

NEW WORLD ORDER

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The Entrance to the Shrine of the Báb, Mount Carmel

THE MESSENGERS OF GOD AS THE SOURCE OF PROGRESS

IN order to consider this question, it should first be clear what is meant by the two main words in the title.

Taking the second one first—what is progress? In this article it is not intended to deal with material progress as a thing in itself. When rightly understood it has, of course, great value, and the history of civilisation is in part a history of growing material knowledge, which has brought about improvements in man's way of living, enlarged his outlook and increased his powers. But material progress is surely only a consequence of that which most of us will concede is the real progress, namely the development and growth of the spirit of man. Material and mental progress is only achieved as a result of the illumination of the spirit; this is what guides and expands the mind and it is by this harmony of mind and spirit that man has gradually through the ages achieved his present stage of development. And the aspect of true progress which has to be achieved in this world of being in the present age is, without doubt, the final attainment of peace and unity among men.

What do we mean when we speak of a Messenger of God? We mean one of those spiritual leaders who have appeared on the earth from time to time throughout the ages and have been the founders of all the great religious systems of the world. Their purpose has always been to instruct and educate humanity and to help it on its way. They show the path, they give the standards by which man measures his efforts to progress. If there had not been these prophets of God in the world, we should have had no ethical standards—we owe them to these teachers. Each of them, Moses, Jesus, Buddha, and the others, spent a certain time on this earth in a human form, some a long time, some only a short while. Each of them founded a great religion, which exists to this day. None of the great world religions has been founded in any other way, all are based on the teachings of a Messenger or Manifestation of God and all embody the same basic truths, and the members of each reverence one of these Messengers as their particular guide and leader, calling Him prophet, saviour, etc., and trying to live by and to obey His precepts. But the dominion of a Messenger of God is like no earthly rule. It is not based on force, but on love; it is won by different

means, by the power of the spirit. It has tremendous vitality—treachery cannot destroy it, it grows through opposition and persecution. God's Messenger has often been outwardly in a humble position in the world and His influence was out of all proportion to His material power. The influence of His Teachings spread and the believers grew in number. Through the Divine Power showered upon them, they developed mentally and materially, and in this way grew up many of the great empires of the world. In this way also the civilisation of the world made its progress, because the influence of the Messenger of God, acting through the spirit of man, touched all aspects of life, inspiring new learning and discoveries, new arts, remoulding old customs and laws which had outgrown their usefulness. Thus the mental outlook of man has been changed through the spirit.

Noah—Abraham—Moses appeared at an early period in the Near East. They taught that there is one God, that all should worship Him and not the idols commonly revered in those parts. This set a high standard of spiritual integrity and raised also the level of conduct and of understanding. Again and again, they and a series of prophets who came after them hammered this teaching home, 'There is but one God and Him alone shall ye worship'. Always the same call to worship one God and to rightness of conduct. And on this foundation, as an example to the rest of the world, was built out of this nomadic undeveloped tribe, the Jewish kingdom and the civilisation which reached its peak in the glories of the rule of Solomon and the wisdom of the Hebrew men of learning, which inspired the learned men of other countries even as far away as Greece.

The teaching of Buddha likewise spread far and wide and affected by its spiritual influence the development of the people who accepted it. An example of this is given by King Asoka, who ruled over a large empire comprising most of the present India and Afghanistan. Under the influence of the Buddhist teachings, he renounced all further attempts to increase his dominions by conquest and devoted himself to spreading the knowledge of the new faith. His missionaries are said to have travelled as far as Greece on their teaching journeys.

Zoroaster, too, gave a great impulse to

those who believed in Him. Under the influence of His Teachings, the great Persian Empire of ancient times was founded and at its peak the Persians were renowned for their honesty, their learning and their culture. As a sign of material progress, we might remember that the ancient Persian Empire had a highly developed and efficient postal system which operated all over the country. This implies, of course, the existence of good roads and safe travel.

Coming nearer to our own times and to our own civilisation, we all know of the effect which the spread of Christianity had in civilising and developing Europe. The whole background of our knowledge and culture is interwoven with the principles of the Christian Teachings. We in Europe, as well as the countries of the East, are indebted, too, to the Teachings of Muhammad, and the development of learning through them, for a great deal of our modern civilisation—for our universities, for instance, the first of which were originally instituted after the example of those founded in the Islamic Empire, and for most of our modern science, which would have been impossible had we not been brought to adopt the Arabic system of numerals. In another important respect, world progress was assisted by the Islamic Empire: through its contact with China, with which its dominions for some time bordered, the knowledge of papermaking was brought to the Near East and thence to the West. Soon after, in Europe, printing was invented and the foundation laid on which later the vast increase in human knowledge and general education could be based.

Christianity and Islam jointly were also responsible for a further development in the civilisation of the world, in this wise. From the beginning of the Roman Empire until the rise of Islam, the centre of Europe was in Rome and all countries with any pretensions to civilisation turned towards the Mediterranean. With the coming of Islam and its empire, which at its peak dominated the entire east and south coasts of the Mediterranean, European traffic and trade in those waters rapidly decreased and the countries of Europe began to turn their faces in other directions. This had its result in the gradual development of national consciousness in the various countries and, still more important, they became conscious of the open sea along the western coasts of Europe and of the oceans beyond. Then, led by the Portuguese, and followed by the Spanish, the French, the Dutch and the English, came the

amazing series of voyages of discovery by which almost the whole expanse of the earth became known and by which European settlers, and with them the Christian Faith, were carried to America, South Africa, Australia, etc.

Apart, however, from their influence on the people of their own times and surroundings and a widening circle of countries around them, it is most important of all to remember that all these Messengers of God led in their teaching to a point on which they all agreed—the coming of a glorious day, in which man should come into his destiny, when ‘the wolf shall dwell with the lamb’ and when the Laws of God should be so observed by all the peoples of the world that ‘the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea’, as Isaiah expressed it. Many are the prophecies of the glory of this time.

And now the Bahá’í message is that this promised day is come. The day foretold by all the prophets, expected by the faithful in all the ages, is here. And why should it not be so? All the Divine Messengers taught that each of them was neither the beginning nor the end, that God sends them from time to time to help humanity on its way. Why should we be surprised that now, when life is mentally and materially more complicated than ever before, when man’s powers over the world in which he lives have increased so tremendously, when evil forces, too, are at work, and in consequence we are facing in this century the greatest crisis in the history of the world—why should we think that in this crucial time God will withhold His guidance from us? No, the Promised Day is come and the One promised throughout the ages has come once more in human form to guide mankind into truth. God has spoken once more to His people, through His Messenger, Bahá’u’lláh.

Bahá’u’lláh, which means simply the Glory or Splendour of God, was born in Persia in the early years of the last century, and in 1863 He proclaimed Himself as the One promised by all the teachers of the past, as the fulfilment of all the prophecies. He said that this is the day in which mankind is to become mature, when he is to attain to a true understanding of his spiritual station, and that spiritual attainment is also to manifest itself in mental and material growth, when the progress of mankind is to become, through the influence of the spirit, also a concrete definite development. This is to be the time in which man achieves his destiny. Is not this the real progress?

Bahá'u'lláh was persecuted for His Teachings, He was exiled and imprisoned for the rest of His life and He was still a prisoner when He died. But His Teachings have spread all over the world—today there are believers in the Bahá'í Faith in sixty odd countries of the world.

The basis of the Bahá'í Faith, therefore, is simply this—that in Bahá'u'lláh the Messiah, the Lord of Hosts, expected by all the religions of the world; came to the earth and gave His Teachings to guide mankind through this most difficult stage of his progress towards maturity. He repeated the spiritual truths given by all the Teachers of the past, truths which never change but which need restatement because mankind has forgotten and ignored them, and He also, like all the others, gave practical commands suitable to the time in which He has appeared. But there is this great difference—this time the message is not primarily for the Jews, the Arabs, the Persians or any other race, it is for the whole of mankind. The emphasis of all Bahá'u'lláh's teaching is on unity. Man must become aware of his approaching spiritual maturity and through this he must become conscious that he is now able to achieve what he could not before—the unity of the human race. Mankind must realise its oneness and this realisation must permeate and influence all aspects of life—individual, religious and national. And through this realisation will be brought about that which was always the culmination of the prophecies: the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth. The day is coming when, spiritually grown up, man will build his civilisation and order his community life on the basis of God's Laws, when the whole earth will obey the same command as was given to Israel of old and will achieve its true unity in the worship of God through the medium of one universal religion and the consciousness of universal brotherhood.

So far as Bahá'u'lláh's practical commands are concerned, many of them have already been advocated or even put into practice by people conscious of the direction in which mankind is travelling, though un-

aware yet of the source of their inspiration. Such principles as universal education, the equal status of men and women, an international auxiliary language, a world tribunal, were astounding and revolutionary when given by Him in the years between 1860 and 1870, but by now they have come to be taken almost for granted as obvious common sense and certainly as ideals towards which we must strive and which we have a hope of achieving.

Bahá'u'lláh describes the earth at this period in its history as 'in a state of pregnancy'. 'The day is approaching', He says, 'when it will have yielded its noblest fruits, when from it will have sprung forth the loftiest trees, the most enchanting blossoms, the most heavenly blessings.' 'The purpose underlying all creation is the revelation of this most sublime, the most holy Day, the Day known as the Day of God, in His books and scriptures—the Day which all the Prophets, and the Chosen Ones, and the holy ones, have wished to witness.'

The theme of the history of man is thus in this day made plain to him and he can now know and understand his destiny. He can understand where past developments were leading him and can see his future stretching before him, nebulous still but full of limitless possibilities under the promise of God's recurring guidance as given through His Messengers. Bahá'u'lláh states that 'the heights which, through the most gracious favour of God, mortal man can attain in this Day are as yet unrevealed to his sight. . . . The day, however, is approaching when the potentialities of so great a favour will, by virtue of His behest, be manifested unto men.'

'Verily I say, this is the Day in which mankind can behold the Face, and hear the Voice, of the Promised One. The Call of God hath been raised, and the Light of His Countenance hath been lifted up upon men. It behoveth every man to blot out the trace of every idle word from the tablet of his heart, and to gaze, with an open and unbiased mind, upon the signs of His Revelation, the proofs of His Mission, and the tokens of His Glory.'

THE STORY OF A WORLD FAITH

1. THE BÁB

(Continued)

AND so for the next nine months the Báb was a prisoner in the Castle of Mah-Ku in the province of Azarbayjan, close to the Russian and Turkish frontiers. He had two of His followers with Him. The warden of

the castle was rough and rude. He would not allow any others to come to the Báb, or even stop for a night in the town of Mah-Ku. But he too, like those before him in whose custody the Báb had been placed, was at

last subdued. In that prison the Báb began to compose 'the most weighty, the most illuminating and comprehensive of all His works'—the Persian Bayán. This book, apart from the laws and principles of the Faith proclaimed by the Báb, contains frequent references to the approach of a still greater Revelation. Again and again, the Báb speaks in the Persian Bayán of 'Him whom God will make manifest', advising His followers not to let anything in His own Revelation stand between them and the recognition of that mighty advent. As the warden became a captive to the gentle and winning qualities of his prisoner, so came unhindered devoted followers from every part of the country to the presence of their Lord. Amongst these visitors and pilgrims was Mulla Husayn, that first believer whose zeal and service had already achieved wonders all over the land. And the Báb told him, 'You will be called upon to perform deeds so great as will dwarf the mightiest achievements of the past.'

In this year of 1848 the little hamlet of Badasht witnessed a remarkable event. Badasht lies in a corner of the province of Khurasan in the north-east of Persia. There came Bahá'u'lláh and Quddus and Tahiriḥ and many others. Mulla Husayn was absent from this gathering, being engaged elsewhere in the same province. The Conference of Badasht made clear the independent character of the Faith of the Báb. Tahiriḥ—the fearless, eloquent Tahiriḥ—threw away her veil, in token of a new birth, and appeared unheralded in the midst of men. It was truly a most revolutionary act. To the orthodox it was tantamount to rank heresy and abomination, deserving a death sentence. There was great consternation. Bahá'u'lláh had come to that gathering calm and silent, and at the end His word and judgment provided the key solution. At Badasht it was conclusively laid down that the Faith of the Báb was not a mere offshoot of the great Islamic tree, an obscure sectarian movement, but the fruit of a new Revelation.

In April of this same year, the Grand Vazir, having heard of the relaxation of all his rules and regulations at the castle of Mah-Ku, had the Báb transferred to another fortress—this time the Castle of Chihriq, not far away from the previous one. The warden of this fortress, who was a Kurd, likewise became attached to the Báb, and disregarded the strict injunctions of the Grand Vazir. He too allowed visitors and pilgrims to throng into the presence of the Báb. Not only he, but the other Kurds who lived in Chihriq as well, held the prisoner

in great reverence. Every morning before commencing their daily tasks, they would approach the prison and turn their hearts and minds in devotion towards the One held captive behind those walls. A story is related of the Báb's sojourn in Chihriq, which gives us a picture of His sense of justice and fair dealing. One day He told an attendant to buy some honey for Him. When the purchase was made and the price disclosed, it was found that the cost was fraudulently high. The Báb did not sanction it. He said, 'I, who am your example have been a merchant by profession. . . . You must neither defraud your neighbour, nor allow him to defraud you. Such was the way of your Master. The shrewdest and ablest of men were unable to deceive Him, nor did He on His part choose to act ungenerously towards the meanest and most helpless of creatures.'

Three months after His arrival at Chihriq, the Báb was taken to Tabriz to stand a formal examination in the Court of the Crown Prince, then a boy of sixteen. That examination was a farce from its start to its end. Even the forged records left by the adversaries to taint the memory of the Báb and show up in their reckoning His ignorance, are ample proofs to the vainglory, the pettiness, the unredeemably prejudiced mind of the so-called wise and learned who conducted that trial, and who had no desire whatsoever to know the truth. To the query made by one of them, the Báb replied, 'I am, I am, the promised One! I am the One whose name you have for a thousand years invoked, at whose mention you have risen, whose advent you have longed to witness, and the hour of whose Revelation you have prayed God to hasten. . . .'

The insistent clamour of some ill-wishers of the Báb could not be stilled, and the authorities were not sure of the next step. It was suggested that the Governor's bodyguard should inflict a prescribed punishment on the Báb, but they considered this to be outside their province, as the matter concerned the religious leaders and not them. Finally, one of the prominent clergymen himself bastinadoed the Báb. After suffering this humiliation, He was returned to the Castle of Chihriq.

Then persecution and torture flamed up all over the land. The followers of the Báb knew no peace and rest. They were hunted and hounded everywhere. Their tormentors used every fiendish device to exterminate them. On their part, the Bábís, hearing of the cruel treatment meted to their Master, drew fresh vigour and zeal from the mounting tide of adversity. Mulla Husayn

and a band of Bábís were besieged in the Shrine of Shaykh Tabarsi in the forests of Mazandaran. This province of Persia borders the Caspian Sea. They built a fortress round the shrine to protect them against the assaults and depredations of the enemies. Bahá'u'lláh visited them in that fortress, but on a second attempt to reach His fellow-believers He was intercepted and detained. In a short while Quddus joined the defenders of Shaykh Tabarsi. These were artisans, peasants, students, scholars, divines who had never wielded rifles and swords in their lives. And now they put armies to flight. Mulla Husayn was waylaid by the enemy and received a mortal blow. The besieged were reduced by hunger, but still they held their ground. At last the foe resorted to treachery. They pledged their word, and took a solemn oath, that should the Bábís lay down their arms and march out of their fortress into the camp of the commander, safe conduct and unmolested dispersal to their homes would be guaranteed to them. No sooner had the besieged done so than they were set upon and murdered. The valiant Quddus was made a prisoner and after unspeakable torments, he was hacked and burned in the public square of his native town.

The martyrs of Shaykh Tabarsi were not the lone sufferers in this whirlwind of affliction. Far down to the south, Vahíd, once an emissary of the Shah, sent to investigate the Cause of the Báb, and

another band of the champions of that Cause were in the same manner forced to take refuge in a fort, were in the same way challenged, attacked and martyred. And again, at Zanjan events took the same course. There, Hujjat—the brave, accomplished, indomitable Hujjat, and the Bábís gathered round him were surrounded, fought and trapped by treachery and broken pledge into glorious death.

Meanwhile the tyrants chose to put an end to the life of the Báb. He was once more taken to Tabriz. In the morning of July 9th, 1850, a number of the leading divines of that city issued the death-warrant of the Báb, prepared long before this occasion. The Báb and a devoted follower were hoisted on a pillar in the public square. A firing squad was drawn in front. At noon, seven hundred and fifty rifles shot out. When the smoke cleared the Báb was nowhere to be seen. He had not run away. He was sitting in a chamber close by, finishing His last instructions to His amanuensis, which had been harshly interrupted earlier in the day. It was now discovered that the shots had only severed the rope with which the Báb was suspended on the pillar. He was once again led out to the same spot. The regiment which had fired at Him, refused to do it a second time. Another regiment was found willing to carry out that dastardly deed.

Thus fell the Báb. Thus men deal with the Light of God.

(To be continued)

A GUIDE TO BAHÁ'Í LITERATURE

Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era, by J. E. Esslemont, M.B., Ch.B., F.B.E.A.

This is a valuable textbook of the Bahá'í Faith. In it we have brief sketches of the lives of its three Founders, the Báb, the Forerunner; Bahá'u'lláh, the Central Figure, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Interpreter and Exemplar; while the main portion of the book is a comprehensive study of Their Teachings and Ordinances, with many extracts from their writings. Chapter XIII deals with the interpretations of the prophecies of the Old and New Testaments and other Sacred Writings, which have been fulfilled in these latter days. Chapter XIV pays striking testimony to the prophetic utterances of Bahá'u'lláh, which give proof of His Prophethood.

Talks by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, given in Paris, edited by Lady Blomfield.

A collection of instructions and explanations given during His stay in Paris in 1912; these were delivered to a variety of

audiences of different schools of thought, and contain valuable spiritual teachings and elucidations of the principles of the Bahá'í Faith.

The Hidden Words.

Verses revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in Baghdad. They contain the profoundest truths in simple direct terms as subjects for meditation, together with counsels and admonitions for the seekers.

* * *

'Lift up your hearts above the present and look with eyes of faith into the future. Today the seed is sown, the grain falls upon the earth, but behold the day will come when it shall rise a glorious tree, and the branches thereof shall be laden with fruit. Rejoice and be glad that this day has dawned; try to realise its power, for it is indeed wonderful. God has crowned you with honour, and in your hearts has He set a radiant star; verily the light thereof shall brighten the whole world.'

'Abdu'l-Bahá.

THE HOLY SPIRIT—THE INTERMEDIARY POWER BETWEEN GOD AND MAN

THE Divine Reality is Unthinkable, Limitless, Eternal, Immortal and Invisible.

The World of Creation is bound by natural law, finite and mortal.

The Infinite Reality cannot be said to ascend or descend. It is beyond the understanding of man, and cannot be described in terms which apply to the phenomenal sphere of the created world.

Man, then, is in extreme need of the only Power by which he is able to receive help from the Divine Reality, that power alone bringing him into contact with the Source of all life.

An intermediary is needed to bring two extremes into relation with each other. Riches and poverty, plenty and need; without an intermediary power there could be no relation between these pairs of opposites.

So we can say that there must be a Mediator between God and Man, and there is none other than the Holy Spirit, which brings the created earth into relation with the 'Unthinkable One', the Divine Reality.

The Divine Reality may be likened to the sun and the Holy Spirit to the rays of the sun. As the rays of the sun bring the light and warmth of the sun to the earth, giving life to all created beings, so do the 'Manifestations' bring the power of the Holy Spirit from the Divine Sun of Reality to give Light and Life to the souls of men.

Behold, there is an intermediary necessary between the sun and the earth; the sun does not descend to the earth, neither does the earth ascend to the sun. This contact is made by the rays of the sun which bring light and warmth and heat.

The Holy Spirit is the Light from the Sun of Truth bringing, by Its Infinite power, life and illumination to all mankind, flooding all souls with Divine Radiance, conveying the Blessings of God's mercy to the whole world. The earth, without the medium of the warmth and light of the rays of the sun, could receive no benefits from the sun.

Likewise the Holy Spirit is the very cause of the Life of Man; without the Holy Spirit he would have no intellect; he would be unable to acquire his scientific knowledge by which his great influence over the rest of creation is gained. The illumination of the Holy Spirit gives to Man the power of Thought, and enables him to make discoveries, by which he bends the laws of nature to his will.

The Holy Spirit it is which, through the mediation of the Prophets of God, teaches spiritual virtues to Man, and enables him to attain Eternal life.

All these Blessings are brought to Man by the Holy Spirit, therefore we can understand that the Holy Spirit is the Intermediary between the Creator and the Created. The light and heat of the sun cause the earth to be fruitful, and create life in all things that grow; and the Holy Spirit quickens the souls of men.

The two great Apostles, St. Peter and St. John the Evangelist, were once simple, humble workmen, toiling for their daily bread. By the Power of the Holy Spirit their souls were illumined, and they received the eternal blessings of the Lord Christ.

(From Talks by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, given in Paris.)

CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editor, NEW WORLD ORDER.

SIR—Mr. J. Lee's letter interests one greatly, for its direction is true to the point, and the concentration upon God as the Point of Unity is most certainly the clear issue and the most necessary need in everyone's life. As none can clearly comprehend the Will of God save by drawing near to His Manifestation, the Message of the Manifestation must be delivered in every quarter of the globe; and in this great Dispensation of the Spirit of Truth, Bahá'u'lláh, God's love and wisdom are re-manifested, His Will made known, and

His New Name revealed. The Call to World Unity has gone forth in the new Name of the Lord, and that Name is the Glory (the Sun of Truth) in the Bahá'í Administrative Order. Thus all eyes should be directed to the New Name and all minds should become acquainted with Bahá'u'lláh's 'Discourse of the Temple' which is to be found in The Bahá'í Scriptures. In this Dispensation, as in all former Dispensations, the Name of God is the glorious Point of Unity.

Yours sincerely,

E. T. HALL.

EDITORIAL NOTE

IN May 1944, the Bahá'í World will be celebrating the completion of the first century of the Bahá'í Era. Our present issue and the previous one have carried the story of the Báb—His mission and martyrdom. You have seen the circumstances attending his declaration on May 22nd, 1844. That mighty occasion marked the inauguration of the Bahá'í Era.

In our next issue we shall give our readers some details of the Centenary celebrations

planned to take place in London during the week May 20th–27th.

‘The Principles of Oneness’, which appeared in our last issue, consisted of excerpts from *The Goal of a New World Order*, a work by the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, written in 1931. We regret that this information was previously omitted.

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

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