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'Abdu'l-Bahá: Apostle of Race Amity

RACE AMITY

'The earth is but one country and mankind its citizens.'—*Bahá'u'lláh*

AN Englishman, well known for his great work for the healing, restoration and beautifying of the earth through trees, was walking down Piccadilly the other morning with an African, a man of learning and great wisdom, a headmaster of a large and flourishing school in West Africa, recently called to England to discuss educational problems. A man whose life is wholly dedicated to helping his people to advance in learning and creative education, one who has accepted as his basic standard of values the two fundamental teachings of Christ: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind' and 'thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' A noble soul whom it is a great privilege to meet. Piccadilly was thronged with people, and several glances of disapproval were thrown at the Englishman. Were those who threw them engaged on work of real value to their fellow men? Were their lives wholly dedicated to a great cause?

This incident is recorded only to remind us that in the midst of the most gigantic struggle the world has ever known, a struggle to preserve what we believe to be the best in the old world and at the same time to create a new and united world, we still foster and nurse unreasoned, unscientific and destructive prejudices which, unless we abandon them, will form one of the greatest barriers to the realisation of our aims. One half of the world is engaged in fighting an ideology which openly professes belief in a race theory. Is one race theory or prejudice any more justifiable or realistic than another? If we are to be consistent we must make up our minds about this matter once and for all.

A recent B.B.C. brains trust discussed the question as to whether all men are potentially equal, and the unanimous conclusion was 'yes'. Equal not in capacity, since every man is endowed with differing capacity and talents, but as human beings, as man. On a purely scientific and biological ground there are few who will contest this. Let us, then, turn our attention to the teachings of Christ; do we in the spiritual realm find support for this race fallacy? The essence of Christ's teachings is universal love of the one race, the human race. Surely it is time we gave up professing one thing and doing another. We find no support for racial prejudice in any shape or form in either the scientific or the spiritual realm, and

are, therefore, confronted with the fact that this prejudice is prejudice pure and simple, but nevertheless powerful and destructive.

It is, in reality, lack of understanding and education that divides us. There are certain negative and disagreeable traits in the human race which we dislike—greed and selfishness being foremost among them. It is natural that we should dislike such traits, but it is unnatural that we should disguise them in racial prejudices. If a man is greedy, selfish or cruel, we should dislike greed, selfishness and cruelty, but we should beware of branding these failings with any other name.

Wendell Willkie in his book 'One World' presents a vivid picture of the great tasks that lie before us, all over the world, and how very similar in character they are. To tackle them successfully we require unity of purpose, and this can never be achieved until we abandon for ever prejudices that have no justifiable foundation, and first and foremost among these is the race prejudice. It has been demonstrated beyond all doubt that in this day and age, by equal opportunities, education, co-operation and goodwill, the barriers between men in different parts of the world can be and are swiftly removed.

In moments of danger, when the physical life of a community is at stake, when it is faced with a common danger, as in times of war, earthquakes, famine, floods and epidemics, mankind realises his essential oneness, his essential humanity. In the hour of suffering and distress he is vividly aware of his human frailty and interdependence, and at such times all artificial barriers of creed, class and colour come crashing down: for a brief moment the common good is all important.

But we forget so quickly once the physical danger is removed, and we fail to realise the spiritual danger with which we are confronted—one which threatens our life far more fundamentally than any physical danger, unless we learn to make this oneness of mankind a living reality. This success of all our diverse plans for the future peace of the world depends solely upon this. Once we can visualise clearly the world as a unit, as one country, and mankind everywhere as its citizens, with responsibilities and rights, then the solution of all our problems will be only a matter of hard work.

We can start today to lay the foundations

upon which to build our new world, and everyone can do something towards it. We do not refuse a man a bed in a hotel because he is anti-social, deceitful, treacherous, or selfish, but we do refuse him a bed because his appearance is slightly different from our own. Is this logical? Is this just? If not, then let us see to it that we do not uphold such actions. Again, how often do we hear remarks about the characteristics of a minority group—let us take, for example, the Jews—derogatory remarks, generalisations and wild speculations, the validity of which we do not pause to consider, we simply repeat the remarks, and so they go the round, causing disharmony and building up barriers. Let us pause to reflect upon everything we hear; and do not let us repeat what we cannot substantiate. If we have constructive criticisms to make, let us make them effectively, and let us have the courage to approach those whom we criticize, instead of spreading mistrust and disharmony which may result in persecution and bloodshed. These are things in which we can all assist—here and now, without waiting for plans and blue prints, or the cessation of armed hostilities. Let us also give time and thought to the consideration of the brotherhood of man: this is a spiritual reality, and must first be understood as such, for it cannot immediately be realised on the material plane where we are separated and cut off from one another by long-fostered prejudices of the emotion, mind and senses, but on the spiritual plane we can immediately become aware of the underlying virtues and attributes and latent potentialities of man.

We can unfetter our minds from prejudices by an effort of the will, but it remains

also to unfetter our hearts and our emotions from deeper and stronger prejudices, and this can best be done through love which is universal and all-embracing and leaves us free from prejudice of all kinds—class, race, creed, and intellect. Let us then consider the validity of the following extract from the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and let us then act in accordance with our conclusions:

'The disease which afflicts the body politic is lack of love and absence of altruism. In the hearts of men no real love is found and the condition is such that unless their susceptibilities are quickened by some power so that unity, love, and accord develop within them, there can be no healing, no relief among mankind. Love and unity are the needs of the body politic today. Without these no progress nor prosperity can be attained. Therefore the friends of God must adhere to that Power which will create this love and unity in the hearts of the sons of men. Science cannot cure the illness of the body politic. Science cannot create amity and fellowship in human hearts. Neither can patriotism or racial prejudice effect a remedy. It can be accomplished solely through the divine bounties and the spiritual bestowals which have descended from God in this Day for that very purpose.

'This is an exigency of the times, and the divine remedy has been provided. The spiritual teachings of the religion of God alone can create this love, unity, and accord in human hearts. Therefore, hold to these heavenly agencies which God has provided so that through the love of God this soul-tie may be established, this heart-attachment realised, the light of the reality of unity be reflected from you throughout the universe.'

BEAUTY AND HARMONY IN DIVERSITY

(Talk given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Paris)

THE Creator of all is One God.

From this same God all creation sprang into existence, and He is the one goal, towards which everything in Nature yearns. This conception was embodied in the words of Christ, when He said, 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.' Man is the sum of Creation, and the Perfect Man is the expression of the complete thought of the Creator—the Word of God.

Consider the world of created beings, how varied and diverse they are in species, yet with one sole origin. All the differences that appear are those of outward form and colour. This diversity of type is apparent throughout the whole of Nature.

Behold a beautiful garden full of flowers, shrubs and trees. Each flower has a different charm, a peculiar beauty, its own delicious perfume and beautiful colour. The trees too, how varied are they in size, in growth, in foliage—and what different fruits they bear! Yet all these flowers, shrubs, and trees spring from the self-same earth, the same sun shines upon them and the same clouds give them rain.

So it is with Humanity. It is made up of many races, and its peoples are of different colour, white, black, yellow, brown and red—but they all come from the same God, and all are servants to Him. This diversity among the children of men has unhappily

not the same effect as it has among the vegetable creation, where the spirit shown is more harmonious. Among men exists the diversity of animosity, and it is this that causes war and hatred among the different nations of the world.

Differences which are only those of blood also cause them to destroy and kill one another. Alas! that this should still be so. Let us look rather at the beauty in diversity, the beauty of harmony, and learn a lesson from the vegetable creation. If you beheld a garden in which all the plants were the same as to form, colour and perfume, it would not seem beautiful to you at all, but, rather, monotonous and dull. The garden which is pleasing to the eye and which makes the heart glad, is the garden in which are growing side by side flowers of every hue, form and perfume, and the joyous contrast of colour is what makes for charm and beauty. So it is with trees. An orchard full of fruit trees is a delight; so is a plantation planted with many species of shrubs. It is just the diversity and variety that constitutes its charm; each flower, each tree, each fruit, besides being beautiful in itself, brings out by contrast the qualities of the others, and shows to advantage the special loveliness of each and all.

Thus should it be among the children of men! The diversity in the human family should be the cause of love and harmony, as it is in music, where many different notes blend together in the making of a perfect chord. If you meet those of different race and colour to yourself, do not mistrust

them and withdraw yourself into your shell of conventionality, but rather be glad and show them kindness. Think of them as different coloured roses growing in the beautiful garden of Humanity, and rejoice to be among them.

Likewise, when you meet those whose opinions differ from your own, do not turn away your face from them. All are seeking Truth, and there are many roads leading thereto. Truth has many aspects, but it remains always and for ever one.

Do not allow difference of opinion, or diversity of thought, to separate you from your fellow men, or to be the cause of dispute, hatred and strife in your hearts.

Rather, search diligently for the Truth and make all men your friends.

Every edifice is made of many different stones, yet each depends on the other to such an extent that if one were displaced the whole building would suffer; if one is faulty the structure is imperfect.

Bahá'u'lláh has drawn the circle of Unity. He has made a design for the uniting of all the peoples, and for the gathering of them all under the shelter of the Tent of Universal Unity. This is the work of the Divine Bounty, and we must all strive with heart and soul until we have the Reality of Unity in our midst, and as we work, so will strength be given unto us. Leave all thought of self, and strive only to be obedient and submissive to the Will of God. In this way only shall we become citizens of the Kingdom of God, and attain unto Life Everlasting.

A BLACK ROSE

From **Portals to Freedom*, by Howard Colvy Ives, published by George Ronald

(Quoted by kind permission of the publisher)

TOWARDS the latter part of April, late one Sunday afternoon, I was again at the home where so many wonderful hours had been spent. It had become almost a habit, when the service at my church was over and dinner dispatched, to hasten in to New York and spend the rest of the day and evening at this home. Sometimes I would have an opportunity to speak to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, but usually I must be content with a glimpse of Him, or with listening to Him while He spoke to a small group. This particular afternoon, however, was destined to be a red-letter day. I was standing alone at one of the windows looking out upon the street, when I was startled by seeing a large group of boys come rushing up the steps. There seemed twenty or thirty of them. And they were not what one would

call representatives of the cultured class. In fact, they were a noisy and not too well-dressed lot of urchins, but spruce and clean as if for an event. They came up the steps with a stamping of feet and loud talk, and I heard them being ushered in and up the stairs.

I turned to Mrs. Kinney, who was standing near. 'What is the meaning of all this?' I asked.

'Oh, this is really the most surprising thing,' she exclaimed. 'I asked them to come today, but I hardly expected that they would.'

It seemed that a few days before, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had gone to the Bowery Mission to speak to several hundred of New York's wretched poor. As usual, with Him went a large group of the Persian and American friends, and it made a unique spectacle as this party of Orientals in

* This incident took place in April, 1912.

flowing robes and strange head-gear made its way through the East Side. Not unnaturally, a number of boys gathered in their train and soon they became a little too vocal in their expression. As I, remember, even some venturesome ones called names and threw sticks. As my hostess told the story, she said: 'I could not bear to hear 'Abdu'l-Bahá so treated and dropped behind the others for a moment to speak to them. In a few words, I told them Who He was, that He was a very Holy Man who had spent many years in exile and prison because of His love for Truth and for men, and that now He was on His way to speak to the poor men at the Bowery Mission.'

'Can't we go too?' one who seemed to be the leader asked. I think that would be impossible, she told them, but if you come to my home next Sunday, and she gave them the address, I will arrange for you to see Him. So here they were. We followed them up the stairs and into 'Abdu'l-Bahá's own room. I was just in time to see the last half-dozen of the group entering the room.

'Abdu'l-Bahá was standing at the door and He greeted each boy as he came in; sometimes with a handclasp, sometimes with an arm around a shoulder, but always with such smiles and laughter it almost seemed that He was a boy with them. Certainly there was no suggestion of stiffness on their part, or awkwardness in their unaccustomed surroundings. Among the last to enter the room was a coloured lad of about thirteen years. He was quite dark and, being the only boy of his race among them, he evidently feared that he might not be welcome. When 'Abdu'l-Bahá saw him His face lighted up with a heavenly smile. He raised His hand with a gesture of princely welcome and exclaimed in a loud voice so that none could fail to hear; that here was a black rose.

The room fell into instant silence. The black face became illumined with a happiness and love hardly of this world. The other boys looked at him with new eyes. I venture to say that he had been called a black-many things, but never before a black rose.

This significant incident had given to the whole occasion a new complexion. The atmosphere of the room seemed now charged with subtle vibrations felt by every soul. The boys, while losing nothing of their ease and simplicity, were graver and more intent upon 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and I caught them glancing again and again at the coloured boy with very thoughtful eyes. To the few of the friends in the room the scene brought visions of a new world in which every soul would be recognised

and treated as a child of God. I thought: What would happen to New York if these boys could carry away such a keen remembrance of this experience that throughout their lives, whenever they encountered any representatives of the many races and colours to be found in that great city, they would think of them and treat them as 'different coloured flowers in the Garden of God.' The freedom from just this one prejudice in the minds and hearts of this score or more of souls would unquestionably bring happiness and freedom from rancour to thousands of hearts. How simple and easy to be kind, I thought, and how hardly we learn.

When His visitors had arrived, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had sent out for some candy and now it appeared, a great five-pound box of expensive mixed chocolates. It was unwrapped and 'Abdu'l-Bahá walked with it around the circle of boys, dipping His hand into the box and placing a large handful into the hands of each, with a word and smile for everyone. He then returned to the table at which He had been sitting, and laying down the box, which now had only a few pieces in it, He picked from it a long chocolate nougat; it was very black. He looked at it a moment and then around at the group of boys who were watching Him intently and expectantly. Without a word, He walked across the room to where the coloured boy was sitting, and, still without speaking, but with a humorously piercing glance that swept the group, laid the chocolate against the black cheek. His face was radiant as He laid His arm around the shoulder of the boy and that radiance seemed to fill the room. No words were necessary to convey His meaning, and there could be no doubt that all the boys caught it.

You see, He seemed to say, that he is not only a black flower, but also a black sweet. You eat black chocolates and find them good; perhaps you would this black brother of yours good also if you once taste his sweetness.

Again that awed hush fell upon the room. Again the boys all looked with real wonder at the coloured boy as if they had never seen him before, which indeed was true. And as for the boy himself, upon whom all eyes were now fixed, he seemed perfectly unconscious of all but 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Upon Him his eyes were fastened with an adoring, blissful look such as I had never seen upon any face. For the moment he was transformed. The reality of his being had been brought to the surface and the angel he really was, revealed.

THE STORY OF A WORLD FAITH

2. BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

(Continued)

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH was born on 12 November 1817, in Tihrán, the capital of Persia. His father, Mírzá Buzurg of Núr, was a highly esteemed minister in the Court of the Sháh. All accounts of Bahá'u'lláh's childhood indicate that He from His earliest years possessed very remarkable and very unusual powers. At the age of seven, He appeared before the Sháh to argue a case on behalf of His father, and won the day. The minister was fully conscious of the extraordinary power of his first-born, although the destiny of the child was unknown to him. Bahá'u'lláh grew up in the environs of the Court, amidst riches and great comfort. But when His father died and the father's post was offered to Him, He refused to accept it. He chose to devote Himself to the service of the poor, the weak and the oppressed. He strove to obtain justice for those who were denied it.

Bahá'u'lláh was a member of the nobility of the land, and as a rule the noblemen were not seekers of profound learning. But Bahá'u'lláh showed such scholastic attainments that He astounded the learned and the leaders of religion. Years later, in a Tablet that He sent to the Sháh, He challenged His detractors to examine the circumstances of His youth and to see that He had not received tuition at any of the seats of learning.

At the age of twenty-seven, Bahá'u'lláh heard the call of the Báb. As we saw before, it was Mullá Husayn, the first disciple to believe in the Báb, who brought the new message to Bahá'u'lláh. The story should be repeated here in more detail. The Báb entrusted a sealed letter to His first disciple and said it was for a great personage who was unnamed. Mullá Husayn was to find Him and to deliver the letter to Him. And so Mullá Husayn went to the capital and began his search. He heard of many notable and renowned figures, but the description of none satisfied him. At last a visitor came to him, whose home town was Núr in Mazanderán, the home of Bahá'u'lláh's family. In the course of conversation, Mullá Husayn inquired about the sons of the late minister from Núr. Thus he heard of Bahá'u'lláh, and he eagerly asked for more information. Then he knew that he had found the unnamed personage who was to receive the Báb's letter. The same visitor, who had told Mullá Husayn of Bahá'u'lláh,

took Him the letter, and on reading it, Bahá'u'lláh accepted all that it contained.

Now, the young nobleman, who had withdrawn from the life of the Court, and whose sense of justice was a byword amongst all who knew Him, became a zealous champion of the new faith. The work of the Báb was bound to arouse hostility and opposition on the part of those who cared more for personal gain and less for truth. And they were many. However, that could not daunt Bahá'u'lláh. Fearlessly he arose to spread the teaching of the Báb. When His fellow-believers were besieged in the fortress of Tabarsí, He visited them without hesitation and, on a second attempt at a later period, He was arrested and suffered the indignities of the bastinado.

When the Báb was martyred in Tabriz, a brilliant, courageous youth, Sulaymán Khán, was there to rescue His mangled remains from the fury of the foe, and as soon as he had done this, he informed Bahá'u'lláh of the success of his enterprise. Bahá'u'lláh arranged for the concealment of the remains in order to protect them from the evil designs of the persecutors. For more than fifty years they were hidden from the knowledge of friends and enemies alike. Today they rest on Mount Carmel.

A short while after the martyrdom of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh travelled to 'Iráq. There He consolidated the ranks of the Báb's followers, and gave them a new vision. No sooner had He returned to Tihrán than the storm broke out again. Two young Bábís, driven to despair by the terrible sufferings of their fellow-believers and the tragic end of their Master's earthly life, decided to strike at the one whom they held to be responsible for these dastardly deeds: no other than the person of the Sovereign. On August 15th, 1852, they ventured upon their insane attempt, the more insane because they had not provided themselves with a weapon that could assure them the success of their plan. They used bird shot for their purpose. The attempt was foredoomed to failure, but the enemies of the Báb were given their golden opportunity to deal yet further blows at His followers. Here, they cried, is a clear proof that these people are a deadly menace to the safety of the realm.—there can be no peace in this land until they are exterminated.

Bahá'u'lláh, at this time, was staying in

a summer resort near the capital. His host urged Him to go into hiding. But He had nothing to fear and rode boldly towards the camp of the Sháh. The news of His approach confounded the enemy. At the moment when they were plotting His arrest and searching for Him, He was coming to them of His own accord. But when had Bahá'u'lláh shown fear and panic? They laid their rough hands upon His person. On the road to the dungeon, a big crowd had gathered to jeer at Him to heap insults upon Him. He who had been their friend and defender, their generous benefactor, was now the victim of their blazing hatred.

People did the same to Jesus. On Palm Sunday they went out to greet Him. They gave Him a royal welcome. And a few days later in the courtyard of Pontius Pilate, they were given a choice—which should die: Barrabas, the proved criminal, or Jesus, the Light of the World? They asked for the death of Jesus—‘Crucify Him’.

When the Báb was on His way to the prison of Máh-Kú, He visited the public bath of a town near to Tabriz. The populace rushed to that bath and, considering the water there blessed by the presence of the Báb, took away every drop that was there. Three years after that, the Báb was shot in the public square of Tabriz, and dense crowds had gathered in the square and upon the roofs to watch and enjoy the scene of fiendish cruelty. They raised their voices not in protest and horror, but in approval. And so has the world ever treated its true Friend.

Among the crowd which hurled abuse at Bahá'u'lláh and pelted Him with stones, while He was being taken on foot over a long distance to the dungeons of Tihrán, an old woman stepped forward with a stone in her hand to strike at Him. She was frenzied with rage, but her steps were weak for the pace of the procession. ‘Give me a chance to fling my stone in his face’, she pleaded with the guard. Behá'u'lláh turned to them and said, ‘Suffer not this woman to be disappointed. Deny her not what she regards as a meritorious act in the sight of God.’ The prison cell in which Bahá'u'lláh was confined, together with many other Bábís, was a grim, dark and stench-laden pit that once served as a reservoir for a public bath, and to which the worst criminals of the capital were consigned. Around His neck they placed one of the two most dreaded chains in the whole land. Under its ponderous weight His whole frame was bent. In one of His works,

‘The Epistle to the Son of the Wolf’, Bahá'u'lláh refers to that chain: ‘If sometime thou shouldst happen to visit the prison of His Majesty the Sháh, ask thou the director and chief of that place to show thee those two chains, one of which is known as Qará-Guhar and the other as Salásil. I swear by the Daystar of Justice, that during four months I was weighted and tormented by one of these chains. “The sorrow of Jacob paleth before my sorrow, and all the afflictions of Job were but a part of my calamities.”’ In the same work, He reveals that it was in the dungeons of His Tihrán that He became conscious of His true Self, and knew that He was ‘The Promise of All Ages’.

‘One night in a dream, this all-glorious word was heard from all sides: “Verily We will aid Thee to triumph by Thyself and Thy pen. Grieve not for that which hath befallen Thee, and have no fear. Truly Thou art of them that are secure. Ere long shall the Lord send forth and reveal the treasures of the earth, men who shall give Thee victory by Thyself and Thy Name wherewith the Lord hath revived the hearts of them that know.”’

And again we read in the same Tablet:

‘During the days when I was imprisoned in the land of Tá (Tihrán), although the galling weight of chains and the loathsome atmosphere of the prison allowed Me little sleep, yet occasionally in My moments of slumber, I felt as if something were pouring over My breast, even as a mighty torrent, which, descending from the summit of a lofty mountain, precipitates itself over the earth. All My limbs seemed to have been set aflame. At such moments My tongue recited what mortal ears could not hear.’

Nabíl, the immortal historian of the Bahá'í Faith, recounts his work, the words of which he himself heard from Bahá'u'lláh, describing the torments of those days: ‘We were all huddled together in one cell, our feet in stocks, and around our necks fastened the most galling of chains. The air we breathed was laden with the foulest of impurities, while the floor on which we sat was covered with filth and infested with vermin. No ray of light was allowed to penetrate that pestilential dungeon or to warm its icy coldness. We were placed in two rows, each facing the other. We had taught them to repeat certain verses which, every night, they chanted with extreme fervour. “God is sufficient unto me; He verily is the all-sufficient” one row would intone, while the other would reply: “In

Him let the trusting trust". The chorus of these gladsome voices would continue to peal out until the early hours of the morning. Their reverberation would fill the dungeon, and piercing its massive walls, would reach the ears of Nasiri'd-Din Sháh, whose palace was not far distant from the place where we were imprisoned. "What

means this sound?" he was reported to have exclaimed. "It is the anthem the Bábís are intoning in their prison," they replied. The Sháh made no further remarks nor did he attempt to restrain the enthusiasm his prisoners, despite the horrors of their confinement, continued to 'display.'

(To be continued)

'By the righteousness of God, my Well-Beloved! I have never aspired after worldly leadership. My sole purpose hath been to hand down unto men that I was bidden to deliver by God, the Gracious,

the Incomparable, that it may detach them from all that pertaineth to this world, and cause them to attain such heights as neither the ungodly can conceive, nor the froward imagine.'

BAHÁ'U'ÁLLH.

EDITORIAL NOTE

The series of reviews of Bahá'í books has unfortunately to be omitted from this issue owing to lack of space, but will be continued next time.

This issue is the last one of Volume III. We take this opportunity to thank our subscribers and we trust that they will

continue their support. We invite and welcome their suggestions, to which we shall gladly give attention.

The first number of our next volume will be the Centenary issue and will contain full information regarding the Centenary celebrations, which amongst other functions will include an exhibition illustrating the hundred years of the Bahá'í Cause.

THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH

THE Báb, The Forerunner, declaration 1844, martyrdom 1850.

Bahá'u'lláh, The Founder, declaration 1863, ascended 1892.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, The True Exemplar and Interpreter, 1844-1921.

SOME BASIC PRINCIPLES

The Oneness of Mankind.

The Oneness of Religion.

The Independent Investigation of Truth.

The Relinquishing of Prejudices.

Education for Everyone.

Equal Status for Men and Women.

The Harmony of Religion and Science.

Solution of Industrial and Economic Problems.

A Universal Language. (Auxiliary.)

Universal Peace; International Executive Authority.

A World Commonwealth.