a thorough accounting of the press coverage of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's participation in the 1912 conference, see Egea, pp. 306. Press accounts of His arrival in the United States also frequently made mention of His intention to participate in the Lake Mohonk Conference. Ibid, pp. 197, 198, 201, 203, 217, 286, 298, 299.
- [←64] *Mahmud's Diary*, pp. 102 – 103.
- [←65] Larry E. Burgess, *The Smileys: A Commemorative Edition*, Moore Historical Foundation, Redlands, California, 1991, p.
- [←66] Butler, Nicholas Murray, *Across the Busy Years: Recollections and Reflections II*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1940, p. 90.
- [←67] 1932 San Francisco Social Registry, <https://www.sfgenealogy.org/sf/1932b/sr32maid.htm>. The social registry is a directory of socially-connected members of high society.
- [←68] Chapman, Anita Ioas, *Leroy Ioas: Hand of the Cause of God*, pp. 45-49.
- [←69] *Bahá'í News Letter: The Bulletin of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada*, no. 12, June-July 1926, pp. 6-7.
- [←70] This was Agnes Macphail, who spoke at the Montreal Conference which was chaired by William Sutherland Maxwell. Nakhjavani, Violette, *The Maxwells of Montreal: Middle Years 1923-1937, Late Years 1937-1952*, George Ronald, Oxford, p. 74. and writers. Some conferences were held in church buildings, others on university campuses, and a few in hotels.
- As in San Francisco, the World Unity Conferences provided valuable experience that enhanced the capacities of the hosting Bahá'í communities. They supplied a means for those fledgling communities to obtain positive local publicity and brought the nascent Faith to the attention of civic leaders as a new and growing force for good. Although the conferences were on the whole successful, as in San Francisco, they stretched to the limit local human and material resources. Shoghi Effendi urged the American community to follow-up with the conference attendees who showed the greatest interest, Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages 1922 – 1932*, p. 117.
- [←71] Horace Holley fled Paris, France with his wife and young child at the beginning of WWI in September 1914 and so keenly understood the significance of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's prediction that another war was coming in His second Tablet to the Hague, written after the Great War. Letter from Horace Holley to Albert Vail, October 21, 1925, Vail papers, U.S. Bahá'í National Archives. Mary Movius, in discussing Dr. Randall's

upcoming role as primary spokesman for the World Unity Foundation with him, mentions her concern about where the coming war will start. Letter from Mary Movius to John Randall, June 11, [1927?], U.S. Bahá'í National Archives.

[←72]

*Bahá'í News Letter: The Bulletin of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada*, no. 20, November 1927, p. 5.

[←73]

Montfort Mills, a lawyer from New York City and former chairman of the National Spiritual Assembly was also part of this consultation, but at the time he was engaged in frequent travels abroad on behalf of the work of the Faith. As much as possible, Mills served as an advisor to and promoter of the World Unity Foundation.

[←74]

Randall was one of the two Christian clergymen from New York City who played active roles in the Bahá'í community during the 1920s and 1930s. Shoghi Effendi said, "I am delighted to learn of the evidences of growing interest, of sympathetic understanding, and brotherly cooperation on the part of two capable and steadfast servants of the One True God, Dr. [John] H. Randall and Dr. [William Norman] Guthrie, whose participation in our work I hope and pray will widen the scope of our activities, enrich our opportunities, and lend a fresh impetus to our endeavors." *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 82. For a brief summary of Randall's life see, Day, Anne L., "Randall, John Herman", Kuehl, Warren F., editor, *Biographical Dictionary of Internationalists*, Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, 1983, pp. 595 – 97. See also, "John Herman Randall Sr.: Pioneer liberal, philosopher, pacifist" by one of his grandsons [David Randall?] at <http://freepages.rootsweb.com/~knowergenealogy/johnhermanscareer.htm>.

[←75]

The Board of Trustees of the World Unity Foundation included the following Bahá'ís: Horace H. Holley, Montfort Mills, Florence Reed Morton, and Mary Rumsey Movius. The other members were: Reverend John Herman Randall (non-denominational Protestant), Reverend Alfred W. Martin (Unitarian), and Melbert B. Cary (friend of Dr. Randall). The Honorary Committee for the Foundation were: S. Parkes Cadman, Carrie Chapman Catt, Rudolph I. Coffee, John Dewey, Harry Emerson Fosdick, Herbert Adams Gibbons, Mordecai W. Johnson, James Weldon Johnson, Rufus M. Jones, David Starr Jordan, Harry Levi, Louis L. Mann, Pierrepont B. Noyes, Harry Allen Overstreet, William R. Shepherd, Augustus O. Thomas. *Bahá'í News Letter: The Bulletin of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada*, no.22, March 1928, p. 8.

[←76]

Letter dated July 7, 1932 from Horace Holley to Florence Morton, U.S. Bahá'í Archives.

[←77]

Frank Lloyd Wright was a friend of Horace Holley, who convinced Wright to submit an article. Wright then suggested that he redesign the magazine's cover. His design, with some modifications, was first used for the October 1929 edition of *World Unity*. Website: The Wright Library, <http://www.steinerag.com/flw/Periodicals/1930-39.htm>. (The article quoted on the website assumes that Holley and Wright met through their mutual friend, Dr. Guthrie. Actually, they first met in Italy in 1910. (Letter from Horace Holley to Irving Holley from Florence, Italy, dated Easter Sunday [1910], in the possession of the author.))

[←78]

Day, Anne L., "Randall, John Herman", Kuehl, Warren F., editor, *Biographical Dictionary of Internationalists*, Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, 1983, pp. 100-101.

[←79]

Most of what is published about Dr. Randall's work with the World Unity Foundation is derived from memorials to him written by his descendants or from his own books.

[←80]

The decision to make the magazine more openly Bahá'í was taken in 1932. Letter dated October 28, 1932 from Horace Holley to Florence Morton, page 2, U.S. Bahá'í Archives. In a 1933 letter to Morton, Holley pointed out to her how he was trying to "build a bridge of sympathetic understanding between World Unity readers and the Articles of the Cause which will be published later on" through his more recent editorials. Letter dated February 2, 1933 from Horace Holley to Florence Morton, page 2, U.S. Bahá'í Archives. See also an explanation of the careful transition to Bahá'í content in letter dated January 7. 1933 from Horace Holley to Mary Movius, U.S. Bahá'í Archives.

[←81]

Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*, pp. 124 -28.

[←82]

Both Randall and Holley were paid for their services, but after the financial crisis started, Holley took a cut in salary even as his responsibilities increased. For a time, he drew no pay but funded the journal from his own savings. Letter dated April 1, 1933 from Horace Holley to Florence Morton, U.S. Bahá'í National Archives.

[←83]

Both Randall and Holley were paid for their services, but after the financial crisis started, Holley took a cut in salary even as his responsibilities increased. For a time, he drew no pay but funded the journal from his own savings. Letter dated April 1, 1933 from Horace Holley to Florence Morton, U.S. Bahá'í National Archives.

[←84]

*Bahá'í News*, no. 90, March 1935, p. 8.

[←85]

Undated World Unity circular. U.S. Bahá'í Archives.

- [←86] Kuehl, Warren F. and Lynne Dunn, *Keeping the Covenant: American Internationalists and the League of Nations, 1920-1939*, Kent State University Press, 1997, p. 73
- [←87] Kuehl, Warren F. and Lynne Dunn, *Keeping the Covenant: American Internationalists and the League of Nations, 1920-1939*, Kent State University Press, 1997, pp. 100-101
- [←88] Day, Anne L., “Randall, John Herman”, p. 596.
- [←89] In a message dated 1 June 1976 to the International Bahá’í Conference in Paris. Available at <https://www.bic.org/timeline/international-bahai-conference-paris>
- [←90] *The Four Year Plan and The Twelve Month Plan, 1996 – 2001: Summary of Achievements*, Bahá’í World Center, 2002.
- [←91] <https://www.bic.org/statements/statement-millennium-summit>
- [←92] Berger, Julia, *Beyond Pluralism: A New Framework for Constructive Engagement (2008 – 2020)*, chapter 7, pp. 16-19. Pre-publication edition. I am grateful to Julia Berger and Melody Mirzaagha, for staff members of the Bahá’í International Community Offices in New York for their assistance and insights. I also wish to thank the BIC New York Office for directing me to Dr. Berger and Ms. Mirzaagha.
- [←93] In 1995, a statement titled “Turning Point for All Nations” was issued for the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the United Nations. It is available at <https://www.bic.org/statements/turning-point-all-nations>
- [←94] “A Governance Befitting: Humanity and the Path Toward a Just Global Order”, A Statement of the Bahá’í International Community on the Occasion of the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the United Nations, p. 5. [https://www.bic.org/sites/default/files/pdf/un75\\_20201020.pdf](https://www.bic.org/sites/default/files/pdf/un75_20201020.pdf)
- [←95] Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday* (London: Cassell and Company, 1947), 152.
- [←96] For a list of arbitration treaties signed before 1912, see Denis P. Myers, *Revised List of Arbitration Treaties* (Boston: World Peace Foundation, 1912).
- [←97] Ivan S. Bloch, *The Future of War* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1900), xi. Quoted by Sandi E. Cooper, “European Ideological Movements Behind the Two Hague Conferences (1889–1907)” (PhD. diss., New York University, 1967). This was the sixth volume of Bloch’s *Budushchaya voyna v tekhnicheskoy, ekonomicheskoy i politicheskoy otnosheniyakh* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiya I. A. Efrona, 1898).
- [←98] David Starr Jordan, *What Shall we Say? Being Comments on War and Waste* (Boston: World Peace Foundation, 1913), 18.
- [←99] Andrew Carnegie, “The Baseless Fear of War,” *The Advocate of Peace*, April 1913, 79–80.
- [←100] *Report of the annual Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration* (1912), p. 49.
- [←101] Address of Samuel B. Capen. *Report of the annual Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration* (1912), p. 159.
- [←102] For some comments and writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on this issue, see, for example: *Makātib-i-Hadrat ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, vol. 4 (Tehran: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 121 B. E.), 161; *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1978) 202:11 and 227:30; *Paris Talks* (London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1967), 40:28; *Promulgation of Universal Peace* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 2012), 98:10 and 103:11.
- [←103] ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, 45:1. Ibid., p. 159.
- [←104] ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 82:11.
- [←105] ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, 227:10. This is part of one of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s communications to the Central Organization for a Durable Peace, in The Hague.
- [←106] ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “Address to the *International Peace Forum*, New York, 12 May 1912,” *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 47:6.
- [←107] ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 98:6.
- [←108] ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 110:15.

[←109]

“Abdul Baha Gives His Impressions of New York”, *The Sun* (New York), 7 July 1912, 8.

[←110]

David Starr Jordan, *War's Aftermath* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1914), xv.

[←111]

Norman Angell, *The great illusion* (London: William Heinemann, 1910), 189.

[←112]

Benjamin Trueblood, *The Federation of the World* (Boston: The Riverside Press, 1899), 132.

[←113]

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 105:6.

[←114]

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 113:15.

[←115]

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 44:13–15.

[←116]

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 104:1.

[←117]

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 107:4.

[←118]

“Apostle of Peace Here Predicts an Appalling War in the Old World,” *The Montreal Daily Star*, 31 August 1912, 1. [The following includes numerous incomplete citations—most need page or publisher data] For other comments about the possibility of a war, see *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 3:7, 103:11, 108:1, 114:2; ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on *Divine Philosophy* (Boston: The Tudor Press, 1918), 95. “The Awakening of Older Nations,” *The Advertiser* (Montgomery, Alabama), 7 May 1911; “Turks Prisoner for 40 Years,” *The Daily Chronicle* (London), Western Edition, 17 January 1913, 1; “Abdul Baha’s Word to Canada,” *Toronto Weekly Star*, 11 September 1912; *Montreal Daily Star*, 11 September 1912, 2; “Abdul Baha’s Word to Canada,” *Montreal Daily Star*, 11 September 1912, 12; “Persian Peace Apostle Predicts War in Europe,” *Buffalo Courier*, 11 September 1912, 7; “Message of Love Conveyed by Baha,” *Buffalo Enquirer*, 11 September 1912, 5; “Urges America to Spread Peace,” *Buffalo Commercial*, 11 September 1912, 14; “Abdul Baha an Optimist,” *Buffalo Express*, 11 September 1912, 1; “Bahian Prophet Returns After a Trip to Coast,” *Denver Post*, 29 October 1912, 7.

[←119]

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, 34:5.

[←120]

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, tablet to David Buchanan of Portland, Oregon, *Star of the West*, 28 April 1919, 42.

[←121]

Letter to Ahmad Yazdani, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, 228:2.

[←122]

Letter sent through Martha Root, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, 202:14.

[←123]

‘Abdu’l-Bahá in *London* (London: Bahá’i Publishing Trust, 1982)60.

[←124]

Seena B. Fazel and Minou Foadi. “Baha’i health initiatives in Iran: a preliminary survey,” *The Baha’is of Iran*, eds. Dominic P. Brookshaw and Seena B. Fazel (New York: Routledge, 2008), 128.

[←125]

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